

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Executive Director of Corporate Services

Community Participation Committee: 29 August, 2012

Subject: Community Participation Committee (CPC) - Evaluation

1. Purpose

- 1.1** This report provides the CPC evaluation feedback and makes recommendations based on the feedback.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1** In conclusion, a high majority of respondents think the Committee is working effectively in providing relevant information and offering opportunities to comment on policies and on consultation mechanisms and arrangements. Areas for improvement should be addressed by the following recommendations.

Committee members are invited to agree the following:

- Community members should use the regular agenda item 'Future Agenda Items for Community Representatives' to query delays and request changes to the order of scheduling of future agenda items if desired (subject to there being something of relevance to report).
- The introduction of a brief 'Feedback' section to the CPC Newsletter (to respond to the need to improve dialogue and feedback).
- Scheduling of agenda items will allow more time for community members to consult their groups wherever possible.
- Community representatives are invited to include group updates in the CPC Newsletter.

- 2.2** Community representatives are invited to make their role on the Committee more effective by:

- Ensuring their group agendas include the CPC as a standing item.
- Asking their group for relevant agenda items.
- Asking for views on agenda items.
- Asking for items for the 'Community News' agenda slot.
- Circulating the CPC Newsletter to their group. All the newsletters are on the Council website and can be accessed at <http://www.west-dunbarton.gov.uk/community-and-living/involving-communities/cpc/>. Anyone wishing the CPC Newsletter sent via email, should contact Community Planning and Policy on 01389 737231.

- 2.3** To help broaden membership, in response to views expressed, the Committee is asked to recommend the following to Council:

Agreement is sought for the Policy Officer Community and Consultation to contact appropriate groups to invite interest in additional places for Women's issues, Ethnic Minority Women and LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual and Transgender).

- 2.4** It is suggested that Committee Members are invited to participate in Equalities Awareness Training.

3. Background

- 3.1** The Community Participation Committee was set up following the Local Government Elections in May 2003 at the Council meeting of 25 June.

- 3.2** The Committee's role and remit in the standing orders (revised July 2009) is to:-

- Provide a forum for obtaining the views of community based organisations.
- Co-ordinate discussion and action on issues raised by community groups and forums.
- Consider comments and suggestions from community based organisations about Council services.
- Consider, promote, and monitor Council consultation arrangements, participation structures and policies and also wider public involvement structures and community engagement arrangements.
- Encourage Social Inclusion and Equality.
- Encourage Health Improvement.
- Co-ordinate community involvement in the ongoing development and review of the Council's Decentralisation Scheme – 'Involving Communities' (in terms of the Local Government Etc. (Scotland) Act 1994, to monitor the progress of the Scheme, and to make recommendations to Council on the nature of decentralisation in West Dunbartonshire and on any delegation of power.
- Promote community involvement in partnership working and to consider matters relating to community involvement in partnership working in West Dunbartonshire.
- Consider matters relating to Community Councils.
- Consider matters relating to the Voluntary Sector.
- Receive information about Council services, policies and associated business.

The Committee may make recommendations to Council or Committees on any, or all, of the above.

- 3.3** Regular evaluation of the Committee is needed to ensure it is fulfilling its role. The April meeting received a report outlining the outputs and outcomes of the

Committee over the last two years. Committee members were asked to refer to this information in making their evaluation responses.

4. Main Issues

4.1 Separate evaluation questionnaires were issued to the community representatives and to the elected members sitting on this committee. A good response was received, with 19 community members out of a potential 25 completing questionnaires. No questionnaires were received from elected members.

4.2 The full evaluation responses are in Appendix 1. The majority of the feedback is positive. Below is a summary of the responses which tell us how the CPC is fulfilling its role:

4.3 Providing Information

The response to this was very positive with 17 (89%) finding the information 'useful' or 'very useful' and 2 (11%) 'fairly useful'. Comments include: 'Providing information is of great importance to us' and 'It is vital for effective community debate that this information is provided along with comment and discussion.'

4.4 Commenting on policies

An even more positive response was received for this with 18 (95%) finding the opportunity to comment on policies 'very useful' and 'useful' and 1 (5%) finding it 'fairly useful'. Comments include: 'Keeps us ahead of the game – gives us a platform to express our views on WDC policies' and 'would like to know if comments are listened to and influence decisions'.

