
NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

22 February 2022

Cabinet

Title: Participation Strategy – Statement of Intent

Purpose: To seek Cabinet's approval for a consultation based on the Statement of Intent, which aims to develop a Participation Strategy for Communities.

Recommendation: That Cabinet:

- a) Notes the Statement of Intent;
- b) Notes officers will continue to develop and deliver a community consultation; and
- c) Agrees to receive further updates.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Open, transparent and participatory government is fundamental to democracy. Thriving democracies depend on citizens taking part, whether through casting votes in elections, standing for election to the local community council or running a local building. Participation and volunteering is inspired by what individuals and communities care about, a shared vision for community, a desire to address inequalities and a sense of responsibility. Volunteering generates significant value for groups, organisations and communities, and for those volunteering. There are lots of different ways that people in North Ayrshire can currently participate in local democracy including contributing to surveys or consultations; taking part in voting, Parent Councils, Participatory Budgeting, sharing in decisions made at Community Councils, Locality Partnerships etc.; and community ownership of local facilities and leadership.
- 1.2 The Statement of Intent summarises the current, main ways in which citizens can take part in local governance. A community consultation will follow to co-design, co-develop and co-produce a Strategy to widen democratic participation, seeking to reach new ways of connecting with citizens. It builds on the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, Scottish Government and COSLA joint Review of Local Governance and the learning from the joint working during the coronavirus pandemic conversations, which informed the Social Renewal Advisory Board.

2. Background

- 2.1 Open, transparent and participatory government is fundamental to democracy. Over the past decade North Ayrshire Council has been building its approach to community empowerment, strengthening communities and supporting community organisations. The strategic direction is set out in the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015.
- 2.2 In December 2017 the Scottish Government and COSLA jointly launched a Review of Local Governance, to review how powers, responsibilities and resources are shared across national and local spheres of government, and with communities. Democracy Matters is a Scotland-wide conversation set up as part of the Local Governance Review and North Ayrshire feedback overwhelmingly agreed that people should have a more active role in decision-making in their local communities. The Social Renewal Advisory Board included in its 'If not now, when?' report in 2021 a focus on giving more power to people and communities and developing new arrangements for local governance.
- 2.3 There are lots of different ways that people in North Ayrshire can currently participate in local democracy including having your say in surveys or consultations; taking part in voting, Parent Councils, Participatory Budgeting, sharing in decisions made at Community Councils, Locality Partnerships etc.; and community ownership of local facilities and leadership.
- 2.4 The 2020 Best Value Audit Report praised the Council for its work, noting the council proactively engages with communities, including hard-to-reach groups and its most vulnerable communities.
- 2.5 The Youth Participation and Citizenship Strategy 2021-2025 sets out the framework for democratic participation by, with and for young people in North Ayrshire. It lays out exactly how and in which groups young people are involved in planning and decision-making so that no decision about them is made without them, including Pupil Councils, Youth Forums, Youth Council, Executive Youth Council and Joint Cabinet. The need to strengthen the democratic framework for older people is included in the priorities for the next 3 years set out in North Ayrshire Council's Strategic CLD Plan 2021-2024. However, there is no single document or strategy which describes adult participation and strategy.
- 2.6 This Statement of Intent summarises the existing participatory approaches. The next step will be community engagement and consultation so that the public co-develop the Participation Strategy. The consultation will be developed and designed with communities to:
 - Improve reach to those seldom heard & marginalised,
 - Help individuals and communities to feel that participation makes a difference,
 - Increase democratic participation, and
 - Help individuals and communities to feel a greater sense of ownership and control.
- 2.7 The current opportunities for participation are set out in the Statement of Intent, with an aim to reflect on what more can be done, especially to maximise the use of digital technologies and to reach deeper into communities. Through the consultation we will co-design, co-develop and co-produce a draft Strategy with communities.

- 2.8 This Statement of Intent sets out ways in which citizens can become involved in co-designing and delivering decisions that affect them: Making voices heard; Taking part; Sharing decisions; and Community leadership and ownership. These are some of the key ways which citizens can get involved in ensuring voices are heard to effect change. The groups and opportunities that are already in place provides a platform for citizens to actively participate and exercise their rights to express views on matters that affect them.
- 2.9 If democracy provides the environment to protect human rights and freedom of expression, then continuing to find new ways of encouraging local people to get involved in debate and deliberation, decision making, and accountability is fundamental to community empowerment and building a fairer society.

3. Proposals

- 3.1 It is proposed that Cabinet:
- a) Notes the Statement of Intent;
 - b) Notes officers will continue to develop and deliver a community consultation; and
 - c) Agrees to receive further updates.

4. Implications/Socio-economic Duty

Financial

- 4.1 The financial implications of consultation will be met from existing resources.

