

**Identifying opportunities for engaging the ‘community’ in local alcohol decision-making: a literature review and synthesis**

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# Identifying opportunities for engaging the ‘community’ in local alcohol decision-making: a literature review and synthesis

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# **Identifying opportunities for engaging the ‘community’ in local alcohol decision-making: a literature review and synthesis**

## **Abstract**

### *Introduction*

Engaging communities in actions to reduce alcohol harms has been identified as an international priority. While there exist recommendations for community engagement within alcohol licensing legislation, there is limited understanding of how to involve communities in local decision-making to reduce harms from the alcohol environment.

### *Methods*

A scoping literature review was conducted on community engagement in local government decision-making with relevance to the alcohol environment. Academic and grey literature databases were searched between April and June 2018 to identify examples of community engagement in local government in the UK, published since 2000. Texts were excluded if they did not describe in detail the mechanisms or rationale for community engagement. Information was extracted and synthesised through a narrative approach.

### *Results*

3030 texts were identified through the searches, and 30 texts were included in the final review. Only one text described community engagement in alcohol decision-making (licensing); other local government sectors included planning, regeneration and community safety. Four rationales for community engagement emerged: statutory consultation processes; non-statutory engagement; as part of broader participatory initiatives; and community-led activism. While not all texts reported outcomes, a few described direct community influence on decisions. Broader outcomes included improved relationships

between community groups and local government. However, lack of influence over decisions was also common, with multiple barriers to effective engagement identified.

### *Conclusion*

The lack of published examples of community engagement in local alcohol decision-making relevant to the UK suggests little priority has been placed on sharing learning about supporting engagement in this area. Taking a place-shaping perspective, useful lessons can be drawn from other areas of local government with relevance for the alcohol environment. Barriers to engagement must be considered carefully, particularly around how communities are defined, and how different interests toward the local alcohol environment are represented, or not.

### **Keywords:**

community engagement; alcohol policy; local government; scoping review

## **Introduction**

Community engagement is upheld as a means of promoting the involvement of citizens in decision-making that affects their lives (Attree et al., 2011). Engaging communities in actions targeting the alcohol environment has been recommended in global strategies to reduce alcohol-related harms (World Health Organization, 2014) and reflects broader commitments in public health to promote citizen contribution to improve the determinants of health and inequalities (Public Health England, 2015; World Health Organization, 2017). However, despite a rich and growing literature on community engagement in different contexts, there has been remarkably little attention given to exactly how communities might be engaged in decision-making around alcohol. With alcohol continuing to pose a significant burden on populations in terms of both health and social harms (Burton et al., 2017), there remains a need for policies addressing the determinants that shape alcohol consumption and related harmful practices. As the evidence for effectiveness of local approaches to targeting the causes of alcohol-related harms builds (De Vocht et al., 2017; Martineau, Tyner, Lorenc, Petticrew, & Lock, 2013), it is important to examine what opportunities there are for supporting community engagement in local alcohol decision-making. This paper describes a review and synthesis of examples of community engagement in local decision-making, highlighting key opportunities and learning for supporting communities (broadly defined) to contribute to decisions that shape their local alcohol environments.

### *Local responses to reducing alcohol harm*

The health and social harms from alcohol relate to a broad range of social, physical and economic determinants, many of which fall under the jurisdiction and decision-making powers of local governments, for example, local authorities in the UK. International evidence demonstrates that regulating the availability and accessibility of alcohol can reduce both alcohol consumption (Popova, Giesbrecht, Bekmuradov, & Patra, 2009) and associated health and social harms (De Vocht et al., 2017; Martineau et al., 2013). In the UK, the primary form of alcohol decision-making at the local government level is licensing, whereby

local authorities hold a statutory function of granting licences to sell alcohol. With capacity to shape hours and conditions of sale, and types and density of alcohol outlets, licensing is a key decision-making mechanism through which to manage the local alcohol environment (Reynolds et al., 2018), which we define as the availability and accessibility of alcohol.

These measures have been identified internationally as effective in reducing health and social harms, including alcohol-related hospitalisations (De Vocht et al., 2017; Livingston, 2011), road traffic accidents and injury, violent and sexual crimes (Burton et al., 2017; De Vocht et al., 2017), and antisocial behaviour (Burton et al., 2017; Popova et al., 2009).

Beyond granting licences to individual premises there are other ways through which local government may be able to impact the local alcohol environment and related harms. These include place-shaping policies such as Statement of Licensing Policies in England and Wales, which give recommendations for licensing practice in the local area (Sharpe, Poots, Watt, Franklin, & Pinder, 2017), or policies related to planning, development and the local economy, (Bradley, 2015) and regeneration strategies (Lawson & Kearns, 2014). Policies and decisions that influence how local places are used are likely to have an impact on the number and type of premises selling alcohol (Egan et al., 2016; Thompson, Milton, Egan, & Lock, 2018), and therefore on what, where and how people drink, and with what consequences for health and society.

#### *Community engagement to improve health*

Community engagement in decision-making has been particularly prominent in the UK and elsewhere in recent years, reflecting increasing trends towards localism promoting the dispersal of control over resources to the local level, ostensibly to ensure more effective, responsive services (Buser, 2012; Cleary & Hogan, 2016). Numerous initiatives have been delivered at the local level reflecting the assumed rights – and responsibilities – of community members to contribute to decision-making, and to help to address health and social inequalities through empowerment (Bridgen, 2004; Whitehead et al., 2016).

However, there have also been more critical considerations of exactly what ‘community engagement’ in decision-making looks like. Defining the ‘community’ can be conceptually challenging, leading to questions about who is – and is not – ‘engaged’ (Reynolds, 2017). ‘Community’ is a contested term, with multiple meanings and applications, denoting groups identified through locality, common interest and / or shared identity, but also heterogenous and dynamic rather than unified (Stephens, 2007). Furthermore, the extent to which community members have real influence over policy actions has been debated (Taylor, 2006), with critiques suggesting engagement can be seen as another form of governance (Rose, 2000). Different forms of engagement are thought to offer varying levels of empowerment over decision-making; from the least empowering practices of information-giving and consultation, to the most empowering where the community is in control over what decisions are made (Popay et al., 2007). Furthermore, the extent to which engagement practices may entrench existing inequalities by favouring those people with higher levels of capacity to become involved has also been identified with concern (Cornish & Ghosh, 2007). Therefore, careful consideration of the possibilities and realities of engagement processes is an important step in exploring ways in which communities might be able to help address health and social harms from alcohol through contributions to local decision-making processes.

