Agenda Item 8

Participation Strategy Update

Falkirk Council

Title: **Participation Strategy Update**

Meeting: **Scrutiny Committee**

Date: **7 June 2018**

Submitted By: **Director of Corporate and Housing Services**

1. Purpose of Report

1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide an update on progress to inform the Scrutiny Committee on the recent participation work undertaken by the Council, with reference to the Scrutiny Panel's 2015 recommendations on participation.

2. Recommendations

2.1. **It is recommended that the Committee notes that Officers will:-**

   (1) Establish a Citizen Space user group to encourage better cross-service communication and collaboration; provide training opportunities; and ensure a consistent approach to monitoring and evaluation.

   (2) Develop a process by which services monitor and evaluate engagement activities so as to effectively measure progress and improvement to the Council's approach to community engagement.

   (3) Develop a set of ethical guidelines for community engagement to support officers.

   (4) Continue to offer training opportunities to staff conducting community engagement.

   (5) Conduct a public consultation to review the Council's participation strategy - 'Have Your Say, the Plan for Local Involvement' which expires at the end of 2018.

3. Background

3.1. A Scrutiny Panel was established in 2015 to review the implementation of the Council's participation strategy 'Have Your Say'. The panel made a number of recommendations to the Scrutiny Committee with the aim to further develop and enhance the Council's engagement with local communities. These were:

   • Review the role, remit and membership of the Corporate Participation Group. This group has a central role in ensuring that there is a

consistent approach to participation and engagement across the
Council and promoting a best practice approach within Services;

- Develop a robust process for local community planning which sets out
  a defined process for the production of plans. This would include
  consideration of using 'place shaping' tools such as "Planning for Real"
  in a consistent manner;

- Develop a defined reporting framework for local community plans to
  ensure that reports on them are submitted to the Scrutiny Committee
  and then the Executive, prior to submission to the Community Planning
  Leadership Board;

- Promote Have Your Say, the Plan for Local Involvement, and the
  principles set out within it more effectively, internally to Members and
  officers, and externally to communities and partner organisations. This
  would include producing a concise summary of the plan;

- Ensure appropriate training is put in place for officers to enable them to
  implement the principles set out in the plan, for example Plain English
  training, training in survey design etc.;

- Record all consultation activity in a corporate database of consultation
  activities, drawing on Service Plans, Community Planning, to avoid
  duplication of consultation/engagement. The effectiveness and
  accessibility of the current database will also be reviewed;

- Provide information to the public/specific stakeholders prior to and after
  they have informed, consulted or engaged with communities, including
  feedback. There should also be a clear process for advising Members
  about consultations that are taking place and feeding the results back
  to them;

- Provide more information on consultations, community engagement
  and Local Community Planning in the consultation section of the
  Council's website;

- Explore different digital means of engaging with local and thematic
  communities. This could include the potential for using a bespoke
  online consultation platform such as Citizen Space. It would also
  include a review of how the Council's use of social media platforms
  could be expanded to support its engagement activities;

- Provide guidance and training to Members and officers on the use of
  social media to ensure this is being used more actively but
  appropriately;

- Ensure that appropriate methods are used to effectively consult and/or engage with hard-to-reach groups and consideration will be given to specific training on consulting and/or engaging hard-to-reach groups;

- Consider the impact of the Community Empowerment Bill and the Council's response to this in August 2015;

- Consider different ways of consulting on the budget employed by other Councils by August 2015 to inform the process going forward and include Councillors in this process; and

- Officers to report back to the Scrutiny Committee periodically on progress on the above.

3.2. The committee accepted the panel's 13 recommendations and reported to the Executive in June 2015. The Executive agreed the recommendations and asked that progress on these was reported to the Scrutiny Committee.

3.3. Since 2015, work has been ongoing to implement the recommendations. In some cases events have overtaken the recommendations e.g. our approach to locality planning has significantly progressed over the last 3 years making the recommendations above less relevant in terms of process. In addition, the national community engagement policy context has rapidly developed. The focus has moved away from informing and consulting with communities toward collaborating with communities. The Corporate Plan reflects this change in direction and commits to 'actively engage people in our area so that they can influence what, how and to whom we deliver our services and achieve our priorities'.

3.4. This report will therefore focus on recent and planned participation work in this area.

4.   Recent Developments

4.1. Recently, and since the appointment of a new Stakeholder Engagement Officer, earlier this year, we have sought to review our approach to make sure it is more aligned to the aspirations of the Corporate Plan and National Standards for Community Engagement.

Youth Engagement

4.2. Council was advised last year that officers would consider further engage young people in the decision making of the Council and in particular the appetite for establishing a youth council.

4.3. In order to progress this work, Officers conducted an online survey of young people, aged 12-25, and living in the Falkirk Council area. The survey was designed to identify *if* and *how* young people want to engage with the Council. It gathered insights on:

- The issues, if any, that are most important to young people (for example, schools and education, transport, housing, mental health, sport and recreation, etc.);
- The extent to which young people feel they can influence decisions made by the Council;
- The types of engagement activities which young people are most interested in participating in (for example, youth council, online surveys, etc.).
- Any barriers preventing young people from getting involved in engagement activities.

4.4. Pupils from Larbert High starred in a short video which was created to promote the survey on social media. Targeted advertising was used on Instagram, Snapchat and Facebook to great effect. This is particularly noteworthy given that some of these platforms are new to the Council. A series of tweets, encouraging residents to complete the online survey, were also used. The survey opened in early March and closed at the end of April 2018 and received 627 responses. The results and recommendations are currently being collated and will be presented to the Executive at its meeting in June.

