Culture and Communities Committee

10.00am, Tuesday, 1 February 2022

Collaborative working with Community Councils

Executive/routine	Executive
Wards	
Council Commitments	

1. Recommendations

1.1 Note the report as requested by the Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee on 9 November 2021.

1.2 Agree to refer the report to the Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee.

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Report

Collaborative working with Community Councils

2. Executive Summary

2.1 This report responds to the call from the Governance, Risk and Best Value (GRBV) Committee on 9 November 2021 for details of the Council's framework for collaboration with community councils. This was to detail current arrangements, funding and how this links into wider community planning responsibilities with any actions for improvement identified.

3. Background

3.1 Community Councils, were first established in Scotland under the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 and maintained under Section 22 of the subsequent Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act, 1994.

3.2 Current support arrangements and funding for Edinburgh's Community Councils took effect following the agreement of the new Scheme for Community Councils in June 2019.

4. Main report

Current Arrangements

4.1 Following Community Council elections in October 2019, there are currently 44 Community Councils within the city boundary. Two areas, Silverknowes/Davidson Mains and Wester Hailes, do not have a Community Council as Silverknowes/Davidson Mains chose not to have an election, as they have a residents' association, and Wester Hailes did not receive sufficient valid nominations.

Guidance and Advice

4.2 Under current arrangements the Council provides post-election induction training to community councillors on the following topics:

4.2.1 Community Councillor Roles, Responsibilities and Governance;
4.2.2 The Place of the Community Council in the City; and,

4.2.3 A Market Place Event with Stands from Planning, Licensing, Edinburgh Association of Community Councils, Edinburgh Partnership and Police Scotland.

4.3 Specific guidance for community councils is provided on the Council's external [website](). The guidance focuses on the following areas:

4.3.1 Best practice and support in the roles of community councillors and office bearers;
4.3.2 Managing the information held by community councils;
4.3.3 The Community Councillor Complaints Procedure and the anonymised summaries of complaints cases that have been determined; and
4.3.4 Social media guidance, that was supported by training sessions in June 2021.

4.4 Guidance is provided on an ongoing basis on specific and relevant topics that impact all community councils, with recent examples including:

4.4.1 Holding electronic meetings following the outbreak of Covid-19 in April 2020;
4.4.2 Requirements for the provision of grants in May 2020;
4.4.3 Election hustings for the Scottish Parliamentary Election in April 2021; and
4.4.4 Resuming physical and hybrid meetings in November 2021.

4.5 Information sharing on behalf of third parties, other Council services and other irregular sources:

4.5.1 The Scottish Community Councils project, managed by the Improvement Service on behalf of the Scottish Government;
4.5.2 The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service;
4.5.3 The Scottish Parliament; and,
4.5.4 Consultations from the Scottish Government.

4.6 Ongoing advice on application of the Scheme for Community Councils, Standing Orders, the Code of Conduct for Community Councillors and signposting to internal and external services/organisations.

Funding

4.7 Community councils receive administrative grants to assist with their operating costs. The base grant for each is £522.00 with a population uplift of £0.02 per person within the community council boundary and an accommodation subsidy based on costs incurred.

4.8 Some relaxations to accounting requirements to take account of COVID-19 restrictions were implemented in May 2020, with additional grant funding being made available to support online hosting of community council meetings in response to a motion to Council from Councillor Rae.

4.9 The Council recognises that, from time to time, community councils may seek to develop small projects to benefit their communities either by themselves or in collaboration with others. Where these projects fall outside the scope or purpose of a community council as defined by statute and the Scheme for Community Councils, the community council can apply to the [Community Grants Fund](),

administered by the locality teams for the potential provision of up to £5000.00 in additional funding.

Links into wider community planning responsibilities

4.10 The important contribution community councils make is recognised in the Edinburgh Partnership governance arrangements. They are involved at all levels in the city, with participation in the neighbourhood networks, as network representatives on the locality community planning partnerships, and through representation by the Edinburgh Association of Community Councils (EACC) on the Local Outcome Improvement Plan Delivery Group and Edinburgh Partnership Board.

4.11 Notwithstanding this, the Best Value Assurance Audit identified that further improvement was required in relation to community engagement and partnership working. In response the Edinburgh Partnership set up a Working Group tasked with developing appropriate responses to the issues raised. This comprised a range of partners, including the EACC. The work of this Group culminated in the Edinburgh Partnership approval of an improvement plan in June 2021.

