



Engaging communities toolkit

A practical guide to consultation and engagement in West Dunbartonshire



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Overview

West Dunbartonshire Council is fully committed to the principles of community engagement – the involvement of local residents in the planning, development and management of services. We aim to continuously improve the quality and delivery of services by learning from those who use them.

To ensure that the approach taken across the Council is consistent the Engaging Communities Framework has been developed. It details the ways and tools the Council will use to provide a coordinated and consistent approach to involvement, consultation, engagement and empowerment of residents throughout West Dunbartonshire.

This framework is intended as a practical resource for Council employees and services to support the planning and delivery of all community engagement activities. It should be used by officers to develop engagement processes, and details the stages required to ensure successful engagement.

At its core, community engagement is about involving individuals, community organisations, service users and wider stakeholders in decision making processes to inform and shape policy. Effective engagement ensures that the widest possible range of local views can be utilised to inform service improvements and deliver improved outcomes.

Defining Community Engagement

There are 5 levels to engagement as detailed in the table below, which are used for different purposes and approached in different ways.

| | Inform | Consult | Involve | Collaborate | Empower |
|---------------------------|---|--|--|---|--|
| Purpose | To provide residents with information to assist their understanding of an issue | To collect information from residents about attitudes and opinions | To work with residents to ensure their concerns and aspirations are understood and considered | To partner with residents in each aspect of the design of services | To place final decision making in the hands of residents |
| Expectation | We will keep you informed | We will keep you informed, listen to and provide feedback on how public input has informed the decision. | We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations shape the process and influence the decision. | We will look to you for advice and help in developing solutions and incorporate your advice | We will help implement what you decide |
| Example techniques | Fact Sheets Websites Newsletters Noticeboards Campaigns | Surveys Public Meetings Citizens Panels Focus Groups | Workshops Community Events Charrettes | Community Forums Participatory decision making Open Space events | Citizens Juries Your Community Community Budgeting |

Our Engagement Principles

When undertaking engagement activity, regardless of the approach, there are underpinning principles that should always be used to guide the engagement and activity. The principles detailed below ensure a consistency to all engagement activity |

Inclusiveness – we will ensure that our approach to participation and engagement encourages and promotes opportunities for all residents

Approachability – We will ensure information is accessible and that it's easy to find out more about how to get involved

Transparency – we will publish and share information about our approach and activities and ask for regular feedback on what we're doing

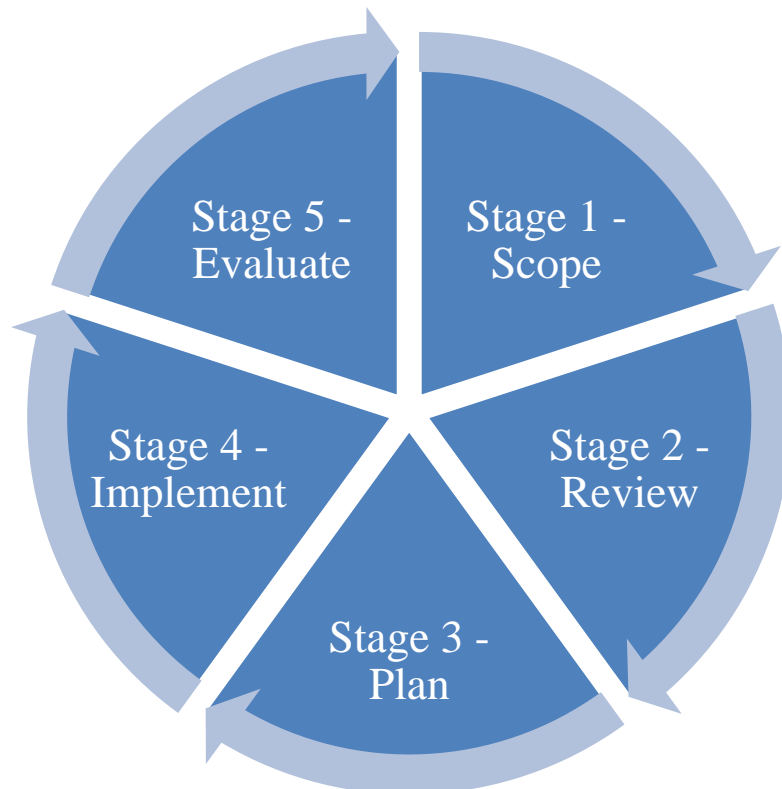
Accountability – we will report back regularly to those who engage and use services and ask for feedback on our approaches. We will work in partnership with residents to improve our approach and learn from feedback

