



Argyll and Bute Council

COMMUNITY COUNCIL HANDBOOK

2022 to 2026



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INTRODUCTION

The aim of the handbook is meet the ongoing needs of new Community Councillors in providing a research tool and in particular, the needs of new or prospective Community Councillors who require more information as they are not yet familiar with the work of community councils.

The handbook aims to collate all the information community councils require to operate effectively and includes links to the Governance Framework for Community Councils, the Argyll and Bute Council Scheme for the Establishment of Community Councils and Code of Best Practice.

PART 1 – INTRODUCTION TO COMMUNITY COUNCILS

What is the Purpose of a Community Council?

The Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 legislated for the formation of community councils and states their general purpose as:

“To ascertain, co-ordinate and express to the local authorities for its area and to public authorities, the views of the community which it represents ... and to take such action in the interest of the community as appears to it to be expedient and practicable”

From 1st April 1996 the role of community councils was enhanced by adding a statutory consultation role for community councils in both planning and licensing matters.

Further powers were given to community councils by the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015. The Act lists community councils as a Community Participation Body thereby providing a mechanism for communities to have a more proactive role in having their voices heard in how services are planned and delivered. The Act sets out the [public service authorities](#) to whom the legislation applies.

It is appreciated that not all community councils are alike and do not all undertake the same responsibilities. The work of community councils varies even within the local authority area although most operate from the standard Model Constitution with a handful of variations which largely affect those community councils who are in receipt of community benefit funding in respect of windfarms and the governance framework for dispersal of funds.

Typically community councils undertake activities such as:

- Environmental projects such as beach cleaning
- Organising local fetes and gala days
- Printing and distributing local newsletters
- Provision of lunch and other social clubs for the elderly
- Representing the Community Council on other local partnership or other organisations
- Campaigning on local issues
- Conducting local surveys
- Organising public meetings in order to establish the views of the community/communities they represent

There are other requirements which all community councils are bound to in their activities and this includes the general duty to promote equality. Community councils in carrying out their functions should have regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination
- Promote equality of opportunity
- Promote good relations between people of different racial groups.

However, it should not be forgotten that the main purpose of your Council is to represent the views of your community.

Action on potholes, street lighting and street cleansing can give people a sense of community and of pride in their immediate area. Even if your Community Council chooses to focus on the resolution of this type of issue (as well as the statutory consultee role which all community councils are obliged to carry out) the community council will still be set to achieve a great deal for the community.

What is the Community Council Scheme?

The basic principles of the way in which a community council is administrated, the process of election, profile of membership and eligibility and their boundaries are laid out in the Community Council Scheme which is put in place by the Local Authority and is also known as the [Scheme for the Establishment of Community Councils](#).

In the event that a community council's constitution does not cover a particular point, or there is an ambiguity or conflict, the [Community Council Scheme](#) will take precedence. In addition, the [Best Practice Agreement](#) sets out arrangements between the Local Authority and community councils for keeping each other informed about matters of mutual interest.

Argyll and Bute Council has a quadrennial Scheme in place at present which came into force on 20th October 2022. It is possible to conduct interim reviews of the Scheme from time to time to allow for any changes in administrative boundaries or operation as necessary. Given the need to consult where there is an intention to amend the scheme, an interim review is not a thing of common occurrence. The most likely requirement to review within 4 years may come as a result of the Local Governance Review.

What is the Community Council Constitution?

The Constitution is an important document because it provides the framework of procedures that will govern the work of each community council.

Community Councils are encouraged to adopt a model constitution although if necessary, this can be amended by following a process which ultimately requires sign off by the [Executive Director with responsibility for community councils](#) at Argyll and Bute Council. The model constitution is based on the national model which is document that has been prepared and promoted by the Scottish Government. At the request of the then Minister for Local Government and Housing, a new more robust section on complaints and sanctions was included in the 2018-2022 Scheme to reflect the increased emphasis on community empowerment and the need for accountability. This section continues to be in the current Scheme.

Once approved and signed on behalf of the Community Council, the constitution must also be signed by the [Executive Director with responsibility for community council](#). A copy of the constitution is retained by the Community Council Liaison Officer who provides an electronic copy to the Secretary of the Community Council who will retain this and supply in connection with funding applications etc.

Relations with the Local Authority

The Local Authority has a range of responsibilities in relation to community councils within the area:

- Setting up and periodically reviewing the [Scheme for the Establishment of Community Councils](#)
- Setting up and reviewing the [Best Practice Guidance](#)
- It may make an annual award towards the administrative expenses of Community Councils
- Governance advice and support from the [CCLO](#)
- Provision of training (co-ordinated by the CCLO)
- Photocopying of minutes and agendas
- Provision of Public Liability Insurance
- Co-ordinating any complaints that require to be heard by a Conduct Review Panel.

Community councils, in demonstrating that they are representative of community views, can play a major role in influencing decision making by public authorities ensuring that such bodies are responsive to local demand.

Local Authority Support to Community Councils

Support for Governance and basic financial matters is available from the [CCLO](#). In addition to this, there are four [Community Learning and Development Officers](#) employed by Argyll and Bute Council that can offer a range of support such as:

- Developing [action plans](#) and strategies
- Assisting the Community Council to engage with “seldom heard or often easily ignored” residents
- Assisting with raising the profile of the community council
- Facilitation role between the community council and other community groups

A [consultation toolkit](#) is available which may assist community councils undertake some of their functions.

[National Standards for Community Engagement](#) should also be followed when undertaking work with the community as these set out the principles for effective engagement.

Community Councils are encouraged to establish close links with both the [CCLO](#) and the [Community Learning and Development Officers](#).

How Community Councillors are Elected

Community Council Members are elected by the local community. Even if your seat was uncontested and no election took place, the Scheme provides for nominations and election.

If properly nominated you are as much elected as would be the case in a contested election and for this reason, it is important that each Community Council distinguishes between **elected, co-opted and advisors**.

Elected and co-opted members may attend meetings, speak and vote. Members of the community council who have been appointed under the “Skills and Knowledge” section of the standard constitution do not count as voting members. Their input is purely advisory, to inform the community council on a subject out with their area of expertise. Such advisors may attend, speak on the subject for which they were appointed (and other matters if permitted by the Chair) but cannot vote and unlike co-opted members, their numbers do not count towards the maximum membership numbers for each community council set out within the [Scheme](#).

