



Local Authorities and Community Groups

**Getting the best for your project
through supportive partnership**

**A report for Scottish Communities Climate Action Network
by Cambium Advocacy and Associates**

Foreword

To support communities who take action on climate change, The Scottish Communities Climate Action Network wanted to find out more about the nature of relationships between community-led groups and their local authorities. The findings of the research show that while many groups work collaboratively with their local authority, about a quarter struggle to report a good productive relationship. This report drills down to find out what makes a good relationship and identifies steps which groups can take to improve their relationship.

The Scottish Communities Climate Action Network's aim is to empower and enable communities to create a low carbon future, and promote local resilience and well-being. We provide a network for mutual support, a shared vision and voice, create opportunities for partnership working and work to tackle the barriers and challenges that community groups taking action on climate change face.

If you have experience of tackling climate change in your community which you would like to share with us, please get in touch. You will find more information about the Scottish Communities Climate Action Network and contact details on www.scottishcommunitiescan.org.uk.

Lucy Gillie and Suzy Goodsir, Scottish Communities Climate Action Network Project Commissioning Group, April 2013

This report was prepared for Scottish Communities Climate Action Network by Cambium Advocacy and Associates

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The authors would like to thank the Scottish Communities Climate Action Network commissioning group for their guidance and input throughout the research. We also appreciate the input of the Scottish Communities CAN Steering Group and all the stakeholders interviewed who gave generously of their time to contribute to this report. Finally, we thank the community groups who participated in the workshop on local authority relationships at the Scottish Communities CAN AGM in March 2013.

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1. Introduction

This report explores how community groups could work better with local authorities to tackle climate change. Some community groups enjoy a good partnership with their local authority, while others struggle to connect. This report gives an insight into the secret of a good relationship, and how to get there.

Local authorities influence many areas which impact the climate change agenda including planning, public transport, roads, and schools. They may run community facilities such as village halls, deliver insulation schemes or support community markets. Local authorities can help community groups with funding or they may offer in-kind support, such as free use of facilities, raising awareness through council publications and events, or by giving staff support. When this joint approach works, local authorities can find that the community project helps with the delivery of services and the achievement of their outcomes, while the group can make a bigger impact.

This report is based on a survey of community groups, in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, and builds on the conclusions of the *Framework for Community Action on Climate Change*.¹ It gives recommendations for community groups and local authorities, and provides suggestions for further work at a more strategic level. The overall conclusion is that developing and maintaining good relationships with local authorities takes time and persistence, but the investment is paid back in good results for both parties.

2. Background

The 1992 Rio Earth Summit and Local Agenda 21 formally acknowledged the role of local authorities and community groups in sustainable development. Since then many Scottish local authorities and community groups have worked together to tackle climate change, with variable results. Now, with the growth of the Transition Town movement and in particular the Scottish Government's support of community groups through the Climate Challenge Fund (now entering its fifth year), there are unprecedented opportunities for local authorities and community groups to work together towards sustainability goals.

The Scottish Government recognises the importance of community groups in achieving behavioural change. Recent reports such as *Low Carbon Scotland: Meeting our Emissions Reduction Targets 2013-2027*², and the *Low Carbon Scotland: A Behaviours Framework*,³ highlight the Scottish Government's aim to encourage more low-carbon behaviours by building common cause with communities. Further opportunities for community groups are offered by Community Planning Partnerships. These are tasked with planning and delivering local services, and giving communities a voice in that process. Ultimately, the Community Plan influences the Single Outcome Agreement, which is an agreement between the Partnership and the Scottish Government on how it will deliver outcomes for local people in the context of national priorities.

¹ Pepper S and Caldwell A, *Framework for Community Action on Climate Change*, 2010

² *Low Carbon Scotland: Meeting our Emissions Reduction Targets 2013-2027*, Scottish Government, 2013

³ *Low Carbon Scotland: A Behaviours Framework*, 2013

3. Recommendations

These recommendations come directly from analysis of information gathered during researching and writing this report.

