Improving Community Engagement in Argyll and Bute

V2 – DRAFT 21/01/09

Listening to Communities to Improve Services

Executive Summary

This is a strategy for engaging with the communities of place and communities of interest in Argyll and Bute. It forms an important part of our overall approach to community planning and community involvement.

The rural nature and dispersed population of Argyll and Bute raises issues in finding appropriate and realistic ways of engaging with individuals and communities.

The strategy is designed to match the needs and preferences of our communities. It will ensure that all sections of the community are fairly represented, have opportunities to participate and are involved in decisions that affect them.

The strategy takes into account the context for community engagement in Argyll and Bute. The action plan for the strategy sets out a programme of work to deliver a number of key outcomes. It sets out activities in four main areas:

- **Strengthen and extend community planning structures and mechanisms** - so that people can get involved wherever and however is most appropriate for them and so that they link together at different levels

- **Increase involvement of all communities particularly children and young people, disabled people, those from different ethnic groups as well as other under – represented groups, in community planning processes at local level and around subjects that they are interested in** - so that their different experiences, needs and views can be taken into account in our services

- **Build capacity of management, staff, community leaders and groups and individuals in community engagement** - so that we have the confidence, skills, knowledge and resources we need to work together as equal partners

- **Increase the coordination of our efforts in community engagement, sharing experiences, knowledge, skills, resources and funds** - so that we can support each other, learn from our experiences and celebrate our successes

The strategy will ensure that individuals and communities are empowered and that there is a consistent approach to community engagement in Argyll and Bute.

Contents

Welcome

Welcome to Argyll & Bute Community Planning Partnership's Community Engagement Strategy – listening, active involvement, consulting, sharing information and dialogue to improve and shape service delivery to meet local needs, issues, and our aspirations to be the Lead Rural Area in Scotland.

Community Engagement is all about communities and service providers working together to improve services. This strategy recognises the vast amount of good community involvement activity that is happening all over the area. It seeks to harness, improve and better co-ordinate this work and make community involvement a positive, inclusive and effective experience for all those involved.

This strategy is a framework to help us take steps to improve the way we work with people and communities.   We want to enable and encourage them to share in making decisions on the services they use or that affect them. In this way our services can truly meet their needs.

This strategy document is for Argyll and Bute Community Planning Partners their organisations, departments and staff who provide services. It will help us all to learn more about community engagement and improve the way we work with different communities.

The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 introduced community planning and made community engagement a statutory responsibility of all partner agencies. Importantly, it shifted the responsibility for participation, requiring agencies to engage *with* the community rather than asking the community to engage with them. Through the community planning process the aims of the Community Engagement Strategy are that the Community Planning Partnership works together:

To ensure that citizens and other key stakeholders in Argyll and Bute have a voice and are able to influence the development of policies and strategies that will affect their lives.

To inform the way in which services in Argyll and Bute are planned and delivered

To inform the process through which change can be achieved

 To achieve this, we want to work alongside and listen to our communities by:

- enabling communities to get involved in making services better
- providing ways for communities to get and exchange information

The Community Planning Partnership recognises the responsibility of each and every partner agency to actively engage with communities in a meaningful way. This means engagement at an early stage in the policy cycle,

