Aberdeenshire Council

Community Council Handbook

1. Community Council Handbook

This Handbook has been designed to meet the needs of all Community Councillors in Aberdeenshire and particularly, new members who may be unfamiliar with the work of their Community Councils or with local government in general.

The aim is to provide some of the essential background information that Councillors will need in order to operate effectively within their Council, together with a brief summary of the main skills required.

The Handbook has been designed to be kept up-to-date and for new sections to be added in response to any changing circumstances or requests from Community Councils for more or additional information.

2. Community Councils

Your action-taking, boat-ponding, campaign-running, decision-making, event-holding, flag-flying, fund-raising, grant-seeking, hard-working, people-helping, project-planning, question-asking, toilet-managing, tree-planting, …………. Community Council.

It would be wrong to think that all Community Councils are alike or that they do the same thing. In practice they vary a great deal in terms of how they are organised and the issues they get involved in.

This is because the legislation that sets out the remit for Community Councils is quite vague as to their purpose. The Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 that originally set up Community Councils states their general purpose as:

"To ascertain, co-ordinate and express to the local authorities for its area and to public authorities, the views of the community which it represents ...... and to take such action in the interests of the community as appears to it to be expedient and practicable.

However there is other more general legislation to which all Community Councils are bound and this includes the general duty to promote race equality. Community Councils in carrying out their functions should have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination
- promote equality of opportunity
- promote good relations between people of different racial groups."

Scheme of Establishment

Each of the three District Councils that became part of Aberdeenshire Council on 1st April 1996 (Gordon, Banff and Buchan, and Kincardine and Deeside) had broadly similar Schemes of Establishment for their Community Councils. These set out the principles under which Community Councils in their areas operated. Aberdeenshire Council has carried out a review of the Schemes of Establishment and has produced its own scheme which has adapted the existing provisions, but with adjustments to reflect the current structure of Aberdeenshire. Within the basic principles stated in the scheme each Community Council is allowed to reflect local needs, with regard to membership, methods of election etc. In the event that a Community Council's constitution does not cover a particular point, or there is an ambiguity or conflict, the Scheme of Establishment will take precedence.

There is a responsibility on behalf of Aberdeenshire Council to review the Scheme of Establishment from time to time. For example, this may become necessary where communities outgrow the boundaries of their particular Community Council, and it is considered appropriate to have one such Council reflecting the interests of the area.

Your Constitution

All Community Councils have a Constitution that is unique to them and which sets out such matters as the rules by which the Council will operate and by which office bearers will be appointed. In so far as possible the constitutions should reflect the Scheme of Establishment and the model constitution that has been circulated. In reviewing draft constitutions however, Area Managers will generally be as flexible as possible in reflecting local needs or circumstances.

It is important that you get from your Secretary a copy of your Council's Constitution so that you can make yourself familiar with its rules. It is also useful to obtain a list of all the other members with their addresses and telephone/fax numbers.

Community Councils are **voluntary organisations** (created by statute) and, their Constitutions permitting, are entitled to raise funds or apply for grants to other bodies, including the local authority.

Relations with the Local Authority

The local authority has a range of responsibilities in relation to Community Councils within the area:

- it is responsible for ensuring that a Scheme for Community Councils is prepared which sets out things like their boundaries, constitutions, finance and so on. In addition the Scheme sets out arrangements between the local authority and Community Councils for keeping each other informed about matters of mutual interest;

- it may make contributions towards the expenses of Community Councils;

- it may provide them with accommodation, insurance cover etc, on terms that may or may not require payment;

- it may delegate responsibilities to Community Councils such as improving amenities, maintaining grounds and managing halls.

Community Councils as the elected body closest to local people can play a major role in ensuring decision making remains as close to those concerned as practicable.

For this to happen, all Community Councillors will have to seize the opportunity and prove that they can make a worthwhile contribution to local government.

If Community Councils do not take an active part and involve themselves in the decision making process, then they will only have themselves to blame if matters of vital concern to their local community are decided elsewhere.

Aberdeenshire Council shares with the Community Councils the same aims and objectives in so far as both want to ensure that quality services are provided which meet the needs of local communities and are responsive to local demand.

Importance of Being Elected

Community Councillors are elected by the local community. They have this in common with local authority Councillors, Members of Parliament, etc. Even if, due to a shortage of nominations, your "seat" was uncontested and no actual election took place, your Constitution provides for nomination and election. If properly nominated you are as much elected as would be the case in a contested election.

For this reason, it is important that each Community Council distinguishes between its Voting Members, Non-Voting Members and others allowed to sit in at meetings.

As a Member you may attend meetings, speak and (if permitted by the Constitution) vote, as of right. You serve for the term allowed by your Constitution. As a Member you should represent all the community, not any specific group, although inevitably different Members have particular areas of interest and localities. Such diversity can add to the collective strength of the Council.

All Constitutions allow for the co-option of Members. Properly co-opted Members have all the rights permitted by the Constitution. Nor must individuals be co-opted because "they don't want to face an election".

Most Community Councils invite representatives of local Chambers of Trade, Police etc to attend their meetings on a regular basis, and others e.g. Council officials or developers, to attend and speak to the meeting by special invitation. Such "guests" can make an important contribution to the meeting, but it is important to remember that they are just that, "guests". They are not elected or co-opted. It should be made clear to them at the time of invitation that they do not have voting rights and may only speak when invited to do so by the Chair.

All formal meetings should be open to the public (and to the press) unless in the case of confidential matters the Constitution permits discussion in private. Since few members of the public are sufficiently interested to attend Community Council meetings, it is common practice for the Chair to ask anyone attending whether they would like to address the meeting and/or take part in the discussion on matters which he knows to be of particular interest.

The rights of these latter two groups are clear - no more, no less, than that of any local elector or member of the public.

Public Visibility

All AGMs and regular meetings should be open to the public (the electorate), and members of the public should be encouraged to attend by adequate publicity well before the meeting date.

Every Community Council should have one or more public notice boards displaying the time and place of meetings, names and addresses of all Members and office bearers and notices of interest to the public, such as the agenda for the next meeting. Special items can be highlighted to attract local interest.

From time to time, every Community Council has matters that must be discussed in private. These matters should be discussed "in Committee" with only elected and co-opted Members present, although where special expertise is required, others may be invited to attend. Such meetings should be confidential and no minutes taken, although it may be appropriate to record at the next regular meeting the conclusions reached.

The approved minutes of all meetings should be circulated to all Members and copies should be made available to the public at local libraries or in other public places.

Good relations should be established with the local press and, if its reporters do not attend AGMs or regular meetings, a suitable press release should be issued highlighting important matters discussed and conclusions reached.

From time to time it may be advisable to issue a formal press release stating the Council's views or clarifying facts. This is particularly important when a controversial issue divides the community or when, in the opinion of the Community Council, their discussions have been either incompletely reported or misrepresented in the media.

Public Liability

It is important that Community Councillors ensure that the public liability and other insurance protection provided by the local authority or policies taken out by their Council are adequate.

Promoting Race Equality

Legislation requires the Community Council to be proactive in promoting race equality. Community Councils when dealing with race equality issues should also consider other equality issues.

Four principles should govern Community Councils efforts to meet this duty. These are:

- It is obligatory
- Must meet the duty to promote race equality in all relevant functions
- The weight given to race equality should be proportionate to its relevance
- The elements of the duty are complementary. The Community Council should consider and deal with all three parts of the general duty"

Useful contact points are listed at the rear of the Handbook

Summary

To summarise, the work of Community Councils varies from council to council, as does the method of operation. Some Community Councils have demonstrated a great deal of imagination in interpreting their role in the community, carrying out tasks such as:

- environmental projects

- organising local galas

- printing and distributing local newsletters

- representing Community Councils on other organisations

- providing lunch clubs for the elderly

- campaigning on local issues

- conducting local surveys

- organising public meetings on major development proposals or the Local Plan

- carrying out Planning for Real exercises

It should not be forgotten, however, that the main purpose of your Council is to represent the views of your community. Action on potholes, road-signs, Christmas lights and such matters can give people a sense of community and of pride in their immediate environment. And even if your Council chooses to confine itself to this role alone, it will still be achieving a great deal for the community.

