



West Dunbartonshire

Community Empowerment Strategy and Action Plan

October 2019

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Language

Although we have used straightforward language in this document as much as possible, there are some words that we should explain.

Communities

Communities describes the relationships and common bonds between people which affect their lives. These can be based on:

Where we live

How we relate to our neighbours, what we think of as our local community and whether we feel we belong.



Other aspects of our identity

These can include age, ethnicity, nationality, disabilities and other things. Sometimes our community might be people who are like us, but don't live near us. We might connect with them because they share common experiences and want to achieve similar things.



Things we are interested in or concerned about

Communities of people also connect over a common interest or issue, for example tenants' groups concerned about housing issues, parents of children with additional support needs, or people involved in shared social or recreational activities.





Community capacity-building

Support for community groups to help them to get involved in local issues, such as helping other people in their community. It can include training, advice, space to hold meetings, and money to organise things.

Community empowerment

People working together to improve their community by having more power and influence over what matters to them, and taking more control over their lives. It is a national priority for the Scottish Government. There is more information about community empowerment on the Scottish Government website [1] and on SCDC's website.[2]

[1] www.gov.scot/policies/community-empowerment/

[2] <https://www.scdc.org.uk/hub/community-empowerment-act>

Community engagement

Two-way communications and relationships between communities, public bodies and other organisations to understand and respond to community needs and ambitions.

Community Planning partners

Each of the 32 local authority areas in Scotland has a Community Planning Partnership. Its members are called 'Community Planning partners'. They work together to deliver public services. More information about Community Planning West Dunbartonshire and its partners is available online.[3]

Co-production

Communities and the public sector working together to agree how public services should be delivered - a positive way to empower communities.

[3] www.west-dunbarton.gov.uk/council/community-planning-west-dunbartonshire/about-community-planning/what-is-community-planning/

Preface

This Strategy and Action Plan is an exciting opportunity for West Dunbartonshire's communities and citizens, the Council and Community Planning partners to work together in a new way to transform West Dunbartonshire's neighbourhoods – by empowering communities.

This will help all our citizens to feel the benefits of being more active in community life. It will also increase individual citizens' own opportunities and horizons, strengthen communities, and make sure public services reflect community needs. Involving local people is crucial to the success of this Strategy and Action Plan.

This document is important to each and every one of us living or working in West Dunbartonshire. It supports and promotes the rights of citizens and communities to actively participate in community life. This could include influencing decisions taken at a local level, to taking on responsibility for physical assets (like buildings) or progressing a locally important project.

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 contains the Scottish Government's ambition for empowered communities:



Scotland's communities are a rich source of energy, creativity and talent. They are made up of people with rich and diverse backgrounds who each have something to contribute to making Scotland flourish. Central and local government needs to help communities to work together and release that potential to create a more prosperous and fairer Scotland.” Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 – A Summary (February 2017) [4]

[4] www.gov.scot/publications/community-empowerment-scotland-act-summary/

Turning that ambition into reality means that the Council must work more closely with communities. This Strategy and Action Plan describes how that will happen.

Community empowerment is not a quick fix solution, nor can it be done by the Council or any other organisations working alone. We hope that local communities, citizens and organisations will work with us to support and deliver the Strategy and Action Plan. There will be challenges, and it will take time and commitment from all partners. But it has the potential to genuinely transform local communities and the lives of individual citizens in West Dunbartonshire through this new way of working.



Section 1: Introduction

Why this Community Empowerment Strategy and Action Plan is needed

Community empowerment is a national priority for the Scottish Government. Back in 2011, the Christie Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services [5] (2011) explained that a new way of working would be required:



Reforms must aim to empower individuals and communities receiving public services by involving them in the design and delivery of the services they use.”

After that, in 2015, the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act [6] brought in a number of new ways for communities to get more involved in running local services and facilities. Since then, more and more Scottish Government policies and guidance have been promoting the concept of community empowerment. These changes mean that local Councils and Community Planning partners need to work differently with local communities, creating new and better relationships with communities.

West Dunbartonshire Council and its Community Planning partners want to support communities in West Dunbartonshire to make more use of these new ways of working, to give communities more power in decision-making and delivering services. This is a central part of the Council's Strategic Plan 2017-2022, [7] which contains an ambition for “high quality services, led by priorities identified by the communities of West Dunbartonshire, in an open and transparent way”.