Community council decisions should represent all of the community, not any specific group, although inevitably different community councillors will have their own particular areas of interest and localities. Such diversity can add to the collective strength of the community council.

Public Visibility

All Annual General Meetings (AGM) and regular meetings should be open to the public (not just the electorate) and members of the public should be encouraged to attend by adequate publicity well in advance of the meeting date. Although there is provision for private meetings in the model constitution, given the nature of community council business there would be very few reasons to conduct a meeting in private and it may be beneficial to seek advice from your [CCLO](#) in advance of calling a private meeting.

Every Community Council should have one or more public notice boards displaying the time and place of meetings, names of all members and office bearers and notices of interest to the public such as the agenda for the next meeting and details of where minutes can be accessed if they are not displayed. Special items can be highlighted to attract local interest.

All agendas and minutes of meetings require to be sent to Communitycouncils@argyll-bute.gov.uk **as well** as being sent to your [Elected Member](#) for the ward(s) in which your community council is situated. Agendas should be circulated a minimum of 7 days before the meeting and draft minutes should be available within 14 days of the date of the meeting. These dates are prescribed within the model constitution.

In the interests of wider community engagement, your community council is encouraged to facilitate a community council website or other social media presence. Advice on setting up and the ongoing facilitation of a website is located [here](#).

PART 2 - Members and Office Bearers

The Community Council Member

As a Community Council member it is important that you recognise that you are required to play a role in your community. This means not simply offering your own views and opinions on local issues, or taking decisions that are based on your own self-interest (both of which would result in a breach of the Code of Conduct and may leave you open to complaint and/or sanctions)

The role of a community councillor is one that requires you to represent the views of your community, or your section of the community. In practice, this will involve discussing issues with people in the community to clarify their views and assess the strength of their feelings on different topics.

Taking on Viewpoints

It is also a good idea to encourage people to bring issues to you so that you can take them up at Council meetings. Try to **check out the facts**, however, before taking matters to the council or other public authority, and if there are two sides to the story, make sure that both of them are put forward. There is little point in taking up time at meetings to discuss problems that are based simply on misunderstandings or misrepresentations of the facts.

The task of any community council is to identify the needs and aspirations of its community and to take decisions that will lead to appropriate action in that community. At some point this might involve setting priorities on the competing or conflicting needs of different sections of the community.

Competition and conflict are normal in any community, so you shouldn't think of them as something that can be altogether avoided. What is important is that you approach competition or conflict in a fair and reasonable manner. This means taking a balanced view of your community's needs and aspirations and giving a fair hearing to representatives from different interest groups in your community. In particular, you should try to avoid being influenced by prejudice or bias, whether in the sphere of race, religion, gender or any other of the "labels" which get attached to people and to local issues.

Conflict and Declarations of Interest

At some point it may be that you will find some conflict between your own personal views and interests and those of the community that you are representing. If such a situation does arise, you must ensure that the views of the community take precedence. Experience shows that if the views of individuals on the community council are allowed to take precedence then the community will very quickly lose confidence in the community council and its work may subsequently be devalued.

In some instances, it may be necessary and appropriate to declare an interest in the matter under discussion and to withdraw from that debate and decision-making. This is particularly important where financial interests are involved. All declarations of interest (financial and non-financial) should be recorded in the Minutes of the meeting. A protocol for declaring interests can be located [here](#).

The Convener and Vice Convener

The Convener has perhaps the most important single role to play in ensuring that community council meetings run smoothly but even a good chairperson will find the task exhausting unless all of the community councillors are given a role.

The Convener is elected in accordance with the rules set out in the model constitution. These rules allow for a maximum period of 8 consecutive years (2 full terms) in the role without having to obtain consent to continue from the [Executive Director with responsibility for community councils](#). The role of Convener (as with the other office bearer roles) must be revisited annually at the AGM where it is good governance to invite nominations for each office bearer role, even where there has been a previous indication that no other community councillors appear interested in the positions.

In essence, the Convener's job is to make sure that discussion on all the items that are on the agenda takes place. In practice, this usually means that the Convener will have to make adjustments about how much time to allocate to each agenda item. It also means that they may occasionally have to bring speakers back to the agenda and generally encourage people to make their contributions brief and to the point.

In regular meetings the role of the Convener is a formal one; all speakers will be expected to address their comments to the Convener which assists in control of the discussion. In committee meetings, where proceedings need not be so formal, the Chair of the Committee may be content to simply steer the general direction of the discussion – generally described as the enabling chair. The extent to which a Chair/Convener adopts one or other of these will be dependent on the circumstances at a particular time or occasion. The characteristics of the two approaches are:

The Formal Convener	The Enabling Convener
General Role and Responsibilities:	
Encourage fair play	Have an overview of the task/goals of the meeting
Stay in charge	Help to clarify goals
Remain neutral	Help the group to take responsibility for what it wants to accomplish
Agenda and timekeeping	Help the group to carry out its tasks
Open the meeting	Have little emotional investment
Introduce all agenda items	Arrange in advance for someone to introduce each agenda item
Be familiar with all agenda items	Arrange in advance for someone to introduce each agenda item
Get through the agenda in the allotted time	Update latecomers
	Keep track of the time
	Evaluate how the meeting went at the end

Discussion:	
Select speakers	Encourage and help everyone to participate
Summarise discussion	Encourage expression of various viewpoints
End discussion	Encourage people to keep to the subject
Make sure that people keep to the subject	Clarify and summarise discussion
	Make it safe to share feelings
	Suggest ways of handling conflict
Decision making and voting	
Make sure decisions are taken and agreed	Suggest structures for decision making
Decide when to vote	Look for areas of agreement
Conduct the vote	Test to see if there is agreement
Make sure that the responsibility for action is allocated	Make sure someone will carry out decisions

Perhaps most importantly of all, the Convener is expected to know the rules by which the community council operates, and ensure that during all stages of its work the community council is operating in accordance with any procedures that are set down. In this context the Convener may be called upon to act as an arbiter when there is a disagreement about how the rules should be interpreted. Of course, advice on the [Scheme](#) can also be provided to any member of the community council or any member of the public by the [CCLO](#).

It is important to recognise that the Convener's role extends out with the meeting itself. The Convener may be called upon to act on behalf of the community council between meetings, or to represent the community council in dealing with outside bodies. This role may also be delegated by the community council to other members.