Given the broad legislative remit of Community Councils, the scope for their future development is very great indeed. The reorganisation of local government brought with it an even more significant role for Community Councils as the elected body closest to the local community.

3. The Community Councillor

As a Councillor it is important that you recognise from the outset that you are required to play a role in your community. This means not simply offering your own views and opinions on local issues, or taking decisions that are based on your own self-interest.

The role of the Community Councillor is one that requires you to represent the views of your community, or your section of the community. In practice, this will involve discussing issues with people in the community to clarify their views and assess the strength of their feelings on different topics.

It is also a good idea to encourage people to bring issues to you so that you can take them up at Council meetings. Try to check out the facts, however, before taking matters to the Council, and if there are two sides to the story, make sure that both of them are put forward. There is little point in taking up time at meetings to discuss problems that are based simply on misunderstandings or misrepresentations of the facts.

At some point it may be that you will find some **conflict** between your own personal views and interests and those of the community that you are representing. If such a situation does arise, try to make sure that the views of the community take precedence. Experience shows that if the views of individuals on the Council are allowed to take precedence then the community will very quickly lose confidence in the Council and its work may subsequently be devalued.

In some instances, matters (a planning application for example) may be under discussion by the Community Council that directly affects the interests of a member of the Community Council or of other parties with whom they have a close business, personal or family relationship. In these circumstances there is likely to be a potential conflict of interest with their role as a Community Councillor that requires to be addressed. In these circumstances and as set out in the Code of Conduct, where such a conflict arises then the member affected should declare the interest, and in appropriate cases, withdraw from the meeting prior to the matter coming under discussion, and take no part in the decision. This is to ensure openness and transparency and to avoid *any perceptions* that the Community Council, or any of its members, is acting in any other than a wholly impartial way.

It is the responsibility of the individual Community Councillor to decide whether they have to declare an interest or make a judgement as to whether a declared interest prevents them from taking part in any discussions or voting. In making decisions for which they are personally responsible, the advice is always to err on the side of caution. The Chair of the meeting can offer advice and guidance and in the case of any doubt or conflicting views reach a decision bases upon the best interests of the Community Council.

All such declarations should be formally recorded in the Minutes of the Community Council meeting.

The task of any Community Council is to identify the needs and aspirations of its community and to take decisions that will lead to appropriate action in that community. At some point this might involve setting priorities on the competing or conflicting needs of different sections of the community.

Competition and conflict are normal in any community, so you shouldn't think of them as something that can be altogether avoided. What is important is that you approach competition or conflict in a **fair and reasonable** manner. This means taking a **balanced view** of your community's needs and aspirations and giving a fair hearing to representatives from different interest groups in your community. In particular, you should try to avoid being influenced by

prejudice or bias, whether in the sphere of race, religion, gender or any other of the "labels" which get attached to people and to local issues.

Although the Members of Community Councils – "Community Councillors" are not covered by the Codes of Conduct, enforced by the Standards Commission for Scotland, which apply to Councillors elected to Local Authorities and MSP's, it is expected by Aberdeenshire Council that Community Councils adopt the Code of Conduct as attached to the Community Council scheme.

The public has a high expectation of its representatives including members of Community Councils and the way in which they should conduct themselves in undertaking their duties. You must meet those expectations by ensuring that your conduct is above reproach at all times.

As a Community Councillor, it is your responsibility to make sure that you are familiar with, and that your actions comply with, the provisions of this code.

4. The Chair

The Chair has perhaps the most important single role to play in ensuring that Council meetings run smoothly. But even a good Chair will find the task exhausting unless all the Members of the Council give the role.

The Chair is elected in accordance with the rules set out in the Council's own Constitution. Your Secretary should be able to provide you with a copy. The Constitution is very important because it provides the framework of procedures that will govern the work of your Council.

In essence, the Chair's job is to make sure that decisions are taken on all of the items that are on the Agenda. In practice, this usually means that the Chair will have to make judgements about how much time to allocate to each Agenda item. It also means that he or she may occasionally have to bring speakers back to the Agenda and generally encourage people to make their contributions brief and to the point.

In regular meetings the role of the Chair is a *formal* one, all speakers will be expected to address their comments to the Chair. This helps the Chair to keep control of the discussion. In Committee meetings, where proceedings need not be so formal, the Chair may be content simply to steer the general direction of the discussion – this may be described as an *enabling* role. The extent to which a Chair adopts one or the other of these will be dependent upon the circumstances at a particular time or occasion. Set out below are some of the characteristics of the two approaches.

Perhaps most importantly of all, the Chair is expected to know the rules by which the Council operates, and ensure that at all stages of its work the Council is operating in accordance with any procedures that are set down. In this context the Chair may be called upon to act as an arbiter when there is a disagreement about how the rules should be interpreted.

It is important to recognise that the Chair's role extends outwith the meeting itself. The Chair may be called upon to act on behalf of the Council between meetings, or to represent the Council in dealing with outside bodies. This role may also be delegated by the Council to others of its members.

Very often the Chair is seen as the "official spokesperson for the Community Council and must be seen as authoritative and fair in all of their dealings with outside bodies, groups, individuals and the Press.

The Role of the Vice Chair

The Vice Chair has no specific duties other than standing in for the Chair when he or she is unable to be present. Often the Vice Chair is the next "Chair in waiting".

THE FORMAL CHAIR	THE ENABLING CHAIR
General role and responsibilities	
Ensure fair play	Have an overview of the task/goals of the meeting
Stay in charge	Help to clarify goals
Remain neutral	Help the group to take responsibility for what it wants to accomplish and to carry out its tasks
	Have little emotional investment
Agenda and timekeeping	
Open the meeting	Run through the agenda at the beginning and get the meeting's approval for it
Introduce all agenda items	Arrange in advance for someone to introduce each agenda item
Be familiar with all agenda items	Update latecomers
Get through the agenda in allotted time	Keep track of the time
	Evaluate how the meeting went
Discussion	
Select speakers	Encourage and help all to participate
Summarise discussion	Encourage expression of various views
End discussion	Encourage people to keep to the subject
Ensure that people keep to the subject	Clarify and summarise discussion
	Make it safe to share feelings
	Suggest ways of handling conflict
Decision making and voting	
Ensure decisions are taken and agreed	Suggest structures for decision making
Decide when to and conduct the vote	Look for and test areas of agreement

Ensure someone will carry out decisions	Ensure that responsibility for action is allocated
Rules	
Check that the meeting has been called in accordance with the rules	
Have a thorough knowledge of the rules	
Rules on points of order and procedure	
Outside the meeting	
Act on behalf of the organisation	
Pursue decisions made in meetings	
Represent the Council to outside bodies	

5. The Secretary

The Secretary is responsible for:

- The Agenda

- The Minutes of the meeting

- Answering all correspondence

- Writing any letters

- Circulating information to Members

- Public relations, dealing with the press, TV and radio (this could also be delegated to the Chair)

- Looking after visitors

- Arranging the venue for meetings

- Liaison with officials of the local authority

- Supporting the Chair and providing (or obtaining) legal and other specialist advice.

To be successful, a Community Council must have an energetic and conscientious Secretary prepared to put in the necessary time and effort. It is incumbent on all Members but especially the Chair to spread the Secretary's load by, for instance, delegating some of his or her responsibilities to others, either individually or to small sub-committees. It is bad policy to overload your Secretary - you might find difficulty getting volunteers! The duties may be allocated to more than one person.

It is essential that the Secretary has access to word-processing and photocopying facilities.

6. The Treasurer

The Treasurer is responsible for issuing all cheques and making payments on behalf of the Community Council and any charities and/or other funds dispersed by the Council.

The Treasurer must manage the bank account, account for all funds received, and ensure money is only spent in a manner approved by the Community Council Members as recorded in the minutes.

