

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Anti-Poverty and Inequality Committee
DATE	11 January 2023
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Citizens' Assembly
REPORT NUMBER	CUS/23/012
DIRECTOR	Andy MacDonald
CHIEF OFFICER	Derek McGowan
REPORT AUTHOR	Paul Tytler, Deirdre Nicolson
TERMS OF REFERENCE	1.2

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to present an approach to developing a Citizens' Assembly in Aberdeen with a particular focus on gender inequality and other inequalities all arising from poverty.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee: -

- 2.1 Agree the principles for a Citizens' Assembly described in this report;
- 2.2 Instruct the Chief Officer Early Intervention and Community Empowerment to further develop plans for a Citizens' Assembly including potential topics for the Assembly to consider which may include looking at gender inequality, and report back to the Committee on 10th May 2023, noting that any budget requirements will need to be considered by Finance and Resources Committee;
- 2.3 Approve the draft Terms of Reference for a Citizens' Assembly in Appendix 1.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 Citizens' Assemblies are a type of democratic method that has been used around the world to empower citizens and solve intractable problems. A Citizens' Assembly brings together a diverse group of the public - selected at random but chosen to broadly reflect the demographics of the local community - to deliberate on an issue and recommend what should be done.
- 3.2 The Working in Partnership for Aberdeen policy statement includes, under 'A Transparent, Accessible and Accountable Council' the following –

- Explore options to establish local Citizens' Assemblies – with the first remit of a Citizens' Assembly being to advise the council on what's needed to tackle gender inequality in Aberdeen.

The work on developing the model for Citizens' Assemblies will explore the delivery of this policy statement.

3.3 The principles underpinning a Citizens' Assembly are:

3.3.1 **Diverse:** They resemble the wider population in all its diversity, having been selected at random from that community to match the demographic characteristics of the population. The process of random selection would reflect the demography of the area, to ensure a representative participants identified. For example, the Citizens' Assembly for Scotland identified the following socio-demographic variables:

- Geography
- Age
- Gender
- Ethnic group
- Educational qualifications
- Limiting long term conditions/disability
- Attitudes towards Scottish independence and the UK's membership of the EU
- Scottish Parliament voting preferences

The proposed socio-economic demographics will be developed in the detailed planning for the assembly and will inform the Terms of Reference.

3.3.2 **Deliberative:** Citizens' Assemblies don't aggregate top-of-the-head opinions, but harvest deeper, more considered judgements.

3.3.3 **Lengthy:** Lasting at least four days, they give participants the chance to get under the skin of a problem, developing their understanding and challenging their assumptions as they go, before arriving at a series of recommendations.

3.3.4 **Informed:** Participants leave as experts in their own right, having heard from 'witnesses' with professional, lived and academic experience of the topic at hand.

3.3.5 **'By the people, for the people':** Recommendations are made by assembly members, not by politicians or officers. They are published without revision, caveat or manipulation and responded to by decision makers.

3.3.6 **Professionally facilitated:** They are painstakingly designed and impartially facilitated to enable rich and meaningful participation by all assembly members, ensuring that everyone is given the space to express themselves freely.

3.4 The Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe) published a briefing [Citizens' Assemblies – An international comparison](#) which referenced earlier

work by the Electoral Reform Society in describing three typical phases of an assembly as:

- **Learning phase:** participants get to know each other, how the assembly works and what its aims are. Relevant facts about the issue at hand are presented to the participants, who get to ask questions of experts and access background and contextual information.
- **Consultation phase:** campaigners from each side get to present their arguments and be questioned on them. Sometimes, the assembly might run a public consultation during this phase to understand what the broader public thinks about an issue.
- **Deliberation and discussion phase:** the participants deliberate amongst themselves. Generally, assembly members will make recommendations to government or parliament at the end of this phase. In some cases, if these recommendations are taken up, they will be put to the people in a referendum (as in the case of Ireland), noting it is usually up to elected politicians whether or not to follow the assembly's recommendations.

3.5 In order to develop the approach for an assembly, the SPICe briefing makes the following recommendations:

1. Assembly Remit - decisions on remit must recognise the impact on design, delivery and governance. The broader the remit, the more time required.

2. Governance Framework - roles and responsibilities must be collectively agreed and clearly defined with responsibilities for oversight, advice, design and delivery distinguished.

