

# Community Council Members Handbook

## Introduction

This handbook has been designed to meet the needs of all Community Council Members in Eilean Siar and particularly new members who may be unfamiliar with the work of their Community Councils.

The aim is to provide background information that Community Council Members will need in order to operate effectively within their Community Council, together with a brief summary of the main skills required, the framework of Community Councils in Eilean Siar, essential administration information including the Community Council Scheme of Establishment, Model Constitution, and the Community Council Member's Code of Conduct.

### 1. What is the purpose of Community Councils?

The Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 that originally set up Community Councils states their general purpose as:

*"To ascertain, co-ordinate and express to the local authorities for its area and to public authorities, the views of the community which it represents and to take such action in the interests of the community as appears to it to be expedient and practicable."*

Community Councils are also statutory consultees on planning and licensing applications within their area.

As well as representing the community to the local authority, Community Councils facilitate a wide range of activities which promote the well-being of their communities. They bring local people together to help make things happen, and many Community Councils protect and promote the identity of their community. They advise, petition, influence and advocate numerous causes and cases of concern on behalf of local communities. Here are some examples of their work from across the country:

- Carry out projects to enhance their community for all types of citizens – elderly, single mothers, minority groups, youths etc.
- Issue community newsletters
- Conduct local surveys
- Campaign on local issues
- Organise community events

Community Councils are the strongest means of becoming involved with your local area. It will give you a good understand of the workings of local government and what is going on locally and nationally. All local authorities in Scotland encourage citizens to become a member of their Community Council.

However, there is other more general legislation to which all Community Councils are bound in their activities, and this includes the general duty to promote equality. Community Councils in carrying out their functions should have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination;
- Promote equality of opportunity
- Promote good relations between people of different racial groups.

## **2. Community Council Scheme of Establishment**

The basic principles of the way in which a Community Council is administered, the process of election, profile of membership and eligibility and their boundaries are laid out in the Scheme of Establishment which is put in place by the Comhairle.

In the event that a Community Council's Constitution does not cover a particular point, or there is an ambiguity or conflict, the Community Council Scheme of Establishment will take precedence.

The Comhairle will review the Community Council Scheme of Establishment usually 6-9 months before the end of the term to allow for changes in administrative boundaries or operation as necessary.

[Model Scheme of Establishment](#)

## **3. Community Council Constitution**

The Constitution is very important because it provides the framework of procedures that will govern the work of each Community Council.

All Community Councils have a constitution that is tailored to them, and which sets out such matters as the rules by which the Community Council will operate and by which Office Bearers will be appointed. In so far as possible the Constitutions should reflect the Community Council Scheme of Establishment.

[Model Constitution](#)

## **4. Community Councillors Code of Conduct**

The Code of Conduct for Community Councillors is based largely on the Code of Conduct for Local Authority Councillors and relevant public bodies as provided for in The Ethical Standards in Public Life et. (Scotland) Act 2000.

Community Councillors, as elected representatives of their communities, have a responsibility to make sure that they are familiar with, and that their actions comply with, the principles set out in this Code of Conduct. The Code and its principles shall apply to all Community Councillors and those representing the Community Council wherever they are acting in an official capacity as Community Councillors.

[Code of Conduct](#)

## **5. Role as a Community Council Member**

As a Community Council member, it is important that you recognise from the outset that you are required to play a role in your community. This means not simply offering your own views and opinions on local issues, or taking decisions that are based on your own self-interest.

The role of the Community Council member is one that requires you to represent the views of your community, or your section of the community. In practice, this will involve discussing issues with people in the community to clarify their views and assess the strength of their feelings on different topics. You should seek to work together with other community council members, promoting community engagement and consultation. Community Council members must also remember to work with reference to their code of conduct.

It's also a good idea to encourage people to bring issues to you so that you can take them up at Community Council meetings. Endeavour to check out the facts, and if there are two sides to the story, make sure that both of them are put forward.