The Treasurer must maintain the Community Council's financial records so that they disclose, with reasonable accuracy at any time, the financial position of the Community Council.

All cheques issued should be signed by at least two persons authorised by the Community Council Members as recorded in the minutes, and notified to the bank in writing. As a general rule, Treasurers should avoid paying out money except by cheque. This makes accounting for expenditure much easier.

The Treasurer must keep proper accounts of all receipts and expenditure and prepare an Annual Statement of Accounts. While there is no requirement that an independent, external auditor be appointed, Councils may wish to consider the additional security and protection such an appointment carries with it.

The Statement must be formally approved at the next AGM, when the Treasurer must report and answer any questions raised by Members of the Council or the public. A copy so certified and approved should be sent to the local authority.

The standard form of words for the Treasurer's Certificate is:

"I certify that the above accounts have been prepared by me and accurately reflect the financial provisions relating to the period ….."

The Treasurer should also prepare simple budgets to advise Members prior to their committing funds.

7. Ways of Working

Broadly speaking, there are two ways of working open to any Community Council. It can choose to play a **reactive** role or it can choose to play a **proactive** role. These are discussed below.

The Reactive Role

Some Councils believe that their primary responsibility is to react efficiently to the problems and complaints that are brought to them by members of their community, and to correspondence coming in from outside bodies like the local authority. The view taken by these Councils may be summarised as follows:

"If it is brought before the Community Council, something will be done about it."

In such a Council, the agenda would be made up almost entirely of issues such as street lighting that needed repairing, grass that needed cutting, and documents sent by the local authority. Clearly these are issues of importance to the community, and therefore matters which need to be resolved. Working in this way, however, is reactive in the sense that individuals and organisations outside the Council set the agenda itself.

The Proactive Role

In contrast, some other Community Councils see it as their job, in addition to responding to issues such as those mentioned above, to facilitate particular courses of action or projects in the community. These might include seeking funding for new play-parks, taking a lead in Planning for Real exercises, or managing local amenities and facilities. In such a Council the approach will not be to wait for problems and issues to be brought before it. Rather, it would set out to identify the various issues that it thinks might affect the community, both in the short and longer term.

Having identified those issues as best it can, it would then proceed to set out some priorities for the community and the Council. This involves thinking what action(s) will bring most benefit for the community, and considering the role the Council might play in making things happen.

It also means taking a decision as to the overall direction in which the Council should move. For example, some Councils have identified the threat to their physical environment as the key issue for their community and have responded by developing a strategy which sets out a series of steps which they intend to take at local level to counter that threat. Other Councils have identified the improvement of community facilities as the key issue and have developed a strategy around that.

So what is involved in thinking and working strategically?

- **Examining what is going on inside and outside the community**

The first step is to take a careful look at the ways in which your community might be developed. Examine the needs that are apparent in the community and try to identify any particular **hopes and ambitions** that might be translated into reality. Then have a look at what is going on in the outside world. What are the major **opportunities or threats**? You might consider the likely impact of matters such as the availability of European or Lottery funding in this category. How

could your Council take full advantage of the opportunities available, or take action to minimise the impact of any "threats"?

- **Reviewing the options**

The next stage is to set out all of the possibilities, all of the things that the Council might get involved in to benefit the community. These are your **strategic options** and they need to be carefully considered before deciding which particular option(s) to pursue. Try to be clear about how much **time, energy and money** would have to be put in to the various options, and establish whether or not those could be justified in terms of the outcome that you would want to achieve.

- **Making strategic decisions**

Once you are satisfied that you have examined all of the options open to the Council it is possible to start taking **decisions** about which option(s) offer most benefit, or make most sense given the circumstances. Effectively this means choosing a **direction** for the Council to pursue. Direction is important for any organisation since it allows the people involved to share a **vision** of where they are going.

Once you have chosen the overall direction try to consult widely within your community. Find out whether people in general are behind you, and try to identify any particular **concerns** that they might have. By consulting early there is a greater likelihood that the community as a whole will be supportive of any action that the Council takes subsequently. It also helps to minimise the danger that the Council moves in a direction that alienates the community as a whole.

- **Setting the Objectives**

Once you are clear about what the overall **goal** is it is possible to set very specific **objectives**. For example, if your chosen goal is "*to improve the cleanliness of the area*" your objectives might be as follows:

- to make local people aware of the issues;

- to involve local schoolchildren in projects;

- to carry out specific clean-up projects.

- **Developing the Strategy**

When the objectives are clearly set out you can then consider the things that need to be done in order to achieve them. This requires you to think about which actions are likely to be the most effective in the particular circumstances of your Council.

Summary

Some Councils take the view that it is their primary responsibility to respond to matters that are brought to them either by their community or by other external bodies. Others take the view that their role extends beyond that of being a purely reactive body to that of being an **initiator** of plans and activities for the community as a whole.

Thinking and acting strategically involves:

- taking a proactive approach to community matters;

- examining the needs and aspirations of the community and the factors in the outside world which affect (or may affect in the future) the community;

- considering the options carefully;

- selecting a particular direction in which to move;

- setting clear objectives to get you to your chosen goal; and

- developing a plan of action as to how those objectives will be met.

8. Meetings

For all Annual General, Special and Regular meetings an Agenda must be published by the Secretary well in advance (good practice suggests at least one week) so that everyone present knows what is to be discussed and can be prepared in advance.

Format

A standard format for Agendas might be:

Meeting of the ABC Community Council at ....pm
on ....day, ... month of 20...
In the XYZ
AGENDA

1	Apologies
2	Minutes of Last Meeting
3	Matters Arising
4	Correspondence
5	Treasurer's Report
6	Reports
	Local Councillor(s)
	Police
	A N Other(s)
7	Planning Issues
8	Any Special Item
9	Any Other Business
10	Time and Place of Next Meeting

- **Apologies**

The apology of any Member who is unable to attend is recorded for the minutes. This is important as some Constitutions automatically bar Members who fail to attend regularly and/or miss a specified number of consecutive meetings without good reason. In cases of genuine hardship, i.e. illness, the meeting can overrule such a provision. Alternatively, the meeting may agree to enforce the ruling, debar the Member and maybe co-opt a substitute.

It is also important to record who was present, so that it will be known in the future, the Members who put their names to any particular motion. A Member present who strongly disagrees with a motion adopted by the Council on a majority vote can ask that his/her opposition be formally recorded in the minutes.

In the extreme, whether or not a Member opposed a motion can have legal implications.

- **Minutes**

It is a requirement of all Constitutions that formal minutes be kept. This is the responsibility of the Secretary but the Council may agree to appoint from within itself or engage for payment or otherwise, a Minute Secretary. This frees the Secretary to take a more active part in the discussions. The Minutes to be approved should be circulated to all Members, and to those whom you wish to confirm the accuracy of the Minute.

At this point in the meeting the minutes of the previous meeting are formally approved. The Chair should ask whether everyone is in agreement that they are a true record of the meeting concerned. If any Member wishes to query any point this is the time to do it. Once the minutes are formally adopted they can not be changed. Any suggested amendments are discussed and, if agreed, a suitable alteration adopted. It must be stressed that only the record of the previous Minute can be discussed and agreed at this stage. Discussions on the merits of any previously recorded decision should not be opened up at this point in the proceedings. It is incumbent upon the Chair to rule accordingly. A Member now proposes the formal adoption of the minutes subject to any agreed amendment. Many Councils require there be a seconder also. If there are still objections the matter is put to the vote, otherwise the minutes are adopted unanimously. This is recorded in the minutes of the current meeting. As in any other disagreement, a Member whose views are not accepted and rejected on a vote can request that his/her objection(s) be recorded in the minutes.

- **Matters Arising**

By going through the minutes of the previous meeting, just approved, item by item, much time is saved by avoiding rehashing old arguments and avoiding the necessity for each item to be listed on the agenda. This procedure ensures nothing is forgotten and that actions promised at the previous meeting have, in fact, been carried out. As all discussion is recorded in the current minutes, items completed drop out, items still ongoing remain to automatically come up at the next meeting. Any correspondence received relative to matters being discussed is best read out by the Secretary at the appropriate point.

