

A short introduction to policymaking for communities seeking local change

The Policy Co-op

Researching with Communities

August 2026



What is policymaking?

It is the act of developing and applying different strategies, rules and processes to tackle societal problems. Policymaking is not about party politics (elections), although both can be interrelated if you are a politician.

Traditionally, policymaking has been ascribed to the actions and responsibilities of governments across different arenas (e.g. housing, social care, transport, education, waste, parks and dog fouling). However, in real life, governments collaborate with or depend on networks of elected and non-elected people to address and tackle the problems that society faces.

In other words, policymaking brings together in different ways and at different times councillors and local government officers, ministers, MPs and civil servants, businesses, **charities** and pressure groups, as well as **citizen** and **community groups**.

Policymaking is **messy** for three main reasons. First, there are many different people and organisations involved in the process, all working at different

levels of government, be it national, regional or local.

Second, there is a diversity of instruments used to make policy. For instance, budgets and targeted spending programmes, economic incentives/penalties, regulations and laws, and commissions or service agreements.

Hence, policy is continuously changing. It is always being made because of the **daily interactions** between many people and the different combinations of policy instruments used.

Third, policy is never without disagreement. As part of our democratic debate, policymaking should create the space for different views and positions to be expressed and deliberated.

We tend to associate policymaking with what is mentioned in the press or social media. However, omissions -what is not said- are also part of policymaking.

Who are the policymakers?

There is a wide range of policymakers who have different reach and influence depending

on the type and size of the problem that is being addressed.

When addressing policy problems that have an impact on the places where people live or on the services and social relations people build,

community groups are important policymakers.

However, one of the key challenges is to identify and map where policy debates are taking place and who are the key decision-makers to influence.

Commonly, three **different but interconnected levels** exist in which policymakers interact: national, regional and local.

	Policymaker types	Areas of influence
National	- Members of Parliament - Civil servants working in Government departments - Prime minister and their cabinet office - National business associations - National public and private funders and trusts - Trade unions - Private and academic consultants/ advisers - National citizen movements	- National laws - National programmes across many and different areas (health, education, housing, environment, planning, immigration, employment, universal credit, court and prison services, etc.) - Devolution
Regional	- Mayors and local councillors - Local partnership boards - Service commissioning boards - Local government and NHS services - Regional business groups - Regional trade union branches - Voluntary and community organisations - Private consultants and advisers - Universities and academics - Regional citizen movements	- Economy, business and employment - Transport - Housing - Health - Planning - Energy and climate change - Policing
Local	- Local and parish councillors - Local government and NHS officers - Local businesses - Local voluntary and community organisations - Neighbourhood assemblies - Local citizen or resident groups	- Provision of social care - Social housing and homelessness - Planning - Parks and libraries - Bins and recycling - Schools and education - Wellbeing - Food redistribution - Alternative energies

How can community groups influence policymaking?

There are several ways in which you can **take** collective **action** beyond the ballot box.



You can participate in governments' consultations (via surveys or citizen assemblies). Campaigning on social media, protesting creatively alongside other groups, or carving spaces for your views to be heard are other options. These actions give you **voice** and work as catalysts for governments to become more responsive to people's needs.

If you want to begin having '**teeth**' (or become more influential) in addition to having voice, you can share ideas with your local councillors and MPs on alternative ways of solving a collective problem. You can

negotiate with local government officers on how to improve the delivery of a service you need.

You may take legal action if a government agency is not doing the work it has been assigned to do by law or if government decisions violate your human rights.

In some places you can co-decide, with local authorities, how a specific budget is allocated to address a collective problem. You can also assess whether a particular government project created the benefits it was set to achieve.

Or, you can implement solutions to your problems independent of what local or national governments are doing. The more influence you have in making decisions and implementing solutions, the better organised you will need to be.

If you find you do not have enough time and resources to work independently, try to find other community groups or local businesses with which you can work in partnership to help put your points across in credible or

sustainable ways. Ask yourself what your community's needs are and who your allies are.

Finally, be aware that the bigger the change you want to achieve, the need to approach public and private sector organisations will increase.

Why should communities care about policymaking?

Because you are part of a group of people pursuing positive change in the place you live. This benefits the work done by people in government. You have opinions about the services you receive and have ideas to improve them. You also understand things that government officials overlook.

To learn more on why policymaking matters, read our *Policy Cycle for Communities* guide. □

Acknowledgements

Ideas in this guide are The Policy Co-op's, developed over decades of researching policymaking. We are grateful to Expert Citizens CIC, Good Organisation, Rimrose Valley Friends, Stoke-on-Trent Foodbank, and Women in Community Action Arbourthorne, who helped us complement this guide through their experiences of working with communities.

The Policy Co-op is on a mission to democratise policymaking. It champions the fact that community groups and organisations are part of this process by making positive change happen locally.

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