

# **WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL**

## **Report by Chief Officer – Housing & Employability**

**West Dunbartonshire Council: 24 February 2021**

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**Subject: Review of Scheme for Establishment for Community Councils**

### **1 Purpose**

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to seek agreement to proceed with the Review of the Scheme for the Establishment of Community Councils based on the proposed timetable.

### **2 Recommendations**

- 2.1** It is recommended that members approve the Review proceeding based on the timetable contained in Appendix 1 of this report.

### **3 Background**

- 3.1** At a Special Meeting of West Dunbartonshire Council held on 20 January 2016, Council agreed the Revised Scheme for the Establishment of Community Councils (the Scheme).
- 3.2** The Review was scheduled to take place in 2020 however due to the Covid-19 pandemic this was unavoidably delayed as teams across the Council were diverted to the emergency response. The Council is now in a position to start the review process.
- 3.3** A review of the Scheme is a statutory requirement set out in the Local Government Scotland Act 1973 and as amended in 1994. The Review offers an opportunity for meaningful consultation and engagement on all aspects of the Scheme while presenting an opportunity to promote and publicise community councils more generally. This will contribute to the aims of West Dunbartonshire's Community Empowerment Strategy (approved November 2019) by promoting authentic empowerment and meaningful local democracy.

### **4. Main Issues**

- 4.1** West Dunbartonshire has 17 Community Councils in principle, although only 11 are currently operational. In the last two years, Duntocher and Hardgate and Dalmuir and Mountblow Community Councils have ceased to operate. More recently, there has been some interest in Alexandria and Dumbarton West in establishing a community council. Some community councils have become more involved in their local communities in activities such as

organising events, provision of food parcels and locality place planning, sometimes working closely with other community organisations and networks.

- 4.2** The process for reviewing the Scheme is set out by statute and will take about nine months to complete. An illustrative timetable is contained as the Appendix to this report with proposed Special Meeting dates subject to approval. This timetable assumes that the process will start in March 2021 and that all three consultation stages will be required. To assist with this process the Scottish Community Development Centre has been appointed to work closely with council staff in undertaking this work.
- 4.3** Section 4 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act details the requirements placed on each Local Authority with regards to Community Councils. It states that meetings of Council be convened for the purpose of reviewing the Scheme.
- 4.4** Once the Review has concluded, the next step is to invite nominations from areas where there are no community councils. Existing community councils will continue to operate until the date of the next elections.
- 4.5** The delay to the Review has delayed community council elections, and this has been unavoidable in the current unprecedented circumstances. The proposed timetable for the Review would target community council elections towards the end of 2021 following its completion. This means that the community council elections can also be held out with any other election cycles, including the Scottish Parliamentary elections scheduled for May 2021. The exact timescale will be confirmed and community councils notified as the Review progresses.
- 4.6** The Scheme for Establishment sets the boundaries for community councils. The first stage of the Review includes a consultation on the boundaries. This provides the opportunity for any anomalies with existing boundaries to be addressed.
- 4.7** The community council boundaries do not fully align with Ward boundaries and a number of community council areas cross ward boundaries. There may be some areas where the boundaries do not fully reflect how local residents recognise their neighbourhoods. The Review will provide an opportunity for residents to consider community council boundaries.
- 4.8** There will be a further two stages of consultation. The approach to the Review is to consult with and build on existing groups and networks including the Community Alliance, Community Council Forum, Equality Forum and West Dunbartonshire Tenants and Residents Organisation. The Review will offer an opportunity to meaningfully engage with citizens on all aspects of the Scheme, including roles and structures. In doing so, it will promote awareness and the benefits of joining or forming a community council, all of which is in line with the ambition for meaningful community empowerment and increased local democracy.

**4.9** Due to Covid-19 restrictions and the need to ensure peoples' safety consultations are being developed to be fully digital. Every effort will be made to maximise levels of participation.

**4.10** The revised Scheme will provide a succinct and updated framework for community councils to operate in for the next 5 years. Whilst a more easily accessible and user friendly suite of information will be held on the Council's web pages which can be kept up to date more readily in between updates of the Scheme.

## **5 People Implications**

**5.1** The process will be led by the Communities Team, working closely with the consultants and key community stakeholders. Officers from Legal and Committee Services will be fully engaged in the process.

## **6 Financial & Procurement Implications**

**6.1** There are no direct financial implications associated with this report. It is being carried out within existing service budgets.

## **7 Risk Analysis**

**7.1** Developing and supporting Community Councils is a key part of the Council's approach to Community Empowerment, as laid out in the Community Empowerment Strategy. Failure to review the Scheme using the correct process could have a negative impact on the reputation of the Council.

**7.2** Engagement with key stakeholders is an essential element of the Review process, which could be impacted by the lack of face-to-face meetings. Measures will be in place to support a fully digital process until Covid-19 restrictions are removed.

## **8 Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)**

**8.1** The Equality Impact Process has begun and will be developed to inform the process as it proceeds. The proposed direction of the review has the potential to broaden and deepen involvement across protected groups, including BME people, young people and disabled people which is the aim of one of the Council's current set of Equality Outcomes. The review will be carried out as an inclusive process working closely with the Equalities Forum and other key stakeholders and seeking to engage with a wide range of residents including those who are seldom heard in local communities.

**8.2** Equality and accessibility considerations will be taken into account during the process.

## **9 Consultation**

**9.1** The consultation process is outlined in the timetable for the Review of the Scheme (Appendix 1).

## **10 Strategic Assessment**

**10.1** The review of the Scheme will be carried out in a manner to support the community empowerment agenda and the delivery of the Council's Strategic plan objectives, in particular in relation to meaningful engagement with active empowered and informed citizens who feel safe and engaged.

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**West Dunbartonshire Council**

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<b>Appendices:</b>	Appendix 1 – Timetable for Review of the Scheme for Establishment
<b>Background Papers:</b>	None
<b>Wards Affected:</b>	All