

**Appendix 1**

# **DEVELOPING COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS IN MORAY**

**Moray Area Forum Discussion Paper**

**March 2009**

The Scottish Government has just launched the *Scottish Community Empowerment Action Plan – Celebrating Success: Inspiring Change*. This discussion paper is to explore how we can strengthen the partnership engagement between local residents, elected members and community planning partners in Moray in response to the outcomes outlined in the above plan

There isn't a single service or development throughout Scotland which hasn't been improved by actively involving local people. Local people use local services and live in their neighbourhoods, so it's no surprise they are often best placed to report the problems and come up with ideas to solve them, whether the issue is anti-social behaviour, litter, better services for young people or improvement to the local park.

This paper has been put together to enable the area forums in Moray to strengthen the partnership engagement between local people, elected members and Community Planning Partners in our areas.

The aim of the paper is to encourage agreement by the area forum membership to engage a renowned and respected training provider to facilitate bringing together key players in the Community Planning Partnership in Moray, including Theme Group Chairs, Area Forum Chairs and Senior Officers within the Community Planning Partnership to explore the feasibility of developing Community Agreements at a local community level throughout Moray.

Community Agreements provide a way for communities to get involved in the decision making process. The development of an Agreement in our individual areas should bring local people together, to harness their ideas and to share their ambitions and dreams for their area.

As a first step, the content of this paper is to explore amongst the area forum members whether we should progress the idea of developing Community Agreements in Moray.

The second step is to discuss with our Community Planning partners our proposal to proceed with their involvement. If Area Forum members are in agreement, the contents of this paper will be presented to the Community Engagement Group for initial discussion and support.

The third step would be to invite and get a positive response from Theme Group Chairs, Senior Community Planning Partnership Managers and Area Forum Chairs to attend a Community Agreement training day facilitated by the Rod Laird Organisation and Moray Council CLD Team Leader.

The cost of the delivery of the training will be approximately £300.00 per Area Forum. We would not request financial contribution from those invited but would cover the costs from budgets already identified by the area forum members for training purposes.

It is anticipated that the outcome of the training will be the agreement to establish Community Agreements across Moray.

The next meeting of the Community Engagement Group is April 23<sup>rd</sup>. I would therefore request all area forum chair people to distribute this paper to their members and organise feedback with an agreement in principle for us to proceed to step 2 in the process.

Alan Beresford

Moray Forum Chair Person

24<sup>th</sup> March 2009

## What is local Community Agreement?

A local Agreement is a voluntary partnership agreement between a community, the local authority and other service providers. It describes the service standards which local people expect from the local authority and other agencies, as well as commitments from service providers, local groups and residents themselves to help meet local community priorities.

An Agreement therefore gives communities an opportunity for greater participation and genuine engagement with local authorities involved in making decisions. Agreements give local people a direct role in influencing local services. They enable them to become more active in their local communities, and take on responsibilities themselves, so that they can actively contribute to improvements, rather than just being passive recipients.

Community Agreements could be developed by the Moray Council in partnership with other service providers, Community Planning Partners and the community, usually through a community level organisation such as a parish council, residents' association, or in our case, the area forum.

**There is no definitive model for a Local Community Agreement.** There are, however, some essential ingredients in Agreements, which differentiate them from other agreements or plans that may already exist in a local area. An effective local Agreement should:

1. **Be an agreement between the local authority, other service providers and the community**, rather than imposed from the top-down or a technical contract between service providers.
2. **Be based on both community priorities and needs identified by service providers**, making it unique to the local area.
3. **Identify and clarify the obligations of service providers, Community Planning Partners and organisations and residents**, including service standards and any commitments taken on by the local community.
4. **Give opportunities to tailor the provision of services locally**, by both modifying local statutory provision and clarifying any elements of delivery which have been devolved to other organisations.
5. **Clarify the role of local councillors and strengthen their local profile.**
6. **Complement existing local documents and feed into service plans and strategic Moray wide documents**, rather than duplicating what is already available.

7. **Empower local people, showing them how to get involved and in particular how they can hold services to account**, rather than just being a contact list or newsletter.
8. **Be relevant to local people's understanding of an area or neighbourhood**, rather than covering large geographical areas.
9. **Be a living documents in which priorities are set for a given period and then reviewed**
10. **Be easy to read and written in plain English.**

## **Why Develop a Community Agreement?**

Community Agreements will take both time and resources to develop locally, so why are they worth developing?

### **Community Agreements can improve performance, efficiency and satisfaction with services**

The process of developing an Agreement can improve local agencies' understanding of a community's needs. By tailoring services to meet these specific needs, tackling emerging issues before they become more costly to solve, and encouraging agencies to work together on local solutions, authorities can make efficiency savings and improve performance. This is likely to increase residents' satisfaction with their neighbourhood.