3. Assembly Phases - sufficient time must be given to each stage of assemblies:

- inception;
- delivery; and
- impact.

4. Assembly Impact - a clear mandate must be set out, including clear parameters for how the assembly will interact with the decision-making of other democratic institutions.

5. Public Engagement - consideration must be given to how the assembly will interact with the wider public to build understanding, foster public deliberation and enhance legitimacy.

6. Capacity Building - future action must include building capacity in skills, resources and infrastructure for delivering deliberative and participatory processes.

7. Research - concurrent research should be embedded and used to inform the Assembly's design and governance. The research should be fully funded and have a duration that enables an assessment of impact.

- 3.6 In respect of the governance arrangements for the Citizens' Assembly, draft terms of reference have been developed at Appendix 1 for consideration by the Committee.
- 3.7 Officers will require to identify the financial costs to run a Citizens' Assembly, seek committee approval for that spend and undertake a commissioning process to secure the services of independent facilitators to develop and deliver the assembly.
- 3.8 The delivery of a Citizen Assembly sits alongside a range of community engagement activities currently delivered by the Council, including participation in Community Councils, Priority Neighbourhood Partnerships, Locality Empowerment Groups and the Citizens Voice Panel. In addition, specific engagement activities take place as part of projects and developments, including, for example, the recent work on the Beachfront Masterplan.
- 3.9 The Community Planning Aberdeen (CPA) Community Empowerment Group has developed a Community [Empowerment Strategy](#) which sets out the approach to community engagement and empowerment. The Strategy was approved by the CPA Board on 30 November 2022.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are financial implications arising from this report, with detailed costings yet to be determined and budget requirements will need to be considered by Finance and Resources Committee.
- 4.2 The costs identified include:
- Independent facilitators to develop the learning for the assembly, to run the assembly and prepare the report
 - Costs of identifying and recruiting the representative participants
 - Event costs, to include location, catering, child care, interpreters, travel costs
 - Staff costs

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 In order for a Citizens' Assembly to be fully effective a governance framework, including terms of reference are required.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 No environmental implications have been identified in this report.

7. RISK

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H) <small>*taking into account controls/control actions</small>	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
Strategic Risk	Not fulfilling the commitment to undertake Citizens' assemblies	Approval of the paper and agreement to progress with the Assembly	L	Yes
Compliance	No risks identified	n/a	n/a	n/a
Operational	Resources to undertake the assembly	Staffing and other resources to undertake a Citizens' Assembly will be identified during detailed planning	M	Yes
Financial	Funding to cover the cost of the Assembly process	Subject to approval	M	Yes
Reputational	Not responding to or implementing the outcomes from the assembly	Effective planning will ensure that there is a clear timescale for the Citizens' Assembly report. Participants will be advised that the Assembly is advisory	L	Yes
Environment / Climate	No environmental risks identified	n/a	n/a	n/a

8. OUTCOMES

<u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN 2022-2023</u>	
	Impact of Report
Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement <u>Working in Partnership for Aberdeen</u>	<p>The proposals within this report support the delivery of the following aspects of the policy statement:-</p> <p>A Transparent, Accessible and Accountable Council</p> <p>Recognise that citizens and communities – rather than the City Council - are best placed to say what services they require and how these are provided</p>

	<p>and seek to give greater control over appropriate services and facilities to local communities</p> <p>Explore options to establish local Citizens' Assemblies – with the first remit of a Citizens' Assembly being to advise the council on what's needed to tackle gender inequality in Aberdeen</p>
<p>Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2016-26</p>	
Prosperous Economy Stretch Outcomes	There are no direct impacts on LOIP outcomes arising from this report, although this will be reviewed in light of the question to be addressed by the Citizens' Assembly.
Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes	There are no direct impacts on LOIP outcomes arising from this report, although this will be reviewed in light of the question to be addressed by the Citizens' Assembly.
Prosperous Place Stretch Outcomes	There are no direct impacts on LOIP outcomes arising from this report, although this will be reviewed in light of the question to be addressed by the Citizens' Assembly.
<p>Regional and City Strategies</p> <p><u>Regional Strategies</u></p> <p><u>Council Strategies</u></p>	<p>There are no direct impacts on Regional Strategies arising from this report, although this will be reviewed in light of the question to be addressed by the Citizens' Assembly.</p> <p>The report will deliver against the CPA Community Empowerment Strategy.</p>

9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	An Integrated Impact Assessment will be required
Data Protection Impact Assessment	A DPIA will be required to assess how the personal data relating to the selection and participation of the assembly participants will be gathered and stored
Other	None

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 None

11. APPENDICES

.12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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Appendix 1

Draft Terms of Reference:

Introduction

Aberdeen City Council's Anti-Poverty and Inequality Committee has committed to establishing a Citizens' Assembly to assist in developing a series of recommendations that will inform the Committee in its remit to alleviate and mitigate gender inequality and other inequalities all arising from poverty in the city.