At some point you may find some conflict between your personal views and interests and those of the community that you represent. If such a situation does arise, try to make sure that the views of the community take precedence.

Experience shows that if the views of individuals on the Community Council are allowed to take precedence, then the wider community will very quickly lose confidence in the Community Council and its work may be devalued.

The task of any Community Council is to identify and reflect the needs and aspirations of its community. At some point, this might involve setting priorities on the competing or conflicting needs of different sections of the community.

## **6. Role as Chairperson**

The chairperson (some people prefer the term 'chair') has the most important role to play in making sure that community council meetings run smoothly. The role of Chair should be respected and supported by all members of the community council.

The chairperson is elected in line with the rules set out in the community council's Constitution. Your secretary should be able to provide you with a copy. The constitution is very important because it provides the framework of procedures that govern the work of your community council.

The chairperson's job is to make sure that decisions are taken on all of the items which are on the agenda. This usually means that they have to make judgements about how much time to allocate to each agenda item. It also means that they may occasionally have to bring speakers back to the agenda and encourage people to make their contributions brief and to the point.

In regular meetings, the role is a formal one and all speakers will be expected to address their comments to the chair. This helps the chairperson to keep control of the discussion. In committee meetings where proceedings need not be so formal, the chairperson may be content simply to adopt an enabling role and steer the general direction of the discussion.

The role of the Chair extends beyond meetings and they may be called on to act on behalf of the Community Council between meetings or represent the Community Council in dealing with outside bodies. This role may be delegated to other Community Council members. The Chair is often the official spokesperson for the Community Council

## **7. Role of Secretary**

The Secretary may be appointed from out with the membership of the community council. The secretary of a community council is generally responsible for:

- compiling and circulating the agenda (with support from the chairperson);
- taking and circulating the minutes of the meeting;
- responding to all correspondence;
- circulating information to community council members;
- public relations, dealing with the press, TV and radio queries;
- arranging the venue for meetings;
- liaison with officials of the local authority;
- supporting the chairperson and providing (or obtaining) legal and other specialist advice.

Community council members in general, and the chairperson in particular, should try to spread the secretary's load. For instance, by delegating some of their responsibilities to others. The secretary should liaise with the Chair in compiling the agenda.

## **8. Role of the Treasurer**

The treasurer is responsible for issuing all cheques and making payments on behalf of the community council.

The treasurer must:

- manage the bank account;
- account for all funds received;
- make sure money is only spent in a manner approved by the community council members as recorded in the minutes.

The treasurer must keep the community council's financial records so that they disclose, with reasonable accuracy at any time, the financial position of the community council.

All cheques issued should be signed by at least two of three persons authorised by the community council members as recorded in the minutes and notified to the bank in writing.

The treasurer must keep proper accounts of all receipts and expenditure, prepare an annual statement of accounts and have it certified as correct by a competent and independent examiner of accounts. They must be formally appointed by the members and named in the minutes.

The annual financial statement or annual accounts must be formally approved at the next annual general meeting when the treasurer must report, and answer questions raised by members of the community council or the public. The approved accounts should be sent to the local authority, as a condition of the annual administration grant process.

The treasurer should also prepare simple budgets to advise members before they commit any funds. Template accounts and guidance has been prepared by the Comhairle.

## **9. Completion of Annual Accounts**

Accounts should be prepared on an annual basis for the period 1 April to 31 March. They should be prepared on a cash accounting basis, i.e. any payments received are recorded during the period in which they are received, and any expenses incurred are recorded in the period in which they are actually paid.

The accounts should be submitted to the Comhairle as soon as possible following approval at the Annual General Meeting. The accounts should take the form of two statements: one showing the summarised income and expenditure for the year, and the other showing the balance of funds held by the Community Council at the end of the financial year.

Full details, plus examples of reconciliations and statements can be obtained by following the link below:

[Community Council Accounting Procedures](#)

## **10. Meetings of the Community Council**

The frequency of meetings is laid out in the Constitution of the Community Council. The Community Council shall meet not less than six times throughout the year (excluding an Annual General Meeting (AGM)).