5. Locality Planning

5.1. 'Your Place, Your Views' was a public consultation carried out between January and March 2018. Developed by the Falkirk East Locality Planning Group – the community planning partnership officer group established to take forward community planning in the east of the district, it aimed to assist the Falkirk Community Planning Partnership in identifying community needs and issues to inform community action planning across Grangemouth, Bo'ness and Blackness and the Upper Braes.

5.2. Owing to its previous success across Scotland, the Locality Planning Group opted to use an online and app based survey called the Place Standard. The Place Standard is a tool, designed by the Scottish Government, NHS Scotland and Architecture and Design Scotland, that can be used to assess the quality of a place and identify areas for improvement. Supplementing the online consultation were four community workshops held in Slamannan, Maddiston, Grangemouth and Bo'ness and four schools workshops carried out in local high schools.

5.3. To ensure a mix of views and also to ensure 'seldom heard groups' views were elicited a number of targeted workshops were held with people from LGBTQ community, minority ethnic communities, people with a disability etc.

5.4. The consultation was successful in providing the Locality Planning group with a sense of community priorities across the Eastern Locality. It was found, however, that the Place Standard tool was overly complicated and time consuming. This had a significant impact on the survey's response rate. The

Locality Planning group are currently developing a similar consultation in the West Locality. Keeping in mind the lessons learnt from the East, officers have developed a shortened version of the Place Standard Survey that will be used in the west and centre of the district as locality planning moves forward.

Winter Weather

5.5.   After the severe weather in March 2018, a survey was undertaken to find out how well the Council kept the public informed about service disruptions. 65% of survey respondents rated the usefulness of the information received as good or very good and 57% were satisfied or very satisfied with the frequency of updates. It was found that the majority of respondents prefer to receive Council news, service updates and alerts through: the Falkirk Council website; email; and Council run social media. This learning will be used to improve external communications.

6.   Developing Our Participation Strategy

6.1.   The Council's participation strategy - 'Have Your Say, the Plan for Local Involvement' – is due for review by the end of 2018. To ensure this review focusses on what is important to local people, we will conduct a consultation with the public, similar to that carried out for the youth engagement review. The survey will ask the public about their preferred methods of participation and the issues that they would like to help influence. In addition we will seek to target seldom heard groups to ensure our strategy is inclusive as possible. This will include those who are digitally excluded.

6.2.   Officers will also consider how the Council's strategy can be brought better in line with the National Standards for Community Engagement. Services will also be asked for examples of best practice. This work will be used to update the participation strategy using evidence and policy based approach. A revised strategy will be submitted to the Executive in early 2019.

Citizens Panel

6.3.   The Citizens Panel – a panel made up of more than 1000 local people who have volunteered to respond to a range of online surveys throughout the year – is currently under review. The aim is to provide panel members more control over the issues on which they are consulted and how frequently they wish to be consulted. A recruitment campaign will be developed in order to improve the representativeness of the panel. 167 young people, aged between 12 and 25, joined the panel as a result of the youth engagement survey.

6.4.   The revised strategy will be promoted to staff via a dedicated engagement page on the intranet. This is currently being developed. The page will also promote the newly developed 'Guide to Community Engagement', which acts as a step by step guide to planning community engagement (appendix 1). This will be supplemented by direct training with officers etc.

6.5.   The guide covers a number of things e.g.:

- Defining the purpose of engagement
- Who to engage with
- Methods of engagement
- Feedback
- Evaluation.

6.6.   It is anticipate this approach will help ensure the quality of our engagement across the council improves and that this leads to improved services and outcomes for communities.

Communications and Social Media

6.7.   The online consultation, discussed in section 5.5 above, will also be used as an opportunity to expand on the results of the severe weather survey on how people receive and understand how the Council communicates with them. The survey results are extremely valuable but are specific to severe weather communications. The online consultation survey will show if similar patterns emerge at a more general level. Given the Council is reducing the number of issues of Falkirk Council news it is important that we look at what this consultation tells us about how to inform people.

6.8.   The Council has witnessed a growth in the use and popularity of social media as a communications channel. Consequently, the Council is looking to expand its use further in various ways e.g. to more specific aspects of service delivery and beyond our current platforms. This would involve the use of an integrated social media management tool allowing more control of the Council's numerous social media channels as well as enhancing its ability to respond to customer enquiries more efficiently.   Council services are also looking to exploit digital channels as part of the ongoing Council of the Future programme.

6.9.   However the Council will continue through a variety of mechanisms communicate and engage with people in more traditional ways. This includes where relevant face to face meetings etc. Our approach to on line consultation through the place standard was supplemented by face to face engagement in various locations and with seldom heard groups.

Corporate Participation Group

6.10.   The Corporate Participation Group played a central role in developing the existing participation strategy, however has not met for a number of months. The main reason for this was to allow us to review where we are going with participation before reconvening that group.

6.11.   Officers are currently reviewing what role it will play in the development of the revised participation strategy. This Group will also have a role in overseeing the use of Citizens Space within the Council. Citizen Space is the Council's

online platform used to develop and host surveys. The purpose of the revised group would be to: revise the current participation strategy; discuss proposed, upcoming and ongoing survey based consultations; offer training in survey design and data analysis; and develop a consistent approach to monitoring and evaluation.

Other Issues

6.12. Monitoring and evaluation tools have been developed which map the principles set out in the Council's participation strategy against performance indicators. These will be updated in line with the revised participation strategy. By ensuring that the monitoring and evaluation of engagement is conducted by services, staff will become better familiarised with the Council's engagement plan and the Council can begin to measure progress and improvements made to community engagement.

