



Review of the Scheme for the Establishment of Community Councils in Fife

Response from Benarty Community Council

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the revised document on the Scheme for the Establishment of Community Councils in Fife.

Consultation Period

Having said that, we feel that the consultation period of 8 weeks was too short. Being able to read, process, digest and critique such an important document, of 58 pages, within that timescale is a big ask, given that most Community Councils, the groups most affected by the document, only meet once a month and depending on the timing of meetings (as in our case), there was only 1 normal meeting where it could be discussed.

Roles and Responsibilities of Community Councils

- 3.1 Last line, “complement” should be “compliment”.

Planning Applications

- 3.3 This para refers to Appendix 6, which is the Complaints Process, and should be changed to Appendix 5.

Licensing

- 3.4 We cannot see the need for this para as it seems to be adequately covered by para 3.5.

Other Activities

- 3.7 Remove this paragraph. It's covered by 2.1

Constitution

- 3.9 We do not disagree that all Community Councils should have a Constitution, but we question whether the Scheme should be used for this purpose. We feel that the Scheme should be used as a model, which Community Councils can then tailor to make it more personal to their area. The Scottish Government model constitution should be used and then tailored to suit each Community Council.
- 3.11 If the Scheme is to be used as the Constitution, there appears to be little need to “adopt” it as well as the Constitution as they will be one in the same.

Information Commissioner's Office

- 3.12 We remain of the view that Community Councils are not required to register with the ICO. It is within the nature of our work to collect some personal data, otherwise we would not be able to represent the community's views or make payments to some residents and groups. These are exempt purposes. If Fife Council continue to force Community Councils to register, then they should also continue to reimburse Community Councils for the cost of registration as an addition to the annual grant.

Representing Views

- 3.14 This para is redundant as it is adequately covered under Statutory Purposes and in paras 3.1 and 3.2. It should be removed.

See also comments on Annual Administrative Grant.

Website

- 3.15(8) See comments on Annual Administrative Grant.

Community Council Areas in Fife

Boundary Changes

- 4.6 We feel strongly that if there is no agreement between affected Community Councils to change a boundary, then the proposal should automatically fall, and the status quo be retained. Para 4.6 should be amended to reflect that, and para 4.7 deleted.

Membership of Community Councils

Population Figures

- 6.3 We feel that only reviewing population figures immediately before each election is insufficiently frequent. The numbers are readily available to Fife Council and should be reviewed on an annual basis. This is particularly important for areas where population figures are increasing as it affects the annual grant.

Minimum Numbers of Members

- 6.5 We feel that the minimum number of members to function as a Community Council should be equal to the number of members required to achieve a quorum at meetings. This would be more consistent.

Co-opted Members

- 6.10 This paragraph is too onerous, particularly given that many Community Councils struggle to fill all their seats. A simple majority at a normal meeting should be enough, with notice being given when the papers for the meeting go out to members.

Youth Members

- 6.13 We question if this is necessary as anyone aged 16 or over is eligible to stand for the Community Council in any case, without having a separate category for Youth Members.

Equalities

Paras 8.2 and 8.3 seem redundant, as all are covered by 8.1.

Meetings

Annual General Meeting

- 10.13 The date of 30 June should be removed. The financial year does not end until 31 March. Getting the accounts completed before 30 June is manageable, but it is not always possible to influence an auditor's diary to get the accounts properly cleared, and then give sufficient notice of an AGM, before 30 June. Instead, the requirement should be to have an AGM, with properly audited accounts, prior to the submission of a grant claim to Fife Council, as per paragraph 12.17.
- 10.27 We feel that minutes should not go into the public domain until they have been approved at the next meeting of the Community Council. 9 times out of 10 the draft minutes are approved unedited, but we should allow for changes to be made before they become publicly available (other than to those members of the public who attend Community Council meetings of course – but they will hear what amendments are agreed).