Human Resources

- 4.2 There are no additional human resource implications.

Legal

- 4.3 None.

Equality/Socio-economic

- 4.4 The purpose of the Statement of Intent, prior to the development of a Participation Strategy, is to reduce inequalities, widen democratic participation and advance community empowerment. North Ayrshire strives to engage well with all parts of the community and partners to address poverty and inequalities, in order to learn from the voices of lived experience, as set out in paragraph 2.6.

Environmental and Sustainability

- 4.5 None.

Key Priorities

4.6 The proposal contained within the report supports the North Ayrshire Council Plan priorities:

- Active and strong communities; and
- People enjoy good life-long health and wellbeing.

Community Wealth Building

4.7 The proposal contained within the report encourages increased democratic participation and greater awareness of community ownership of land and assets and plural ownership of the local economy through inclusive ownership models like cooperatives.

5. Consultation

5.1 Consultation with communities will take place based on the Statement of Intent, using a range of methodologies and a mix of digital and face-to-face engagements.

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For further information please contact **Rhona Arthur, Head of Service (Connected Communities)**, on **(01294) 324415**.

Background Papers

Appendix 1: Participation Strategy – Statement of Intent

Participation Strategy – Statement of Intent

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This is a Statement of Intent to develop a strategy about powers, rights and existing opportunities to take part in local community life and democratic structures in order to open a conversation about developing new ways of making views known. The community discussions will start with the existing participation structures within the Council and through structures, such as Locality Partnerships, will broaden to include the Community Planning Partnership and partners. The intention is to develop a strategy for North Ayrshire to encourage greater participation in local democracy and to provide a progression route for young people from the [Youth Participation and Citizenship Strategy 2021-2025](#).
- 1.2 Over recent years the Council, CPP and partners has reached out to ask people for their views and worked alongside their groups. Support has been given to assist communities to take control of local land and assets. In North Ayrshire we have developed a model that is based on working with our communities and partners to address poverty and inequalities, that is co-defined, co-designed and co-delivered by all who can be involved in empowering communities.
- 1.3 There are lots of different ways that people in North Ayrshire can currently participate in local democracy including having your say in surveys or consultations; taking part in voting, Parent Councils, Participatory Budgeting, sharing in decisions made at Community Councils, Locality Partnerships etc.; and community ownership of local facilities and leadership.
- 1.4 We want to pull together all these approaches and consider what more we can do. We want our Statement of Intent to shape a new strategy to show how together we can:
- Improve reach to seldom heard & marginalised,
 - Help you to feel your participation makes a difference,
 - Increase democratic participation, and
 - Help you to feel a greater sense of ownership and control.
- 1.5 We want to find out more from our communities about how you'd like to be included in decision-making and taking part in local community organisations. People's engagement is crucial to the success of democracy, so we are grateful for the responses, participation, and volunteering of our citizens.

2. National Context

- 2.1 Open, transparent and participatory government is fundamental to democracy. **Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015** provided new rights for community bodies and encourages communities to do things for themselves. It sets out ways in which communities can make their voices heard in the planning and delivery of services.

“The voices of communities themselves, especially those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage, are integral to successful community planning.

Their needs and aspirations, and their own capacity to make change happen (with support where needed), are reflected in the local priorities the CPP sets, in how community planning partners shape services and direct resources.”

- 2.2 In December 2017 the Scottish Government and COSLA jointly launched a **Review of Local Governance**. The Review is considering how powers, responsibilities and resources are shared across national and local spheres of government, and with communities. It is important to recognise that the Review is not simply about local government, as ‘Local Governance’ is much wider. Democracy Matters is a Scotland-wide conversation set up as part of the Local Governance Review. More than 4000 participants, including participants in meetings held in North Ayrshire, in the first phase of Democracy Matters conversations overwhelmingly agreed that people should have a more active role in decision-making in their local communities. Many councils and wider public sector partners shared their proposals for change. North Ayrshire Council submitted a response to the [Review of Open Government](#) stating that *participatory democracy needs to be widened out from just participatory budgeting to participatory approaches to deliver open government. We have to find ways to engage and involve citizens in service design and delivery in meaningful ways, respecting professional expertise but also allowing community based solutions to have parity of esteem with public sector where relevant.*
- 2.3 The coronavirus pandemic has hampered further Democracy Matters conversations, however the Social Renewal Advisory Board, set up to look at transformational ideas on how to deliver real change, continues the participatory democracy evolution. Four Calls to Action are included in its [‘If not now, when?’](#) report in 2021 which focus on giving more power to people and communities, empowering frontline teams, and building new ways of working, based on what has worked well during the pandemic and developing new arrangements for local governance.
- 2.4 **Call to Action 16** is for the public sector to give more control to people and communities over the decisions that affect their lives. It is a central recommendation. The **Social Renewal Advisory Board** identifies the need for increased participation, with decision-making as close to communities as possible, taking full account of equality and human rights and enabling involvement of lived experience experts in policy making, and an extension of participatory budgeting, so that communities of place and identity have more say on how public money is spent. They note that more funding and support is needed to help communities buy land or buildings and run them for the benefit of the community so that they become self-sustaining. Further to this there is also an identified need to publicly and properly value the contributions of volunteers and take a range of steps to make volunteering easier and more accessible.
- 2.5 Other Calls for Action include enabling local teams to improve local service delivery to build on new ways of working, based on what has worked well during the pandemic, and to develop new arrangements for local governance, best suited to the communities they serve. The Social Renewal Advisory Board recognises the need to improve the current model of how people are governed locally and for greater collaboration, including on the key issues of public health and health inequalities.

