Glasgow Centre for Population Health

Response to Glasgow City Council's consultation on the City Charter

Introduction

The Glasgow Centre for Population (GCPH) was established in 2004 to generate insights and evidence to improve health and tackle inequality. Within this broad remit, community empowerment and participation has become an important aspect of the Centre's work[i]. The creation of this City Charter – in collaboration with Glasgow's citizens – can be an important development for empowering people across the city. It also provides an opportunity to improve public understanding of what the Council can and cannot provide, as well as how citizens can support – and be supported by – Council activities.

Policy context

The creation of a City Charter which meets the needs of local people is consistent with the Scottish Government's national outcome that *"public services are high quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive to local people's needs"* [ii]. We also feel it could play an important role in supporting the implementation of the Community Empowerment Act (Scotland) 2015, particularly in relation to encouraging public participation in decision-making and the new duties placed on Community Planning to tackle inequality in areas of identified need[iii].

The recent Draft Community Plan and the Resilience Strategy are existing Council policies where there is likely to be overlap with the Charter. Further, the inclusion of a commitment to "provide volunteering opportunities" is in line with the Council's existing commitment to Glasgow's Volunteer Charter. This Charter places an expectation on signatory organisations to increase the number of volunteering roles, gather baseline information on existing roles and create an action plan to support this commitment. We hope that the inclusion of a statement on volunteering within the City Charter is an indication that meeting the objectives of the Volunteer Charter remains a Council priority. Overall it may be beneficial to make reference to all strategies that have been shaped by – or which have shaped – the creation of this City Charter. It may also be worth setting out how the values and visions identified will be monitored and can support existing Council objectives.

Creation of the Charter

On page 1 it is stated that a representative group of citizens were involved in the Charter's development. In the interests of transparency, we would like to know how participants were invited to take part, how many attended and how the group collectively reached a decision about the included statements, particularly those relating to the role of citizens. To ensure further public participation, it may also be worth using a range of approaches to get public feedback on current and future drafts of the Charter. In order to increase public interest it might also be helpful to outline why it has been created, how the Council expects it to shape the delivery of their own services and what citizens can expect from staff as a result of the agreement. If seeking to shape practice across all Council services, it may also be beneficial to state how members of staff will be made aware of the Charter and what obligation they have to the commitments within it.

In terms of citizen contribution, it is not clear whether the vision reflects what the Council expects from local people, or whether a collective agreement has been reached. Further, although the commitments of citizens are framed alongside various Council commitments, it may be considerate to acknowledge that the expectations being placed on local people will be to some extent dependent on the Council fulfilling its own obligations.

Citizens' role

The visions and values within the Charter place a strong onus on individual responsibility for actions and behaviour. Some of these do not account for the role that individual circumstances (e.g. disability, income) or wider structural factors (e.g. the environment, available opportunities) play in shaping an individual's ability to meet them. Although some commitments such as "looking out for vulnerable or isolated people" may reflect a wider societal responsibility, others are more specific and may not therefore be appropriate at a whole population level. For example, "volunteering" and "taking up opportunities for work and training" may not be possible for all citizens, even if it is a Council objective to increase volunteering or employment across the population. Further, the expectation for citizens to "pay their Council Tax and other charges on time" may be desirable for the Council to manage its own financial affairs, but for many people this may not be possible at times for reasons outwith their own control. This is important given that almost half of Glasgow's population live within one of the 20% most deprived areas in the Country[iv]. Similarly, asserting that citizens should "look after themselves, become more active and adopt a healthier lifestyle" suggests that external factors are not important in shaping individual behaviours. Indeed, recent research in Glasgow found that people were more likely to be active in their neighbourhood

when there were high levels of social interaction and the environment was perceived to be aesthetically attractive[v]. In such areas there should perhaps be a greater onus on the Council and other partners to help create the right conditions for people to make healthier choices.

Council's role

In relation to the Council's contribution, we would like to see the inclusion of a commitment which mirrors the citizen value of "treating each other with respect, no matter what people's different backgrounds or circumstances are". In addition, the inclusion of the expectation that members of the public will email or use the Council's App to report issues excludes citizens who do not have access to the internet. Digital exclusion has been identified as an important form of inequality across the city, with 22% of the Glasgow population having no access to the internet[vi]. In more than half of the city's datazones – and particularly the most deprived areas – more than 40% have no access[vii]. In the interests of inclusion and transparency, it is recommended that contact in person or by telephone is also included as an expected citizen contribution.

Equality

Several values included could contribute positively to making Glasgow a fairer and healthier place to live. For example, ensuring that employers in Glasgow pay the Living Wage (presumably the Glasgow Living Wage?), providing more community staff, having well-priced facilities and better public spaces are positive commitments. These commitments will be effective if targeted towards the parts of the city where the need for support, improvement and affordability is greatest. Taking this into consideration, we would welcome an additional commitment to reducing inequalities in health, income and access to services by prioritising investment and support in areas of disadvantage.

Monitoring and reporting

To track progress over time, it is recommended that a reporting mechanism is put in place to track how/if the agreed contributions are being met. This might include representation from local people to assess how/if their roles are being met.

[i] Dodds S. *Social contexts and health: a GCPH synthesis.* Glasgow: GCPH; 2016. Available at: http://www.gcph.co.uk/publications/620_social_contexts_and_health

[ii] Scottish Government. *National Outcomes.* Available at: http://www.gov.scot/About/Performance/scotPerforms/outcome

[iii] Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015. Available at: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2015/6/pdfs/asp_20150006_en.pdf

[iv] Understanding Glasgow. Glasgow indicators: *Poverty.* Available at: http://www.understandingglasgow.com/indicators/poverty/overview

[v] Sawyer A, Jones R, Ucci M, Kearns A, Smith L, Fisher A. (2017) Cross-sectional interactions between quality of the physical and social environment and self-reported physical activity in adults living in income-deprived communities. PLoS ONE 12(12): e0188962. Available at: http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0188962

[vi] Scottish Household Survey. *Local Authority Tables Glasgow.* Edinburgh: Scottish Government; 2016. Available at: http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0052/00528099.pdf

[vii] White D. *Across the divide: Tackling digital exclusion in Glasgow.* Dunfermline: Carnegie Trust; 2015. Available at: https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/across-the-divide-full-report/