

An Introduction to Community Councils

1. What is a Community Council?

Community councils are groups of people who care about their community and want to make their area a better place to live. They meet, usually once a month, and their chief role is representative; to consult the local community and to put forward these views to the local authority and other organisations including Scottish Government, NHS Lothian and Police Scotland. The local authority, in turn, has a duty to consult community councils on how local services are delivered and other issues affecting their neighbourhoods. Community councils have the right to be consulted on any planning applications in their areas and are also kept informed about licensing applications.

2. Background

Community councils were introduced through the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973. The Act defined the purpose of a community council 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, in relation to matters for which those authorities are responsible.”

3. Activities

There is a great variety of activity undertaken by community councils to represent their communities. Community councils will regularly:

- *write letters and emails following a meeting of the community council in order to highlight an issue*
- *attend meetings with public officials to discuss local issues*
- *hold public meetings either at regular intervals or in response to a specific issue, or to find out what are the areas of concern within the community*
- *Monitor the upkeep of the area*
- *carry out surveys in the area, typically by using questionnaires*
- *meet with other community councils or other community groups*
- *co-ordinate and submit responses to draft policy reports or consultation documents*
- *receive and respond to enquiries and problems raised by members of the public*
- *send representatives to attend a meeting of a Neighbourhood Partnership, Advisory Group or Regeneration Partnership*
- *produce a newsletter and distribute it to all homes in the area*
- *post information regarding meetings and activities on notice boards, websites or other forms of social media*
- *arrange for public officials or others to attend future meetings of the community council*
- *arrange community events such as gala days, fetes, or clean up days to promote the community council and foster good relations within the community.*

Community councils often take part in activities such as clean-ups and other projects which might benefit their area, either working on their own or in partnership with other agencies.

A community council can act as a campaigning body in raising awareness of specific local issues. They can be particularly useful in co-ordinating smaller, local organisations to ensure that resources aren't being wasted and that several groups aren't all trying to do the same job.

3. Community Councils in Edinburgh

Community councils already established in Edinburgh range from rural communities to inner city neighbourhoods. Community council representatives are volunteers, and are elected for a period of 3 years. Each community council receives an annual grant from the City of Edinburgh Council intended to cover its administrative expenses.

Community councils have a statutory right to be consulted on local planning issues. The City of Edinburgh Council's Planning Service sends out a weekly list of all planning applications submitted. While there is no statutory requirement for local authorities to consult them on licensing matters, community councils are considered as 'competent objectors'. They may appoint representatives to attend meetings of the Licensing Board and speak in support of objections.

4. Establishment

Community councils are established in accordance with the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 and have certain statutory roles and powers. Local Councils are required by law to set up a scheme to allow the establishment of community councils.

The Scheme also provides information on the rules and regulations governing community councils such as election procedures, boundaries and membership. Ultimately, it is entirely a matter for any community to decide if they want a community council in their area. Some neighbourhoods feel that they are already well represented by tenants and residents associations or other groups.

However, should people living in an area decide to form a community council, all that is required is that at least 20 people who are on the electoral roll for that area sign a petition requesting that the City of Edinburgh Council takes the necessary steps to organise an election to establish a community council. At that point, a report will be prepared to go to the Communities and Neighbourhood Committee of the Council recommending the adoption of a timetable for the election.

For more information see www.edinburgh.gov.uk/communitycouncils