



ENGAGING OUR COMMUNITIES

Communities at the Heart of Everything We Do

A Framework for Community Engagement in East Ayrshire



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Introduction

In November 2016, East Ayrshire Council and the East Ayrshire Community Planning Partnership approved and adopted 'Engaging Our Communities' a framework for community engagement in East Ayrshire. The framework sets out clear principles and standards for community engagement for all partners and communities to apply based on the National Standards for Community Engagement.

East Ayrshire has a diverse range of communities from rural villages to larger towns, each with their own unique characteristics, needs, strengths and assets. Community engagement is vital to the development of strong, vibrant communities and is central to our work in East Ayrshire to improve community life and the quality of our services.

As partners, we are fully committed to engaging our communities to help us plan and deliver the services that people need and that make best use of our resources. We also recognise that communities have their own strengths and assets and have an important role in co-producing services that meet people's needs and aspirations.

This framework has been developed to ensure that our communities continue to be fully engaged in our work as key partners and stakeholders. It has been designed as an overarching framework for the Council, Community Planning Partners and Community Organisations who are involved in the process of community engagement, providing a clear definition of community engagement and setting out guiding principles and standards for all partners to adopt and follow.

We have a long and strong tradition of community engagement in East Ayrshire. There is a broad range of engagement activity already underway to address local issues, influence policy and shape services. Current examples include the work of Community Led Action Plan Steering Groups, Community Councils, Youth Forums, Residents Surveys, the East Ayrshire Tenants and Residents Forum, Equalities Forum, Residents Panel, and Patient Participation Forums. The framework builds on this work and reaffirms our commitment to community engagement which will help us to achieve our vision where:

'East Ayrshire is a place with strong, safe and vibrant communities where everyone has a good quality of life and access to opportunities, choices and high quality services which are sustainable, accessible and meet people's needs.' *(East Ayrshire Community Plan 2015-30)*

The overall aim of the framework is to provide communities with the ways and means to influence and shape the way services are planned and delivered in East Ayrshire. Our approach is to provide opportunities and support that enable communities to be actively involved in the decisions that affect them, helping them to be more inclusive and able to build on their own strengths and assets.

Policy context

The policy and legislative background on community engagement has evolved in recent years to reflect the growing need to engage communities in planning and delivering public services.

National Standard for Community Engagement originally launched in 2005 and recently updated, had previously been widely adopted by organisations to inform the process of community engagement and improve its outcomes.

The Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services (The 'Christie Report', 2011) concluded that future public services should be built around people and communities and should strengthen their autonomy and resilience. The Scottish Government's response to the Commission's report reaffirmed its commitment to listening, engaging and responding to community needs and aspirations through open, inclusive and responsive dialogue.

'We will empower local communities and local service providers to work together to develop practical solutions that make best use of all the resources available.' *(Scottish Government 2011)*

Community planning requires public agencies to work together with communities to plan and deliver better local services that improve people's lives. **The East Ayrshire Community Plan 2015-30** recognises that successful community planning is based on meaningful, sustained and effective engagement with local people and communities. As partners, we value the skills, capacity, knowledge and potential of our communities and will build on the commitment and confidence evident in local groups and organisations.

Successive legislation in health and social care has also sought to empower and support individuals, families and carers to have greater choice and control over the services they require. There is now a legislative requirement to involve and engage all partners and stakeholders in health and social care with the emphasis on local planning and delivery arrangements.

The rights of children and young people to have their views listened to are enshrined in **Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child**. The participation rights state that children are entitled to the freedom to express opinions and to have a say in matters affecting their social, economic, religious, cultural and political life. These principles are embedded into the **East Ayrshire's Children and Young People's Service Plan 2015 -2018**.

The creation of **Vibrant Communities** was part of East Ayrshire Council's Transformation Strategy linked to the Christie Report on public sector reform and focussed on transforming our relationship with the communities we serve.

Vibrant Communities uses an asset based approach to working with all sectors of the community, children and young people, adults and older people and the wider community to develop sustainable communities and reduce inequalities through prevention and early intervention services. People and communities are at the heart of Vibrant Communities work which is taking a new approach to the challenge of public sector reform by working with, rather than for communities, to change culture and harness the knowledge, skills and experience of local people.

A key aspect of Vibrant Communities is how they work closely with other Council services and partners to ensure a consistent approach to engaging with communities, service planning and delivery, promoting an asset based and person centred approach.