Flexibility – we want to make sure our models of engagement and involvement reflect the varying needs of local communities and residents

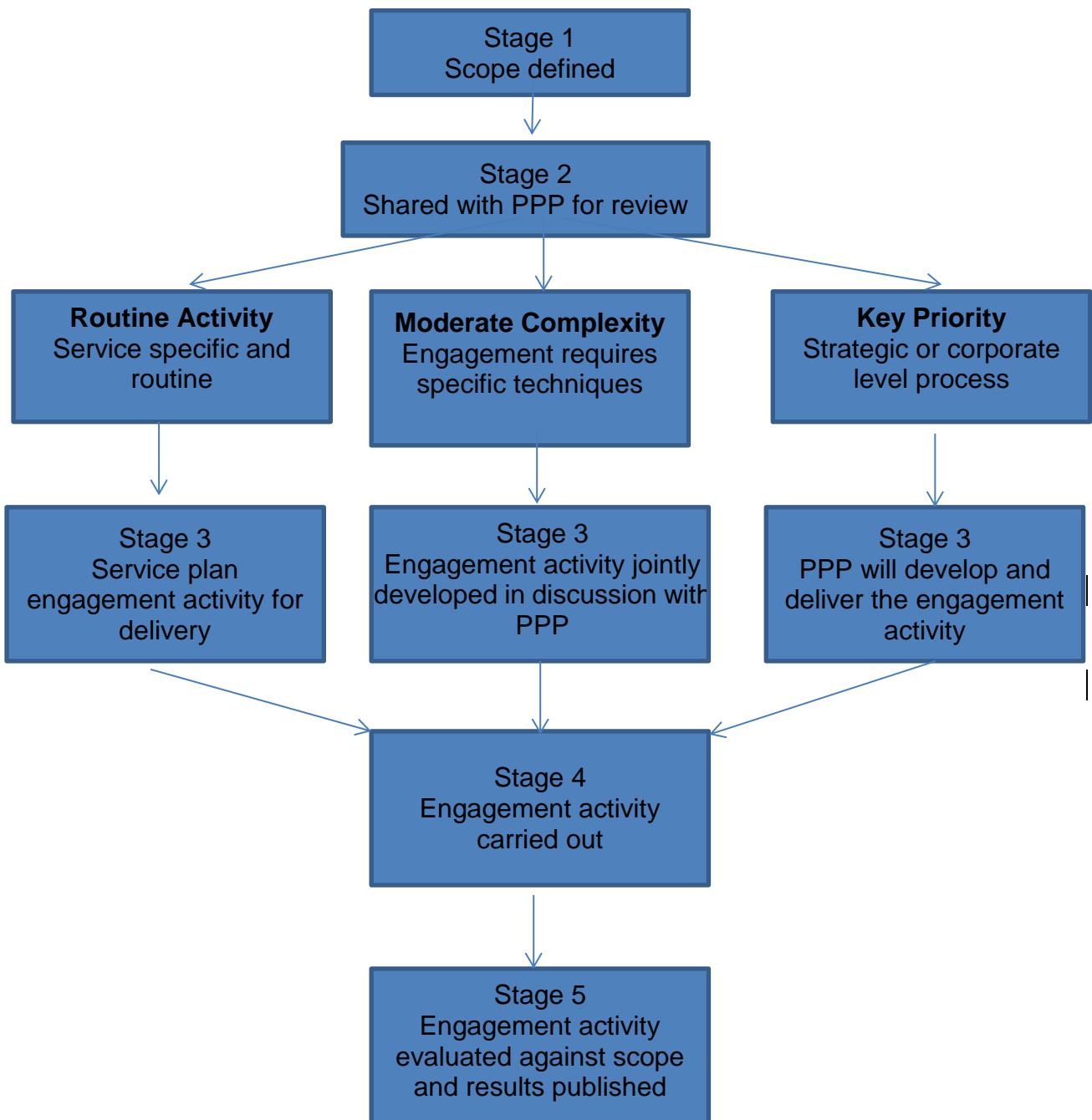
Co-ordination - we will work to strengthen co-ordination and links across communities- both geographical and interest recognising the links and dependencies that exist

Engaging Communities Framework

The Engaging Communities Framework has 5 defined stages which ensure that key questions are considered and the engagement activity is well planned. This is critical to ensuring that the service undertaking the engagement activity gets back what it needs from the process but also to ensuring that residents or service users being engaged with find the process valuable.



