Digital engagement workshop for Community Councils: Glasgow 2016

General Report – issued April 2016

1   Overview

This report covers a workshop on digital engagement for Community Councils held in Glasgow on 22 March 2016. It should be read as an adjunct to the public report on similar workshops funded by the Scottish Government and held in autumn 2015 in Ayr, Elgin, Forfar and Newton St Boswells.

This report is intended for anyone interested in community councils, including the Scottish Government (SG), Improvement Service (IS) and Local Authority Community Council Liaison Officers (CCLOs).

Following our established practice, the workshop combined presentations by subject experts with attendee-led round-table discussions. It was well received and felt by delegates to be of immediate benefit. There is clear demand for follow-up events, potentially more focussed on training.

The rest of this short report covers:

- an outline of the workshop process and contents
- a summary of key findings.

Appendices contain links to further reading and resources.

We would of course be very happy to contribute to training programmes building on the needs we have found.

We wish to express our thanks to the School of Computing at Edinburgh Napier University whose funding made this event possible.

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Centre for Social Informatics, Edinburgh Napier University, April 2016

2   About the workshops

This workshop was an extension to a programme of four workshops on digital engagement for CCs, commissioned by the Scottish Government's community empowerment team. The workshops were organised and presented by Bruce Ryan and Peter Cruickshank of Edinburgh Napier University's Centre for Social Informatics, in conjunction with the CCLOs of the host Local Authorities (LAs). A report on these workshops is available at http://www.iidi.napier.ac.uk/c/grants/grantid/13382910.

The Glasgow workshop was funded by Edinburgh Napier University. It was co-hosted by the Glasgow Community Council Liaison Officer, Steven Dowling. As with previous workshops, it mixed small-group discussions with expert presentations from the Scottish Government, the Improvement Service, Edinburgh Napier University and the Democratic Society. The workshop was attended by 33 delegates, each representing a different CC, from six LAs – see box.

> **LAs represented at the Glasgow workshop (numbers of delegates)**
> Glasgow (21)
> Clackmannanshire (1)
> Dumfries & Galloway (1)
> East Ayrshire (1)
> Edinburgh (4)
> North Lanarkshire (5)

3   Discussion

The following is a transcription of the small-group discussion findings. These are consistent with the major findings from the previous workshops, in particular, that most CCs find it difficult to recruit sufficient members to develop and maintain digital engagement channels.

Each section below included links to online resources with further details (note that access to khub.net requires a (free) Knowledge Hub account).

3.1   What are the major barriers to CC digital engagement?

Highlighted issues included

- Fear of technology
- Lack of basic skills and training, including lack of awareness of funding sources
- Continuity and security issues, e.g. control of usernames and passwords to shared resources
- Need for suitable templates and models.
    - http://modelcc.net may be part of a solution to this.
- Understanding and building audiences in the local community.
    - Audience surveys may help to understand what the community wishes from a CC online presence.
- Lack of time to maintain presences – this may be related to difficulty in recruiting members.
- Demographic issues, e.g. older people may not understand how to use the internet
- Connectivity issues, e.g. lack of access to the internet, poor internet speeds.

Further details can be found online:

- Flipchart (https://khub.net/documents/10440977/19179985/S1.jpg)
- Video (https://youtu.be/4WB4uXtm7K0).

3.2   How can CCs best use the internet?

Highlighted issues included

- More online engagement might lead to more offline/face-to-face engagement.
- Facebook is widely used
    - But not everyone wants to use it.
    - Who should control and keep a CC Facebook page up to date? (It can be difficult to gain control of a page if its owner moves on.)

- CC online presences could be built into community portals, e.g.
  - forums for conversation
  - connecting to and linking with local community groups
  - disseminating news about local events and issue
  - finding out and sharing the community's views, potentially using surveys and polls.
- Email address lists can be built up and then used to disseminate CC/community news.
- There is a call for generic email addresses, e.g. info@anytownCC.net
  - But who should monitor and control these? It was suggested that named people should be responsible for each CC's communications.
- Training could be online, but downloadable to avoid bandwidth issues. Topics might include data protection and copyright.
- To avoid paying for costly video-hosting solutions, videos can be put into DropBox. Then links to these can be put onto the CC online presence.

Further details can be found online:

- Flipchart (https://khub.net/documents/10440977/19179985/S2.jpg)
- Video (https://youtu.be/elcVz9OagBM).

3.3 Topics chosen by delegates

Highlights include:

3.3.1 Features of an ideal CC website template

- When suitable templates have been created in WordPress, these can be exported for re-use elsewhere.
- In general, photos are good. There should also be links to community groups
- Suitable tools/resources include YouTube for 'how-to' guides, a dead-link checker to aid maintenance, analytics

See also flipchart at https://khub.net/documents/10440977/19179985/S3b.jpg.

