

GOOD PRACTICE AGREEMENT

(Updated – October 2020)

Section 1

Introduction

Fife Council is committed to supporting and developing Community Councils. The Council values the role of Community Councils in communicating and consulting with local communities and as a means of involving local people in the process of local government and making representations to those who provide services to their Communities.

Fife's Community Plan - Plan for Fife – brings together public service providers and the wider community in Fife and sets out 4 Priority Themes: opportunities for all; thriving places; inclusive growth and jobs; and community led services. See Plan for Fife on the Fife Council website - [Plan for Fife | Fife Council](#).

Community Councils are important participants in the process of delivering these goals, to achieving the vision and in doing so improving the quality of life for their communities.

This Agreement outlines the practical support and standards that Community Councils can expect from Fife Council and also details the expectations of the contribution that Community Councils as effective representative organisations can make within the Community Planning agenda.

There is provision for over 100 Community Councils covering all parts of Fife, all as diverse and individual as the communities they serve. Some will find parts of the agreement more relevant than others, it is not intended as a rule book but to offer a benchmark for best practice.

The Good Practice Agreement relies on the goodwill and commitment of Fife Council and Community Councils to work together. Fife Council, having regard to changing circumstances and representations made to it, shall from time to time review this Agreement, and where it considers it ought to be amended, shall proceed with the full involvement of Community Councils.

Section 2

Fife Council's Commitment to Community Councils

Consultation and Participation

General

Community Councils make a valuable contribution by representing the views and interests of local communities and expressing those to Fife Council. Fife Council has a statutory obligation to consult Community Councils on planning applications and alcohol licences - a separate section below deals with planning applications.

The Council is committed to consulting with Community Councils on a range of other issues, for example:-

- ◆ *changes in licensing policies;*
- ◆ *major works or major utility works of which the Council is aware;*
- ◆ *policy developments likely to have an effect on the people that Community Councils represent;*
- ◆ *Community Council issues e.g. review of Scheme of Establishment of Community Councils, Election Rules and the Complaints Procedure.*

Community Councils can be involved in consultation and participation at a local level in conjunction with local forums, etc.

Community Councils will be invited to participate in the Council's decision-making processes in a variety of ways; questionnaires, public meetings, joint working groups, Local Forums etc. as appropriate. Timescales will, as far as possible, be reasonable to allow Community Councils to participate and respond fully – a minimum of six weeks' notice will be given wherever possible. There may be occasions where Community Councils are asked to respond at short notice e.g. planning applications.

A Consultation Diary will be available on the Fife Council website giving information on Council consultation exercises including the issues to be consulted on, the dates of the exercises, methods to be used and relevant contact numbers. The Consultation Diary can be viewed via this link - [Consultation Diary | Fife Council](#).

Wherever possible, a minimum of six weeks' notice of meetings and events will be given to enable Community Councils to arrange for a representative to participate. If possible, greater notice will be given, and less notice given only if unavoidable.

Community Councils will be informed in writing of the outcome of consultation exercises they have been involved in, for example planning applications, Common Good Fund applications, consultations on reviews etc.

The Council will offer support and training to enable Community Councils to carry out their role as representatives of their Community e.g. Planning process etc.

The Council will organise and conduct elections to Community Councils.

Planning Applications

See Schedule 5 of the Scheme for the Establishment of Community Councils in Fife

- All Community Councils will be emailed a weekly list of all planning applications for the appropriate area. Community Councils can request formal consultation on an individual application within 7 working days of the issuing date of the weekly list.
- A minimum 14-day consultation period will be initiated, beginning on the date of issue of the application details. Copies of the relevant plans and forms will be sent direct to the Community Council

- The case officer is identified on the weekly list to assist the Community Council, e.g. for further discussion or information. Informal consultation with Fife Council Officers may also take place if considered necessary by the Economy, Planning and Employability Service.
- Community Councils are also informed whether the planning application will be considered by the Area Planning Committee or whether it is an application which can be determined under delegated powers to officials.
- Fife Council will advise Community Councils of the outcome of Planning applications on which they have made representations.

In dealing with planning applications Community Councils should have regard to Planning Advice Note 47 issued by the Scottish Government – see link [Planning Advice Note 47](#).

Information and Resources

Information

The agendas, reports and minutes of all Council Committees will be made available for inspection on the Fife Council website www.fife.gov.uk

A list of the dates of Council Committee meetings is available on Fife Council's website.