support and encouragement for community representatives/ stakeholders and training and skill development for their staff.
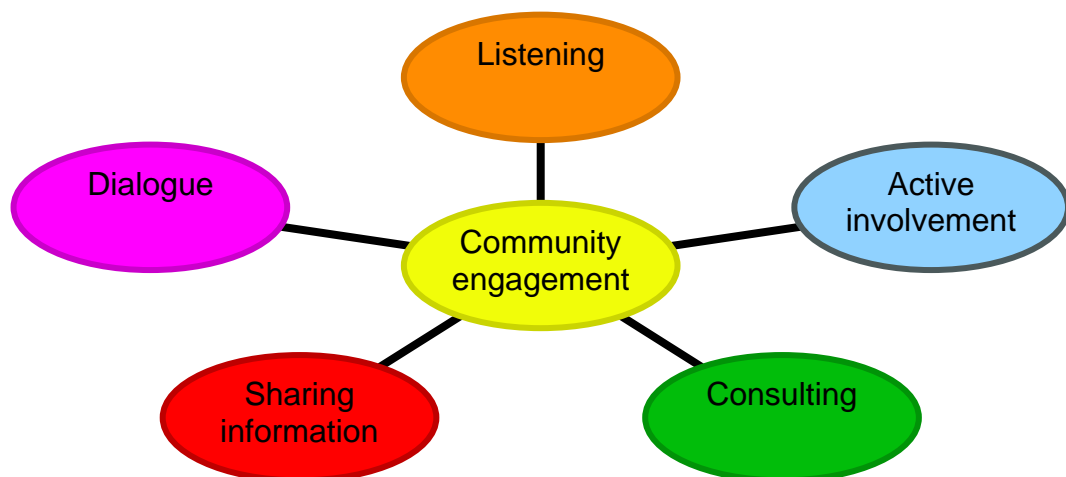
What is community engagement?

Community engagement covers many different activities carried out with the people who make up communities. At its core it is about making sure that people can participate in lots of different ways to make Argyll and Bute a better place to live, work, study and play. The Partnership has adopted the following definition of community engagement:

> *Community engagement is the process of involving communities in the development and management of services such as health, education and housing. It may also involve other issues which concern us all, or it may be about tackling the problems of a neighbourhood, such as crime, drug misuse or lack of play facilities for children. Community engagement takes many shapes and forms. It can involve simple exercises in consultation through the formation of multi-agency partnerships with community representation at the centre. Underlying effective community engagement is the commitment of service providers and planners to listen to those for whom services are being planned'.*
> (Communities' Scotland, Community Engagement How to Guide)

Elements of community engagement

Community engagement can happen in many ways, from Citizens panels, to focus groups, community radio and websites, through arts, training local people to research their communities' needs and priorities, community events and much, much more. At the heart of community engagement is the development of relationships, open and clear communication, networking,

listening and understanding the diverse nature of the people and geography of Argyll and Bute. This strategy helps guide us all to do this.

Types of engagement

Empowerment	A range of processes and structures enabling communities to gain greater influence and control over decision made that affect them.
Involvement	Involvement and participation give opportunities for individuals, customers and stakeholders to influence the way that services are managed, developed and delivered and can also help to engage the community and voluntary sector in the delivery of services. Involvement helps build trust and understanding and can help to overcome apathy and cynicism.
Consultation	A form of communication that actively invites a response to specific issues. Consultation helps to give people the opportunity to be heard. Clear and agreed objectives should underpin any consultation with agreed ways to feedback the outcomes to those taking part.
Communication	A dialogue or two way process. Active listening and opportunities to feedback experiences and opinions contribute to the process of improvement and learning and demonstrates that people can have influence on decisions and processes.
Information	Making people aware of local issues and initiatives

Improving Community Engagement in Argyll and Bute

Already within Argyll and Bute there is a vast amount of community engagement work currently being undertaken by partner agencies across the area. The strategy does not seek to replace this work but instead to harness, improve and better co-ordinate it.

Objectives

♦ To ensure that throughout the Community Planning Partnership there is a clear understanding of and commitment to engaging with communities about decisions that affect them.

♦ To establish a co-ordinated and consistent approach to community engagement in Argyll and Bute.

♦ To ensure that those involved in community engagement in Argyll and Bute aspire to meet the National Community Engagement Standards.

♦ To ensure that Community Engagement is inclusive by giving every citizen of Argyll and Bute the opportunity to express their views and that those views will be listened to and respected, placing particular emphasis on 'hard to reach' groups.

♦ To ensure that the outcomes of community engagement impact on decision-making and the way in which services are delivered.

♦ To plan and deliver services, strategies and policies that reflects the needs of the citizens of Argyll and Bute.

♦ To provide a strategy for sustained community engagement in the work of the Community Planning Partnership.

♦ To ensure that the community engagement process is transparent and accessible to all.

♦ To provide appropriate support to local people involved in the process.

♦ To place particular emphasis on engaging 'hard to reach groups'.