3.1 Recommendations for community groups

The research identified a set of 'top tips' for community groups aimed at making it easier for groups to access support from their local authority. Of course, every group will need to tailor their approach to suit their situation. Local authorities are all different, and opportunities vary depending on the project. However, there are some general lessons that can be learned from existing projects that are relevant in most cases. More specific advice can be provided through membership organisations such as Scottish Communities CAN or the Development Trusts Association Scotland, or by contacting other groups within the same council area.

- **Use your contacts.** Find a 'guide' within the local authority who supports what you do and can point the way. Remember your allies might not be the usual suspects.
- **Get to know your local authority and how it works.** Research the council policy or strategy that is most closely related to your project. Find out how and when decisions are made, and which council employees are key to your success.
- **Be clear about what your group aims to achieve.** Use the Single Outcome Agreement and relevant strategies to identify your shared objectives.
- **The first approach matters –be the solution and show how you can be useful.** Approach early in the project planning stages and go right to the top. At the same time make contact with the appropriate officer – housing, fuel poverty, allotments and use third party networks such as the Energy Saving Scotland Advice Centre.
- **Inform and involve your elected members.** Work across all political parties and independents.
- **Relationships need continuous support.** Be patient, engage over a decent timescale, and think how you can help each other.
- **Set realistic expectations.** Understand and respect local authority timescales and budget constraints.
- **Have, or always be prepared to develop, a Plan B.** If your first approach is not successful, try another route - there are lots of people in the council to work with. Sometimes the council might not be your best partner for this project so have another option ready to go.
- **See change as positive and adapt.** Look for new opportunities and adjust your plans if there is a change of administration or restructure.
- **Prioritise and build in capacity for engagement.** Engagement is not an optional extra. Seek funding so you have officer time for relationship building and to be involved in strategic levels of community planning.

3.2 Strategic level recommendations

The focus of this report is how community groups can address some of the barriers they face with forming a productive relationship with local authorities. Some barriers exist at a national or local

authority policy level and the research led to a number of recommendations for policy development or joint working.

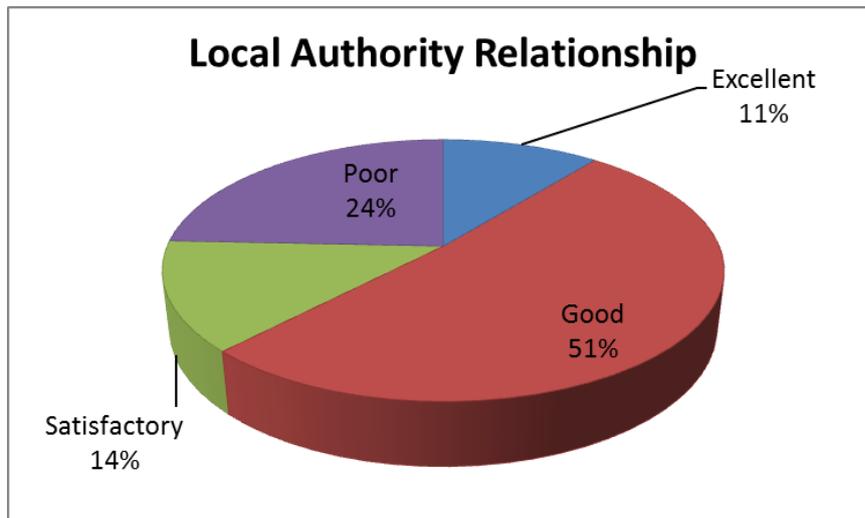
- **Review local authority climate change declaration reports to assess how they reflect the community group contribution:** Sustainable Scotland Network (SSN) is continuously working with local authorities on the declaration and how to improve it. Scottish Communities CAN could work with the SSN to make sure the next round raises the profile of community action on climate change.
- **Scottish Government and local authorities should design fuel poverty and insulation programmes that encourage working in partnership with community groups:** Scottish Communities CAN is already undertaking work with the Energy Saving Trust on the relationship between Energy Saving Scotland advice centres and community groups and discussions are underway on how Climate Challenge Fund projects can get involved in the Green Deal. These channels as well as the Scottish Government housing team should be used to ensure the community group potential is brought into the new Home Energy Efficiency Programme for Scotland from the start.
- **Build capacity in local authorities to work with community groups:** Work with SSN and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) to identify the necessary staff resources to help improve relationships as suggested in this report. For example, consider how a local authority secondment could be funded to work with Scottish Communities CAN on these projects and explore where joint working can realise big carbon savings and joined up community action.
- **Explore how the Sustainable Scotland Network can help:** Scottish Communities CAN and SSN could work together to identify 1) how SSN members could support community groups; 2) how SSN, given its new remit for the wider public sector, could help establish links with other agencies such as the National Health Service on health inequalities or active lifestyles; and 3) the potential for a joint project with Keep Scotland Beautiful (KSB – administrators of the Climate Challenge Fund) supporting one or two groups in the early planning stages, sketching out the most beneficial route for establishing a good relationship.
- **Provide an ‘introduction service’:** Scottish Communities CAN could use its membership to provide peer-to-peer support for new and existing groups in one local authority area, or across a theme such as food, home energy, or transport. Scottish Communities CAN members might also be able to help mediate a solution between a group and a local authority before a poor relationship gets entrenched. This ‘service’ could collaborate with the Climate Challenge Fund plans for mentoring support.
- **Encourage annual community group gatherings in each council area:** Scottish Communities CAN could explore the potential to work with each council to host an annual gathering of community groups in its council area with local authority staff to share experience (similar to Perth and Kinross model), discuss any barriers, and come up with ideas for joint initiatives. It might also be useful to link into existing gatherings for other parts of the voluntary sector – health, poverty, sports, etc.
- **Build capacity through the Climate Action and Support Programme (CASP):** Work with CASP and SSN to develop training workshops and resources on working with local authorities. For example, help with understanding council procedures, community planning, Single Outcome Agreements, council strategies, and relevant national policy.

