

**COMMUNITY COUNCILS IN FIFE**  
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**Q What are Community Councils?**

A Community Councils are voluntary organisations which are established by local government legislation and made up of people who have an interest in the wellbeing of their community. They are volunteers, although democratically elected, and their main purpose is to represent the views of their local community to the local authority and other public bodies. In particular Community Councils have the right to be consulted on planning and licensing applications within their area.

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**Q Apart from representing the views of the community, what else do Community Councils do?**

A Community Councils may carry out a number of activities which are in the general interest of the communities they represent, including safeguarding and improving the amenities and environment in their area. Community Councils can also act as a campaigning body in raising awareness of specific local issues. Examples of activities which Community Councils may become involved with include:

- Holding public meetings or carrying out surveys to find out the view of the community in relation to specific issues;
- Producing a newsletter or developing a website advising of activities going on in the area; and
- Arranging community events such as gala days, environmental clean-ups and improving facilities for young people in the community.

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**Q How do I find out about my local Community Council?**

A Contact details for the Secretary and Chair of each active Community Council are available on the FifeDirect website.

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**Q Do I have to be on the Community Council to attend their meetings?**

A No. Community Council meetings are generally open to all members of the public, although the public may only participate and speak at meetings if invited to do so.

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**Q How do I complain about the local Community Council?**

A Complaints should be raised in the first instance with the Secretary (or another office bearer). If you are dissatisfied with the response you receive, you can ask Fife Council to review the complaint. The Complaints Procedure is outlined at Schedule 4 to the Scheme for the Establishment of Community Councils in Fife (the Scheme).

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**Q We don't have a Community Council in our area, how do we get one established?**

A Elections to Community Councils take place every 4 years. However, in between elections if 20 electors from within the area submit a written application to have the Community Council established, Fife Council will make the necessary arrangements to hold an interim election for that area. This will involve public notices, seeking nominations to the Community Council and making arrangements for a ballot in the event that there are more candidates than places available on the Community Council.

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**Q Who can stand for election onto Community Councils?**

A In order to stand for election and to vote at Community Council elections you must be at least 16 years of age and your details must be included on the electoral roll.

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**Q How many members are there on a Community Council?**

A In Fife the number of members on a Community Council is determined by the size of the population, subject to the minimum size being 8 members. This increases to up to 20 members in areas where the population is 11,000 or more. Details of the specific membership of each Community Council is included in Schedule 1 to the Scheme.

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**Q Should each Community Council have its own Constitution and Standing Orders?**

A The Scheme acts as a constitution for all Community Councils throughout Fife. However, should a Community Council wish to adopt its own constitution it can do this so long as the constitution does not conflict with the Scheme and it is subject to the approval of Fife Council. Model Standing Orders are included in the Community Council Information Pack. It is good practice to formally adopt Standing Orders and it is recommended that this be done early in the life of a new Community Council.

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**Q How long should the Office Bearers be appointed for?**

A Office bearers must be appointed for a minimum period of one year, however the Community Council can agree to appoint its office bearers until the next formal election is due. It is not necessary, although often preferred by Community Councils, that office bearers are re-elected each year at the annual general meeting. It should be noted, however, that in the first year after an election the

office bearers should not be re-appointed at the AGM unless at least one year has elapsed since the inaugural meeting.

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**Q How are Community Councils funded?**

A Community Councils receive an annual grant from Fife Council. They can also apply for other grants to carry out special projects or activities in their area, as well as holding fund-raising events.

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**Q Can co-opted members vote?**

A Co-opted members are generally appointed for their expertise or interest in a specific matter the Community Council has to consider. They need not be eligible to stand as a member of the Community Council but although entitled to speak on any matter they may not vote on any item of business considered by the Community Council.

Co-opted members should not be confused with members elected or appointed in between formal elections to fill vacancies on the Community Council. Persons appointed to fill vacancies must be eligible to stand for election to the Community Council and once appointed are full members of the Community Council with the same rights as those appointed at the formal election, including the right to vote.

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**Q What is the role of Fife Councillors on the Community Council and can they vote?**

A Elected Members of Fife Council are entitled to be *ex officio* members of Community Councils within their Ward. This means they are entitled to participate fully in the meeting but have no voting rights. They provide an important link between Community Councils and Fife Council, and can help the Community Council develop projects and resolve local issues.

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**Q We have casual vacancies. How should these be filled and what rights do the new members have?**

A If, at the last election, there were more candidates than places available on the Community Council, when a vacancy arises it must be offered to the unsuccessful candidate who received the most votes at the most recent election. In the event that he/she is unable to fill the vacancy for whatever reason, the vacancy should then be offered to the unsuccessful candidate who received the next highest number of votes and so on, until either the vacancy is filled or the list of unsuccessful candidates is exhausted.

