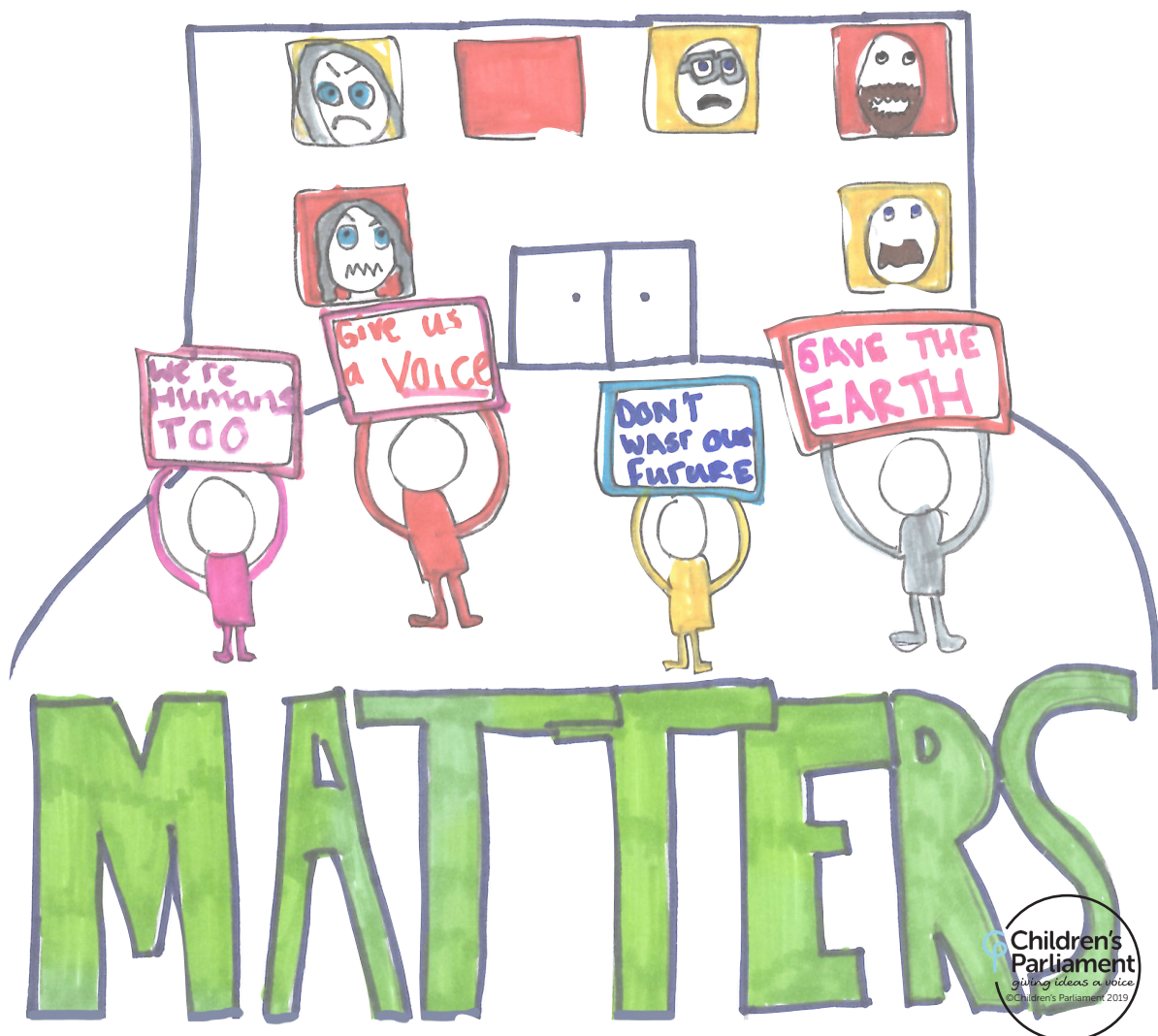


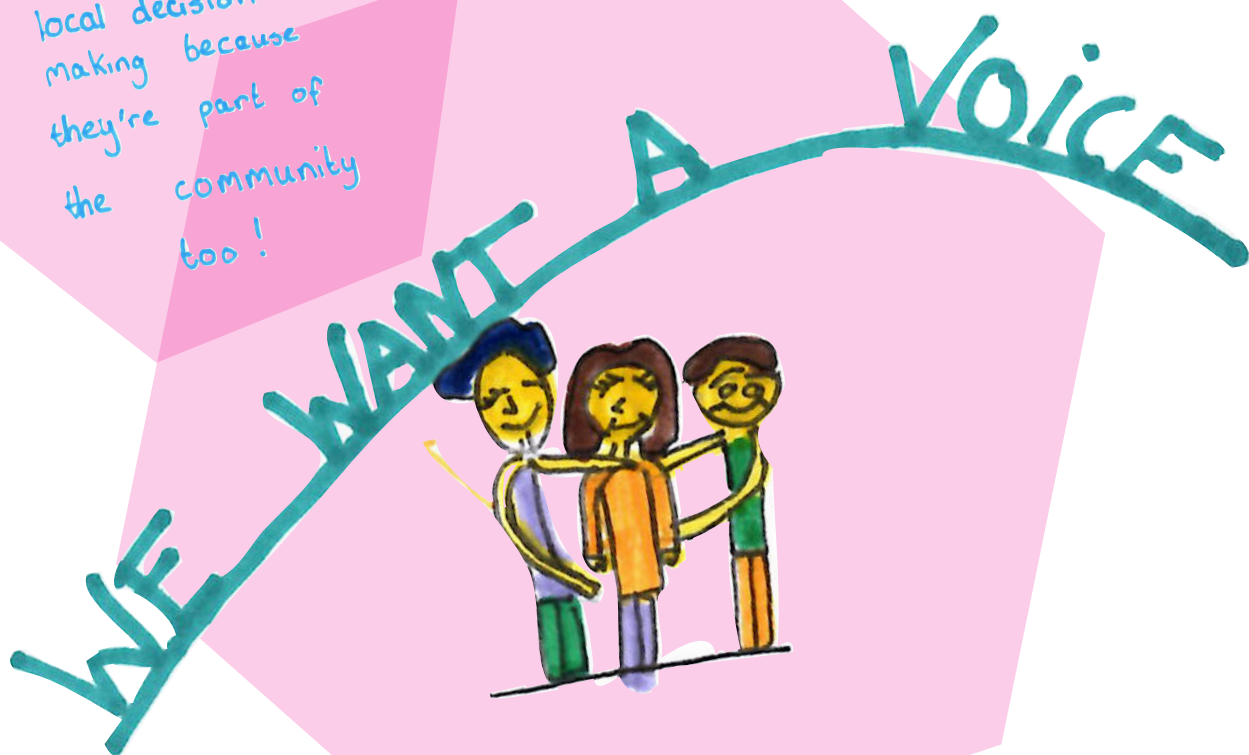
DEMOCRACY

Democracy matters to children

Children's Parliament Consultation on
'Democracy Matters'
August 2019



Children should
be involved in
local decision
making because
they're part of
the community
too!



Thank You

Thank you to the Members of Children's Parliament (MCPs) from Breadalbane Academy for sharing their views and experiences on children's participation in local democracy. The MCPs' hard work, creativity and thoughtfulness have helped co-produce this magazine, which captures the views and ideas that arose from the workshops.

Thank you also to Monica Young from Breadalbane Academy for her ongoing support and encouragement throughout this consultation.

Letter from the editors

Dear Scottish government,
We are a group of children from Dunkeld and Binnam
and we are members of childrens parliament We are creating
a magazine this time and we are happy to share you our
ideas Democracy matters to children!!!



Democracy Matters to Children's Parliament

Scotland is currently reviewing local democratic practices under the Local Governance Review. As part of this, over 4,000 people have contributed to the national conversation on Democracy Matters¹, which is exploring the ways in which communities can have a greater say in decisions that affect them.

For children, paths to meaningful involvement in decision-making are currently limited and many children have little or no experience of participation in democratic processes. In recognition of this, we worked with 15 Members of Children's Parliament² aged 12 to 13 to explore key questions from the Democracy Matters consultation.