- **Explore potential for revenue-raising partnerships:** With more community groups looking to become financially self-sufficient, it is worth considering if some partnerships or Service Level Agreements could include some form of recompense. This also applies to the potential to extend or replicate services to nearby communities. Scottish Communities CAN could work with its members to consider any precedents which could serve as a model for other groups and also tap into the experience from the voluntary health and social care sector.

4. Main findings

The recommendations are based on a survey of community groups taking action on climate change, interviews with key stakeholders and community groups for the case studies. The survey undertaken for this report indicates that most (62%) of the 39 community groups who responded feel that they have a 'good' or 'excellent' relationship with their local authority, 14% have only a 'satisfactory' relationship, while 24% have a 'poor' relationship (see chart below). The survey highlights the concern that one in five groups is frustrated by a lack of support from their local authority. With only a small proportion (11%) reporting an excellent relationship, there is definitely much scope for improvement.

Overall, how would you describe your relationship with your local authority?



Source: Cambium Advocacy Online Survey, February 2013

4.1 Benefits of working together

The type and value of the benefits of working together varies greatly across local authorities and community groups. This section considers the range of benefits from the perspective of community groups and local authorities, but it should be noted that in almost all cases, these are seen very much as mutual benefits. In most cases, the list and value of benefits grows over time, as the relationship strengthens.

4.1.1 Benefits to community groups

The survey and interviews revealed a number of benefits community groups enjoyed. Some of these are at a very practical level – such as giving the group second-hand tools, while others are at a more strategic level – such as a supportive active travel policy. This list is not comprehensive and is provided here to inspire community groups and local authorities to think about how they can support each other.

Equipment and labour: second hand office furniture, bicycles recovered from the waste stream, gardening tools, digger for a day, council staff and community service workers for allotments.

Funding and jobs: grants, bridging loan, advice, letters of support for funding applications, funding jobs through graduate employment schemes.

Assets: Leases for allotments, peppercorn rent or gift of community buildings, office or shop space at a reduced rent, space for a Christmas ‘pop up’ shop, car club parking spaces and key holders, technical support for wind turbine developments.

Technical expertise, data and staff resource: Procurement expertise (eg for bulk buying solar thermal scheme), marketing and communications, advice on health and safety requirements, architectural advice, local knowledge about sites, surveyors, housing data, fuel poverty mapping, open space audit.