3. Local context

- 3.1 Over the past decade North Ayrshire Council has been building its nationally recognised approach to its delivery of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, strengthening communities and supporting community organisations. The strategic direction is set out in the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015. The intended participation strategy, together

with the [Youth Participation and Citizenship Strategy 2021-2025](#), sets out the framework for democratic participation in North Ayrshire.

- 3.2 North Ayrshire Council is committed to involving local people and communities in taking decisions which affect their lives. In North Ayrshire, community engagement and community empowerment are part of a continuum which includes our approach to engagement, consultation, co-production and co-delivery.
- 3.3 Building trust with communities is underpinned by accountability, openness and transparency. Widening democratic participation and enabling people to take part requires new approaches. The Council has made significant supports available to encourage democratic participation, including the Consultation and Engagement Hub, training through the Leadership Collective, specialist toolkits and help with accessing funding to deliver their ambitions for communities.
- 3.4 North Ayrshire Council and the Carnegie Trust worked in partnership to explore how the practical application on [kindness](#) could support the Council's existing work on tackling poverty and inequality. This was to help with the Council's objective to reframe its relationship with communities and how it could do things differently to improve outcomes. The Council saw it as an investment in the staff to achieve that vision and how using kindness as a value could reset the relationship between citizen and state, to drive forward community wellbeing. This had led to increased empowerment of frontline staff and greater use of whole systems approaches, with staff looking at situations from multiple perspectives and building connections which recognise local relationships.
- 3.5 The Statement of Intent sets out the variety of ways in which local people can currently have their say and influence decisions which affect their lives. The local feedback from the Democracy Matters consultation, Fair For All Commission, programme of Community Listening Events which supported the Social Renewal Advisory Board and consultation which took place in early 2022 has emphasised the need for further change to widen the numbers and communities taking part. North Ayrshire Council's ground-breaking Community Wealth Building Strategy is a step-change in providing the right framework for economic recovery based on fairness and equity. It encourages increased community ownership of land and assets and plural ownership of the local economy through inclusive ownership models like cooperatives.
- 3.6 The Statement of Intent sets out four different aspects of current participation and areas for further exploration:- Making your voice heard; Taking part; Sharing decisions; and Community leadership and ownership.
- 3.7 In practice it is only the democratic structures which are solid and have linear relationships. Participative democracy is complex and fluid and takes considerable care and staff resource to support. If democracy provides the environment to protect human rights and freedom of expression, then continuing to find new ways of encouraging local people to get involved in debate and deliberation, decision making, and accountability is fundamental to community empowerment and building a fairer society.

4. Making your voice heard: current NAC practice and areas for further exploration

- 4.1 This Statement of Intent sets out ways in which citizens can become involved in co-designing and delivering decisions that affect them. These are some of the ways which you can get involved in ensuring your voice is heard to effect change. The groups and opportunities that

are already in place provides a platform for you to actively participate and exercise their right to express your views on matters that affect you.