Agreements can identify solutions that can be led by residents, area forums or the voluntary and community sector (MVSO). This may provide a direct cost benefit, but participation will also enhance the capacity of the community to meet its own needs and therefore improve longer term sustainability.

Agreements empower both residents and councillors to monitor the service commitments made. This scrutiny and improved dialogue can help agencies respond quickly to local needs and make delivery more efficient.

### **Improving Satisfaction with Services**

Consultation by service providers in Great Lever, Bolton identified the physical environment and the social impact of anti-social behaviour as the issues that most concerned residents of the neighbourhood management pathfinder area.

In response the 'safe and clean' community agreement ( in Bolton it is called a charter ) sets out agency responsibilities and agreements on service standards, response rates and resources, as well as contact details and practical advice on how residents can help improve the area. The agreement has helped shape local service delivery, improve resident satisfaction by 16 per cent and reduce dissatisfaction with litter and rubbish by 18 per cent.

### **Community Agreements can contribute to a variety of performance measures**

As part of the Audit of Best Value 2 Moray will need to take into account performance measures based on how satisfied residents are with the council, including whether residents feel they can influence decisions in their local area and if they are a member of a community association, school board or area forum. The information provided to citizens through Community Agreements, and clear opportunities to get involved further, can help local authorities to meet these measures.

Community Agreements can also help local authorities and Community Planning Partners demonstrate how they inform, consult and involve local residents in their decision making, which is highlighted in Moray's Single Outcome Agreement.

A Community Agreement may also help the Moray Council and Community Planning Partners to evidence neighbourhood contributions to Moray wide initiatives, including their approaches to Community Empowerment and Single Outcome Agreement targets and outcomes.

## **Community Agreements can help build understanding and trust locally**

Agreements themselves, and the process of developing one, build mutual understanding and trust between service providers and local communities. They allow communities to play an active role in the process of place shaping and create a shared sense of ownership around improvements.

Agreements also set clear and transparent standards for service provisions which, when delivered, enhance both local understanding and confidence.

### **Building a better understanding with Service Providers**

As part of the Peel Hall Mancunian Agreement in Manchester, the council agreed to provide various environmental works and features (such as hanging baskets) in response to requests from residents to improve the look of the area. Residents not only agreed to maintain them, but also to maintain each others.

The agreement, and the process of developing it, has helped foster new relationships between residents and encouraged pride in the local area. In particular the ward co-ordinator and environmental officers are seeing an increase in the number of people who have the confidence to come forward.

## **Community Agreements can engage councillors and help promote their role locally**

Agreements can help to strengthen local representative democracy in an area by empowering local councillors. Councillors can play an important role whether providing links in the community or local groups, acting as brokers in neighbourhoods with conflict, or acting as champions in neighbourhoods with low capacity or little history of engagement. This role, as well as including contact details in the Agreement itself, will help enhance the profile of local councillors and help create a strong and productive relationship between councillors and the communities they serve.

Local councillors will be able to use the service commitments and priorities named in the Agreement to hold services to account. This monitoring role can tie into existing scrutiny structures, local scrutiny or a Councillors' Call for Action.

### **The importance of Councillors**

In Walsall each local ward has a local neighbourhood partnership which brings together council and other service providers with ward level organisations, community organisations and councillors. Each partnership produces a neighbourhood agreement which reflects what the various parties are going to do over the next year.

Local councillors have an important role in the development of their local neighbourhood agreements. They chair the local partnerships and negotiate commitments with the service providers and local groups so that the community's priorities are met.

## **Community Agreements can help build community capacity**

Involvement in creating a Community Agreement will help develop the knowledge and capacity of local residents and community groups. Agreements can help residents engage better with agencies, ward councillors and scrutiny processes. This can lead to greater community participation in other forms of neighbourhood working – such as the development of community organisations, Neighbourhood Policing Agreements and taking up opportunities for more formal democratic engagement.

The process of designing local solutions will enhance the capacity of the community to meet its own needs with sustainable solutions.

## **Community Agreements can help clarify partnership work and avoid duplication between agencies**

The process of developing an Agreement will bring council services and other agencies together with ward councillors and residents to consider how best to meet local needs. Sharing information between providers and finding joint solutions will help avoid duplication between agencies. The service standards outlined in a Community Agreement will also help clarify the nature of partnerships locally and their separate responsibilities for delivery.

Community Agreements can also help reduce the need for additional consultation and the associated expense, by bringing together existing information about the community from previous consultations exercise by different agencies or groups.

## **A Community Agreement is based on both community priorities and needs identified by service providers**

### **Identifying community priorities**

A comprehensive view of residents' priorities can often be arrived at by pulling together the results of existing engagement and consultation such as area forums, community plans, action plans, regeneration projects, ward plans and local councillors' casework.

