

People First

Community Engagement

Interim Report

by

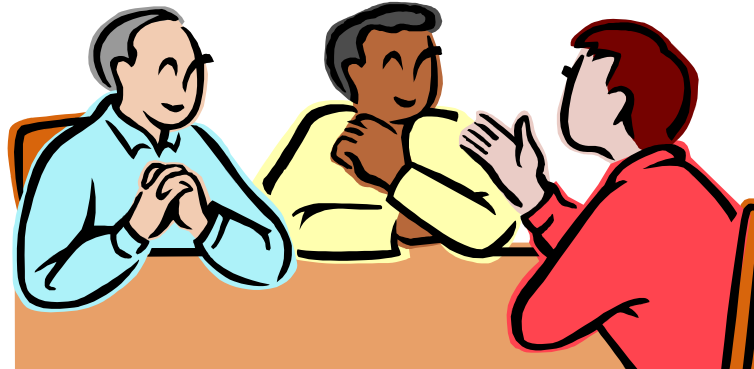
Argyll Voluntary Action



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Background

This work has been funded by LEADER and delivered by Argyll Voluntary Action; commencing in Spring 2011 it has been designed to engage with and consult the harder to reach groups across Argyll and Bute. These are our people who would never attend a public meeting but are frequently the recipients of public services. As a consequence of rural isolation, lack of confidence, disability, social isolation and a range of possible reasons these are the groups of people whose voices are not heard and who previously have not had an available route to have their say in the planning and delivery of public services.

Through connections with frontline organisations and community interest groups across the sector there exists the opportunity to harness their potential and vastly improve the involvement of the hard to reach groups, the vulnerable, disadvantaged and marginalised groups.

Traditional means of involvement tend to favour the more vocal, mobile and confident members of communities. As a result the views of the recurring few who do engage in existing processes dominate, often at the expense of the more vulnerable and marginalised individuals who form the excluded majority; yet these are often the very people for whom many services are designed. It follows therefore that real participatory engagement is needed to ensure these voices are heard.

We have been careful within this work to concentrate efforts on people who have not engaged with Forward Together events or other consultations as far as we are able to ascertain.

In this way the equality concept is applied to community engagement to address the widest possible inclusion of a community whether of place, identity or interest.

The full report will be due and available towards the end of April 2011 but we have prepared these interim findings as a brief report to inform our partners within Argyll and Bute Council and to aid their dialogue with residents of the area prior to setting the forthcoming budgets and making what will inevitably be some difficult decisions on spending and savings with the council budget.

Methodologies

Local knowledge and links with the voluntary and community sector were widely used to inform the various methods to engage with a wider audience.

In many areas this led to smaller focus groups and an emphasis on 'participatory' engagement – the concept of taking the debate to people rather than asking them to come to the consulting agency. Through our voluntary sector links it was possible to identify some harder to reach and disadvantaged groups – these were approached and consultation made possible at a level and location best suited to the participants. This has taken Argyll Voluntary Action staff to meet at various fora, at people's homes with neighbours, at meetings held at cafes or schools and even on board a ferry. We have been invited by groups with specific interests, from bird-watching to mums and toddlers and groups with community of place as the common interest as well as those with a specific ability or disability.

We have used methods which include, simple consultation by vote and comment, world cafe style (on a small scale), questionnaires, future focus, community indicators.

For the purpose of this report we have collated all results into tables as a simple guide which we trust will help inform future planning of services.

Main Report – Local Issues

We are presenting the issues highlighted and actions which communities and people felt were important – the comments below may or may not relate directly to local plans but do reflect the issues raised and suggestions made from a total of 104 residents. In contrast to Forward Together smaller engagement enabled some suggestions to be made, some may be aspirational but others may well be achievable or link to the budget consultation.

Community Life Issues	Actions perceived as short term/easily achievable/low cost	Longer Term Action
<p>That of an overall decline in community life and ‘balanced’ communities Sub – issues included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decline overall in quality of local facilities and management(schools, leisure, retail) • Communities shrinking into isolated groups linked to • Ageing population and young people leaving the area • Few activities for young people • Antisocial behaviour and alcohol abuse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change attitudes within and between communities and people work towards a caring, supportive, positive community and work in genuine partnership • Local newsletter or magazine which shows a positive image of the local community • Better information re health, community events and employment • Avoid public consultation overload – don’t expect the community to be able to deliver without support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make schools the flagship schools which tackle antisocial behaviour, include local people in (oral) history lessons so pupils know and value their area • Tackle the aspiration of young people to leave the area, enable them to make staying a positive life choice due to a revival of the area • Fewer schools at primary level may enable those remaining to become centres of excellence – encourage families to migrate inwardly • Well managed community resources don’t have to be run and managed by Council – or even Health – let third sector take on buildings (with