¹ Scottish Government (2019) Democracy Matters <https://www.gov.scot/publications/democracy-matters-community-ideas-future/>

² All children who participate in our projects and consultations become Members of Children's Parliament. Unlike other parliamentary bodies, Children's Parliament is not an elected body. Rather it is a participatory one, engaging with children across a range of settings in order to include as many children as possible.

INTRODUCTION

to Children's Parliament

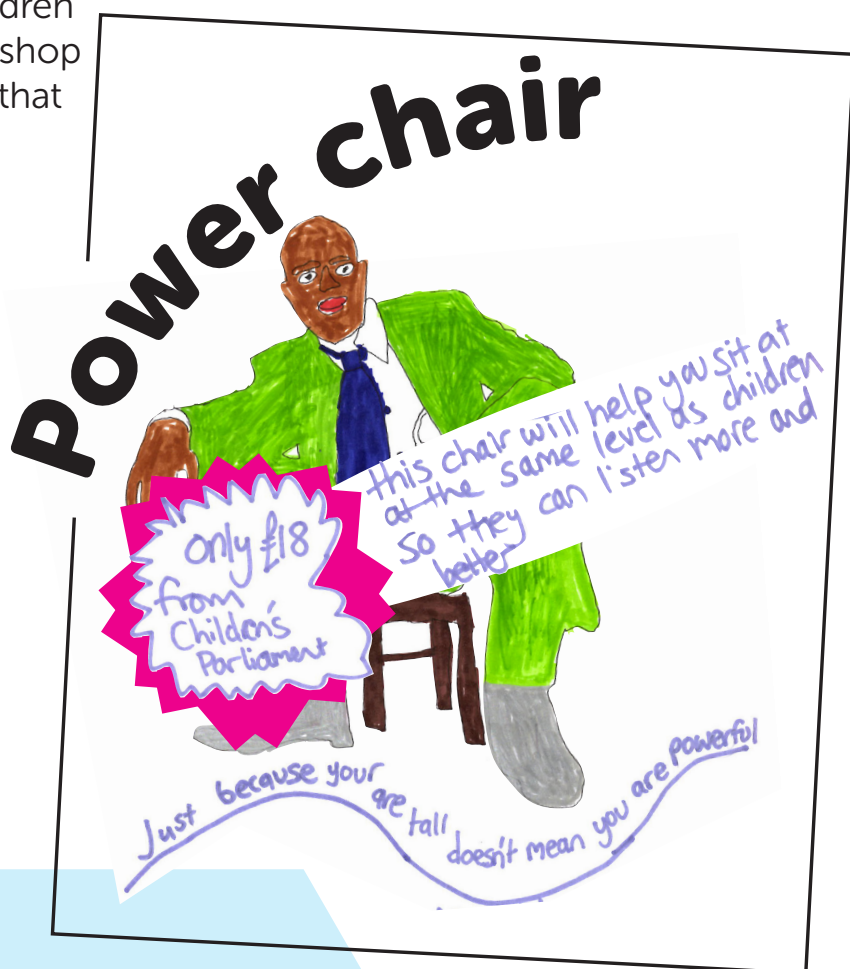
Children's Parliament is Scotland's Centre of Excellence for children's participation and engagement. Children's Parliament works for a future where children in Scotland are healthy, happy and safe. We do this by providing children with opportunities to share their experiences, thoughts and feelings so that they can influence life at home, in school and in the community, through change at a local and national level.

At Children's Parliament, we use a children's human rights-based approach; specifically, we use the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which provides a set of minimum standards against which we can measure how we are doing and below which we must not fall.

CHILDRENS Parliament
is giving children a
voice and somewhere
they can say their
ideas. And be heard

I got involved in childrens
parliament in primary
school and we took part in a
project And we made all the
boards on our dream for the
community that we live in. I
really enjoyed working with
childrens parliament.

To explore the children's views and experiences of children's participation in local democracy, Children's Parliament facilitated a series of creative workshops in May and June 2019. The workshops were underpinned by an understanding of children's human rights and explored the relationship between human rights and local democracy more broadly. To present their ideas in response to the consultation, the children spent their final workshop creating the content that forms this magazine. One of the children designed this 'mock' advert to playfully draw attention to the power imbalance between children's and adults' participation in local democracy and to encourage adults to listen to children in a meaningful way.

