

Kinross-shire Local Committee Evaluation

Executive Summary

June 2023

Perth and Kinross Council

Introduction

Perth and Kinross Council (PKC) commissioned Iconic Consulting to evaluate the Kinross-shire Local Committee pilot from January 2022 to March 2023.

PKC agreed to pilot Kinross-shire Local Committee as a new approach to explore how decentralised decision-making and local democracy could be strengthened. Councillors and officers jointly developed a pilot [Scheme of Administration](#), and it was approved by Council in October 2021 with a budget of £40,000 to support administration and evaluation of the pilot. The Committee is a part of PKC's formal Committee structure and its powers cover:

- **Decision-making powers** extend to placemaking policy (subject to wider Council policy and statutory duties and powers); funding allocations related to functions devolved to the Local Committee; capital funding devolved to the Local Committee; and grant funding for local community projects devolved to the Local Committee including the Community Investment Fund and Common Good.
- **Policy direction and priority-setting** on infrastructure, economic development, roads and environment services delivered by the Council in Kinross-shire.
- **Scrutiny and recommendatory powers** relating to wider Council policy and delivery as these affect Kinross-shire plus capital projects delivered by the Council in the ward.

Membership consists of the four Ward Councillors and a representative from the six Community Councils in Kinross-shire. Councillors are voting members and fulfil the roles of Convenor and Vice Convenor. The Community Council representatives are non-voting members.

Six meetings took place during the pilot. The first five meetings were held virtually via Microsoft Teams. The sixth meeting was a hybrid with in-person and online attendees. Overall, the meetings have been well attended.

The evaluation aimed 'to assess initial impact on local decision-making and community empowerment, and identify wider potential democratic, resource and structural implications for the Council'. A mixed methods approach was adopted for the evaluation consisting of: a document review; observation of the Committee meetings; interviews with Committee members, PKC Officers and community representatives from Kinross-shire Action Partnership; and a review of local democracy and community engagement in other local authorities in Scotland.

Local Committee powers and effectiveness

Kinross-shire Local Committee first met in January 2022 and has therefore had a relatively short amount of time to discharge the extensive powers assigned to it in the Scheme of Administration. It is therefore understandable that the Committee has discharged a relatively small proportion of the powers at its disposal during the pilot period. The powers that have been discharged have tended to be used on isolated occasions and in a light touch manner.

The Local Committee made good use of its General Powers to request Ward Councillors, PKC Officers, other persons and outside organisations attended meetings, responded to questions and submitted reports in response to relevant matters.

The main use of decision making powers focused on the power to promote Road Traffic Orders and to make proposals to Council on community participation requests and the transfer of functions to community management and ownership subject to Council policies. The Local Committee did not discharge the majority of its other decision making powers related to Infrastructure and Economic Development, Roads, Environment, and Communities.

Kinross-shire Local Committee has not discharged its Scrutiny and Recommendatory Powers. These powers are regularly used by Area Committees in other local authorities in Scotland.

The factors that enabled the Local Committee to discharge its powers effectively included:

- Ward Councillors identifying relevant items that reflected community concerns;
- PKC Officers engaging well with the items raised by members;
- the added impetus provided by the current Convenor;
- the identification of a Lead Officer; and
- the support and guidance provided by PKC's Legal and Governance Services.

Barriers to the Local Committee's effectiveness included:

- the relatively short time covered by the pilot;
- changes in Local Committee membership;
- PKC Officer capacity;
- limited forward planning of the Local Committee agenda;
- disagreement between Ward Councillors and PKC Officers about proposed agenda items;
- limited awareness of the Local Committee's powers;
- PKC Officers not raising potential agenda items with Ward Councillors that fall within the Local Committee's powers;
- the absence of a Kinross-shire Community Plan setting out local priorities; and
- limited opportunity for Community Council representatives to propose agenda items.

The following recommendation was made regarding powers and effectiveness:

Recommendation 1: Kinross-shire Local Committee members discuss greater use of the Committee's Scrutiny and Recommendatory Powers. This could include specific Council services outlining their work in Kinross-shire and seeking the views of Committee members on local issues and priorities.

Decision making

Kinross-shire Local Committee made a limited number of decisions during the pilot. However, it should be noted the pilot covered a relatively short time period and the agenda at some meetings was also limited. Decisions have been made by consensus and without the need for votes. Ward Councillors have not brought their political allegiances into the decision making process.

Community Council representatives welcomed their involvement in the Local Committee and did not highlight their non-voting status as an issue in the decision making process. Community Council representatives contributed constructively to the discussions at times but, overall, they were subordinate to the Ward Councillors in the decision making process, in our view. The new Convenor has made a notable effort to engage Community Council representatives in discussions at recent meetings and we commend them for this proactive approach.

It appears that the Local Committee's decisions could have been reached using the structures and processes that existed before the Committee was established. This led some consultees to question the added value of the Local Committee and highlight the resource implications. On the other hand, other consultees felt the benefit of the Local Committee came from the fact the decisions were being made at a local level by Kinross-shire Councillors and Community Council representatives.

The decisions made by the Local Committee regarding the allocation of CIF grants and the awarding of £30,000 to the King George V Playing Field weakened rather than strengthened the local decision making process, in our view.

The following recommendations were made regarding decision making:

Recommendation 2: An action log is established and maintained by PKC Officers and reviewed at Local Committee meetings.

Recommendation 3: decisions regarding any future budgets devolved to the Local Committee are transparent and inclusive, taken by all members at the meetings. Community Council representatives should have equal access to information prior to the meeting and equal input into the discussions at the meetings.