Principles
- Openness
- Honesty
- Transparency
- Respecting and promoting equality and diversity
- Respecting and valuing the individual
- Listening and taking on board what people say

The strategy aims to build a partnership approach to improving community engagement in Argyll and Bute, and focuses on building capacity to work with, listen and respond to people and communities.

Definition of terms

The term 'community engagement' is used to embrace a whole spectrum of activities that support the two-way communication process between the partnership and citizens, and other key stakeholders.

'Consultation', 'involvement', 'participation' and 'research', are all terms that are regularly used, often interchangeably, to describe community engagement activities. However, each term refers to intrinsically different forms of engagement, which are dependent on the overall objective of the exercise. It is important that the appropriate terminology is used when undertaking any form of engagement activity in order to avoid confusion and clarify purpose. A summary of standards for community engagement that Argyll and Bute CPP will aspire to meet is attached as Appendix 3.

'Communities' can be defined in different ways. A simple and broadly accepted definition is as follows: -

- **Communities of place –** the 'community' is defined by an area with physical boundaries, e.g., neighbourhood, ward, village, town, etc.

- **Community of interest –** the 'community' is defined by a shared interest, experience or demographic characteristic – i.e. young people, people with disabilities, working population, ethnic minorities or gay/lesbian/bi-sexual and transgender (LGBT).

People can belong to more than one community. It is also worth noting that members of defined communities may not necessarily regard themselves as such and consideration must be given to this when approaching different 'communities of interest'.

'Stakeholders' is a generic term for all people who have an interest in the well being of Argyll and Bute. This includes residents, businesses, government, public service organisations, voluntary organisations etc.

'Hard-to-reach groups' is a widely recognised term to describe those groups or communities who experience social exclusion and are generally perceived by agencies as being difficult to access and are thus 'disempowered'. However, it is important to note that many of these communities are not actually that 'hard-to-reach' and do not consider themselves as such. It is simply that to date partners have not been successful in seeking their views.

Best practice guidance indicates that partners are required to engage with communities and that must be both worthwhile and necessary. However, community engagement requires a great deal of effort and commitment and can be time and resource intensive.

Benefits

There are many benefits that can be gained by both partner organisations and by citizens. The following can be achieved by listening to and working with the community

- ♦ **Plan and provide suitable and localised services that are tailored to the needs of the community**
  Community engagement is at the heart of evidence-based policy and practice. It stands to reason that people who live and work in Argyll and Bute and receive the services that we are trying to improve, are best placed to tell us what issues affect them and what is needed to improve their quality of life. By defining issues and debating problems and solutions with the public, partners can target resources where they are needed and thus provide suitable and localised solutions that are tailored to the needs of the community. This helps us to provide public services that are more responsive to the needs of the citizens of Argyll and Bute within the resources available to us.

- ♦ **Empower people to define the vision for their own community**

People, who belong to, live in or work in particular communities, should have the right to influence the future of their community. If people can be involved in defining the vision for their community, it will create a greater sense of 'community spirit', belonging, and pride.

♦ **Provide information and opportunities for the public to be better informed**
Sharing information helps the people gain an understanding of public sector agency policies or priorities. It also helps to manage expectations, as the agencies are able to explain what can and cannot be achieved, why something is or is not being done and what constraints exist. Research has revealed that partners who are perceived to be more effective at communicating with the public score higher levels of service satisfaction.

♦ **Monitor & measure performance**
In an ever-increasing culture of performance management, community engagement, particularly consultation through surveys, is an effective way of establishing base-line data for performance indicators that organisations can use to 'measure' issues such as user-satisfaction etc.

♦ **Encourage local people to become actively involved in the democratic process**
One likely effect of enhancing community engagement is the reinvigoration of the democratic process and a reversal of the declining trends in voter turnout for both general and local elections. It is important to note that the engagement itself is an exercise in participatory democracy that many people will find much more satisfactory than simply exercising their right to vote.

♦ **Build on 'responsible citizenship'**
If communities are enabled to play a significant role in improving their neighbourhood, or in planning and developing a project or initiative, they are more likely to develop a greater sense of responsibility or ownership towards it. This will strengthen the role of the community in the management of their neighbourhoods.