- 4.2 Local people know their communities better than anyone. Working in partnership with local people allows them to control their own decisions and shape their future. **Engagement, consultation and working with communities** to deliver successful outcomes are at the core of the Council's daily work. Consultation is the way public organisations get feedback from people about the work that they are doing. Consultation is carried out in many ways- for example it can be done online, by telephone or face to face. They can be carried out on any topic or subject. They can be national and be about, for example, influencing major policies, or they can be carried out locally to help take difficult decisions or find out what people think about local issues. Good consultations make sure that local people and communities are involved in the decisions that affect their lives from day to day.
- 4.3 The [Consultation and Engagement Hub](#) is a resource which is shared across CPP and community partners. It includes a bank of trained staff as well as this online engagement hub, which includes information on how to plan and submit a consultation and an online list of current and past consultations.
- 4.4 As well as this, you can use the above link to access our Community Choices website, which provides the opportunity to engage on key topics and take part in conversations about the things that affect you.
- 4.5 The Council worked with the Consultation Institute to develop its approach to public consultation and engagement and that has enabled co-design and co-delivery with communities, including Locality Partnerships. The Council's 2020 Best Value Audit Report notes: The council is committed to community empowerment and its work to mainstream community input into day-to-day decision making is recognised nationally. Despite challenges, the council has worked to engage with hard-to-reach groups.
- 4.6 The Council's Community Consultation Process have been designed meet the Consultation Institute's Charter Principles;
- Integrity – There must be an honest intent to consult;
 - Visibility – Communication with all must create a high level of awareness on how to participate;
 - Accessibility – It must be easy for those who wish to be involved, to become involved
 - Confidentiality and Transparency – The Freedom of Information Act makes it almost impossible to keep things confidential between public bodies, but all parties need to be aware of the public interest test and of the principles of openness and transparency;
 - Disclosure – Both the consultors and consultees need to be totally open with each other and not conceal or withhold information which might prevent dialogue;
 - Fair interpretation – There is a strict burden upon consultors to analyse and interpret consultation data objectively and present it in the same way; and
 - Publication – It is critical that everyone who took part in the consultation gets to see what happened as a result. Ideally the consultees will recognise that their input is reflected in any publication and resultant outcome.
- 4.7 [Shaping North Ayrshire](#): one of the earliest pilots for the Consul platform with COSLA. Consul is designed to be a tool used by government bodies to engage with citizens, it allows for citizens to propose ideas that can be reviewed and voted on by others. Consul is used in 35

countries, by 135 institutions and has approximately 90 million users. A key digital tool for participation, it has been used in North Ayrshire to engage in consultations and debates such as the future of halls, centres and libraries, how we spend the council budget and climate change.

- 4.8 **Surveys and focused thematic events, like workshops and charrettes** are often the starting points to making your voice heard and starting to influence change locally. The North Ayrshire Community Planning Partnership and Council webpages and social media are key access points to surveys.
- 4.9 As well as the thematic surveys, the Council has a **North Ayrshire People's Panel Survey**. This is a survey of 2000 local residents who have agreed to answer questions and provide their views on the areas in which they live. We then hold focus groups for 8-12 people in each locality to find out a bit more about their views.
- 4.10 The People's Panel Survey was originally carried out annually but is now every two years. The Partnership uses this information to decide what action to take on the issues that local residents share what needs to be improved.
- 4.11 **Charrettes** are public workshops, usually taking place over a couple of days or longer where local people can come and share their views. In recent years there have been a number of charrettes in North Ayrshire focused on town centre improvements and their outcomes have contributed to the work of the Locality Partnerships.
- 4.12 **Chit Chats** are informal local community engagement approaches. These started out based in community centres but during the pandemic moved online. Locality based, these take discussions to a local neighbourhood, even street level to ascertain and take into account the views of local people.
- 4.13 Key Council meetings are already streamed live and available for 'watch again' and The Council shares information via its website, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and YouTube. The next stage of involvement is attending meetings held by the democratic tiers. Community Council, Locality Partnership and Council meetings all allow public observers to attend. The public are welcome to attend Community Council and Locality Partnership meetings. These are advertised well in advance on local websites and social media. When meetings are held online it may be necessary to register in advance so that links can be emailed.
- 4.14 The public have a right under the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 to attend Council and Committee meetings, along with the press. On occasion, there are items on the agenda during which the public are excluded. This is because it includes discussion of a private matter where the Council has an obligation of confidentiality, such as a commercial transaction. The Council live-streams its meetings and provides 'watch-again' access.

Areas for further exploration

- Developing the use of **Discussion Forums** including the local, face-to-face or online ChitChats in local community spaces. Throughout the pandemic **Teams and Zoom** have been used. There is potential to reach a wider cross-section of communities by linking into other regular meetings like Breakfast Clubs, to hear people's views.

- Improving the engagement with citizens using digital channels.
- Introducing Citizen engagement reference groups in an ongoing way to keep local people engaged as the initiatives develop and throughout delivery. Stakeholder reference groups are currently set up to develop the methodology and focus for engagements and consultation.
- Engaging more widely using **Shaping North Ayrshire – Consul** to make sure everyone is able to take part. This is a digital tool for debating and voting, currently used for consultations and debates.
- Moving public engagement in policy development forward into early stages so that communities have increased influence.
- Improving public feedback mechanisms, format and channels.