[5] www.gov.scot/publications/commission-future-delivery-public-services

[6] www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2015/6

[7] www.west-dunbarton.gov.uk/council/strategies-plans-and-policies/strategic-plan/

This Community Empowerment Strategy and Action Plan explains how the Council and its Community Planning partners will work with communities in the future to turn these ambitions into reality.

The benefits of community empowerment

West Dunbartonshire's communities face a number of challenges linked to a shrinking population which is also getting older, lower life expectancy rates than the national average, and higher than average mental health issues and drug abuse. One of the biggest challenges is that there is clear evidence that people living in our most deprived neighbourhoods have a much higher risk of developing a long-term health condition when they are younger, experiencing more health problems during their lives, and ultimately dying younger than the Scottish average.

In its national strategy for tackling social isolation, [8] the Scottish Government is clear that the number of people who experience poor physical or mental health, or other issues like social isolation, can be reduced by helping people to be more active in their communities.

By working with – or 'empowering' – communities, individual people in those communities will be better able to deal with the challenges of everyday life. For example, joining a community walking group or helping a community garden can build personal confidence, wellbeing and fitness, as well as tackling loneliness and isolation.



[8] A Connected Scotland", Scottish Government, 2018 (<https://www.gov.scot/publications/connected-scotland-strategy-tackling-social-isolation-loneliness-building-stronger-social-connections/pages/3/>)

When people come together in their community to provide opportunities for people to meet or improve their local environment, this helps not only those individuals but also the community as a whole. That is because it helps to create the strong social relationships that are fundamental to good communities. **Success breeds success.** The more good things that are going on in a community, the more they will generate.

Benefits of community empowerment

Harnesses the strengths of individual members of the community.



Increases confidence and skills of individual people.



Better quality of life in local neighbourhoods.



Greater accountability of public bodies.



More trust and confidence between communities and public bodies.



Better understanding of local issues, leading to more responsive services.

More opportunities for all.



Less inequality and social isolation.



Better health and wellbeing.



Who this document is for and how it has been prepared

This Strategy and Action Plan is for everyone in West Dunbartonshire. It was prepared collaboratively by West Dunbartonshire Council, local communities and Community Planning partners. Work began in September 2018, when the Council appointed the SCDC (Scottish Community Development Centre) [9] to engage with local communities to develop the strategy and action plan.

We spoke with many local people to understand the challenges faced by communities and discuss what needed to be done. Those valuable conversations have led to a Strategy and Action Plan that we hope will, over the next few years, result in stronger communities and healthier, more fulfilling and more rewarding lives for people across West Dunbartonshire

Phase 1: what needs to change?

Aim: work out what the Strategy and Action Plan should focus on.

What we did

Small group discussions with local communities and communities of interest and identity across West Dunbartonshire.

Three larger events held in Alexandria, Dumbarton and Clydebank.

Focus groups and discussions with local community representatives, Councillors and Council staff.

prepare draft
Strategy
and Action Plan



Phase 2: have we got it right?

Aim: review draft Strategy and Action Plan.

What we did

Three evening events in Alexandria, Dumbarton and Clydebank.

Online consultation survey.

Critical friends' review session.

Councillors' briefing.

[9] www.scdc.org.uk

What was said

"We'd like a network of local places where young people can meet socially - not just for sport. These might be youth clubs, youth café or whatever - basically spaces that are open in the evenings and weekends which we can use as our own."
[local resident]

"More out of school activities would make our communities safer and reduce the chances of us getting involved in anti-social behaviour."
[Young resident]

"Information, funding, advice, support and capacity building are all really important to enable community groups to be empowered."
[community organisation]



"People want action in their community – how can we get quick wins so that people can see that we are serious?"
[Council officer]

"We need honesty about why we can and can't do things."
[local Councillor]

"Some Community Councils are very active and some areas don't have one. More needs to be done to strengthen them and make them more representative of the wider community in terms of age, sex, ethnicity and so on."
[Council officer]

To gain communities' confidence and trust, we need to see the Strategy in the day-to-day life and work of Council departments and staff."
[local resident]