♦ **Improves relationship between partner agencies and the public**
Community Engagement makes organisations more open and accessible.. Making public services more responsive to people's needs can help to build on and improve relationships.

♦ **Build capacity**
Community engagement can help to build capacity of participants. If participants are engaged with effectively, their knowledge base and skills are likely to develop. They will learn about their community and the specific issues that are under discussion, and also about organisational structures and processes.

Existing Mechanisms for Community Engagement

Within the Argyll and Bute Community Planning Partnership, there are many examples of engagement activity taking place and are working towards Argyll and Bute Community Planning Partnership objectives. While this list may not be exhaustive, it does suggest that there is a range and diversity that gives citizens and other stakeholders an opportunity to feel that their views are gathered by various providers of services.

- Community Planning Conferences
- Citizens' panel
- Focus Groups
- Multi-agency Partnership Groups including local people
- Community Regeneration Partnerships
- Community Care Forum
- Young Scot/Dialogue Youth
- Community Health Partnership - Patient Involvement Activities
- Crime Prevention Panels
- Community Safety Partnerships
- Domestic Abuse Forum
- Feedback Forms
- Elected Members' Surgeries
- NHS Public Partnership Forum
- Community Development Trusts
- Community Councils

Developing the Strategy

- ♦ Having recognised the number and range of activity already taking place, particularly within existing partnerships, it is essential to ensure that it takes place in a coordinated way.

- ♦ The nature of Community Engagement is that there cannot be 'a one size fits all' when dealing with a diversity of communities of both place and interest.

- ♦ However there is a need to develop a framework where good practice can continue and be improved. The framework would also cover new activity which can be piloted in an attempt to harness the views of a wider range of people of all ages and sections of the community who are not engaged in the process at this point.

For community engagement to be effective it must be carried out within the structure of the framework across all levels of the CPP organisations. There is a role to be played in Community Engagement at CPP level, by partner organisations corporately, by Departments and services, at Area level, thematically and at unit level. (Appendix 1- the roles for these different levels within the organisation.)

Our Priorities

In Argyll & Bute there are many good examples of communities and service providers working together to improve their services.

We want to build on what we have learned so far. This strategy aims to help us share these experiences and strengthen the ways we work together. We want the ways we work together to be based on: listening, inclusiveness, openness, honesty, dialogue, shared decision- making and sharing information.

We have identified the following priority areas for action to help us achieve this way of working together:

Priority 1

We need to strengthen and extend community planning structures and mechanisms – so that people can get involved wherever and however is most appropriate for them and so that they link together at different levels.

What we plan to do now

Establish local area and thematic planning groups who are responsible for developing community planning mechanisms and community engagement throughout Argyll & Bute.

Map existing community planning mechanisms.

Develop a Communications Strategy for Community Planning including Community Engagement

Priority 2

We need to increase the involvement of all communities, particularly children and young people, disabled people, those from different ethnic groups as well as other under-represented groups, in community planning processes which are relevant to them – so that their different experiences, needs and views can be taken into account in our services

What we plan to do now

Find out more about which subjects communities are most interested in and the best ways for them to become involved and use this information to guide the way we work together

Extend capacity building work with communities and individuals to build their confidence and skills so that they can participate in community planning

Encourage all organisations including the Third Sector (large and small) to evaluate the way they engage with difference communities and develop their own strategies and guidelines to improve the way they do this

Partners identify staff time, resources, training and funds to enable communities to become engaged

Develop the CPP Annual Conference as a key event for building joint working and skills and bringing together service providers and a range of communities

Priority 3

We need to build the capacity of management, staff, community leaders and groups and individuals in community engagement so that we have the confidence, skills, knowledge and resources we need to work together as equal partners.