Partnership working: Joint promotion of “zero-waste fortnight,” Service Level Agreement for provision of fuel poverty advice, pilot 20 mph zone, bulk-buy promotion for renewables, long-term contract for Reuse and Repair shop, contracts for work with schools.

Networking: Facilitate peer-to-peer support and networking, Perth and Kinross community fundraising hosts an annual gathering of community groups, the Borders Energy Agency was created to encourage information sharing and joint initiatives.

4.1.2 Benefits to local authorities

In the case studies and surveys, it was apparent that local authorities can benefit greatly from working in partnership with community groups. The benefits ranged from delivery of services on the ground through to increased input into local economic strategies. In some cases, local authorities are actively seeking new community groups to replicate the progress they are enjoying with existing groups. As with the list for community groups, this list is not exhaustive and is provided to encourage dialogue between community groups and local authorities on how they can work together.

Delivery on services and outcomes: Community projects can extend council resources to reach more people. Community groups are helping to deliver fuel poverty services, home energy efficiency programmes, sustainable procurement, turning derelict land into growing spaces, facilities for allotment training, cycle training and job creation. These projects help the local authority meet their duty under the Climate Change Act to help reduce emissions and can also contribute to a host of other outcomes relating to provision or need for social services, education, waste, etc.

Community engagement on the ground: Community groups provide face-to-face delivery of services – be it for home energy advice, cycle training, or community events. They are often run by trusted local people who can provide a credible community voice at council forums. Community groups frequently have the ability to engage a wide range of people in joint initiatives such as a growing project, community consultation on traffic calming, or renewable energy pilots.

Funding: Community groups can access funding sources not available to the local authority – such as the Climate Challenge Fund. Community groups can also often bring together a variety of funding sources in pursuit of a common, larger objective, such as climate change.

Innovation: Community groups can take risks, work quickly, be fleet footed, and test new approaches. Working with a community group gives local authorities a safe space for creative initiatives – such as Car Clubs, handyman services, and wormeries.

Punch above their weight: Local groups often have access to an astonishing range of expertise from within the community and can achieve great results at very little cash cost.

Public profile: Working with community groups can bring positive publicity to the local authority, both within the local community and in the national arena.

4.1.3 Key policies and strategies

Community groups have the greatest opportunity of working with local authorities and winning these benefits by researching their policies and strategies. The following set of policy and strategy documents are provided as a starting point for community groups wanting to learn how their project might fit with national and local priorities. All community groups should start with their local authority Single Outcome Agreement (which can be found on the local authority website), and then work with the relevant policies and strategies for their work areas. Familiarity with Scottish Government policy can help identify opportunities for working in partnership e.g. on insulation programmes, food waste, and sustainable transport.

Local Authority Policy Toolbox

Single Outcome Agreement

Community Planning Partnership

Environmental Strategy

Economic Development and Regeneration Strategy

Local Authority Corporate Plan

Find the right policy for your project: Allotments Policy, Cycling Policy, Sustainable Transport Policy, Environmental Strategy, Fuel Poverty Strategy, Economic Development Strategy

National Policy Toolbox

[National Performance Framework](#)

[Low Carbon Scotland Strategy for Meeting Emissions Targets](#)

[Low Carbon Scotland: A Behaviours Framework](#)

Home Energy Efficiency Programme Scotland

[Scottish Sustainable Procurement Action Plan](#)

[Cycling Action Plan Scotland](#)

[National Food and Drink Policy](#)

Useful Third Party Organisations

[Nourish Scotland](#)

[Food for Life Scotland – Soil Association](#)

Energy Saving Scotland advice centres

[Energy Saving Trust](#)

[Sustrans](#)

[Eco-Schools](#)

[Community Recycling Network Scotland](#)

[Development Trusts Association Scotland](#)

4.2 Lessons learned - feedback from community groups

The common issues arising out of the survey and interviews can be summarised as the following:

Community groups need the local authority: Whether it be planning permission, access to land for allotments, cycling infrastructure, or a digger for a day, local authorities often hold the keys to making the community group's vision a reality.