Very often the chairperson is seen as the "official spokesperson" for the community council and must be seen as authoritative and fair in all of their dealings with outside bodies, groups, individuals and the press.

The Role of the Vice Convener

The Vice Convener has no specific duties other than standing in for the Convener when he or she is unable to be present.

The Secretary

The Secretary is responsible for:

- Preparation & issue of the Agenda, at least 7 days before the meeting takes place
- Preparation & issue of the Minutes of the meeting within 14 days of the meeting date
- Answering correspondence
- Writing any letters
- Circulating information to Members

- Public relations, dealing with the Press, TV and Radio (depending on individual arrangements this may be a function of the Convener)
- Looking after visitors
- Arranging the venue for meetings (and any remote attendance)
- Liaison with officials of the Local Authority
- Supporting the Convener and providing (or obtaining) legal and other specialist advice.

To be successful, a community council must have an energetic and conscientious Secretary prepared to put in the necessary time and effort. It is incumbent on all Members but especially the Convener to spread the Secretary's load by, for instance, delegating some of their responsibilities to others, either individually or to a small committee of the community council. The community council may also wish to consider whether a separate role of minute secretary would be of benefit as it is bad policy to overload your secretary and you may have difficulty in getting volunteers for the role.

The Treasurer

The Treasurer is responsible for issuing all cheques and making payment on behalf of the community council and any charities and/or other funds dispersed by the Council.

The Treasurer must manage the bank account, account for all funds received and ensure money is only spent in a manner approved by the community council and as recorded in the minutes. Use of the Administration Grant fund which the Council may provide to community councils is restricted, for more information about the permitted usage see the website.

The Treasurer must maintain the community council's financial records so that they disclose, with reasonably accuracy at any time, the financial position of the community council. Many community councils choose to report the financial position at each meeting.

All cheques issued should be signed by at least two of the three agreed community councillors. These signatories should be agreed by the community council. **Authorised signatories may not be co-habitees.**

As a general rule, Treasurers should avoid paying out money except by cheque or bank transfer as this will make accounting for expenditure much easier.

The Treasurer must keep proper accounts of all receipts and expenditure and prepare an Annual Statement of Accounts. The Annual Accounts shall be independently examined by a person of good standing appointed by the community council, who must not be a member of that community council.

A copy of the independently examined statement of accounts/balance sheet shall be forwarded immediately after the statement is approved at the AGM, together with a draft minute of the AGM, to the [CCLO](#) or via the [website](#) (providing you have electronic copies of the AGM minutes and accounts available to upload). This will allow for early payment of the administration grant and any other grant payments due to the community council to assist with running costs for the year ahead.

The **financial year** of a community council shall end on 31 March each year to coincide with the necessity to approve annual accounts at an AGM before 30th June each year.

Youth Members

The current scheme permits those 16 or over becoming elected or co-opted members of the community council. Youth engagement is encouraged and training and advice as to how this can be facilitated has been offered by the council. [Information](#) and [contacts](#) for youth engagement are available on the Council's website.

PART 3 – MEETINGS AND RECORD KEEPING

Frequency of Meetings

The frequency of meetings is laid out in the Constitution of the Community Council but as a rule, those with fewer than 600 of an electorate must meet on 5 or more occasions per year (4 ordinary meetings and one AGM) whilst those who have in excess of 600 of an electorate must meet on 7 or more occasions per year (6 ordinary meetings and one AGM). An AGM may be followed by an ordinary meeting.

Annual General Meetings

Once in each year before 30th June, the Community Council must convene an AGM for the purposes of receiving and consider annual reports by the Convener and Secretary, the consideration of annual independently audited accounts, appointment of office bearers and the scheduling dates of meetings for the next year.

A typical AGM agenda is laid out in the Standing Orders for the Community Council adopted as part of the adoption of the Scheme for the Establishment of Community Councils.

For convenience, and to obtain any grant funding, the secretary should circulate the draft minutes of the AGM within 14 days of the meeting date, as well as 12 months later when they require to be formally adopted.

Some community councils find it assists to record the proceedings at the meeting. In terms of data protection requirements, it is important to mention at the start of the meeting, for the benefit of all attendees, that the meeting is being recorded for the purpose of producing a minute only and that all recordings will be deleted upon approval of the minutes after the next ordinary meeting.

Agenda

For all Annual General, Special and Regular meetings an agenda must be published 7 days in advance of the meeting date in line with the Constitution so that everyone present knows what will be discussed and can prepare accordingly in advance of the meeting. Included with the agenda should be a copy of the previous minutes and relevant paperwork that members need to familiarise themselves with in order to fully participate in the discussions and if necessary, make decisions on. The order of business for all meetings is contained with the model standing orders for meetings which forms part of the Scheme.

If proposing to co-opt new members, appropriate notification to all existing members of the community council must be given at least 14 days in advance of the meeting date and in terms of public notice, the intention to co-opt (as well as the details of those proposed) should be included on

the agenda for the meeting where the decision will be made. The notice should contain the name and address of the person being proposed as well as confirmation that they are included in the most recent electoral register for the community council area. A [form](#) has been prepared for use when co-opting which sets out the process, once approved, this should be forwarded to the [CCLO](#) who will update membership records.

Apologies

The apology of any member of community council who is unable to attend is recorded for the minutes. This is important as the model constitution can call for the disqualification of members who fail to attend meetings of the community council over a 6 month period. This disqualification is subject to the community council being dissatisfied for the reason behind the non-attendance so it is imperative that those reasons are established before applying this disqualification.

It is also important to record any apologies for meetings for the purpose of voting as this will be by simple majority. In the extreme, for legal purposes it may be required to have a record of which community councillors were present at a meeting where a decision was made.

Guests at the Meeting

All formal meetings should be open to the public (and to the press) unless there are confidential matters that the Constitution permits discussion in private. It is good practice for the Convener to ask anyone attending whether they would like to address the meeting on matters which he/she knows to be of particular interest.

It is common practice for other guests to attend meetings such as the Police, Council Officials or developers by invitation. Please remember that neither invited guests or members of the public/press are entitled to participate in decision making.

Minute Taking and Format

It is a requirement of all constitutions that formal minutes are kept of meetings. This is the responsibility of the Secretary but the Community Council may agree to appoint from within itself or engage for payment of expenses, a Minute Secretary. This frees the Secretary to take a more active part in the discussions. However the responsibility for the minute rests with the Secretary even when a Minute Secretary is in place.