What we plan to do now

Provide joint training for community planning partners

Include community engagement courses within corporate training programmes for all partners

Improve the availability of development support for community groups to enable them to effectively influence community planning

Set up a Community Engagement Tool Kit which any partner can access including locally available resources, expertise and funds and signposting to other areas

Priority 4

We need to increase the coordination of our efforts in community engagement, sharing experiences, knowledge, skills, resources and funds – so that we can support each other, learn from our experiences and celebrate our successes

What we plan to do now

Establish Community Engagement Tool Kit links on the Community Planning and other appropriate websites

Improve recording of community engagement activities and the use of this information by organisations and groups involved in developing services

Champion successful initiatives of volunteers, communities and service providers working together to improve services

The end result we aim for is:

People and communities are fully engaged in determining the way services are provided through community planning processes in their local community and/or through an interest group.

With people and communities fully engaged in community planning processes:

- Our services can truly meet the needs of people who use them or are affected by them

- We can achieve the priorities set out in Argyll & Bute Community Plan

- Everyone involved can get a lot more out of working together – new skills and knowledge, feeling useful and valued in our work and our communities, embracing and celebrating our diversity and even make new friends and have fun.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Community Engagement will be monitored and evaluated by creating and monitoring annual community engagement plans.

Monitoring

This Community Engagement Strategy is part of a suite of "How we do things" which includes a Planning and Performance Management Strategy (PPMF); a Community Engagement Strategy; a Communications Strategy; and a Public Performance Reporting Strategy. The CPP framework within which this Community Engagement Strategy sits is encapsulated in the following diagram.:
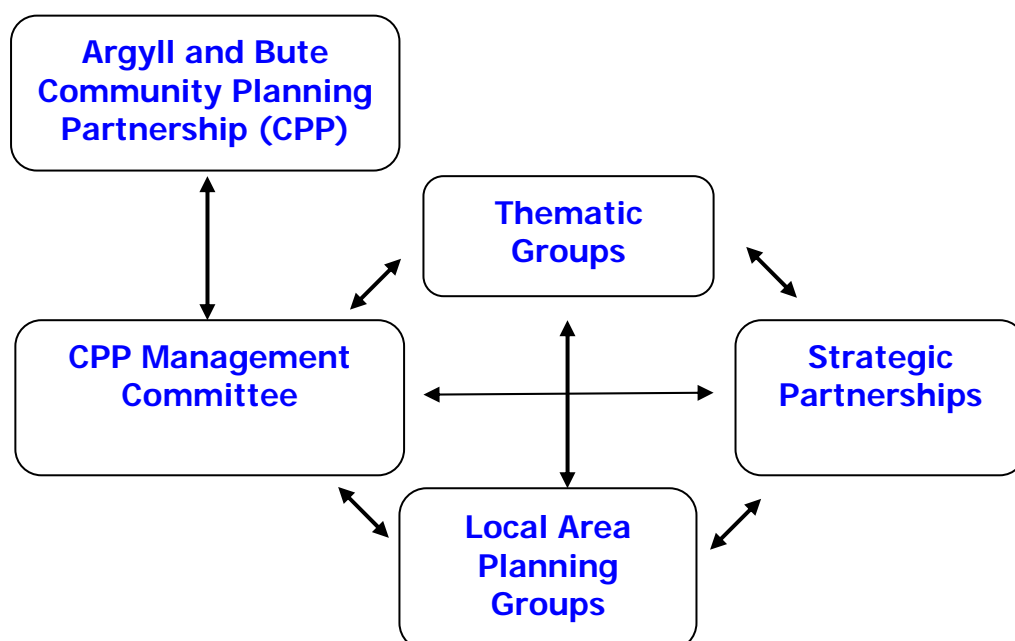
High level Community Engagement aims are translated into priorities which influence the corporate plans of the Council or one or more of its partners. A template for community engagement plans is at Appendix 5. These will form the basis for monitoring the impact of community engagement on shaping services, as well as the measuring engagement against the National Standards for Community Engagement.

