

# Democracy

# Matters

Electoral  
Reform  
Society  
Scotland

2019

A VISION FOR  
THE FUTURE  
OF SCOTTISH  
DEMOCRACY

OUR DEMOCRACY ACT AS IF WE  
OWN THE PLACE.

ERS Scotland &  
Our Democracy Coalition



Asset and Obstacle Mapping, 2018

This pamphlet highlights ERS Scotland and the Our Democracy Coalition's vision for the future of local governance in Scotland. The timing of this proposal comes at a pivotal time in Scottish politics, when the Government is consulting citizens and civil society groups about the design of our democratic system. Despite the fact that our democracy is more proportionally representative than the UK electoral system, our politics is far less local. This is a problem as it leads to a sense of disempowerment as decisions are being made elsewhere.

Our vision, summarised in this pamphlet, is a provocation to stimulate ideas rather than a final blueprint. It is based on the work we have been doing over a number of years. We have held local-level democratic events throughout the country, helping communities to create a shared vision for their future; developed a citizen-led Declaration on Local Democracy to unite the people of Scotland behind a common cause; and held a national conference on the future of democracy in Scotland. This has given us an understanding of what people want, what works, and what new structures, processes and institutions are needed to create a democracy that is fit for the 21st century. A democracy that is designed to bring people closer to decision making and foster collaboration and consensus in our communities.

# Our Vision

1

The existing local authorities should become regional / city authorities with a legally defined remit to provide infrastructure and services to assist more local units of governance to deliver their plans/vision and meet their defined 'challenges'. This should also involve all elements of non-acute health services.

2

A new layer of elected 'development councils' would be available to any community that met certain criteria and could show popular support. This might mean through local democratic events, votes, or both. This council will be statutory bound to have as a priority delivery of the local plan / vision set by the citizens' assembly below.

3

A 'development council' must establish a standing, annual citizens' assembly for that community. Its early sessions would design a community vision / plan for the next three years and then subsequent annual gatherings for the 'development council' to be accountable to the citizens' assembly on progress on the vision. The citizens' assembly should be randomly selected so that it can fulfil requirements of democratic legitimacy. The assemblies must become as much a part of the democratic process as elections and so should be regulated by a new section of the Elections Management Board.



'Act As If...' Council - Govan, Glasgow 2017

Democracy is the right for people to decide how the place where they live is run. For a hundred years this right has built our communities, our society and our sense of justice. But too few people now believe that this right is being honoured, too few believe that they decide and too many believe they are powerless and voiceless. So we call for a new democracy which is ready to help us build for a hundred years to come.

First, decisions must be made for each place, in that place by the people who live there. Our towns and villages must decide for themselves just as our nation must decide for itself. Power must exist at the scale of the community which is affected.  
We need our democracy much closer.

Second, the right to decide should not disappear each time the brief flicker of an election is over. Delegating our right to decide is not, in itself, enough. We must create a democracy that involves us all the time, where citizens do not just choose rulers but shape the rules.

Third, democracy must be powerful. The right to choose must be matched by the power to do – and the power to do must be matched with the resource to do it. Democracy is not gifted from above but from below, so power and resource must rest in the places where people live.