To ensure a consistent approach is taken to engagement activity across the organisation all engagement processes should be reviewed at stage 2 before progressing. This review will be carried out by the PPP team. The process is as follows:



1. Scoping

At the scoping stage you should be thinking about the purpose of your engagement process – what is it you want to know and who from? Think about your reasons for engagement:

- My purpose for engaging is...
 - Gain understanding?
 - Improve practice?
 - Plan / redesign a service?
 - Involve the community in addressing an identified need?

Can you answer the following questions?

- What is the purpose?
- Why would the community engage on this issue?
- Do they have the same anticipated outcome as you?
- What is it you want to know?
- What do you already know?
- Who are you stakeholders?
- Are there groups who may find it difficult to engage?
- Are some views better represented than others?

Before you move on to the next stage in the process you should have answers to each of these questions. If you cannot answer any question you may need to rethink the reason for the engagement process and the desired outcomes.

2. Review

At this stage you should consider the skills needed to carry out the engagement process and the organisational priority associated with the activity. There are three tiers to the engagement activity carried out across the organisation – from service specific engagement with users of a service to corporate and strategic engagement designed to inform the strategic direction of the organisation. All engagement scopes should be shared with the PPP team for review and will be progressed to Tier 1,2 or 3 following review as follows:

Routine activity - engagement activity refers to ongoing engagement with users of a specific service. This could be sharing of information with a user group through a mailing list or newsletter, asking users of a service for feedback after they've received the service or holding user group meetings to gather more detailed feedback on a service. This is localised and service specific engagement which can be carried out at a service level by officers using this framework.

Moderate complexity - engagement activity is more involved and structured around key questions the organisation or service is looking for feedback on. Tier 2 engagement activity is likely to focus on consultation, involvement and collaboration type activities. There will be more use made of engagement tools for this type of engagement activity, such as online surveys, workshops and public meetings/events. This engagement activity can often be carried out at a service level by officers with guidance and support from the PPP team.

Key priority - engagement activities are strategic and corporate in nature, focused on collaboration and empowerment of residents, intended to ensure full involvement in the development, design and delivery of the strategic priorities for West Dunbartonshire. The majority of engagement activity at this level will develop through the strategic leadership group of the organisation and be tasked directly through the Policy, Planning and Performance team. All activity of this type generated through a service should be shared with the PPP team for delivery.

3. Plan

At the planning stage you should focus on your desired outcomes. What difference do you or those involved want the engagement process to make. Remember that not everyone involved will want the same thing from the process and this will influence the approach. You should consider:

- What will be good evidence of success?
- How will you collect evidence during the process?
- Are there barriers to involvement?
- What resources might you need to overcome these barriers?

Identifying the resources available to undertake the engagement process is key to planning the activity and deciding on the method or tools to be used. You need to consider the skills, experience and facilities available to you. How long do you have to undertake the process, considering who you want to involve and potential barriers. Finally is there a budget specific to this engagement process?

Now you can consider what method(s) you will use. This will be informed by who is involved – think about what works best for them. Would it be helpful to use more than one method? You need to consider who will do what, and where this will take place. What were your measures of success? Which method is best to deliver on this? Details on the types of approaches and tools you could utilise are provided in the following section. There are many to choose from – be imaginative in your approach to get the best from your engagement.

4. Implement

When you undertake your engagement activity you should reflect on whether you are doing what you said you would do, and involving the groups you said should be involved. You should refer to your plan from the previous stage and make sure you are delivering or able to record why not.

Did everyone you wanted to involve engage? If not, why not? If there are barriers to engagement can you remove them? Perhaps an alternative method is needed?

Is everyone getting what they wanted and needed from the process? Gather feedback from participants as you go – ask if they feel engaged, like the process etc.

Are you able to document what you are gathering through this process? Reflecting on your plan – are you gathering the evidence you need? Reflect on what is going well and identify any changes that need to be made.

Are you feeding back to participants throughout the process? Did you commit to this? If not are how will you record learning and share this with stakeholders and participants?

5. Evaluate

Following your engagement activity you can evaluate the process. At this stage you should reflect on your scope, plan and implementation.

What did you set out to do? Do you have evidence collated?