6.13. There also remains a need for training in survey design. Often surveys are too long, too complicated, and collect unneeded personal data. The unregulated collection of personal data has serious implications for the Council in regard to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). This opens the Council's to accusations of data protection breaches and unethical practice. The Council should, thus, consider producing a set of ethical guidelines for community engagement including how to engage with people, what information can we legitimately ask of people etc. This would, of course, raise the issue of how adherence to these guidelines would be ensured. Engagement activities could possibly undergo an approval process, conducted either at a service or Council level. The feasibility and implications of such a process require more exploration and will be taken forward by the revised participation group

6.14. A training needs assessment can be carried out, with staff and elected members across the Council, to identify training on the issues noted above.

6.15. Currently, there is no active corporate database of consultation activities. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the previous database was ineffective, with only a minority of services using it. Citizen Space offers a database of surveys, however, non-web based engagement activity is absent. The National Standards for Community Engagement offer an online database tool – VoiCE. Officers will review whether this may be suitable to use within the Council.

6.16. There are currently two webpages from which the public can access information about community engagement:

6.17. http://www.falkirk.gov.uk/services/council-democracy/consultations-surveys/ which is the main community engagement page and https://say.falkirk.gov.uk which lists open consultations on Citizen Space. Web traffic statistics show that these pages are used infrequently. This may be owing to the fact that engagements are predominantly promoted via the Council's social media channels. These channels have been effective and their popularity is ever increasing.

7. **Implications**

   Financial

7.1. The costs to the Council, for engaging with the public, can be met from existing budgets. An additional cost will be incurred for a social media management tool but this is critical to ensure corporate information is managed appropriately. Funding for this will come from existing budgets.

   Resources

7.2. Nil

   Legal

7.3. Nil.

   Risk

7.4. There is a risk that if the Council does not engage nor communicate with its communities it will not deliver on it corporate plan priorities and fulfil its obligations with regards community empowerment. If we do not pursue the actions in the report, we may not be engaging effectively with communities.

   Equalities

7.5. We will ensure we monitor engagement with seldom heard groups and that the final Participation strategy is subject to an EPIA which will also seek to fulfil our Fairer Scotland Duties.

   Sustainability/Environmental Impact

8. **Conclusions**

8.1. Good progress has been made on implementing the recommendations made by the Executive in 2016 following the scrutiny panel review and learning points will be taken into account when revising the Council's participation strategy. The Council is now entering a new phase of community engagement delivery. Officers will move away from a strictly consultation based approach and explore new methods of collaboration and co-production which are advocated in the National Standards for Community Engagement and Council Corporate Plan. Officers also recognise the value of evidence based policy making and extensive consultation will be carried out with the public to ensure that the Council's approach to engagement is meeting the needs of local communities.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Guide to Community Engagement
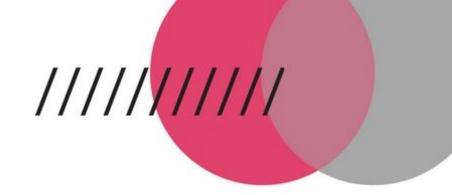
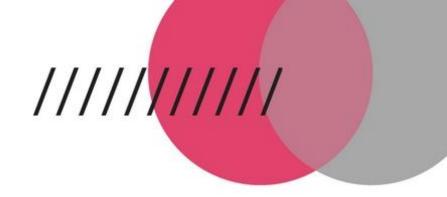## List of Background Papers:

None

GUIDE TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Falkirk Council

As a Council, we want to work with local people to improve our services and make the Falkirk Council area the best possible place to live and work. We know that the services we provide are better when we listen to the people who use them and we know that we can achieve much more when we work together with local communities to make things change. We regularly ask people for their views in lots of different ways and we often work together with community groups to improve local communities.

Now, we want to become even better at involving communities.

This guide sets out the many steps that should be followed when planning community engagement. It covers everything from the different engagement methods that can be used when engaging with communities, to promoting and evaluating your engagement activity. It is intended primarily for Council staff who are relatively new to community engagement. It acts, however, as a useful guide to meeting the commitments set out in the Council's engagement strategy – *Have Your Say – A plan for local involvement.*

Contents

Introduction

What is community engagement?

Community engagement describes the many ways in which the decisions reached by councils are done so with the involvement of the communities directly affected. This can entail, for example, involving communities in community planning, the development and provision of services, or tackling community issues such as mental health and wellbeing or facilities for young people. Engagement is a two-way process which involves interaction and dialogue with the goal of generating mutual benefit.

Why is it important?

It is a statutory requirement:

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 has a specific focus on promoting effective engagement and participation to help communities achieve greater control and influence in the decisions and circumstances that affect their lives. With the introduction of community planning, community engagement has become even more important. In particular, there is a push to better involve people living in areas of socioeconomic disadvantage. It is only by listening to the experiences and ideas of people who live in these communities that we can find solutions, and make changes, that will make a lasting difference.

It brings significant benefits to the Council and communities:

1. Decision making is enriched by community involvement

Engaging with communities can demonstrably improve the quality of work undertaken by the Council. Not only do communities challenge, enrich and broaden the decision making process, but services and plans that have been developed in partnership with communities result in greater impact and relevance.

2. It helps the Council to demonstrate accountability in a climate of increasing scrutiny

The Council receives millions of pounds of public money. Increasingly, councils need to be open and transparent about what they are spending public money on - and why. Through community engagement, the Council can demonstrate its openness, transparency, and accountability to ensure that there is well informed debate and dialogue about future investment.

3. It strengthens and enriches the Council's brand and identity and can increase public appreciation and support for local government

Communities base their judgements of the council on personal experience and the experiences of family and friends. Community engagement demonstrates the Council's willingness to listen and change and offers an opportunity for dialogue and collaboration.

4. It makes a positive contribution to society

By embedding community engagement into our work, the Council is better able to respond to community needs and issues. The Council can make a positive contribution to social justice and develop more effective ways to support communities to make a difference.