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council needs to improve image – frontline workers do not always give a good impression • Stricter alcohol policy – 12 people disappointed at failure of minimum price level • 	<p>some security) and enable those buildings to multi-task; may want to keep a library but does not only have to be a library</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council is not best placed to own and manage museums (although a lack of clarity over how many were council owned)
<p>Public Realm – streets and open spaces Ambition for an environment which reflects the unique and beautiful landscape around within the towns and communities Issues here included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rubbish and dirty streets • Problems with traffic management • Neglect of play areas and green spaces within towns • Need for attractive place for tourists and to encourage inward migration – ‘ashamed’ of Campbeltown 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More efficient street cleaning • Target litter – particularly at beauty spots and forestry areas – dangerous and tourists need educating, more litter bins • No overnight camping outside designated sites – height barriers • Encourage people to take care of properties • Reduce numbers of holiday homes – could a local tax be introduced to discourage? • Make guest house and b and b of better local standard – avoid poor image 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extension of number community gardens – pride in place • Encourage ‘grow your own’ campaign, link to health schemes • Set up social enterprises to manage open spaces and parks – community trusts • Police no parking areas and audit traffic management to improve shopping experience (Helensburgh and Oban) • More creative solutions for recycling, needs higher priority
<p>Built Environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing • Shops • Public buildings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit empty buildings and spaces – sell or let and improve • Work with RSL’s to improve look of housing in some town areas • Prevent overdevelopment around community fringes which impact on scale of community (eg Kilchrennan) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit of community buildings, many unattractive and no longer serve purpose; need to meet local needs, not an asset of expensive and or underused • Housing needs – make sure social housing is attractive if new build • Less second homes, holiday homes improves community and means more available housing

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage small shopkeepers find incentives to maintain smaller retail outlets eg first year rate discount, voucher scheme to support local shops? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be flexible, vacant properties may be more attractive with change of use • Debate around need for more CCTV in towns – opinion equally divided • Attract more bigger name stores to main areas • Where there is no chamber of commerce encourage shopkeepers/traders forum
<p>Employment and Training issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability • Information • Appropriate • Opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage businesses from all sectors to speak to potential employees/school-leavers • Deal with issues locally based on local conditions and need • Affordable child care is needed • Employment needs to be diverse, too much is part-time or short term (seasonal) • Outsource education/training in soft skills and let schools concentrate on academia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote and develop a culture of learning • Holistic training needs not met by college courses available • Work with social enterprise to encourage local business allow small scale industrial estates to flourish • Ensure road links are maintained and viable to encourage wider trading • Ask people what they want before providing training – too many evening classes are not popular and expensive to run • Employment preferences to local (Argyll and Bute) residents – if legal.

Main Report - Wind Farms

These are results from a small sample (this work is ongoing) around the MAKI area as one likely to be impacted upon by current and future plans; it is therefore a snapshot of those living on the western fringes of the mainland. Many people had both negative and positive comments to make demonstrating the lack of clarity around this issue

Achnamara, Keillmore, Dunardry, Knapdale - 18 people

Comments for :	Comments against:
<p>Understand the need for economic investment Would support if majority of jobs linked to it were local Would support small scale development only Should bring some income to local communities Opportunity for businesses to support workers and families Needs to involve community from the beginning – Council loses credibility if seen as a done deal, but could be benefits for everyone. Will a hydrology consultant be used to advise? Can communities have sight of environmental impact assessment?</p>	<p>Effects on bird life – has this been evaluated Will have adverse effect on tourism – unattractive Transport and access (including for offshore) is a major concern – where does the electricity come ashore how does it get where it is needed? Onshore facilities will impact on cultural and heritage sites unless carefully managed What happens after the 25 year lifecycle Shadow flicker effect is disruptive to birds and causes light variation from considerable distance Negative affect to house prices What about noise/low frequency vibrations ?</p>

Total overall response – 7 support, 6 would not support, 5 would want further information/evidence.

Main Report - Budget Consultation

This was based on the difficult choices paper and therefore centred on the services as described. Generally, a very broad format was used with facility for suggestions. For many people this was a difficult to come to terms with and required significant explanation. The following results are from a total of 169 respondents.

Topic	Reduce Services/ Do differently	Maintain/increase services	Suggestions and comments
Education	No – 87 yes - 49	Yes – 91	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are primary schools which could close, with careful handling • Important to keep standard of education • Too many poor quality teachers, can this be addressed? • Should not compromise our young people’s education • Bus transport cheaper than keeping building for few pupils • Many parents would not support any school closure • A school should be excellent – if not, what is the point? • A good business manager should be able to manage more than one school, are heads up to the task? • Reduce community learning or development staff – other options from colleges and voluntary sector do job better, then transfer buildings • Give one school each area to voluntary organisations and operate evening classes and day classes – then no need for Council to own or manage • Fewer schools which achieve great results will be more attractive – introduce competition

Roads and Transport	No – 101 yes 23	Yes – 115	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor roads cost lives must maintain eg gritting in winter • Good roads helps attract business and inward migration • Some bus routes are empty most of day • Don't understand link between council, public transport and bus and ferry companies – why does council pay? (12 comments of this nature) • Should not compromise on safety and everyone needs to use road travel • Condition of roads is dangerous • Some buses only needed in term times – restrict operation times
Planning	Yes – 132 no - 19	Yes - 44	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OLI – ditch or restrict CHORD (27 of 38) • Most people not affected if planning application takes longer • Simplify planning process • Refuse more building application • Reduce number of officers • MAKI, H & L, C & Bute need CHORD • Doesn't save very much money • Some savings on all CHORD projects (56)
Culture and Sport	Yes – 129 no - 36	Yes – 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take village halls out of council ownership and give to communities • Museums and libraries should operate in voluntary sector, communities, do this very differently • Could restrict hours initially • Outsourcing a better solution • Allow for flexible use • Some play parks could be adopted by neighbourhood / community groups • Input of voluntary sector not appreciated/recognised – give opportunity to demonstrate what can be done • Already precedents of better way to run these