- **Formal Motion**

A formal motion is a motion, the wording of which is agreed precisely and recorded in the minutes. It can be passed unanimously, or be subject to a vote. In the case of AGMs and EGMs, the wording of the proposed motion is usually (often by the Constitution must be) set out on the agenda calling the meeting.

The results of any vote must be detailed in the minutes and, if they so request, the names of those opposing the motion listed.

- **Correspondence**

During correspondence any letters (faxes and telephone calls) received since the first meeting on new topics are read out by the Secretary and any necessary action by your Community Council decided. To save time, long, complicated and/or routine items, e.g. your local authority minutes, are not normally read out but referred to and circulated to Members later.

- **Treasurers Report**

The Treasurer can report on the financial situation of the Council, on any monies and expenditure and consider other budgetary related matters

- **Reports**

So far the meeting has involved only the Members (and co-opted Members) unless the Chair invited comment on any particular item from others presented. Reports is the point in the

meeting when regular attendees such as the local Police, local Councillor(s), representatives of local bodies such as the Chamber of Trade, etc, are asked to give a brief report to the Council. This is the point at which the Community Council learns what others are doing and in the subsequent discussion can advise on what not only the Community Council but the local community think. Some reports will be regular, i.e. to every meeting, others occasional.

- **Planning Issues**

Planning is often a key concern of Community Councils and to the public in their areas. Many Councils have a regular slot on their Agenda to deal with planning matters. These can range from considering planning applications and how they should respond to these to dealing with developing Local Plans or considering responses to other forms of consultation. Some Council's have established sub-committees or working groups to deal with planning issues given the timescales involved and the degree of scrutiny often required.

To ensure transparency and openness, it is suggested that the process of how planning applications will be considered by the Community Council, should be formally recorded or incorporated into the Council's constitution. A suggested form of wording (which can be amended as appropriate) would be:

The Community Council shall consider all applications for planning permission that come before it and shall record in the Minutes of the meeting the view of the Community Council in regard to the application. If for any reason, a response is required in advance of consideration by the full Council, the matter shall be delegated to the Secretary in consultation with the Chair to frame an appropriate response which shall be submitted to the next meeting of the Council for homologation.

The Minutes of the Community Council should also detail the decision of the Community Council and where appropriate, the matters to be contained in any correspondence, in relation to specific planning applications. Where decisions are delegated to a sub-committee then these should be reported at the next Community Council meeting for homologation and noting in the record. Similar procedures should be followed in regard to commenting upon Local Development Plans or other strategic planning documents

In making representations, Councils may offer views based, on the one hand on facts or evidence or, on the other, based upon more general expressions of community concern or support for any proposal. Both are equally valid but care should be taken to ensure that whatever type of view is expressed, that it can be properly supported, given that views may be challenged through either the planning or legal processes.

Issues in regard to Declarations of Interest can often come into play when considering planning matters. Further advice on this is contained in section 3 of the handbook.

- **Special Items**

When there is an item of special interest it should be given its own spot on the agenda. It may be a presentation by a visiting speaker - in which case the Chair may advance the item to the start of the meeting so the visitor does not have to sit through the routine business. This is not only common courtesy but particularly important if the speaker has far to travel, enabling him/her to get away as early as possible.

- **A O B**

Any Other Business gives Members the chance to raise issues and, in particular, matters brought to them by the public. Normally, the Chair will move round the table giving each Member the chance to raise topics in turn.

- **Time and Place of Next Meeting**

It is important where possible that everyone present knows, or is reminded of, the time and place of the next meeting before the meeting breaks up, even if there is an existing published timetable of meetings.

AGMs and Extraordinary Meetings

Most Constitutions rule on the notice required and the matters that can be considered at Annual General and Extraordinary General Meetings.

The procedure for elections will be as detailed in the Constitution. Normally the outgoing Chair will have the Chair until the new Chair is elected unless he be a candidate in which case the senior Member not a candidate will preside. On election the new Chair takes the Chair for the rest of the meeting. Under some circumstances meetings are more efficiently conducted on the basis that the outgoing Chair fully concludes the meeting before handing over.

If a Member or co-opted Member is to be elected, the Constitution may rule that any person on the local Electoral Roll present at the meeting can vote. This is the only exception to the rule that Members eligible to vote alone may vote.

Normally, no other matters may be raised at the AGM, and in all cases no matter not printed on the official agenda, which agenda must be published the prescribed number of days before the meeting as detailed in the Constitution.

For convenience, the Secretary should circulate the Minutes of AGMs immediately after the meeting, as well as 12 months later

A typical AGM agenda will be:

The Annual General Meeting of the ABC Community Council
at ....pm on ....day ....month of 20....
in the XYZ
AGENDA
1. Apologies
2. Minutes of Last Meeting
3. Chair's Report
4. Treasurer's Report
and where election(s) are to be held, one or more of the following:
5. Election of Chair
6. Election of Vice Chair
7. Election of Treasurer
8. Election of Secretary
9. Time and Place of the Next Regular Meeting

The agenda for **Extraordinary General Meetings** must be restricted to only those items raised in the motion calling for the meeting. No other matters must be discussed. Any special resolutions should be passed or rejected as printed on the agenda. Any alteration should only be with the consent of those present and then only if the Constitution allows for the printed resolution to be amended.

A typical agenda would be:

Extraordinary Meeting of the ABC Community Council
at ....pm, on ....day, ... month of 19...
in the XYZ
to consider the Special Resolution as detailed below
AGENDA
1. Apologies
2. Special Resolution

Voting will be as allowed by the Constitution, but generally all registered electors present may vote.

Minutes will be taken of the meeting and considered at the next regular meeting.

9.   Minutes

Minutes in a standardised format must be taken of all regular meetings, AGMs and EGMs. They must record the date of meeting, time and location, those present, apologies received, who was in the Chair, all elections, appointments, votes, agreed expenditure, topics discussed and agreed actions. (Except in the case of formal motions) they are not required to record every word said, rather they must summarise the views of Members and record conclusions.

Good minute taking is a skill, so that neither too little nor too much detail is included.

As the permanent record of the Community Council's business, they are a very important document with both historical and legal implications.

Responsibility for the minutes rests with the Secretary, though a Minute Secretary may be employed for convenience.

The format of the minutes follows closely that detailed for the agenda with subheadings corresponding to agenda items and each topic discussed.

Copies of the Approved minutes should be circulated to Members, the local authority, local library and to the local community via copies placed on notice boards or, for example, deposited in local Post Offices.

Minutes of all meetings must be retained for future reference and passed on to each new Secretary for safekeeping.

Minutes, agendas and accounts should be kept in perpetuity. Other material should perhaps be held for at least 5 years. However some material may have historic importance in the future and Community Councils may wish to discuss this either with the city archivists who look after Aberdeenshire Council's records, the Library Service or a local Heritage Society before anything is disposed of.

10. Working effectively in meetings

Meetings are of crucial importance to the work of Community Councils. It is at meetings that opinions, ideas, feelings, good intentions etc get translated into hard decisions, and it is those decisions that will ultimately be translated into practical action in your community. If you really want to influence what is going on in your community then it is vital that you learn to participate **effectively** in the work of your Council's meetings.

It is perfectly normal that, in any meeting, the individuals present will have different, sometimes opposing, views. For this reason it is important that meetings are chaired effectively so that there is a **balance** between hearing what everyone has to say on a subject and getting through all the items of the agenda.

If there is something of major significance that you want to raise at a meeting make sure that you tell the Secretary **in advance** so that it can be included as an item on the agenda. This means that the person in the chair can try to ensure that sufficient time is made available to discuss your item. If you do put an item on the agenda be prepared to give a short presentation to the meeting setting out:

- the background to the situation (no more than is necessary);

- what you think the central issue is;

- what you think ought to be done about it.