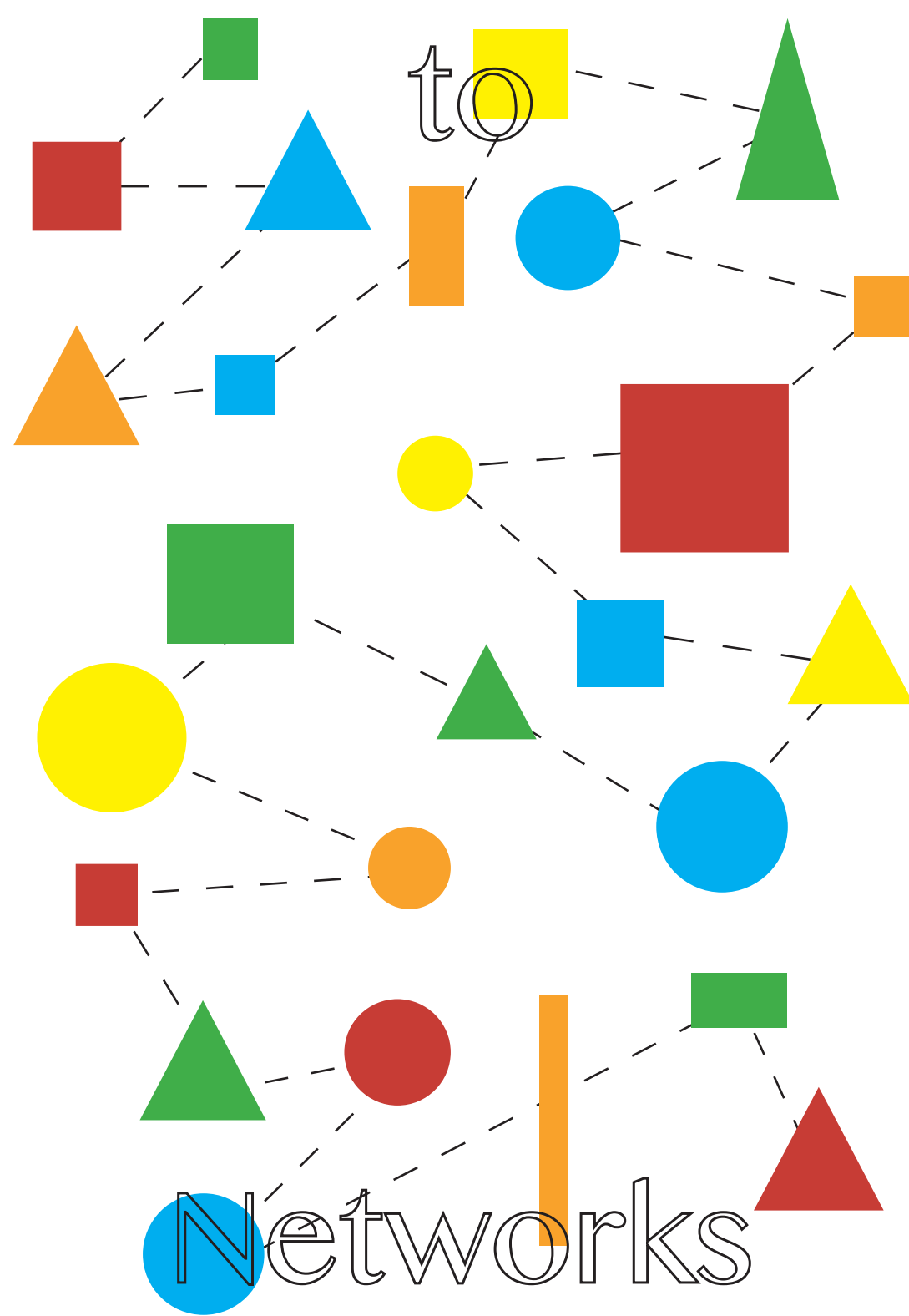
This is our simple vision for our future; a truly local democracy, a truly participatory democracy and a truly powerful democracy.

We have learned the lesson of our last hundred years; it is not enough that the future is built, it must be built for us. We must now learn a lesson for our next hundred years; it is not enough that the future is built for us, it must be built by us.

# DECLARATION ON LOCAL DEMOCRACY

From

Hierarchy







*Reclaiming Our Coalfield Communities - Bo'ness, 2018*

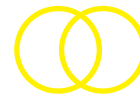
# SEVEN

# PRINCI-

# PLES

# OF

# REFORM



## 1

### THE PRINCIPLE OF SOVEREIGNTY

Democratic power lies with people and communities who give some of that power to governments and local governments, not the other way around.

## 2

### THE PRINCIPLE OF SUBSIDIARITY

Decisions should be taken as close to communities as possible, and local governance must be the right shape and form for the people and places it serves

## 3

### THE PRINCIPLE OF TRANSPARENCY

Democratic decisions should be clear and understandable to communities, with clean lines of accountability back to communities.