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Swimming pools can raise funds if run by social enterprise • Why does council give so much money to Atlantis leisure – review how this operates • Mid Argyll pool raising mostly own funds – if it can be more sustainable so can others • Council should support all these services • Council needs to fund support for third sector to run services not the service; can be found elsewhere • Don't want to lose libraries • Need swimming pools to expand and give young people something to do • Could playfields be run by clubs that use them or community groups • Play areas need investment, important for young families
Social Care	Yes (do differently) – 91 no - 43	Yes – 29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must look after elderly people • Voluntary sector very good at this • Council gives good service but is not efficient • How can this work without Health services being affected • Cannot fail the most vulnerable • Outsourcing won't work if all staff are TUPE'd across - too expensive for anyone to take on • Staff benefits mean council created a problem to try change things • Work with Health and voluntary sector to find solutions • Need the services but council always most expensive provision • Some services duplicate what voluntary sector does • Will need funding – difficult to raise funds if it is a statutory provision – is it? • Charge people who can afford it more for services • Outsourcing residential care will mean closures if private sector – inflexible

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decide what is statutory and stop what else is provided (4) • Does not need manager for every care home – in private sector managed centrally. • Council wages too high at higher grades
Supporting People Services	67 people said they did not really understand how this was different and what it paid for. 35 yes to reducing	Yes – 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unsure what this is about – 70 comments similar to this • If is about homeless people then find different way • Use the housing associations • Housing team is too big in Rothesay • Does this money come from government and have to be spent this way • Older people should be supported
Environmental Services	Yes -58 do differently No - 48	Yes – 63	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where are all the public toilets? • Audit public toilets for use and close if necessary • Lots of council have two weekly bins and some alternate with recycling bins and waste • Need to encourage lot more recycling • Link with tackling climate change • Sounds cynical but cemetery charges are relatively cheap and unavoidable so could be increased • Some recycling could be social enterprise • Keep weekly bins for business premises and cafes to avoid problems • Make people aware of saving planet and recycling • Tourists use hotels and restaurants so don't need public toilets • Introduce small charge at recycling centres for n109 on recycled rubbish • But need heavy fine for flytipping

General Comments

•Council should become procuring authority not main provider. •Council has too many staff too well paid and not working hard (35) •People will accept changes if there is reason and if service quality is there •Council cannot expect communities and voluntary sector to do things for nothing but can be more efficient and save costs • 109 people willing to pay more council tax • 84 people willing to pay more for some services •Council should stop using outside consultants who must be expensive •too many frontline staff not fully employed (not busy) •its council who need to think differently stop being protectionist •must ensure the most frail and vulnerable are cared for •have community buses on very rural routes linking to the main providers at ‘central’ points eg the towns and nearby, or trunk road intersections; needs to be joined up – very lively discussion with 18 people – centred on a hub and spoke model

Brief Summary (figures are from total of 169 possible responses)

Topic	Reduce/ do differently supported	Maintain/increase supported
Education	49	91
Roads and Transport	23	115
Planning	132	44
Culture and Sport	129	26
Social Care	91	29
Supporting People Services	35 (not fully understood)	27
Environmental Services	58	63

In Conclusion

The purpose of producing this interim report is twofold: in line with the project aims to improve the involvement of the hard to reach groups, those who may be vulnerable, marginalised or disadvantaged and who would not for many reasons take part in a public consultation meeting; secondly and in relation to this interim report, to help inform the budgetary considerations of partners within Community Planning.

This report does not therefore cover the entirety of the project nor take account of developing actions arising from our activities. However, it does present a snapshot of views. Whilst many of the comments are not dissimilar to those heard at Forward Together events 1 and 2 we do believe that there is some evidence to support that this alternative approach – more personal and engaging on equal terms across a number of communities – has given a rather more balanced view than might be apparent from public consultation events; this particularly was evident relating to education and social care. Both these topics can tend toward the emotive but our findings do indicate a level of support for some of the difficult decisions which need to be taken. Moreover, the time allowed and scope for individual input gives scope for suggestions to emerge.

Overall, there was concern for *quality* of services, be that school education or health and social care. Given the opportunity for engaged discussion did, we believe, allow for consideration of alternatives and for a realistic consideration of the possible scenarios presented. Also reflected is the growing appreciation of the wider economic situation and this drives an acknowledgement that each of us needs to take some responsibility and accept some change.

The project is funded until the end of March 2011 and a full and comprehensive report covering all aspects will then be produced. Argyll Voluntary Action wishes to acknowledge and thank Argyll and the Islands LEADER for making this first phase project possible.