Be prepared to **listen** to other people's ideas on the matter; they may have information on the subject that you don't, or they may come up with ideas that offer a better solution than yours. Remember that the key thing for a good Community Councillor is to make things happen in the community. Point scoring at meetings is a distraction that everyone can do without!

Sometimes you may be asked to participate in a **working group** in order to research some points for the next meeting of the Community Council. Working groups can play an important part in clarifying issues so that decision making is easier at future meetings. Although working groups may involve some extra time commitment you should try as far as possible to get involved so that the work of your Council is spread evenly and you get a deeper insight into what is going on at Council meetings.

A formal record of what was agreed at meetings is kept in the form of minutes. Make sure that you agree with what appears in the Minutes as these will usually determine exactly what action is to be taken.

As a general rule, it is much easier to get your way by working and co-operating, rather than by confrontation. This is equally true whether in meetings, in dealings with other Members or in correspondence, e.g. when writing to officials of the local authority.

Community Councils that make a positive contribution command respect. Local authority Councillors and officials value their opinions and consult them before any proposals affecting their community

11. Using Time Effectively

For many people, participating in the work of Community Councils involves the **sacrifice** of valuable leisure time. On the one hand they want to be active in the affairs of their community, on the other hand they want to ensure that there is the minimum intrusion into their free time.

In order to achieve this it is necessary to take a fairly disciplined approach to the use of time. This is particularly important when it comes to meetings. Perhaps the single most damaging thing for any Community Council is unproductive meetings where the discussion is not focused on issues of importance to the community and where those doing the talking are more interested in their **personal agenda** than the agenda of the Council.

For those less used to public speaking or debating, it is sometimes useful to write down in brief on a piece of paper or card the particular points which you intend to raise. This helps to concentrate thoughts and expedite discussion.

Establishing Priorities

Another problem that some Councils have acknowledged is that they find it very difficult to deal with matters that are not practical issues such as "grass cutting" or "potholes in the road". While these issues are an important part of the work of a Community Council it should never be forgotten that there are other matters, which may be less tangible in the short term, but which may nevertheless have a major impact on the community for some time to come. These may include, for example:

- Changing economic conditions

- Demographic changes in the community

- Long-term development proposals

It is important that placing too much emphasis on "nuts and bolts" issues does not overlook matters like this of strategic importance to your community.

The way to overcome this problem is to think in terms of priorities and to encourage other Members of the Council to think likewise. Try to be clear about which issues are most important for your community and to allocate most time to them. This may mean choosing between the short-term things like "potholes in roads" and the longer-term matters such as the reorganisation of local government. Remember always that important issues are important and should not be set aside simply because there is another issue that appears on the surface to be more urgent.

One way to get through complex issues that are important and long term is to break them down into chunks and deal with them one by one over a series of meetings. Another approach would be to split up the task and allocate responsibility for bits of the task to different individuals or groups in the Council. Some Councils have adopted "watching briefs" whereby individual Members with specific skills, knowledge or experience, are given the role of "watching out" for issues in that particular area of interest. This would also help in dealing with the wide range of consultation documents that Community Councils are asked to respond to. A " Planning Convener" or sub-committee is often appointed to ensure that timely responses to applications are made

The Community Council may also be asked to participate in meetings of other bodies such as the Community Council Forum, Rural Partnership or local Community Safety Group. You may wish to appoint representatives to these bodies to ensure that your voice is heard. A reserve is also useful to ensure continuity of attendance.

12. Report Writing

If there is a particular issue about which you feel strongly, or about which you happen to know quite a lot, you may want to write up a short report so that your fellow Councillors can make themselves familiar with the information before or after a meeting.

Some people find the thought of writing a report quite frightening. In actual fact, writing a report is very simple if you approach it in the right way. The stages of report writing are set out below:

Stage 1 - Planning the Report

The first thing to do is to write down on a piece of paper why you are writing the report. You should try to become clear about what it is that you are trying to achieve by writing a report. Are you merely trying to inform your fellow Councillors about something or are you trying to influence them to take a particular decision on an issue?

Once you are clear about what it is that you want to achieve it is much easier to decide how to set about the task. Remember, very few people want to read reports just for the sake of it!

The next thing to do is to decide what information you will need to include in order to achieve your objective. The golden rule here is to make sure that you include no more information than is absolutely necessary. You can always supply additional information if anyone asks for it!

Stage 2 - Preparing the Report

Having decided what you want to include you will then have to gather your information. This might involve taking statements from people, or doing some research of records. The important thing here is to try to make sure that your information is accurate and balanced. People are seldom fooled by a one-sided report. And remember the following points:

- Don't put in too many statistics as people generally find statistics hard to swallow.

- Keep your sentences short and try to avoid using long words and formal language that you would not normally use.

- Start with an introduction that explains in a nutshell what the report is about.

- Go on to develop your ideas in the main body of the report then do a short summary of your case.

- Finish off with a conclusion that sets out clearly what it is that you are recommending the Council to do about the matter.

Aberdeenshire Council encourages its officers to follow a particular style in preparing reports. The template below may be useful for Community Council members.

REPORT TO XX COMMUNITY COUNCIL

SUBJECT

1.0   Purpose of Report
           Why the report has been prepared

2.0   Background
           Past history of the subject matter, previous decisions by Community Council etc

3.0   Proposals
           What you are proposing or to be recommending

4.0   Discussion
           Discuss the issues surrounding the report, how and why you have come to the
           conclusions reached and what has led you to a particular conclusion or recommendation

5.0   Consultations
           Which bodies agencies groups or individuals you have spoken to about your proposals
           and whether or not they are supportive.

6.0   Financial Implications
           Describe the financial implications of the report and how they will be met. Distinguish
           between one-off capital costs and on-going revenue costs.

7.0   Other Implications
           Does the project have any staffing or equal opportunities implications, is it sustainable in
           the longer term, how will it be managed.

8.0   Recommendations
           List each of your recommendations in turn, highlighting specific matters requiring
           decision by the Council.

This report by
Date:

13. Dealing with the Press

As a Community Councillor, someone may approach you at some time from the press who is looking for a story. Alternatively there may come a time when, for whatever reason, you decide that you want to take information to the press. In either case it is important that you recognise how the press operates so that you can gain maximum benefit and avoid some of the common pitfalls.

Generally speaking the press has two major priorities:

- to get "copy", that is to say, material to fill up newspaper columns;

- to get good "stories", that is to say, articles that have a **human-interest value** and which have the effect of lightening up the contents of the newspaper.

When you are dealing with someone from the press it is likely that they will make a quick assessment as to which category your information falls into, and this assessment is likely to be important in determining what actually happens to the information that you pass over. By giving your information a "human interest" dimension it may be possible to get much fuller coverage than would be possible otherwise.

For example, if you wanted to publicise a gala in your community you might simply pass details of the event over to a local paper. Alternatively, you might write a short article on the person who is organising the event and the particular problems that have been encountered on the way. If you choose the first option it is likely that the information will be tucked away in a corner of the paper where not many people will notice it, whereas if you choose the second option you may find that a fairly lengthy article appears with a photograph alongside.

The primary concern of the press is to sell newspapers and that means providing news and information that people will want to read. So try to make sure that you are providing material that will **interest** people as well as simply **inform** them.

Perhaps the best way to interest the press is to issue a formal "Press Release", which at its most effective is probably a half to three-quarters page of A4. It can be issued to both local and regional newspapers and on occasion may interest national papers such as The Scotsman, The Herald or Sunday Post. Don't forget local radio and television stations.

You should also keep in mind that journalists have the power to edit news items. In practice this means they can put an emphasis on particular words or events that you may not have intended and in this way the message that you were trying to convey may end up getting distorted. The solution is to try to ensure that you choose your words carefully, knowing that anything you say could end up as a headline. It is not difficult to make the headlines in a local paper, but it is sometimes difficult to live with the headlines that you make!