#### *Alcohol and the community*

In alcohol literature, the ‘community’ has often been conceptualised as the spatial setting in which behaviour change initiatives to reduce alcohol-related harms are delivered, and / or the target population receiving an intervention, identified by demographic characteristics or drinking behaviours (Room, 2017). However, there has been some recent recognition of the potential for the community as a more active entity in helping to address harms relating to the alcohol environment through contribution to local policies and decision-making. In guidance supporting the Licensing Act 2003 for England and Wales, involvement of the community is explicitly recommended:

“encouraging greater community involvement in licensing decisions and giving local residents the opportunity to have their say regarding licensing decisions that may affect them” (Home Office, 2015, paragraph 1.5).

Yet, there is a lack of research examining how this role plays out in these contexts, and who might and might not be able to be involved in this way. In Scotland, there is a more formal structure for involving community members in licensing decisions, via local ‘licensing forums’, in which community members (alongside other stakeholders) can review and advise on local licensing processes (Scottish Executive, 2007). However, the limitations of these approaches in practice have been described, including the challenges faced in ensuring community representation on local licensing forums, and questions raised about the influence of these forums on decisions (Fitzgerald, Winterbottom, & Nicholls, 2018). In Australia and New Zealand, the value of community engagement in alcohol licensing processes is formally recognised in legislation, but recent literature indicates that there is very little evidence of the successful involvement and impact of the community on licensing decisions (Kypri & Maclennan, 2014; Livingston, Wilkinson, & Room, 2016). Similarly in Scotland, while guidance for supporting community members to raise concerns about licence applications or existing premises has been developed (Alcohol Focus Scotland, 2016), the impact of this on engagement and alcohol decision-making is not clear (Fitzgerald et al., 2018).

Another interpretation of ‘community’ has been seen in the recent Community alcohol partnerships (CAP) established in the UK since 2007 (see <https://www.communityalcoholpartnerships.co.uk/>). CAPs offer a mechanism through which alcohol retailers, licence-holders and business owners work with local stakeholders including the police, council, education providers and health services to target under-age drinking and related issues at the local level. However, the CAP model has been criticised for its restricted definition of ‘community’ including members of the local alcohol industry, but not local residents or other non-statutory groups, and for a lack of clear evidence of impact on



alcohol-related harms (Petticrew et al., 2018). Furthermore, it focuses on developing initiatives to reduce under-age drinking, rather than influencing the alcohol environment more broadly.

### *Focus of this paper*

There are clear gaps in current knowledge around the ways in which communities can be engaged in local alcohol decision-making, and how best to support the involvement of different groups and individuals, with likely different sets of concerns relating to the alcohol environment. There also remain questions about the extent to which formal recommendations facilitate the involvement of communities in the licensing process and the possible outcomes of such engagement, in terms of influencing decision-making and the resulting impact on alcohol-related health and social harms. However, it is possible that there is learning from other areas of community engagement that can be usefully transferred to the context of alcohol decision-making. There are statutory provisions for consultation across multiple areas of local government decision-making in the UK and beyond these basic requirements, there is increasing emphasis on the importance of community engagement across local government for the accountability, transparency and efficiency of decision-making (Local Government Association, 2017). So, while there are different legislative requirements for licensing and other decision-making, such as planning, there is potential for valuable learning around supporting engagement in alcohol decision-making that is transferable across these areas.

As a first step toward identifying ways to support community engagement in alcohol decision-making, a scoping literature review was conducted to identify examples of community engagement in decision-making at the local government level in the UK context. This paper presents the synthesis of this literature in terms of the rationales, processes and outcomes of community engagement local decision-making, and discussion of this in relation to international evidence on effective policies to reduce alcohol-related harms, to identify opportunities to increase and support engagement in local alcohol decision-making.

## Methods

A literature review was conducted to identify literature describing examples of community engagement occurring within local government decision-making in the UK, and the outcomes, barriers and facilitators of engagement. The aim was to identify any examples of community engagement in alcohol decision-making and also to synthesise learning from across other areas of local decision-making that might usefully inform steps to support communities to help influence their local alcohol environments. The approach drew on principles from the scoping review methodology employed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005). This methodology was selected for its ability to identify the "extent, range and nature" of examples of community engagement in local decision-making in the UK (Arksey and O'Malley 2005: 21) and to identify any gaps in the literature around community engagement in alcohol decision-making. It was also considered suitable for searching for, and synthesising, a broad range of sources from across multiple fields and disciplines.

The review sought to answer the following research question: how have communities been engaged to shape decision-making within local government in the United Kingdom? The scope was deliberately wider than only alcohol decision-making for two reasons: first, because initial scans of the literature indicated very few alcohol-specific examples; and second, because taking a broad understanding of the alcohol environment potentially implicates other areas of local decision-making, such as planning.

The search strategy was shaped and refined through an iterative process, as part of a wider study of community engagement in alcohol decision-making which also involved stakeholder workshops and case study research in local authorities. Search terms were developed to reflect synonyms of, and words similar to 'community' (including citizen, resident, public), and 'engagement' (including participation, involvement, consultation). Searches were conducted of both academic and grey literature databases (Medline, Web of Science, International Bibliography of Social Sciences, Social Policy and Practice, OpenGrey) and the

'case studies' section of the Local Government Association website. This was supplemented through consultation with members of the steering group of the wider study (involving practitioners, academics and community members) to identify additional texts. The search strategy is presented in Supplementary File 1.

Following the aim of the scoping review methodology, and the diversity of the types of text retrieved, the texts were not appraised for their 'quality' (Arksey and O'Malley 2005). Instead, the synthesis aimed to identify the range and type of examples community engagement in local decision-making. The term 'text' is used in this paper (instead of 'study') to reflect the variety of types of source identified through the search, including not only academic and research reports, but also more theoretical papers and descriptive case studies.

*Inclusion and exclusion criteria:*

Searches were limited to texts published in English, since 2000, to be relevant to contemporary UK local government processes. For inclusion in the review, texts needed to describe examples of community engagement in decision-making occurring within local government in the United Kingdom. Given the conceptual complexity around the term 'community', the working definition of community was kept open and broad, to include potentially multiple groups outside the professional, statutory and political actors who constitute 'local government' and its agencies. The working definition of 'engagement' guiding the review included any practices that facilitate the sharing of views of people positioned outside standard local authority decision-making structures. However, we excluded texts that described engagement only with third sector organisations whose mechanisms of representation of community groups were not clearly described.

To ensure relevance for the type of decision-making that can shape the alcohol environment, we defined 'decision-making' for the search strategy to include i) policy-making; ii) statutory processes such as licensing and planning decisions; iii) resource allocation; and iv) priority setting and strategy development. Texts were excluded if they described community

engagement towards other goals such as for health promotion or education; behaviour change; building local networks, neighbourhood trust or a sense of community ownership; gauging public perceptions and attitudes (unless feeding directly into priority setting or policy formulation); increasing local government accountability, trust and transparency; or evaluation of current services. Further, texts needed to describe concrete examples of community engagement processes and local decision-making, and contain sufficient information of these examples to allow for meaningful synthesis with other studies. This included a detailed description of the rationale for, and mechanisms, of community engagement.