Appendix 1:

Community Engagement Framework

Community Planning Level Engagement	
Internal Stakeholders:	Council and formal Community Planning Partners
Community Stakeholders	Communities and Service Users
Areas for Engagement:	Community Plan and SOA
Engagement informs:	Community Plan, and SOA; and to Corporate Plans of Council and partners. Cascades to strategic, area and thematic partnerships
Engagement reporting:	
Reporting themes:	Community Plan and SOA deliverables Improving for the future
Report to:	CPP Management Committee

Corporate Level Engagement (eg Council)	
Internal Stakeholders:	Council, Executive, SMT, PPGs, Area Committees
Community Stakeholders:	Communities Service Users
Areas for engagement:	Corporate Plan and other strategic plans
Engagement Informs:	Corporate Plan, SOA, and cascades to inform other Strategic Plans, Service Plans, Area plans, Thematic plans
Engagement reporting:	
Reporting themes:	Corporate deliverables Customer satisfaction against corporate priorities Improving for the future
Report to:	Executive, SMT and cascades to inform PPGs- and Area Committees

Service Level Engagement	
Internal Stakeholders	SMT and DMTs
Community Stakeholders	Communities Service Users Statutory and non statutory Consultees eg School Parent Councils, Community Councils etc
Areas for Engagement	Service Plan/service priorities/customer satisfaction
Engagement Informs:	Service priorities and unit/area/thematic plans as appropriate.
Engagement reporting:	
Reporting Themes:	DMT, SMT, and cascade to Executive, PPGs or Area Committees as approriate
Report to:	

Area Engagement	
Internal Stakeholders	Area Committees with relevant CPP partners
Community Stakeholders	Local Community Groups Service Users
Areas for Engagement:	Area priorities. Corporate and Area plan deliverables Improving for the future Place making
Engagement Informs:	Area plans and in turn corporate and thematic plans
Engagement reporting:	
Reporting Themes:	Outcomes and Customer feedback Area Plan and corporate plan deliverables (at area level) Place Making
Report to	Area Committee CPP partners/Services

Thematic Level Engagement	
Internal Stakeholders:	Policy and Performance Groups/CPP Partners/Services
Community Stakeholders:	Community Groups Service Users
Areas for Engagement	Thematic priorities Outcomes and customer feedback Improving for the future
Engagement Informs:	Corporate and Community Plans, SOA and in turn informs Area plans and service plans
Engagement reporting:	
Reporting Themes:	Development of policy themes Outcomes and customer feedback Improving for the future
Report to:	PPGs, Services and relevant CPP partners (including Strategic Partnerships)

Appendix 2

National Standards

10 national standards for community engagement

THE INVOLVEMENT STANDARD
We will identify and involve the people and organisations that have an interest in the focus of the engagement

THE SUPPORT STANDARD
We will identify and overcome any barriers to involvement

THE PLANNING STANDARD
We will gather evidence of the needs and available resources and use this evidence to agree the purpose, scope and time-scale of the engagement and the actions to be taken

THE METHODS STANDARD
We will agree and use methods of engagement that are fit for purpose

THE WORKING TOGETHER STANDARD
We will agree and use clear procedures that enable the participants to work with one another effectively and efficiently

THE SHARING INFORMATION STANDARD
We will ensure that necessary information is communicated between the participants

THE WORKING WITH OTHERS STANDARD
We will work effectively with others with an interest in the engagement

