

Communities and Neighbourhoods Committee

10am, Tuesday 2 August 2016

Community Councils – Advancing Local Democracy

Item number	7.3
Report number	
Executive/routine	Executive
Wards	All

Executive summary

The general purpose of Community Councils (CCs) is to act as one of the key voices for their local area. CCs aim to represent their area by seeking and expressing the views of the community. They have an important role to play in a variety of different areas of work such as Neighbourhood Partnerships (NPs), Planning and Licensing.

To assist CCs in fulfilling this role, the Council delivered a CC Development and Support Programme. The Local Community Planning, Community Learning and Development, Planning and Communications Services collaborated to design and deliver the programme.

This report provides a summary of the programme for 2015/16, together with details of future activity to inform the ongoing partnership working with CCs.

Links

Coalition pledges	P33
Council Priorities	CP4
Single Outcome Agreement	SOA4

Community Councils – Advancing Local Democracy

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Communities and Neighbourhoods Committee:

- 1.1 note the CC Development and Support Programme for 2015/16; and
- 1.2 refer this report to the 12 Neighbourhood Partnerships for information.

Background

- 2.1 Community Councils (CCs) are governed by a [Scheme](#) which sets out the framework for their creation and operation. The Council approved a revised Scheme in August 2013, which provides a modernised framework for CCs and is complemented by improved guidance information.
- 2.2 Following the CC elections in 2013, induction sessions were held in 2014 aimed at new community councillors and members who wished to refresh their skills. This was followed by a programme of support covering thematic priorities identified through a survey of community councillors.

Main report

- 3.1 The Development and Support Programme comprised nine sessions delivered from March 2015 to February 2016. A summary of each session categorised by theme is provided below:
 - 3.1.1 Influencing decision making - This aspect of the programme comprised two sessions. The session on Neighbourhood Partnerships focused on the role of CCs in ensuring the community is involved in the development and delivery of services in their area. 'How the Council Works' was delivered by Committee Services and provided CCs with information on the Council governance arrangements and how to get involved.
 - 3.1.2 Planning - Recognising the role of CCs in the planning process, three sessions were held to support them in their role. One provided an introduction to planning, and was targeted at community councillors new to the planning process. The second aimed to promote an understanding of the links between spatial planning and community planning and the relevant policy contexts. The final session, delivered in February 2016, was entitled 'What needs Planning Permission?' and aimed to provide a

better understanding of the background to the planning system and statutory powers.

- 3.1.3 Engagement and Communications – A session was delivered in May 2015 aimed at promoting a better understanding of community engagement and the importance of this to CCs, and included an introduction to the National Standards for Community Engagement. This was followed by two sessions dedicated to promoting an understanding of communications as an engagement method. The first session, delivered by the Communications Service, provided an understanding of media in Edinburgh, and how to generate media interest through a range of channels to reach different audiences. The second session on using Social Media provided support and advice to community councillors on different online engagement platforms. This included a social media surgery where community councillors could discuss their individual needs, set up accounts and trouble shoot issues.
- 3.1.4 Funding - A dedicated 'How to Apply for a Grant' workshop was offered as part of the programme. This is a key element of the Community Funding Support Programme delivered by the Local Community Planning Team and is designed to improve community skills in preparing grant applications. The workshop was delivered jointly with Voluntary Arts Scotland, and included a demonstration and presentation on 'Edinburgh 4 Community', the Library Service online funding portal.
- 3.2 Across the programme community councillors from 31 out of a possible 45 CCs participated, as shown in Diagram 1, with Colinton, Tollcross and Trinity CCs having the highest levels of participation. For those unable to attend, a summary and all materials from each of the sessions was uploaded onto the Neighbourhood Partnership website and the link sent to all CCs.
- 3.3 Attendance at each of the sessions varied, with 'influencing decision making' as a theme proving to be the most popular with 47 attendees, followed by 'engagement and communication' with 37 and 'planning' with 33. A table showing the attendance by event is provided in Diagram 2, together with the number of evaluation form returns.
- 3.4 Findings from the evaluation process showed that the sessions were positively received. Of particular note was the value in terms of relevance to community councillors' needs and the consequent support in the delivery of their role. The sessions considered most relevant were 'How the Council Works', community engagement, 'What Needs Planning Permission' and 'How to Apply for a Grant', with over 90% of respondents rating these as excellent.