Searches and screening were conducted by Author 1 between April and Jun 2018. Author 2 co-screened a sample (approximately 25%) of the abstracts / executive summaries (or introductory paragraphs, if no abstract) identified following the first stage of screening of titles, and a similar sample of the full texts. Any differences in assessment were discussed and resolved between the two reviewers.

#### *Charting and synthesis of data:*

Following the scoping review methodology, data were extracted by both reviewers from the included texts using a 'charting' technique (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). This involved sifting, interpreting and recording key information about the examples of community engagement described in each text into an Excel spreadsheet. This information was then synthesised using a narrative technique in a 'descriptive-analytical' style (Arksey and O'Malley 2005) to highlight themes across the examples of community engagement that were relevant for our research question, relating to the rationale and mechanisms of community engagement, outcomes and barriers and facilitators.

## **Results**

#### *Search and screening results:*

A total of 3030 texts were identified through database searching and one extra text was identified through the steering group. Following removal of duplicates and screening of titles, the abstracts / executive summaries / introductory paragraphs of 311 of the 3031 texts were reviewed, and 82 were co-screened by Author 2. This resulted in 141 texts included for full text screening, of which 35 were co-screened by Author 2. Following screening of the accessible full texts (nine were not accessible within the review period), 32 texts were identified as meeting the inclusion criteria. Of these, three texts were identified as describing the same example of community engagement in decision-making (Lawson & Kearns, 2010a, 2010b, 2014). Therefore, only one of these papers, judged to contain the most relevant information for the focus of this review, was included (Lawson & Kearns 2010a). See Figure 1 for a flowchart describing the search and screening process and Table 1 for the description of the 30 included texts included in the final review.

*[Insert Figure 1 and Table 1 around here]*

#### *Overview of literature*

The included texts were academic journal articles (21), PhD theses (four), research, consultancy and third sector reports (four) and one book. Most texts (21) presented examples of community engagement drawn explicitly from empirical research, including single and comparative case studies involving qualitative methods such as interviews and documentary analysis, and one ethnographic study. Four texts drew on mixed method or qualitative evaluations of strategies or programmes that involved community engagement, and one text presented findings from a mixed methods feasibility study. Four texts presented descriptive accounts of community engagement, but with no explicit reference to research methods. See Table 1. While all included texts had a predominant focus on the UK, several also described community engagement in other countries including the US (Beebeejaun, 2006), Sweden (Soneryd & Weldon, 2003), South Korea (Kyung, 2006) and Norway (Abram & Cowell, 2004).

Only one example of community engagement for alcohol decision-making was included in the review (Iconic Consulting, 2014). This report arose in response to an evaluation of changes to licensing legislation in Scotland and examined opportunities for, and the impact of, greater community involvement in licensing decisions and local alcohol policies. Another two texts describing local alcohol licensing forums in Scotland were identified but were excluded at the full text review stage as they lacked sufficient description of the community(ies) involved and detail of the decisions they might influence (Fitzgerald et al., 2018; Rushmer et al., 2015). Two further texts reviewed had an alcohol focus: Cabras and Bosworth (2014) described actions taken in rural areas by residents and business owners to try to conserve local pubs; and Mistral et al (2006) described features of partnership working under the UK Community Alcohol Prevention Programme. However, again, the former was excluded for a lack of focus on local government decision-making, and the latter for a lack of detail regarding the community groups involved, and the specific decision-making they sought to influence.

Of the remaining included texts, planning and urban regeneration were the most common areas of UK local government decision-making depicted (14 out of 30); see Table 2. Many of these texts described examples of engagement in large-scale regeneration projects which may have involved decisions beyond the planning department, such as the renovation or replacement of social housing stock or the design of transport routes and green spaces.

In the following sections, key themes derived from the synthesis of community engagement examples are presented including: i) types of 'community' engaged; ii) rationales and forms of community engagement; iii) outcomes to community engagement; and iv) barriers and facilitators to engagement.

*[Insert table 2 around here]*

*Types of 'community' engaged*

The 'communities' engaged in local decision-making processes were rarely explicitly defined across the reviewed texts, although many texts described the groups of people and / or organisations involved in engagement activities. These roughly fell into three categories. First, local residents, implicitly identified as a community of place or locality, in relation to the council and / or the initiative of interest. Examples included residents of three housing estates invited to contribute to decision-making about regeneration of local housing (Lawson and Kearns 2010a); and residents of three rural / semi-rural areas engaged and supported to develop neighbourhood plans (Brookfield, 2017). Second, groups of people identified by particular shared characteristics or needs (communities of interest or identity), though typically also sharing a locality. Examples included people with disabilities invited to develop a co-produced housing strategy suitable for disabled people's needs (Anna Evans Housing Consultancy, Mandy Littlewood Social Research and Consulting, Henderson, & Grant, 2011), and people identified as 'disadvantaged' and 'excluded' within an urban area supported to engage with the local planning system (Carpenter & Brownill, 2008). Third, the use of established community and voluntary groups as 'representatives' of residents and / or communities of interest and identity. Examples included engagement with an established group of local traders from a minority ethnic population to contribute to the redevelopment of a town centre (Beebeejaun 2006). In the context of alcohol licensing decision-making, involving representatives from community councils, voluntary organisations and tenants' and residents' associations in workshops to consult on and develop statements of licensing policy (Iconic Consulting, 2014). In many texts, the engagement described involved more than one of these categories of people (see Table 1).

