

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Subject: REVISED SCHEME OF DECENTRALISATION
Meeting: FALKIRK COUNCIL
Date: 22 JUNE 2011
Author: DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Council's first Scheme of Decentralisation was published in 1997, in line with the requirements of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1994. It laid out the ways in which Council services and decision-making would be brought closer to local communities and set out a new way of working through the establishment of Area Forums.
- 1.2 The Leisure, Tourism and Community Committee approved the Council's new strategy for community participation, 'Have Your Say – a plan for local involvement', on 12 April 2011. Alongside this strategy, the Committee approved a draft revised Scheme of Decentralisation, which has since been subject to the 8 week formal consultation required under the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1994. This paper presents the final version of the revised Scheme for approval and outlines the key points of feedback received from the consultation process.

2. REVISED SCHEME OF DECENTRALISATION

- 2.1 The revised Scheme of Decentralisation, attached as Appendix 1, was developed to ensure a good fit with the 'Have Your Say' strategy. A range of discussions were held with communities to shape 'Have Your Say' and, in particular, to develop and confirm the 'Principles for Community Involvement' within the strategy, which should underpin all of the work that the Council does to involve and consult communities. The revised Scheme was written to ensure that the Council's approach to decentralisation, bringing services and decision-making close to local communities, fits with these Principles.
- 2.2 The revised Scheme sets out a number of practical ways in which Falkirk Council will seek to ensure that our services are responsive to the needs of people in their local communities. These include points in relation to information provision, consultation, engagement and empowerment, and service delivery.
- 2.3 The revised Scheme does not make any reference to continued support for Area Forums. The Leisure, Tourism and Community Committee discussed the role of Area Forums in November 2010 and April 2011, following consultation on the Participation Strategy with Members, where there was a clear view expressed that the Forums are no longer an appropriate mechanism to consult or engage with communities. Whilst the Area Forums were very successful for a number of years, community attendance at them has declined

significantly in recent years and, furthermore, it is clear that Forums do not fit with the Principles for Community Involvement.

3. CONSULTATION PROCESS

- 3.1 In line with the requirements of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1994, the draft revised Scheme of Decentralisation was sent to all Community Councils and published on the Council's website, along with details of how to comment. The draft revised Scheme was also sent to Conveners of all the Area Forums. Given the strong cross-party message from the Leisure, Tourism and Community Committee with regard to the future Area Forums, all communications in relation to the consultation have made this position clear, in order to avoid contradicting one of the core Principles for Community Involvement, that issues should not be consulted on when they are not likely to change as a result.
- 3.2 Only one written response has been received in response to this consultation from a Community Council. This response highlighted a concern that the end of support for Area Forums might lead to additional work for Community Councils and also questioned whether 10% of the local population expressing concern about an issue was too high a bar to instigate a public meeting with officers. In response to this latter point, the relevant clause has been deleted from the revised Scheme. Face to face discussions between Council officers and community organisations will continue to be an important mechanism for consultation and community participation, but it does not seem appropriate to set an arbitrary level of community concern before such discussions can be arranged.
- 3.3 One Area Forum requested a meeting to discuss the draft revised Scheme. In response to this request, a joint meeting of Area Forum Conveners and other Area Forum Core Group representatives was held on 1 June 2011. Representatives of 5 of the 6 Area Forums were present at this meeting.
- 3.4 The meeting on 1 June presented a strong view from the active members of Area Forums that some key elements of the Forum model should not be lost, even if Council is minded to cease support for the existing arrangements. These elements were:
 - The importance of public meetings to enable local communities to express their views on particular issues of concern (examples included the M80 upgrade, Hospital proposals etc);
 - The importance of maintaining mechanisms for Council officers to be responsive to local community issues, preferably in a face to face way;
 - The need to ensure the skills and experience of local activists continued to be encouraged and used by the Council; and
 - The non-political nature of the Area Forums.
- 3.5 As discussed with the Area Forum representatives at this meeting, the proposal to cease support to Area Forums does not mean that these elements need be lost. The revised Scheme of Decentralisation makes specific reference to continued support for representative community organisations, including Community Councils, Tenants Organisations and Parent Councils. Where such organisations, or other groups of citizens, identify a particular issue of concern, we will continue to offer face to face public meetings with relevant officers. Furthermore, Council Services already run public

meetings on issues of particular concern such as major developments in housing, transport or education.

4. PETITIONS COMMITTEE

- 4.1 The Leisure, Tourism and Community Committee of 12 April which approved 'Have Your Say' and the draft revised Scheme of Decentralisation, also discussed the possibility of the Council introducing a 'Petitions Committee' as an additional mechanism for community members to raise issues of concern. A number of other authorities in Scotland and the rest of the UK operate such a committee, although there are significant variations in how they are run. If Members are minded to explore this idea, further work will be required to explore the options and identify the risks and resource implications of such a development.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The revised Scheme of Decentralisation brings the Council's approach up to date as regards localised decision-making and service provision. It also ensures a good fit between the Scheme and the Council's new strategy for community participation, 'Have Your Say – a plan for local involvement'.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Council is invited to:

- 6.1 **Approve the revised Scheme of Decentralisation as attached at Appendix 1; and**
- 6.2 **Decide whether to further explore the option of a Petitions Committee and, if so, recommend that a report on this be presented to Leisure, Tourism and Community Committee in the first instance.**

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DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

Date: 8 June 2011

Ref: ABK0611FC – Scheme of Decentralisation

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LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Note of formative discussion with Member 2 June 2010
2. Have Your Say – a plan for local involvement (Falkirk Council Community Participation Strategy approved by LT&C Committee 12 April 2011)