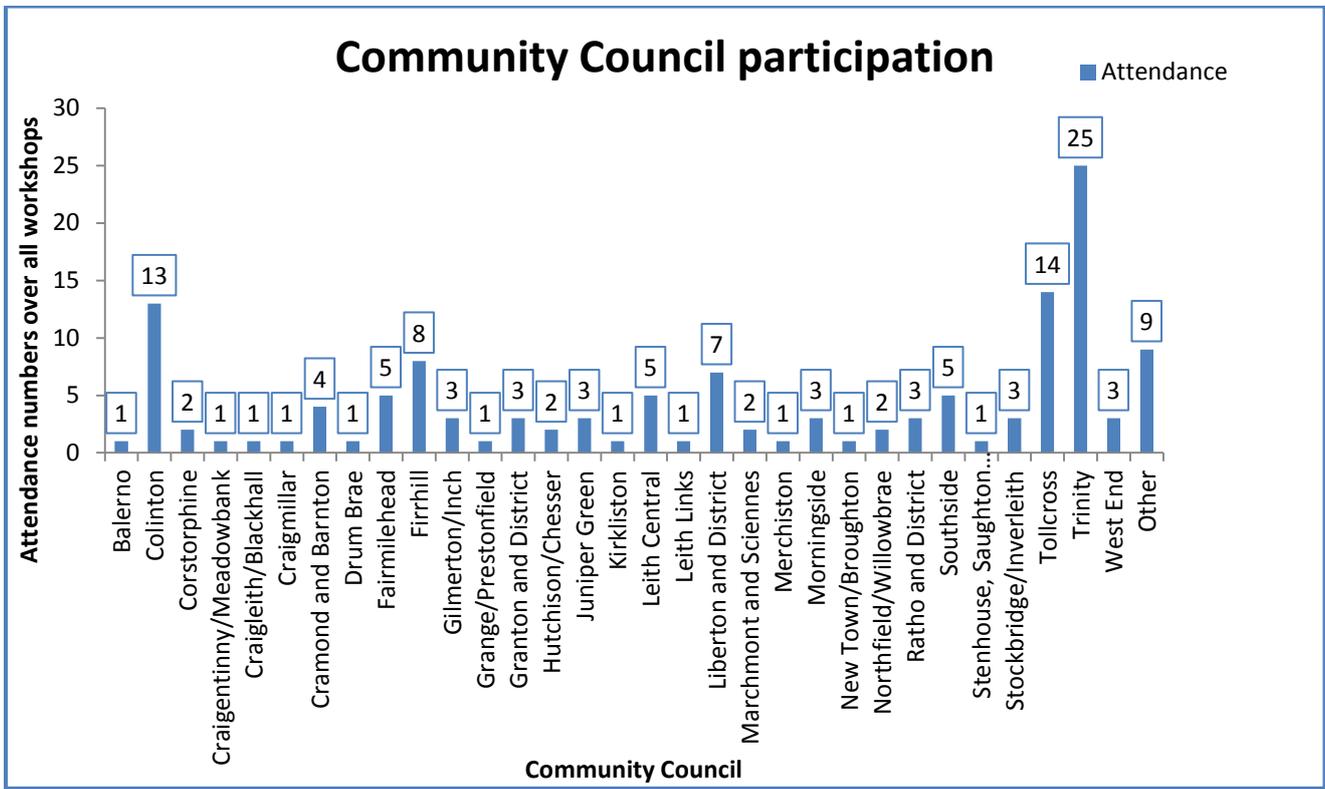


Diagram 1 - Community Council participation

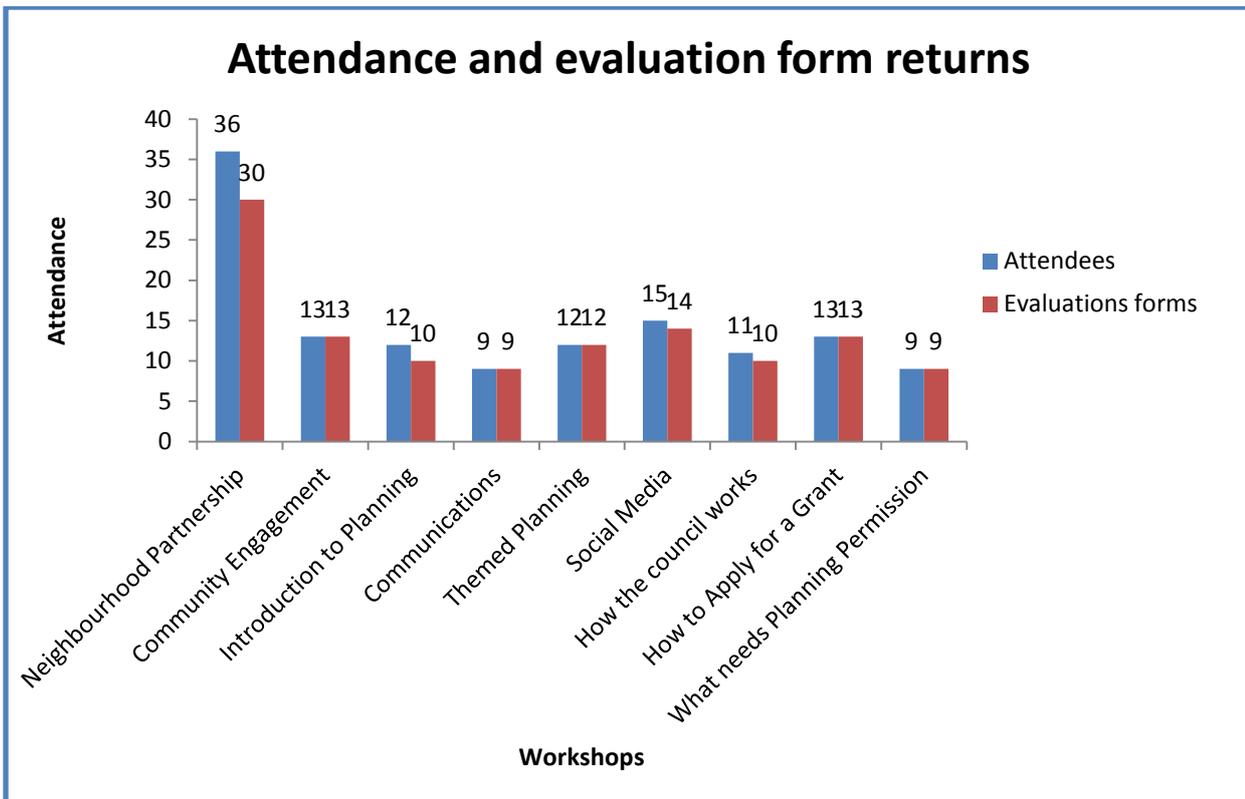


Diagram 2 – Attendance and evaluation form returns

- 3.5 As part of the evaluation, participants were asked for additional topics or areas of support that would be beneficial in their role. Ideas suggested included the role of office bearers, licensing, health and social care and the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2016. These will be considered as part of a future Development and Support Programme.
- 3.6 With the triennial elections taking place in September/October 2016, current activity is focused on the design and delivery of a communications plan to promote awareness of CCs with a view to encouraging nominations. Work is also underway to develop a new induction programme, which will be delivered following the elections.
- 3.7 Work is also progressing on the refresh of the Edinburgh Planning Concordat. This document aims to encourage closer working between the development industry, the Council and community councils when major developments are proposed. This work is expected to be finalised in autumn 2016.

Measures of success

- 4.1 Each session in the CC Development and Support Programme was evaluated by attendees, with this information informing the development of the programme and support to CCs.
- 4.2 CCs aim to represent their area by seeking and expressing the views of the community. The work of CCs contributes to citizen participation in governance and democratic decision making, increases community cohesion and improves the quality of life. These objectives are core to the NP approach, and across the city are measured based on key indicators drawn from the Edinburgh People's Survey of people feeling they are able to have a say on things happening or how services are run in their local area; satisfaction that people from different backgrounds can get on well together; and improved satisfaction with neighbourhoods as a place to live.

Financial impact

- 5.1 The costs of the CC Development and Support Programme are contained within existing budgets.

Risk, policy, compliance and governance impact

- 6.1 There are no adverse impacts arising from this report.

Equalities impact

- 7.1 The CC Development and Support Programme enhances the Council's ability to meet its General and Public Duties under equalities legislation. There are positive rights impacts in that the programme aims to increase participation and voice by encouraging wider public engagement. Fostering good relations within the community is also a key feature of the programme.

Sustainability impact

- 8.1 Delivery of the programme has a positive impact on social justice and well being through assisting CCs in fulfilling their representative function and supporting them in engaging with the wider community.

Consultation and engagement

- 9.1 CCs were asked to identify thematic priorities which informed the initial design of the Development and Support Programme. Feedback from the session evaluation process during the programme informed the delivery and will be taken into account in designing future programmes of support.

Background reading/external references

[Support and Development Programme – Session summary and materials](#)

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Links

Coalition pledges	P33 – Strengthen Neighbourhood Partnerships and further involve local people in decisions on how Council resources are used
Council Priorities	CP4 – Improve quality of life – Safe and empowered communities
Single Outcome Agreement	SOA4 – Edinburgh’s communities are safer and have improved physical and social fabric
Appendices	None