### *Rationales and forms of community engagement*

The literature described examples of community engagement in local decision-making arising for a range of reasons and via different mechanisms. Four different categories of rationale for community engagement were identified across the texts: i) engagement in the

form of statutory consultation for local government decision-making; ii) non-statutory forms of engagement occurring in addition to statutory consultation or as part of decision-making with no statutory expectation for consultation; iii) local engagement as part of national / international participatory initiatives; and iv) engagement as a form of community-led activism. Both across and within these categories there were differences in the forms of engagement and the levels of participation offered to communities. These are discussed, with examples, below.

i. Statutory consultation:

The legal and statutory requirement to involve communities, or 'the public' in local decision-making was indicated in several texts as the rationale behind community engagement, reflecting basic requirements for councils to provide to communities with information and opportunities for consultation on new policies, strategies or planning proposals. Examples included, among others: community partnership boards as a mechanism for 'community planning', a statutory requirement in Scotland (Sinclair, 2011); consultation of community organisations for the development of strategies within community safety partnerships (Skinns, 2005); and statutory consultations on local licensing policy and opportunities for communities to object to licence applications (Iconic Consulting, 2014). Two texts described engagement as part of processes that have a quasi-legal status in the UK: community consultation as part of evidence-gathering for a health impact assessment of a proposed waste incinerator development (Chadderton, Elliott, Hacking, Shepherd, & Williams, 2013), and for an environmental impact assessment into a proposed extension to an airport (Soneryd & Weldon, 2003).

ii. Non-statutory forms of engagement:

Other texts described community engagement that occurred instead of (or as well as) the basic level of consultation required for some forms of decision-making (eg on planning applications), or as part of processes of decision-making without formal statutory requirements for consultation. These non-statutory examples typically adopted more



participatory approaches to engagement. Examples included, among others: the use of 'community forums' enabling residents and / or communities of interest such as traders to meet with council practitioners, for example to shape a strategy for town centre redevelopment (Beebeejaun, 2006) and regeneration of a large social housing estate (Lawson & Kearns, 2010a). Other texts described the use of multiple mechanisms to engage community members to inform decision-making such as workshops, interviews, and video making with residents to inform plans to improve local transport and road safety (Brownill & Carpenter, 2007); and a combination of informal meetings, 'door-knocking' and workshops to help inform local transport provision in a rural area (Local Government Association, 2012). There were also several examples of communities occupying a 'partnership' role in decision-making, such as the establishment of partnerships involving residents, community groups and councils officers in relation to the development of different community strategies (Raco, Parker, & Doak, 2006), and the co-production of local housing strategies with disabled people (Anna Evans Housing Consultancy et al., 2011). Finally, the mechanism of participatory budgeting was described in an example of engagement of communities in deprived rural areas in decisions to identify and address local priorities (Moir & Leyshon, 2013).

iii. Engagement as part of participatory initiatives:

Several examples of community engagement were linked to the local delivery of national and international initiatives that emphasised public participation. Examples included local engagement as part of the delivery of the *New Deal for Communities* initiative (Batty et al., 2010; Blakeley & Evans, 2009; Durose & Lowndes, 2010), designed to establish partnerships of community members and the local authority to inform strategies for regeneration in deprived areas. Other texts described examples of engagement as part of local roll-out of the *Local Agenda 21* (LA21) scheme, an initiative originating from the United Nations, designed to encourage local government to promote sustainable communities (Abram & Cowell, 2004; Connelly, 2002; Sharp, 2002). Other initiatives forming the

backdrop to engagement included the *Community Participation Programme*, aiming to develop local strategic partnerships between community groups and local authority decision makers (Taylor 2006); the *Renewal Area* initiative to regenerate social housing (Kyung 2006), and the 'neighbourhood plans' initiative (Brookfield 2017). Despite the participatory framing of these initiatives and policies, there were variations in levels of participation offered through the engagement examples, ranging from community consultation on draft strategies to more participatory mechanisms to involve communities in the design of policies.

iv. Community-led activism:

The vast majority of examples of community engagement in local decision-making represented 'top-down' modes of engagement, led by local authorities or initiated through higher level initiatives. However, there were a few examples of more 'bottom-up' engagement in the form of community activism, in response to council-proposed plans and strategies. Tooley (2017) described the active response of local residents to proposed plans for the redevelopment of a city centre neighbourhood, which prompted more council-led engagement including the creation of a local liaison group. There were also a couple of examples of activism as an expression of frustration with limited opportunities for real engagement. Sturzaker (2010) described residents using local media and lobbying the council to try to prevent the development of affordable housing in a rural area. Similarly, Blakeley and Evans (2009) described a group of residents mobilising to lobby the local council when opportunities to shape plans for local regeneration, as part of the *New Deal for Communities*, were perceived to be limited.

*Outcomes of community engagement*

Not all texts included in the review explicitly described outcomes of the community engagement process in detail, perhaps reflecting the difficulties of identifying and attributing community influence on decision-making. Furthermore, there were few clear patterns identified in relation to the rationale for community engagement and the number or type of

outcomes reported, although there were no reports of engagement directly influencing decisions in the texts identified as presenting statutory engagement processes.

Direct influence of the community on decision-making was reported in several texts which reflected the more participatory approaches to engagement, and engagement as part of broader participatory initiatives. These included the incorporation of community concerns and priorities into the design and implementation of local housing strategies (Anna Evans Housing Consultancy et al., 2011), on resources and infrastructure in local parks (Jones, 2002), on local planning policies (Sharp, 2002), on the design and delivery of interventions as part of the New Deal for Communities initiative (Batty et al., 2010), on street design and traffic controls (Brownill & Carpenter, 2007), and on changes to bus routes and frequencies (Local Government Association, 2012).

There were also a range of outcomes described across different rationales for community engagement that had effects beyond influencing individual plans or policies. These included practitioners reporting they had “learned how to listen” to the community (Brownill & Carpenter, 2007); greater awareness of council processes and continued involvement in regeneration activities among some community members (Lawson & Kearns, 2010a); and community members reporting improved relationships with the local authority and having built up “useful contacts” at the council (Parker & Murray, 2012). Other texts identified increased opportunities for community members to be involved in decision-making processes following engagement (Duncan & Thomas, 2000; Taylor, 2006) and a ‘reinvigoration’ of political processes within the local council (Raco et al., 2006).

Longer term outcomes were described in some texts, in the form of the recognition of the cultural needs of ethnic minority groups in future regeneration planning policies (Beebeejaun, 2006), keeping issues of sustainability ‘on the agenda’ at the local council (Connelly, 2002), and the development of networks of stakeholders and resources to inform future actions (Cloke, Milbourne, & Widdowfield, 2000). Individual outcomes were also noted in a couple of texts, including an increased sense of ownership leading to a greater

sense of safety and security for some community members (Jones, 2002), and to an increased feeling of “personal political efficacy” prompting further engagement (Blakeley & Evans, 2009: 25).

Other texts described a lack of community influence on decision-making, typically community recommendations being overlooked in plans or policies or lacking a clear plan of when and how recommendations would be implemented (Abram & Cowell, 2004; Connelly, 2002; Lawson & Kearns, 2010a; Moir & Leyshon, 2013). Within these examples, the engagement might be considered ‘successful’ in terms of decision-makers fulfilling statutory or political expectations to consult with communities, but ineffective in terms of community influence on decisions (Lawson & Kearns, 2010a). A few texts also reported negative outcomes from engagement, such as reported ‘disillusionment’ among community groups in relation to community activism-led engagement and its outcomes (Blakeley and Evans 2009), and the breakdown of relationships between community groups and local decision-makers. The latter arose in one context once funding supporting engagement finished, and through some groups being ‘de-recognised’ or ostracised by local authority practitioners following criticism of decision-making (Durose & Lowndes, 2010). Finally, several texts acknowledged that even more participatory approaches to engagement led to the continued exclusion of those groups already marginalised or excluded from decision-making processes (Carpenter & Brownill, 2008; Cloke et al., 2000).