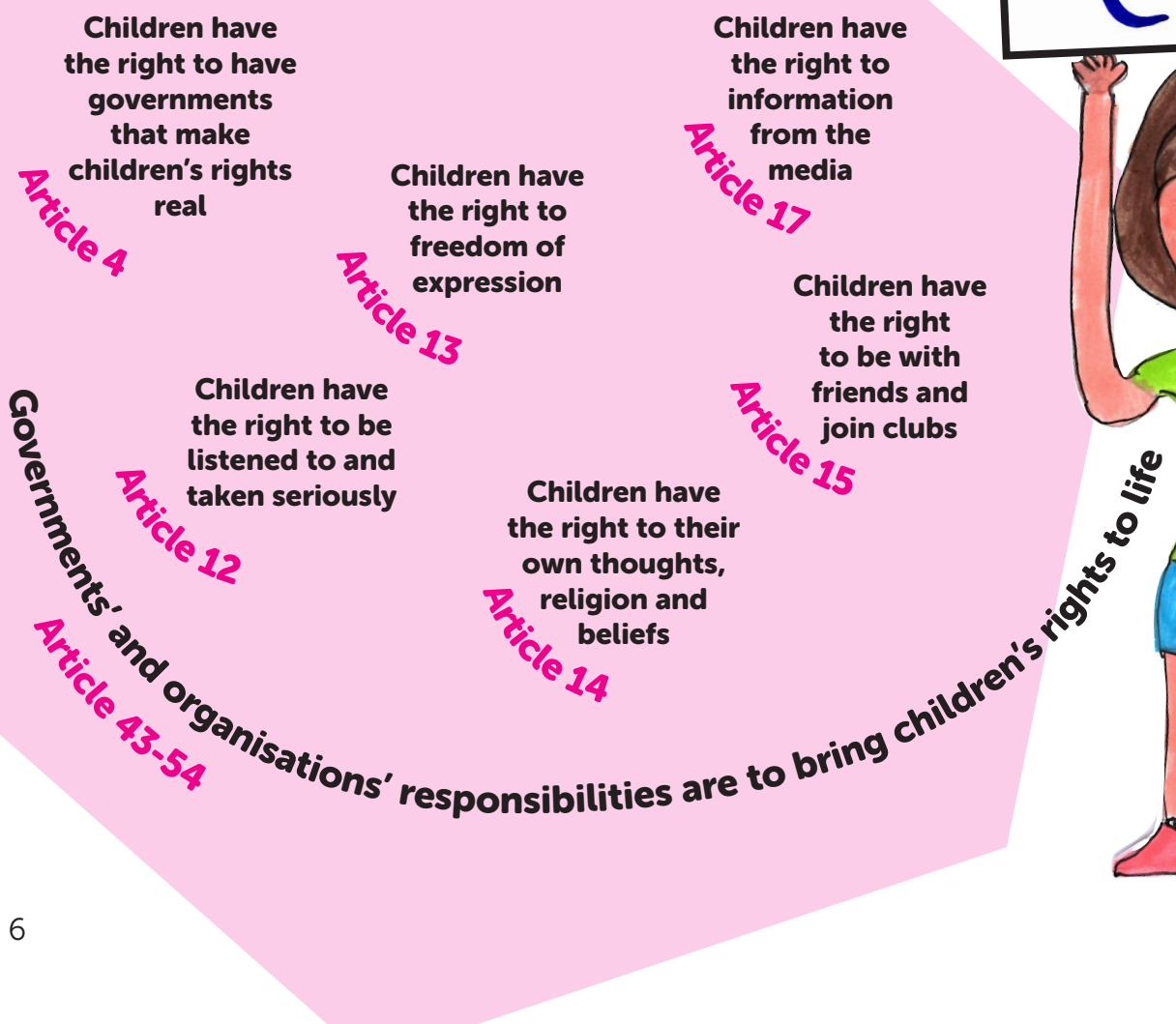


Adults get heard more than children
but children have the right to be
heard as well as adults.