Local authorities need community groups: Particularly in times of budget cuts, community groups may offer a cost effective route to service delivery, for example with fuel poverty and home insulation programmes. Community groups can demonstrate local demand for council measures, such as traffic calming, cycle routes, or composting, and show how community enterprises can work.

A poor relationship doesn't help anyone: Just as a good relationship can be beneficial to all parties, so a poor relationship can be detrimental to everyone. A lack of communication and understanding of needs could irreversibly damage the prospects of a project. For example, a group may need a lease to enable a funding application to be approved and:

- A poor understanding by the community group of the processes required within the local authority to produce a lease could mean the lease is requested on too short a timescale for the local authority to be able to meet the requirement, or
- A poor understanding of the project and its benefits by the local authority could mean that the lease agreement is not treated with the required degree of priority, consequently the funding, and the potential benefits of the project are lost or delayed. The time wastage and frustrations involved can have lasting impact on relations between the local authority and the group.

Poor communication can also result in the duplication of effort and confusion amongst the public – for example if the group and authority both run a separate food waste or energy efficiency campaign.

Community groups need to maintain their independence: It was generally felt that having a good relationship with your local authority doesn't mean the community group loses its independence. Some community groups are keen that they should be perceived as independent of the local authority, as it is felt to give them more trust on the ground. Tensions can arise when the local authority wants acknowledgement of the resources it is providing to the project and the community group feels that the level of acknowledgement is too great, or if one party or the other wishes the scope of the project to extend to territory the other is uncomfortable with. A strong clear relationship will normally ensure that these tensions can be overcome.

Different ways of working: Local authorities and community groups are very different types of organisations. Community groups are often able to be more responsive, creative, entrepreneurial, and able to operate within tight timeframes, whereas local authorities have more protocols and processes to follow with various checks and balances in place. This difference can be frustrating, and it was commonly reported as a difficulty. Community groups need to adapt to this reality and set their expectations and timetables accordingly.

Where to start: Many community groups reported finding it difficult to navigate their way around the local authority and its various strategies, policies, and services. A good place to start is the Single Outcome Agreement, as it sets out the priorities for the council and will determine how the budget is spent and officer time is allocated.

Networking with other groups: Some groups find it easier to work with local authorities because they are already a part of the council (eg schools), have an established relationship working on social or regeneration issues, or are used to working as part of a big organisation (eg housing associations). Some community groups reported that it can be useful to link up with these organisations to learn from their experience, meet the right contacts, and join up the social, economic and environmental agendas.

Relationships have their ups and downs: Local authorities are complex organisations and community groups report having good relationships in some areas but not all. Community groups which were able to be pragmatic and to work with the local authority where they could, and willing to search for other routes when they encounter blockages, seemed to be more successful.

5. Case studies

Four case studies were selected to illustrate how some community groups have established a good relationship with their local authority, what benefits they enjoy by working in partnership, and their suggestions for how other groups can learn from their experience. The groups are the LEAP (Local Energy Action Plan) Project in the Renfrewshire Council area, Love Milton in the Glasgow City Council area, Sustaining Dunbar in the East Lothian Council area, and Greener Kirkcaldy in the Fife Council area.

LEAP – Local Energy Action Plan

www.myleaproject.org



LEAP provides free energy advice services to the communities of Lochwinnoch, Kilbarchan, Howwood and Bridge of Weir in the Renfrewshire Council area. They also run a community car club in Lochwinnoch and Bridge of Weir.

LEAP was very keen to work with Renfrewshire Council from the outset. The project offers Home Energy Checks to all residents inclusive of council tenants. LEAP work closely with the Council Housing Energy officer to feedback any major issues to the council, which has helped Renfrewshire Council prioritise which properties to upgrade. LEAP provides behavioural and energy saving advice, much of which the tenants can take on board themselves. As LEAP established a strong track record with a solid funding base, the Council has taken a greater interest in how their work can be integrated with Council plans. This interest has generated more opportunities for joint ventures and expansion into new areas.