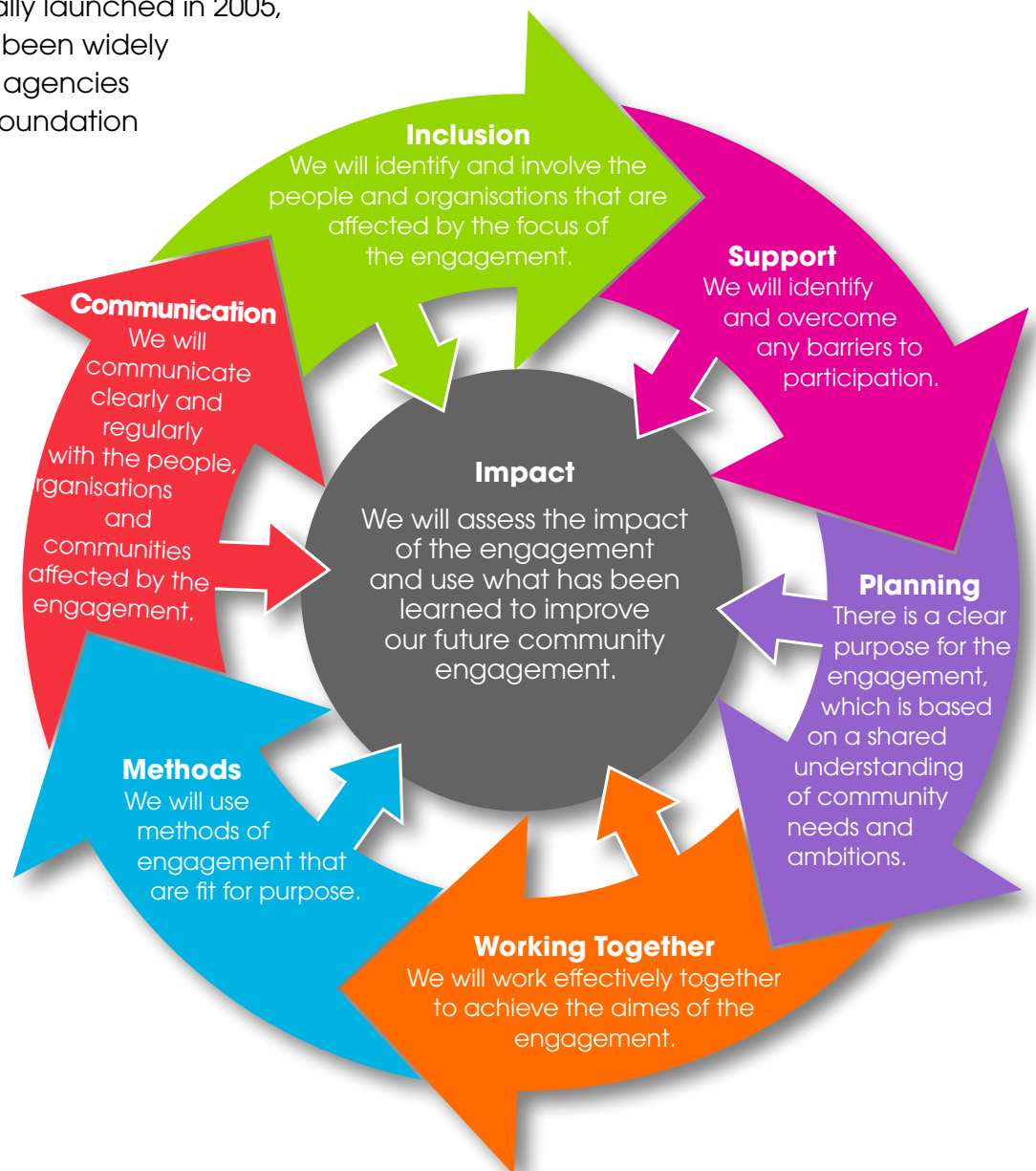
The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 seeks to empower communities, giving them more of a say in how public services are planned and delivered. The Act has a specific focus on community engagement to achieve greater control and influence by communities in decision making. It seeks to empower communities through the ownership of land and assets and by strengthening their voice in identifying needs and appropriate responses.

Participation Requests are a new process which allow a community body to enter into dialogue with public authorities about local issues and local services on their terms. Communities might use the Act to discuss with service providers how they could better meet the needs of users, or even propose to take over the delivery of the service themselves. Similarly, although at an early stage, participatory budgeting seeks to involve local communities in decisions about the distribution of public service budgets. This is a new way for local people to have a direct say in how, and where, public funds can be used to address local needs.

National Standards for Community Engagement

The new **National Standard for Community Engagement** were launched in September 2016 after being reviewed and refreshed to reflect the developing policy and legislative context for community empowerment in Scotland. The detailed performance standards have been designed to support and inform the process of community engagement.