5. **Taking part: current NAC practice and areas for further exploration**

- 5.1 Some opportunities to take part will need you to develop skills or knowledge you may not already have. Community Learning and Development (CLD) is a field of professional practice that enables people to identify their own individual and collective goals, to engage in learning and take action to bring about change for themselves and their communities. CLD uses a range of formal and informal methods of learning and social development with individuals and groups in their communities. These include Community Associations and Community Councils, Participatory budgeting, Food systems: Pantries, Larders and Community Fridge's, Food with Dignity, Community Asset Transfer, Participation Requests, Support to Allotments and Community Gardens, Leadership Collective and Grant Support. CLD programmes and activities are developed in dialogue with communities and participants. The priorities for the next 3 years are set out in [North Ayrshire Council's Strategic CLD Plan 2021-2024](#).
- 5.2 **Voting in an election**, or in a ballot or referendum is a more formal way of having your say. Voting can be on a single issue, like a referendum, or it can be to decide who represents your views. Although the age at which you can vote can vary in elections, you can register to vote in Scotland from age 16 and is open to British citizens, EU or Irish citizens living in UK, Commonwealth citizen who has permission to enter or stay in the UK- or who does not need permission-, or a citizen of another country living in Scotland or Wales who has permission to enter or stay in the UK, or who does not need permission. You normally need to register to vote only once (not every time) but remember to update your details. You can do this online. Votes in the UK are cast in secret, with the papers being marked with a 'X' or ranked in order of choice, and the papers put sealed ballot box. Your right to vote gives you the power to choose a candidate to represent your views and influence policies in national and local government as well as in more local governance contexts like community councils.
- 5.3 A **Parent Council** is a group of parents selected by all parents in the school to represent their views. Parent Councils have an important role to play in school improvement by ensuring that the parental perspective is represented and taken into account. They are partners with the school who work on behalf of all parents to discuss educational matters that are of importance to all, but are not involved in the direct management of the school.

- 5.4 Tenants' Associations, Residents' Associations and Tenants' Panel** provide ways of tenant participation; getting involved and influencing decisions about homes, housing and community. Working together with the Housing Team, tenants can help to influence the services they receive, shape the housing policy for the future and ensure good communication about the housing issues which affect residents' lives. [Customer Connections](#), North Ayrshire Housing Services' Tenant Participation Strategy 2017-22 sets out the different ways in which customers can be consulted and involved.
- 5.5 Participatory budgeting** is a democratic way for people to have a quick and easy say on how public money is spent. A PB process gives people the opportunity to identify and discuss what matters to them in their communities and to vote on their priorities. In North Ayrshire the processes are agreed with local stakeholder groups, organisations send in their project ideas and the public then vote online or in person. Community and Youth work grants are awarded through PB and several thematic PB events have taken place including community food projects and mental health projects.
- 5.6 Volunteering is critical to the** hundreds of community groups and organisations across North Ayrshire. These add immeasurable community, cultural, sporting, health, environmental and heritage value; all being driven by local people who volunteer to help. Organisations range from advice and advocacy agencies, targeted support groups, therapy and wellness organisations, agencies providing public services such as caring for the elderly, to children's groups, clubs for enthusiasts and hobbyists such as cooking, reading and chess, knitting bees, historical societies and walking clubs. There are many different volunteering opportunities in North Ayrshire and these are well-supported by The Ayrshire Community Development Trust and Arran Community and Voluntary Service (these are North Ayrshire's two third sector interfaces). More information about volunteering can be found on the [Community Planning Partnership](#) website. Sometimes volunteering leads into greater degrees of participation and the Council works with the third sector interfaces to support volunteers as they start to develop a new group.
- 5.7 Climate Change and the Environment – Clean-Up Crews, Tree Planting, Gardens and Growing** There are a number of community groups and projects in North Ayrshire actively engaged in carrying out a range of innovative and valuable environmental and growing initiatives. They take part by literally 'getting their hands dirty'. Keeping beaches and the countryside free of litter has motivated many to come out for community clean-ups and this has greatly enhanced the local environment. Streetscene have a Volunteer Strategy and the Council sincerely values the efforts of the volunteers to keep seas, beaches and countryside plastic and litter-free. The Council works in partnership with local, self-managed community allotment organisations through the Council's Locality Co-ordinators and Officers. Communities have been empowered through Community Asset Transfers and the Community Investment Fund and this has enabled allotments to flourish. Work continues to strengthen links between growers and community food providers. In June 2019 the Council declared a Climate Emergency setting a target to reduce and remove emissions for North Ayrshire to achieve net-zero carbon status by 2030. The [Environmental Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy](#) sets out actions, including a pledge of £500,000 to plant trees and an opportunity for partnership with community groups to get involved.
- 5.8** One of the key purposes for Community Planning in North Ayrshire is to promote equality across our residents. In June 2019, the **Fair For All Commission** met for the first time, which saw people with lived experience of poverty ('experts by experience') and people in positions of organisational leadership and influence ('civic and business leaders') come together for the

first time to hear the Community Commissioners stories of poverty. The stories shared intend to deepen understanding of the emotive and difficult sides of poverty and hopefully improve perceptions, challenge stereotyping and reduce the stigma of poverty, leading to more informed decision-making by the leaders across business, public and voluntary sectors in addition to Scottish Government. The Commission's findings informed the Child Poverty Action Plan and the pandemic response, especially the need for tackling food insecurity. Work continues to empower staff to consider the problems residents face in the context of poverty. The work of the Commission is taking part a whole new level and fundamental to changing systems and society.