Did you involve all groups you intended to involve and take action to address identified barriers? Were participants able to review and support the gathering of evidence?

Think about what worked and what didn't – remember things rarely go exactly as planned. Did you implement your plan? Did you amend activities? Did you have to revise approaches or cancel activities?

Did you deliver the anticipated outcomes from the process? What have you learned by undertaking the engagement activity? Do you need to do more work? What are your next steps?

At this stage you should be preparing feedback for your participants. This should include details of what you set out to do, the process undertaken and the information gathered. Where there unexpected outcomes? This is also an opportunity to reflect on their feedback throughout the process. Here you can detail anything you would change if doing this exercise again and any lessons you can apply in future.

Finally – what will you now do with the information gathered?

Community Engagement Standards

A defined framework for consultation and engagement allows the Council to deliver our activities in a consistent and transparent manner, understood by our residents and partner agencies. While this framework is specific to the Council it is complementary to engagement activities carried out across a range of partners and, wherever possible, engagement activity will be carried out in partnership.

West Dunbartonshire's Engaging Communities Framework has adopted the 7 National Standards for Community Engagement. These standards underpin all engagement activity carried out by the Council and inform the process of engagement to ensure a best practice approach is adopted. The standards support the Council in implementation of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, which requires Council to promote effective engagement and participation of communities.

The 7 standards of community engagement are:

- Inclusion
- Support
- Planning
- Working Together
- Methods
- Communication
- Impact

Details on each of the standards can be found in the table below.

| Standard | What it means | How will we know we have met it? |
|------------------|--|---|
| Inclusion | We will identify and involve the people and organisations that are affected by the focus of the engagement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • early involvement • plans to involve underrepresented/ excluded groups • commitment to continued two-way communication • All opinions, including minority and opposing views, are valued |
| Support | We will identify and overcome any barriers to participation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needs assessment carried out, involving all participants • Action is taken to remove or reduce any practical barriers • Access to support is provided for groups |
| Planning | There is a clear purpose for the engagement, which is based on a shared understanding of community needs and ambitions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early engagement to identifying and defining the focus • A clear and agreed engagement plan is in place • All available information has been shared and used • Agreed outcomes and measures for the engagement process • The timescales for the engagement process are realistic • There are sufficient resources to support an effective engagement process |
| Working Together | We will work effectively together to achieve the aims of the engagement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The roles and responsibilities of everyone involved are clear and understood • Decision-making processes and procedures are agreed and followed • The methods of communication meet the needs of all participants • Information is accessible and shared • Communication between all participants is open, honest and clear • The community engagement process is based on trust and mutual respect • Participants are supported to develop their skills and confidence |
| Methods | We will use methods of engagement that are fit for purpose | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The methods used are appropriate for the purpose of the engagement • The methods used are acceptable and accessible to participants • A variety of methods are used to ensure a wide range of voices • creative methods used to encourage maximum participation and effective dialogue • The methods used are evaluated and adapted, if necessary |
| Communication | We will communicate clearly and regularly with the people, organisations and communities affected by the engagement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information on the community engagement process is clear • Information is made available in appropriate formats • participants have access to all information that is relevant to the engagement • Systems are in place to gather and utilise wider community views • Feedback is a true representation of the range of views expressed |
| Impact | We will assess the impact of the engagement and use what we have learned to improve our future community engagement. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The outcomes the engagement process intended to achieve are met • Decisions reflect the outcome and feedback from the community engagement process • Local outcomes, or services, are improved as result of the engagement process • Participants have improved skills, confidence and ability to take part • Partners are involved in monitoring and reviewing the quality of the engagement • Feedback is provided to the wider community • Learning and evaluation helps to shape future processes |

Community Engagement Approaches and Tools

There are many different methods and techniques that can be used to engage with communities. The tool used is dependent on the required outcome and the level of engagement required. This is defined utilising the community engagement cycle described in the previous section.

Details are included below of key tools and approaches that can be used to engage with communities. They have been split into three broad categories: **INFORM**, **CONSULT** and **ENGAGE** so that it is clear what methods can be used to achieve different levels of participation.

For each, we have given a brief description, outlined the benefits and weaknesses and where appropriate, provided links to useful resources. This section will give some ideas about the different ways to engage people to get the most out of our engagement activity.

