

West Dunbartonshire Council**Report by Chief Executive****Community Participation Committee – Wednesday 21st April, 2004**

Subject: Proposals for WDC's Revised Decentralisation Scheme**1. Purpose of Report**

This report sets out the proposals for the Council's revised Decentralisation Scheme and invites comments on these proposals.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Council has a responsibility to develop meaningful ways of involving our communities in decision-making about our services and the policies that shape them.
- 2.2 This is a key process for improving services and offering them in a way which best meets the needs of our service users, the citizens of West Dunbartonshire.
- 2.3 Government policies also place obligations through Local Government law upon Councils – Decentralisation, and more recently, Community Planning, Best Value and the whole community regeneration agenda all have a clear requirement to involve service users in decision-making about how, when and where services are offered. This means we have to develop further our systems for public involvement, monitor their effectiveness and provide feedback.
- 2.4 The Local Government in Scotland Act, which contains the legislation for Community Planning, Best Value and community regeneration, directs public service providers to work together on public involvement mechanisms through Community Planning. The changing policy landscape presents particular challenges in developing a system which works for West Dunbartonshire Council but also fits in with partnership developments in public involvement.
- 2.5 There are concerns that the Decentralisation Scheme legislation, though still a statutory duty, is now out-dated in the light of the more recent local government legislation relating to Best Value, Community Planning and the whole community regeneration agenda.
- 2.6 In practice, there need be no contradiction between these. The aims of Decentralisation are consistent with the aims of Best Value, Community Planning and community regeneration – that the community and public service providers should work together to provide high quality, "joined-up" services.

- 2.7 However, with the integration of SIP and Community Planning structures, we are in a transitional phase. An important part of the integration process will be the development of shared public involvement/community representation structures. The Council's own structures should be responsive to this.
- 2.8 The review has highlighted the need for all agencies to work together on ensuring that structures complement one another and avoid duplication. All partners should work together to achieve coherent processes. A separate report suggests a role in this for the Community Participation Committee.
- 2.9 This means that our community involvement structures have to be responsive to the developments taking place through Community Planning.
- 2.10 The review set up an officers multi-agency working group and a community/voluntary working group to look at the broad scope of the scheme and in particular at the membership, role and remit of the CPC. The latter is dealt with in detail in a separate report.
- 2.11 A meeting also took place to gather views from Community Councils.
- 2.12 In addition, a questionnaire on the membership, role and remit of the CPC was sent to over 400 community groups, and posted on the website for responses.
- 2.13 WDC has set up the Community Participation Committee to provide a link between our communities and the Council.
- 2.14 The role and membership of the committee has been examined as part of the review of the Decentralisation Scheme. This is dealt with in a separate paper.
- 2.15 This report sets out the general findings of the review and makes recommendations about future action. A more detailed action plan is attached – see Appendix 2 .

3. Main Issues

- 3.1 There is broad agreement on the key aims of Decentralisation as follows:
- Involving our communities and other partners in decision-making and strengthening partnership working
 - Strengthening the existing representative groups in West Dunbartonshire and encouraging networking between them
 - Providing information about the Council, its services and its work with partners
 - Strengthening links with the Community and Voluntary Sector

- 3.2 Appendix 1 sets out a Draft revised Scheme of Decentralisation “Involving Communities”.
- 3.3 The Voluntary/Community Review group expressed the view that the Scheme document should be short, straightforward, in Plain English and non-glossy. The document has been drafted with these requirements in mind.
- 3.4 Appendix 2 sets out the Draft Action Plan that has been produced in consultation with service departments and other partners. It will be subject to regular review and development. It is a starting point for developing baseline information and directing future action. Work is on-going with service departments on the development of actions. An up-date will be provided to a future meeting.
- 3.5 One of the main areas for development is the linking and relationship of Council structures to one another and to partner structures. This includes the role of the Community Planning Core Group (or its successor) in decision-making processes.
- 3.6 *Involving our communities and other partners in decision-making and strengthening partnership working*

Some key areas for action:

- Developing the CPC
- Developing community involvement in Council committees and other decision-making structures
- Using the Citizens’ Panel
- Developing budget consultation in service departments
- Linking with SIP/Community Planning integration structures
- Delivering services in a ‘one stop shop’ way for service users through single shared assessment
- Involving young people in decision-making
- Involving tenant representatives in decision-making about services

- 3.7 *Strengthening the existing representative groups which currently operate in West Dunbartonshire and encouraging networking between them.*

Some key areas for action:

- Community Councils - provide support to Community Councils and WD Community Council Forum
- Tenants’ Representation – build the capacity of tenants’ representatives
- Community Safety – review the use of community safety awards money
- Community Learning and Development – continue to develop ICT Learning Centres as a resource for members of the community

- Accessible Services – support West Dunbartonshire Access Panel to improve access to Council offices and the wider community.

3.8 *Providing information about the Council, its services and its involvement with partners.*

Some key areas for action:

- Up-dating Council A-Z
- Running Community Day as part of Community Week
- Producing Council News
- Developing the External Communications and Consultation Strategy
- Informing tenants through :
 - Tenant Participation Strategy
 - Factsheets
 - Newsletters
 - Website
 - Community Day/Week
- Providing information about Community Planning
 - Hot News
 - Website

3.9 *Strengthening links with the community and voluntary sector*

- Agreeing a process with partners for producing joint voluntary policies in line with 'Engaging Communities'
- Funding voluntary and community groups through Local Council Grants

Appendix 2 gives a fuller account of all the priorities and objectives in relation to the Scheme. These are subject to on-going development.

The Scheme will be subject to regular monitoring and review and should be responsive to the changing policy landscape.

4. Recommendations

4.1 The Committee is invited to comment on the above proposals.

4.2 The Committee is invited to recommend points 3.1 to 3.9 to Council.

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Background papers:

Community Participation Committee, 20/08/03 – Review of Decentralisation Scheme
- Programme for Review

Community Participation Committee, 8/10/03 – Scheme of Decentralisation – Review
Update