

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCILCABINET28 January 2016Report by Deputy Chief ExecutiveFUTURE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
ARRANGEMENTS IN EAST RENFREWSHIRE**PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1. To seek approval for the revised arrangements for community engagement in East Renfrewshire in line with the requirements of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. The Cabinet is asked to note the impact and requirements of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015; and agree:

- (a) A framework for participation requests will be developed by the end of March 2016 as part of the new framework set out in paragraphs 7-10;
- (b) That Area Forums will cease to operate from April 2016; and
- (c) Departments will continue to be provided with training, support and tools to engage with communities under the new arrangements.

BACKGROUND

3. The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 was passed by the Scottish Parliament in June 2015. The Act is an amalgam of requirements on councils and other public sector bodies. While much of the attention around the Act has focused on asset transfer at its core the Act is intended to strengthen community planning and give local communities a stronger role in planning, service delivery and improving outcomes. This is where most of the cultural, policy and resource implications are within the Act.

4. The Act is based on the principle of increasing community participation in decision making and work to improve outcomes. It is necessary to define key terms:

Term	Meaning
Consultation	Communities are invited to give views on a complete or mostly complete proposal that the organisation has drafted. These types of consultation tend to rely on representative structures and processes. Small numbers of often the same individuals give views on a wide range of issues.
Engagement	Communities are involved in or their views are taken into account throughout the design and development of a proposal. The proposal is still completely or mostly owned and developed by the organisation. These types of engagement are a mix of representative structures and more broad based community participation depending on the issue, service and organisation.

Term	Meaning
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Co-Production	<p>Communities are treated as equal partners; they are given power and have meaningful influence. They directly contribute to the shaping of the proposal, co-own it and can be involved directly in its delivery.</p> <p>This is intended to be a much more participative process that involves a more diverse mix of community members than traditional consultation and engagement approaches.</p>
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5. The Act represents a shift from the traditional representative consultation and engagement models to a significantly more participative model. This links strongly to East Renfrewshire’s organisational capabilities. Not simply in terms of community engagement but a more participative approach requires better use and analysis of socio-economic and demographic data and potentially more digital engagement through websites and social media. The table below sets out some of the key differences and practical implications for services of moving to a more participative approach.

Traditional Representative Engagement Model	Participative Engagement Model
Easier to manage and access	More complex and labour intensive Requires more pre-planning; up-to-date disaggregated socio-economic data, demographic and contact information which is constantly changing.
Relatively static participant base and model	Wider variety of participants
“Fall-outs”, misjudgments or misunderstandings can be easier to manage and resolve due to the relatively few participants. Equally well-run engagement doesn’t always receive the traction or attention it deserves.	““Fall-outs”, misjudgments or misunderstandings are more visible to “ordinary people”, and can reach deeper into communities. There is greater potential to enhance or damage the Council’s reputation based on how well planned and run the community involvement is.
Structures and arrangements are few and tend to mirror Council structures and governance.	Myriad of different approaches required based on subject and target engagement group/community.
Tends to be (but not exclusively) dominated by individuals from certain demographics (Predominately aged 50+, white and male)	Much more diverse – engagement and co-production is targeted at specific relevant demographics and communities (both geographic & communities of interest).
Can occasionally lead to tensions between elected members and community representatives over who represents the views of community.	Can be challenging for organisations to hand-over some power in a relationship with communities. Equally it creates opportunity for better defined roles and contributions.

6. The Act represents a shift from the traditional representative consultation and engagement models to a significantly more participative model. It comes with different challenges and risks than traditional models. Two key areas are respect and feedback. If communication is not clear or communities feel patronised or taken for granted this can have wider implications for the Council. The behaviour of one service can and will enhance or undermine other services ability to engage with that community/client group in the future. This type of approach will place a burden on community groups to behave responsibly and to operate transparently and in line with the principles of good governance themselves.

The New Framework

7. The Act requires a new approach to community engagement in East Renfrewshire, under the Act community groups can request to participate in the improvement of outcomes – the Act states that there is a default presumption in favour of granting such requests unless the organisation has “reasonable” grounds to refuse. As a result the Council must:

- Ensure we have a robust, transparent process for handling participation requests and ensuring the participation is honoured when granted;
- Define reasonable criteria for refusing requests. This may include requests groups or individuals who engage in unacceptable or intimidatory behaviour or where they have weak governance where this is relevant.
- Develop a fit-for-purpose framework for supporting services to undertake a more participative approach; and
- Consider the future of area forums.