“I would be happy to participate in whatever way practical to help promote and disseminate community empowerment.” [local resident]

“We want to create a community hub building with space for community activities event space, meeting rooms, kitchen and so on – which we could share with others.” [community organisation]

“The balance between corporate/government requirements and community interests needs to be adjusted.” [local resident]

“Centralisation and restructuring of Council services in recent years makes it hard to get to Council offices by public transport, or to know who to speak to.” [local resident]

“To encourage communities to do things for themselves, they need to know that we as an outfit are prepared to change the power balance. If we do, the sky’s the limit.” [Council officer]

“Councillors could do more to get people to join in.” [local Councillor]

“Some Community Councils are very active and some areas don’t have one. More needs to be done to strengthen them and make them more representative of the wider community in terms of age, sex, ethnicity and so on.” [Council officer]

“Some communities are reluctant to engage with the Council because of the history. It’s more difficult now that we are saying we want to empower you, communities are sceptical and suspicious.” [Council officer]

Section 2: The Strategy

Vision

Our shared vision is for West Dunbartonshire to be a place where:

- Empowered communities are the norm, with citizens, communities, the Council and other organisations working together to take decisions and improve neighbourhoods.
- Communities can shape and influence local services and plans for the future of their places, and are encouraged and helped to do so.
- Communities, the Council and Community Planning partners trust each other.
- Community ownership and pride are encouraged.
- People are active in and committed to their communities.
- Citizens of all ages make valuable contributions to their communities and work together across generations.
- Young people engage positively with their communities and develop into the community leaders of the future.
- Individuals and communities have fair and better access to work, wealth, and healthy and fulfilling lives.



Objectives

Fundamental objective: Develop and improve local community empowerment.

- Helping local people to understand community empowerment and how it can improve their lives and communities.
- Letting people know about the opportunities for community empowerment that have been created by legislation and policy.

- **Building trust** and respect amongst communities, Council, and Community Planning partners.
- Helping local communities, the Council and Community Planning partners to have honest discussion about the challenges of balancing community aspirations and public resources.

**How will we
achieve
this?**

- Ensuring that community engagement and empowerment activity complies with the National Standards for Community Engagement, [10] Audit Scotland's Principles for Community Empowerment [11] and other relevant standards.
- Explaining the roles of Councillors, staff, other Community Planning partners and communities themselves in community empowerment.


- Supporting communities with the resources, facilities, information and knowledge they need to make community empowerment a success.
- Providing the Council, Community Planning partners and communities with the training they need.

[10] www.scdc.org.uk/what/national-standards


[11] www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/report/principles-for-community-empowerment

To achieve these objectives, we need to tackle barriers to community empowerment. Here are some examples of barriers that local communities told us about during preparation of this Strategy and Action Plan:

Jargon and technical language



Increasing centralisation of public services, and visibility of the Council or Community Planning partners in communities.



Relationships characterised by conflict rather than dialogue.



The Action Plan (section 3 of this document) explains what will be done to tackle barriers like these, in order to develop and improve community empowerment.

Across West Dunbartonshire, some communities are better placed than others to make use of community empowerment opportunities. More impact on tackling inequality may be made by focussing support on communities that experience, for example, poor health and unemployment.



Principles

In preparing this Strategy and Action Plan, many people raised important points about what is needed to make community empowerment a reality. We have summarised these in a set of principles.

- Communities will define their own needs.
- Services will be co-produced with communities, so those who use services have an equal say to those providing them.
- Priorities will be discussed and agreed if there aren't enough resources to do everything.
- We will all listen to each other, respect different points of view, and engage without confrontation.
- Communications with communities will take place in a variety of ways, including online and face-to-face.
- Confidence, skills and knowledge for community empowerment will be strengthened amongst local people and those working in our public services.
- Communities will be supported to create successful organisations that engage citizens in different ways and work for people of different experiences and ages.
- Communities will be able to influence how public services operate and also do things for themselves.
- We will all work together to spot problems early and act on them before they get worse.
- We will all be self-aware and willing to learn from each other and our mistakes.