### *Barriers and facilitators to community engagement and influence*

A range of factors were identified across the literature as shaping the extent to which communities were engaged in local decision-making processes, and the extent to which they had influence; many of these are commonly recognised across existing literature on community engagement (see for example O'Mara-Eves et al., 2013). Barriers to engagement included: the mismatch between expectations among different actors for the process and outcomes of engagement, including the timeframe of decision-making, and the

reality; influence; lack of skills, knowledge and resources required for engagement, within both communities and councils; and the challenge of managing competing interests.

Facilitators to engagement included having partner organisations (for example from the voluntary sector) to guide and support community groups to engage, building on existing networks of relationships and resources, and having appropriate council support for engagement in the form of funding and leadership. The barriers and facilitators identified in the literature are summarised in Table 3.

*[Insert Table 3 here]*

## **Discussion**

This review sought to identify and synthesise literature relating to community engagement in decision-making with what is known about effective strategies for reducing alcohol-related harm, relevant to the local government decision-making context in the UK. The review was conducted as part of a broader programme of work exploring mechanisms for engaging the community in local alcohol decision-making. We identified 30 texts that described in some detail examples of community engagement in decision-making in local authorities in the UK, many relating to planning and urban regeneration, and assessed the literature to draw out the range of rationales and mechanisms for community engagement, outcomes and barriers and facilitators.

### *Paucity of alcohol-related examples*

Only one example of community engagement included in the review was directly related to alcohol decision-making, specifically engaging communities in licensing policy and decision-making in Scotland (Iconic Consulting 2014). The recommendations from this example include improving accessibility to engagement, and supporting and educating community members in becoming involved in the licensing process, and are valuable for informing ways to support community involvement in licensing in other local government contexts. However, the lack of other relevant examples relating directly to alcohol decision-making must be

critically considered; only five of the 141 full texts reviewed had an alcohol focus, and at the abstract screening stage, there was only one more text focused on alcohol (on public health guidance for alcohol misuse and cardiovascular disease). This apparent paucity of published work on community engagement in alcohol decision-making could reflect two issues. First, that there is a lack of recognition of the potential value and importance of community engagement among local decision-makers shaping the alcohol environment, and / or a lack of understanding of how best to engage the community in these decisions. Second, that writing up examples of community engagement in alcohol decision-making to share learning has been of limited priority to date among researchers and / or practitioners. This is despite recognition of the importance of involving the community in licensing processes in guidance supporting the Licensing Act in England and Wales (Home Office, 2015), and in Scotland (Fitzgerald et al., 2018), and WHO recommendations for involving the community in actions to address alcohol harms (2014).

These findings also correspond with the picture in other contexts beyond the UK. In Australia, a paucity of published examples of community involvement in alcohol licensing has been identified (Livingston et al., 2016), and in New Zealand, recent research has identified barriers to successful, influential community input into licensing decisions despite legislative changes to “improve community input into local alcohol licensing decisions” (Kypri, Maclennan, Brausch, Wyeth, & Connor, 2019: p1). This suggests that guidance and recommendations in licensing legislation have not been effective in making the reporting of community engagement in alcohol decision-making a priority in either research or practice literatures. Furthermore, even in the Scottish context, where licensing legislation requires community involvement via alcohol licensing forums, there are challenges reported with engaging community members and in identifying their influence on decisions (Fitzgerald et al., 2018). This indicates a need for looking beyond licensing for examples and learning to guide engaging the community in decision-making to shape the alcohol environment.

### *Opportunities for community engagement to help reduce alcohol harms*

There is a strong and largely coherent body of international evidence around population-level alcohol policies that are effective in reducing alcohol consumption and related social and health harms (Anderson, Chisholm, & Fuhr, 2009; Burton et al., 2017; Foster et al., 2017; Martineau et al., 2013). A number of these recommended policy interventions are implementable (and implemented) at the local government level in the UK (and elsewhere), including licensing strategies and policy to reduce alcohol availability and accessibility, to reduce density of alcohol outlets and improve serving practice in alcohol outlets (Anderson et al., 2009; Burton et al., 2017; Foster et al., 2017; Martineau et al., 2013). Arguably, it is at these points of local decision-making that engaging the community has the potential to be most productive in helping to reduce alcohol-related harms. The recommendations from the single example of community engagement in alcohol licensing in the review included improving accessibility to engagement, and supporting and educating community members in becoming involved in the licensing process. These echo the barriers and facilitators to community engagement in other examples (and in engagement literature more broadly) and are therefore valuable for informing ways to support community involvement in licensing in other local government contexts.

Policies aimed at reducing the physical density of licensed premises and the accessibility of alcohol (via restrictions on the time and day of sale) are amongst those interventions with the strongest evidence of effectiveness for reducing alcohol harms (Burton et al., 2017; Foster et al., 2017). Therefore, taking a broader, place-based perspective toward the alcohol environment offers additional learning points from the community engagement examples included in the review for local alcohol decision-making. Many of the examples of engagement reviewed reflected community input to decisions about resources and spaces in their local areas. As such, these examples are comparable with place-based alcohol policies, such as local licensing strategies, and other decisions that might affect the local environment in which alcohol is sold and consumed.

The review also highlighted multiple examples of engagement arising around the local delivery of broader participatory initiatives and policies, such as neighbourhood planning legislated through the Localism Act 2011 (Bradley, 2015), and regeneration programmes such as the *New Deal for Communities* programme. While barriers to successful engagement were noted in these examples, it appeared that top-down support and the formal provision of resources for community engagement within these participatory initiatives facilitated the sustained involvement of communities and, in some cases, their influence over decisions. There are few, if any comparable participatory initiatives or policies relating to alcohol in the UK or elsewhere. However, any future place-based participatory initiatives should be seen as valuable opportunities for engaging communities in a range of decisions that might shape the alcohol environment.

Furthermore, community engagement in place-shaping decisions, enabling communities to influence local spaces and resources, may impact directly on the local alcohol environment, even if this is not their primary focus. The potential of planning and regeneration decisions to reduce alcohol availability is reflected in an example described by Hippensteel et al (2019), who highlight the likely reduction of land permitted for off-premise alcohol outlets following new urban rezoning legislation in Baltimore, U.S. This suggests a range of potential opportunities for community engagement to help influence decision-making that is effective for reducing alcohol-related harm.

