



Fife Centre for Equalities
Barriers to Engagement 2025-2026

*Learning from the Kirkcaldy Decides Participatory
Budgeting Project*



Common Grounds Network - Origin:



In April 2024, FCE assumed stewardship of the Fife Interfaith Group (FIG). FCE aims to continue the group vision, to bring people together from across Fife to share their religious views, beliefs, cultures and humanity.

The network is open to those with a religion or belief, as well as those who may not necessarily follow a specific belief but are looking to connect with others.

Throughout 24-25, we hosted a range of meetings and events to bring new members into the group, discuss the direction and type of activity they would like to take part in and lead.

The meetings included:

- *April 24 – 12 attendees*
- *May 24 – 12 attendees*
- *July 24 – 39 attendees*
- *September 24 – 11 attendees*
- *December 24 – 3 attendees*
- *Mailing List on 31/3/25 – 41 people*

One item that the group agreed on was restoring the Beveridge Park Peace Garden, which was originally designed by the previous Fife Interfaith Group. As part of this process, they applied for the [You Decide Kirkcaldy](#) participatory budgeting project for £15,000.

The application was successful, and as such a programme of design workshops and community engagement sessions has been created to carry out this project:

Overview:

For the past year, Fife Centre for Equalities (FCE) has been gathering views of individuals and groups on barriers to active participation across Fife. The focus was on initiatives such as statutory service consultations, participatory budgeting and similar community wealth building opportunities.

To gather these views, FCE engaged with individuals **via a range of community events** and use as a point of focus experiences of participants in the **Common Grounds Network** (which focuses on public participation and community cohesion) as well as **6 interviews** with a mix of individuals involved with participatory budgeting and those who are not.



In addition to these general collection methods, feedback was also gathered at FCE's own **community roundtable discussions**, which focused on **specific protected characteristics**.

To ensure that the responses collected were quality and that those contributing felt safe, **responses were anonymised unless requested** by the individual to be named. FCE primarily uses a **person-centred approach** to our reporting and analysis, engaging with clients concerns firsthand before assessing further support after. When referring clients looking for support, we ensure that the appropriate specialist service providers are assigned and that any necessary **reasonable adjustments are in place** before engaging.

Overall findings concluded that communities are **happy to contribute and participate** in local democracy and community wealth building programmes, as long as they are aware of what they are getting in to and that their expectations are managed accordingly.

For those that had been involved with community wealth building initiatives, the feedback was positive, that the process was explained to them and that they were **supported thoroughly by Fife Council staff**.

Breakdown by Protected Characteristics:

Disability:

The primary feedback gathered from engagements with individuals with disabilities and long-term conditions was mostly focused on the accessibility of resources.

The focus of these discussions was on online accessibility, with members from the deaf and hard of hearing community sharing their experiences of trying to learn about what is in their area without the digital literacy required to use a smartphone or computer.

Two members had raised their reliance on physical materials such as leaflets, community noticeboards and word-of-mouth from friends and family.

Gender Reassignment:

From the FCE LGBT+ Community Roundtable, a concern was raised with the group that when accessing ONFife venues, that the lack of gender-neutral toilets was a prominent barrier for them taking part in activities at their venues.

Knowing what spaces are safe for trans individuals is a cause of anxiety for them, for example, if they are challenged in a public bathroom, how do they know that the venue will keep them safe?

It was also highlighted that online security can be a risk for the LGBT+ community, online meeting spaces such as Teams and Zoom, have been targeted by "Zoom bombings".

Religion and Belief:

Feedback from the Fife Common Grounds Network focused on a need for a safe, open space for individuals and groups to come together face-to-face to discuss community initiatives and participation opportunities that impact their local areas.

Members of the faith community had discussed how beneficial town hall style engagements were, and that it was a valuable opportunity to disseminate information within their own congregations and communities.

Key Themes from Interviews:

Unfamiliarity with Terminology and Process

The most common response amongst those who had not engaged with consultations or participatory budgeting before was a lack of knowledge surrounding the programme themselves, what participatory budgeting means and how someone would go about becoming involved with the initiative.

Individuals and groups are less likely to be involved if understanding what the programme entails from the start is a barrier. 36% of those interviewed felt that the programme “wasn’t for them” – believing that it was solely for constituted groups and more “official” organisations.

One individual had highlighted that when researching the process, that a bank account from an organisation had to be used to ensure that it was not going to an individual’s account, as their community group was only a few members and quite informal, they felt that they were ineligible.

It is worth noting, however, that those who had engaged fully with the process and had asked for support and advice from the contacts provided, even when unfamiliar with the process, had a more positive outlook on their experience with participatory budgeting.

One-way Consultation and Managed Expectations

A running theme that was raised by those interviewed was a feeling of apathy with local consultations, and that their responses were not valued or considered.

36% of respondents felt that there was no use in responding, as “nothing would happen anyway”.

In addition to this, there were feelings of disappointment post-consultation, 40% of respondents felt that there was not enough feedback to the points they had shared, and where their community contributions have helped.

All of those interviewed were happy to say that they would attend a face-to-face session with those in charge of the consultation to see what has happened and the benefits it has brought.

One individual had spoken on their experience of seeing consultations being promoted on similar topics, specifically looking at green spaces. Although the consultations contained different titles, because they were the same topic the individual felt dissuaded from contributing again, as they felt that it would be a waste of their time.

Another respondent felt that their concerns within their community were not being heard, as they had nowhere to suggest ideas for the Council’s attention.

Accessing Online Resources

A common theme throughout all of FCE's reporting so far has been the barriers brought on by accessing online materials and information, this is carried over when looking into local participation.

This is not a new topic, certain characteristics are disproportionately impacted when attempting to access online materials, such as disability, age, race and socio-economic deprivation. This is due to a range of factors such as:

- Lack of resources e.g. smartphones and computers.
- Lack of digital literacy.
- Lack of language support.
- Inaccessible design.

A portion of the individuals interviewed had no issue with using search engines and online portals to find the information that they require, however, 18% of the respondents highlighted that due to the vast amount of content available on the Fife Council website, that it is incredibly difficult to find what you need even with the search function available.

Next steps

- Link to inclusive comms/alignment
- Empowerment work, investing community learning

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Fife Centre for Equalities (FCE) is a local charity, funded by Fife Council, with the charitable aims of raising awareness and understanding amongst all communities and community groups in Fife of equality and diversity.

FCE provides access to appropriate information, assistance and training to communities and community groups in support of fair and inclusive community development.

Our values are to work with honesty, integrity, respect, and transparency, and strive to demonstrate a fully inclusive approach in everything we do. We work with communities and with partners to help make Fife a fairer and more equal place to live, work and study.



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