The minutes to be approved should be circulated to all Community Councillors, Elected Members and the CCLO in addition to members of the public/press. This should occur within 14 days of the meeting date. The minutes of the previous meeting are formally approved at the next meeting.

- The Convener should ask whether everyone is in agreement that they are a true record of the meeting concerned;
- If any community councillor wishes to query any point this is the time to do it. Once the minutes are formally adopted then they cannot be changed;
- Any suggested amendments are discussed and, if agreed, a suitable alteration adopted. It must be stressed that only the record of the previous Minute can be discussed and agreed at this stage. Discussions of the merits of any previously recorded decision should not be

opened up at this point in the proceedings. It is incumbent upon the Convener to rule accordingly.

- A community councillor now proposes the formal adoption of the minutes subject to any agreed amendment. Some community councils prefer to have a seconder before agreeing to adopt the minute as a correct record.
- If there are still objections the matter is put to the vote, otherwise the minutes are adopted unanimously. This should be recorded in the minutes of the current meeting;
- As in any other disagreement, a community councillor whose views are not accepted and rejected on vote may wish to request that their objection is recorded in the minutes.

Format of Minutes

Minutes in a standardised format must be taken of all regular meetings, AGMs and Special Meetings. They must record the date of meeting, time and location, those present, apologies received, who was the Chair for the meeting (remembering that this may not always be the Convener), all appointments, votes, agreed expenditure, topics discussed and agreed actions. Minutes do not need to record every word said, rather they must summarise the views expressed and record conclusions.

Good minute taking is a skill, so that neither too little nor too much detail is included. A common fault is pages and pages of minutes that do not allow the reader to grasp the key points and decisions made. As the permanent record of the community council's business, they are a very important document with both historical and legal implications.

The format of the minutes follows closely that detailed for the agenda with subheadings/numbering corresponding to agenda items and each topic discussed.

Matters Arising

Matters arising should relate to any outstanding actions avoiding the necessity for each item to be listed on the agenda. This procedure ensures nothing is forgotten and that actions promised at the previous meeting have, in fact, been carried out. As all discussion is recorded in the current minutes, items completed drop out, items still ongoing should come up at the next meeting. Any correspondence received relative to matters being discussed is best read out by the Secretary at the appropriate point.

Correspondence Received

During correspondence any letters, emails phone calls etc received since the last meeting on new topics should be read out by the Secretary and any necessary actions by the community council agreed in relation to those. To save time, long complicated or routine items are not normally read out and may be referred to and circulated after the meeting.

Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer can report on the financial situation of the community council, on any monies and expenditure and consider other budgetary related matters.

Reports

So far the meeting has involved only the community councillors and co-optees (unless the Convener invited comment on any particular item from others present) “Reports” is the point in the meeting where regular attendees such as the local Police and Elected Members may be asked to give a brief report to the community council. It is suggested that the Police updates are included early on the agenda to facilitate any unplanned operation need that local Police Officers may require to respond to.

This is the point at which the community council learns what others are doing and in the subsequent discussion can advise on what not only the community council but the local community think. Some reports will be regular, i.e. to every meeting, others very occasional.

Special Items

When there is an item of special interest it should be given its own spot on the agenda. It may be a presentation by a visiting speaker – in which case the Convener may advance the item to the start of the meeting so the visitor does not have to sit through the routine business. This is not only a common courtesy but particularly important if the speaker has far to travel, enabling him/her to get away as early as possible.

Planning Issues

Planning is often a key concern of Community Councils and to the public in their area. Many Community Councils have a regular slot on their Agenda to deal with planning matters. These can range from considering planning applications and how they should respond to these to dealing with developing Local Plans or considering responses to other forms of consultation. Some Community Councils establish committees or working groups to deal with planning issues given the timescales involved and the degree of scrutiny often required.

Planning consultations can occur in two ways:

1. Firstly, the Council, as planning authority, may formally consult your Community Council on specific proposals for development which may be of interest within your community area.
2. Secondly, a Community Council can request a consultation on the application. This request can be made after you have received and considered a weekly list of all planning applications submitted to the Council. This request must be made within 21 days of the date of the weekly list issued by Argyll and Bute Council.

For most planning applications, consultees have 14 days from the date of issue of the consultation to respond with comments on the proposal. Once received, your Community Council will be taken into account during the determination of the application. Planning Advice Note 47 ([PAN47](#)) provides more information about the statutory role of community councils in planning matters.

Local Development Plan

Community Council involvement is an important part of Development Plan preparation and the Council carried out extensive consultation at all of the various stages of the plan. Local engagement exercises are often arranged by Community Councils as a means of obtaining local views and

responses to proposals. Similar consultation takes place on any subsequent policy documents such as Supplementary Guidelines or Development Briefs. Information on the LDP (and emerging LDP2) can be viewed [online](#).

AOB/AOCB

Any Other Business/Any Other Competent Business (AOB/AOCB) gives community councillors the chance to raise issues and, in particular, matters brought to them by the public. Normally, the Convener will move round the table giving each community councillor the chance to raise topics in turn. It may be the case that items raised here are unable to be dealt with but, if not, can be added to a future agenda.

Time and Place of Next Meeting

It is important that everyone present knows, or is reminded of, the time and place of the next meeting before the meeting breaks up, even if there is an existing published timetable.

Minute Summary

A formal minute will always be required following every meeting; however, not everyone in your community will be drawn into reading this. Consider whether a minute summary could allow you to capture the main points from your community council meeting. This is a good way of ensuring that the community are aware and up to date of what the Community Council is doing; it also provides ongoing promotional opportunities.