Have Your Say: A plan for local involvement

The Council's community engagement strategy for 2015-2018 sets out the Council's plan for achieving greater community involvement. This is summarised below:

Influence
- Where possible, communities will be involved in the identification, evidencing and interpretation of community needs and issues.
- Community engagement will take place only when communities can genuinely inform and influence the decision making process.

Communication
- The information necessary for communities to get involved will be shared in a clear and accessible language.
- We will provide participants, and the wider community, with feedback on the outcomes of engagement exercises.

Organisational
- A culture of community involvement will be promoted throughout the Council which will ensure a full and clear role for communities in decision making across all levels.
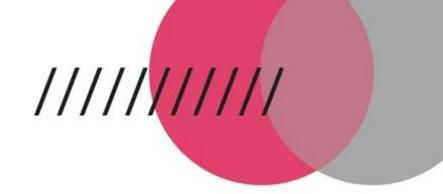
Learning and Evaluation
- We will regularly monitor and evaluate how well we are involving communities in decision making.

Reaching Everyone
- We will take a range of creative approaches to engage with people from marginalised and underrepresented communities.
- We will take measures to involve and reduce barriers for people with protected characteristics.

Partnership Working
- The Council will collaborate with other statutory, third sector and community partners when developing and carrying out community engagement.

Step by Step Guide to Planning Community Engagement

1. Defining the purpose of your engagement

Community engagement describes the range of approaches that the Council can take to involve local communities in decision making processes.

When planning your engagement, think about your reason for involving the community. Ask yourself: Why am I (or the Council) doing this? What do I/we want to achieve?

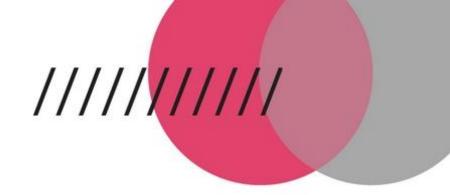Some possible reasons for engaging with the public are, for example:

- To disseminate information about decisions made by the Council
- To gain new understanding of a community or an issue
- To improve policy or practice
- To plan or alter services
- To collaborate with communities in developing and running a project or activity
- To inspire children, young people or adults to take an interest in local democracy

These can be categorised into three broad, and often overlapping, purposes that engagement can serve:

Informing: Informing and educating communities and making the work of the Council more accessible.

Consulting: Actively listening to the communities' views, concerns and insights and using them to inform decision making.

Collaborating: Working in partnership with communities to solve problems together, drawing on each other's expertise. Enabling community members to participate in every aspect of planning and decision-making for new programs or services.

2. Do I need to engage?

Typically, it is expected that Council staff will engage with communities regarding any decisions or issues that will directly affect their lives. It is important to ensure, however, that the activity is not repeating or duplicating previous or current community engagements or other research.

You should, therefore, consider:

- What data is already available? Build a profile of your target group/community/issue – look at census data, ward/constituency profiles, area and settlement profiles, Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation data zones, etc.
- Is it reliable and up to date?
- Have there been previous community engagements on a similar subject?
- Can you use the results?
- What do you still need to know or know more about?

3. What are my objectives?

Having identified the purpose of the activity, it will be possible to set out your objectives. Avoid setting your focus too wide - the tighter the focus, the better the chances of achieving your goals. When setting your objectives, you should focus on the desired outcomes of the engagement. You should also, however, think about the wider objectives and commitments of the Council's engagement plan.

For example, the Council wants to involve more people in decision making processes, particularly those from marginalised and underrepresented communities. You might, therefore, record the number of people participating in your engagement. While this is an important thing to know, simply knowing it tells you little about the success of your engagement. Engaging ten participants from marginalised and underrepresented communities is arguably a greater success than engaging fifteen people from over-represented communities. You should consider, therefore, setting objectives associated with the Council's engagement plan. This will help you to gather information that tells you whether you are contributing to the Council's long term goals.
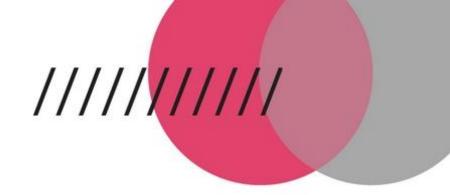
Below is an example list of objectives:

You are planning a community workshop to find out community views on the proposed closure of a local primary school. Realistic objectives might include:

- To inform the local community about the proposed closure and likely impact on them and the delivery of their children's education.
- To find out how the closure of the primary school will affect the local community.
- To engage with 40-50 parents.
- Engage with 80 - 100 current pupils.
- To engage with parents and pupils with protected characteristics.
- To use the views of the local community to inform any decisions made about the future of the school.
- To ensure that parents and students feel they have been listened to and had an influence over decisions made about the future of the school.

Revisit your objectives throughout your engagement. Upon completion of the engagement project, they will form the basis of your evaluation (see page 9).

4. What is the timescale of your engagement?

We will always allow at least six weeks when we are asking community organisations to respond to a consultation or attend a consultation event. This is because we realise that community groups usually only meet once a month, so need six weeks notice to discuss things at their meetings. We will always allow at least three weeks notice when we are asking individual community members to respond to a consultation or attend a consultation event.
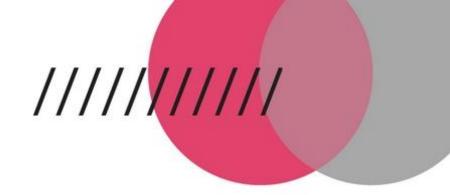
5. Who should I engage with?

An important part of planning any community engagement is to think about the people you want to engage with. Largely, you will be engaging with the communities directly involved in, or affected by, the focus of your engagement. It is often helpful to break this down into different types based on categories such as age, gender, ethnicity, location and interests.