4.5 Commenting on consultation mechanisms and arrangements

Again a positive response indicated 16 people (84%) agreed the opportunity to comment on consultation mechanisms and arrangements is 'very useful' or 'useful' and 3 (16%) thought it 'fairly useful'. Comments include: "Again not a lot of space for community organisations to have real in-depth input." "It allows us to comment on how the Council consults".

4.6 Opportunity to put items on the agenda

The majority of people agree that there is sufficient opportunity to put items on the CPC agenda (15 or 79%) with only one person disagreeing and three undecided. Comments include: "We have done so many times" and "Some seem to be on the agenda without being discussed for a long time (Not continuous updates). Others have been known to quietly fall off the agenda."

4.7 Are you treated with respect?

The overwhelming majority agreed they are treated with respect (18 or 95%) with one person undecided. Comments include: "I think the Chair was very fair with all members of the Committee" and "I always feel like an equal member".

4.8 Do you get the opportunity to contribute to discussion?

The majority (15 or 79%) agree that they get the opportunity to contribute to discussion. Four people (21%) are undecided. Comments include: "There is fairness by Chair in ensuring each person at the table has the opportunity to contribute and "Not always – seems to be the same people commenting all the time".

4.9 Do you feel that community views, questions and issues are listened to?

There is a slightly lower agreement on this point with 13 (68%) agreeing and 6 (32%) undecided. Comments include: " Hopefully, but feedback on changes made because of CPC comments would be good" and "Listened to –yes. But perhaps not given enough serious consideration when debated in-house at a later date when final decisions are being taken".

4.10 Do community views expressed at the CPC have influence over decisions taken by Council?

13 (68%) people agreed the views expressed at the CPC have some influence (11) or a little influence (2), one person felt there is no influence and 5 (26%) are undecided. Comments include: " Really unsure. Maybe some feedback on how CPC has had influence in the past would be helpful in reassuring members that this happens." "Some things are fairly cut and dried but on some matters the administration has gone off to think again."

4.11 Information and support to participate

The vast majority (18 or 95%) feel that they receive sufficient information and support to participate fully in the business of the Committee. One person doesn't feel there is enough support. Comments include: "Sometimes paperwork backing presentations could be improved – given out at the time of the presentation" and "The CPC administration is, in my opinion, the best of any Committee that I attend. The paperwork is of a very high quality and this contributes hugely to the effectiveness of the Committee".

4.12 Do you think the Community Membership of the CPC reflects the diversity of the community in West Dunbartonshire?

There was a mixed response to this with 11 (58%) saying yes, 4 (21%) saying no and 4 (21%) undecided. Suggestions on who should be included are: young people (x3), women (x2), Black and Minority Ethnic (x2) and LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgender) (x4)". Disabled representation was suggested (currently represented via the West Dunbartonshire Access Panel).

In addition to these comments made directly on membership, representation was also raised in relation to other questions as follows:

Commenting on Policies - “But it is limited in terms of how representative the Committee actually is. Are oppressed groups like women and minorities represented proportionately and appropriately?”

The opportunity to contribute to the discussion of the agenda items - “The mainly white male composition ensures most time and space is taken up by them.”

4.13 About community representatives’ groups and role on the CPC

We asked six questions to find out how much the CPC features on community representatives’ group agendas. The responses show that there is scope for representatives to be more proactive in their role, in particular on seeking agenda items for the CPC and items for the Community News standing item. (See the full table in Appendix 1).

4.14 Ideas for improving the CPC

There were some positive comments about the way the Committee currently works. Key points include:

- broaden the membership of the Committee (supported by points made at 3.12 on Committee membership)
- improve timescales to allow groups to contribute to the agenda
- circulate the CPC Newsletter electronically and
- include group updates in the CPC Newsletter.

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 The influence of CPC views on Council decision-making should be better evidenced. If this isn’t achieved, there is a risk that the CPC will fail to fulfil its full role.

8. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

8.1 An impact assessment has been carried out in relation to the evaluation feedback and equalities considerations are being taken into account by recommending follow up action on:

- broadening membership and
- the support requirements identified by one respondent.

To help raise awareness of equalities considerations, members of the committee can also take part in Equalities Awareness Training run by the Council.

9. Consultation

- 9.1** The recommendations are based on the evaluation responses of community members of the committee who represent their wider groupings.

10. Strategic Assessment

- 10.1** The Community Participation Committee plays a role in gaining community views and supporting community activity. It informs all the strategic priorities by way of contributing to developing and improving services and policy making.