Liaison with Fife Council

- 11.1 We welcome the inclusion of a specific email address to contact Fife Council. However, Fife Council must ensure that the email address is monitored regularly and that it acts as a proper gatekeeper to the rest of Fife Council in ensuring that any queries etc are directed to the correct officer. Fife Council should consider setting up a dedicated department to deal with Community Councils.

Resourcing a Community Council

Annual Administrative Grant

- 12.13 The grant amount, both flat rate and additional amount per capita, has not changed since the 1970s. This severely hampers Community Councils from carrying out the full range of responsibilities that they have to their communities.

In addition, responsibilities for creating and maintaining a website, and other social media presence, plus carrying out various consultations with residents, costs money. The annual grant barely provides enough to cover basic domain name registration and web hosting. Community Councils in Scotland are eligible for gov domain names and this should be funded by Fife Council, along with funding for websites, which require more security than ordinary websites. Gov.uk or Gov.scot and accompanying hosting can be in the region of £300 per annum, which leaves little funds for other responsibilities.

The current level of grant funding also does not take into account that some Community Councils, including Benarty, have an approved Local Place Plan in place. It is difficult to see how any new projects, that are included in the approved plan, will get off the ground without an increase in the annual grant.

Also, the reimbursement of the ICO registration fee, in addition to the annual grant, should be retained and referred to in this section of the document. It is 8.2(d) of the current scheme.

- 12.18 There should be a mechanism for annual changes in grant (outside of population movements, which should automatically trigger a change), for example, the amounts (flat rate and per capita rate) should be increased by the level of inflation, or at the very least, increase in line with council tax increases.

Other Council areas within Scotland are significantly more generous than Fife. For example, Lerwick in the Shetlands has a population not too different from Lochgelly, yet they receive a basic grant of £17,923 (2023-24 figures). Fife Council need to urgently review grant funding for Community Councils.

Please see Annex A which is the findings of a grants report to Fife Community Councils which may inform your review of funding for Community Councils.

Liability of Community Council Members

Notwithstanding the insurance point at 13.1, there may need to be separate consultation on the liabilities of Community Council members.

Contracts

Given the constraints on Community Councils in other sections of the document, eg Role and Responsibilities, we do not see the need for this section as it adds another

layer of bureaucracy. For example, creating and maintaining a website, which we are required to do under the Scheme, automatically means additional, unnecessary paperwork to obtain Fife Council's permission.

Complaints

- 16.1 The Appendix reference should be changed from "5" to "6". See also comments on Appendix 6.

Dissolution of a Community Council

- 17.3 This paragraph does not take into account any Community Councils who only meet quarterly. Missing only one meeting would fall foul of this requirement.

- 17.4 The reference should be to Appendix 6.

Political Activities

We question whether it is necessary to spell this out in such detail. The first sentence is all that's required.

Review and Amendment of the Scheme

- 20.1 There should be a regular, specified review of the Scheme, rather than "from time to time". There should also be a mechanism for Community Councils to request a review where they believe that there has been a material change.

Appendix 2 - Population Scale

It is unclear to us how Benarty Community Council membership has reduced from 14 to 13, particularly when we have a rising population. We are one of the Community Councils who managed to fill all our seats at the last election and would prefer the number to remain at 14. It makes no difference to the chart on this appendix and makes no difference to funding. The proposed scale is unnecessarily complicated and convoluted and it should remain as in the current Scheme, with perhaps adjustment of numbers at the lower end of the scale only, i.e. 6 community councillors for communities with under one thousand people.

Appendix 2 – Population Figures

As per the comment on Appendix 1.

Appendix 3 – Model Standing Orders

- 1.3 Remove "and must be held prior to 30 June each year". See comments on 10.13 of main document.

Appendix 3 – Model Standing Orders

9.1 See comments at 10.27 of main document.

Appendix 5 – Planning Applications

Para 3 Community Councils should be consulted on all planning applications within their area, not just those “that are categorised as being of national or major scale”.

Appendix 6 – Complaints Process

3.3 Anonymous complaints should never be accepted, but we do support the second sentence.

Scheme of Electoral Arrangements

This should be a separate document and not part of the Scheme for the Establishment of Community Councils.

