



Practice Note 30

Formartine Ward Forums

Contact Name: Mark Mitchell

Position Held: Community Planning Officer

Telephone: 01358 726406

Email: Mark.Mitchell@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

Address: Aberdeenshire Council

Formartine Area Office, 29 Bridge Street, Ellon, Aberdeenshire

AB41 9AA

Topic Areas: Community Engagement, Partnership Working

Project Background and Aims

Community Planning in Aberdeenshire is delivered through six administrative areas. Service provision is decentralised in order to promote information sharing and meet local needs more efficiently and effectively. Each administrative area has a local Community Planning Group (CPG) and a Community Planning Officer working alongside Community Planning Partners within the overarching framework of Aberdeenshire Community Planning Partnership (CPP). Aberdeenshire CPP also utilises a community engagement strategy to promote and support strong, active and inclusive communities that are both informed and actively involved in decision-making.

The Formartine Community Planning Group was established in 2006, bringing together representatives from the organisations, services and communities who are active within the local area. The administrative area covers 319 square miles with over 39,000 residents. Formartine is further broken down into three Wards, Turriff and District, Mid-Formartine and Ellon and District, covered by eleven Elected Members.

The CPG is facilitated by Aberdeenshire Council, with partners including the Formartine Partnership, Aberdeenshire CVS Central and South, Grampian Fire and Rescue Service, NHS Grampian, Grampian Police, Community Safety and representatives from local communities. Since 2008 the Formartine CPG has worked towards the aims and objectives set out in the Local Community Plan. The Local Community Plan is frequently updated and amended to reflect the changing priorities of the community. This can be viewed at www.ouraberdeenshire.org.uk/localcommunityplans.

For a number of years the Formartine CPG held an annual Formartine-wide event, to gather the thoughts and views of the residents living in the area. These events would consist of discussion workshops with partners and the wider community.

However, although well attended (usually around 100 participants) these events tended to attract the same group of people and it was felt that engagement had to be broadened to reach a wider cross-section of the communities within Formartine. Since 2010, a series of forums have been held at ward level utilising different formats to engage with a wider range of people across the community and make decision making in Formartine more bottom-up.

The priorities identified in each Ward Forums feed into the Formartine Community Plan and focus the work of the CPG and its wider community partners. The focus of the forums in 2010/2011 was to engage with communities and stakeholders to identify the priority issues for that ward area for each of the five Community Planning themes: Community Wellbeing, Jobs and the Economy, Lifelong Learning, and Sustainable Environment and Developing Our Partnership. These themes are closely linked to the Scottish Governments Strategic Objectives of Healthier, Wealthier and Fairer, Smarter, Safer and Greener.

The purpose of the forums for 2011/2012 is to boost the Jobs and the Economy theme and increase the involvement of local businesses in community planning activity.

Outcomes

National	<p>9: 'We live our lives free from crime, disorder and danger',</p> <p>11: 'We have strong and resilient communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others',</p> <p>and</p> <p>15: 'Our public services are high quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive to local people's needs'.</p>
Local	<p>9.1: 'Our Communities will be safer places in which to live, work and visit',</p> <p>9.3: 'People in Aberdeenshire will feel safer from anti social behaviour and experience an improved quality of life'.</p> <p>11.1: 'An improved approach to engagement and consultation with actively involved residents and communities',</p> <p>11.2: 'Successful, achieving communities with the confidence to tackle the things that matter to them, in particular strong, resilient communities in Aberdeenshire's regeneration areas',</p> <p>11.4: 'Effective, well-developed partnerships – community planning, community councils, shared services and joined up delivery',</p> <p>15.4: 'Community planning partners' services are responsive to local people's needs'.</p>

Resources

Funding: Community Planning Group annual budget.
Partners: Aberdeenshire Council; Aberdeenshire CVS Central and South; Aberdeenshire Volunteer Centre; Formartine Partnership (Local Rural Partnership); Grampian Fire and Rescue Service; NHS Grampian; Grampian Police; Formartine Community Safety Group; 12 Community Councils; and representatives from local communities.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Further information on the Formartine Ward Forums can be requested from the Community Planning Officer.

Activities

The evaluation and feedback from participants at the last Formartine-wide event in December 2009 indicated that people felt that opportunities for discussion of the more local issues that were relevant to them were limited and thus discussions often seemed to focus on another part of Formartine that they were not familiar with. Thus, in 2010, the CPG decided to change the format, with forums taking place on a biannual basis and at a ward level.