4.12 A key action under the theme of community empowerment was to:

__Develop a framework for collaboration with the Edinburgh Association of Community Councils__ and the community councils, to ensure they can fulfil their statutory function in representing local communities and build a productive relationship with all community planning partners and the Council in particular.

4.13 To take this forward, a bilateral group was set up comprising City of Edinburgh Council senior managers and EACC members. Two meetings have been held to date and an improvement plan produced. The plan focuses on strengthening the relationship between the Council and community councils both in the short-term and by addressing structural issues in the medium term. A summary of the actions is set out below.

4.14 **Immediate way of working – communications (to 2022)**

4.14.1 <u>Information flow</u> – actions to improve the information posted on the Edinburgh Partnership website, provision of structural diagrams and glossary of terms on community planning arrangements in the city and activity to raise awareness of community planning.

4.14.2 <u>Access to Council and Contacts</u> – Council key contact list to be produced and maintained and contacts for community council chairs to be kept up to date.

4.14.3 <u>Communication and dialogue</u> – measures to strengthen senior management participation in EACC meetings, improvements to information sharing based on community councils identifying their areas of interest, briefing on community councils and community planning to be produced for Council officers.

4.15 **Medium term actions – structures (to 2024)**

4.15.1 Community council elections – to hold the next community council election in 2024 and to review the approach to promoting elections to identify improvements.

4.15.2 Community council boundaries – to carry out a review of community council boundaries in 2023.

4.15.3 Council support for neighbourhood networks and locality community planning partnerships – implementation of the Council Place review to establish a Community Empowerment Team.

4.15.4 Support for community councils – review support arrangements for community councils, explore options for increasing information on Council business, develop a mechanism for information sharing within communities to support collaborative working, carry out a training needs analysis to inform a potential development programme for community councils.

4.15.5 Maximise local information and capacity building – mapping of local networks to identify potential efficiencies and opportunities for sharing knowledge.

4.16 A significant issue for the EACC is the need for resources to develop the capacity and facilitate the engagement in representing community councils in strategic processes. As noted above, and in line with statutory requirements, revenue support is provided direct to individual community councils by the Council. As a non-statutory body, funding is not provided to the EACC although it provides a co-ordinating function and is a member of the Edinburgh Partnership Board.

4.17 Whilst this request is reflected in the improvement plan it is acknowledged that it is a matter for Edinburgh Partnership members, not just the Council, and needs to be based on a clear understanding and definition of the support required and an option appraisal for how this might best be achieved.

4.18 In raising the community council's concerns, the EACC has recognised that this is not just an Edinburgh issue but a national one. On that basis the Chair has approached CoSLA and the Improvement Service to open discussions with the Scottish Government on what can be done nationally to support change, with the potential to use the learning from Edinburgh to inform the approach.

4.19 The need to progress this work with the input of partners recognises the original action under the Best Value improvement plan to develop a collaborative framework with the Edinburgh Partnership. Partners agreed at the Board meeting in September 2021 to nominate representatives to participate in these discussions. To date positive responses have been received from Police Scotland, Edinburgh University, Scottish Enterprise, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and NHS Lothian.

5. Next Steps

5.1 The improvement plan between the Council and EACC and community councils will continue to be implemented.

5.2 A meeting of the Edinburgh Partnership members and the EACC to discuss the development of the collaborative framework is scheduled for January 2022. A progress report on the outcome of this work will be considered by the Edinburgh Partnership Board in March 2022. Updates on progress on this activity are regularly provided as part of the Best Value Assurance Audit reporting to the Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee.

6. Financial impact

6.1 Current revenue budget support for community councils is contained within existing budget allocations.

6.2 Subject to the work with partners on the development of a collaborative framework, further support may be requested, and this will be considered by the Edinburgh Partnership and through individual member governance processes and any additional call on Council financial resources would require a funding source to be identified.

7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

7.1 All activity outlined in this report has been subject to collaborative working with community councils.

7.2 The proposals will assist the Council to better deliver its equality and rights outcomes and the delivery of the Equality Act 2010 public sector equality duties to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations.

7.3 The proposals will support and strengthen engagement and capacity building activity with communities.

8. Background reading/external references

8.1 Scheme for Community Councils - 2019

9. Appendices

9.1 None.