Inform

| Method / tool | What is it used for? | benefits | weaknesses |
|---|--|---|---|
| Factsheets/ Newsletter | <p>Provide information in an easily accessible format</p> <p>Can be used to inform the community about developments in their area</p> | <p>If distributed regularly, can build community awareness and understanding</p> <p>One of the cheapest and cost effective methods of keeping people informed</p> | <p>May not be accessible to people with low levels of literacy or visual impairment</p> <p>People may not take time to read it</p> |
| Websites / online tools | <p>A variety of web based processes are available to choose from which gives people the opportunity to get involved at different levels</p> <p>Websites provide a way for organisations to provide information to the public</p> <p>Online methods can be used as standalone processes or as part of a wider engagement activity</p> | <p>People can choose a convenient time and place to participate</p> <p>Can create debate and exchange of views</p> <p>Effective means of developing and sustaining interest through a community</p> <p>Can reach large numbers of people</p> <p>Less time consuming for participants than attending a workshop or meeting</p> | <p>Excludes those without access to the internet</p> <p>Needs to be publicised to generate activity</p> <p>Some people may feel intimidated</p> |
| Noticeboards and Media Campaigns | <p>Use of highly visual materials to get a particular message or information across a range of audiences</p> <p>Displays are normally set up in local community areas like community centres, shopping centres, libraries</p> | <p>Can ensure reach to a large audience</p> <p>Engages and generates interest</p> <p>Can reach people who may not normally participate</p> | <p>Requires advance planning and preparation</p> <p>Product requires to be designed – has a cost implication</p> |

Consult

| Method / tool | What is it used for? | benefits | weaknesses |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|---|
| Surveys & Questionnaires | <p>Most widely used engagement method</p> <p>Undertaken to identify needs and views of a large number of people in a standard format</p> <p>Often best to use a short and concise questionnaire where people's views on an issue are being sought</p> <p>Good way of collecting quantitative and qualitative information from local people at a certain point in time.</p> | <p>Can gain the views of a large number of people</p> <p>Useful for obtaining quantitative data</p> <p>In principle data can be compared over time or with results from elsewhere</p> <p>Useful for identifying and evidencing need</p> | <p>Need to be well designed and coded to get 'usable' answers</p> <p>Large questionnaire surveys are time consuming and labour intensive</p> <p>Information may be limited</p> <p>Do not offer any real sense of community engagement or provide an opportunity for people to exchange views</p> <p>Can contribute to 'over-engagement' if public are surveyed on a number of occasions</p> |
| Public Meetings | <p>Large scale communication and consultation on broad topics</p> <p>Allows for messages to be shared widely and views to be sought</p> | <p>Enables large numbers of people to have their say</p> <p>Provides an opportunity to explain processes, give information and gather feedback</p> <p>Demonstrates openness and transparency</p> <p>Enables participants to develop networks</p> | <p>Unlikely to be representative - not everyone has the time or inclination to attend</p> |

| Method / tool | What is it used for? | benefits | weaknesses |
|-------------------------------|---|--|--|
| Consultation Documents | <p>Regularly used for formal engagement by local authorities and other government bodies to seek formal responses from statutory consultees</p> <p>Provides an opportunity to provide detailed background information on a particular proposal or issue</p> | <p>A written document allows the service to set out in detail the whole picture and ask specific questions</p> <p>A document can also be used to explain complexity and provide background information</p> <p>Paper based engagement is safe and predictable</p> <p>Web based processes allow comments on documents and responses to questions to be displayed in full</p> | <p>The sheer size and detail in a document can have a negative effect on the people being consulted</p> <p>People are reluctant to read long documents</p> <p>A large number of responses can be labour intensive to collate and analyse</p> <p>Printed documents may not accessible to the full community</p> |
| Citizens Panel | <p>Representative sample of people from a local area who agree to be involved in various engagement activities</p> <p>Panels normally involve around '1000 plus' local people</p> | <p>People agree to be on the panel thereby increasing response rates</p> <p>May allow for some measurement of changes over time</p> <p>Provides a ready-made sample of individuals to consult with</p> <p>The composition of panels can be made representative of the local population</p> <p>Can be delivered on-line</p> | <p>A turnover of the panel may reduce the validity of 'tracking' over time</p> <p>Doesn't work well for small specific service related issues</p> <p>Representativeness of panels can be difficult to achieve</p> |

| Method / tool | What is it used for? | benefits | weaknesses |
|-------------------------|--|--|---|
| Telephone Survey | <p>Sample of people from local areas who are contacted by telephone to gauge satisfaction over a range of services</p> <p>Surveys normally involve around 100 local people per month</p> | <p>Can ensure a good response</p> <p>Easier to contact hard to reach groups</p> <p>Allows issues to be explored in more depth than paper based survey</p> <p>Provides a ready-made sample of individuals to consult with</p> | <p>Interviewer cannot respond to questions or provide agency specific responses</p> <p>Not necessarily representative</p> <p>Can be costly and time consuming</p> <p>Specific skills required</p> <p>Difficult to analyse</p> |