Working in partnership:

- Informal arrangement with Housing Energy officer and the Energy Saving Scotland Advice Centre to provide home energy advice to four villages. LEAP provides referrals to both the council and the ESSAC.
- Joint project work for energy reduction in council owned buildings, joint funding applications for renewable energy activity, assistance with securing car club parking spaces in council car parks, licences for food and festival events, and support for promotional activity including providing display and promotional items.

Lessons learned

- **Establish good relationships on a practical level:** In LEAP's case, this has been the Housing Energy officer and more recently the communications officer and assets and estates manager. LEAP invited the key council officers out to the village to explain the project objectives and communication channels have been open ever since.
- **If your first attempt to engage fails, try someone else:** LEAP's initial contact was not very supportive, so "we had the sense to look elsewhere"; after all "there are plenty of people in the council to talk to". LEAP takes a very proactive view on their relationship with the council - "we have a good relationship with the council because we make it so."
- **Get on with the job:** LEAP focused on delivering its project outcomes for two years with the help of one solid contact at the council all the time maintaining confidence and momentum. Based on LEAP's success they have been awarded more funding to extend the reach of the services, and the Council Chief Executive wants the council to be more strongly associated with LEAP.
- **Contribute to Council Strategy:** On the basis of its track record, LEAP was invited to present to the council as part of its review of their Community Plan. The council wants to understand the project and continue to support it.
- **Don't put all your eggs in the council basket:** You may not be able to rely on the council to deliver what you need, particularly to your timescale. LEAP has managed to arrange car parking for the Car Club in council car parks, but there was always a Plan B if that fell through.
- **Build in flexibility for change:** A new administration and council restructure meant delays to the car club and a stop to the solar thermal joint work.
- **Get to know your elected officials:** LEAP worked through their local councillor to secure support for the Car Club.

Love Milton

www.lovemilton.org



Love Milton involves a series of arts and food growing projects with an aspiration to self-build a community centre using reclaimed materials. Quite simply, Love Milton aims to make Milton a better place to live.

Love Milton believes it is essential for them to work with the local authority to make their dream of a community centre a reality – the group needs planning permission, a land purchase agreement as well as other support to realise wider regeneration opportunities. Love Milton admitted that they sometimes find Glasgow City Council can be “unwieldy” to work with. Nevertheless, Love Milton has made good progress in getting support for their work.

Working in partnership:

- Officers in Development and Regeneration helped Love Milton set up as a charity and company limited by guarantee. They also provided kick-start funding for community gardens.
- Glasgow Community and Safety Services approached Love Milton to do some litter projects, and Love Milton persuaded them to help build community gardens, involving their employment placements and training to help with the work.
- Glasgow City Council placed a land-hold agreement in favour of Love Milton for development of the building site – giving them exclusive rights to develop proposals for the site. Glasgow City Council awarded Love Milton planning permission for the site.

Lessons learned

- **Relationships take time – stick at it.** Spend the time to make and maintain relationships in the council. Love Milton finds this difficult as it is such a small organisation with one project officer.
- **Speak their language:** explain your project in terms of local authority strategies and outcomes in the Single Outcome Agreement. Show how your project ticks the boxes. Love Milton produced a business case for the regeneration of their area which showed how their project provided opportunities for training, education, regeneration, and healthier lifestyles – all important outcomes for the council. This led to the council producing their own report to build on Love Milton’s proposition.
- **Talk to the decision-maker:** Love Milton found that council officers have limited autonomy, so it is important to get to Heads of Department to get the necessary support. One councillor facilitated a meeting with the Head of Economic Regeneration which unlocked doors on the land transfer.
- **Work carefully with elected members:** Love Milton engaged the elected members in their multi-member ward on the basis that everyone wants meaningful change, though this has not been without its difficulties due to competition over party politics.
- **Prove you are a partner, not a competitor:** Love Milton works with council services and council arms-length companies such as Glasgow Community and Safety Services, Glasgow Life and Glasgow City Property as required to obtain funding, in-kind support, or permissions.

Sustaining Dunbar

www.sustainingdunbar.org



Sustaining Dunbar aims “to bring people together to build a future for our locality which is not reliant on fossil fuels.” It has projects spanning home energy, local food, and sustainable transport. Sustaining Dunbar members were clear from the start that East Lothian Council would be a crucial partner in creating a vibrant, low carbon economy. Over a period of several years, they invested a huge amount of time establishing contacts at the strategic, political and practical levels. This has resulted in a broad network of local authority contacts and allies who have helped pursue the low carbon agenda.