## 4

### THE PRINCIPLE OF PARTICIPATION

All communities must be able to participate in the decision making that affects their lives and their communities.

## 5

### THE PRINCIPLE OF SPHERES NOT TIERS OF GOVERNMENT

Different parts of the democratic system should have distinct jobs to do that are set out in 'competencies', rather than depend on power being handed down from 'higher' levels of governance.

## 6

### THE PRINCIPLE OF INTERDEPENDENCY

Every part of the democratic system must support the others, and none can be, or should seek to be, self-contained and self-sufficient

## 7

### THE PRINCIPLE OF WELL-BEING

The purpose of all democracy is to improve opportunities and outcomes for the individuals and communities that empower it

ERS supports the principles outlined in the COSLA Commission and suggest these be financed by the principle of fiscal flexibility and redistribution.





*Reclaiming Our Coalfield Communities - Cardenden, 2018*



*Reclaiming Our Coalfield Communities - Dalmellington, 2018*

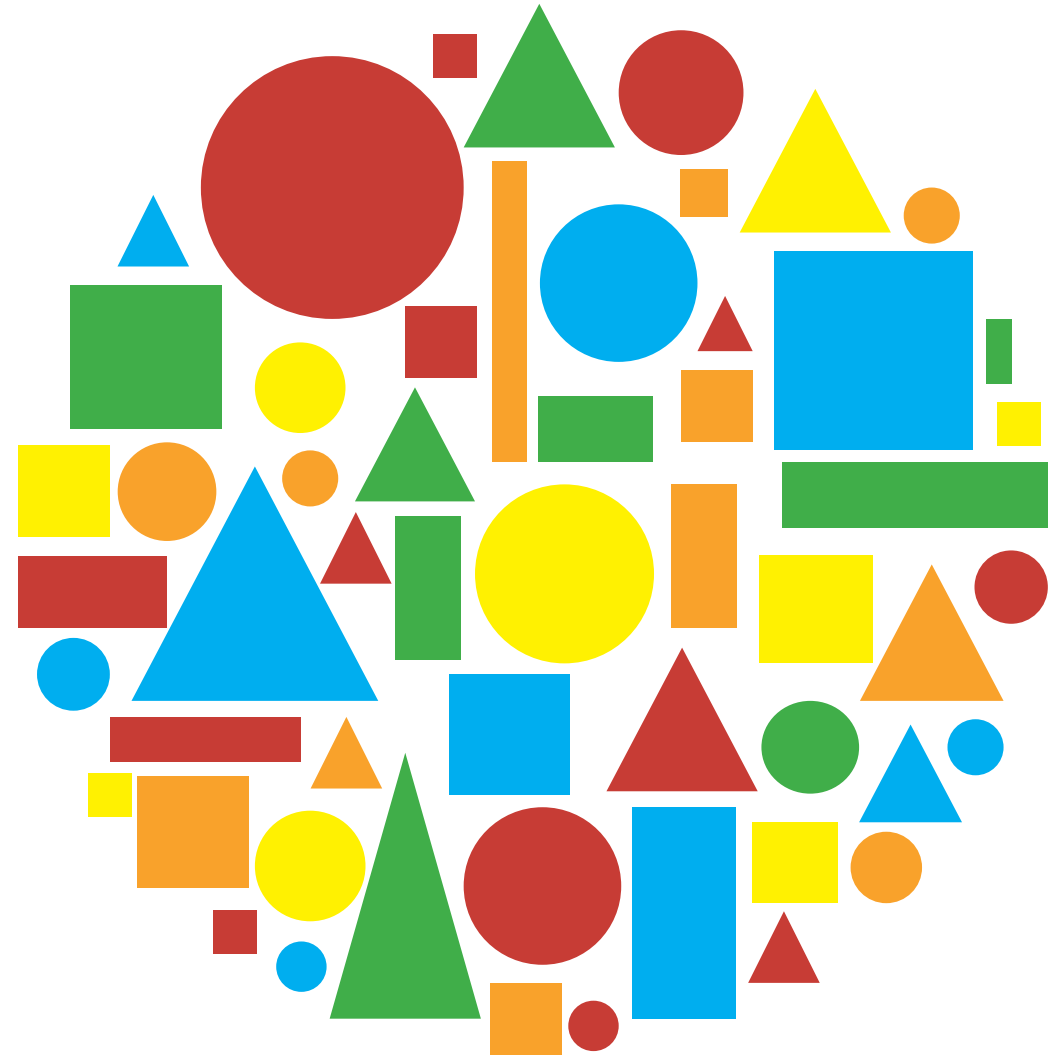
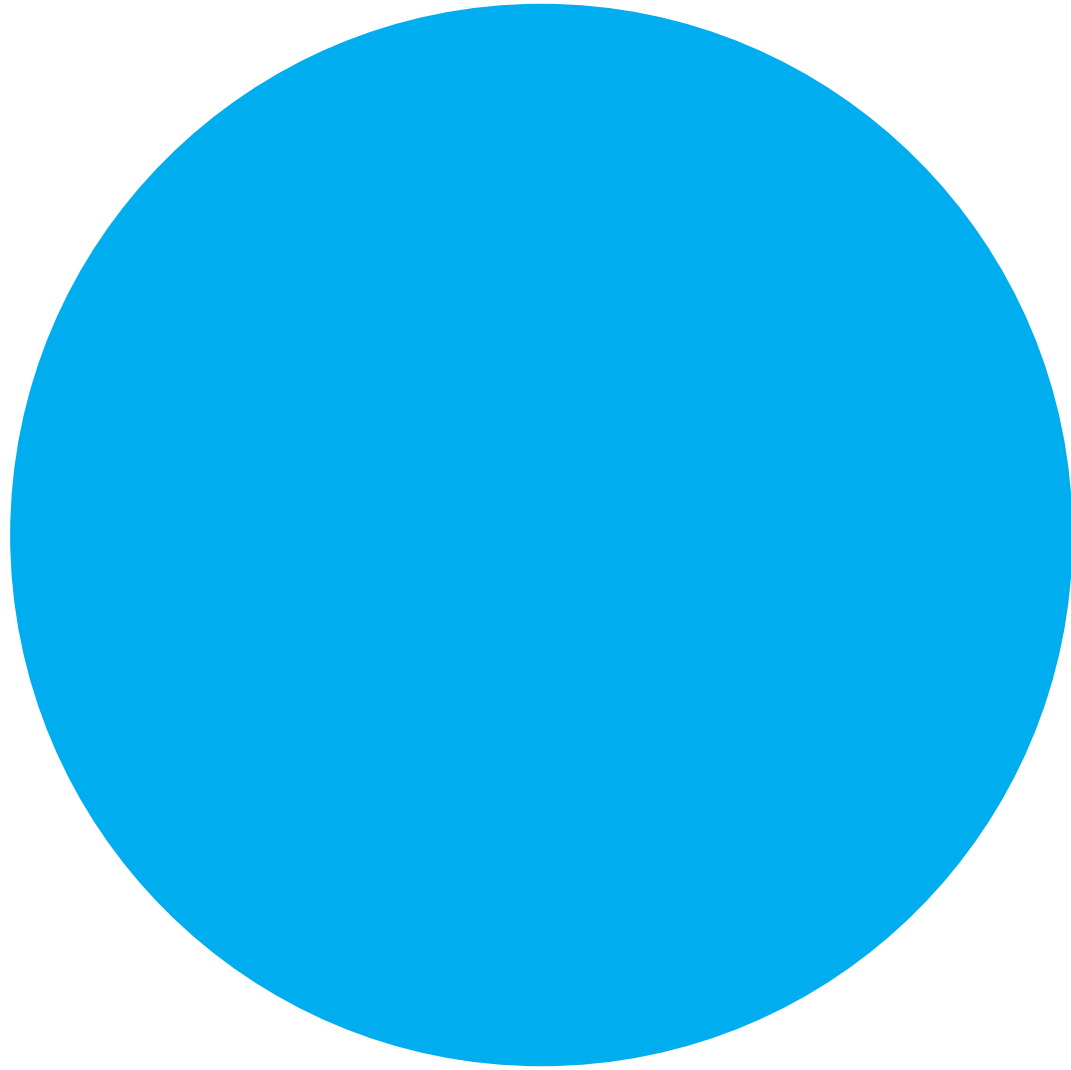
The photos in this document are from community assemblies and local democratic events, or mini-publics, that were carried out throughout Scotland in 2017 and 2018. Rather than merely speculating on the model that local governance should take, we tested tools and decision making processes to understand what works and how local democracy should look in the future.



