

# Press Briefing: Dunfermline New City Assembly

*The Dunfermline New City Assembly aims to lead the charge in Scotland's democratic innovation, a model of democracy in action. With trust in politics at an all-time low and the challenges facing our communities and Councillors larger than ever, the Assembly aims to make sure that the Dunfermline community is heard with the clearest voice possible.*

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## Why does this matter?

Local democracy and democracy at large are receiving record-low levels of trust. In 2024, the [British Social Attitudes](#) survey polled Brits at 45% who would 'almost never' "trust British governments of any party to place the needs of the nation above the interests of their own political party". This is the highest rate ever polled by the Centre for National Research.

In research conducted on behalf of the Electoral Reform Society [Scotland](#), Scots were asked how much they trust politicians and political parties. Parties got 3.1 and politicians 2.8, where 0 was 'do not trust at all' and 10 was 'completely trust'.

Dunfermline, Scotland's newest city and once its ancient capital, is growing fast and undergoing major change. That makes it the ideal place to pioneer a new way of doing democracy. One that gives residents the voice and say they deserve, helping Councillors make more informed decisions on behalf of their constituents.

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## The Problem

Big decisions in local communities are often made with limited public input. For example, in research conducted by [Demos](#) on the issue of planning consultations, they found that over half of the population did not know how to take part in consultations. Throughout their work they estimate that – in regard to planning consultations – less than 10% of the population in English local areas are dominating conversations on planning and the future of local areas.

In research conducted for ERS Scotland about [Scottish Councils](#), the results from Scots suggest they want a more decentralised way of doing local government. Especially as Scots showed they did have more connection and therefore, trust, in community councils compared to either Holyrood or Westminster.

With [trust in politics continuing to decline](#), after 25 years of Scottish devolution, a change must be made. The Assembly can build trust, legitimacy, and innovative solutions that politicians alone might miss.

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## The key details - What the Assembly will do

The Assembly will be formed of 35 participants, chosen by lottery and sortition using Dunfermline's household register using data held by Royal Mail. The participants demographic breakdown has been chosen based upon that of Dunfermline's population. You can view a comparison of the demographics compared to those in the Assembly participants [here](#).

They will meet over three weekends in early 2026 – once in January, twice in February – to deliberate the question, **“We all want Dunfermline to be a great place to call home. As our city grows and develops, how do we continue to improve our community for today and tomorrow?”**.

This discussion will be managed by trained facilitators. Those facilitators will be chosen from the Fife community itself and are independent of the Scottish government, Fife Council and ERS Scotland.

At the conclusion of the Assembly its recommendations will go to the City of Dunfermline Area Committee. They will be asked to consider and respond with details of how the Council will work with the community and other relevant partners to meet the recommendations.

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## Independence & Funding

The Assembly is being delivered by a coalition of organisations including the Electoral Reform Society Scotland, Fife Council, the Scottish Government and the Sortition Foundation.

The Sortition Foundation have been responsible for the sortition element of the selection process. Insuring independence in the selection of participants.

The Electoral Reform Society Scotland and Fife Council have been responsible for engaging the local community in the design process of the Assembly and the question the Assembly will consider. They have also been responsible for sourcing and training the facilitators who will run the sessions independently of both the ERS and Fife Council.

It is funded by the Scottish Government. As announced in the [Programme for Government 2025](#) a grant was awarded for the project, with full transparency.

Participants will receive remuneration for their time and participation. That amount will be £500. This is to ensure that everyone, regardless of income or background, can take part.

Safeguarding procedures will also be put in place for participants who wish to have them, such as anonymity to the press, to guarantee participants feel capable of contributing to their fullest extent.

The process will also be independently evaluated by researchers from the Youth and Civic Engagement Hub (EYCE) which is part of LSE Consulting. LSE Consulting has been established by the London School of Economics & Political Science (LSE). EYCE is a consulting business providing academic expertise on education, youth and civic engagement for the purpose of delivering more inclusive and democratic societies.

A programme for observers of the deliberative sessions is also being established.

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## Quick facts

- The Dunfermline New City Assembly will be the first city-level Citizens' Assembly in Scotland.
- It forms part of the government's Programme for Government in 2025 as part of their developments on devolution in Holyrood's 25<sup>th</sup> year anniversary.
- Part of Scotland's "new city" journey as Dunfermline is Scotland's newest city.
- The project forms part of the wider debate about democratic reform across the UK with House of Lords reform, the English devolution Bill, and extension of the franchise to 16- and 17-year-olds in England & Wales.

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## Quotes

- Councillor James Calder, Area Convenor for the city of Dunfermline Area Committee: "*We're thrilled with the Scottish Government's commitment to empowering our local community through a Citizens' Assembly. As Scotland's newest city, it's an exciting opportunity for residents to actively participate in decision-making processes that directly affect their lives. I look forward to seeing how this pilot develops and working with the Citizens' Assembly to help Dunfermline thrive.*"
- Willie Sullivan, Director of ERS Scotland: "*ERS Scotland are delighted to see the opportunity Dunfermline now has to lead Scottish democracy. The challenges our communities are facing are larger than ever before, and we strongly believe it is the people who live in Dunfermline who know what their community needs and what they hope for. The Dunfermline Citizens Assembly gives a new way for the people of Dunfermline to influence the future of their city. Once the ancient capital, Dunfermline is now the leader in modern democratic innovation.*"
- Peter Reid, Dunfermline resident: "*Dunfermline already has great volunteers and community groups, bringing in new and different voices can only make Dunfermline a better place for everyone. This is a real opportunity for the people of Dunfermline to have a say on the issues that affect them.*"

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## Briefings and links

- [Electoral Reform Society briefing on Citizens Assemblies](#)

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## Media team

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