Collaboration



Trust



Honesty



Information



**Ingredients of good
community
empowerment**

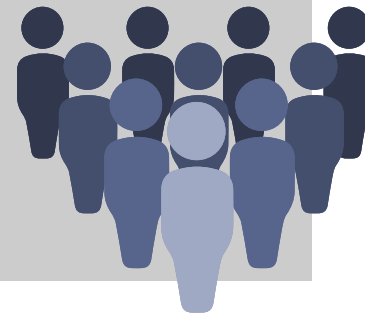
Resources



Support



Capacity

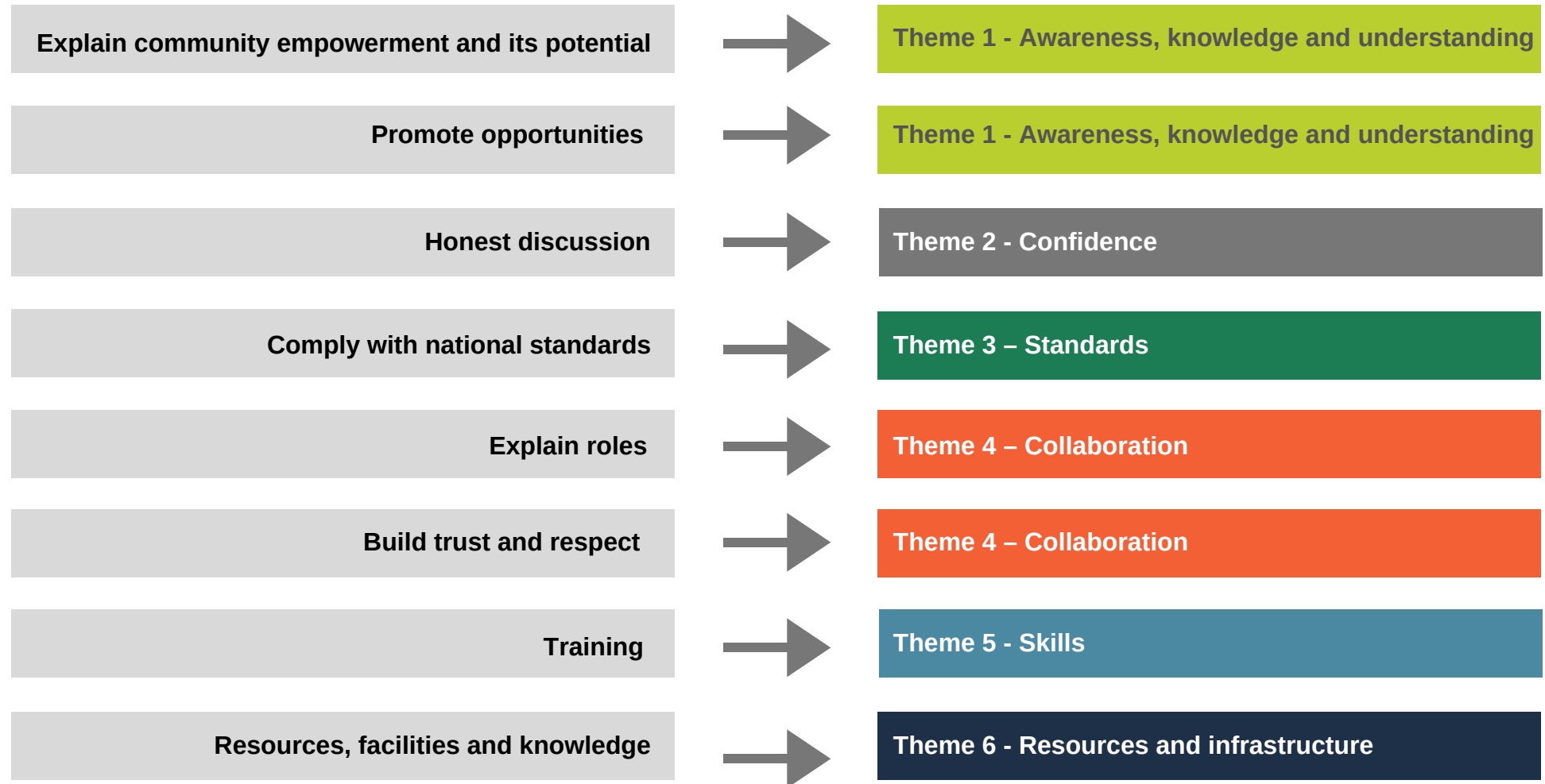


Confidence



Action themes

To achieve those objectives, the Action Plan is divided into six 'action themes'. These are described in more detail in Section 3. The diagram shows how the action themes relate back to the objectives described on page 15.



