

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Subject: COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION STRATEGY UPDATE
Meeting: LEISURE, TOURISM AND COMMUNITY COMMITTEE
Date: 11 SEPTEMBER 2012
Author: DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This paper provides an update on the implementation of the Council's Community Participation Strategy, which was approved by Committee in April 2011. It sets out the progress that has been made in developing and improving the Council's approach to Community Participation, and outlines areas for further work.
- 1.2 Members will recall that the strategy contains two main sections – the Principles for Community Involvement and an Action Plan for Better Community Involvement.
- 1.3 The Principles for Community Involvement in Falkirk set out the standards that the Council will aim to achieve whenever involving local communities. The Council may not be able to achieve these standards in every situation as they are aspirational.
- 1.4 The Action Plan for Better Community Involvement lays out a range of actions to be taken forward over the three year period of the Strategy (2011-2014) in order to develop the Council's approach to community involvement, including:
- Improvements to how we communicate before, during and after consultations.
 - Systems for ensuring better coordination of consultations to avoid duplication and prevent consultation fatigue.
 - Proposals for further staff training to ensure consistently high standards of practice across all Services.
 - Plans for developing and enhancing the Citizens Panel.
 - Actions to ensure that everyone in the community is able to make their voice heard.
 - Some specific points with regard to involving community organisations, given their important roles as voices for local communities.
 - An outline of how we will monitor and review progress.

This report provides an update on the main elements of the Action Plan.

2. COMMUNICATION

- 2.1 In order for community members to participate in Council consultations or other community engagement opportunities, they need to know that these opportunities are available. To facilitate this, the main 'Consultations' section of the Council website has

been restructured to include clear information about all Council consultations and engagement opportunities. It is also important for community members to be able to see what has happened as a result of their input, so the website now includes information on all previous consultations in a standard 'We asked, You said, We did' format. Since some community members do not have internet access, a summary of consultation information is also being included as a regular feature in Falkirk Council News.

- 2.2 Some community members may have difficulty in accessing written material, due to visual impairment, learning disability, having English as a second language, or a combination of reasons. To help improve accessibility, guidance has been provided for all officers regarding alternative formats. Options for training officers in inclusive communication are being considered following the Scottish Government's Inclusive Communication in Scotland project. Guidance has also been provided to officers regarding other access issues, such as ensuring that meetings with community members are held in accessible venues.

3. CONSISTENCY AND COORDINATION

- 3.1 When the Strategy was introduced in 2011, it was recognised that there was already a wide range of consultation and engagement activity happening across the Council, much of it of a good standard. However, there were concerns highlighted through feedback from communities about a lack of coordination, resulting in duplication or 'consultation fatigue', and occasional instances of weak consultation processes.

- 3.2 A Community Participation database has now been established to record all consultation and community engagement activity across the Council. This enables officers from all Services to see the full picture of current and past Community Participation, thereby improving coordination and avoiding duplication. The database is also designed to help officers plan their consultations, asking them to provide information in line with the Principles for Community Involvement which were adopted as part of the Strategy.

- 3.3 Although the database has been in full operation for less than a year, it provides evidence of 40 different consultation or community engagement exercises carried out by Council Services. Importantly, the database is set up to record information about the outcomes of consultations, as well as the results, so that Services are encouraged to provide feedback to consultees; clear evidence can be provided of the impacts of community involvement. For example, in the past year:

- Customer-led inspections in Housing generated 75 recommendations leading to various service changes under 3 broad themes: 1) Communicating more effectively 2) Improving what we do already 3) Involving our customers
- Consultation on the Litter Strategy reinforced the Council's basic approach of combining cleaning with campaigns and community involvement. The top priorities for action were dog fouling (which the Council has already run a high profile campaign on) and food litter/packaging, so the aim is to develop a campaign in this area. The Zero Tolerance approach to litter and dog fouling, using fixed penalty notices, was also strongly supported.
- A consultation on Community Payback Orders reinforced the Council's approach, and provided a significant number of suggestions for unpaid work under these orders, many of which have now been carried out.

