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# NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

27 March 2024

## North Ayrshire Council

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**Title:** Working Group on Local Representation

**Purpose:** To report on the findings and recommendations of a short-life Working Group on Local Representation

**Recommendation:** The Council is invited to:

- (a) Note the work carried out by the short-life Working Group on Local Representation; and
- (b) Note the conclusions reached by the Working Group on Local Representation.

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## 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 At its meeting on 17 May 2023, the Council approved a motion on the establishment of a short-life Member Officer working group to examine opportunities for, and any gaps in, local representation. The motion also sought further information on the operation of community councils and the process for reviewing the Scheme for the Establishment of Community Councils in North Ayrshire.
- 1.2 A politically representative working group met in June and August 2023 with a further meeting in January 2024 to consider the above and prepare recommendations for the Council's considerations.

## 2. Background

- 2.1 The following motion was approved by the Council at its meeting on 17 May 2023:

*“Council notes that Community Councils are operating in some areas of North Ayrshire and are working hard in partnership with local Elected Members to give their communities a voice; however, some areas currently don't have an active Community Council.*

*Council further notes that Community Councils as the first tier of Local Government are an important and vital part of local democracy especially when it comes to their role as a statutory consultee under Planning Legislation.*

*Council therefore agrees to instruct officers to bring to a Special Council meeting a report outlining the current operation of Community Councils in our area and highlighting which areas do not have an active Community Council.*

*Officers are also requested to advise Council of the process for the review of the Scheme of Establishment of Community Councils and its implications in the event that Council decides at a Special Meeting to review the Scheme.*

*Furthermore, the Council agrees to:*

- 1. Establish a Members' short-term working group that will explore how local representation operates in each of North Ayrshire's localities. The purposes of this working group will be to:
  - a. Establish how local representation currently operates.*
  - b. Clearly define the representative roles of existing groups.*
  - c. Identify where there are gaps in local representation; and*
  - d. Establish a plan that helps ensure equality of local representation across all areas of North Ayrshire, which will include clarification on the different representative roles of Locality Partnerships and community councils and how non-statutory community groups fit into local representation; and**
- 2. Consider, review, and potentially agree to implement the recommendations of the short-term working group at the proposed Special Meeting of North Ayrshire Council along with the report on the review on the Scheme of Establishment."*

- 2.2 The politically representative working group, which included officer participation from Connected Communities and Democratic Services, met on 27 June 2023, and 10 August 2023 with a concluding meeting on 18 January 2024. The June meeting focused on the Scheme of Establishment for Community Councils ("the Community Council Scheme") and agreeing what further information the group required to complete the work requested of it. At the August meeting, the group considered a presentation showing the range of communities, both geographical and of interest, who are presently involved in participating through the various mechanisms surrounding locality planning. This is included as Appendix 1.
- 2.3 The current Community Council Scheme was adopted at a Special Meeting of the Council on 30 March 2016. The Scheme provides for up to 17 community councils covering every part of North Ayrshire. At the moment, eleven are active, namely Arran, Beith and District, Cumbrae, Fairlie, Irvine, Kilbirnie and Glengarnock, Kilwinning, Largs, Skelmorlie, Stevenston and West Kilbride.
- 2.4 Locality planning is a requirement of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015. It is one of the ways local communities work together with public and third sector organisations to improve residents' lives and neighbourhoods. North Ayrshire has taken a particularly inclusive approach to community and locality planning, understanding that building community capacity and social capital within our communities is a more effective route to reducing inequalities than public sector service delivery alone.
- 2.5 Each of the 6 localities in North Ayrshire – Arran, Garnock Valley, Irvine, Kilwinning, North Coast and the Three Towns – has a well-developed Locality Partnership, where elected members, community representatives and officers from the Council and partners come together to identify and act on their local priorities. The work of these partnerships extends beyond the formal meetings themselves, with a range of

participation opportunities available in each locality. Appendix 1 explains these and the various communities, geographical and of interest, who are engaged in them. The overview is illustrative, not comprehensive.

- 2.6 The working group considered the support which is available should areas without an active community council wish to establish one, and the range of other groups in each area including the ways which they can be involved in decision making. They also considered the national context, with the Democracy Matters phase 2 conversation taking place nationally to consider if some decisions about a wide range of Scotland's vital public services that are currently the responsibility of either national or local government should be taken closer to the people, they most affect. This is part of the ongoing Local Governance Review which has been a shared review by the Scottish Government and CoSLA and is expected to produce recommendations for action.
- 2.7 The group considered how information on the opportunities which are available to participate is shared with communities. The development of a new participation strategy, outlining the commitment of the Council and its partners to participative approaches, and the various opportunities which are available, will help to clarify the purpose of different community participative groups and the ways in which people can take part in them. This will include clear information of the roles of the representative groups as well as the less formal routes for participation.
- 2.8 The working group discussed the challenges around participation, including ensuring representativeness, and encouraging people to participate when life can be demanding and there may be less capacity for them to do so. Officers recognised these challenges and were able to advise that representativeness is a core consideration when designing participation routes, including ensuring that people can engage in the way that is most appropriate and attractive to them. It was recognised that sustained participation requires adequate resourcing and appropriate skills and methods, and this will be an ongoing challenge which officers will continue to address along with support from elected members.

## **Conclusions**

- 2.9 The majority of the working group found that there was no current need for a review of the community council scheme of establishment, given the range of participation opportunities available in all geographical areas, although not all members were in agreement with this. Encouragement would continue to be given for community councils to be established in areas which do not currently have one. In the absence of any recommendation by the working group to conduct a formal review of the Community Council Scheme at this stage, there is no requirement for the matter to be considered at a Special Meeting of the Council.
- 2.10 The working group recognised that the local representation through locality planning is extensive and that the majority of groups in each area are already represented in an appropriate way. They agreed that there were several groups where stronger links should be developed in order to ensure all communities of interest across the area had opportunities to participate. This in particular included continuing the developing work with older people and ensuring that the link with BME communities is strengthened. Work is being progressed around these areas.

- 2.11 The working group requested that consideration be given to whether non-statutory community groups could receive information on planning proposals in order to submit responses. This was investigated and information was shared that groups could sign up to the portal in order to receive the same information as statutory consultees such as Community Councils. This will be vigorously promoted.
- 2.12 In view of the depth and breadth of participation and engagement across North Ayrshire, and the potential of forthcoming change through the conclusions of the Local Governance Review, the working group concluded that there was no need for any changes to the current landscape of representation within North Ayrshire beyond the developmental work outlined in 2.7. In addition, the promotion of opportunities to participate should continue through local networks and partners to ensure that the widest possible range of community members are aware of them.

### **3. Proposals**

- 3.1 Note the work carried out by the short-life Working Group on Local Representation; and
- 3.2 Note the conclusions reached by the Working Group on Local Representation.

### **4. Implications/Socio-economic Duty**

#### **Financial**

- 4.1 None

#### **Human Resources**

- 4.2 None

#### **Legal**

- 4.3 None

#### **Equality/Socio-economic**

- 4.4 None

#### **Climate Change and Carbon**

- 4.5 None

#### **Key Priorities**

- 4.6 Strategic Aim - We will have active, inclusive, and resilient communities.

#### **Community Wealth Building**

- 4.7 None

## **5. Consultation**

5.1 No consultation was required.

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For further information please contact **Rhonda Leith, Head of Service (Connected Communities)**, on **01294 324415** or **Rhondaleith@north-ayrshire.gov.uk**.

### **Background Papers**

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