The Guidance for Community Councils, a collection of key documents such as the Scheme of Establishment, this Agreement and other relevant advice is available on the main Community Council page of Fife Council's website via this link - [Community Councils | Fife Council](#).

Resources

Local Customer Services Centres can provide advice and information to Community Councils on the range of equipment and resources that can be accessed locally, including:

- photocopying facilities
- computing/IT facilities (and training as appropriate)
- meeting spaces
- use of telephone

Funding

The Council will agree the level of funding for Community Councils annually as per the Scheme for the Establishment of Community Councils.

- A form will be issued to Community Councils at the start of each financial year detailing what information is required for payment of the annual grant.
- Funding up to a maximum award will be issued on receipt of a completed form with the appropriate information (including the previous year's audited accounts, bank statement and meeting schedule).
- If the previous year's audited accounts show a credit balance of more than 20% of the total amount of grant received for that period or the cumulative balance being carried forward exceeds 3 times the annual grant then the Council will require an explanation of how this money will be used.

Community Councils can access additional funds for special projects through the Community Grants Scheme. Information on this is available at Local Offices and other Council facilities such as Community Centres and on Fife Council's website.

Insurance

The Council will arrange and fund a block insurance policy on behalf of Community Councils which will provide a base cover of insurance and will be reviewed regularly.

- Community Councils will be responsible for the excesses attached to the policy.
- A summary of the policy is available from Finance and Corporate Services Risk Management Section (email: risk.management@fife.gov.uk), a copy of the policy is also available on the Community Council page on the Fife Council website.
- The Risk Management Section will provide advice on arranging all risk cover for specified items and valuable items of equipment owned by Community Councils.
- Additional public liability insurance cover for summer fetes etc. can be arranged as required and any additional costs for this cover will be passed on to the Community Council. Community Councils should contact the Risk Management Section to arrange this cover, providing details of the event and how many people are expected to attend.

Communication and Responding to Community Councils

The Council will endeavour to meet reasonable requests for officer attendance at Community Council Meetings when given at least 7 days in advance.

Enquiries received from Community Councils will be referred to the most appropriate Service or officer.

Written enquiries will normally be answered within 10 working days. If your enquiry cannot be answered within 10 working days because it is complex and needs more time, we will tell you how long it will take us to reply and who is dealing with this.

Correspondence with Community Councils may be copied to the appropriate Elected Member(s) for information, if relevant.

Community Councils can use the Council's website (web chat) or social media pages (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and You Tube) to contact the Council – information is available at all public contact points including local Customer Services Centres and is also available online at www.fife.gov.uk

Role of Fife Council Members

All Fife Councillors are ex officio members of any Community Council within their wards (Section 4 of the Scheme for the Establishment of Community Councils in Fife).

Councillors' role at meetings is to act as a liaison between the Community Council and Fife Council. This will entail explaining the Council's position to Community Councils and also representing the views of the Community Council to Fife Council.

Attendance at Community Council Meetings

The Scheme requires that this document provides a protocol for the attendance of Fife Councillors at their Community Council meetings. Given that members of the Council may be ex officio members of more than one Community Council and are also invited to meetings of other local organisations such as management committees and may require to attend other meetings associated with the membership of Fife Council, it is impractical for every Councillor to attend every meeting of every Community Council.

Community Councils should discuss with their local Councillors a mutually agreed pattern of involvement with the Community Council.

Standards

In carrying out their duties, Councillors are required to comply with a Code of Conduct which sets the standards of conduct that must be applied.

Of particular interest to Community Councils is the contribution a Councillor can make in respect of individual applications such as those relating to planning or licensing. Councillors who are on Committees dealing with such matters can discuss issues or concerns, attend public meetings and make known what representations they have received but must **not** express a "for" or "against" view if they wish to participate in discussion and voting at Committee on a particular application.

Section 3

Community Councils' commitment to carrying out their roles

Representing the Community

Community Councils have a duty under statute to represent the views of their community to Fife Council and other public bodies. It is important that they reflect the broad spectrum of opinion and interests of all sections of their community. In ascertaining the views, Community Councils should ensure that there is wide consultation with the Community and encourage local interest and participation in community debate. Any response should incorporate a summary of the views expressed together with a recommendation reflecting the balance of community interest.