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Date: 16 August 2012

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Appendices: **Appendix 1:** Community Participation Committee – Your Views (Community Representatives) Evaluation Feedback 2012.

Background Papers: CPC Evaluation 14 April 2012

Wards Affected: All Wards

Community Participation Committee (CPC) – Your views

The following is a summary of responses to the CPC Evaluation Questionnaire 2012.

1. Providing information

How useful is the information provided about Council services through the CPC?

(E.g. waste services and recycling, Council Tax arrangements, regeneration in West Dunbartonshire; management of events; A-Z Signpost to Services)

Very Useful	Useful	Fairly Useful	Not useful
8	9	2	0

Your comments:

- It was sometimes dominated however by elected representatives who already have their own fora.
- To keep us up to date. Providing information is of great importance to us.
- Recycling arrangements work well but still feel kerbside glass recycling would improve the service greatly.
- It is vital for effective community debate that this information is provided along with comment and discussion.
- The information that is provided is very useful and allows us to see how the Council services work.

2. Commenting on policies

How useful is the opportunity to comment on Council Policies?

(E.g. Annual Equality Scheme, West Dunbartonshire Alcohol and Drug Strategy)

Very Useful	Useful	Fairly Useful	Not useful
10	8	1	0

Your comments:

- But it is limited in terms of how representative the committee actually is. Are oppressed groups like women and minorities represented proportionately and appropriately?
- Sometimes more time needs to be given for discussion.
- Keeps us ahead of the game. It gives us a platform to express our views to WDC policies.
- Our comments are listened to.
- It is inevitable that there will be differences of opinion on policies but this is healthy and contributes to good quality input to test policies. CPC is not about the administration “selling” their policies but good, robust policies will get support.
- Really good committee for the community to enable us to comment on Council policies that we may not otherwise do.

- Would like to know if comments listened to and influence decisions.

3. **Commenting on Consultation mechanisms and arrangements**

How useful is the opportunity to comment on consultation mechanisms and arrangements? (e.g. WD Citizens' Panel; Community Forums; Consultation Training)

Very Useful	Useful	Fairly Useful	Not useful
8	8	3	0

Your comments:

- Again, not a lot of space for community organisations to have real in-depth input.
- Again sometimes it feels as though there has been pre-determined decision making.
- Citizens' Panel gives a much better spread of people than Community Forum.
- The CPC was instrumental in the community policy that the CPP Strategic Board, rather than Executive Board, should make more of the decisions after open debate and discussion being adopted.
- It allows us to comment on how the Council consults.
- Again are comments taken into account when deciding

4. **Is there sufficient opportunity to put items on the CPC agenda?**

(through the standing item "Future agenda items for community representatives")

Yes	No	Undecided
15	1	3

Your comments:

- But maybe there could be a space at the end of meetings to have free-flowing discussion about future agenda items. More room for AOCB to reflect barriers that prevent formal submission of items.
- We have done so many times.
- Yes, there is scope enough to put future items on the agenda. Some seem to be on the agenda without being discussed for a long time. (Not continuous updates). Others have been known to quietly fall off the agenda.

5. **During CPC meetings do you feel you are treated with respect?**

Yes	No	Undecided
18	0	1

Your comments:

- Anne Clegg is very helpful, informative and professional in her support to the CPC.
- Having only attended two meetings to date I can truthfully say I was treated respectfully.
- I always feel like an equal member.
- I think the Chair was very fair with all members of the committee.
- Think Jim (Cllr Brown) does a great job of chairing which encourages debate.
- Respect is a two edged sword and I feel that the community representatives have, in response to a very fair chair, improved in this respect.
- Sometimes passions can be heated but not to the detriment of respect.
- Most of the time. Some councillors can be patronising.

6. During CPC meetings do you feel that you get the opportunity to contribute to the discussion of the agenda items when you want to?

Yes	No	Undecided
15	0	4

Your comments:

- Felt that the meetings were chaired well and fairly, however individual members could be encouraged to take account of the amount of time they take up with their contributions.
- Some members should not be members. They never speak. Let's have members that express their views.
- The mainly white male composition ensures most time and space is taken up by them.
- There is fairness by chair in ensuring each person at the table has the opportunity to contribute.
- Always.
- Yes – but others that are less inclined should be invited (encouraged?) to contribute by the Chair.
- Even as a depute you can ask questions at the end.
- Not always.
- Not always – seems to be the same people commenting all the time.