General Comments

There should be an area on Fife Council’s website that provides basic information on Community Councils, for example, the names and contact details of office bearers, meeting dates etc; with perhaps a link to each Community Council’s website.

REPORT ON COMMUNITY COUNCIL GRANTS

TO FIFE COMMUNITY COUNCILS

JOHN PURDIE
BENARTY COMMUNITY COUNCIL

AUGUST 2024

Produced for the 17 September 2024 meeting of Fife Community Councils

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Preface

At the meeting of Fife Community Councils on Tuesday 25 June 2024 the Agenda Item of Community Council Grants was discussed again and it was agreed that I look into the matter and bring back a report to Fife Community Councils for the next meeting.

In the original email from Donald Campbell, Chair of Kincardine Community Council, the grant and funding was one of the issues, with a mention of Fife Council's £10 million underspend. It later came out that grants for Community Councils in Fife had not risen for at least a decade and it was suggested perhaps not for 20 years.

I don't want to bore everyone with reams of facts and figures so I have attempted to keep this report as brief as possible while staying relevant.

Executive Summary

Overview

This report addresses the issue of Community Council grants within Fife, responding to discussions and concerns raised at meetings of Fife Community Councils. The report investigates the current state of funding for Community Councils in Fife, highlighting inadequacies and proposing recommendations for improvement.

Key Findings

1. **Fife Council Grant Insufficiency:** The fixed basic grant of £400 from Fife Council is insufficient to cover the extensive list of administrative and community activities. The additional 12 pence per person allocation, based on population, is inadequate and outdated.
2. **Comparison with Other Local Authorities:** Grants from other Scottish local authorities cover a broader range of expenses and provide higher basic amounts. Appendix 1 details these variations, highlighting the need for standardized, comprehensive funding across Scotland.
3. **Democracy Matters and Participatory Budgeting:** The ongoing Democracy Matters consultation and participatory budgeting initiatives provide an opportunity to enhance Community Council funding and responsibilities. This alignment could empower councils through better financial and decision-making capacities.

Recommendations

1. **Nationwide Questionnaire:** Extend the survey to gather comprehensive feedback from Community Councils across Scotland.
2. **Grant Review and Standardization:** Conduct an official review of administrative costs covered by grants and establish a standardized nationwide list, including allowances for inflation.
3. **Event Funding:** Develop a list of regular events organized by Community Councils, with grants adjusted to cover these activities adequately.
4. **Insurance Costs:** Set a realistic and inflation-adjusted figure for insurance costs within the grant framework.
5. **Empower Community Councils:** Lobby for the transfer of participatory budgeting to Community Councils, enhancing their role in local decision-making.
6. **Minimum Grant Standard:** Establish a minimum Community Council grant to be applied across Scotland.

Conclusion

The current funding model for Community Councils in Fife is inadequate and outdated. A substantial increase in grants and a more standardized, comprehensive funding approach are urgently needed. Implementing these recommendations will strengthen the financial stability and operational capacity of Community Councils, enabling them to better serve their communities and fulfil their statutory roles.

Introduction

Scottish Community Councils were created by the Local Government Act 1973. Scottish Community Councils play a crucial role in local governance, serving as the most local tier of statutory representation in Scotland. They bridge the gap between local authorities and other public bodies and communities, helping to make public bodies aware of the opinions and needs of the communities they represent.

Scottish Community Councils are elected bodies, with community councillors usually serving for a term of four years. Elections are generally held every four years; the year of election varies in each Local Authority.

Running of Community Councils is by core funding from Local Authorities, generally in the form of fixed grant, mostly with an additional population based supplement. The items covered by the grant vary from local authority to local authority. Local authorities can also provide non-financial support to Scottish Community Councils, such as access to meeting rooms, training, and advice on community engagement. Community Councils can access external funding from public and private bodies.

Scottish Community Councils have no statutory powers but do have leave to pursue any purpose and are legally required to be consulted on planning.

