WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by Chief Executive

Community Participation Committee: 22 August 2007
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Subject: Community Engagement Structures – The Role and Operation of the Community Participation Committee (CPC)

1.   Purpose

1.1   This report outlines the feedback gained from an exercise carried out with community representatives, seeking their views on the operation of the CPC.

2.   Background

2.1   In response to a question raised by a member of the public at the Open Forum of the January CPC, a report was made to the March 2007 meeting, providing details of the current community engagement structures and identifying their roles. The aim was to provide the opportunity for the committee to discuss any potential duplication of community engagement structures.

2.2   Community representatives present considered the Community Participation Committee to be a good platform to raise issues and receive prompt answers to questions.

2.3   Elected Members present considered the Community Participation Committee to be a valuable and effective Council Committee.

2.4   It was agreed that those community representatives not present at the meeting would be contacted regarding their views of the Community Participation Committee.

2.5   The following report outlines the responses and implications for the operation of the CPC.

3.   Main Issues

3.1   A questionnaire and covering letter were sent out to all community representatives (including substitute representatives).

3.2   Eleven questionnaires were returned.   Appendix 1 provides the complete feedback including comments. The following key points   emerged:-

➢ Providing Information

A large majority (nine) found the information provided about Council services to be very useful or useful. Two respondents found it 'fairly useful'.

➢ Commenting on Policies
A large majority (nine) considered the opportunity to comment on policies very useful or useful. One respondent found it 'fairly useful'.

➢ Pre-Agenda Meetings
There was a more divided view on the usefulness of providing summaries of key points for reports for promoting discussion at pre-agenda meetings.   Five respondents indicated they would find these helpful, three would not and a further three are unsure.

There were only two positive comments about the usefulness of pre-agenda meetings and six negative comments five of which indicated respondents did not want pre-agenda meetings.

➢ System for Encouraging Community Issues onto the CPC Agenda
There was an extremely positive response to this, with ten respondents indicating it worked well (one 'don't know' from a new member).

➢ The Business of the Committee
The majority of respondents (seven) felt that the business of the committee could not be carried out through other structures (e.g. Community Planning Partnership Board), only one thought it could be, with a further two unsure. There were several positive comments about the way the CPC works.

Improvement Issues

3.2   There were few concrete suggestions for improvement, but the following points were made:-

➢ Ideas for Improvement
  o One comment was about encouraging all members of the CPC to speak out
  o A suggestion for a website with a PIN where community representatives could post local topical issues instantly
  o More continued recognition of the CPC's value
  o Keep up the good standard of chairing

Some of the other comments highlight areas where further work requires to be done:-

➢ Comments on: Presentations

While most respondents indicated that presentations were of a high standard, one respondent felt the quality of presentations varied, with some presenters requiring work on their presentations.

➢ Proposed Action for Improvement
As a general rule, shorter presentations, giving key points and allowing time for questioning, have tended to be well received. The Policy Officer, Community & Consultation will continue to provide guidance on this to services prior to meetings and feedback following meetings. Employees also have access to appropriate training to improve presentation skills.

➢ Comments on: Commenting on Policies/System for Encouraging Community Issues onto the Agenda
While most respondents felt commenting on policies was a valuable process, one expressed that it can be disappointing how little attention is paid to any comments made on policies. A related question was posed in response to the question on the system for encouraging community items i.e. is any action taken on the subject after the meeting?

➢ Proposed Action for Improvement
We will work on strengthening the follow up of points raised through effective use of Action Sheets based on minutes of the meeting and providing feedback on subsequent action taken.

In addition, we will continue to work to ensure that the items are taken to the CPC for views and feedback at the appropriate time i.e. before final decisions have been reached.

➢ Comments on: the Business of the Committee
While the substantial majority of respondents feel that the CPC has a specific role in relation to Council business, the question was raised "Could the proposed new Community Planning 'Hubs' be threat to the CPC?"

This highlights the need to review the roles of different structures as they develop, including the CPC, to ensure that duplication does not occur.

4. Personnel Issues

4.1 There are no personnel issues.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 There are no financial issues.

6. Risk Analysis

6.1   The main risks in relation to the CPC are that the Council fails to use it to maximum effect as a vehicle for ensuring community comment on proposed developments, and conversely, that taking issues to it in advance of decision-making may slow up the decision-making process.

7.   Conclusions

7.1   The predominant view favours the continuation of the CPC and a strengthening of its 'influencing' role.

8.   Recommendations

8.1   The committee is invited to:-

(a)   agree the predominant view favouring the continuation of the CPC and the strengthening of its influencing role;

(b)   discuss and come to a decision on future arrangements for pre-agenda meetings; and

(c)   discuss, comment and recommend to Council as necessary on the improvement issues at 3.3.