- 3.4 More examples of these kind of impacts will be available in future years, as the database and the Principles for Community Involvement that underpin it become fully established as normal working practice.
- 3.5 To avoid clashes between events, and also improve public communication, all major consultation and engagement events are now listed in the 'What's On' pages of the Council website.
- 3.6 Following on from the Council's involvement in the national 'Better Community Engagement' programme, a range of learning opportunities are to be developed for officers, to ensure that the standard of consultation and engagement is consistently high across the Council. There was a significant delay in publication of the materials from the Scottish Government programme, but these are now online, so we can build on best practice.

4. CITIZENS PANEL

- 4.1 The Citizens Panel was established in 2010 as a consultation mechanism which would allow all Services to gather the views of the public economically, easily and effectively. The Panel started with just over 1000 volunteers, and in April 2011 Members set a target of 1500, representing 1% of the population of the Council area. This target has now been exceeded, with the current membership standing at just over 1700.
- 4.2 The membership of the Panel is broadly representative of the wider population in terms of gender, geographical spread, disability and ethnicity, and whilst the membership is slightly older than the wider population, significant steps have been made in recruiting younger members, as well as offering alternative routes for younger people to get involved. In recent weeks, we have been piloting a process of discussing issues covered in Citizens Panel questionnaires face to face with young people and excluded groups, such as homeless people. It is also important to note that the Panel is just one route for consultation, and that complimentary approaches continue to be used alongside it by Services, often with a particular focus on sections of the public who may not be well represented amongst Panel members.
- 4.3 The Panel has been used by a range of Services and Community Planning Partners over the last two years, gathering the views of the public on a wide range of subjects. These have included questions on:
- Housing, to feed into the Local Housing Strategy
 - Litter, to feed into the review of the Litter Strategy
 - Dog fouling, as part of the review of the Dog Fouling campaign and Green Dog Walkers
 - Policing priorities, to feed into Central Scotland Police's Strategic Plan, alongside information from Stirling and Clackmannanshire
 - Working with offenders
 - Communication around extreme weather, winter gritting and snow clearing
 - Transport, to feed into the Local Transport Strategy
 - Climate Change, to feed into the Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy
 - Adult Protection, as part of a review of the national advertising campaign

- Advice services
- Waste Strategy
- Antonine Wall, to consider how we can make more of it
- Roads and footways
- Keeping Children Safe
- Falkirk Community Trust marketing

4.4 The Panel has also provided useful feedback on how the Council consults and engages with local communities. Panel members gave very positive responses to questions about how the Citizens Panel process itself works, with 89% agreeing that the questionnaires are a good way for the Council to consult with local people. Importantly, 76% of respondents also felt that they receive good feedback about what has happened as a result of their views, with only 4% disagreeing. The importance of providing adequate feedback was highlighted in the Community Participation Strategy, following strong comments from a range of individuals and community organisations.

4.5 In relation to Council consultation as a whole, the key findings from the Citizens Panel were:

- 56% of respondents agreed that the Council is good at consulting and involving local people, whilst only 15% disagreed.
- 46% of respondents agreed that the Council listens to the views of local people, with 21% disagreeing.
- 40% of respondents agreed that the Council responds to the views of local people, with 22% disagreeing.

4.6 This data will be used as a baseline to monitor the progress of the Community Participation Strategy.

4.7 A similar picture is provided by the Panel's responses to questions about feelings of influence:

- 88% of respondents agreed that it is very important to them to feel that they can influence decisions about their local area, with just 2% disagreeing.
- 75% of respondents agreed that they would like to be more involved in the decisions that Falkirk Council takes about their area, with just 4% disagreeing.
- 36% of respondents agreed that they can currently influence decisions about their local area, with 32% disagreeing.

This data needs to be interpreted with some care, as the views of people who have volunteered to be on the Citizens Panel may not be entirely representative of the wider population, but the figures nevertheless provide an indication of public views.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Committee is invited to:

5.1 **Note the progress in implementing the Community Participation Strategy; and**

- 5.2 Request a further progress report in 2013, prior to the Strategy being reviewed in 2014.

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DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

Date: 31 August 2012

Ref: ABM0912SR – Community Participation Strategy

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LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Citizens Panel questionnaires and feedback reports – all available online at www.falkirk.gov.uk/citizenspanel
2. Community Participation Strategy and Revised Scheme of Delegation considered by the Leisure, Tourism and Community Committee on 12 April 2011
3. Community Participation Strategy available at:
https://www.falkirk.gov.uk/about_council/consultations/PDFs/final_com_participation.pdf