Correspondence after a Meeting

Following a community council meeting, there may be a number of items that require investigation by officers of Argyll and Bute Council. Community councils are asked to consider whether matters are routine (minor defects or service failures) or major (proposals to remove or amend a service, which would affect a number of members of the community). Major issues should be put in writing in the first instance to the service department, copied to elected members who represent the community council area. Routine matters can be made through the council's "Report it" section on the website www.argyll-bute.gov.uk or by calling the appropriate number from the list below:

Council Tax Enquiries: 01546 605511
Benefit Enquiries: 01546 605512
Roads, Waste, Pest Enquiries: 01546 605514
Complaints and Feedback: 01546 605516
Social Work and Social Care: 01546 605517
Planning Services: 01546 605518
Regulatory Services: 01546 605519
Switchboard/General Enquiries: 01546 605522

The Community Council Liaison Officer (CCLO) should be contacted in the first instance for matters relating to :

- The Constitution of a community council;
- The election of community councils i.e. the overall electoral system and not the procedure

- adopted at a specific election;
- Funding of a community council;
- Proposed amendments to the area of community council or a proposed change to existing divisions;
- The formation of a new community council;
- A statutory code, such as that relating to planning applications (i.e. the code itself and not the way in which a specific application was dealt with); or
- A query with regard to the Best Practice Agreement

Enquiries will be acknowledged within 3 working days and simple enquiries will be responded to within 10 days from the date the request was received. An enquiry which requires research should be responded to within 20 working days. If this is not possible the council will let you know why and will provide information as to the name, telephone number and email address of the person dealing with your enquiry.

Circulation and Retention of Minutes (and other documents!)

The draft minutes of all meetings should be circulated within 14 days of the date of the meeting to all community councillors, elected members and to communitycouncils@argyll-bute.gov.uk. Copies should also be made available to the public by displaying on local noticeboards. Draft minutes must be clearly identified as being in “draft” and this will enable community council information to be available to the communities represented as soon as possible. These can be replaced with approved minutes when available.

Minutes of all meetings must be retained for future reference and passed on to each new Secretary for safekeeping. Minutes should be kept in perpetuity and financial records should be retained for a period of 6 years. Other material should be held until the administrative use has expired (for notes from or recordings of meetings these should be destroyed as soon as the minutes have been approved). An agreed system of archiving documents and accounting for destroyed documents (a document destruction log sheet) may be something which the community council wish to put in place to ensure compliance with document retention rules.

Some material may have historic importance in the future and community councils may wish to discuss this with the Council’s [Archivist](#) before anything is disposed of.

Access to Documents

Community councils are not subject to Freedom of Information legislation although community councils do have a requirement to keep their communities involved in their work and decisions by displaying agenda and minutes for their meetings. Websites are useful in terms of making documents readily accessible to the community on an ongoing basis.

Working Effectively in Meetings

Meetings are of crucial importance to the work of Community Councils. It is at meetings that opinions, ideas, feelings, good intentions etc get translated into hard decisions, and it is those decisions that will ultimately be translated into practical action in your community. If you really

want to influence what is going on in your community then it is vital that you learn to participate effectively in the work of your Council's meetings.

It is perfectly normal that, in any meeting, the individuals present will have different, sometimes opposing views. For this reason it is important that meetings are chaired effectively so that there is a balance between hearing what everyone has to say on a subject and getting through all the items of the agenda.

If there is something of major significance that you want to raise at a meeting make sure that you tell the Secretary in advance so that it can be included as an item on the agenda. This means that the person in the Chair can try to ensure that sufficient time is made available to discuss your item. If you do put an item on the agenda, be prepared to give a short presentation to the meeting setting out:

- The background to the situation (no more than is necessary);
- What you think the central issue is;
- What you think ought to be done about it

Be prepared to listen to other people's ideas on the matter; they may have information on the subject that you don't, or they may come up with ideas that offer a better solution than yours. Remember that the key thing for good Community Councillor is to make things happen in the community. Point scoring at meetings is a distraction that everyone can do without.

Sometimes you may be asked to participate in a committee in order to research some points for the next meeting of the Community Council. Committees can play an important part in clarifying issues so that decision making is easier at future meetings. Although being a member of a committee may involve some extra time commitment you should try as far as possible to get involved so that the work of your Community Council is spread evenly and you get a deeper insight into what is going on at Community Council meetings.

As a general rule, it is much easier to get your way by working and co-operating rather than by confrontation. This is equally true whether in meetings, in dealings with other Members or in correspondence, for example when writing to officials of the Local Authority.

Community Councils that make a positive contribution command respect. Elected Members and Officials value their opinions and consult them before any proposals affecting their community are put into effect.

Part 4 – Ways of Working and Establishing Priorities

Broadly speaking, there are two ways of working in any community council. It can choose to play a 'reactive role' or it can choose to play a 'proactive role'. These are discussed below:

The Reactive Community Council

Some community councils adopt a view that their primary responsibility is to react efficiently to the problems and complaints that are brought to them by members of their community, and to correspondence coming in from outside bodies like the Local Authority.

The view taken by these Community Councils may be summarised as follows:

“If it is brought before the community council, something will be done about it”

In such a Community Council, the agenda would be made up almost entirely of issues such as street lighting that needed repairing, grass that needed cutting, and documents sent by the Local Authority. Clearly these are issues of importance to the community, and therefore matters which need to be resolved. Working in this way, however, is reactive in the sense that individuals and organisations outside the community council set the agenda itself.

The Proactive Community Council

In contrast, other Community Councils see it as their job, in addition to responding to issues such as those mentioned above, to facilitate particular courses of action of projects in the community. These might include seeking funding for new play parks or managing local amenities and facilities. In such the approach will not be to wait for problems and issues to be brought before it. Rather, it would set out to identify the various issues that it thinks might affect the community, both in the short and longer term.

Having identified those issues as best it can, it would then proceed to set out some [priorities for the community and the community council](#). This involves thinking what actions(s) will bring the most benefit for the community, and considering the role the community council might play in making things happen. It also means taking a decision as to the overall direction in which the Community Council should move.

For example, some community councils have identified the threat to their physical environment as the key issue for their community and have responded by developing a strategy which sets out a series of steps which they intend to take at local level to counter that threat. Other community councils have identified the improvement of community facilities as the key issue and have developed a strategy around that.

Developing a Proactive Strategy

Examining what is going on inside and outside the community; the first step is to take a careful look at the ways in which your community might be developed.

- Examine the needs that are apparent in the community and try to identify any particular hopes and ambitions that might be translated into reality;
- Then have a look at what is going on in the outside world. What are the major opportunities or threats;
- You might consider the likely impact of matters such as the availability of European or Lottery funding in this category (NOTE – have you signed up for [funding alerts?](#));
- How could your Community Council take full advantage of the opportunities available, or take action to minimise the impact of any “threats”?