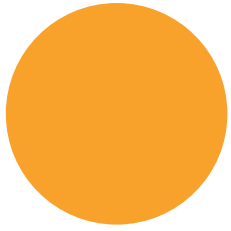
*The Big Blantyre Blether, 2018*



From Big



to Small



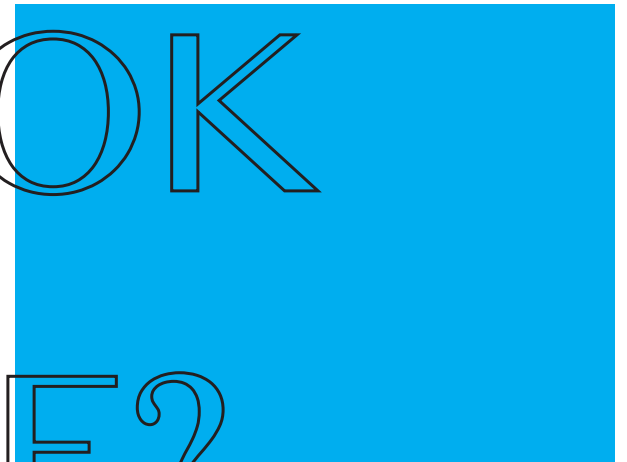
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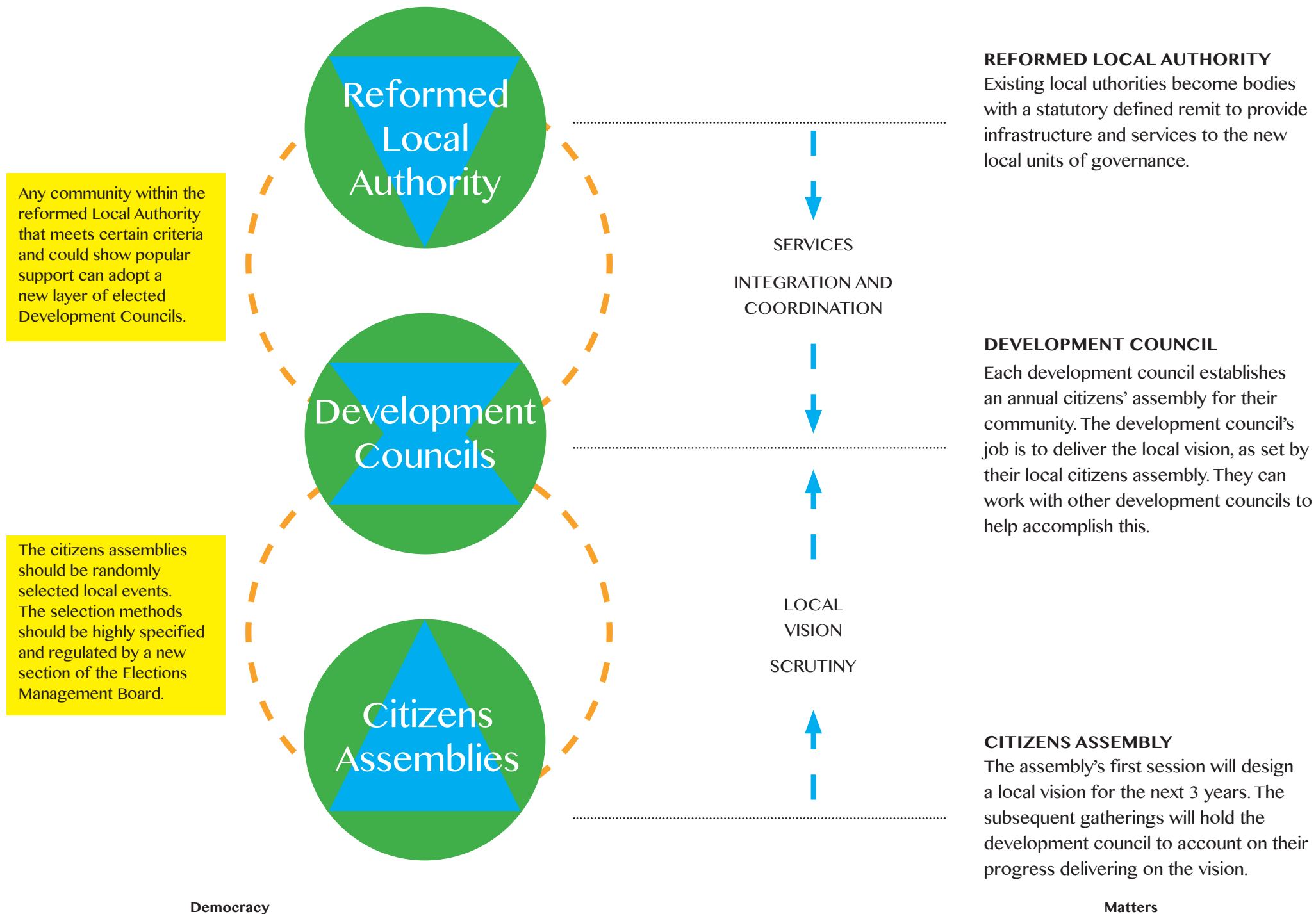