Fife Council Grant

On page 19 of The Scheme for Establishment of Community Councils notes that grant provided is for:

“(a) an amount to cover insurance, paid directly to the insurance company by Fife Council which will include public liability, employers' liability, loss and theft of money, personal accident, libel and slander and limited all risks cover for equipment;

(b) a fixed basic grant for all Community Councils, which will be used in the first instance to cover the main administrative costs including:

- Auditors' fees
- Stationery
- Postage
- Travel costs
- Accommodation lets (where meetings are held outwith Council premises)
- Bank charges
- Advertising
- General publicity and promotional materials
- Consultation with the community
- Financial assistance to local groups and projects within the Community Council area “

The fixed basic grant is £400¹. With the best will in the world £400 will not cover the list above for one year. Fife Community Councils also receive 12 pence per person in the Community Council area¹ but this is variable and all Community Councils receive a different amount. Community Council populations in Fife range from 51 (Moonzie) to 18,171 (Royal Borough of St Andrews) as noted in Schedule 1 of the Fife Scheme. This adds a minimum of £6.12 and maximum of £2,180.52 to the basic grant.

Other Local Authorities provide reimbursement for a lot more items, including Affiliation fees, Subscriptions, Website Costs, Honorariums, hardware and software².

Basic grants in other Local Authorities vary in form and amount. Appendix 1 lists those publicly available.

What is covered by the grant varies from Local Authority to Local Authority. It should be standardised so all Community Council grants are covering all items from a set list which can be agreed nationwide. This list should be properly costed.

Grant Example- Benarty Community Council

Here we look at an example of grant usage.

Currently the Fife Council Grant to Benarty Community Council is £1,087.60 per year. This is divided up into the fixed basic grant of £400 plus 5,730 times £0.12, £687.60, giving the total. Information Commissioner Office costs are separate from the grant.

Annually Benarty Community Council: -

- Funds and hosts a Citizen of the Year Award, in the region of £200
- Funds the Armistice Day Service, in the region of £150
- Takes a page in the Benarty Heritage Preservation Group calendar, generally £100
- Gives a donation to the Benarty Gala, generally £100
- Gives a donation to the local Pipe Band Competition, generally £100

These costs alone exceed the basic grant. The Community Council also produces a printed quarterly newsletter via a sub group. By necessity the newsletter relies on grants and to a small extent adverts. Our monthly meetings are kindly provided free – these costs would otherwise be £150 per annum. Although an honorarium (£50) is in place for Secretarial costs until recently any general meeting costs and domain and web hosting costs were absorbed by the Secretary. Accounts are audited gratis.

Benarty Community Council has run a deficit in previous years. Were it not for free meetings and absorption of meeting costs running the Community Council would be at least 80% of the whole grant before anything else or unexpected items could be considered.

As an addition Benarty Community Council minutes have been deposited in the local Library. While there is not always the Audited Accounts numbers from some minutes are present. From November 1999 the minutes show that there was £1,800 in the Benarty Community Council bank account including £300 ring fenced. This **could** put the Fife Council grant to Benarty Community Council in the early 2000s at around the £1,300 mark seen below. It is concerning to find the figures show Benarty Community Council has had **decreases** in the Community Council Grant from Fife Council, including a reduction at the most recent Scheme review.

The approved Accounts from 2008 show a Fife Council Grant of £1,301.06

The approved Accounts from 2010 show a Fife Council Grant of £1,234.46

As noted, currently the Fife Council Grant is £1,087.60

The basic grant is insufficient. If the basic grant of £400* had risen by 2% a year from 2000 it would still only be £643.47 and the additional element would be 17 pence, giving Benarty £1,645.08. In addition to running costs a list of regular events should be drawn up which the grant should cover, reasonably costed and allowing for inflation. The additional element is also insufficient and should be reviewed or

removed. If the figure is reviewed any new figure should be set at a much higher bar with regular increases and particular note of changes to population.