Section 3: The Action Plan

This section explains what actions will take place to make this Strategy become reality. The actions are divided into 6 themes. After each theme is an example of community empowerment that is already taking place in West Dunbartonshire, to give a flavour of the kind of activities which will become more commonplace as this Strategy becomes reality. More detail on each action will be contained in a Delivery Plan that will be prepared in 2020. This will include timescales for each action and who will be involved.

Theme 1: Awareness, knowledge and understanding

Raising awareness, knowledge and understanding of community empowerment

Outcomes

Individuals, communities, Council and Community Planning partner staff understand what community empowerment means and how it can help individuals and communities.

Council, Community Planning partners and communities are aware of the opportunities for community empowerment and the legal duties on public bodies.

Actions

Communications Plan to manage how the Council, Community Planning partners and communities should communicate to turn this Strategy and Action Plan into reality.

Make more use of Link Up West Dunbartonshire [12] website for information and communication.

Development sessions for all Council and Community Planning partner staff to raise awareness of community empowerment and how they can contribute.

[12] www.linkupwestdunbartonshire.org/

West Dunbartonshire Youth Council

WDYC was launched in 2019 by West Dunbartonshire's two elected MSYPs (Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament) and other young people who stood as MSYP candidates. Their aim is to give West Dunbartonshire's young people opportunities to engage in decision making, support them to identify issues that are important to them, and then make local change happen. It's also a fantastic opportunity for young people to meet and work alongside other young people, youth workers, senior Council staff and Councillors.



[13] www.youthlinkscotland.org/policy/national-youth-work-strategy/

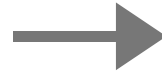
At their launch event in September 2019, the Youth Council agreed priorities for their manifesto and local campaigning. Their priorities will also feed into the next National Youth Work Strategy 2020-2025 with the help of Youthlink Scotland [13]. Supported by West Dunbartonshire's Working4U Youth Learning team, members of the Youth Council have gained their Participatory Democracy Certificate. This develops communication, group decision-making and negotiation skills in the context of democratic engagement, and counts towards their level 5 national qualifications.

Theme 2: Confidence

Increase confidence for community empowerment

Outcomes

Local people believe in the value of community empowerment, especially those who face the greatest barriers.



Actions

Share good practice and communicate the benefits of community empowerment.



Up-to-date contact list for key people in the Council and other Community Planning partners.

People who face the greatest barriers have increased confidence from participating in community activity.



Remove barriers to participation in community activity like a lack of access for disabled people, childcare, transport and language, encouraging informal community support for people experiencing these barriers.

When considering local priorities, balance community aspirations and financial constraints.



Co-produce policy for good engagement based on the Council's existing community engagement framework.

West Dunbartonshire Learners' Voice Group

The Learners' Voice Group [14] is made up of learners from across West Dunbartonshire Working4U's adult learning and literacies groups [15].

The aim of Learners' Voice is to enable people to share the benefits of adult learning, and have a say in how it is organised both locally and nationally.

Members of the group meet every week. They have taken part in local and national events and consultations. With the support of a Working4U Development Worker, they organise the annual Learner Voice event that gives local people the opportunity to celebrate adult learning and influence its future provision.

[14] www.facebook.com/WDLearnerVoice/

[15] www.facebook.com/Working4UAdultLearning/



Theme 3: Standards

Set standards for how we work and behave in the context of community empowerment

Outcomes

National standards for Community Engagement [16] are adopted for community engagement and service delivery.



Actions

Awareness and training on the National Standards for Community Engagement for the Council, Community Planning partners and communities.

The Council, Community Planning partners and community organisations have agreed ways of working together to deliver the Strategy and Action Plan.



Co-ordinate community engagement by the Council and Community Planning partners to make it easier for communities.