Children's Rights, Local Democracy and Decision Making

Children's human rights are about ensuring that children are healthy, happy and safe. The Scottish Government has committed to incorporating the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into Scots law, which means it is imperative that children's views are sought in all matters that affect them. As outlined in the UNCRC, governments have a duty to ensure that children's human rights are realised at home, at school and in the community.

Children's human rights are universal, interdependent and indivisible. When asked to consider which rights might be particularly important to local governance, children identified the following rights:



**What do
'local' and
'community'
mean to
children?**

**What kind of
community
do children
want to grow
up in?**

**WE HAVE
VOICE GIVE US
CHOICE**



What do 'local' and 'community' mean to children?

When asked to reflect on what 'local' and 'community' mean, the MCPs identified the following key words. How many can you find in the wordsearch?

What is community?

- People
- Parks
- Houses
- Groups
- Speaking
- Shops
- Trees
- Cars
- Bridges
- Friends
- Lights
- Churches
- Bins
- Beaches
- Woods

What is local?

- Neighbourhood
- Neighbour
- Shops
- Family
- Around your area
- School



The MCPs recognised that whilst some children might feel a strong connection to one particular community, others might feel less involved or connected. They also discussed the different types of communities one might be part of in terms of geography, identity, interests, experience and life-stage.

What kind of community do you want to grow up in?

MCPs shared their vision of the kind of community that can help children feel happy, healthy, safe and valued:

Relationships | The relationships children have with others living in their community was highlighted by the MCPs as being of particular importance to children. Children want to grow up feeling respected, safe and valued by adults and other children in their community; they want to feel that they have people they can trust. Not knowing other people in the community can leave children feeling afraid of and uncertain around strangers.

Regarding relationships in the community, children described feeling unsafe and unsure when exposed to adults and young people drinking alcohol, smoking or taking drugs – especially at community events, games and festivals³.

Environment | One of the most prominent themes to emerge in this consultation was the MCPs reflection on the importance of the physical environment for children. MCPs highlighted that the environment is important to many children and that children frequently wish for “lots of green space”, “less traffic”, “low noise levels” and “more places to play” “more street lights” “more trees” “more bins” “protected wildlife” “safe crossing points” “speed bumps” “no graffiti”.

Leisure and Socialising | In addition, the MCPs emphasised that there needs to be leisure and social opportunities to bring the community together such as community markets, fairs and events, spaces for people to spend time and hang out, creative clubs and activities, and places like “cinemas for entertainment” “more art clubs for creative minds” “more places to be accepted” “New year celebrations” “Having more fun stuff for children and young people”.

¹ The children's reflections in this consultation mirror the views and experiences of children involved in Children's Parliament's 2019 investigation into the impact of alcohol on children's lives, delivered on behalf of Alcohol Focus Scotland. For more information, visit: <https://www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/alcohol-free-child-hood-consultation/>

Physical Activity | In order for communities to be happy, healthy and safe places for people to live, the Members of Children's Parliament highlighted the importance of ensuring communities are active, accessible places and home to lots of indoor and outdoor physical activities such as "active kids clubs and youth clubs" "fitness activities" "skate parks" "high ropes courses" "nice walks" "swimming pools".

Shops & Restaurants | The MCPs emphasised the importance of having access to "healthy, fresh food" in local shops and encouraging communities to have "less fast-food places". Given the children's rural context, they emphasised the need for more shops and supermarkets in / near small towns and villages.

Policies, Laws and Regulations | For communities to be places where children's human rights are understood and respected, the MCPs recognised the need for certain policies, laws and regulations to be in place. One example that children focused on was alcohol and drug-related issues such as drink driving and drunken behaviour, suggesting certain policies, laws and regulations were needed to curb these issues within the community.

Children also recognised the need for services such as the police, fire brigade and ambulance to keep communities safe, happy and healthy.

Feeling safe!

What does Local mean to you?
An Eco, Healthy community
that Work together to Solve
Problems!

What kind of community
do want to grow up in!
Happy, Helpful and kind
atmosphere!

What local issues
are important to you?
rubbish lying around!!!

Respect!