THE IMPROVEMENT STANDARD
We will develop actively the skills, knowledge and cionfidence of all the participants
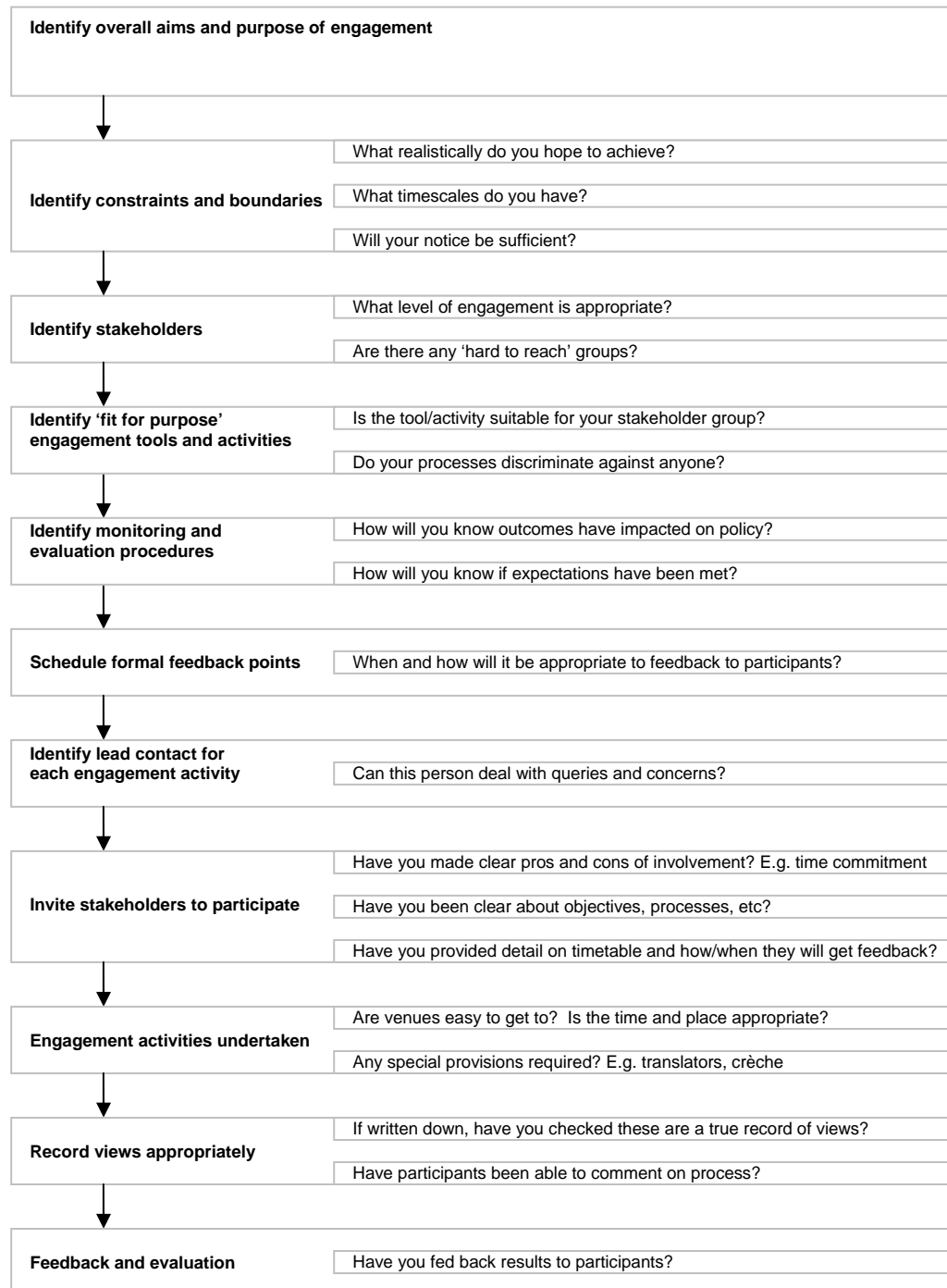
THE FEEDBACK STANDARD
We will feed back the results of the engagement to the wider community and agencies affected

THE MONITORING AND EVALUATION STANDARD
We will monitor and evaluate whether the engagement achieves its purposes and meets the national standards for community engagement

Appendix 3

Guidelines for planning community engagement

Identify overall aims and purpose of engagement	

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Identify constraints and boundaries	What realistically do you hope to achieve?
	What timescales do you have?
	Will your notice be sufficient?

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Identify stakeholders	What level of engagement is appropriate?
	Are there any 'hard to reach' groups?

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Identify 'fit for purpose' engagement tools and activities	Is the tool/activity suitable for your stakeholder group?
	Do your processes discriminate against anyone?

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Identify monitoring and evaluation procedures	How will you know outcomes have impacted on policy?
	How will you know if expectations have been met?

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Schedule formal feedback points	When and how will it be appropriate to feedback to participants?

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Identify lead contact for each engagement activity	Can this person deal with queries and concerns?

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Invite stakeholders to participate	Have you made clear pros and cons of involvement? E.g. time commitment
	Have you been clear about objectives, processes, etc?
	Have you provided detail on timetable and how/when they will get feedback?