Each Community Council will determine at the outset if and when they will hold an AGM and this must be agreed in the Constitution. Constitutions rule on the public notice required and the matters that can be considered at Annual General Meetings.

A typical AGM agenda will be as in the model Constitution which is contained in section 11.1(b). No other matters may be raised at the AGM, which have not been printed on the official agenda. The agenda must be published the prescribed number of days before the meeting as detailed in the Constitution.

For convenience, the Secretary should circulate the Minutes of AGMs immediately after the meeting, as prior to the next AGM.

Special meetings may be called at short notice to deal with unexpected items that are urgent or to deal with, e.g. a complaint. The agenda for a special meeting must be restricted to only those items raised in the motion calling for the meeting. No other matters must be discussed. Voting will be as allowed by the Constitution, but generally voting members present may vote unless they have declared a conflict of interest. Minutes will be taken of the meeting and considered at the next regular meeting.

Agendas for all AGM's, Special and regular meetings must be published by the Secretary well in advance and in line with the Constitution so that everyone present knows what is to be discussed and can be prepared in advance. Good practice would be to circulate the agenda 7-10 days prior to a meeting taking place.

Along with the agenda, the secretary would include the minutes of the previous meeting and relevant papers that members need to familiarise themselves with in order to fully participate in the discussions and, if necessary, make decisions on.

The order of business is contained within the Standing Orders of the Community Council (section 4).

### [Standing Orders](#)

## **11. Minute Taking at Meetings**

Minutes in a standardised format must be taken of all ordinary meetings, annual general meetings, special meetings and any sub-committee meetings. These minutes must record:

- the date of meeting;
- time and location;
- those present;
- apologies received;
- who was in the Chair;
- all elections;
- appointments;
- votes;
- agreed expenditure;
- topics discussed and agreed actions.

It's not necessary to record every word spoken, except in the case of formal motions. Instead, they should be the summarised views of the members. The following points should also be taken into account:

- good minute taking is a skill, so that neither too little nor too much detail is included;
- as a permanent record of the community council's business, minutes are important documents with both historical and legal implications;
- responsibility for the minute's rests with the secretary;
- the format of the minutes follows closely that detailed for the agenda with subheadings corresponding to agenda items and each topic discussed;
- copies of the minutes should be circulated to all members and to the Comhairle;
- Minutes are submitted for approval as to accuracy to the next meeting.
- Minutes of all meetings must be retained for future reference and passed on to each new secretary for safekeeping.

## **12. Annual General Meeting**

In addition to ordinary meetings of the community council; an Annual General Meeting (AGM) shall be held usually in May or June of each year to:

- Approve the minutes of the previous Annual General Meeting (AGM);
- Approve Chairperson's annual report;
- Approve the Annual Accounts;
- Election of office bearers;

### **13. Funding Sources for Community Councils**

There are many sources of funding available for Community Councils, and dependent on what type of project you are undertaking, there may be a specific funding source relevant to that. More information can be found by following the link below.

[Funding|Community Council \(communitycouncils.scot\)](https://communitycouncils.scot.nhs.uk/funding)

### **14. Training for Community Councils/Councillors**

The Comhairle will provide training on a range of topics. Community Councils will be invited to identify training needs.

The Improvement Service and The Open University (OU) in Scotland are working together to offer all community councillors in Scotland the opportunity to learn new skills using free OU courses.

Courses on offer include:

- Digital Skills
- Business Skills
- Finance and Fundraising
- Community and Society

More information can be found by following the link below.

[Skills Support for Community Councils](#)

### **15. Data Protection**

The Data Protection Act 2018 (alongside UK GDPR) governs the use of personal data, which ensures the fair and proper use of people's information and their right to privacy. It imposes important obligations on any persons or organisations, including Community Councils, which acquire, store, use or deal with personal data – either electronically or within certain paper records.

More information can be found by following the link below:

[Data Protection – a Quick Guide for Community Councils](#)