Local democracy

Kinross-shire Local Committee has enhanced the community's participation in the democratic process if the community is viewed as the local Community Councils. If however, the community is viewed more broadly as the general public then it is our view that the Committee has had a more limited impact on community participation. There was a marked improvement in the contribution from Community Council representatives at the February 2023 Local Committee which was a hybrid meeting at which the Convenor proactively sought to engage community representatives.

Kinross-shire Local Committee has enhanced community leadership as the Community Council representatives have taken on the important role of representing the views of the community across Kinross-shire. The low profile of the Local Committee however means that this leadership role will be limited. The four Ward Councillors are elected representatives of the community and their membership of the Local Committee enhances their role as community leaders.

Kinross-shire Local Committee has enhanced community empowerment to a degree although the impact has been mixed to date. It has enabled the community to examine community ownership options for the former Blairingone Primary School which was an aim of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015. However, it is our view that the Community Council representatives are not empowered as equal members of the Local Committee. This is partly due to their non-voting status but also due to the limited information and input they are afforded before and during meetings. Changes to the way CIF funding has been allocated have also weakened community participation and empowerment, in our view.

The following recommendations were made regarding local democracy:

Recommendation 4: PKC promotes and raises awareness of Kinross-shire Local Committee.

Recommendation 5: Local Committee membership is included as an agenda item at a forthcoming meeting so all members can share their views and try to agree a way forward.

Recommendation 6: The involvement of Community Planning Partners in Kinross-shire Local Committee is included as an agenda item at a forthcoming meeting so all members can share their views and try to agree a way forward.

Recommendation 7: PKC Officers and Ward Councillors ensure Community Council representatives are provided with the same level of information and input before and during the meetings as Ward Councillors.

Recommendation 8: Community Councils are contacted by PKC to put forward potential agenda items before every Local Committee meeting.

Recommendation 9: A future meeting of Kinross-shire Local Committee includes an agenda item on the Committee's powers and decision making process with a presentation from PKC Legal and Governance Services followed by a question and answer session.

Recommendation 10: A Kinross-shire Ward Panel is re-instated for future CIF awards.

Resource and structural implications

Kinross-shire Local Committee has had resource implications for PKC Officers including, but not limited to, the administration of the Committee, attendance, and the production of reports for the Committee. We estimate these tasks have required an additional 204 hours of work for PKC Officers, although we suggest this is a conservative estimate. In addition, PKC Officers undertook other tasks that we have not been able to quantify. This includes the additional work undertaken by the lead officer since autumn 2022, and other officers including senior officers who have contributed to the implementation and review of the Local Committee. The Committee also required additional time from Ward Councillors, particularly the Convenor and Vice Convenor.

There have been no noteworthy implications for the Council's Committee structure from the establishment of Kinross-shire Local Committee during the pilot period. However, it is possible that more significant structural challenges could have arisen in different circumstances, or could in the future.

It is our view that Perth and Kinross Council's operational structure - which is focused on services rather than areas - could have unintentionally contributed to the Local Committee's limited impact described in this report. If additional Local Committees are established, as proposed by PKC, there may be a greater focus on area-based rather than service-based issues and this could have implications for the way the Council plans and delivers its services in the future.

Kinross-shire Local Committee and Action Partnership have distinct roles and there have been no examples during the pilot period of the Local Committee encroaching on the KAP's remit. There have been concerns about the diminution of the role community members of the KAP were afforded in the CIF allocation process however this related to the Ward Councillors decision to proceed without a Ward Panel and was not an unavoidable consequence of establishing the Local Committee.

Area Committees in other local authorities in Scotland tend to have an authority-wide Community Planning Partnership but not local Community Planning Partnerships such as the KAP. The Area Committees in other local authorities also tended to have a Community Action Plan.

The following recommendations were made regarding resource and structural implications:

Recommendation 11: PKC Ward Councillors and Senior Officers consider the resource implications of maintaining Kinross-shire Local Committee and establishing Local Committees in other wards.

Recommendation 12: PKC Ward Councillors consider the additional demands on their time, particularly the Convenor and Vice Convenor, in maintaining Kinross-shire Local Committee and establishing Local Committees in other wards.

Recommendation 13: Local Committee reports are presented verbally or as concise written reports to minimise the demands on PKC Officer time.

Recommendation 14: Site-specific road safety issues in Kinross-shire are dealt with outwith Local Committee meetings, as they are in other wards in Perth and Kinross. This would also have the benefit of freeing up Local Committee meeting time for ward-wide roads issues and other non-roads issues.

Recommendation 15: PKC progresses work to compile a Community Action Plan in Kinross-shire as the Local Committee could have an important role in taking forward the issues prioritised in the Plan.

Conclusions

Overall, this evaluation has shown that Kinross-shire Local Committee has impacted, to a degree, on local decision-making and community empowerment during the pilot period. There have been some successes in strengthening local decision-making and community empowerment, however they have been relatively minor and this leads us to conclude the Local Committee has not, at this relatively early stage of its existence, fully justified the resources involved.

Some PKC Officers questioned the overall benefits of the Local Committee given its restricted powers, limited agendas, the additional resources it has required from Officers, and the limited impact it has made over the pilot period. However, it was noteworthy that other Officers, Ward Councillors and Community Council representatives acknowledged some challenges had, not unexpectedly arisen, during the pilot period, and felt it was still finding its purpose, but nonetheless remained strongly committed to the concept of a Local Committee for Kinross-shire. Their view was that the Local Committee was a welcome addition that would continue to evolve and be more impactful over time. We understand PKC is planning a Development Day to address some of the issues raised in this report which could contribute towards this process.