Examples include:

- Schools and colleges (primary, secondary and further education)
- Community groups
- Families and children
- Young people
- Adults with disabilities
- Minority ethnic communities
- Residents of a specific neighbourhood or town

Whoever you choose to engage with, you should consider the following:

- Consider why your target audience might want to engage with you. What are the incentives of engaging? What will they gain from taking part? How is the activity useful and engaging for them?
- Identify a community champion. A representative from a community organisation associated with your target audience who can assist in the development of the event and who can provide valuable knowledge and contacts. This should offer a mutually beneficial opportunity for both parties to learn and collaboratively develop an engagement activity.
- Seek advice from various network groups within the Falkirk area, for example, Black and Minority Ethnic group, LGBTQ group, or disability group etc. Ideally, involve members of the target audience in the planning and development of your engagement as this will help you develop an as effective project as possible.
- Consider a range of learning styles and include different types of activity to suit the varied styles and preferences of your target audience.
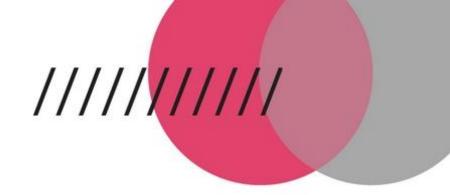
- Consider any barriers preventing your target audience from taking part and what you can do to lessen or overcome them. Barriers can include:
    i. Transport (availability, times and cost)
    ii. The time/date of the activity (for example, does it clash with the working day, religious observance, exam period or even a big sporting event?)
    iii. Accessibility and mobility (both physical, psychological and cultural)
    iv. Language (do you need interpreters or alternative formats?)
    v. Childcare and caregivers
    vi. Lack of trust in you and the Council
    vii. Perceived relevance of the engagement
    viii. Perceived difficulty of the engagement

6. Methods of community engagement

There are many different methods for engaging with communities, some of which may be more suited to your purpose and audience than others. When choosing a method of engagement it is important to consider what resources are available for you to use, for example:

- What skills and experience can you and your colleagues bring to the engagement?
- What budget is available to carry out the engagement?
- What facilities are available (e.g. buildings, equipment, and transport)?
- What timescale are you working to?

All of these factors will influence which methods you can use. Below are some examples of methods which can be used to engage with the public, though this is by no means the full range of methods.

Citizen Space:

Citizen Space is an online platform used to develop and host online surveys. Surveys are the most widely used engagement method and are undertaken to identify community needs and views in a standardised format. If marketed well, they have the potential to generate a large volume of responses. Online consultations can be used for a number of reasons, including to:

- Give large numbers of people, or a group of people unable to meet offline for reasons of time, cost, mobility or geography etc., the opportunity to engage.
- Give people the opportunity to give their views on important community issues
- Elicit feedback on services or a recent service or policy change
- Feed into the direction of Council priorities
- Engage communities in the development of Council policy or strategy

Online surveys are flexible when it comes to the number and location of community members involved. The method allows them to participate at a time and place convenient to them. It also enables community members who might not be able to participate using other methods to be involved, for example, older people, people with a disability, those not confident enough to go to public meeting and those in rural and remote areas. Surveys can also acts as a prompt to further involvement in a wider engagement project, with participants asked if they would like to receive information about, or invitations to, related events.

Citizens Panel:

The Citizens Panel is a cross section of the local population who have volunteered to respond to regular online surveys. Citizens Panel surveys ask questions on a range of different issues submitted by all services. There are regular calls for submissions circulated to all services. Services can submit a small number of questions to each survey, thus, bypassing the need to conduct a larger scale engagement project. The Citizens Panel is, thus, an ideal method if you have only a small number of questions to ask.

The Citizens Panel can be used for a number of reasons, including to:

- Get regular feedback on Council services
- Measure whether people's views are changing over time
- Provide a sounding board for new approaches or potential changes
- Engage in a continuing dialogue with the local population

We try to make sure that panel membership is broadly representative of the population and consider issues like age, gender, ethnic origin and disability. Generally, the surveys achieve a high response rate.

Community Workshops:

Community workshops bring together local people to receive information and give feedback on issues of shared interest. Generally, the workshops involve presentations on the topic or proposed plans, followed by the opportunity for attendees to have any questions answered. More in-depth discussions on the issue can then take place by breaking up participants into smaller groups.

Community workshops can be used to:

- Inform local people of, and receive feedback on, plans, service developments or strategies for an area.
- Promote and discuss the results of a recent engagement project.
- Consult communities in their views on a particular topic or issue relating to your service, or to inform future engagement activity.

Community workshops are usually one-off events and all local people are invited to attend. This can make it difficult to predict the number of participants, however, direct invitations can be sent to community representatives to boost numbers.
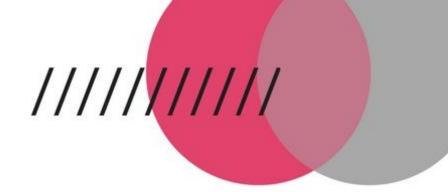
Focus Group:

Focus groups are small group discussions that provide in-depth information and views on a specific topic or issue. They provide a more natural setting than survey as they allow participants to share their experiences and form collective understandings of the issue under study. Focus groups are often used in combination with online surveys as they will allow any emerging issues to be explored in more depth and in a less restricted way. A focus group could be used to:

- Assess the views of users of Council services
- Explore with local residents the impact of potential budget cuts
- Test people's reaction to proposed changes
- Generate ideas for improvement

Generally, focus groups should involve no more than 10-12 people so as to allow all participants the opportunity to contribute and for a discussion to develop. You will have to identify someone to facilitate the discussion, such as, yourself or a colleague, or a community leader. A discussion guide should be prepared in advance that allows for flexibility. It should draw out the issues that you are keen to explore without confining the discussion to a rigid structure or list of questions.