3.3.2 How can CCs/CC members learn from each other?

- By networking/building up contacts
- Regular meet-ups
- News updates sent to all CCs
- External experts or CCs with relevant expertise delivering training

3.3.3 The KnowledgeHub

Suggestions included

- Setting up a Glasgow topic within the existing CC group
- Using the KnowledgeHub for safe continuous storage of files and hosting discussions

It is worth noting that that the KnowledgeHub is a **free** public tool, and that training is available from the Improvement Service.

3.3.4 Handling abusive online comments

This topic triggered a wide ranging discussion, it was suggested that abusive comments are best ignored or simply deleted. Only in extreme circumstances should the Police be called in. WordPress and other platforms allow moderation of comments. However there is a debate around free speech versus preventing hate-speech.

This highlights the need for community councillors to have access to consistent and legally grounded guidance on good practice in online engagement.

3.3.5 How to recruit CC members using the internet, and hence increase awareness of CCs?

Suggestions included

- Provision of training and workshops
- Sharing good practices between CCs across Scotland
- Understanding audiences, hence choosing appropriate communication channels
- Engaging student representatives to teach and share digital skills

Further details can be found online:

- Flipchart (https://khub.net/documents/10440977/19179985/S3.jpg)
- Video (https://youtu.be/29h0nKKM4Z4).

Appendix 1: Further reading and resources

Most documents linked to here are in the library of the Scottish community councillors' KnowledgeHub group (https://khub.net/group/scottish-community-councillors-online/library). Membership of this group is necessary to access the documents, but is open to all community councillors and will be considered for other stakeholders.

Other links are to:

- The Improvement Service YouTube channel (https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCj0N2FYL2Ljb4oS49pyyqHQ) and
  - The national website for CCs (http://www.communitycouncils.scot).

Current CC website, Facebook and twitter use

643 CCs have websites, 343 use Facebook, 114 use Twitter. These are not exclusive: for example, 157 CCs have websites and Facebook pages.

(Source: https://khub.net/web/b.ryan/blog/-/blogs/2015-cc-digital-presences)

Resources created by previous research by Edinburgh Napier University

Criteria for an ideal CC online presence

https://khub.net/documents/10440977/16901497/An+'ideal'+CC+online+presence.pdf

Development of a model CC online presence

https://khub.net/documents/10440977/16901497/a+model+CC+online+presence.pdf

Report on 2014 survey of CC online presences

Ryan, B. M., & Cruickshank, P. (2014). *Community Councils online*. (http://www.iidi.napier.ac.uk/c/publications/publicationid/13379605).

Some blog-based website platforms

- Weebly: http://www.weebly.com/uk
- WordPress: https://wordpress.com
- Blogger: https://www.blogger.com

Appendix 2: Workshop presentations and outputs

The table below contain hyperlinks to documents on the KnowledgeHub group (https://khub.net/group/scottish-community-councillors-online) and the IS YouTube channel (https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCj0N2FYL2Ljb4oS49pyyqHQ).

Session	Ayr	Elgin	Forfar	Newton St Boswells	Glasgow
Welcomes, introductions and presentations, closures					
Welcome	video	-----	-----	-----	
Introduction and background to the workshops	video presentation	video presentation	video presentation	video presentation	video presentation
Scottish Government presentation on *community empowerment*	video presentation	video presentation	video presentation	video presentation	video presentation
Improvement Service presentation on *digital resources for community councils*	video presentation	video presentation	video presentation	video presentation	video presentation
The Democratic Society presentation on *digital tools for community councils*	video presentation	video presentation	-----	video presentation	video presentation
Chewin' the Fat, **a Facebook page for Community Councillors**	video handout presentation	-----	-----	-----	-----
Presentation on *CC digital success stories*	-----	video	-----	-----	-----
Building a CC website using Wordpress	-----	-----	-----	-----	video
Final discussion and close	video	-----	video	-----	
Table sessions/workshops					
Session 1: *What are the major barriers to CC digital engagement***?**	video flipchart – all tables flipchart – table 5	video flipchart – all tables	video flipchart – all tables	video flipchart – all tables	video flipchart
Session 2: *How can CCs best use the internet***?**	video flipchart – all tables flipchart – table 3/4 flipchart – table 5	video flipchart – all tables	video flipchart – all tables	video flipchart – all tables	video flipchart
Session 3: *Topics chosen by delegates*	video flipchart – table 3/4 flipchart – table 5	video	video flipchart - topics flipchart – findings	video flipchart – all tables	video flipchart (all tables) flipchart (ideal CC online presence)