Reviewing the Options

The next stage is to set out all of the possibilities, all of the things that the Community Council might get involved in to benefit the community. These are your strategic options and they need to be

carefully considered before deciding which particular option(s) to pursue. Try to be clear about how much time, energy and money would have to be put in to the various options, and establish whether or not those could be justified in terms of the outcome that you would want to achieve.

Making Strategic Decisions

Once you are satisfied that you have examined all of the options open to the community councils it is possible to start taking decisions about which option(s) offer most benefit, or make most sense given the circumstances. Effectively this means choosing a direction for the community council to pursue. Direction is important for any organisation since it allows the people involved to share a vision of where they are going.

Once you have chosen the overall direction try to consult widely within your community. Find out whether people in general are behind you, and try to identify any particular concerns that they might have. By consulting early there is a greater likelihood that the community as a whole will be supportive of any action that the community council subsequently takes. It also helps to minimise the danger that the community council moves in a direction that alienates the community as a whole.

Setting the Objectives

Once you are clear about what the overall goal is, it is possible to set very specific objectives. For example, if your chosen goal is “to improve the cleanliness of the area” your objectives might be as follows:

- To make local people aware of the issues;
- To prioritise areas within your community council area;
- To involve local schoolchildren in projects;
- To carry out specific clean-up projects.

Developing the Strategy

When the objectives are clearly set out you can then consider the things that need to be done in order to achieve them. This requires you to think about which actions are likely to be the most effective in the particular circumstances of your community council.

Establishing Priorities

Another problem that some Community Councils have acknowledged is that they find it very difficult to deal with matters that are not practical issues such as “grass cutting” or “potholes in the road”.

While these are an important part of the work of a community council it should never be forgotten that there are other matters, which may be less tangible in the short term, but which may nevertheless have a major impact on the community for some time to come. These may include, for example:

- Changing economic conditions;
- Demographic changes in the community;
- Long-term development proposals.

It is important that placing too much emphasis on “nuts and bolts” issues does not overlook matters of strategic importance to your community. The way to overcome this problem is to think in terms of priorities and to encourage other Members of the Community Council to think likewise.

Try to be clear about which issues are most important for your community and to allocate most time to them. This may mean choosing between the short-term things like “potholes in roads” and the longer-term matters such as the reorganisation of local government. Remember always that important issues are important and should not be set aside simply because there is another issue that appears on the surface to be more urgent.

One way to get through complex issues that are important and long term is to break them down into chunks and deal with them one by one over a series of meetings. Another approach would be to split up the tasks and allocate responsibility for bits of the tasks to different individuals or groups in the community council. It may be possible to work with other likeminded groups which operate in your area to share responsibilities/workloads.

Some community councils have adopted “watching briefs” whereby individual members with specific skills, knowledge or experience are given the role of “watching out” for issues in that particular area of interest. This would also help in dealing with the wide range of consultation documents that community councils are asked to respond to. A planning liaison or planning committee can often be appointed to ensure that timely responses to applications are made.

The community council may also be asked to participate in meetings of other bodies or groups which are part of the community planning process. You may wish to appoint representatives to these bodies to ensure that your voice is heard. A reserve can also be useful to ensure continuity of attendance.

Using Time Effectively

For many people, participating in the work of community councils involves the sacrifice of valuable leisure time. On the one hand they want to be active in the affairs of their community; on the other hand they want to ensure that there is the minimum intrusion into their free time.

In order to achieve this it is necessary to take a fairly disciplined approach to the use of time. This is particularly important when it comes to meetings. Perhaps the single most damaging thing for any community council is *unproductive meetings* where the discussion is not focussed on issues of importance to the community and where those doing the talking are more interested in their personal agenda than the agenda of the community council.

For those less used to public speaking or debating, it is sometimes useful to write down in brief on a piece of paper or card the particular points which you intend to raise. This helps to concentrate thoughts and expedite discussion.

Part 5 – Report Writing and Press

Each Community Council will operate differently, what generally works well is the community councils identifying key areas relevant to their community. Form an appropriate structure and identify the best community councillor to be part of this e.g. if they have a particular interest,

experience or skill. For example, planning, youth, environment, education, health, transport, roads and housing.

Whatever format you as a community council decide it is important to remember the following key elements:

- Accurate information;
- Concise information;
- Identify key points;
- Outcomes and recommendations for future action.

Dealing with the Press

As a community council member, someone may approach you at some time from the press who is looking for a story. Alternatively there may come a time when, for whatever reason, you decide that you want to take information to the press. In either case it is important that you recognise how the press operates so that you can gain maximum benefit and avoid some of the common pitfalls.

Good relations should be established with the local press and, if its reporters do not attend AGMs or regular meetings, a suitable press release should be issued highlighting important matters discussed and conclusions reached. Where appropriate it is good practice to establish good relationships between the local media and the community council.

Generally speaking the press has two major priorities:

- To get “copy” that is to say, material to fill up newspaper columns;
- To get good “stories”, that is to say, articles that has a human interest value and which have the effect of lightening up the contents of the newspaper.

When you are dealing with someone from the press it is likely that they will make a quick assessment as to which category your information falls into, and this assessment is likely to be important in determining what actually happens to the information that you pass over. By giving your information a “human interest” dimension it may be possible to get much fuller coverage than would be possible otherwise.

For example, if you wanted to publicise an event in your community you might simply pass details of the event over to a local paper. Alternatively, you might write a short article on the person who is organising the event and the particular problems that have been encountered on the way. If you choose the first option it is likely that the information will be tucked away in a corner of the paper where not many people will notice it, whereas if you choose the second option you may find that a fairly lengthy article appears with a photograph alongside.

The primary concern of the press is to sell newspapers and that means providing news and information that people will want to read. So try to make sure that you are providing material that will interest people as well as simply inform them.

Perhaps the best way to interest the press is to issue a formal “Press Release” which at its most effective is probably a half to three-quarters page of A4. It can be issued to both local and regional

newspapers and on occasion may interest national papers. Don't forget local radio and [television](#) stations.

Local Radio Stations in the Argyll and Bute Area are as follows:

- [Your Radio \(103 & 106.9 FM\)](#)
- [Oban FM \(103.3\)](#)
- [Argyll FM \(106.5/107.1 & 107.7 FM\)](#)
- [Bute FM \(96.5 FM\)](#)
- [Clyde 1 \(102.5 FM\)](#)
- [Dunoon Community Radio \(97.4 FM\)](#)

You should also keep in mind that journalists have the power to edit news items. In practice this means they can put an emphasis on particular words or events that you may not have intended and in this way the message that you were trying to convey may end up getting distorted. The solution is to try and ensure that you choose your words carefully; knowing that anything you say could end up as a headline. It is not difficult to make the headlines in a local paper, but it is sometimes difficult to live with the headlines that you make.