If the Community Council is unable to appoint anyone from the list of unsuccessful candidates they may fill the vacancy by any other reasonable method. Members appointed to vacancies have exactly the same rights as members appointed at an ordinary election, including voting rights.

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**Q How should we promote and run our meetings?**

A Community Councils must hold at least quarterly meetings, one of which will be the annual general meeting. With a few exceptions, meetings of the Community Council will be open to the public and provision must be made for this both in terms of the meeting room space and layout and public notification being given for arrangements for Community Council meetings. This may be done by an advertisement in the local paper; notices on village or community notice boards, on the local authority or Community Council's own website or by inclusion in a newsletter or leaflet drop. Most Community Councils hold their meetings on a regular day of the month (e.g. first Monday of each month) and agendas should be made available in accordance with the Standing Orders of the Community Council or model Standing Orders provided by the Council.

It should be remembered that although the meeting is open to the public, it is not a public meeting and it will be for the chairperson to decide at which points it is appropriate for members of the public to contribute. The Community Council may, as part of their Standing Orders, determine how they would wish the public to participate, for example by including an item on the agenda for public input or holding an informal open discussion prior to commencing the formal meeting or allowing the public to participate prior to the final decision being taken on each item on the agenda.

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**Q When do I need to declare an interest and under what circumstances should I withdraw from the meeting?**

A If you have a financial interest in a matter which will be under discussion at the Community Council meeting you should declare an interest in this matter at the start of the meeting and withdraw from the meeting whilst the matter is being discussed. If you have an interest which is not financial you should nonetheless declare this as soon as you become aware of the interest, then you should ask yourself if an ordinary member of the public who knew all the facts would think that your interest was likely to influence your decision. If you think the public would believe your interest would influence you, you should leave the meeting. If the interest is fairly marginal and you do not believe the public would think you would be influenced by it you may remain and participate in the debate and decision. Declarations of interest, whether or not they require a Community Councillor to leave the meeting, should be recorded in the minutes.

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**Q What if another Community Councillor should have declared an interest and hasn't?**

A It is for each individual Community Councillor to determine whether or not he/she has an interest in a particular item which should be declared. If it has been suggested that a particular member should have declared an interest, it would be appropriate for the Chair to enquire as to whether or not the member intended to declare an interest. Given that it is still possible to participate in the debate despite having declared an interest under certain circumstances, and given that failure to declare an interest may result in "fingers being pointed" at either the individual member or Community Council, it is considered preferable if in any doubt to declare an interest than to suppress it.

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**Q What do we do if we get a complaint?**

A The procedure for dealing with complaints is laid out in Schedule 4 to the Scheme. This covers acknowledging receipt of the complaint; investigating the complaint and reporting back to the Community Council; advising the complainant of the outcome of that investigation and providing advice on Stage 2 in the event that the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome. All of the above actions have a timescale attached.

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**Q If the Community Council disbands, what happens to their funds?**

A After all debts have been paid the remaining funds and any assets transfer back to Fife Council who will hold these for the benefit of a future Community Council, if established. If a Community Council is not re-established for the area, Fife Council may decide to provide the funding to another organisation within the area, for example to enable projects to be completed.

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**Q How do we go about changing our boundary?**

A Any requests to amend boundaries of existing Community Councils, including merging adjoining Community Councils or subdividing existing Community Council areas, should be submitted in writing to the Head of Democratic Services, Finance and Corporate Services. The request should demonstrate local support for the proposal, such as confirmation that the matter has been discussed at a Community Council meeting held in public at which support was expressed or the inclusion of a petition with local signatures, for example. Any Community Councils adjoining or otherwise affected by the proposal must also be in agreement.

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**Q What can we spend the grant on?**

A The grant provided by Fife Council is designed to cover the general running costs of the Community Council. It comprises 4 elements: insurance cover; an administrative grant; a per capita allowance for each member of the population within the area; and reimbursement of any fee associated with the requirement to notify in terms of data protection. The general running costs may include meeting room accommodation, the production and circulation of minutes, agenda and reports; telephone costs; advertising costs; general publicity and promotional activities; and consultation exercises. If, during the course of the year, the Community Council does not spend all of the administrative grant, it may disburse funds to other local community groups so long as they have similar objectives and purposes, namely acting in a representative capacity or making improvements to the amenities and environment within the area. It is recommended, if a Community Council is proposing to disburse grants, that some basic criteria/rules are established at an early stage.

For further information on keeping the financial records etc. please refer to the Financial Guidelines for Community Councils.

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