Community Right to Buy Consultation
SURF's Response

About This Paper

In July 2025, the Scottish Government launched a [public consultation](#) on Community Rights to Buy (CRtB), with a view to better understanding how rights can be improved to facilitate community ownership. The document assessed various elements of the current process, including important questions around the structure and composition of community bodies, and ballot and petition ratios required to proceed.

SURF is particularly interested in where this consultation intersects with questions around improving local democracy and Democracy Matters - which are a key priority for our forthcoming 2026 Manifesto.

SURF consulted with our network with a call to anyone who a) has in the past engaged with the Community Right to Buy process, or b) has the ambition to do so in future. Although timescales were tight, we are grateful to everyone who responded to this call and provided insights into how CRtB can be improved.

SURF's Response to Selected Questions

3.   *Do you support the Scottish Government recommendation that the residence and voting eligibility requirement is reduced to being anything over 50% of the community? What ratio of ordinary members should be required of a community body to ensure that control of community-owned assets remains with local members of the community?*

SURF circulated a call to its network, specifically those groups or organisations that a) have had a degree of experience with Community Right to Buy in the past or b) have ambitions to use CRtB in future, and therefore have an active interest in it.

The responses – which were from community groups likely to make use of CRtB – indicated that they were in favour of lowering the threshold from 75% to 50%. We are also aware of significant DTAS and CLS engagement with their respective members which supports lowering this threshold.

For groups operating at a local scale, the 75% threshold can clearly be onerous, and this may be more pronounced for certain communities. Although SURF acknowledges that the above is likely to be the opinion of many community groups, the proposed changes also intersect significantly with the ongoing Democracy Matters process, with questions

about how decision-making, improved participation, and accountability can best be structured and enabled to the benefit of local communities. It is crucial that communities are supported and empowered properly given the time, effort, and resources involved in building capacity and coalitions within communities through complex processes like CRtB.

The above tension also seems to highlight that this process – which is by its very nature so unique and place-based – makes it difficult to state definitively what the appropriate percentage is, or what ballot and petition rations should be.

4. Should the ratio of members required to attend be amended from the current 10%? If so, what proportion do you think would still ensure that the local community is fairly represented at general meetings of the company?

On this point, opinions were divided, with some in SURF's network stating that they did not feel the 10% ratio should be increased, whereas others felt that 10% was quite low, and that it could be increased (by a reasonable amount).

As with Question 3, there is no straightforward one-size-fits-all approach, but if – as per point 3 above – the threshold for ordinary members is lowered from 75% to 50%, and 10% of members are required to attend each meeting, it is possible that meetings – and perhaps the wider process – could be shaped more by those not living in the community than residents.

SURF would caution against a scenario where communities of interest have the potential to outweigh communities of place.

5a. Could some of these levels of community support and turnout required be reduced while still providing sufficient evidence that the proposals have community support? If so, which ones?

Within the SURF network, those that responded found the current system onerous. However, the methods for addressing this issue differed, from reducing the percentage that registers a vote while keeping the percentage in favour the same to reducing the ballot thresholds and removing the separate minimum turnout altogether. Although opinions were divided on how to achieve the above, there was agreement over how restricting this was for organisations in practice.

5b. Should the demonstration of support in a ballot be solely based on the percentage of the community in support (i.e. with no separate minimum turnout requirement)—so for example a 25% threshold could be met by a 50% turnout and 50% support—or a 25% turnout and 100% support?

See above (5a)

5c. If a ballot were based solely on the percentage of community support, with no minimum turnout, should the percentage of those against the proposals be considered, instead of just those in favour?

See above (5a)

End of consultation response

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For further information on SURF's policy influencing activities, please visit:
www.surf.scot/policy

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