Try to remember also the constraints that local newspapers work under. They have tight deadlines to meet so make sure that you submit your copy in plenty of time. They also appreciate information and articles that can be printed without a lot of cutting and reorganising so try to make sure the information you provide is to the point.

Handling Press Interviews

When a journalist is actually interviewing you it is necessary to be particularly careful about what you say. It is easy to be caught off guard and say something that you really didn't mean. Be very wary about *off the record* comments because these may end up being attributed to you.

The best approach is to think out what you want to say before the interview starts. If that means taking a few minutes to prepare your thoughts, do so. Try to be clear about what sort of message you want to convey, and make sure that it doesn't get lost during the interview. If you are unclear, ask them to call back later, and do your research for example by checking with the Convener or Secretary before you commit yourself to comment.

Beware too that spreading erroneous or inaccurate information or indulging in abusive criticism of other parties, can not only devalue what may have been a reasonable case, but could also invoke legal action for defamation.

Quick Do's and Don'ts

DO	DON'T
Buy Time – don't respond off the cuff. A casual comment can be taken out of context	Don't use an item of information as fact unless you are certain of it
Prepare what you want to say – Write it down and then ring back. You may be asked for an immediate response due to deadlines but be firm, take a few moments to consider a response.	Don't speculate. Your conjecture will end up as somebody else's hard fact
Do explain where the media's questions can be answered if you yourself cannot help.	Don't hinder or obstruct. The media have a job to do and it is better to form a good relationship and give them the information you feel you can give. In emergency situations the media can be very useful if information the public quickly of developing situations.
Do remember that your attitude to the media and what you say reflects on everyone else involved.	Don't say "No Comment" No comment is a negative remark, and is seen as confirmation that you have something to hide.

Keeping Fellow Community Councillors Informed

Community councils should agree a protocol to ensure all community councillors are aware and informed of press dealings. This ensures that relationships are maintained and developed within the community council.

Keeping People Informed

It is worth remembering that, for most people in your community, the only regular information about the work of their local community council that they have access to is what they read in the press. For this reason, it is a good idea that community councils make every effort to pass good quality information to the local press on a regular basis.

The more informed members of the community are about local issues the greater the likelihood that they will want to get involved in what's going on. This may require providing information in other formats, such as a different language or considering the age group of the audience that you are trying to communicate with.

If a member of the press is unable to attend your meeting it would be good practice to provide a summary of the meeting to your local press in the form of a [press release](#).

As part of your community council's ongoing promotion and commitment to engage with your local community, provide regular updates through the press to highlight the work you are undertaking and success stories.

Writing a Press Release

From time to time it may be advisable to issue a formal press release stating the community council's views or clarifying facts. This is particularly important when a controversial issue divides

the community or when, in the opinion of the community council, their discussions have been either incompletely reported or misrepresented in the media.

Whatever the need for a press release, when developing your news story you may wish to run through the following checklist:

- Do you have a factual news story you have that will appeal to journalists Assess the community interest angle and whether there a 'hook', a reason for the story.
- Identify the key facts – who, what, why, where, when, how?
- Identify who should be quoted from your organization and whether third party quotes would be helpful and useful.
- Check whether a photo can be used to support the release.
- Confirm any approval procedure for the release. If you are asking for a third party to provide a quote then it is advisable to send them the release – you want them on side.
- Ask whether you need a [press release](#) or whether this might be a picture story where a photo and a caption would suffice.
- Think about what else can you offer the journalist when you telephone them about the story

Part 6 – Dealing with Conflict

Working in a community council may not, at first sight, appear to have much to do with “politics”, and all community councils should act as non-political bodies in the party political sense.

However, it has to be recognised that the work of community councils concerns the exercise of power, albeit at a very local level. For example, there is the power to:

- Get things done in the community;
- Approach other tiers of government
- Raise funds to support particular projects:
- Allocate resources within the community, and so on.

Wherever power is exercised there is always the possibility of conflict developing. This may be because individuals and organisations find themselves competing for access to the resources in the community. Or it may be simply that individuals or organisations wish to demonstrate their ability to wield power and influence in the community. Whatever the reason, conflict can break out from time to time even in the most peaceful of communities. When it does it is important to know how to deal with it effectively so that major rifts do not develop in the community.

Because community harmony is so important Community Councils need to ensure that, as far as possible, they exercise their power in a fair and reasonable manner. They should also try to ensure that they work in a tactful and diplomatic manner, liaising and consulting with individuals and other organisations in the community wherever possible.

Conflict within Community Councils

It also has to be recognised that conflict can break out within Community Councils, just as in any other part of the community. It may be that conflicts are imported into the context of the community council from outside, or it may be that conflict breaks out because of a particular issue that is on the agenda. It is useful to think about dealing with such conflict before you actually find yourself in the situation. This gives you a chance to work out a strategy before you get caught up in the emotion of the event.

Personality Clashes

Conflict which relates to personality clash is one of the most difficult to deal with because the actual issue over which the clash takes place may simply provide an opportunity for the participant to demonstrate their strongly opposing views.

Where this is the case they may be less concerned with reaching agreement or getting through the community council's agenda than with addressing their own personal agenda. Such personality clashes can make other community council members feel uncomfortable, and can prove damaging in the long term to the work of the Community Council.

In this situation it is worthwhile remembering that it is not usually possible to change a person's personality. If there are certain things which someone is doing that cause conflict in the group, rudely interrupting other people for example, or monopolising the discussion, it may be possible to find a way of persuading that person to change his/her behaviour. This can sometimes be achieved by the use of good-natured humour, aimed at making the person aware of the behaviour that other people find offensive. At other times it may be necessary to try to persuade the Convener to intervene more forcefully so as to prevent that behaviour leading to conflict.

In any case it is generally a good idea for community council members to talk about how they feel about "difficult" behaviour, otherwise there is a danger that communication will break down and conflict will emerge eventually in an even more damaging form.