Where further engagement is needed to understand the community's priorities, this should be well designed and carried out to avoid 'consultation fatigue'. In particular it should be clear how it fits with existing engagement activities including neighbourhood management, community planning or regeneration strategies. Good practice guides and consultation toolkits are available from a number of sources.

### **Capturing data on known local challenges and needs**

The Moray Council and other service providers should be actively engaged in the development of Community Agreements from an early stage. They will often have data from surveys, previous consultation with service users, national statistics and a Single Outcome Agreement between the local authority, COSLA and the Scottish Government which together will present a comprehensive picture of local needs. This works best where agencies have good local data.

Service providers may already be targeting specific provision and resources in a particular area. This will be captured in service plans and, together with an understanding of the flexibility and constraints of resources will help inform negotiations on local priorities and actions. Strong local leadership from the Moray Council and the Community Planning Partnership is essential to encourage agencies to engage directly with residents at the local level.

## **A community Agreement identifies and clarifies the obligations of all the players**

### **Responsibilities and obligations of local service providers**

Agreements should provide clarity on the type and breadth of services delivered locally, by the council and other agencies such as the Police, Grampian Primary Care Trust, Scottish Skills Agency and Registered Social Landlords. Rather than providing standardised information each service should make clear any local variation in services. Agreements therefore provide a good opportunity to advertise services to local people.

The Moray Council and other agencies should include information on how they can be contacted and what the community can expect to receive from them, or be consulted upon during the year, within the Agreement.

#### **What you can expect from services in your area**

The Rother Valley West Community Agreement (they use the word charter) is marketed under the strap line 'what you can expect from local services in your area'. The document contains general service information (such as response rates and contact details) as well as specific locally negotiated commitments from service providers including council, Police and Primary Care Trust.

The charter clearly sets out the type of information residents can expect to receive, how to contact their local councillor, and how to get involved in decision making locally.

### **The role of Area Forums, Community Councils and other organisations**

In many cases, an area forum, community group or community council will take a lead in helping develop local Agreements and it is important their role is acknowledged in the final document.

### **The role of residents**

Community Agreements empower communities to get actively involved in helping make their area a better place. Individual residents can take responsibility for what happens in their areas through agreeing community commitments within Agreements. These can include reporting problems or an agreement to cut the grass next to their home. This harnesses the energy and knowledge of local people and helps promote collective responsibility.

The nature of such a voluntary agreement means there is no right or redress if a community fails to meet its obligations. The agreement, however, can help raise awareness of people's responsibility as individuals and increase a sense of local ownership.

### **Developing the responsibilities of residents and service providers**

An increase in arson and anti-social behaviour motivated agencies and local people to get together to form the Community Pride Agreement in Staffordshire Moorlands.

The Agreement sets out the roles and responsibilities of both services and local people to help tackle community priorities. Services have made commitments to clear graffiti, ensure refuse is collected and maintain green space. Local people are encouraged to take responsibility for the local environment by reporting graffiti, separating their refuse and maintaining the grass verges outside their homes.

This sense of shared responsibility has been central to the agreement's success. The agreement has been partially helpful for service providers as it is structured around Local Area Agreement outcomes, helping to clarify how agencies work together to meet targets.

## **A Community Agreement gives opportunities to tailor the provision of services locally**

### **Tailoring the provision of services by local agencies**

The process of developing an Agreement can give communities opportunities to suggest improvements to the services they receive from a range of agencies. This can mean tailoring delivery to a local area based on local knowledge, negotiating additional provision or agreeing local targets to improve performance and tackle urgent needs.

These local targets can help to improve public scrutiny, enabling ward councillors and the community to hold service providers to account.

### **Tailoring the delivery of statutory services**

The Witton Lodge Community Association has been involved in improving the housing and environment of Birmingham's Perry Common for many years.

The Community Association has recently developed a protocol with local environmental services to help shape the way in which the city council's street scene budget is spent in Perry Common to reflect local priorities.

## **A Community Agreement complements existing local documents and feeds into service plans and strategic authority-wide documents**

To avoid duplication and 'engagement fatigue', Agreements should draw on existing information. This would include previous consultation exercises, detailed service plans for services provided by the Moray Council and other agencies (including Community Planning Partners such as Police, Health Services and Skills Agency), local regeneration strategies, community or neighbourhood plans and tenant participation structures.

Agreements can inform both individual service plans (the council's or those of other agencies) and strategic authority-wide documents such as Single Outcome Agreements, the Community Engagement Strategy, Fairer Scotland Fund Strategies and the MVSO compact.