However, caution must also be urged when considering the range of groups that might fall under the umbrella of 'community' in relation to alcohol decisions. This review highlighted multiple sets of actors becoming engaged as the 'community', including communities of interest, such as local business owners, as well as groups of local residents. This suggests potential for conflicting views and interests around the alcohol environment that might arise through engagement mechanisms, with careful consideration required of how to manage these, particularly in recognition of economic interests in local alcohol provision (Petticrew et al., 2018).



The alcohol policy evidence literature also highlights aspects of process that are effective in addressing alcohol-related harms, in particular, the sharing of data around alcohol-related incidents between local government agencies for understanding and acting on issues contributing to harm (Foster et al., 2017). The review of community engagement literature highlighted the value of community engagement practices for building relationships between local authorities and a range of actors that might fall under the label of ‘community’, including local residents, communities of interest / identity, and representatives from local organisations, and for developing deeper understanding of issues faced by the community. This suggests that, in addition to communities shaping the content of alcohol-related policies and programmes, mechanisms of engagement across a range of groups could be beneficial for facilitating sharing of data and experiences around alcohol-related harms experienced locally. Therefore, it appears that there are useful lessons to transfer from other examples of community engagement to support the involvement of communities in a range of alcohol decision-making at the local level. Of course, the barriers and facilitators to ‘successful’ engagement – many of which are well documented in broader community engagement literatures (Bagnall et al., 2016) – must be taken into consideration. These lessons are summarised in Box 1.

*[Insert Box 1 here]*

### *Limitations*

Although an extensive search of academic and grey literature was conducted, it is possible that further relevant studies were not identified, particularly given the conceptual complexities of defining ‘community’ and ‘decision-making’, and the lack of consistent terminology for ‘community engagement’. Furthermore, limiting the review to texts that described decision-making within UK local government only means potentially useful texts from other settings would have been excluded, and the transferability of our findings beyond the UK is more difficult. However, the insights from community engagement examples in the UK appear to complement the broader, internationally-relevant body of literature on effective

policies to address alcohol harms. As such, this review has been able to situate the localised examples of engagement with a more transferable body of evidence, which can resonate with efforts to strengthen community involvement in decisions affecting the alcohol environment in other contexts.

### *Conclusions and recommendations*

This review was conceived as a first step in exploring to how community engagement at the local government level might be able to influence alcohol decision-making. Next steps for this line of research include more in-depth examination of the realities of community engagement in decisions that shape the alcohol environment, and careful examination of whose voices are and are not influential as the 'community' in such decisions. While many of the texts included in this review commented on potential of engagement to be exclusionary, for example Taylor (2006), it remains a challenge to understand who is missing from the picture, and whether inequalities in engagement reflect and even reinforce existing social and health inequalities. This is perhaps particularly important to consider in the context of alcohol, acknowledging competing interests between industry, policymakers, and different groups within the community, (Petticrew et al., 2018) with varying levels of resource and influence.

The dearth of examples of community engagement in local alcohol decision-making in the UK highlighted in this review indicates a need to transfer lessons on supporting engagement in other, complementary fields of decision-making, such as planning and regeneration. The insights from this review also suggest the need for higher-level support to provide a formal framework to help justify the allocation of time and resources locally to establish engagement processes in relation to licensing and other alcohol decision-making. This must go beyond simple recommendations buried within licensing legislation, to exploring opportunities for alcohol decision-making to be linked in with broader participatory initiatives that build on established learning and best practice for community engagement. A potential example of this, currently being evaluated in the UK, is an initiative training community

members to become empowered to intervene in local licensing practice (Cook et al., 2018). Furthermore, stakeholders should seek ways in which to work across areas of local decision-making to use opportunities and resources for community engagement established, for example, in planning, regeneration, and sustainability, to help communities contribute to place-shaping decisions that affect the broader alcohol environment, to reduce alcohol-related harms.

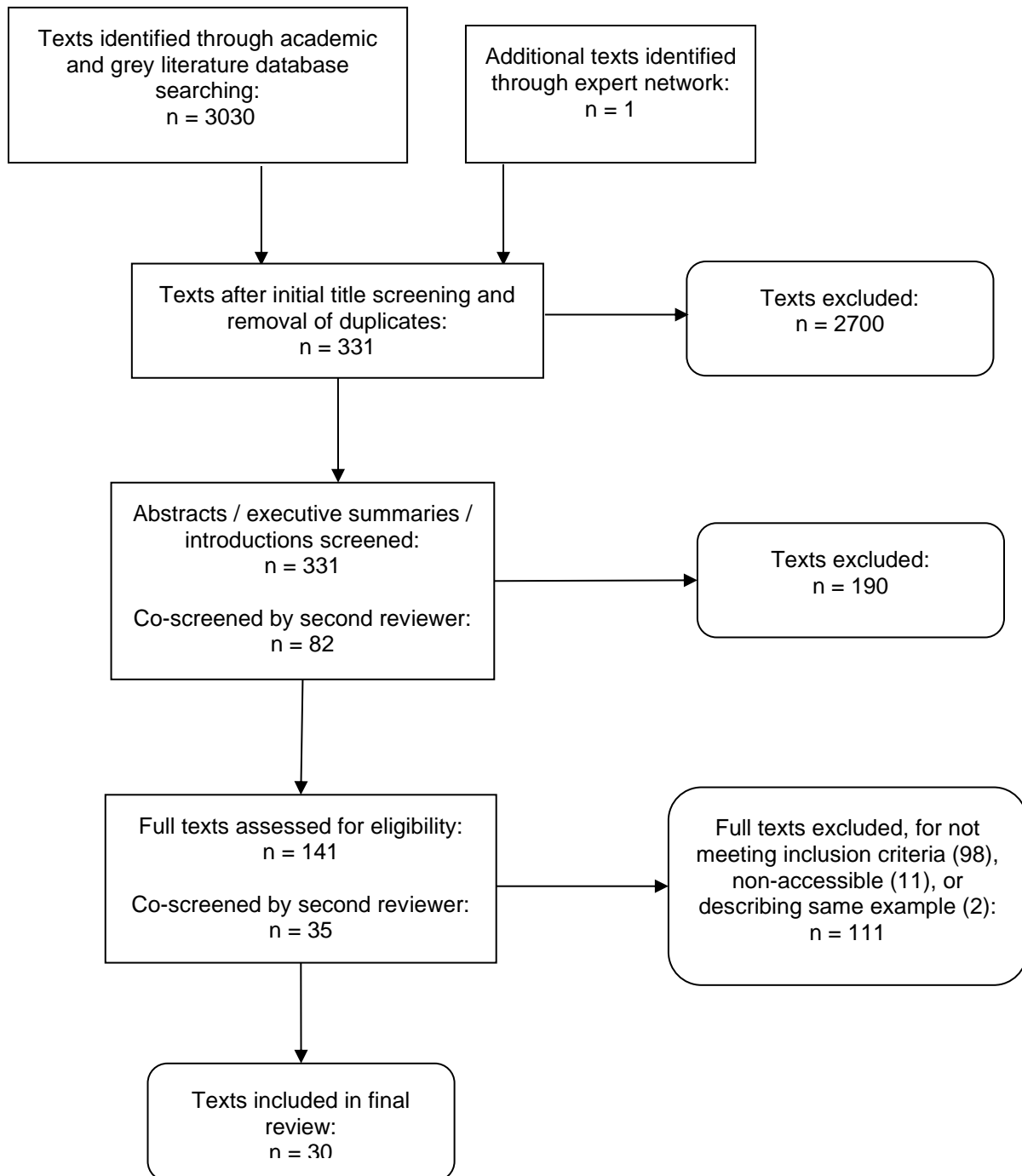
### **Declaration of Interests**

None.