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David McMillan
Chief Executive
Date: 2 August 2007

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Person to Contact: Person to contact: Anne Clegg, Policy Officer, Community & Consultation, 01389 737177

Appendix: Questionnaire Feedback

Background Papers: West Dunbartonshire Council – Wednesday 29th June 2005 & Wednesday 31st August 2005: Role of the Community Participation Committee in Relation to New Community Planning Partnership
CPC: Wednesday 20 September, 2006, CPC Achievements   Evaluation and Development
CPC: Wednesday 21st March, 2007: Community Engagement Structures

Wards Affected: All

Community Participation Committee – Your views

Providing information

How useful is the information provided about Council services through the CPC?
(e.g. a range of community learning and development services; sports development services; recycling; welfare rights)

Very Useful   Useful   Fairly Useful   Not useful
8   1   2

Your comments:
- All partners are present and give answers to questions
- Knowledge gained, especially in community learning and recycling, has been most useful to community groups with which I am involved
- It gives us the chance to hear the right information from people in the know, not hearsay
- Principal speakers have all been excellent
- Depends on where you interest is
- Mixed impressions – some services outgoing, others need to work on their presentations
- It's a good way to get our views across

Commenting on policies

How useful is the opportunity to comment on Council Policies?
(e.g. Draft Disability Equality Strategy; WDC Corporate Plan; WDC Customer First Strategy; WDC Consultation Strategy; WDC Anti-Poverty Strategy;
West Dunbartonshire Corporate Action Plan for Alcohol and Drugs and WDC Race Equality Scheme)

Very Useful   Useful   Fairly Useful   Not useful
6   3   1

Your comments:
- All partners are present and give answers to questions
- Being lately come to the CPC, I feel unable to comment
- I feel that comments made are listened to and, if warranted, acted upon
- Hopefully to put across the opinions of the people we represent
- An obviously useful forum for the above: ideal opportunity
- Think this is important and very useful
- Very useful, but it can be disappointing how little attention is paid to any comments made
- It's a very useful way to comment on policies

Pre-agenda meetings
Would summaries of key points for reports be helpful for promoting discussion at pre-agenda meetings?

Yes	*No*	*Don't Know*
5	**3**	**3**

Your comments:

> ➢ Pre-agenda meetings can bring out salient points to be discussed at main meeting
> ➢ This meeting does not seem to achieve much
> ➢ They are not necessary
> ➢ I do not really see the point of such meetings
> ➢ Don't like pre-agenda meetings – send out any papers giving us time to study them
> ➢ Whose summaries?
> ➢ Not in favour of pre-agenda meetings
> ➢ Very useful to have pre-agenda meetings

Is the system for encouraging community issues onto the agenda of the CPC working?
(through the standing item "Future agenda items for community representatives")

Yes	*No*	*Don't Know*
10		**1**

Your comments:
> ➢ Gets information to the public
> ➢ This works very well
> ➢ That's why it is a success
> ➢ Yes, but is any action taken on subject after meeting?
> ➢ The system for encouraging community issues is working.

The business of the committee
In your view could the business of the CPC be carried out through other existing structures e.g. the Community Planning Partnership Board (CPPB)?

Yes	*No*	*Unsure*
1	**7**	**2**

Your comments:
> ➢ Why when a thing is working has it always to be changed?
> ➢ The CPC seems to be much more open and receptive of suggestions put by community representatives. On occasional visits to the CPPB everything appeared to be pre-determined
> ➢ Because we do not make the final decisions
> ➢ The CPC is the optimal opportunity for community engagement, very capably chaired by Cllr Casey
> ➢ Think CPPB has a very big agenda as it is

- The CPPB are still trying to sort themselves out (half the community reps are going). There is a role for the CPC.
- If we could just find an 'Anchor Role' e.g. Town Centres Planning. Could the proposed new 'Hubs' be a threat to us??
- CPC has a more non-political representation of Community Representatives
- In the past Community Planning has had too many issues to deal with

Finally, have you any Ideas for improving our CPC?

- No, leave it as it is
- Encouragement of members who are not local semi-politicians to speak out. I have felt sometimes that councillors have arrived with their own private agenda which excludes others.
- The CPC seems to work well in its present format
- No, under the present leadership of yourself it runs very well and well presented
- A website where, with a PIN, we could post local topical issues instantly
- More continued recognition of its value. Chairing of meetings in the past kept the follow of business in a fair, appropriate manner. Try for the same.
- I have enjoyed the CPC and hope it will carry on.