

## Commission on Parliamentary Reform

### Engage Renfrewshire - Forum for Empowering Communities

1 February 2017

There were 14 in attendance representing various community areas such as Community Learning and Development (CLD), Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB), Access Panels etc.

#### **We asked: What have been your experiences of engaging with the Parliament?**

#### **You said:**

Across the group there was a variety of experiences in engaging with the Parliament including cross party groups, giving oral evidence to committees and taking part in events such as Parliament Day Paisley and Community Conferences (Outreach Services event)

Overall Parliament was seen as open and welcoming. There is a perception that the Parliament has become more adversarial in recent years and that it is becoming more like Westminster. Committee meetings are seen as too formal and using language that's inaccessible to many people. The overall standing of the Parliament at any time is tied into the perception of how well the Government is performing.

#### Cross Party Groups –

There had been mixed experiences but some felt these were mainly talking shops and direct outcomes weren't always obvious, although the groups were valuable as networking opportunities. The Cross Party Group on Disabilities was seen as achieving an impact on legislation. There was disappointment that the UK Government hadn't got involved in the cross party group on Welfare Reform.

#### Evidence to committees –

Those who had taken part saw this as part of their job and it was a normal experience to be challenged, so they were quite comfortable with the process.

#### Events –

Parliament Day Paisley was seen as very valuable, allowing a large number and diverse group of people to get involved with the Parliament in their local area. However there had been no direct feedback about the outcome of the event.

Engage Renfrewshire has been contacted since the Parliament Day and are likely to work with the Outreach Office at the Scottish Parliament and Parliamentary committees on child poverty and welfare issues this session.

Groups working with Engage Renfrewshire have taken part in Community Conferences at the Parliament and these were found valuable in giving the participants knowledge of how the Parliament works and issues such as the

difference between Parliament and Government. They are keen to be involved in more of this type of event.

#### Recommendations from the group

- The Parliament should develop more imaginative and interactive educational materials to help people understand the difference between Parliament and Government
- All documents should use plain English, breaking up difficult technical information into manageable chunks
- Feedback should be given immediately after engagement to encourage continued interest and involvement
- More digital platforms such as Skype should be used to involve more people.
- There should be more focus on in depth engagement such as mini-publics