

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Executive Director of Corporate Services

Community Participation Committee: Wednesday 11 December, 2013

Subject: Community Engagement Update

1. Purpose

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to describe the outcome of four recent Neighbourhood Listening Events and sets out some learning points which will inform future community engagement.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1** It is recommended that the approach to neighbourhood community engagement is revised to ensure effectiveness and best use of resources.

3. Background

- 3.1** A paper on New Approaches to Community Planning was agreed by the Community Planning partnership in June 2013. It outlined a new approach to community engagement as follows:

“ A new landscape for significant community involvement in neighbourhood services. This would allow local people to get involved in discussing and addressing issues of importance in their local communities. It would build on the strengths and enthusiasm already present in the area, with support and development provided from key services.”

- 3.2** A series of Listening Events was planned to put this into practice, starting with four events covering five of the seventeen neighbourhoods.

4. Main Issues

- 4.1** The purpose of these listening events was to engage local residents to identify community priorities, in the context of the five strategic priorities as adopted by the Council.
- 4.2** Significant efforts were made to ensure good coverage and awareness of the sessions and to promote attendance. Planning for the meetings involved linking to local groups, including Community Councils and tenants and residents groups. This process identified the best locations and ways of publicising the meetings and allowed local groups to get involved in spreading the word about the

meetings. It was hoped this engagement and ownership would help encourage a better turnout of local people. The sessions were also run over two time slots on each day to make them as accessible as possible and children's activities were provided at the early session on each day.

4.3 There was widespread publicity for the events:

- Press advertisements in the three local papers and the Community Advertiser
- Distribution of thousands of flyers through community groups, shops, libraries, community centres, and some letterbox drops
- Letter and flyers circulated to larger community groups
- Website
- Facebook and Twitter
- Banners (Bowling and Balloch/Haldane)
- Adverts on Your Radio throughout the days leading up to each event

4.4 However attendance at meetings has been disappointingly low:

- Dalmuir 4
- Dumbarton 11
- Bowling 8
- Balloch 8

4.5 Despite the low numbers of people taking part, useful discussion took place at all meetings. For example, in Dumbarton, there was good discussion on regeneration of the Town Centre. But feedback from those in attendance suggests that few local residents are interested in coming along to these events unless they have a specific issue or concern to discuss.

4.6 The issues people raised at the events will be followed up in the appropriate manner and feedback provided directly to the individuals. Some issues have already been responded to and work carried out.

4.7 The approach to engagement will be reviewed in light of the experience so far and will present a report to the February meeting of the Community Planning Management Group and the March meeting of the Community Participation Committee, outlining a revised approach. It is felt that engagement should be primarily be delivered via existing channels such as the Citizens' Panel, online customer surveys and Facebook, and telephone surveys through the contact centre. Events such as parent/teacher nights at schools may also be utilised. Service specific engagement should be delivered through existing community groups and organisations.

5. People Implications

5.1 There are no people implications.

6. Financial Implications

6.1 There are no financial implications.

7. Risk Analysis

7.1 We must strive to improve our approaches to community engagement, otherwise we risk failing to meet current requirements and future statutory obligations arising from the proposed Community Empowerment Bill.

8. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

8.1 An equalities screening has not identified any issues. Meeting arrangements were designed to accommodate people's different requirements.

9. Consultation

9.1 These events were discussed with a range of groups including Community Councils and Tenants and Residents Groups. There were also discussions with a range of relevant officers in advance of the events.

10. Strategic Assessment

10.1 This work contributes to 'Positive dialogue with local citizens and communities' referred to in the Strategic Plan.

.....
Amanda Coulthard
Corporate & Community Planning Manager

Person to Contact: Amanda Coulthard
Council Buildings
Garshake Road
Dumbarton G82 3PU
01389 737271
Amanda.coulthard@west-dunbarton.gov.uk

Appendices: None

Background Papers: None

Wards Affected: All