Conflict Over Community Issues

Another form of conflict that you might come across in meetings relates to the particular community issues on the agenda, rather than personality clashes. From time to time issues will arise that some community councillors feel particularly strong about. This may be because of their personal beliefs or values, or it may be because they are representing the strong views that are held in sections of the community.

If you do find yourself in this sort of conflict it is important to show that, even if you don't see things the same way as the other person(s), you do recognise that they feel strongly about the issue, and you understand what their concern is. You should then explain your feelings on the matter, being firm but friendly, trying wherever possible to find concerns that you share with them. Then move on to the areas where you differ and try to use their ideas as a base on which to build a solution that is acceptable to all concerned.

For example:

“I understand your concern about x and think that it’s something that we ought to do something about. However, I would want to approach the problem from a different angle because I think that Y is important too. Why don’t we do z, which will meet your concerns about x and my concerns about y?”

In this way it is possible to demonstrate to other people that you are able to listen to other people’s ideas as well as presenting your own. By demonstrating your ability to listen you will also increase the likelihood that other people will listen to you. In all types of conflict a member arriving at the meeting “all fired up” about a particular issue is unlikely to act constructively or agree to compromise. A shrewd Convener will, as early as possible, allow both sides ample time to state their case and then try to engineer a compromise.

Planning issues can often arouse considerable feelings, conflict and are potentially divisive. It is important that all sides are given the opportunity to make their views known and the role of the Convener can be crucial in managing a difficult situation.

Depending on the circumstances, it may be useful to hear representations from prospective developers and from those that are either supporting or objecting to development proposals. It is important that equal opportunity is given to all sides and in these circumstances, time limiting contributions may be appropriate.

If you find yourself in a situation where despite your best efforts to resolve conflicts both internally and externally, you are advised to contact your [CCLO](#) immediately.

Part 7 – Annual Grant and Looking for Funds**Annual Administrative Grant**

Argyll and Bute Council may provide an [annual grant](#) to community councils to cover the costs of administering community council business. The grant shall be fixed at a rate reviewed by the Local Authority when reviewing the Scheme for the Establishment of Community Councils and will be released following approval of the examined accounts which must take place at the AGM. Discretionary grant funding may also be available, please check with your [CCLO](#).

Community councils are able to raise funds in order to carry out their work in the community. Often this involves the organisation of fund raising events, but another option that is often open to Community Councils is to apply for grant funding from one of a very wide range of sources.

The quality of the application for grant funding can often be critical to its success or failure. Very often the grant aiding bodies will not have any opportunity to meet with those who are making the application and so their sole source of information about the proposal may be what is contained in the original application. For this reason it is important that the information provided is appropriate and, if possible, persuasive.

Finding Funding

Sign up to the funding newsletter to receive notification of funding [here](#).

Changes to the Third Sector Funding previously distributed by the Council mean that community councils are now eligible to apply for an annual award from the [Supporting Communities Fund](#).

Preparing Speculative Grant Applications

Many grant-aiding bodies have special application forms that have to be completed. Where this is not the case you should try to state your case in about two sides of A4 paper, with any supplementary documents attached.

Begin with a brief summary of who you are, what the project is and how much money you want. You could also give a brief introduction to your community, emphasising any particular constraints that there are, such as remoteness or high unemployment (you may want to attach a map showing your area and location)

Provide information about your organisation:

- It's title, address, telephone contact and number
- How it is organised, constitution, membership etc;
- It's financial situation, including information about any other, or previous sources of grant funding;
- Its overall objectives and its past achievements.

Give a clear account of what you will do with the money if your application is successful, and what you hope to achieve by spending it. Explain what your working methods will be and indicate how you will plan and control your budget.

Refer to the need that exists for the project and how there is a gap in provision from other sources, so that you are not seen to be duplicating existing services (you might include any supporting evidence that is available, newspaper articles, statistics etc).

Explain why your community council is best placed to carry out the project and, if possible, show that you have consulted with your community and other organisations and have their support (if you are co-operating with other bodies then say so!)

Some other Tips on Applying for Grants

- Try to make information enquiries first to establish whether funds are still available, and if so what is the criteria for awarding them;
- Remember that you will be competing with other organisations and other projects so try to convey the importance of the project and emphasise its value for money. Above all, try to fire the imagination of the person(s) who will be assessing the application;
- Appearance is always important in these decisions so try to make sure that your application is typed up neatly and well presented;
- If possible get someone who has had no contact with the project to look at your application before you submit it. They may be able to spot jargon, inconsistencies or ambiguities;
- Don't be tempted to underestimate your costs. You may find that you are subsequently unable to finish the project or that you have to skimp over important matters in ways that affect the overall success of the project;

- Support is available around funding e.g. identifying funding sources and developing funding applications from the Council's [Social Enterprise Team](#).

Part 8 – Insurance for Community Councils

As a public body, each Community Council is responsible for ensuring that an appropriate level of insurance covers its activities. To assist in this public liability cover has been arranged for all community councils who require this by Argyll and Bute Council. The premiums for this are paid directly to the insurers. If you have any queries relating to the policy, please refer these to the [CCLO](#) who will raise them with the appropriate personnel.

Should you wish to check whether an event organised by the community council falls within the scope of the standard policy, please fill in a [special events proposal form](#) and send to the [CCLO](#).

Part 9 – The Licensing (Scotland) Act 2005 – Occasional Licences and Extended Hours

Community Councils are consulted in respect of licence applications. Consultations can be:

Specific i.e. specific notice is sent in respect of new premises licences and major variations to a premises licence. Specific consultation is for a minimum of 21 days; or

General i.e. a general notice is given in respect of occasional licence applications on the licensing pages of the [Argyll and Bute Website](#) for any member of the public (including community councils) to comment upon. General consultations last for a minimum of 7 days, unless special circumstances justify a shorter period. For this purpose specific notice is not given that the application appears on the website. It is up to the public to monitor the website.

The role of the community council in the licensing process is to represent the view of the community. Anyone can lodge an objection or representation in respect of the premises licence applications.

An objection is an objection to any licence being granted. A representation means a licence is acceptable in principle but the person making the representation would like to see modifications or conditions to address perceived problems.

There are also extended hours applications where the licence holder wishes to extend normal licensing hours for a specific event on licensed premises.

If you have further enquiries regarding licensing, please email licensing@argyll-bute.gov.uk or alternatively telephone 01546 604128.

Chapter 10 – [Argyll and Bute Council Structure](#)