

Belhelvie Community Council

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1. Purpose of This Document

This document contains extracts from a number of articles on Aberdeenshire Council's website about Community Councils. It should prove helpful to anyone who wishes to find out more about what Belhelvie Community strives to achieve and be a useful precursor to reading through the formal documents. We hope this inspires you to come along to the Community Council meetings and perhaps consider becoming a Belhelvie Community Councillor.

2. Community Councils - Purpose and Roles

Community Councils represent the views - and take action to promote the interests of - the community. Community Councils can carry out a variety of roles, including:

- Help with environmental projects
- Organising local galas
- Printing and distributing local newsletters
- Representing Community Councils on other organisations
- Providing lunch clubs for the elderly
- Campaigning on local issues
- Conducting local surveys
- Organising public meetings on major development proposals or the Local Plan
- Carrying out Planning for Real exercises © Neighbourhood Initiative

3. Community Council Handbook

This Handbook has been designed to meet the needs of all Community Councillors in Aberdeenshire, and particularly new members who may be unfamiliar with the work of their Community Councils or with local government in general.

The aim is to provide some of the essential background information that Councillors will need in order to operate effectively within their Council, together with a brief summary of the main skills required.

The handbook covers the following topics:

- Community Councils
- The Community Councillor
- The Chair
- The Secretary
- The Treasurer
- Ways of Working
- Meetings Community
- Minutes
- Working Effectively in Meetings
- Using Time Effectively
- Report Writing
- Dealing with the Press
- Dealing with Conflict
- Looking for Funds
- Aberdeenshire Councillors
- Planning Framework
- Insurance
- Long Service Awards

4. Code of Practice

4.1 Code of Practice for the Exchange of Information between Community Councils and Aberdeenshire Council

It is for the mutual benefit of Aberdeenshire Council (the Council), Community Councils in the Aberdeenshire area and the communities they serve that:

- Constructive discussion
- Consultation
- Information exchange

takes place in a positive and meaningful way.

This Code of Practice for the Exchange of Information between the Council and Community Councils is intended to help ensure that these organisations exchange reliable information, explanations and guidance in a way that will be beneficial for the whole community.

This Code of Practice shall be monitored by the Council and representatives of Community Councils. A review will be carried out on an annual basis.

4.2 Aberdeenshire Council - Checklist of Good Practice

Aberdeenshire Council shall:

- Consult directly with Community Councils on all issues where consultation with the public is a statutory requirement
- Advise a Community Council directly and in advance of press advertisement, of planning applications within a Community Council's area, through circulation of the Weekly List of Applications
- Consult with Community Councils on changes in licensing policies
- Advise a Community Council of major works proposed by the Council, or of major utility works of which the Council are aware and of any changes to timing or duration of those works, within a Community Council's area
- Agree to receive representations from Community Councils on matters of concern to their community
- Allow Community Councils to have access to information (other than information of a confidential or exempt nature as defined by the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985) on matters of concern to enable informed decisions, sensible comment and meaningful consultation
- Provide Community Councils with updated lists of Aberdeenshire councillors, officials and calendars of meetings
- Provide Community Councils with relevant Area Committee agendas and minutes and copies of other Aberdeenshire Council agendas and minutes when requested
- Nominate an officer of Aberdeenshire Council to act as Liaison Officer between Aberdeenshire Council and Community Councils
- Endeavour to meet reasonable requests for officer attendance at Community Council meetings
- Encourage effective, full and careful consultation with Community Councils over matters of common interest by providing sufficient information in adequate time to allow a considered response
- Ensure that Community Councils are provided, where requested, with reasons for decisions taken (this would be consistent with the Code of Guidance on Openness which COSLA has developed) , and that in all cases they are informed about reasons for decisions on cases where they have expressed a view
- Involve Community Councils in any consultations arranged through public meetings
- Acknowledge written communications from Community Councils within 5 working days, and reply within 28 days
- Give Community Councils the opportunity to participate in the processes that lead to decision making on issues relating to their areas
- Ensure that Community Councils continue to be involved effectively in decentralisation schemes and that decentralised structures are complementary to the role of Community Councils