In order to fulfil their potential as effective, representative local organisations, Community Councils are expected to:

- Encourage local interest and participation in Community Council elections through the effective use of publicity and local community networks, etc.
- Recognise that the Community Council itself cannot always reflect the views of all sections of the community and therefore should form links with other local organisations e.g. youth groups, tenants' associations, etc to gather their views and opinions and to inform them of the work of the Community Council.
- Look at ways of finding out what the community thinks by carrying out surveys, holding public meetings and exhibitions, incorporating Open Public Forums into meetings, etc and be able to demonstrate, as far as is possible, that the views they express are representative of the communities they serve.
- Inform the community of the work and decisions of the Community Council by issuing newsletters and posting agendas and minutes of meetings in public places, on notice boards, social media and the Community Council's website if they have one..
- Consider establishing committees to deal with specific pieces of work, e.g. producing a newsletter. Although the majority of the membership of a committee should be elected members of the Community Council, there is scope for seeking representation from other people. There is no age restriction on the membership of committees, so young people for example could be actively encouraged to become involved.
- Make special arrangements to participate in any statutory consultation exercise e.g. planning applications, which require a quick response.
- Encourage the public to use their Community Council as a vehicle of communication with the Council and other statutory bodies.
- Establish proper arrangements to deal with consideration of Planning applications. These will likely include :-
 - nominating a Planning contact who is the official correspondent for planning matters for the Community Council.
 - establishing a mechanism to ensure that responses to consultations on Planning applications are submitted timeously.
 - considering Planning applications at a formal meeting of either the Community Council or a Committee.
 - arrangements for reporting back to the Community Council on any decisions taken by a Committee.

When considering planning applications, Community Councils should always bear in mind their **obligation to represent the views of their Community**, including where there may be different opinions held.

Effective Organisation

The Scheme for the Establishment of Community Councils provides a legal framework for the operation of Community Councils.

In terms of the Scheme, Community Councils are required to:-

- Hold at least a minimum of four meetings a year, one of which meeting will be an Annual General meeting and publicise them well in advance to promote local awareness and encourage attendance at the meetings.
- Ensure meetings are open to the public and encourage open debate and discussion.
- Ensure meetings are held wherever possible in premises that are accessible to all members of the community.
- Maintain proper financial records and give regular financial reports at meetings.
- Submit annual audited accounts at the Annual General Meeting. These can also be displayed locally, included in a newsletter or posted on the Community Council's or Fife Council's website.
- Have regard to material conflicts of interest and ensure that their membership are aware of the need for **declarations of interest at appropriate times.**

In addition, in order to make best use of resources and funds, Community Councils are expected to: -

- Make particular efforts to encourage young people to attend and participate in meetings. Note that the Scheme allows for nominated representation from local youth organisations. There is no age restriction for these nominated members.

Funding

Community Councils may award a portion of their grant to local community groups and projects which further the aims and objectives of the Community Council.

Information

- Use Fife Council's website www.fife.gov.uk to display contact details for the Secretary and Chairperson of the Community Council, including the frequency, venue and time of meetings.
- Keep local Councillors advised of major issues.
- Utilise technology (eg email, social media, websites) to maintain the Community Council's local profile.

Training

- Take advantage of appropriate training opportunities offered by Fife Council and other relevant bodies.
- Liaise with other Community Councils and local organisations to establish and share good practice and exchange information.

Insurance

- Ensure adequate risk insurance cover is in place for items of value owned by the Community Council.
- Take advice from Fife Council Finance and Corporate Services Risk Management Section on Public Liability insurance responsibilities and arrangements when organising summer fetes or other events.

Standards

The Scheme for the Establishment of Community Councils provides a legal framework in relation to the standards expected of Community Councils and individual Community Councillors.

All Community Councils should ensure that each of their members has signed the necessary Declaration of Acceptance and is aware of the terms of **Schedule 3 –Code of Conduct for Community Councillors - to the Scheme.**

Community Councils and individual Community Councillors are expected to maintain high standards of conduct in line with Schedule 3 to the Scheme at all times. Fife Council will provide written advice on Declarations of Interest as part of the Community Councils' Information Pack.

Communicating with Fife Council

In all contact with Fife Council, offer the name, address and, where possible, a daytime telephone number and email address of the Community Council's contact person and agree a timescale for responding to any request for information, etc.

The Community Council Liaison Officer, Democratic Services, Fife Council should always be advised (by email to community.councils@fife.gov.uk) of the names and addresses and where possible, telephone numbers and email addresses of the members and office bearers of your Community Council and of any changes to these.