Trees

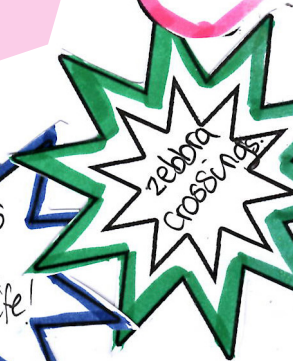


WHAT ISSUES MATTER TO CHILDREN

Local issues children want to have a say in:

- Community safety
- Education (how schools are run, school food, staff, curriculum, physical buildings)
- Environmental maintenance and conservation (litter, cleanliness, bins and recycling, protecting wildlife and natural environment)
- Leisure and sports facilities
- Local activities and opportunities for children and older people
- Planning and development (buildings, street lighting)
- Public transport
- Road (including traffic, speed limits, zebra crossings)
- Budgeting
- Choosing local political representatives (voting)

The MCPs emphasised that not all children might want to be involved in local democracy and that children have the right to opt-out of participation. The MCPs felt that not all issues and matters would be relevant or of interest to all children. They also discussed whether in some cases, it should be the responsibility of adults to make decisions, but they agreed that even if children are not directly involved, children's rights should always be respected.

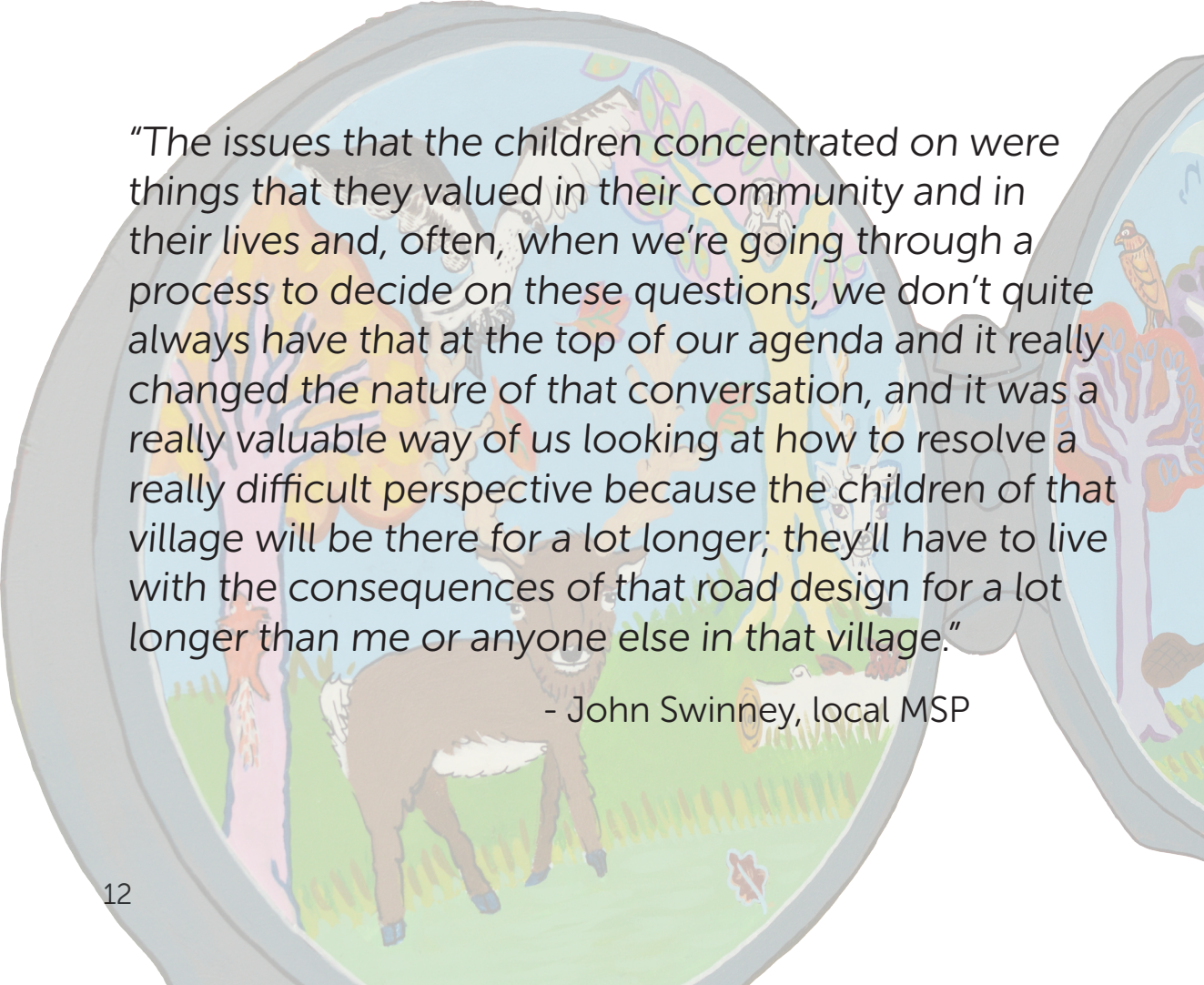


Case Study: Dualling of the A9

Throughout 2017–18, Children’s Parliament worked with children and young people from the Dunkeld & Birnam area to ensure their views, ideas and experiences were included in community-wide discussions on the dualling of the A9.

As a result of these discussions, children from the Royal School of Dunkeld created a series of ‘billboards’, which illustrated their vision for the future of Dunkeld & Birnam.

These billboards were unveiled at the Big Ask, a community event to gather people’s views around the development of the A9. Since then, the children’s work has been on display at the Birnam Arts Centre and the Royal School of Dunkeld, inviting adults to reflect on the children’s involvement in community planning and the impact this had on the process.



“The issues that the children concentrated on were things that they valued in their community and in their lives and, often, when we’re going through a process to decide on these questions, we don’t quite always have that at the top of our agenda and it really changed the nature of that conversation, and it was a really valuable way of us looking at how to resolve a really difficult perspective because the children of that village will be there for a lot longer; they’ll have to live with the consequences of that road design for a lot longer than me or anyone else in that village.”

- John Swinney, local MSP

Interview

In June 2019, MCP Sif, interviewed MCP Grace, about her experience of being involved in the discussions around the A9 and her thoughts on involving children in local democracy more broadly.