Try to remember also the **constraints** that local newspapers work under. They have tight **deadlines** to meet so make sure that you submit your copy in plenty of time. They also appreciate information and articles that can be printed without a lot of cutting and reorganising so try to make sure that the information you provide is to the point.

Handling Press Interviews

When a journalist is actually interviewing you it is necessary to be particularly careful about what you say. It is easy to be caught off guard and to say something that you didn't really mean. Be very wary about **off the record comments** because these may end up being attributed to you.

The best approach is to think out what you want to say before the interview starts. If that means taking a few minutes to **prepare** your thoughts, do so. Try to be clear about what sort of message you want to convey, and make sure that it doesn't get lost during the interview (what happens to that message later on is in the hands of the journalist!). If you are unclear, ask them to call back later, and do your research e.g. by checking with the Chair or Secretary before you commit yourself to comment.

Beware too that spreading erroneous or inaccurate information or indulging in abusive criticism of other parties, can not only devalue what may have been a reasonable case, but could also invoke legal action for defamation

Keeping People Informed

It is worth remembering that, for most people in your community, the only **regular** information about the work of the Community Council that they have access to is what they read in the press. For this reason, it is a good idea that Community Councils make every effort to pass good quality information to the local press on a regular basis. The more informed members of the community are about local issues the greater the likelihood that they will want to get involved in what's going on. This may require providing information in other formats e.g. audio tapes, large print, Braille and in other languages

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Quick Do's and Don'ts

Buy time – don't respond off the cuff. A casual comment can be taken out of context. Prepare what you want to say – write it down if you want and then ring back. You will be asked for an immediate response and told about tight deadlines but be firm and take a few minutes to think about your response.

Don't use an item of information as fact unless you're certain of it.

Don't speculate. Your conjecture will end up as somebody else's hard fact.

Don't hinder or obstruct. The media are there to do a job and it is better to form a good relationship with them and give them the information you feel you can give. In emergency situations the media – particularly broadcast media – can be very useful in informing the public quickly of developing situations.

Don't say *No Comment. No comment* is a negative remark, and is seen as confirmation that you have something to hide.

Do explain where media questions can be answered if you yourself cannot help.

Do remember that your attitude to the media and what you say reflects on everyone else involved.

Writing a Press Release

Headed Paper

To all News Editors (add and Picture Editors if there is a photo opportunity).
For Immediate Release/Embargo – Day of Week, Date, Time.

Short Heading Like This

Make these first few words count. Write short sentences.

Keep the second paragraph short and succinct, but directly describing the subject.

Then communicate the broader story of why the subject matters, and where the future of it lies or perhaps the reasoning behind it.

Where possible include a quote from the relevant person.
Use full name and job title: Jimmy Brown, Community Council Secretary or Mary Brown, chair of XX Community Council. This is preferable to the anonymous spokesperson.

A good press release should answer the questions who, what, why, where and when.

It is difficult to stipulate an exact length of press release – but try to keep it to one page. Some topics will demand more space than others. But as a rule keep the press release short and concise. If you need to include background information do this on a separate sheet- perhaps a series of bullet points headed

Notes for News Editors.

Further information from:

Your first name and surname
Your title
Tel No

- If you need more information contact: *name and telephone*

14. Dealing With Conflict

Working in a Community Council may not, at first sight, appear to have much to do with "politics", indeed virtually all Councils will act as **non-political bodies** in the party political sense. However, it has to be recognised that the work of Community Councils concerns the exercise of power, albeit at a very local level. For example, there is the power to:

- get things done in the community;

- take on the other tiers of government;

- raise funds to support particular projects;

- allocate resources within the community, and so on.

Wherever power is exercised there is always the possibility of conflict developing. This may be because individuals and organisations find themselves competing for access to the resources in the community. Or it may be simply that individuals or organisations wish to demonstrate their ability to wield power and influence in the community.

But whatever the reason, conflict can break out from time to time even in the most peaceful of communities. When it does it is important to know how to deal with it effectively so that major rifts do not develop in the community.

Because community harmony is so important Community Councils need to ensure that, as far as possible, they exercise their power in a **fair and reasonable** manner. They should also try to ensure that they work in a **tactful and diplomatic** manner, liasing and consulting with individuals and other organisations in the community wherever possible.

Conflict Within Councils

It also has to be recognised that conflict can break out within Community Councils, just as in any other part of the community. It may be that conflicts are imported into the context of the Council from outside, or it may be that conflict breaks out because of a particular issue that is on the agenda. In any case it is useful to think about dealing with such conflict before you actually find yourself in the situation. This gives you a chance to work out a strategy before you get caught up in the emotion of the event.

Personality Clashes

Conflict which relates to a clash of personality is perhaps the most difficult to deal with because the actual issue over which the clash takes place may simply provide an opportunity for the combatants to demonstrate their strongly opposing views. Where this is the case they may be less concerned with reaching agreement or getting through the Council's agenda than with addressing their own personal agenda.

Such personality clashes can make other Councillors feel uncomfortable, and can prove damaging in the long term to the work of the Council. In this situation it is worthwhile remembering that it is not usually possible to change a person's personality. What can be changed, however, is their behaviour, that is, what they actually do.

If there are certain things which someone is doing that cause conflict in the group, rudely interrupting other people for example, or monopolising the discussion, it may be possible to find a way of persuading that person to change his or her behaviour. This can sometimes be achieved by the use of good-natured humour, aimed at making the person aware of the behaviour that other people find offensive. At other times it may be necessary to try to persuade the Chair to intervene more forcefully so as to prevent that behaviour leading to conflict.

In any case it is generally a good idea for Councillors to talk about how they feel about "difficult" behaviour, otherwise there is a danger that communication will break down and conflict will emerge eventually in an even more damaging form.

Conflict over Community Issues

Another form of conflict that you might come across in meetings relates to the particular community issues on the agenda, rather than to more general clashes of personality. From time to time issues will arise that some Councillors feel particularly strongly about. This may be because of their personal beliefs or values, or it may be because they are representing the strong views that are held in sections of the community.

If you do find yourself in this sort of conflict it is important to show that, even if you don't see things the same way as the other person(s), you do recognise that they feel strongly about the issue, and you understand what their concern is. You should then explain your feelings on the matter, being firm but friendly, trying wherever possible to find concerns that you share with them. Then move on to the areas where you differ and try to use **their** ideas as a base on which to build a solution that is acceptable to all concerned.

For example:
"I understand your concern about X and think that it's something that we ought to do something about. However, I would want to approach the problem from a different angle because I think that Y is important too. Why don't we do Z, which will meet your concerns about X and my concerns about Y?"

In this way it is possible to demonstrate to other people that you are able to **listen** to other people's ideas as well as presenting your own. By demonstrating your ability to listen you will also increase the likelihood that other people will listen to you.

In all types of conflict a Councillor arriving at the meeting "all fired up" about a particular issue is unlikely to act constructively or agree compromise. A wise Chair will, as early as possible, allow both sides ample time to state their case and then try to engineer a compromise.

Planning issues can often arouse considerable feelings, conflict and are potentially divisive. It is important that all sides are given the opportunity to make their views known and the role of the Chair can be crucial in managing a difficult situation. Depending on the circumstances, it may be useful to hear representations from prospective developers and from those that are either supporting or objecting to development proposals. It is important that equal opportunity is given to all sides and in these circumstances, time limiting contributions may be appropriate.

15.   Looking for Funds

Like other voluntary organisations, Community Councils are able to raise funds in order to carry out their work in the community. Often this involves the organisation of fund raising events, but another option that is often open to Community Councils is to apply for grant funding from one of a very wide range of sources.

The quality of the application for grant funding can often be critical to its success or failure. Very often the grant aiding bodies will not have any opportunity to meet with those who are making the application and so their sole source of information about the proposal may be what is contained in the original application. For this reason it is important that the information provided is appropriate and, if possible, persuasive.

Preparing the Application

Many grant-aiding bodies have special application forms that have to be completed. Where this is not the case you should try to state your case in about two sides of A4 paper, with any supplementary documents attached.