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Engagement activities undertaken	Are venues easy to get to? Is the time and place appropriate?
	Any special provisions required? E.g. translators, crèche

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Record views appropriately	If written down, have you checked these are a true record of views?
	Have participants been able to comment on process?

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Feedback and evaluation	Have you fed back results to participants?

Appendix 4

Glossary of Terms

Active Citizenship	Active citizenship is where local people become involved in community life, either formally, through local groups and institutions, or by taking part in events or activities that help define local issues and bring about changes in their local area that aim to improve the overall quality of life. Active Citizenship is one of the key elements of Community Empowerment.
Capacity Building	Capacity Building is the provision of support to ensure that organisations, individuals or networks have the skills, knowledge, structures and resources to realise their full potential. Capacity building support can take many forms, including direct facilitation and training, transferring knowledge and expertise, through financial investment or in any combination of these.
Citizens' Panel	The Citizens' Panel is made up of a representative sample of local people across Argyll and Bute (approx. 1000), who are asked to provide their opinions about the efficiency and effectiveness of local services and how they might be improved.
Community Empowerment	The term community empowerment refers to the development of strong, active and empowered communities, in which people are able to do things for themselves, define the problems they face, and tackle them in partnership with public bodies. Community empowerment involves three essential elements: active citizenship, strengthened communities and partnership in meeting public needs. Its practical process is community engagement.
Community Engagement	Community engagement is the process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting the well being of those people.
Community Development	Community Development is the process of developing active and sustainable communities based on social justice and mutual respect. It is about influencing power structures to remove the barriers that prevent people from participating in the issues that affect their lives. Community development is strongly influenced by values which include equality, accountability, choice, mutuality and continuous learning, community development practitioners are one of the basic support needs to harness community action *(see above)* .
Focus Groups	A focus group is a group of people who have been brought together to discuss a particular subject in order to solve a problem or suggest ideas.
Local Area Planning Groups	
Local Community Planning Groups	Each of the 4 administrative areas of Argyll and Bute has a range of Local Community Planning Groups, which brings together representatives from the Community Planning Partners to identify and address the needs and concerns of local areas at a local level.
Local Action Plans	Local action plans result from a process of structured community engagement, undertaken by local people, with the aim of developing a comprehensive, shared vision for that community. The process of developing local action plans has grown and matured to be a powerful vehicle for community engagement that delivers huge rates of participation within communities.
Performance Indicators	Performance indicators are a set of standards which partnerships can use to measure performance over time.
Planning and Performance Framework	
SOA	The Single Outcome Agreement is an agreement between the Community Planning partnership and the Scottish Government. The regulation of SOA's is set out within government guidance in a way that gives freedom and flexibility to local government to choose its own priorities and targets, including how success will be measured.
Social Enterprise	(see also: *Community Enterprises*) Social enterprises are enterprises with a primary social purpose. They have some form of social or community ownership structure and recycle surplus profits instead of paying out to shareholders or owners. Social enterprise is often seen as a way of supporting public service delivery through combining social aims with creating earned income, thereby generating financial sustainability.
Stakeholders	All organisations and individuals with an interest in a particular issue or service.
Thematic Groups (PPG's)	The four thematic groups (PPG's) allows the CPP to group similar issues together so we can work efficiently to improve the quality of life in Argyll and Bute. The groups report regularly to the CPP Management Committee.
Third Sector	Third sector is the overarching term for organisations and groups that operate other than for private profit. In general, the sector is made up of voluntary and community organisations together with social enterprises and social firms. Charitable status is not a defining characteristic and the definition includes organisations that have registered as companies or are involved in campaigning and advocacy.
Tool-kit	Term used to describe a guidance document to help others implement actions.
Voluntary sector	Voluntary Sector is a generic term for the wide field of non-profit making organisations that operate across many different themes. The voluntary sector is generally considered to refer to larger more formal charities or organisations, rather than the smaller community sector organisations which tend to be place-based. Many national voluntary sector organisations and networks employ large numbers of staff and have significant turnover in either fundraising, endowments or earned income. At the other end of the scale, there are many self-help voluntary groups which share a common interest or cause and are largely run by volunteers