There are seven key elements of the new Standards and these are illustrated below. They describe effective community engagement and provide performance statements that can be used by everyone involved in community engagement to achieve positive outcomes. Originally launched in 2005, they had been previously been widely adopted by practitioners, agencies and organisations as the foundation for effective practice.



What is the Community Engagement Framework?

The East Ayrshire Community Engagement Framework:

- Establishes a common understanding of, and renewed commitment to community engagement across all organisations, partners and partnerships
- Sets out clear principles and standards for community engagement for all partners and communities to apply based on the new National Standards for Community Engagement
- Provides a framework for working with our communities to ensure that they are fully engaged in our work as key partners and stakeholders, particularly equality groups and the hardest to reach

Through the framework, we will aim to:

- Work with, rather than doing to people to harness the knowledge, skills and experience of our communities
- Embed an asset based, solution focussed approach in all our work
- Promote community engagement activity which is inclusive and improves the lives of our youngest children, young people, adults and communities in East Ayrshire
- Improve the quality of services and make better use of our resources.



What is Community Engagement?

Community engagement is about building positive relationships with our communities, based on a shared understanding of local needs, issues and priorities. It involves respectful dialogue between all participants to create the right environment to achieve positive outcomes.

There is no 'one size fits all' for community engagement, since all communities have their own unique characteristics and aspirations. Similarly, community engagement is not a single activity but rather a way of working based on inclusion, involvement, and influence. It requires a shared commitment from all participants to responsibility, accountability and collaborative working. The National Standards for Community Engagement define community engagement as:

'Developing and sustaining a working relationship between one or more public body and one more community group, to help them both to understand and act on the needs or issues that the community experiences.'

Community engagement therefore, involves a wide range of different approaches and activities that support the involvement of children, young people, adults and communities in how we plan and deliver services together in East Ayrshire.

Our Communities

This framework focusses on our towns, villages and neighbourhoods and everyone who lives and works in East Ayrshire and accepts that community can mean different things to different people.

Communities can be defined in different ways.

Communities of place are defined by a geographic location with a physical boundary such as a village, town, neighbourhood or locality.

Communities of interest refers to a group of people who share a particular interest or experience.

Communities of identity are defined by those who identify themselves with, for example young people, older people, faith groups or equality groups.

These definitions recognise that people may identify themselves with more than one community. Community engagement needs to be flexible, responsive to local circumstances and sensitive to how people identify themselves, to ensure that everyone, particularly those who are hardest to reach, are able to contribute.

Community Engagement Activity

There are many different ways to describe community engagement. 'Participation', 'involvement' and 'consultation' all describe aspects of community engagement. However, because community engagement is such a broad term it can lead to confusion and different interpretations. We have defined community engagement as incorporating the following range of activity and local examples have been provided to illustrate each.

Informing



To provide the community with balanced information to enable them to understand issues, problems alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.

The East Ayrshire Community Plan 2015-30 Website contains information on the work of the Community Planning Partnership including the principles and values, key themes and priorities, progress and performance, community involvement and partnership working. This ensures that partners and the general public have access to all relevant information, to help them understand the work partnership and the impact across East Ayrshire.

Consulting



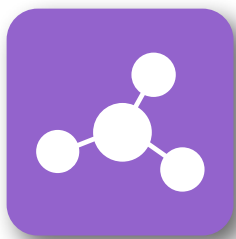
To listen to community views and gather feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions. Consider their input and feedback results.

East Ayrshire Tenants and Residents Federation represents individual tenants and resident organisations and worked with East Ayrshire Council to co-produce an easy to understand information guide and consultation planner on a new rent structure. They also promoted consultation through various media, including a series of roadshow consultation events.

'I felt my views were listened to throughout the process. Being part of the working group allowed me to work with the Council and develop a new rent structure that is easier to understand and fairer'

(Federation Member)

Involving



To work directly with the community throughout a process to ensure that concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and taken into consideration.

On an annual basis the East Ayrshire Children & Young People's Strategic Partnership carries out a survey with children and young people in P3, P6, S1 and S3 in order to gather feedback from them in relation to their wellbeing. The survey questions reflect the SHANARRI wellbeing indicators and the feedback from the surveys and further focus group work is then used to inform future services and supports for children and young people.

Collaborating



To work with the community on each aspect of decisions to be made, including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solutions.

Participatory Budgeting (PB) events held in Mauchline, Newmilns & Darvel saw Community Action Plan Steering Groups lead the process for the first PB events in their local communities. The Steering group set the criteria for applications based on their Community Action Plan Priorities and Health and Social Care outcomes and then invited the local community to decide which projects to support.