#### **Delivery of Local Area Agreement targets by the community**

Birmingham's Strategic Partnership has developed elements of its Local Area Agreement to smaller areas. Community groups in three areas of the city have developed neighbourhood area agreements, taking responsibility for the delivery of activities which meet LAA targets and outcomes in their areas.

These lead community groups will decide how services are commissioned locally. In some cases they will provide services themselves and in others they will negotiate with service providers locally and monitor their delivery. This innovative approach is designed to help tackle entrenched problems so that solutions are tailored to the local area.

### **A Community Agreement empowers local people**

Agreements will be available to every resident in the Moray area forum areas. They should demonstrate how local people can contact their local councillor or service provider and how to get involved in activities locally, including holding services to account.

#### **Improving engagement**

Experience suggests that where communities are involved in the development or monitoring of a Community Agreement, the capacity of the community to work together and connect with services increases. Agreements can also provide a way for residents to become involved in other community activities, improving their knowledge of their local area and the opportunities available to get involved. For example, Agreements can empower residents by signposting them towards community policing teams, ward councillor surgeries or community forums.

### **Developing skills among local residents**

The Foxwood Neighbourhood Agreement shows how local involvement can empower residents and improve services. The neighbourhood agreement is monitored by a community action group and, more formally, within a local partnership including residents and elected councillors.

The monitoring has enabled residents to hold service providers to account and make the allocation of resources and the setting of targets more visible.

### **Holding service providers to account**

Community Agreements should include information about how residents can contact local services and how they can hold providers to account where a service falls short of what they expect. Agreements can provide opportunities for local residents to become actively involved in monitoring their local Agreements, whether this is through highlighting issues directly to service providers or taking on a more 'formalised' role such as checking local litter levels. In addition local councillors, using the enhanced community focus that Community Agreements provide, can help set up negotiating meetings of local partners, local scrutiny structures or, as a last resort, through a Councillors' Call for Action.

The monitoring and accountability of local services can be strengthened by linking the performance aspects of an Agreement into existing council scrutiny structures, which have a formal route to the council. The Moray Community Engagement Group and Local Service Providers can also take the lead role in overseeing Agreements and their results locally, providing performance information directly into the Community Planning Executive Board and the Local Service Providers Executive Boards.

### **Monitoring Service Performance**

The 'Keeping Kendray Clean and Tidy Agreement' was established in 2006 between local service providers and the residents of the Barnsley estate. This agreement explains which service provider is responsible for what, and the service standards residents can expect. Because the agreement is two-way, it also spells out the residents' responsibilities.

### **A Community Agreement is relevant to local people's understanding of an area or neighbourhood**

Agreements should be relevant to the local area, covering an area which is recognised as distinct by residents. Where Agreements are instigated by local demand the area they cover will be self defined. Where local authorities take the lead on developing Agreements they should be in line with natural neighbourhoods. Agreements covering areas with a population in excess of 10,000 are not recommended as areas of this size are often too large to be seen as a distinct area. Given that Elgin, the largest settlement has two area forums, it is not anticipated that this would be a problem in Moray.

### **A Community Agreement is a living document where priorities are set for a given period and then reviewed**

Agreements should include a commitment to long-term community engagement. Local priorities will vary over time as circumstances change. A date for review, determined locally, should therefore be agreed when the Agreement is first signed. Refreshing the Agreement on a regular basis enables people to assess progress and celebrate what has been achieved. This can help create momentum and increase people's satisfaction with the results.

## **A Community Agreement is easy to read and written in plain English**

Agreements should always be clear and easy to understand. They should be written in plain English and offered in other accessible formats if requested, including languages other than English.

As Agreements combine contributions from service providers, residents and councillors they should become more detailed, taking on an action plan format for future joint activity. However, a shorter version could be published that gives the essential information and contacts. This version can be distributed to every resident.

The timescale for pulling together a Community Agreement is listed below. Support for the development would be sought from the proposed new Community Support Unit under consideration by Moray Council. As this Community Support Unit proposal will be going out for community consultation, it is anticipated that requests for support would be based on whether the stakeholders consulted agreed with the Unit being set up. Should the Community Support Unit not go ahead, support would be requested from the Moray Councils Community Learning & Development Adult Team.

<b>OUTLINE PROGRAMME</b>		
<b>FULL AGREEMENT, SEVERAL SERVICES</b>		
<b>(needs customising to your circumstances)</b>		
1.	Preparing the ground	2-3 months
2.	Framework agreement	2-6 months
3.	First two services/projects	4 months
4.	Training/briefing days	Twice a month
5.	Pilot monitoring	4 months
6.	Elapsed time	10-11 months
(i.e. Task 1 comes first, tasks 3 and 5 are back to back, and tasks 2 and 4 can take place at the same time as 3 and 5)		