You may need to hold more than one focus group. You might, for example, want to engage with people who might have different views on the topic, such as, different age groups, neighbourhoods, etc.
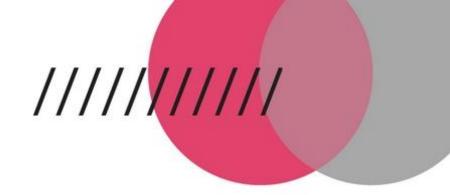
Co-production:

The Scottish Co-Production Network describe co-production as 'a relationship between service provider and service user that draws on the knowledge, ability and resources of both to develop solutions to issues that are claimed to be successful, sustainable and cost-effective, changing the balance of power from the professional towards the service user. The approach is used in work with both individuals and communities'.

Co-production is different to traditional engagement approaches that create clear distinctions between the Council and the users of council services. The co-production approach involves working *with* communities throughout the entire decision making process. All participants, both council and public, should have an equal input into decisions made or services developed as a result of the engagement. This means that all participants work together without privileging one type of knowledge or experience over another.

The core principles of co-production are:

- Co-operation: The notion of making decisions *with* people rather than *on* people. Co-production is, thus, collaborative – a two-way conversation between all participants who are working together to reach decisions on, or provide solutions to, community issues.
- Equality: There should be equality in the decision making process. This entails mutual respect, trust and appreciation between all participants and valuing all contributions, whether based on expertise or experience.
- Social Justice: This means that the engagement will have a real impact for those involved and those affected by any decisions made and should go some way to reducing inequalities, improving lives and addressing the imbalance of power.

Communities of Practice:

Working in partnership with communities involves a long term commitment to engaging with individuals and groups. Co-production often involves people and organisations with different cultures, knowledges, power relationships, priorities and identities that can make effective co-production difficult. By establishing a community of practice, the Council and community organisations/members can better align goals, address power imbalances and develop mutually beneficial partnerships.

A community of practice is a 'a group of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do, and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly'. Via the process of sharing information and experiences within the group, members learn from each other, and have an opportunity to develop their own knowledge and skills.

The key elements of a community of practice are:

- Members are brought together by a learning need they share, for example, a community issue.
- This process of collective learning establishes a strong working relationship between members over time.
- Their interactions produce resources, solutions and ideas that affect community issues, services and practice (whether they engage in practice together or separately).

This approach is a valuable way of ensuring that the skills and experiences of different communities and organisations are able to influence the planning and delivery of services and activities. When establishing a community of practice, you should consider the following:

1. Identify the 'practice' or topic. Is it, for example, people interested in reducing crime in a certain neighbourhood or people interested in improving housing for disabled people living in the Falkirk area?
2. Decide who should be involved and what the expectations of members are.
3. Decide where and when you are going to meet and what resources you will need.
4. Identify mechanisms for translation between different cultures, for example, service user, service provider, practitioner, policy maker.

5. Plan periodic reviews. What has the community of practice achieved? Has it met its goal? Is the community of practice still needed?
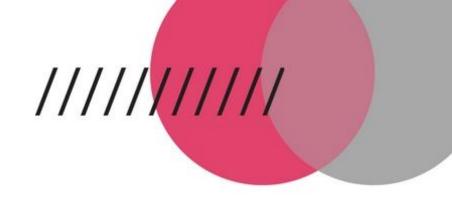
A community of practice can be used for:

- Grouping projects together under a shared theme to encourage longevity and maximise impact
- Enabling all stakeholders to keep up to date with information and skill development that is relevant to them
- Influencing key decision makers by providing them with well evidenced and jointly developed solutions to shared problems
- Explicitly addressing power differentials and diverse knowledge bases

Participatory Action Research:

Participatory action research (PAR) involves the same principles of "co-production". It involves local people or community groups, facilitated by the Council, undertaken research into the needs and experiences of their community. Participatory action research should always be instigated by issues identified *within* a community and the need to seek solutions, as opposed to the Council's own priorities. The communities involved in PAR are more often that not experiencing a range of issues from socioeconomic deprivation, to deteriorating social relations, to political disenfranchisement. These issues alone, however, do not instigate research. Rather, PAR is typically carried out in response to a catalyst which instigates discussion and debate within a community, for example, a rapid increase in migration, flooding, or the closure of a public service.

The approach gives communities the power to define the issues that affect them and the way these should be explored. They are then involved in undertaking the research - for example through surveys or focus groups. It is an effective way of conducting local research, as local people often have good links with the community and can encourage higher rates of participation.

PAR can be used for:

- Making decisions that are drawn from a wide range of knowledge and appreciation of people's lived experiences.
- Developing the skills of local communities. It can help participants gain an appreciation of their own knowledge and abilities which can lead to greater self-esteem.
- Aligning Council priorities with the issues and topics of most interest and importance to local communities.
- Altering perceptions of Council engagement activities, as "here today, gone tomorrow", by changing the way the Council does community engagement. This can improve the image and credibility of the Council and its staff.
- Working with new people and organisations in an innovative way.

7. How will you promote your engagement?

Effective promotion is essential to increasing knowledge of, and participation in, your community engagement activity or event. By now you should have already identified: 1) the objectives of your engagement, 2) who you want to engage with and 3) which methods of engagement you will use. If these three factors are clear, promoting your event or activity should be relatively straightforward.