In establishing a Citizens' Assembly, the Committee wishes to:

- learn about the shared and contrasting values, concerns and needs of Aberdeen City citizens
- better understand the citizens' vision for the future of the city
- provide citizens with an unprecedented opportunity to shape proposals to alleviate and mitigate poverty and inequality

Guiding Principles for the Citizens' Assembly

Openness and Transparency

The Citizens' Assembly will regularly share its learning and deliberations with the public through the Council's website.

Accountability and Legitimacy

The Citizens' Assembly will work within a defined mandate. The Assembly will deliver recommendations to be considered at the Anti-Poverty and Inequality Committee and referred to other committees as appropriate.

Membership

The members of the Citizens' Assembly will represent the needs and interests of all Aberdeen City citizens. While it is anticipated that Assembly members should broadly represent the demographics Aberdeen City citizens, assembly members will be randomly selected.

Accessibility

The Council will provide reasonable support to address barriers that may prevent an Assembly member from participating successfully.

Independence

The Citizens' Assembly will have full independence to determine how to best fulfil its mandate.

Well-informed

The Citizens' Assembly will deliver sound recommendations. The Assembly's recommendations will be informed by a range of perspectives and sources of expertise.

Balance

The Citizens' Assembly will consider a diversity of voices and perspectives in its deliberations.

Collaborative decision-making

Citizens' Assembly members will work towards consensus when drafting their recommendations, while also respecting and documenting differing perspectives among its members.

Respect

Citizens' Assembly members will strive to be conscientious and fair-minded in their deliberations.

3.0 Mandate of the Citizens' Assembly

The Citizens' Assembly will be asked to consider a number of topics and develop a series of recommendations that will inform the Anti-Poverty and Inequality Committee in alleviating and mitigating all forms of poverty and inequality in the city.

To assist the members of the Citizens' Assembly with their task, the Council will provide a learning programme including information on existing policies; relevant data and existing budget.

4.0 Constraints on the Citizens' Assembly

The Assembly will enjoy wide latitude in its ability to make recommendations.

The Anti-Poverty and Inequality Committee will accept, modify or reject specific recommendations from the Assembly or remit them to an appropriate Council Committee.

5.0 Schedule of the Citizens' Assembly

The schedule of meetings for each Citizens' Assembly will be decided by the Anti-Poverty and Inequality Committee.

6.0 Reporting of the Citizens' Assembly

The Citizens' Assembly's recommendations will be collated into a report and considered by the Anti-Poverty and Inequality Committee.

7.0 Composition of the Citizens' Assembly

Members of the Citizens' Assembly will be randomly selected.

7.1 Number of Members

The Citizens' Assembly will consist of 40 members.

8.0 Roles and Responsibilities

8.1 Citizens' Assembly Members

Members of the Assembly are expected to:

- Attend each Citizens' Assembly
- Work to understand and represent the varied perspectives of all citizens
- Treat each other with dignity and respect
- Take an active role in the work of the Assembly.
- Work collaboratively to achieve a strong consensus concerning the Assembly's recommendations.

If a member of the Assembly must withdraw owing to illness or unexpected events, his or her position may be filled from the pool of applicants at the discretion of the Chair.

8.2 Chair of the Citizens' Assembly

The members of the Citizens' Assembly will appoint a Chair.

The Chair will ensure

- the smooth running of the Assembly
- that all members are given the opportunity to fully participate and
- that the recommendations of the Assembly are appropriately documented and submitted to the Anti-poverty and Inequality Committee for consideration

8.3 The Chief Officer – Early Intervention and Community Empowerment

The Chief Officer – Early Intervention and Community Empowerment will ensure appropriate staff from across the Council are available to sufficiently support the Citizens' Assembly.