Areas for further exploration

- Sharing the experience of community leadership to help community organisations access or develop the skills and support needed to achieve their ambitions for community.
- Progressing with the development of **Participatory budgeting** which has been successfully established in North Ayrshire.
- Involving more people in **Volunteering**, especially about climate change, which offers so many local opportunities for action
- Addressing the power, knowledge, skills and resources needed to co-create, co-develop and co-deliver services as local government increasingly sees itself as a partner and enabler working alongside community.
- Acting collectively to reduce wellbeing and mental health pressures and developing the role of local community organisations in shaping places we all want to live in.

6. Sharing decisions: current NAC practice and areas for further exploration

- 6.1 North Ayrshire Council is proud of its history of working closely with its communities and of how it has subsequently embraced the principles of **the Community Empowerment Act**. An empowered community is one where individuals and communities have the confidence, skills and ability to influence decisions, take action and make change happen in their lives and communities. This includes communities of place, interest and identity. You can read more about the way North Ayrshire has implemented the Community Empowerment Act in this [report](#). Community empowerment involves sharing decision-making, co-defining and co-designing the actions which work best in our local communities. The 'keystones' of the Community Empowerment Act include participatory budgeting, participation requests and community asset transfer. The **Leadership Collective** brings together community leaders, the CLD training and development programme and the third sector interfaces to enable community participants to have the skills, knowledge and support to make the most of opportunities.
- 6.2 Increasingly complex issues will not be solved by the Council, agencies or communities working alone or in silos. There is a need to work together in ways that leverage the talents, insights and contributions of as many members of the community as possible, whether that be communities of place or interest. There are six **Locality Partnerships** in North Ayrshire which

cover the whole local authority. The Locality Partnerships focus on a partnership approach to tackling local issues and inequalities. They are the means by which we fulfil duties under the Community Empowerment Act (Scotland) 2015 to have locality arrangements. The overall aim of locality planning is to harness the power of Community Planning Partners and communities to work together towards shared, data led, priorities. Their membership comprises: Elected Members, Community representatives, Community Council Chairs and Community Planning partners. Following consultation, use of the Place Standard and consideration of local statistical profiles the LPs have agreed local priorities and plans. The Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) Locality Planning Forums have also decided on local issues to be addressed. The HSCP uses the same geographies as the CP LPs, and links between the two structures are in place. The membership of each partnership along with their remit is available in the terms of reference on the [Community Planning Partnership](#) website along with the Impact reports on the difference Locality Planning is making.

- 6.3 There are multiple opportunities to put yourself forward for election to a position in a community organisation or democratic structure. These include **standing for election** to the Council itself, Locality Partnerships, Community Councils, Parent Councils, Community Associations, Tenants' Associations and a huge number of community groups. The Council's Locality Teams and the third sector interfaces support a range of these to make sure they have the skills and knowledge they need to form committees and govern themselves well. There is training available to help people becoming a Chair, Treasurer, Secretary or Trustee of local bodies, some of which are also charities. The [North Ayrshire Virtual Community Facebook](#) groups have over 5000 members and provide news on local training opportunities and funding.
- 6.4 Local **Community Associations** promote the charitable aims of education, recreation and social welfare for the wider benefit of their community and they undertake to manage their local community centre to achieve those aims. In a unique partnership arrangement Community Associations jointly wrote, negotiated and co-produced a "Community Contract" with the Council. It defines the contribution of the Council alongside the expectation of the Association to deliver its key aims. Learning, through courses and classes, youth work, elderly and early years' activities, is offered, and the Community Associations to keep two thirds of the letting income raised, to be used for community benefit mainly through subsidising activities for local residents and groups. Community Associations take responsibility for activities in the centres and are trained in 'keyholding' enabling them to operate the buildings independently. They help to build a sense of power and control in communities but also require the Council to provide a range of capacity building activities that encourage everyone to exercise meaningful control in their lives and the locality in which they live. The North Ayrshire Federation of Community Organisations ([NAFCO](#)) represent Community Associations and other community organisations and continue to work with Council Officers in their members' interests.
- 6.5 **Community Councils** are provided for in statute by the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 and the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994. Community Councils are entirely independent from the local authority and they act as a voice for their local area. Their specific role can vary according to their local area's needs. Community Councils have a statutory right to be consulted on applications for planning permission and to be included in statutory consultations. This is where they differ from Locality Partnerships whose role is focused on addressing poverty and inequalities and do not have the same statutory consultation entitlements. Community Councils meet regularly in local venues and generally their meetings will be open to the public. You can read more about Community Councils on the [Council website](#). Community Council as supported by North Ayrshire Council's Democratic Services and Connected Communities who provide support, coordinate elections and run training. There are

currently 12 Community Councils operating in North Ayrshire and work continues to help those areas who do not have an active one.