Once you have thought about these factors, you should first consider your message:

- Identify your key message and communicate it in a simple 'headline' statement that can be expanded upon in your website/poster/leaflet/press release, etc.
- Indicate why your target audience should take part.
- Remember that you are communicating with a wide range of people with differing knowledge and skills, so use plain English
- Be concise - people lead busy lives and will likely not engage if bombarded with information.

Once you have identified your key messages, you should contact the Council's Communications and Participation team on **engagement@falkirk.gov.uk,** who can advise you on targeted promotion. This can include:

- Providing information about your event/activity on the Council website.
- Informing community organisations who represent your target audiences.
- Promoting the event/activity on social media.
- Designing printed materials.
- Promoting your event/activity in local news.

8.How will you give feedback on the results of your engagement?

Providing feedback is one of the most important stages in the engagement process. It shows participants how their views have been taken into account and what has happened as a result of the engagement. Historically, the Council has not consistently provided feedback on the results of engagements to participants. Even when feedback has been shared, participants are often uncertain as to how they might access this information. The Council's engagement strategy makes a commitment, however, to sharing engagement results publically.

Providing open and transparent feedback is key to building long-lasting relationships between the Council and communities which are built on mutual trust. Feedback demonstrates that participants have been listened to and that their views have had an impact on decision making. They are more likely, therefore, to see community engagement as worthwhile endeavour and may participate again in the future. If feedback isn't received, participants may feel their time was wasted or that their contributions have made little difference to decisions made.

Participants should be informed, from the onset of the engagement, how and when they will receive feedback. Typically, feedback will be made available on the 'Consultations' section of the Council website. It should be written in "plain English" and published in the following format:

- **We Asked** – a summary of what the consultation was about and how and what participants were asked.
- **You Said –** a summary of the participants' views and opinions
- **We Did –** what has, or will change, as a result of the engagement

You may also want to consider sending feedback via email, on social media, in local newspapers or at a public meeting.

9. How will you evaluate the engagement?

Evaluation is in important part of the engagement process. It is a learning process which helps us identify what worked well and what can be done to improve future engagements. It can be used, for example, to:

- Review whether you have met the objectives of the engagement
- Identify which engagement methods work best with different communities
- Identify which communities you work well with or those you are missing
- Explore how well you are reducing barriers to participation
- Measure the impact the engagement had on local communities

The purpose of evaluation is threefold. Firstly, it will enable you to continue developing your community engagement skills. Secondly, the results can be used to promote the value of community engagement (benefits, outcomes and impact). Thirdly, it forms the evidence which can be used to measure how well the Council is meeting the principles laid out in Have Your Say: A plan for local involvement.

To help you effectively evaluate your engagement, a range of evaluation resources have been included in this guide:

- **Appendix 1:** An evaluation form to be completed by staff leading the engagement
- **Appendix 2:** An evaluation form to be completed by participants at one-off events, such as, community workshops
- **Appendix 3:** Evaluation questions to be included at the end of online surveys
- **Appendix 4:** An equality monitoring form that can be completed by the participants (both online and in person) that will measure which communities you are engaging with.

While these forms will primarily assist you in developing your community engagement skills, it is also important to share completed evaluations with the Stakeholder Engagement Officer. The data will be used to monitor how well the Council is performing as a whole. Completed evaluations should be sent to **engagement@falkirk.gov.uk.**

Appendix 1: Evaluation Form

1	The activity was:	Informing	Consultation	Collaboration
2a	**Briefly describe the activity:**			
2b	**What were the project objectives?**			
3a		**Who were the stakeholders?**		
3b		**How were stakeholders recruited/ encouraged to be involved? How successful was this?**		
3c	**Involvement**	**How was the engagement promoted to stakeholders? How successful was this?**		
3d		**Were there any barriers to participation? If so, what were these barriers?**		
3e		**What measures were taken to overcome barriers?**		

4a	**Methods**	**What method of engagement was used? Why?**
4b		**How (un)successful/ suited was this method?**
4c		**Did you allow at least six weeks when asking community organisations, and 3 weeks when asking individuals. to respond to a consultation or attend a consultation event?**
5a	**Information**	**Were communities given adequate, plain English, information prior to the engagement?**
5b		**Was this information available in alternative formats/languages? Was this requested?**
6a	**Feedback**	**Have participants been provided with feedback? If not, why?**
6b		**Through which medium was feedback provided (e.g. email, website, public meeting)?**
6c		**Did feedback follow the "We Asked, You Said, We did" format? If not, why?**

7a	**Outcomes**	**Did you achieve the project objectives?**
7b		**To what extent will the results of the engagement influence any decisions made?**
7c		**What impact has the engagement had?**

Feedback Form Guidance:

1. What category does the engagement fall under?

Informing: Informing and educating communities and making the work of the Council more accessible.

Consulting: Actively listening to the communities' views, concerns and insights and using them to inform decision making.

Collaborating: Working in partnership with communities to solve problems together, drawing on each other's expertise. Enabling community members to participate in every aspect of planning and decision-making for new programs or services.+

3a. Who was the engagement aimed at (e.g. all adults in the Falkirk council area; unemployed adults in Grangemouth; disabled adults; parents; young people; etc.)?

3b. e.g. was the event open to everyone in the target audience? Were specific schools, community groups, residents associations targeted? Did you use gatekeepers, such as community groups, to gain access to target audience?

3c. e.g. announcement on social media; targeted advertising on social media; press release; posters and flyers; etc.

3d. Accessibility, mobility, childcare, travel costs, language barriers, cultural/religious barriers, time of day/week, etc.

3e. e.g. venue had ramps, childcare provided, interpreters etc., alternative times/dates.

4a. e.g. focus group, panel, online survey, public meeting, etc.

4c. As specified in the Council's engagement strategy, this is because we realise that community groups usually only meet once a month, so need six weeks notice to discuss things at their meetings. We will always allow at least three weeks notice when we are asking individual community members to respond to a consultation or attend a consultation event.