Begin with a brief summary of who you are, what the project is and how much money you want. You could also give a brief introduction to your community, emphasising any particular constraints that there are such as remoteness or high unemployment. (You might want to attach a map showing your area and location.)

Provide information about your organisation:

- its title, address, telephone contact and number;

- how it is organised, constitution, membership etc;

- its financial situation, including information about any other, or previous, sources of grant funding;

- its overall objectives and its past achievements.

Give a clear account of what you will do with the money if your application is successful, and what you hope to achieve by spending it. Explain what your working methods will be and indicate how you will plan and control your budget.

Refer to the need that exists for the project and how there is a gap in provision from other sources, so that you are not seen to be duplicating existing services. (You might include any supporting evidence that is available, newspaper articles, statistics etc.)

Explain why your organisation is best placed to carry out the project and, if possible, show that you have consulted with other organisations and have their support. (If you are co-operating with other agencies then say so.)

Some Other Tips

Try to make informal enquiries first to establish whether funds are still available, and if so what the criteria are for awarding them.

Remember that you will be competing with other organisations and other projects so try to convey the importance of the project and emphasise its value for money. Above all, try to fire the imagination of the person(s) who will be assessing the application.

Appearance is always important in these decisions so try to make sure that your application is typed up neatly and well presented.

If possible get someone who has had no contact with the project to look at your application before you submit it. They may be able to spot jargon, inconsistencies or ambiguities.

Don't be tempted to underestimate your costs. You may find that you are subsequently unable to finish the project or that you have to skimp over important matters in ways that affect the overall success of the project.

Aberdeenshire Council provides an annual administration grant to Community Councils and provides for membership of the Association of Scottish Community Councils and insurance cover. Other grants may be available and the local Area Manager is a useful first point of contact if you are looking to raise money for projects or activities.

16. Aberdeenshire Councillors

Aberdeenshire Councillors provide an important link between Community Councils and Aberdeenshire Council. All Aberdeenshire Councillors are ex officio members of their local Community Councils and attend meetings on a regular basis. This allows them to gauge community opinion on a wide range of matters as well as helping Community Councils realise local projects and aspirations and liasing with Council services to resolve issues such as broken drains, potholes etc.

Building a good working relationship between Community Council and Councillor is obviously important, if all are to gain from the expertise, experience and knowledge which each can bring to the table.

It is important to say, however, that at the end of the day, while your Councillor will take cognisance of the views of the Community Council, they cannot be bound by them and require to take all factors into consideration in reaching decisions.

Equally Aberdeenshire Councillors will be aware that they are ex-officio members of the Community Council and will take care to distinguish between that role and their role as an elected Councillor for Aberdeenshire.

While their role as an Aberdeenshire Councillor may include attempting to persuade fellow Councillors to commit to a particular course of action and will certainly involve them in direct participation in the decision making process, their role as an ex-officio member of the Community Council is to observe proceedings and offer advice and guidance and the benefit of their local knowledge and experience, but does not include them in being involved in the decision-making process which is rightly the responsibility of the other members of the Community Council.

That they will bear in mind that many matters that come before Community Councils for discussion will at a later stage come before the Aberdeenshire Council for a decision, and any indication of their views on that matter may in some circumstances preclude them from participating in future consideration of the matter by Aberdeenshire Council.

It follows from the above that Community Councils should not seek the view of their Aberdeenshire Councillor on how they might vote on a particular issue when it comes before the Aberdeenshire Council.

A protocol has been established in regard to the resolution of disputes between Community Councils and Aberdeenshire Councillors which cannot be settled between those concerned.

While it is always preferable that any matters are resolved between the parties concerned, there may be occasions where this does not happen and a more formal process is required.

As a first step, either party can invite the local Area Manager to convene a meeting and seek to resolve the matter; as a second step, a meeting is convened involving all parties and chaired by the Area Committee Chair, and supported by the Area Manager and the local representative of the Association of Scottish Community Council or the Chair of the newly-established Community Council Co-ordinating Group.

Should matters remain unresolved then parties would have recourse to the more formal avenues open to them. However, given that all parties are working to the same objective then it is hoped that this will not be a regular or frequent occurrence.

The Community Planning Framework and the role of Community Councils

Introduction

The Council has a number of plans which link together to ensure the achievement of the Council's aims and objectives. All Council plans are set in the context of the **Aberdeenshire Community Plan** which brings together local public sector, voluntary sector and community partners to share a strategic vision for Aberdeenshire. The following information provides a broad overview of community planning in Aberdeenshire.

Aberdeenshire Community Planning Partnership (CPP)

Community planning is a way of working. It can best be described as:
- Making sure people and communities are genuinely engaged in the decisions made on public services which affect them;
- A commitment from organisations to work together, not apart, in providing better public services

The Local Government Act (2003) places a statutory duty on Local Authorities to lead Community Planning Partnerships in their area and for the NHS, Scottish Enterprise and Police and Fire Boards to engage with the process. A key part of this duty is to ensure effective engagement of local communities in planning local services.

At the time of writing, there are twelve community planning partner organisations involved in the partnership, with the Council as lead partner. Since 2006, Aberdeenshire Community Councils have been one of these partners with a representative at Board, Executive and Local Community Planning Group levels.

"Working with Communities" – Aberdeenshire Community Plan 2011-15

The Aberdeenshire Community Plan sets the agreed strategic vision of "working together for the best quality of life for everyone in Aberdeenshire". The most recent edition was published in 2011.
The vision is pursued through the major themes: community well being, jobs and the economy, lifelong learning and a sustainable environment. The partners have agreed that six principles will underpin all their work: inclusion, accountability, evidence-based, sustainability, efficiency and partnership.

Single Outcome Agreement (SOA)

The SOA is an agreement between the Community Planning Partnership and the Scottish Government. The CPP identifies the priorities for Aberdeenshire, the outcomes that it wants to deliver in partnership for Aberdeenshire communities, and the performance indicators that will measure progress.

The Single Outcome Agreement now forms part of the Aberdeenshire Community Plan.

Local Community Planning Groups
There are six Local Community Planning Groups (LCPGs), one in each of the Council's administrative areas. Local representatives of community planning partners, and other relevant representatives from that area are members of these groups. Community Councils have a significant role to play in local community planning. There is a place for a community council representative on each LCPG. The LCPG aims to communicate well with all community councils in its area, in many cases through the establishment of Ward Forums. Each LCPG is supported by a local Community Planning Officer.

Local Community Plans

Each LCPG produces a Local Community Plan for its area. These replace the previously existing Council Area Plans, and incorporate actions to be delivered in partnership which benefit local communities. Local Community Plans are developed through engagement with local communities - community councils have a key role to play here – and in consultation with local councillors on the Area Committee.

Further Information on Community Planning

The Our Aberdeenshire community planning website (www.ouraberdeenshire.org.uk) provides a one-stop source of information on community planning in Aberdeenshire.

For information regarding the Board and Executive levels of the Community Planning Partnership, please contact the Corporate Policy Officer (Community Planning) on 01224 664308 or communityplanning@ouraberdeenshire.org.uk

For information regarding LCPGs or Local Community Plans, please contact the relevant local Community Planning Officer, by using the email above or by phone as follows:

- Banff & Buchan – 01261 813200
- Buchan – 01779 483242
- Formartine – 01358 726406
- Garioch – 01467 628338
- Kincardine & Mearns – 01569 768327
- Marr – 01975 564804

Council Plan

The Council Plan identifies how the council aims to achieve its goal to make Aberdeenshire the best area and the best council in Scotland. The purpose of the plan is to set out the council's vision, core objectives and key priorities so that they are clear to Aberdeenshire communities, council employees, and to other public sector organisations, voluntary organisations and businesses. The plan provides a strategic framework for the council's service delivery across a three year period and is reviewed and refreshed annually. Highlighting the council's three main priorities of growing Aberdeenshire's economy, managing demographic change and ensuring early intervention, the plan also reflects the shared priorities that have been identified in the Aberdeenshire Community Plan 2011-2015 supported by the Single Outcome Agreement.