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**Figure 1:** Flow diagram describing search and screening process and results



**Table 1: Description of included texts**

<b>Authors</b>	<b>Year of publication</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Text type &amp; nature of study</b>	<b>Local government area</b>	<b>Rationale for community engagement</b>	<b>Type of community(ies) engaged</b>	<b>Context of community engagement</b>
Abram & Cowell	2004	Scotland	Journal article.  Comparative case study; qualitative methods.	Multiple areas	Statutory consultation.  As part of participatory initiative.	Representatives from community / voluntary groups	Public involvement in the development of community strategies, including under Local Agenda 21, in a council near Glasgow.
Anna Evans Housing Consultancy et al	2011	Scotland	Report.  Evaluation; qualitative methods.	Social housing	Non-statutory engagement	Representatives from community / voluntary groups Communities of interest / identity	Pilot scheme involving the co-production of assisted housing strategies for people living with a disability in tow local authorities in Scotland.
Batty et al.	2010	England	Report.  Summary from programme of evaluation research; mixed methods.	Planning & regeneration	As part of participatory initiative.	Local residents	Community involvement in neighbourhood regeneration in multiple areas as part of the New Deal for Communities initiative.
Beebeejaun	2006	England	Journal article.  Comparative case study; qualitative methods.	Planning	Non-statutory engagement	Representatives from community / voluntary groups  Communities of interest / identity.	Community forum established to involve minority ethnic groups in plans for the redevelopment of a

							suburban town centre in a deprived, ethnically diverse council in the West Midlands.
Blakeley & Evans	2009	England	Journal article.  Case study; qualitative methods.	Planning	As part of participatory initiative.  Community-led activism.	Local residents	Community activism arising during urban regeneration occurring as part of the New Deal for Communities initiative in Manchester.
Brookfield	2017	England	Journal article.  Case study; qualitative methods.	Planning	Statutory consultation.  As part of participatory initiative.	Local residents	Various mechanisms for involving local residents in the development of neighbourhood plans in three rural and semi-rural areas near Leeds.
Brownill & Carpenter	2007	England	Journal article.  Case study; qualitative methods.	Planning	Non-statutory engagement	Communities of interest / identity. Local residents.	Council-led engagement in plans to improve road safety and transport routes on a high street in Oxford.
Carpenter & Brownill	2008	England	Journal article.  Evaluation; qualitative methods.	Planning	Non-statutory engagement	Communities of interest / identity.	The provision of a service to support and encourage participation from disadvantaged groups in the planning system in Thames Gateway area.
Chadderton et al.	2013	Wales	Journal article.	Planning	Non-statutory engagement.	Local residents	Community engagement as part of a health impact

			Descriptive case study; no methods specified.		Community-led activism.		assessment of a proposed large waste incinerator in a densely populated, disadvantaged area of Cardiff.
Clift	2008	England	PhD thesis.	Planning	Non-statutory engagement.	Representatives from community / voluntary groups	Two case studies of third sector and community participation in partnership working around urban regeneration in two London boroughs.
			Comparative case study; qualitative methods.				
Cloke, Milbourne & Widdowfield	2000	England	Journal article.	Homelessness	Non-statutory engagement	Representatives from community / voluntary groups	Establishment of a multi-group partnership to respond to issues identified in local media around homelessness and beggars in a town centre in Taunton, South West England.
			Descriptive case study; no methods specified.				
Connelly	2002	England	PhD thesis.	Environment, sustainable development	As part of participatory initiative.	Representatives from community / voluntary groups Local residents	Engagement of residents in the planning and management of strategies for sustainable development as part of the Local Agenda 21 initiative in two local authority areas in England.
			Comparative case study; qualitative methods.				
Duncan & Thomas	2000	England	Book.	Planning	Non-statutory engagement	Local residents	Involving residents in local regeneration through a range of programmes with

			Review of policy and practice with case examples; mixed methods				locally-elected committees of residents, in Walsall, West Midlands.
Durose & Lowndes	2010	England	Journal article.  Case study; qualitative methods.	Planning	As part of participatory initiative.	Representatives from community / voluntary groups Communities of interest / identity Local residents	Involving residents in developing and implementing neighbourhood policies for regeneration under the New Deal for Communities initiative, in two areas of Manchester.
Iconic Consulting	2014	Scotland	Report.  Feasibility study; mixed methods	Licensing	Statutory consultation.	Representatives from community / voluntary groups Local residents	Different opportunities for communities to comment on alcohol licensing policy and object to new and existing licensed premises in Scotland.
Jones	2002	England	Journal article.  Case study; qualitative methods.	Parks, green spaces	Non-statutory engagement	Communities of interest / identity	Public participation in the co-management and maintenance of parks in Oldham, North West England via 'friends groups'.
Kyung	2006	England	PhD thesis.  Comparative case study; qualitative methods.	Planning	As part of participatory initiative.  Community-led activism.	Local residents	Different mechanisms of engagement of residents in the planning and delivery of housing renewal in deprived estates in Birmingham



							(and contrasted with Seoul), as part of the Renewal Area strategy.
Lawson & Kearns	2010a;	England	Journal article.  Case study; qualitative methods.	Urban regeneration, social housing	Non-statutory engagement	Local residents	Involvement of residents, via community forums, in the development of plans to regenerate large social housing blocks on three estates in Glasgow.
Local Government Association	2012	England	Report.  Descriptive case study; no methods specified.	Transport	Non-statutory engagement	Representatives from community / voluntary groups  Local residents	Range of mechanisms to involve residents and community groups in the development of new transport service provision and changes to existing services in a rural area in Staffordshire.
Moir & Leyshon	2013	England	Journal article.  Case study; qualitative methods.	Multiple areas	Non-statutory engagement	Representatives from community / voluntary groups  Local residents	The use of participatory budgeting approaches to involve residents and community groups in identifying local priorities and initiatives in deprived rural areas in Cornwall.
Parker	2008	England	Journal article.  Descriptive case study; no methods specified.	Planning	Non-statutory engagement	Communities of interest / identity Local residents	Supporting residents to contribute to the development local parish plans in rural areas in Berkshire, South East England.