7. During CPC meetings do you feel that community views, questions and issues are listened to?

Yes	No	Undecided
13	0	6

Your comments:

- Have found comments and suggestions from some members have been very supportive and helpful.
- It sometimes develops a quite defensive culture, but generally, members are very helpful.
- But possibly more could be achieved.
- But I am not sure if they will be considered at the final stage when the policy will be made.
- Listened to – yes. But perhaps not given enough serious consideration when debated in-house at a later date when final decisions are taken.
- It is inevitable that elected members will to an extent 'hog the limelight' but that contributes to debate and the community has shown itself to be fairly adept at elbowing its way into the discussion.
- More so than a lot of committees.
- Not always
- Hopefully, but feedback on changes made because of CPC comments would be good.

8. Do you think community views expressed at the CPC have any influence over decisions taken by Council and other committees?

Considerable Influence	Some Influence	A little influence	No influence	Undecided
	11	2	1	5

Your comments:

- Really unsure. Maybe some feedback on how CPC has had influence in the past would be helpful in reassuring members that this happens.
- Cllr. J Brown has been very supportive and helpful e.g. re crèche facilities (although this is now a bigger problem).
- I have no evidence.
- Very little.
- Would be delighted if more could be done legally.
- Not sure on this one. We have no evidence that at Council meetings we are taken seriously, or CPC item on the agenda is just nodded through.
- Some things are fairly cut and dried but on some matters the administration has gone off to think again.
- CPC has no devolved powers so major budgetary decisions will not always be taken on board, and why should they?
- Could be improved on.
- Again would like to think so but evidence would be good.

9. Do you receive the information and support you need to participate fully in the business of the committee?

Yes
18

No
1

If no, what additional information or support do you need?

- Minutes, papers etc are all very clearly ordered and this is very helpful. Have found Anne Clegg to be very approachable and informative.
- But sometimes not. Perhaps verbal briefings at the start of the year about structures, format and language?
- Informed comments by other members, officials and councillors help to form opinions.
- Sometimes paperwork backing presentations could be improved – given out at the time of the presentation.
- The CPC administration is, in my opinion, the best of any committee that I attend. The paperwork is of a very high quality and this contributes hugely to the effectiveness of the committee.
- Saying yes, but could be improved on

10. Do you think the Community Membership of the CPC reflects the diversity of the community in West Dunbartonshire?

Yes
11

No
4

Undecided
4

If no, are there are specific interest groups who you feel should be included?

Please state:

- Young people, women, Black and Minority Ethnic (BME), Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgender (LGBT).
- Women – should be gender balanced. BME Groups. Younger people. Disabled people. LGBT groups.
- LGBT Groups (feel there is still a lot of discrimination here, so perhaps this would go some way to improving situation).
- LGBT
- Not everyone, in fact very few, belong to comments, groups. So it is the age old story of the same old people contributing – could do with younger groups/people

11. About your group and your role as a representative on the CPC

Question	Yes Always	Yes Sometimes	No
Is the CPC included as a standard item on your group's agenda?	12	6	1
Do you ask your group for agenda items for the CPC?	7	8	4
Do you feedback information to your group on CPC agenda items?	12	6	1
Do you ask your group for views on CPC agenda items?	10	6	3
Do you ask your group for items for the Community News standing item on CPC agenda?	3	10	6
Do you circulate the CPC Newsletter to your group?	12	4	3

12. Finally, have you any Ideas for improving the CPC – including anything that would help you fulfil your role in relation to question 11?

- Membership could be broadened to ensure greater representativeness.
- My opinion is that the CPC works to its strengths.
- Time should be given for groups to be able to contribute to the agenda – although groups are asked timescales do not always allow for contribution.
- We feel this is a good and worthwhile committee as it brings together representatives from other organisations and members of the Council.
- It was helpful to know how Council works and how the groups participate in decision making, if all the departments are working to their budgets etc. What are the future arrangements to improve the services and how they will be funded? The taxpayer funds are not wasted and checks and measures are in place? How it is necessary to cut some services to save the other services which are more important.
- As a substitute member I have seldom had a chance to participate fully. I intend to take this issue up with the main CC Forum member.
- A fully updated Community Directory as a point of reference.
- Circulate the CPC Newsletter to group secretaries electronically.
- It would be interesting if CPC members sent updates to be included in the CPC papers of what their groups are doing and how they discuss items from CPC committee.
- The community in general could do better with more general information in many aspects re the CPC.

Ends