The first Ward Forum was held in Turriff in November 2010, with local residents, business, public and voluntary services invited to meet with Community Planning Partners and discuss community issues and service delivery. Following the success of that event, the process was rolled out to the Mid-Formartine and Ellon and District Wards

The Ward Forums are organised by the local Community Planning Officer, with support from other members of the Area Team. Publicity and advertising is paramount to ensure as many people as possible have the opportunity to attend the forums. Articles and adverts are run in local papers to ensure a wide audience is reached. In addition, local businesses and community buildings display posters and other promotional material advertising the local events. The forums are advertised four weeks in advance with posters and two weeks in advance in the local media. A mailing network has also been established to disseminate important information to community groups and individuals on a variety of topics.

Invitations are sent to targeted Council Services and staff and a wider list of partners, stakeholders and community groups. Local Councillors, Community Councils, Council Services, Community Planning Partners, local groups and local businesses are invited to come along and participate in the event.

The Ward Forums allow for localised discussion on issues and concerns that affect those living and working in the vicinity. The format for the first series of event took the same structure whereby a general discussion took place around the community

planning themes followed by an electronic vote to prioritise the issues raised. There was then a question and answer session with a panel of community planning partner representatives, allowing for members of the public to address their concerns

The actual format of a Ward Forum will vary, ranging from a structured event, with an agenda and minutes, to a general discussion forum where people can come along and discuss issues affecting them locally, including informal training and learning experiences. A format similar to that on Dragon's Den is being developed with a view to engaging communities and supporting local businesses and social enterprises. Adopting this variety of approaches will help to maintain interest in participating in the Ward Forums and serve to attract new audiences to attend

In 2010/2011 the format consisted of a World Café style engagement with each table discussing one of the five themes in the Community Plan. For example, one table discussed the theme of Sustainable Environment and the issues of allotments and alternative healthy eating were raised. In response to this, the Council fed back the services they offered and NHS Grampian advised on healthy diets.

Each table was facilitated by one of the Community Planning Partners and discussion took place for around an hour. Each of the concerns raised was noted and then each group had to prioritise from each a theme their top priority. The top priorities from each group were then collected together and inputted into an electronic voting system. Each and every member of the forum received a hand-held voting device and an overall priority was chosen under each of the themes.

The evolving format of the Ward Forums was one way of engaging with young people in particular as they had seldom attended the Formartine-wide meetings as they found the events 'boring'.

Impact

Over 140 people attended the three Ward Forums in 2010/2011. A variety of community groups attended with a number of 'new' participants both individual and group. In addition, the forums were attended by a significant number of young people, more so than the Formartine-wide events. The increase in community engagement has been achieved at a relatively small cost (venue hire and refreshments.)

Community Planning Partners view the Ward Forums positively, as the CPG has been able to engage with a broader range of community representatives than before. Forum participants have commented that they have been able to discuss the main issues within their community and be able to get things done with the support of others. Moreover, they have been able to meet new people in the community they did not previously know.

Issues and concerns that have been highlighted to the CPP at Ward Forums have been discussed at the CPG and acted upon with the support of council or partner

services where necessary. For example, dog fouling has been a recurrent issue across all three wards and as part of a coordinated campaign. The CPG has funded dog waste bags to be distributed through the Formartine area in partnership with the Community Councils

Lessons Learnt and Sustainability

The Ward Forums have provided information on funding for community groups, for example, how to fill out applications and the type of funding available. However, this has been a time consuming exercise and local sessions have been held to run alternative training sessions on community funding following a need being identified at the local Ward Forums.

The Ward Forums allow for open discussion on any issues affecting local people, with responses given on the night from the appropriate Community Planning Partners (if available). This, however, can be heated and at times requires some mediation if the issues are contentious.

Summary

In Formartine in Aberdeenshire Community Planning is partly delivered through the use of Ward Forums. The forums are held biannually in each of the three wards in Formartine, utilising various formats such as a World Café, 'Dragon's Den' and question and answer sessions. The priorities identified in each Ward Forums feed into the Formartine Community Plan and focus the work of the Community Planning Group and its wider community partners.

Produced 8th September 2011.

Scottish Community Safety Network is a company Limited by Guarantee Registered in Scotland, Company No:SC357649
SCSN is Registered Scottish Charity No: SC040464

Address:

2 Hill Street Edinburgh EH2 3JZ,

Tel No: 0131 225 8700

E-mail: info@scsn.org.uk

Website:

<http://www.communitysafetyscotland.org/>