IT



LOOK  
LIKE?







# How will we pay for it?

We suggest taking the experience of the Local Tax Commission, revisiting it, and using it to create a funding system for local governance based on local collection and retention, with a layer of redistribution at the national level. There should be a great deal more flexibility for Local Authorities to use a range of local taxes to fulfil their needs. Including things like land and property taxes, and bed and tourist taxes.

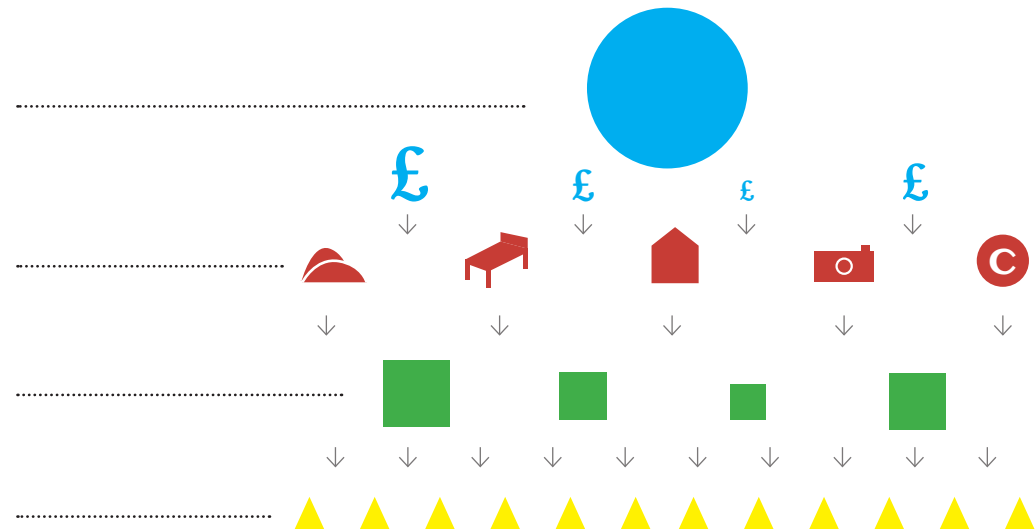


Proportional  
Redistribution at the  
National Level

Flexible Local Tax  
(land, bed, property,  
tourist, congestion)

Local Authorities

Development Councils





From  
Competition

to

Cooperation