Sif: Hello Grace, today we're going to be asking you a few questions about the A9 project. First of all, what did you like, enjoy or learn?

Grace: We started the billboard project to give our opinion on our village. I enjoyed the artwork, it was definitely the best bit.

Sif: What happened as a result of the billboards? Who gave you feedback?

Grace: We got involved by going to local conferences to speak to councillors. We always got feedback about our ideas on the billboards from councillors and other people that were there.

Sif: Based on your experience, what is your advice for adults who want to involve children in local democracy?

Grace: Do more of it! Children always have good ideas and always ask quite a lot of questions that are important for adults to hear.

Sif: Based on your experience, what is your advice for children who want to be involved in local democracy?

Grace: Contact your councillor as they can do most of the stuff that you want or need to happen so you can reach your goal.

Sif: Thank you Grace!



Local Democracy + Children

Forms of local democracy: what works for children and what doesn't

Here MCPs tell us what forms of local democracy might work for children and give their recommendations for how existing forms could be adapted or improved to ensure children can participate and have their say.

"In the community, not many children help to make decisions in the community by choice. Children don't get to decide what the money is spent on, they also don't get to vote or choose who gets to be in charge. For the very few that do get to have a say in making decisions, they don't enjoy it. Children are barely involved: we can make some decisions but they are boring and we don't care about them! In the community there are a few different ways you can see [and experience] democracy. You can see voting polls, petitions and community meetings that are normally always controlled by adults and are quite boring. Most adults that don't have children won't listen to children! In our local community, children have some chances to make decisions that actually affect us in a major way. In our area, there are meetings for decisions that affect us in a moderate way, but they are not very child orientated so basically no children go."

- MCP, age 13

Community council meetings

Children could attend community council meetings to have their voices heard on matters related to the community.

Recommendations

MCPs suggest that communities “should have more young people and kids at the meetings” so that both adults and children are involved in decisions about their local community. They recommend that the meetings should take place in spaces suitable for children and at times that work for children. They shouldn’t be too long, and they should be fun. The meetings should be child-friendly and have free food and drinks.