Service Plans

The council delivers all of its services to the public through the different Services into which it is structured. In addition to the Chief Executive's Service which includes the Area Managers, the frontline Services are: Education, Learning and Leisure, Housing and Social Work and Infrastructure Services. Supporting frontline services is Corporate Services which ensures the legal and financial probity of all council activities and is responsible for managing the reputation of the council and providing the tools for delivering a safe, healthy and motivated workforce to contribute to the council's vision to be the best.

Each Service Plan sets out how the Service will contribute to the achievement of the council's priorities through delivery of key objectives. Service plans identify the opportunities and challenges for the service and how the delivery of the key objectives will be resourced and managed. Service plans are developed for a three year period and reviewed annually. Services regularly report on how well they are delivering on the key objectives set out in their plans.

Copies of the Council Plan, Service Plans and regular performance monitoring reports can be accessed on the council's website:

www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/performance

18. Insurance for Community Councils

As a public body, each Community Council is responsible for ensuring that an appropriate level of insurance covers its activities. To assist in this a standard cover has been arranged for all Community Councils by Aberdeenshire Council. The premiums for this are paid directly to the insurers.

This part of the Handbook sets out brief insurance information and notes on the insurance policy arranged by the Council on behalf of Community Councils.

Insurance cover is in respect of appropriate Community Council activities. Information on this is set out below and it is for each Community Council to consider whether or not all of its activities are fully covered. Queries regarding the Insurance Cover available to Community Councils should always initially be made through the Aberdeenshire Council contacts listed below (or through the local Area Manager).

It is also important to note that this insurance cover is applicable to Community Councils only and does not extend to cover affiliated bodies (i.e. Community Associations, etc). These bodies must arrange their own insurance cover in respect of their activities.

Examples of Community Council activities covered under the Public Liability Section of the Insurance Policy.

Where any doubt exists as to whether cover is provided automatically under the policy this should be referred to the Insurers via the Aberdeenshire Council contacts for clarification.

If an extension is required to the policy to cover any particular activity / event an addition premium will be charged by the Insurers and this will be recoverable from the Community Council concerned. Premiums may vary dependent on the type of activity / event being insured.

Events / Activities insured as standard :-

i)   All administration and community meetings held by the Community Council in respect of their role as outlined within the handbook.
ii)   Local community projects in respect of enhancing the appearance and image of the community (i.e. floral displays, hanging baskets, tubs, etc).
iii)   Community "tidy up" campaigns and projects where appropriate Heath & Safety measures have been implemented in respect of clothing, tools and containers, etc.
iv)   Routine management and cleaning responsibilities for Public Conveniences, which have been allocated to Community Council in order to prevent closure or other appropriate reasons. It is anticipated that cleaning operations will be carried out by either members of the Community Council or volunteers acting with their approval and on their behalf.
v)   Liability issues in respect of the erection and display of festive lights and decorations within the community. Material damage in respect of the lights / displays is not covered under Public Liability and if required, this needs notification of addition to the policy under "material damage – all risks".
vi)   Fund-raising events – community council fund-raising events where the attendance is not expected to exceed 250 and will not involve any hazardous activities. These events must be organised, run and supervised by the Community Council.

Events / Activities requiring additional clarification, notification and insurance:-

i)   An activity not covered within the handbook or referred to or similar to those within the previous acceptable list of activities.
ii)   Any event being organised by the Community Council which may involve hazardous activities.

iii)   Any event which will exceed a maximum of two days activities / cover.

iv)   Events which will have an attendance in excess of 250.

v)   Firework displays which will also include bonfires and / or additional activities.

It is imperative when holding an event that all Authorities (i.e. Police, Fire Brigade, etc) are advised accordingly.

Events / Activities which are not acceptable /covered under the standard cover provided by the Insurers require notification to the Council's Insurance Section prior to the event / activity taking place and with sufficient time for any additional insurance cover to be investigated and put in place where appropriate.

The recommended notification period is at least 28 days.

On requesting the possibility of additional insurance cover or clarification of cover applicable to an appropriate event the Community Council should supply comprehensive details of the event and activities involved.

When organising any activity / event the Community Council has a responsibility to see that Health & Safety issues are considered and guidelines followed where applicable. Information on Health & Safety issues for events and activities will in most cases be available from the Council's Health and Safety Unit.

In exceptional circumstances Community Councils may need to engage professional advisers. As Community Councils are wholly funded by the Council and are statutory consultees on applications being considered by the Council there is a high risk of there being a conflict of interest between the Community Council and Aberdeenshire Council. Accordingly it is inappropriate that the Council should provide professional services directly to Community Councils. A fund has been established to allow Community Councils some access to private legal or other professional advice.

The Council's Director of Law an Administration is authorised to release any such funding. This is a very small fund and agreement to release it will only be given in exceptional circumstances. Community Councils are expected to normally obtain any advice they require from within existing budgets.

Community Councils are of course covered by a public liability policy arranged by the Council and should legal claims be made against the Community Council then immediate contact should be made with the Insurers.

Policy Details

Policy Name   Aberdeenshire Council on behalf of Specified Community Councils.
Policy Number   YLL-122017-9213
Renewal Date   01 April (annually).
Insurer   Zurich Municipal
Insurers Address   Community Insurance Centre, Mountbatten House,
                     Grosvenor Square, Southampton, SO15 2RP
Telephone Number   084 5725 4910

Covers available and applicable to the Policy:

- **Public Liability:**

Limit of Indemnity   £ 5,000,000
Excess: £100 applicable to each and every claim.

- **Employers Liability :**

Limit of Indemnity   £10,000,000
Excess   Nil

- **Libel and Slander:**

Sum Insured   £ 100,000
Excess   10% each & every claim or £1,000 whichever is the lower.

- **Fidelity Guarantee :**

Persons Guarantee   All Members and Employees
Sum Insured   £ 2,500
Excess   £100 each and every loss.

- **Personal Accident :**

Persons Insured   Members and Employees
Cover   Accident and Assault
Capital Sum   £ 10,000
Weekly Sum   £ 25
Limits   £500,000 any one person & £2,000,000 any one incident

- **Material Damage and All Risks:**

Applicable only to Community Council who have special arrangements in respect of property and contents.

Additional premiums charged in respect of any cover arranged under this section of the policy.

Excess   Variable ranging from £100 to £250.

All excess applicable to the Policy will be the responsibility of the Community Council should a claim arise.

N.B.

It is a requirement that all Community Councils where property, all risks cover or annual events / activities which requires extension to public liability cover, advises the Council's Insurance Section of there continued requirement by 28 February annually in order that cover may be included on renewal.

Contacts :

Aberdeenshire Council
　　　　Denis Scott, Insurance Officer
　　　　01224 665378
　　　　　　　　denis.scott@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

　　　　Jacqui Harrold, Administration Manager.
　　　　01224 664224
　　　　　　　　jacqui.harrold@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

Zurich Municipal
　　　　Jon Harris
　　　　0238 072 4055
　　　　　　　　jon.harris@uk.zurich.com

19.   Long-Service Awards

Long-Service Awards are a means of Aberdeenshire Council recognising the service of Community Council members over an extended period of time.

Awards, in the form of a certificate signed by the Provost and Chief Executive of Aberdeenshire Council, are made to those who have served as members of Community Councils for 20 years.

The Awards are presented on some suitable occasion such as an Annual General Meeting, a Community Council Forum or Area Committee meeting. The first awards were made in 2002.

Applications for Awards should be made to the local Aberdeenshire Council Area Manager by December 31st in any year for presentation in the early part of the following year.

The following form may be used:

Community Council Long Service Award

I confirm that:

……………..………………….……………………………………..
(insert full name of recipient)

of:

(insert name) …………….…………………….……………Community Council

has served as member of the Community Council for a period of not less than 20 years and hereby request the presentation of a Long Service Award.

Signed: ……………………………..   ……………………………..
                      (Chair)   (Secretary)

Date: ……………..