5b. Including BSL, braille, etc.

7b. How will the results be taken into account in the decision making process? Do decisions made reflect the findings of the engagement?

7c. For example, have local issues and services improved as a result of the engagement? Are the community more involved in decision making? Have the participants gained new understanding/skills?

Appendix 2: Participant Evaluation Form

1. Overall, how would you rate this event?				
Very Good	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor

2. Where did you hear about today's event?

3. How well do you feel you understood the following aspects of the event?			
Purpose	Fully understood	Partially understood	Didn't understand
How my views will be used	Fully understood	Partially understood	Didn't understand

4. How would you rate the event on the following aspects?					
Information received prior to the event	Very Good	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor
The purpose of the event	Very Good	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor
The venue/location of the event	Very Good	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor
Length of the event	Very Good	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor
Any other comments:					

5. How much influence do you think today's discussion will have over future decision making?		
A strong influence	Some influence	No influence

6. Do you feel your views were listened to and valued during the event?		
Yes	Sometimes	No

Please explain why…

7. What did you enjoy most about today's event?

8. How could the event have been improved?

9. I **know when and where I can access feedback on today's event?**	
Yes	No

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Appendix 3: Survey Evaluation Questions

1. Overall, how would you rate this survey				
Very Good	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor

2. How well do you feel you understood the following aspects of the survey?			
Purpose	Fully understood	Partially understood	Didn't understand
The questions asked in the survey	Fully understood	Partially understood	Didn't understand
How my views will be used	Fully understood	Partially understood	Didn't understand

3. How much influence do you think the survey results will have over future decision making?		
A strong influence	Some influence	No influence

4. How, if at all, could this survey be improved?

5. I know when and where I can access the results of this survey?	
Yes	No

Appendix 4: Equality Monitoring

Falkirk Council Equality Monitoring Form

We want to ensure our services are provided fairly and accessible to those who need them. Information provided will help us get a picture of who contacts us and who uses, or does not use, our services. This will be used to help us improve the services we provide, reduce any barriers to access and meet the Council's equality obligations under the Equality Act 2010.

Please answer the questions by ticking the boxes you feel most accurately describe you. Some questions might feel personal and you **do not** have to answer any questions that you would prefer not to. The information is important to us, is requested on a voluntary basis, is anonymous and will be kept completely confidential.

Age	
Under 16	☐
16-24	☐
25-44	☐
45-64	☐
65 or over	☐

Gender	
Male	☐
Female	☐
Other (please write in)	……………………………………………..
Is your gender identity the same as the gender you were assigned at birth?	
Yes ☐	
No ☐	

Which of the following options best describes how you think of yourself?	
Heterosexual or Straight	☐
Gay or Lesbian	☐
Bisexual	☐
Other (please write in)	……………………………………………..

What is your legal status?	
Single	☐
Married	☐
Civil partnership	☐
Separated	☐
Co-habiting	☐
Divorced	☐
Widowed	☐

Residency	
Are you a British / United Kingdom citizen?	
Yes	☐
No	☐
Are you a national of another country?	
EU national	☐
Refugee	☐
Asylum seeker	☐
Other (please write in)	………………………………………..

Employment Status	
Student	☐
Employed / self-employed	☐
Not employed and looking for work	☐
Not employed and not looking for work	☐
Apprentice/ training	☐
Retired	☐
Other (please write in)	………………………………………..

What is your ethnic group? (please tick one)	
White:	
Scottish	☐
Other British	☐
Irish	☐
Gypsy / Traveller	☐
Polish	☐
Other (please write in)	……………………………………………………..
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups:	
Other (please write in)	……………………………………………………..
Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British:	
Pakistani, Pakistani Scottish or Pakistani British	☐
Indian, Indian Scottish or Indian British	☐
Bangladeshi, Bangladeshi Scottish or Bangladeshi British	☐
Chinese, Chinese Scottish or Chinese British	☐
Other (please write in)	……………………………………………………..
African:	
African, African Scottish or African British	☐
Other (please write in)	……………………………………………………..
Caribbean or Black:	
Caribbean, Caribbean Scottish or Caribbean British	☐
Black, Black Scottish or Black British	☐
Other (please write in)	……………………………………………………..
Other ethnic group:	
Arab, Arab Scottish or Arab British	☐
Other (please write in)	……………………………………………………..

What religion, religious denomination or body do you belong to? (please tick one)	
None	☐
Church of Scotland	☐
Roman Catholic	☐
Other Christian	☐
Muslim	☐
Buddhist	☐
Sikh	☐
Jewish	☐
Hindu	☐
Pagan	☐
Other (please write in)	……………………………………………..

Do you have unpaid responsibility for children as a parent, grandparent, guardian etc.?	
Children age 0-4	☐
Children age 5-10	☐
Children age 11 -18	☐

Are you currently pregnant or have you been pregnant in the last year? (please tick one)	
Yes	☐
No	☐

In the past year, have you taken:	
Maternity leave	☐
Additional paternity leave (ie more than two weeks)	☐
Adoption leave	☐

Are you a carer? A carer is someone who provides unpaid support/care for a family member, friend etc. who needs help with their day to day life because they are disabled, have a long-term illness or are elderly	
Yes	☐
No	☐

Do you have a physical or mental health condition or illness, or a learning disability, which you expect to last for 12 months or more? (please tick one)	
Yes	☐
No	☐
Don't know	☐
If yes, does your condition or illness reduce your ability to carry out day to-day activities? (please tick one)	
Yes, a lot	☐
Yes, a little	☐
Not at all	☐

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

The information that you have provided is very valuable to us and will be treated confidentially.