Engage

| Method / tool | What is it used for? | benefits | weaknesses |
|--------------------------|--|--|---|
| Workshops | <p>Workshops and focus groups allow people to discuss their ideas in an open and relaxed atmosphere</p> <p>Can take a variety of different formats, depending on the topic for discussion</p> | <p>Encourages active discussion in a welcoming environment</p> <p>Time and resource efficient way of identifying and clarifying key issues</p> | <p>Require a higher level of officer attendance for facilitation</p> <p>Can generate a number of discussion topics not planned for</p> <p>Agenda can be lost to tangential topics</p> |
| Charrette | <p>Uses maps and photographs of an area or specific location to illustrate how people view their area; what they like or dislike or improvements they would like to see</p> | <p>Stimulates discussion</p> <p>Can build a sense of community ownership</p> <p>Can help people see and understand their community in different ways</p> | <p>It may not appeal to a wider community audience</p> <p>Can be expensive and require a lot of resources</p> <p>May not be well attended</p> |
| World Cafes | <p>Aim to gather the views of participants in a comfortable and informal setting, much like a café</p> <p>Discussions take place in small groups.</p> <p>Participants move around the tables in order to discuss each discussion topic</p> | <p>Informal atmosphere created which encourages conversation</p> <p>Flexible</p> <p>Less formal than a public meeting</p> <p>Easier to participate</p> | <p>Success can be dependent on the questions set</p> <p>No significant level of quantitative data for analysing trends over time</p> |
| Open Space Events | <p>An approach to meetings that gives participants the opportunity to set the agenda</p> <p>Participants are responsible for the content and recording of the event</p> <p>Fluid and unstructured approach</p> | <p>Increases skills of participants</p> <p>Promotes empowerment and ownership</p> <p>Breaks down traditional 'them' and 'us' barriers</p> | <p>Limited control</p> <p>Danger of not capturing the full content</p> |

Appendix 1

Legislative context

The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 established in legislation the role of Councils in facilitating the Community Planning process, at the heart of which is 'making sure people and communities are genuinely engaged in the decisions made on public services which will affect them.'

The duty to involve people in the design and delivery of services has increased in recent years, with the publication of the Christie Report (2011) and the enactment of the [Community Empowerment \(Scotland\) Act 2015](#). Engaging with communities is not just about meeting legal duties. Genuine and effective community engagement has benefits for both the Council and residents:

- Enhanced wellbeing and increased levels of satisfaction
- Increase local ownership and enhanced community pride
- Increased dialogue and communication between local people and organisations
- Responsive services that meet local need

The Act also puts in place a mechanism for communities to identify needs in their local area and request action be taken. These Participation Requests allow for local communities to request involvement in improving an outcome, working jointly with services to deliver on this.

Appendix 2

Additional Useful resources

National coordinating Centre for Public Engagement

<https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/do-it/techniquesapproaches>

Not another engagement: Making Community Engagement informal and fun

<http://www.involve.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Not-Another-Engagement.pdf>

Community Planning Toolkit: Community Engagement

<http://www.communityplanningtoolkit.org/sites/default/files/Engagement.pdf>

The Scottish Government Community Engagement How To Guide

<http://www.gov.scot/Topics/People/engage/HowToGuide>

Better Community Engagement (Scottish Community Development Centre)

http://www.scdc.org.uk/media/resources/what-we-do/better-comm-engage/better_community_engagement.pdf

Dialogue by Design Handbook

http://designer.dialoguebydesign.net/docs/Dialogue_by_Design_Handbook.pdf

National Standards for Community Engagement

<http://www.scdc.org.uk/what/national-standards/>

Making it Meaningful: Involving Communities in Community Planning

<http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Built-Environment/regeneration/engage/HowToGuide/LearningPoint1>

Visioning Outcomes in Community Engagement (VOICE)

<http://www.scdc.org.uk/what/voice/>

National Co-ordinating centre for public engagement

<http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/>