8. Over the past 2-3 years Community Planning and Community Learning and Development officers have been working with partners and incrementally laying the foundations for this approach. The new approach to community engagement is built on two data-driven foundations:

- (a) We have disaggregated socio-economic and demographic data and analysis of our local communities in order to understand their needs and priorities; and
- (b) We know, as far as possible, which community groups operate in East Renfrewshire, where and when - and for groups linked to key outcomes, what their capacity, priorities and needs are;

9. We have undertaken mapping of community groups which is updated on a regular basis. This approach is already being used by services across the Council. There have been over 200 consultations using Citizen Space, the Council’s consultation hub, since it launched in 2014. Using our community mapping database consultations on Citizen Space can be targeted at specific groups and individuals with particular interests relevant to the consultation subject. The mapping tells us that East Renfrewshire is comprised of resilient and active communities and there is a vibrant third sector. There are approximately 846 groups available for residents to access including 245 sports and hobby/activity groups, 128 early years education, 78 adult education groups and 53 seniors groups. There is generally a good spread of groups across gender, age, ethnicity and location.

10. The new framework also takes account of three factors to ensure we meet our new legal duties and that we can respond to and reach our target partners in communities:

Participation Requests	Communities Accessible via Existing Groups	Communities Not Accessible via Existing Groups
↓ Coming Into the Council	↑ Going out from the Council	↑ Going out from the Council
<p>Required by Act</p> <p>Default presumption in favour of participation</p> <p>Requires a process and set timescales for response and appeal.</p> <p>Departments will be required by law to work with approved community groups to improve outcomes</p>	<p>Utilise engagement tools and community mapping of existing groups to identify participants from community of interest relevant to the consultation/co-production.</p>	<p>Use socio-economic and demographic data and analysis to target areas where target community members are likely to be.</p> <p>Support services to find and engage those participants.</p>

11. Sometimes services will want to target consultations at specific geographic areas. There are natural communities that local people relate to (Barrhead; Neilston; Uplawmoor; Newton Mearns; Thornliebank; Giffnock; Netherlee; Stamperland; Clarkston; Busby; Eaglesham and Waterfoot). However sometimes services will need a geography larger than these communities but smaller than East Renfrewshire as a whole, for example the Health & Social Care Partnership requires this type of locality. To address this need the new framework divides East Renfrewshire into four notional local areas which are listed below and shown on a map in Annex 1:

- A. Lavern Valley (Barrhead, Neilston and Uplawmoor)
- B. Newton Mearns
- C. Giffnock & Thornliebank
- D. Netherlee, Stamperland, Clarkston, Busby, Eaglesham and Waterfoot

12. The four local areas are comprised, first and foremost, of natural communities and, as far as possible, match the boundaries of school catchment areas. They are the local areas used by the new Health and Social Care partnership and were originally identified with this process and the national requirements for HSCPs in mind. Each area has a roughly equal population and wide cross section of community groups based on the demographics of the local area. Having this type of local area built into the framework makes it more flexible.

IMPLICATIONS FOR AREA FORUMS

13. In 2011 the Community Planning team began work on a review of Area Forums. 17 Community representatives, 6 partners and a range of elected members fed in their views on the effectiveness and operation of Area Forums. The team also undertook an analysis of the minutes and the agendas. The work showed that there was widespread consensus that Area Forums were no longer fit for purpose and struggled to be relevant. At that time the Scottish Government announced its intention to bring forward the bill that would become the Community Empowerment Act. As a result further work on the review of Area Forums was

delayed until the new Bill was passed and the national requirements associated could be better understood. In the interim period work commenced updating the Scheme of Establishment for Community Councils to ensure that the scheme was fit for purpose and Community Councils were as representative as possible of their local communities.

14. Since 2011 there is nothing to suggest that the operation of Area Forums has altered significantly. Feedback from elected members and Area Forum members strongly suggest that the findings from 2011 hold true today. The main order of business for Area Forums has been the disposal of the budget allocated to them. The Council as already agreed, as part of the existing budget savings, that 2014/15 would be the final year of Area Forum budgets. These issues, together with the strategic direction set out in the Community Empowerment Act towards a more participative approach to working with communities, suggest that Area Forums are no longer fit for purpose and should cease to operate following the end of the financial year.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

15. There will be a small time-release saving from the administration of Area Forums. The Socio-economic, demographic and community mapping analysis together with staff training and support around community engagement and co-production is largely in place and is being met from existing resources. However the burden and responsibility for pre-planning, working with communities and taking forward participation requests will sit with services within departments. This has the potential to create additional work demands for staff in services across the organisation; however it is not possible to quantify what this will mean or where demands may be greatest at this time.

RECOMMENDATIONS

16. The Cabinet is asked to note the impact and requirements of the Community Empowerment Act; and agree:

- (a) A framework for participation requests will be developed by the end of March 2016 as part of the new framework set out in paragraphs 7-10;
- (b) That Area Forums will cease to operate from April 2016; and
- (c) Departments will continue to be provided with training, support and tools to engage with communities under the new arrangements.

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ANNEX 1

- A. Levern Valley (Barrhead, Neilston and Uplawmoor)
- B. Newton Mearns
- C. Giffnock & Thornliebank
- D. Netherlee, Stamperland, Clarkston, Busby, Eaglesham and Waterfoot

Four Local Areas