Working in partnership:

- Dunbar 2025: engaged the whole community in devising a 15 year plan for a low carbon future. The project clearly mapped out what local authority actions were needed and who should be involved.
- 20 mph zone – Sustaining Dunbar worked with East Lothian Council on putting in place a pilot 20 mph zone and promoted participation in a public consultation.
- Home energy: The Be Green initiative refers households to the local authority home insulation scheme, and teamed up with the council and the Energy Saving Scotland Advice Centre to promote discounted solar thermal panels and photo-voltaics.
- Projects on food growing and food waste in schools – close integration with education department and Eco Schools.
- Conferences – involve East Lothian Council in hosting high profile events, such as the Nourish conference and upcoming Reconomy (Transition Network) conference.

Lessons Learned

- **Use all your contacts, keep them informed, involve them:** the project staff and board members used all their contacts –

professional and personal – to get to know the local authority better. How do you get things done? Who might be important allies? What is reasonable to expect? They were fortunate enough to have a previous working relationship with the Chief Executive who opened doors to all departments.

- **Get funding** so you have officer time to commit to relationship building and be involved in strategic levels of community planning: Sustaining Dunbar participated in the East Lothian Environment Forum, which developed the Environmental Strategy for the Community Planning Partnership and ultimately influenced the Single Outcome Agreement.
- **Use all your elected members** and stay away from party politics: they involved all three local councillors (one was the Council Leader) in their work and helped ensure the low carbon agenda remained a priority in the Environment Forum and Community Planning Partnership.
- **Be open and inclusive:** Dunbar’s vision for 2025 was put together through a survey and interviews with over 1500 residents. The strong emphasis on community engagement is evident in all the projects – from wormeries to rural bus forums. Evidence of representing the community by consulting with everyone and organising well attended public meetings adds credibility has helped East Lothian Council to see Sustaining Dunbar as a genuine community voice needing to be heard.
- **Make yourself useful:** “they help us more than we help them” is the view of the Community Planning Officer. They ran a resilience workshop in partnership with the council, they try out new ideas like car clubs which can be replicated across the council, and they help make the links between the Environment and Economic strategies with tangible examples such as the community bakery.
- **Be positive about change:** a change of administration, priorities, and restructure has presented some real challenges for Sustaining Dunbar. They are working with their strong network of contacts and responding to the ‘economic growth’ mantra by showing how the localism agenda can result in jobs, good health and well-being.



Greener Kirkcaldy is a community-led charity which helps local people to 'go greener', reduce their carbon footprints and fuel bills. The group provides advice on home energy, greener transport and waste, and supports a community orchard and growing project. In many areas their project is a good fit with Fife Council's objectives, and they have forged strong relationships with officers in fuel poverty and the parks department.

The relationship is very much on a practical level, working with the right people to get the job done. They would like to do more at a strategic level – "if only there were more hours in the day" – and recognise this will become more of a priority as they establish a secure future for Greener Kirkcaldy.

Examples of working in partnership:

- Service Level Agreement with Fife Council to provide home energy advice. Greener Kirkcaldy makes referrals to the fuel poverty programme, and receives referrals from Fife Save to do home visits. Greener Kirkcaldy extends the council resource and provides face-to-face contact with fuel poor households that otherwise wouldn't be reached.
- Home insulation 'hot spot' campaign run as a joint venture with the Energy Saving Scotland Advice Centre and the Council to offer a discounted insulation to local householders.
- The Council approached a Kirkcaldy Allotments Group and Greener Kirkcaldy a local allotments group about making use of common good land for growing spaces and a community orchard. A derelict walled garden was transformed by the community groups in partnership with the Council's allotments officer and Parks Department, who gave in-kind support in the form of labour, tools and equipment.