*Assuming the basic grant has always been £400

Democracy Matters

Democracy Matters was launched in 2018 and is an ongoing consultation. It was brought up at the June meeting with notes of possible remuneration for community councillors such as expenses but there being no additional money for funding community councils. Democracy Matters concerns itself with the following topics

- Scotland's Citizens' Assembly
- Participatory Budgeting
- Community Right to Buy
- Community Learning Exchange

The consultation paper³, “Democracy matters phase 2 consultation - local governance review”, talks about establishing new decision making bodies for local communities, and does so in a couple of fictitious examples. This is surely unnecessary when Community Councils are already in place. This would be an ideal situation to tie up proper funding with additional powers or responsibilities for Community Councils, and provide for consultation, decision making powers and budgets locally via Community Councils.

Participatory Budgeting

Participatory budgeting was also mentioned at the June meeting of Fife Community Councils and in actuality was the source for my previous suggestion of 1% of a Local Authority budget to fund Community Councils.

Participatory Budgeting was agreed as a framework in Scotland in 2017 with agreement between the Scottish Government and Local Authorities that “at least 1% of local government budgets will be subject to PB by the end of 2021”⁴. Participatory budgeting is a democratic process in which citizens decide directly how to spend part of a public budget. In Fife this has taken the form of semi-regular, Area Committee based consultations with the public on how an amount of money was to be spent.

Fife Council in 2022/2023 appear to have only spent £270,000 on participatory budgeting according to the Best Value thematic work in councils 2022-23; £170,000 on The Forward West Fife and £100,000 on the play park at Lochore Meadows Country Park⁵. This would be way below 1% of their budget even in 2022/2023.

Making this framework more rigorous and regular could strengthen communities by the 1% of the budget being allocated to Community Councils for local consultation and decision for each community. Who better to lead for local areas than Community Councils?

Questionnaire

The best way to get answers is to ask questions. A questionnaire was created and distributed to all Fife Community Councils for consideration. The questionnaire is anonymous and all questions are optional. The questionnaire remains open and can be completed by Community Councils or Community Councillors via the email link sent in July.

Conclusions and Recommendations

There is no solution to Community Council funding which will satisfy everyone but what is clear is that the funding of Community Councils in Fife – and Scotland wide – is inadequate and needs to be urgently looked at and funding drastically increased, with provision for ongoing rises built into any funding mechanism.

It is also clear that the Fife basic grant is too low for the running of most groups, particularly the most local tier of statutory representation. The additional 12 pence per person is also antiquated and inadequate, and in the case of Fife generally outdated population wise as several areas of Fife have seen recent house building projects resulting in community expansion.

It is recommended:

- To spread the questionnaire, perhaps with additional or revised questions, Scotland wide, to gain the views and opinions of Community Councils across Scotland.
- An official review of what is covered by the grant administratively is needed, and a nationwide list of what the grant covers agreed, allowing for inflation to be included in the pricing.
- An official list of regular events Community Councils traditionally organise, which the grant should cover should be drawn up, reasonably costed and allowing for inflation and rises.
- An official set figure for the insurance should be included rather than a note a part of the grant is for insurance. This should be realistically calculated and allow for inflation and rises.
- Lobbying for Community Councils to be given powers, finances and responsibilities rather than creating new community bodies as suggested in the Democracy Matters document.
- Consideration should be given to the transfer of Participatory Budgeting to Community Councils. Community Councils can engage with the public at a local level more than the local authority. Community Councils are also in more of position to know what is needed locally.
- There should be a **minimum** Community Council grant Scotland wide, ideally more than the highest current grant given (Lerwick, pop 7,500, £17,923 for 2023/2024).

Any reviews may be conducted by a Local Authority, but a better option is for things to be done on a Scotland wide level.