"It gives people the opportunity to vote on things that they would prefer rather than people making the decision for them" (Participatory Budgeting Participant)

Empowering



To place the final decision in the hands of the community. This approach empowers communities to make the decision and take control of projects and service delivery.

Community Led Action Plans enable local communities to identify and take forward their own priorities through local community engagement and development. They are led by local steering groups supported by Vibrant Communities. This helps to ensure that the plans are genuinely community led and empowers local people to have a greater say in shaping their community's future. The process enable communities to become more connected, engaged and empowered.

"It has been the community that has decided what we want for our community, we have ownership" (Community Action Plan steering group member)

Community Engagement in Practice

In practice, community engagement will involve a wide range activities and approaches. Each activity is equally valid depending on the context and local circumstances. The approach taken should be informed by the purpose of the engagement and how the participants want to work together to achieve their aims. The principles and standards set out in this framework, however will help to ensure that the best approach is taken for each set of circumstances.

Our current methods of community engagement include linking with established organisations and networks such as Community Councils, Third Sector Interface, Community Led Action Plan Steering Groups, the business community, tenants and residents associations, equality forums and older people and youth forums. In health and social care, Patient Participation Forums and participation arrangements support the participation and engagement of the public and service users. We will continue to promote and strengthen these links to ensure that communities have a voice in the decisions which affect them.

We will continue to explore new and creative ways to engage with communities through, for example better and more effective use of social media. Social media and digital communication provide the scope to extend our reach beyond existing organisations and networks to engage with community members in more flexible, responsive and immediate ways. Going beyond traditional engagement methods and using more creative and innovative approaches has real benefits both in reaching a wider audience and in gathering solution-focused feedback.



Guiding Principles for Community Engagement

There is no blueprint for community engagement and a range of different methods may need to be explored before the right approach is found that works for a given community and set of circumstances. However, experience of working with communities suggests that there are guiding principles that characterise success and help deliver good outcomes.

- The reasons for engaging with communities should be made clear from the start of the process to ensure clarity of purpose and transparency about what can and cannot be influenced.
- People should be involved at the earliest opportunity to allow them to influence how the process will be conducted and consider the issues involved.
- A knowledge of community needs, issues and priorities is equally important both in helping to understand the local context and in finding out what is important to local people.
- An awareness of what other engagement may be taking place will also be useful in avoiding any duplication of effort and thinking through how engagement activity can be coordinated.
- It will be easier to connect with people by engaging with them through existing networks and community links and meeting with them in the places and spaces they use.
- Thinking about methods of communication, the language used and approach taken is important to ensure that the engagement is inclusive, representative and meaningful.
- Building trust and good relationships can take time but is an essential aspect of effective engagement.
- Being flexible and responsive will also help to ensure that the process is inclusive and productive.
- Participants also need to receive feedback on how their views have been taken into account and what will happen after the engagement process has concluded.

Our Commitment to Community Engagement

National Standards for Community Engagement

In East Ayrshire, the Council and Community Planning Partners have agreed that the new National Standards for Community Engagement will be the basis of our community engagement practice and activity. They will inform and guide all our community engagement to ensure this is effective, coordinated and consistent.

Building our Community Engagement Capacity

Although community engagement activity is already taking place across East Ayrshire, we will continue to build the capacity of staff and partners to engage consistently and effectively. The National Standards will be rolled out to staff and partners as part of the national programme to raise awareness of the standards and new online support materials.

Vibrant Communities will work with Organisational Development to make full use of national resources as well as share and develop training and support materials across partners to assist staff to understand and implement the Community Engagement Framework and National Standards for Community Engagement.

Community Engagement Charter Mark

To strengthen and support community groups and organisations to engage with their members and wider communities, Vibrant Communities work with them to develop a Community Engagement Charter Mark.

The Charter Mark will be an indicator of quality and will show to the wider community that the group or organisation is committed to community engagement, has undertaken relevant training and is applying this framework and the National Standards for Community Engagement in their work.

The Charter Mark will also be adopted by the Council and Community Planning Partners to illustrate their commitment to the Framework and the new National Standards for Community Engagement.

Our Commitment

Our commitment to community engagement, together with the National Standards and guiding principles provide the basis for all our community engagement activity. We will promote the framework throughout all our links and networks and make effective use of social media and digital communication to extend our reach to all our partners, organisations and communities.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT in East Ayrshire

Communities at the Heart of Everything We Do



East Ayrshire Council
Comhairle Siorrachd Àir an Ear

active connected
vibrant
COMMUNITIES