



COUNCIL EXECUTIVE

JOINT FORUM OF COMMUNITY COUNCILS IN WEST LOTHIAN

REPORT BY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

A. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To consider a request by the Joint Forum of Community Councils to be recognised by the council as an umbrella organisation for community councils in West Lothian.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To consider the request by the Joint Forum of Community Councils for recognition as an umbrella organisation representing the interests of community councils in West Lothian
2. To note that recognition will result in the Joint Forum being entitled to send one representative to meetings of each of the council's Policy Development & Scrutiny Panels and to it participating and being represented in the community planning partnership structure
3. If its request is granted, to consider the provision of financial support to the Joint Forum, and on what conditions
4. If the request is granted, to agree that officers should consider and make arrangements for non-financial support by the council in relation to matters such as lets in council premises, provision of storage accommodation, social media/internet assistance, and involvement in council consultations

C. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

I	Council Values	Being honest, open and accountable; making best use of our resources; working in partnership
II	Policy and Legal (including Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equality Issues, Health or Risk Assessment)	Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973
III	Implications for Scheme of Delegations to Officers	None
IV	Impact on performance and performance Indicators	N/A

V	Relevance to Single Outcome Agreement	N/A
VI	Resources - (Financial, Staffing and Property)	Anticipated to be met within existing budgets
VII	Consideration at PDSP	N/A
VIII	Other consultations	Community councils in West Lothian; Joint Forum of Community Councils

D. TERMS OF REPORT

1 Background

- 1.1 The council is required to make and review a Scheme for Community Councils every five years and provide support as it sees fit. That requirement does not cover a representative or umbrella group for those community councils. However, the council's Scheme for Community Councils recognises the former West Lothian Association of Community Councils as the representative body for community councils in West Lothian. An annual grant was paid to the Association. The Scheme also acknowledges the Association's right to send one representative to PDSP meetings. That right to PDSP participation was already set out in the council's Scheme of Administration.
- 1.2 The Association disbanded in 2015 and until recently there has been no such overarching representative body for community councils. The Scheme for Community Councils states that in the event of the Association ceasing to exist the council and the community planning partnership will work with a properly constituted successor body. The right to PDSP representation has been preserved in the council's Scheme of Administration for any officially recognised umbrella body. The annual grant has not been paid since the Association's demise.

2 Joint Forum of Community Councils in West Lothian

- 2.1 The Joint Forum has made a formal request to the council to be recognised as a representative body. It was established in April 2018. It aims to share knowledge and experience, to formulate questions for PDSPs and to influence community planning decisions. It operates through four office-bearers and a sub-group made up of those office-bearers and seven other members. Those eleven sub-group members come from eleven different community councils. It has held three open conferences, with the last of those taking place in May this year. The sub-group meets monthly and is in effect the Joint Forum's management or executive committee. Its meetings are open to all community councils to attend.
- 2.2 More than 20 community councils have been involved in those events. It is establishing four forums to work in the defined areas of health, police, public transport and planning. It has set up a website and social media presence. It has received the funds and office equipment held by the Association at its demise.

- 2.3 All active community councils were notified of the Joint Forum's request and were asked by the council for their views, followed up by the Joint Forum itself. There have been responses from 26 out of 34 active community councils, with 25 supportive of the Joint Forum's request. The dissenting view was that the disparity in size of the various community councils and the types of issues relevant to a rural council compared to an urban council, preclude the Joint Forum as being an effective voice for all.
- 2.4 A letter dated 3 April 2019 is in the appendix. It contains information provided by the Forum in support of its request. It includes the Joint Forum's Terms of Reference and some financial information.

3 PDSP, LAC and community planning partnership participation

- 3.1 The request for recognition will carry with it the right to send one representative to meetings of each of the council's PDSPs. The Joint Forum had asked to have two places at each. They have been informed that an increase will require a change to the Scheme of Administration by full council. It would also result in an imbalance when compared to the one place available for other organisations such as the Senior People's Forum and the Voluntary Sector Gateway. For those reasons officers are not recommending any change to the present entitlement.
- 3.2 The Joint Forum also asked for two places on the Community Planning Partnership Board. As noted above, the Scheme for Community Councils allows for one place. However, the extent of the Joint Forum's participation in the community planning partnership structure, including at its Board meetings, is for the Board to determine.
- 3.3 The Joint Forum has also suggested some more formalised arrangements for participation by it and community councils at LAC meetings. The Scheme of Administration presently allows each LAC to determine those arrangements for itself. Practice therefore varies. Some suggestions for change in relation to the current rules, including imposing a standardised approach, are included in the ongoing review of decision-making arrangements which has been to PDSP and is due to come to committee in the near future. For those reasons, officers are not recommending any change to the present position.

4 Financial and other council support

- 4.1 The former Association received an administration grant from the council of £1000 each year. The Joint Forum has requested payment of that grant as a minimum. It has asked for additional funding. Details of the request are in the appendix along with information about how it intends to apply any financial support it receives.
- 4.2 The Joint Forum has asked for other non-financial support from the council, such as cost-free lets of council premises, the use of storage accommodation, social media/internet assistance, and involvement in council consultations. They have also asked for assistance and support from council officers in starting the work of their four themed forums. These are things which can be looked at if the Joint Forum receives the formal recognition it has requested. They can be progressed by officers through delegated powers as operational issues without the need for recourse to committee.

E CONCLUSION

- 1 The reinstatement and success of a representative body for West Lothian community councils should help improve engagement with communities and help

their representation and participation in council and community planning partnership decision-making.

F BACKGROUND REFERENCES

1 Scheme for Community Councils

2 Scheme of Administration

Appendix 1 - Joint Forum letter, 3 April 2019

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Date of meeting: 20 August 2019