4.3 Community Councils - Checklist of Good Practice

Community Councils shall:

- Advise Aberdeenshire Council on local opinion concerning matters of interest to that authority
- Bring to the attention of Aberdeenshire Council matters requiring their attention or action
- Actively seek the views, opinions and aspirations of the full cross-section of the Community and be able to demonstrate that steps have been taken to consult the

local community when appropriate, and in all cases be sure as far as possible that the views they express are representative of those of the community they serve

- Express the views of their community on proposed plans or projects for that community. This should include positive support for acceptable schemes as well as criticism for those which are opposed by the local community. Where appropriate, suggestions for changes should also be put forward
- Provide Aberdeenshire Council's Library Service with copies of all Approved minutes of meetings of the Community Council
- Advise Aberdeenshire Council of changes of names or addresses of the officer bearers or voting members within 14 days of these occurring
- Inform Aberdeenshire Council in advance of any consultations being arranged through public meetings
- Invite representatives of statutory bodies and other organisations, when appropriate, to attend meetings of the Community Council
- Encourage the public to use their Community Council as a vehicle of communication with Aberdeenshire Council
- Contact Aberdeenshire Council as soon as practicable regarding matters where the information/action required cannot be provided by the Community Council alone
- Respond to written communications from Aberdeenshire Council within a reasonable time and encourage the use of an initial acknowledgement system of reply
- Identify a contact point through whom consultation on planning, licensing etc. can be co-ordinated

5. Establishment of Community Councils Scheme

5.1 Aberdeenshire Council - Aims and Values Regarding Communities

Aberdeenshire Council is committed to a decentralised pattern of local government and service delivery. The Council's Statement of Aims and Values highlights the importance of working with local communities:

- We will involve our many communities by consulting and working together
- Community councils have a key role to play and the Scheme provides a framework within which they and Aberdeenshire Council can co-operate and work together.
- Aberdeenshire Council is committed to ensuring successful consultation and working together with Community Councils in all areas of Aberdeenshire Council's responsibilities.
- Following consultation with the public, Aberdeenshire Council finalised the Scheme for the Establishment of Community Councils. This Scheme came into effect on 1st April 2001.
- All Community Councils are required to operate within the terms of the Scheme.

5.2 Community Councils

Community Councils are voluntary bodies, which exist within a statutory framework, and which have been granted statutory rights of consultation. ***The general purpose of a community council is to ascertain, co-ordinate and express the views of the entire community within its agreed boundaries.*** Community Councils can

help ensure that Aberdeenshire Council is as fully informed as possible about the circumstances, needs and wishes of local communities.

Community Councils are non-party-political and non-sectarian in their discussions and in their decision-making.

Community Councils, unlike other community organisations, are statutorily included in the consultation process for all planning applications affecting their area. There are also specific powers in relation to licensing.

As community planning develops, this will emphasize the need for Aberdeenshire Council to develop its relationship with community councils as part of its engagement with our local communities.

4.3 Advice and Assistance

Copies of the Scheme and supporting information are available for inspection in the following Council offices and in each public library within Aberdeenshire.

- St. Leonards, Sandyhill Road, Banff AB45 1BH
- Arbutnot House, Broad Street, Peterhead AB42 1DA
- Area Office, 2 Schoolhill Road, Ellon AB41 9AN
- Gordon House, Blackhall Road, Inverurie AB51 3WA
- Viewmount, Arduthie Road, Stonehaven AB39 2DQ
- Area Office, School Road, Alford AB33 8TY

The Area Manager at each of the above addresses will be pleased to assist with any query in regard to the Scheme and provide any advice as may be required.

As part of its commitment to working with Community Councils, Aberdeenshire Council will do its best within available resources to make grants to assist Community Councils carry out their various responsibilities. Where practically and financially feasible, Aberdeenshire Council will also make its premises available for use by Community Councils for their meetings.