Notes

- 1 Fife Council Community Council Training document, February 2024, page 20.
This information is also available in the Fife Scheme documentation
- 2 Argyll and Bute Scheme of Community Councils 2022 pages 11 and 12.
- 3 Online consultation:
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/democracy-matters-phase-2-consultation-local-governance-review/pages/1/>
- 4 Community Empowerment, Participatory Budgeting, Agreement with Local Government
<https://www.gov.scot/policies/community-empowerment/participatory-budgeting/>
- 5 Best Value thematic work in councils 2022-23, Page 14.
https://www.fife.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0027/539163/Fife-Council-22-23-Best-Value-Thematic-Review.pdf

Appendix 1 – Other Local Authority Grants

Information on Community Council grants from other local authorities was found via google search, some of which date back to 2015 and may not be the most up to date. Shetland Islands are currently reviewing their scheme. Not all were publicly available; the details below account for about half the Local Authorities in Scotland. As can be seen not all included actual figures. Available figures were taken from either the Local Authority websites or the Scheme for Establishment document.

Aberdeen City Council “£600 plus 7pence per head of population”

Dundee City Council “£330 plus 2p Per registered Elector”

Edinburgh City Council “standard lump sum plus a per capita component of 2p for every person living in the community council area”

East Lothian “a fixed sum plus a grant per head of the estimated electorate of the Community Council area”

Glasgow “Each Community Council can be considered eligible to receive an annual Administration Allowance from the City Council, which may also take account of the population size included in the Community Council’s boundary”

Inverclyde Council “(a) an Administrative Grant of £500 and (b) a Project Grant, which varies from year to year and according to the population of a Community Council Area”

Moray “Moray Council provides an annual grant to Community Councils to cover the costs in administering community council business. The grant shall be fixed at a rate reviewed and advised annually by the Local Authority and may be disbursed in one or more instalments during the course of the financial year”

North Ayrshire “The maximum grant payable is calculated at a rate of £200 per Community Council, plus £30 per thousand of population.”

Orkney Islands “Orkney Islands Council provides each Community Council with an annual grant, in the region of £3,500 per annum, to be spent at their sole discretion. In addition, financial assistance is provided through the Community Council Grant Scheme, Seed Corn funding and Community Development Funding (CDF). This allows them to be an active co-ordinator and benefactor to their local community. The majority of Community Councils arrange the caretaking of burial grounds in each area with the costs being met by Orkney Islands Council.”

Perth and Kinross. “Subject to the submission of independently examined accounts, Perth & Kinross Council will provide an annual top-up administrative grant, to ensure that a community council has a minimum administrative grant bank balance of £700 at the end of the financial year.”

South Ayrshire “Each Community Council can be considered eligible to receive an annual Administration Allowance from South Ayrshire Council, which will take account of the population size included in the Community Council’s boundary.”

Stirling “Stirling Council provides an Administration Grant to each community Council for Administrative expenses such as hall/room hire, Photocopying, newsletters, websites and fees such as for data protection registration. Community Councils are responsible for how this money is spent. Community Councils are also responsible for producing a set of accounts each year which need to be independently examined and approved at their Annual General Meeting (AGM).”

Shetland Island

Community Council core funding

Community Council	2023/24
Bressay	£5,802
Burra & Trondra	£5,998
Delting	£11,317
Dunrossness	£9,546
Fetlar	£4,302
Gulberwick, Quarff & Cunningsburgh	£9,923
Lerwick	£17,923
Nesting & Lunnasting	£7,127
Northmavine	£12,667
Sandness & Walls	£9,227
Sandsting & Aithsting	£10,218
Sandwick	£8,034
Scalloway	£7,258
Skerries	£4,164
Tingwall, Whiteness & Weisdale	£8,306
Unst	£8,423
Whalsay	£7,696
Yell	£8,531
TOTALS	£156,462

East Dumbarton

3. The amount allocated to each Community Council is as follows:

Community Council	Grant 2023/24
Baldernock	£765
Bearsden East	£1,740
Bearsden North	£2,876
Bearsden West	£1,740
Bishopbriggs	£5,290
Campsie	£877
Kirkintilloch	£4,400
Lenzie	£2,128
Milton of Campsie	£949
Milngavie	£3,120
Torrance	£870
Waterside	£825
TOTAL	£25, 580

Argyle and Bute

Number in electorate	Grant payable (£)
Up to 600	400
601 - 1000	400
1001 - 5000	500
5001 +	700