Parker & Murray	2012	England	Journal article.  Case study; qualitative methods.	Multiple areas	Non-statutory engagement	Communities of interest / identity Local residents	Community-led planning mechanisms to identify local priorities in predominantly rural areas in Berkshire, South East England.
Raco, Parker & Doak	2006	England	Journal article.  Comparative case study; qualitative methods.	Multiple areas	Non-statutory engagement	Representatives from community / voluntary groups	Engagement of residents in the development of community strategies, alongside other planning processes, in Reading and Berkshire in southern England.
Sharp	2002	England	Journal article.  Case study; qualitative methods.	Environment	As part of participatory initiative.	Representatives from community / voluntary groups Local residents	Community participation in the design of local environmental policies as part of the Local Agenda 21 initiative, in a local authority area in South East England.
Sinclair	2011	Scotland	Journal article.  Case study; qualitative methods.	Planning	Statutory consultation.	Representatives from community / voluntary groups	Engagement in planning via community partnership boards to shape local policies, plans and budgets in Scotland.
Skinns	2005	England	PhD thesis.	Community safety	Statutory consultation.	Representatives from community / voluntary groups	Consultation of local communities to inform the ongoing decision-making of community safety

			Comparative case study; qualitative methods.			Communities of interest / identity	partnerships in Birmingham, Cambridge and Lincoln.
Soneryd & Weldon	2003	England	Journal article.	Environment, planning	Statutory consultation.	Local residents	Public participation in an environmental impact assessment of redevelopment plans for Manchester Airport.
			Comparative case study; qualitative methods.				
Sturzaker	2010	England	Journal article.	Social housing	Statutory consultation.	Representatives from community / voluntary groups	Involvement of 'rural elites' in parish councils and other mechanisms to shape plans for increasing affordable housing stock in five locations in England
			Comparative case study; qualitative methods.		Community-led activism.	Local residents	
Taylor	2006	England	Journal article.	Multiple areas	As part of participatory initiative.	Representatives from community / voluntary groups	Involvement in Community Partnership Programmes as forms of local strategic partnerships for local development, in multiple areas in England.
			Evaluation; mixed methods			Communities of interest / identity	
Tooley	2017	Scotland	Journal article.	Planning	Community-led activism.	Local residents	Organisation of a community activist group to oppose the proposed redevelopment of a neighbourhood in Edinburgh.
			Ethnographic study; qualitative methods.				

**Table 2: Local government area focus of texts included in the review**

<b>Local government area</b>	<b>Number of texts</b>
Planning and regeneration	12
Social and affordable housing	5
Environment, sustainability, park management	4
Community safety	1
Licensing	1
Local transport	1
Homelessness	1
Multiple areas of local government	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>

**Table 3: Summary of the key barriers and facilitators to community engagement in local decision-making**

	<b>Description</b>	<b>Example texts</b>
<b>Barriers</b>	<p>Mismatch of community expectations and reality of timescale of local government decision-making, and of capacity of council to make changes.</p> <p>Engagement occurring too late in the decision-making process, eg consultation on drafted policies, meaning limited opportunity for community influence, and disengagement.</p> <p>Lack of technical knowledge among community members in specific issues and / or decision-making processes, leading to exclusion and disengagement, eg discussing transport planning or environmental evidence.</p> <p>Lack of capacity, skill and/or inclination among council members to engage communities effectively, eg favouring representative democracy over participation, lacking resources to translate community inputs into data to inform decision-making.</p> <p>Time, energy and resources required of community members to become and remain engaged is challenging, eg lacking confidence, risk of 'burnout'</p>	<p>Carpenter &amp; Brownhill; Parker; Abram &amp; Cowell</p> <p>Abram &amp; Cowell, Raco et al; Tooley; Lawson &amp; Kearns</p> <p>Brownill &amp; Carpenter, Soneryd, Skinns; Iconic Consulting</p> <p>Carpenter &amp; Brownhill; Durose &amp; Lowndes; Sharp; Sturzaker; SKinns; Jones, Sinclair; Soneryd; Taylor; Kyung.</p> <p>Blakey &amp; Evans; Brookfield; Anna Evans; Tooley; Iconic Consulting</p>
<b>Facilitators</b>	<p>Involvement of partner organisations with engagement skills and networks to act as liaison, support and / or advocates for communities to become engaged.</p> <p>Building on existing networks and community structures, making the most of existing relationships and resources.</p> <p>Adequate resources and leadership for engagement, including top-down support from high level decision-makers, funding for engagement activities, fostering a 'culture' of engagement in all strategies.</p>	<p>Abram &amp; Cowell; Brownill &amp; Carpenter; Carpenter &amp; Brownill; Parker and Murray; Sinclair</p> <p>Beebeejaun, Batty, Chadderton; Brownill &amp; Carpenter;</p> <p>Duncan &amp; Thomas; Batty; Chadderton; Cloke; Parker &amp; Murray</p>

## **Box 1: Lessons drawn from the synthesis of community engagement and alcohol policy literatures**

### **How community engagement can influence local decision-making to address alcohol-related harms**

#### *Alcohol licensing:*

Mechanisms of engagement to support community contributions in relation to individual licence applications and to broader licensing policy, to shape the availability and accessibility of alcohol.

#### *Place-based planning and regeneration strategies:*

Engaging communities in strategies and plans for shaping local neighbourhoods, to contribute views on development of resources and places that might affect the density of alcohol outlets and the availability of alcohol locally, and reduce related harms.

#### *Data sharing:*

Community engagement can help to develop stronger relationships between communities and councils, leading to sharing of information that can generate better understanding of alcohol-related issues faced in local areas, to help inform appropriate responses.

### **Recommendations for supporting community engagement in local decision-making:**

Consider ways to manage carefully the range of interests and expectations for the process and outcomes of decision-making among the different groups (of locality, of interest, of identity) that might fall under the umbrella of 'community'.

Provide appropriate support and resourcing for community engagement, in the form of guidance / advocacy, skill development (community members and council), funding and time, as part of broader participatory initiatives or strategies, and to reduce the risk of 'burnout' of communities involved.

Involving communities early in the decision-making process, avoiding consultation on drafted policies, and enabling the development of knowledge and relationships between community members and council officers over time.

Make the most of existing networks, structures and relationships, to facilitated engagement, though acknowledging the potential for this to exclude those already marginalised.

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