[16] www.scdc.org.uk/what/national-standards

The Vale in Focus

A Place Standard community conversation

In October 2018, Clydesider Creative [17] (a West-Dunbartonshire-based community media social enterprise) successfully applied for funding from the Scottish Government's Place Standard [18] Conversations fund to organise a series of participatory photography workshops and a community event. The aim was to encourage community conversations about the quality of life, place and space in central Alexandria and surrounding Vale of Leven.

The events were run in partnership with local social enterprise Inclusive Images and with support from Alexandria-based Loch Lomond Craft Centre. A local creative facilitator hosted an art workshop for young people so that they could creatively share their thoughts and ideas.

At the end of the seven weeks the workshop participants selected the photos which they felt best illustrated life in the Vale and captioned them. These then formed the backdrop for a Community Exhibition and Community Marketplace event held in Alexandria Community Education Centre with local community groups, schools, policymakers and politicians participating in conversation café style discussions, using the photos being used to stimulate debate about Alexandria's future.

[17] www.clydesider.org/about/

[18] www.placestandard.scot

[19] www.clydesider.org



The results were compiled into a Community Report which is being used by local groups to back up funding applications and is also influencing future changes in Alexandria, such as improvements to the town centre. A summary version of the report was published in the Clydesider community magazine which reaches 25,000 local people. Digital copies of the report are available from www.clydesider.org. [19]

Theme 4: Collaboration

Ensure clarity of roles and effective collaboration amongst Councillors, Council officers, Community Planning partners, volunteers and communities.

Outcomes

Everyone's roles have been agreed and are clear.

Better joint working across organisations



Actions

Clear online information about everyone's roles

Training for new and existing staff and volunteers about their roles.

Joint training for Council and Community Planning partners and communities, to bring people together and help mutual understanding.

Network of 'empowerment champions' amongst Council services, Councillors, Community Planning partners and communities to promote this Strategy and what it can achieve.

Theme 4: Collaboration

Outcomes

Better joint working across organisations



Actions

Revitalise the Community Alliance to lead communication with local communities and represent views to the Council and Community Planning partners on community empowerment issues.



Shared calendar of community events and activities, for example based on Link up West Dunbartonshire website. [20]



Ensure all Community Planning partners and third sector organisations like Housing Associations understand how they can help deliver community empowerment and have agreed ways of working together and with their own communities.

[20] www.linkupwestdunbartonshire.org/

Police Scotland Youth Volunteers

Police Scotland Youth Volunteers (PSYVs) [21] are groups of young people aged from 13 up to 18 across Scotland, supported by adult volunteers and a police constable. West Dunbartonshire PSYVs volunteer at community and national events to strengthen the relationship between the police and young people, breaking down barriers and promoting positive role models.

It is a practical way for young people to get an insight into policing and inspire them to participate positively within their communities – as well as gain self-esteem, team skills and awards like the Saltire and John Muir Awards.



[21] www.scotland.police.uk/about-us/police-scotland/police-scotland-youth-volunteers-scheme



West Dunbartonshire PSYVs have volunteered at events like the Lomond 10k Run, Bowling Spring Fest, Edinburgh Military Tattoo, Erskine Bridge Walk and Rock of Ages. Local organisations which have been supported include WD Foodshare, St Margaret's Hospice and No Knives Better Lives.

PSYV will also be proactively working in their communities, looking to assist when they identify problems.

Theme 5: Skills

Developing skills for community empowerment

Outcomes

Understand what skills the Council, Community Planning partners and communities need to make community empowerment a success.



Actions

Training programmes for all Council and Community Planning partner staff on community engagement and empowerment.

Training opportunities are available locally to support community empowerment.



Develop new and improved ways of working with communities and delivering services.

West Dunbartonshire Greenspace Volunteers

The Greenspace Volunteers [22] work with the Council's Greenspace team on a range of conservation projects and maintenance tasks across West Dunbartonshire.

From wildlife surveys to woodland thinning, there's a huge range of opportunities for folk to meet new people and help nature. At Balloch Castle, the volunteers have restored the overgrown meadow area at Balloch Castle Country Park to encourage more native species and wildlife. They also created a forest school there with a willow dome, wildlife viewing station, pond and planting trees and bulbs.



Other recent activity by the group includes wildlife surveys and practical conservation tasks at Brucehill in Dumbarton and the Saltings in Old Kilpatrick.