- 6.6 The [Youth Participation and Citizenship Strategy 2021-2025](#), sets out the framework for democratic participation by, with and for young people in North Ayrshire. It lays out exactly how and in which groups young people are involved in planning and decision-making so that no decision about them is made without them, including Pupil Councils, Youth Forums, Youth Council and Executive Youth Council. Twice a year, the Joint Cabinet brings together representatives from secondary schools, youth bodies, senior politicians and officers. An elected member is the Young People's Champion to highlight and bring forward matters of concern.
- 6.7 Included in the priorities for the next 3 years set out in [North Ayrshire Council's Strategic CLD Plan 2021-2024](#) is the need to strengthen the democratic framework for our **older people**. Currently there is a network of elderly and older people's groups, however the pandemic has proved very challenging for sustaining these. An elected member is the Older People's Champion to highlight and bring forward matters of concern. The Chief Executive convenes meetings with older people's representatives twice a year. The CLD Team will be prioritising the co-development and co-design of a framework for older people's participation so that elderly and older people's groups are helped to re-establish and ensure a wider representation.
- 6.8 North Ayrshire Council is the only local authority to meet the Scottish Government's target of spending 1% of its mainstream budget with direct public influence. Mainstream **Participatory budgeting** can play a central role in collectively defining services, post pandemic, which meet the changed (and changing) needs of communities. Good examples are the involvement of local people in decisions about the grounds maintenance budget and the **Community Investment Fund (CIF)**. North Ayrshire Council has provided a total of £6m funding allocation to enable communities to address the priorities they have identified through Locality Partnerships. The CIF supports the North Ayrshire Community Planning Partnership's Local Outcomes Improvement Plan, Fair for All and Community Wealth Building Strategy. This fund is innovative and enables communities to bring forward ideas to develop local services and places. The Locality Partnership's role is to develop and coproduce the proposal, building connections with partners or funders for local people. The CIF has had some remarkable projects already, especially when partnering with the Scottish Government's Regeneration Capital Grants Fund. You can read more about the project in the [annual update](#) (item 7).
- 6.9 There is also a formal **Participation request** process which is part of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015. Participation requests are designed to complement and improve our range of involvement of local communities. The process provides a way in which a local group can make a formal request to be included in future development which affects them. This could include suggesting how service providers could better meet the needs of users, offering volunteers to support a service or even proposing the community body could take over the delivery of the service themselves.

Areas for further exploration

- Reflecting on the Power of Wellbeing, part of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 and working with communities so that it is used to benefit them in policy and practice.

- Developing more effective and engaging use of social media channels, following the successful **Facebook Live** events which have been held to discuss the Covid -19 Pandemic, the Council Budget and the launch of the Community Wealth Building Strategy.
- Reviewing the **Locality Partnerships**, which, have been in place for 6 years, for efficacy. Arran Locality Partnership has piloted a joint approach with Health and Social Care's Locality Forum, providing valuable learning.
- Extending the partnership working with communities in the Locality Hubs, which were set up in the pandemic and now have a mix of staff and community coalescing around them.
- Considering the role of **Community Associations** and their capacity to support the community needs revealed by the pandemic, like local food larders.
- Strengthening **Community Councils**, which provide an independent voice and have rights to be asked for their view during planning and statutory consultations. Not all areas are represented by Community Councils and they are an important part of local democracy.
- Exploring the role of **Citizens' Assemblies and Citizens' Panels/Juries**, which are groups of people who are brought together to discuss a specific issue or issues in depth and reach a conclusion about what they think should happen.
- Responding to national discussion about moving beyond **mainstreaming participatory budgeting** and **participation requests** to co-production of commissioned services and considering what that means for CPP and Council services.
- Strengthening local voices in Planning, Housing, Economic Growth and Town Centre policy - twenty-minute neighbourhoods have featured prominently in recent place-making policy discussion. Since 2020, many have worked from home and related differently to their home town as it has become the centrepiece of identity and belonging.