Participatory Budgeting

Children and young people could be allocated a proportion of local budgets to spend on issues that are important to them.

Recommendations

MCPs suggest rolling this out to all communities in Scotland. Children “should get between £5000 - £10000 a year to spend in each community” because many children “don’t get to choose” how community money is spent. They suggest a group of children should be set up and meet regularly to discuss what to fund.

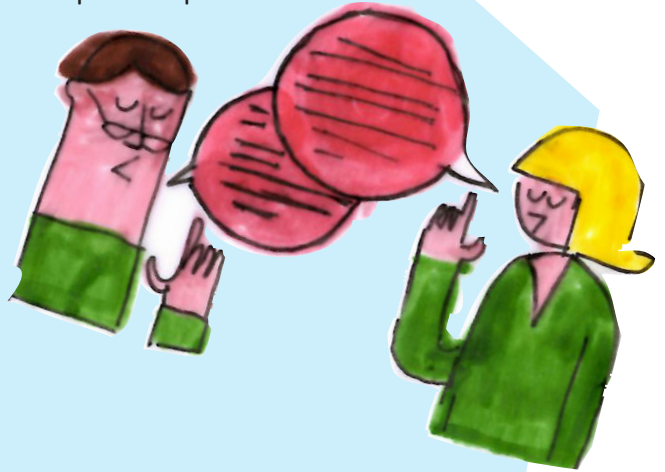


Meet your local councillor

Children could meet with their local councillor in school, in their local surgery or other at community events.

Recommendations

Local councillors should meet children where they usually go - at schools / clubs / groups to hear about any issues they would like to discuss. They could "have a special place in the village" where children can meet with them. This space should be "friendly and welcoming" and should have snacks, games and activities for the children to do.



Protests

Children could initiate or participate in protests about issues that matter to them.

Recommendations

MCPs suggest that children should be able to hold protests at "times that work for children", in locations that are "easy to get to". Protests should be "fun" and involve "moving around". Children should be taken seriously if they are protesting and adults (parents, schools etc.) should support children and protest with them. Decision makers should listen to children's protests and "make changes to law".



Pupil Voice

Children could participate in school-community democracy such as pupil voice and pupil councils.

Recommendations

MCPs suggest making pupil voice meetings “fun and playful” so that children of all ages and abilities are able to participate. They also recommend establishing links between pupil voice and wider community council meetings so children can discuss community matters and they feed their ideas into community meetings. They stress the importance of making sure adults highlight the children’s ideas so they are recognised and valued:



“They should have some adults to listen and take some ideas for another meeting with just adults but they mention their name and how they got the idea.”

Write to your local councillor

Children could write to their local councillor to share their ideas, views and concerns about their local area. Children recognise that there may be barriers for some children participating in this activity – especially younger children, children with limited writing abilities, and for children with limited resources available to them.

Recommendations

Local councillors must respond to the children’s communication and give clear feedback on the outcome of the child’s request, whether or not action has been taken or will be taken.

Top 10 ways to get kids more involved in their community!

1. "Make sure all children and adults know children have the right to participate in local democracy!"

2.

"We could vote [on local issues] and that would make us feel more involved."

10.

"Children need to hear back quickly from the adults who are making decisions. It's really important so children know their ideas have been heard and taken into account."

9.

Respect children: "We can't change the way adults view our opinions negatively and how much they trust us to make important decisions."

8.

"Adults should listen to our opinions. They don't have to do everything that children say but they must value and listen to their ideas."

How Can We Get Kids Involved?

3. "Let children talk to councillors as they can help!"

4. "We need a good community group that children are motivated to go to and enjoy having a say in because it will make them feel valued."

5. "We should have more young people and kids at the meetings."

6. "Have fun meetings with drinks and snacks so children don't go hungry or thirsty. They could play games related to the subject and give them the option to come along or not."

7. "Let children decide about climate change and environment because it's our world too."

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Children

A dults Should
Listen to Our
Opinions. "They don't
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 **Children's
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giving ideas a voice

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