22] www.west-dunbarton.gov.uk/leisure-parks-events/parks-and-greenspaces/volunteer-with-greenspace/

Theme 6: Resources and infrastructure

Ensuring that there are sufficient resources, facilities and support to increase community empowerment.

Outcomes

Access to information, support and advice on community empowerment for local communities.



Actions

Publish clear policy and guidance on Asset Transfer, Participation Requests, Asset Register, Common Good Register and other aspects of community empowerment legislation.



Work together locally to provide space and support for community empowerment in each local community.



Co-ordinate all community empowerment support services to ensure effective delivery in local communities

Good quality, affordable and accessible spaces for community activities.



Continue to invest in Participatory Budgeting, co-producing improvements with local communities.



Extend and improve 'Your Community' neighbourhood approach to local service delivery, linking it with community-led action planning such as Local Place Plans.

West Dunbartonshire 'Your Community'

Your Community [23] is a neighbourhood approach designed to enable all partners in local community life to make their best contribution to improving West Dunbartonshire. It is based on a belief that local people should be engaged, supported and empowered to direct how local services are delivered in their communities.

Resources have been focused on some of West Dunbartonshire's most deprived and vulnerable communities to help create opportunities for local people to shape the future of their neighbourhood, establish ambitions and learn new skills. Local people, public services and the third sector are working together to improve local communities.



In Dumbarton's Castlehill, for example, local people (including school children) went on a walkabout in early 2019 to agree with Council officers and the police what action needed to be taken – with the agreed priorities being tackling dog fouling, better recreation facilities, a community garden and a community family fun day – which took place in July 2019.

The Your Community programme runs in parallel with the Council's Community Budgeting [24] programme. This 'participatory budgeting' programme was developed in 2016 and is designed to give local people the power to allocate funding to local projects. The programme has evolved through each of the four phases organised so far in response to feedback from participants, including online voting methods.

Future phases will see further improvements. All sorts of community-led projects have received funding since 2016, from community arts to greenspace improvements.

[23] www.west-dunbarton.gov.uk/council/community-planning-west-dunbartonshire/your-community/what-is-your-community/

[24] www.west-dunbarton.gov.uk/council/community-planning-west-dunbartonshire/community-budgeting/

Section 4: Making it happen

Who will deliver the Action Plan?

Delivering the tasks in the Action Plan will involve commitment from communities, from organisations and people in the Council, and from Community Planning partners like health, emergency services and further education. To be successful, we will all need to work together in new ways.

A Delivery Plan will be prepared in 2020 which will explain who will lead each task.

Who will deliver the Action Plan?

- Community groups
- Local citizens
- Local businesses
- Councillors
- Staff from the Council and Health & Social Care Partnership
- Community Planning partners and their staff
- Third sector organisations (like Housing Associations)



Resources

It is important to remember that delivering this Strategy and Action Plan will involve people and organisations working differently. But it will need resources too. So, to make sure that the Action Plan is properly implemented, the Council will:

- Work out what investment will be needed to deliver the Action Plan.
- Review available resources for delivery of Action Plan.
- Look for new sources of funding for the Council, Community Planning partners, communities and others.

To tackle inequalities between communities like health, wellbeing and access to work, some communities need more support for community empowerment than others. This may mean difficult decisions to ensure that resources are distributed equitably amongst communities, guided by the West Dunbartonshire Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2017-2027 [25] prepared by the Community Planning Partnership.

We will continue to work with West Dunbartonshire Equalities forum to support people who face additional barriers, like language or disability.

[25] www.west-dunbarton.gov.uk/media/4313518/west-dunbartonshire-plan-for-place.pdf

How long will it take?

Some tasks in the Action Plan can be done within a few months, others will take up to five years. The Delivery Plan, which will be prepared in 2020, will contain timescales for each action.

Keeping on track

Progress on implementing the Delivery Plan will be reviewed by the revitalised Community Alliance, who will update the Council, Community Planning partners and the wider community.

Regular progress updates will be posted publicly online for everyone to see.

The impact of the Strategy and Action Plan will be monitored by Citizen's Panel surveys and through community engagement by the Council and Community Planning partners.