Lessons learned

- **Establish good relationships on a practical level.** For the food project, they work closely with the allotments officer and Parks Department. For home energy, work closely with the Energy Saving Scotland advice centre on any home energy efficiency. They can broker a good relationship with the housing department and help develop joint ventures and pilot projects
- **Think how you can help them,** and more often than not the local authority will return the favour. For example, Greener Kirkcaldy provides space for training new allotment holders and the parks department provides a digger for a day. The council needs to get rid of its leaf waste, so the allotments group takes it and turns it into leaf mould.
- **Be opportunistic and adaptable:** make sure your project plan includes enough flexibility to take advantage of opportunities the council might provide. Greener Kirkcaldy provided the 'perfect fit' for the Parks Department when they wanted to set up a new growing project in a council park. The Parks Department is providing some funding, plants, and heavy labour while Greener Kirkcaldy offers community engagement, involvement with the local high school, and design expertise.
- **Be patient.** It takes time to prove yourself and time for the council to respond. Fife Council now comes to Greener Kirkcaldy with ideas because they know it is a trusted partner. Even then, council processes and formalities may not always make it feel like an equal relationship.
- **Don't assume council officers talk to each other** – "priorities and agendas vary within the Council – it's a big organisation!" Do your research and be aware of internal politics.
- **Good relationships mean you can ask for help when you need it,** like space for a Christmas pop-up shop.
- **Your group has a lot to offer:** Cutbacks mean councils need community groups more than ever. "It would be a real blow if we didn't have community energy groups" is the view of the fuel poverty officer, who is looking to foster similar community activity in other parts of the council area.

6. Conclusions

Establishing a good relationship takes time, and often takes a great deal of effort. Some community groups are fortunate to have a helpful council officer in the right place, and a council which is genuinely supportive of the climate change agenda. Some groups already have established contacts in the council, giving them a head-start on forging good ties. Whatever the situation, groups need to be proactive. Groups that present themselves as useful and as delivering solutions to problems the local authority wants to solve seem to develop the most beneficial relationships. All of this takes time and needs to be built into the project plan and funding applications. There will be some occasions when a group is simply unable to make a connection and needs to pursue another route to get the project done. In this case, it is vital to keep communication channels open for opportunities that might arise in the future.

This report focuses on what community groups can do to build their relationships with local authorities. It is equally important for local authorities to consider their roles and responsibilities in that relationship. This report could be used as a springboard for discussion with local authority networks on how, particularly in a time of budget cuts, community groups and local authorities can find ways to work together on delivering a low-carbon future for Scotland.

There are now over 400 community groups supported by the Climate Challenge Fund, with still more groups growing out of the Development Trust and Transition movements. These groups provide a wealth of experience and have delivered real progress on emissions reductions, engaging communities and influencing social norms. However, this report suggests the potential of these groups could be even greater if positive working relationships could be more generally established with their local authorities. This gap can be partly addressed by community groups applying the types of approaches suggested in this report. At the same time the Climate Challenge Fund, and community networks like Scottish Communities CAN can build capacity through training and mentoring. Additionally, it is clear that some local authorities, or some departments within a particular local authority, appear to be much better at embracing the potential of community groups than others. The reasons for this appear to be complex and considerable benefit could accrue from further work as suggested in the report recommendations.

When local authorities and community groups work together it is clear that the impacts are significant. All parties are encouraged to seek to develop these relationships and to recognise the benefits of joint working while respecting the constraints and requirements of the other.

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www.lovemilton.org

www.greenerkirkcaldy.org.uk

www.sustainingdunbar.org

www.myleaproject.org

List of interviews

Les Brown, Fuel Poverty Officer, Fife Council

Alan Caldwell, Alan Caldwell Associates

Veronica Campanile, Policy Officer, Policy and Partnerships, East Lothian Council

Carol Gemmell, Project Manager, LEAP Project

Rona Gold, Climate Change and Waste Officer, COSLA

Suzy Goodsir, Greener Kirkcaldy

David Gunn, Kate Airlie, Rebecca Vivers, KSB (Climate Challenge Fund Administrators)

Lee Ivett, Project Co-ordinator, Love Milton

Sitar Ramsay, Community Engagement Officer, Energy Saving Scotland advice centre South East

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