7. **Community leadership and ownership: current NAC practice and areas for further exploration**

- 7.1 North Ayrshire Council has a commitment to subsidiarity, or making decisions as close to the communities they affect as possible, and local democracy. This is to strengthen local and community decision-making and democratic governance in ways that improve outcomes in local communities, grow Scotland's economy for everyone's benefit, support communities to focus on their priorities, and help new ideas to flourish. This approach accepts variation in decision-making arrangements across the country: the experience of what is right for one place will not necessarily be right for another. Our communities have played an increasing, empowered role in tackling inequalities and driving inclusive growth through community wealth building. This includes taking a leading role in delivering services, managing and owning community facilities and planning for the future with local people and the Community Planning Partners. Community ownership or control of assets can empower individuals and communities, helping them respond to local challenges by taking greater control of the land and buildings where they live. People can feel a sense of ownership and pride when they control their own assets and often the experience of doing so is inclusive, inspirational and rewarding. It may also allow groups to develop commercial proposals which will support

community benefit. Asset transfer also may mean that public assets get used more frequently and more effectively. Community-led ownership may also allow additional opportunities for groups to secure extra funding or resources. A wide range of skills are required to support and sustain successful community ownership projects and the Council provides guidance to develop new skills, secure funding and create peer-led community leadership. This investment in community leadership is central to the rebalancing of “service provision”, the long term financial sustainability of the public sector, and community cohesion and volunteering.

- 7.2 North Ayrshire Council launched its **Community Wealth Building (CWB) Strategy** in May 2020, along with a five-year action plan to become a Community Wealth Building Council. Community Wealth Building uses the economic levers available to Anchor Institutions to develop resilient, inclusive local economies, with more local employment and a more diverse business base, ensuring that wealth is locally owned and benefits local people. Anchor Institutions are organisations which are rooted within local economies and bring wealth to the area in the form of jobs and supply chains. One of the 5 main strands is the development of under-utilised land and assets for community use. This links with the Council’s Community Asset Transfer Policy and there are a number of recent examples in the [Annual Report](#).
- 7.3 North Ayrshire Council had a **Community Asset Transfer** Policy prior to the enactment of the legislation and has been actively supporting our communities to develop their social capital and organisational capacity, including to undertake the management of community facilities for many years. The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 and its subsequent guidance, provides for us an endorsement of our policy of individual and community capacity building, leading to more active, resilient and responsible communities where people provide a wide range of services to meet peoples’ expressed need. Community Asset Transfer involves the transfer of responsibility for an asset from the council to any suitably qualified community, voluntary or social enterprise group. Some assets must stay under council ownership to support the delivery of essential services or economic activity in an area. The [Council website](#) hosts information about the rigorous process which safeguards both the applicant group and the public interest, as well as holding a register of the Council’s assets. North Ayrshire has multiple, remarkable examples of Community Asset Transfer, including buildings for use as community and youth hubs, sports facilities and land for community use as allotments.
- 7.4 Communities are at the heart of the new local placemaking approaches where there are new opportunities for participation through combining community and spatial planning. **Local Place Plans** form part of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019. They offer the opportunity for a community led, but collaborative, approach to creating attractive local places. They provide the local voice in planning and designing communities. The introduction of Local Place Plans and Local Action Plans for Islands adds another layer to the complex community and spatial planning. North Ayrshire Council has been working with communities to try to align these emerging priorities and actions with Locality Partnerships, the Council, the HSCP and other partners. Local Place Plans are locally led and owned and fit within the context of the Local Development Plan and the Strategic Housing Investment Plan.
- 7.5 Community organisations have worked closely with the Council throughout the pandemic to address food poverty and to coordinate a network of fourteen larders across the local authority. Community **Food Pantries and Larders** are move towards a dignified provision of food for the community. The council provides practical support through a handbook co-created with community organisations which contains practical information, such as operational management and volunteer recruitment. Financial support to set up the infrastructure required, such as fridges and shelving has also been provided. This work offers a

different type of participation and is supported at a high level within the local authority, as well through the council's Community Wealth Building Strategy, which focuses on Fair Food for All.

Areas for further exploration

- Developing the role of 'macro' community organisations and third sector organisations within the co-production of **Community Wealth Building**, which is changing participation in the North Ayrshire economy.
- Linking together the synergies of working with communities to deliver **Local Place Plans** and very local actions, like improving town centres and parks, with the development of skills, jobs and diverse business in our **Community Wealth Building**.
- Sharing control of local spend with communities to support the changes identified in **Local Place Plans, which** need to have fiscal control to make change happen.
- Ensuring that local spend is evidence-led and needs based. Vast amounts of data are held by public agencies. The Council's open data portal already provide access, however, public engagement with open data is unclear.
- Improving performance reporting at community level so that communities can engage with it easily.
- Developing and diversifying the community leadership, which quickly responded to the opportunity to set up **food pantries and larders**. The food network needs to be attract more volunteers and be sustained if it is to continue its community support.

8. What more can we do?

- 8.1 Now that we have set out what is currently in place through the Statement of Intent, we want to reflect now on what more we can do through, especially to maximise the use of digital technologies and to reach deeper into communities.
- 8.2 We will look forward to opening the conversation about some new ways of making your views known and hearing from our communities.