Notes on Area Partnerships, etc. and Community Empowerment.

1.0 Introduction

Peebles Community Council has expressed concern on several occasions regarding the lack of effective community involvement in many areas. These include but are not restricted to items such as Area Partnerships, Chambers Institution and Common Good. We note the expressed desire of our new Elected Councillors for a reset in this regard. There are two areas that may require some adjustment: the relationship between community and elected councillors and the community and SBC. It is noted that on page 66 of the SBC agenda for Thursday's full council meeting a constitution for Area Partnerships will be discussed. Item 1(a)ii identifies "*One representative from each of four different Community Councils in the Area Partnership area as* ***non-voting*** *members*". This underlines the points we have been trying to make for some years now.

We understand how difficult it may be for newly elected councillors to assimilate the plethora of new detail that they will be expected to understand. This document has been produced to assist in your deliberations.

2.0 Audit Scotland Findings (Oct 2019)

The CPP has been slow to implement the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015

133. The Act aims to give communities more influence over how their council and its partners plan and provide services. It also establishes ways for residents to get more involved in local decision-making and service provision. A council is required to work with its community planning partners to engage with community bodies and improve local outcomes. Joint efforts and resources should be targeted on areas of greatest need to reduce inequalities.

The CPP has been slow to empower and engage communities

3.0 Area Partnerships in other areas

<u>East Lothian</u>

- Chaired by a member of the local community
- Supported by an area manager
- Provided with administrative support
- Devolved budget of £200K
- 20+ members including 3 elected councillors. All have voting rights (wide community representation including school PTA, community councils, trade associations, neighborhood groups, charities, etc.)
- Quorum is 10

Renfrewshire

- Councillors representing the area
- Equal number of community members
- Chair of each community council or nominated person with automatic membership
- Representation by local organisations
- At least one young person organisation where possible
- Decisions by consensus
- Chaired by an elected member
- Vice chair from the community
- Quorum 25%
- Supported by an area supervisor
- Provided with administrative support
- Includes reps from Police Scotland, Engage Renfrewshire, Health and social Care Partnership

The evidence shows that there is no fixed model. However, both models detailed show equal voting rights and no complete control by the council or its elected members. Whatever the model, it should meet the guidance set by the Scottish Government and comply with the community Empowerment Act.

4.0 Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 – Part 2 Community Planning Guidance

The following bullets are pulled from this guidance.

- Driven by strong shared leadership directed toward distinctive local circumstances (page 4)
- Community planning partners both statutory and non-statutory provide strong shared leadership (Page 5)
- This commitment to securing effective participation from community bodies should be led, planned, and managed effectively at a partnership level, with strong shared leadership from all partners including community bodies. (Page 12)
- Shared leadership is needed to ensure collective ownership for effective community planning in an area. Strong shared leadership provides a CPP with a clear strategic direction and stretching ambitions for local communities, and momentum to drive progress and secure continuous improvement. (Page 20)
- While traditionally community planning has tended to be seen as a council-led exercise in which other bodies participated but did not lead, effective community planning now requires every community planning partner to contribute to strong shared leadership. (Page 20)
- Partners demonstrate collective ownership (Page 6)
- Shared leadership is needed to ensure collective ownership

- working with rather than doing to people and communities, to achieve better outcomes. This can harness communities" ambitions to fulfil their own potential, building on their knowledge, experience, talents, and aptitude; and from this, support positive outcomes. It can be an effective way of pursuing prevention. (Page 15)

  [NOTE: there can be no shared leadership without equality]

- 18. One example of how CPPs can gain a community perspective is by using Participatory Budgeting as a tool for enhanced community engagement and as a development of participatory democracy. Participatory Budgeting gives local people a direct say in how and where public funds can be used to address locally identified requirements by providing the opportunity to identify preferences and allocate spend within defined parameters. (Page 15)
- The CPP has a strong understanding of its local areas, including differing needs, circumstances, and opportunities for communities (geographical and communities of interest) within its area. This understanding is built on appropriate data and evidence from partners and community perspectives flowing from effective community engagement. (Page 27)

5.0 **SCDC Report – A Review of Local Area Partnerships and the Community Fund in the Scottish Borders.**

This is a 57-page report and PCC strongly recommend that this is studied prior to any debate being entered into on the Area Partnerships. The following bullets are considered relevant.

- The ownership of Area Partnerships should be broadened beyond the Council itself with more explicit roles for communities and other Community Planning Partners.
- Meetings should have more input from community reps in setting the agenda and making decisions alongside other partners
- Adopt Audit Scotland Principles for Community Empowerment and involve local communities in developing scrutiny arrangement for empowerment locally.
- 69 (57%) respondents said that they or someone from their organisation/community council have attended an Area Partnership meeting. Of those who have attended the AP meeting; 28 (40%) reported a ‘Poor’ or ‘Very Poor’ experience. 25 (36%) said the experience was ‘Acceptable’ and 16 (24%) reported that their overall experience was ‘Good’ or ‘Very good’

6.0 Conclusion

SBC give the perception that they wish to retain central control and have little interest in devolving decision making. Other administrations appear to have met the Community Planning Guidance better than SBC and shared leadership can only be achieved through equality, dialogue, and mutual respect.

From the SCDC Report we note.

- With the greater emphasis on community empowerment, participative budgeting, and locality planning – not just for the Council, but for other public authorities/services - their main aim will be to form a community engagement platform to develop priorities and outcomes for the area. They will act as a community consultation body, not just for the Council, but other service providers in the area, becoming a strong voice for their own area"

Comments from the contributors to the report's findings very much echo our own views

- "Whilst much of the meeting is devoted to public consultation, some items require a decision by Councillors only, and it is not always clear whether comments from the public are wanted." (Online survey response)
- "There was no 'partnership' on display, merely what the more cynical might conclude was an event that would tick a box for the council labelled 'community consultation/partnership'." (Online survey response)
- "The intention is there to support empowerment, but I don't think APs do that. At the moment paid statutory staff outnumber the community, comments from the community voices are not minuted. This send signals around equity, power and interests." (Stakeholder - Community Planning Partner)
- "Not co-ordinated and initial discussions seemed rather broad. Didn't encourage involvement and unsurprisingly attendance has drifted away. Local groups need to have active participation in the decision making to make this work." (Online survey response)