

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by Chief Executive

Community Participation Committee: 23 April 2008

Subject: Draft Interim Community Engagement Strategy

1. Purpose

- 1.1** This report provides a Draft Interim Community Engagement Strategy (attached as Appendix 1) and outlines a consultation process to determine priorities and draw up actions for 2009-10.

2. Background

- 2.1** The Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994 made it a statutory requirement for Councils to have a Decentralisation Scheme. The aims of Decentralisation are about moving services and information closer to local people. It is a process rather than an end in itself.
- 2.2** Since then the community engagement agenda has been taken forward by the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003, in the wider context of Community Planning and Best Value.

3. Main Issues

- 3.1** The community engagement strategy for the Council will also act as our Decentralisation Scheme. Relevant developments in community planning engagement mechanisms will be built in as and when appropriate.
- 3.2** The aims of the Community Engagement Strategy are “To support and enable all communities to have meaningful participation in shaping the policies which affect them and services which they use, and work together with communities to improve the quality of life in West Dunbartonshire”.
- 3.3** The main objectives of our community engagement strategy are built around:
- Developing systems and processes to enable communities to engage in a range of ways (accessible to a range of people) to influence decision-making
 - Establishing and maintaining structures and mechanisms to support engagement
 - Clearly publicising and communicating (using a range of methods) the existence of the above structures and mechanisms and how they work
 - Providing accessible information about Council/partner services and relevant issues

- Supporting community capacity by supporting the development of representative groups and encouraging networking between them
- Making specific arrangements to ensure the involvement of excluded and minority groups
- Working in partnership with the community and voluntary sector

3.4 Several key issues have to be prioritised and addressed to take forward essential elements of the strategy including:

- Capacity and resources to support effective community engagement (including issues of co-ordination and responsibility)
- Support to Community Councils
- Support to Tenants' & Residents' Groups
- Support to minorities in our communities

3.5 Voluntary Sector

The recently developed West Dunbartonshire Joint Voluntary Policy sets out the framework for best practice approaches in working with volunteers and voluntary and community groups.

3.6 Consultation

Consultation is an important aspect of the wider process of community engagement. The Council's Consultation Strategy, currently under review, sets out the processes for co-ordinating consultation and promoting best practice in the approaches used. It will be updated as part of this wider process to provide specific guidance for the Council on consultation approaches.

3.7 Other important aspects which support community engagement include:

- Community Group Database
- West Dunbartonshire Citizens' Panel
- West Dunbartonshire Community Day
- West Dunbartonshire News
- Budget Consultation
- Funding of community groups and voluntary organisations

3.8 Success indicators – Monitoring and Evaluation

We will develop an action plan with a range of measures which we can use to inform progress and future developments and provide evidence for external scrutiny. It is suggested that progress will be reported annually to the Community Participation Committee and Community Planning Partnership Board.

- 3.9** The content of the Draft Interim Community Engagement Strategy will be subject to consultation during April – June with appropriate officers, Elected Members and community members. This report to the CPC and a report to the Community Planning Board will form part of the consultation process.

4. Personnel Issues

- 4.1** There are no personnel issues.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1** Additional resource implications may be identified during the consultation process for consideration when setting budgets for 2009-10.

6. Risk Analysis

- 6.1** There is a risk that resources may not be available to take forward key priorities in the community engagement strategy.

7. Conclusions

- 7.1** The basis of an effective community engagement strategy is to use a range of different methods and mechanisms appropriate to different needs and, where appropriate, to co-ordinate activity. The development of the new Scheme should identify priorities, build on existing good practice and make the best use of partner resources.

8. Recommendations

- 8.1** Members of the committee are invited to:-

- (a) approve the content of Appendix 1 as the basis for the consultation on the Community Engagement Strategy;
- (b) agree that a review of support to Community Councils is carried out as part of the consultation;
- (c) agree that a review of support to Tenants' & Residents groups is carried out; and
- (d) provide views and feedback on the content of Appendix 1 including priorities and gaps.

David McMillan
Chief Executive
Date: 4 April 2008

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Appendix: West Dunbartonshire Council Draft Interim Community Engagement Strategy

Background Papers: Wednesday 19 April, 2006, Community Participation Committee: WDC Consultation Strategy and Draft Policy and Procedures;
Wednesday 12 December, 2007, Community Participation Committee: Review of “Involving Communities” – WDC’s Decentralisation Scheme; Proposals for Developing New Scheme

Wards Affected: All wards