

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Housing and Environment
DATE	13 th April 2010
CORPORATE DIRECTOR	Pete Leonard
TITLE OF REPORT	Community Signature Initiative – next steps

REPORT No. H&E/010/057

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To advise Members of the completion of the first year of the Community Signature initiative and to report on the programme for the second year

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the Committee :

- 1 notes the successful completion of the first year of the Community Signature initiative in Torry and the next steps for year two as set out in the main considerations of the report;
- 2 approves the exemption of a contract extension for the Community Signature from the requirement of Standing Order 5 of the Council's Standing Orders Relating to Contracts and Procurement (the requirement to go out to competitive tender and to advertise on the Public Contracts Scotland Portal) on the grounds that the contract extension is justified by special circumstances (Standing Order 1(6)(i)) as detailed in this report ; and
- 3 agrees to receive a six-monthly progress report at the meeting set to be held on 17th November 2010.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The cost for the development of the next stage of the Community Signature initiative will be contained within the overall revenue budget for 2010-2011, with each service contributing £5000 towards the overall budget of £25,000.

This sum of £25,000 for 2010/2011 will be matched by in cash and in-kind staff costs externally by partner organisations including Grampian Police, Job Centre Plus, Shell, and the Foyer.

4. SERVICE & COMMUNITY IMPACT

The development of the Community Signature can be regarded as one cornerstone for promoting sustainable development initiatives that will help uplift the perception and amenity of a locality, and complements other economic, social, environmental, and physical initiatives being undertaken; Community involvement will continue through the schools and local organisations.

The Signature work being undertaken by staff of the City Council complements their remit for community engagement and will fit into the overall framework for corporate community engagement

5. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

The development of Community Signature as envisaged will help address a number of environmental and locality issues, and will assist in seeking to secure external funding for the implementation of any sub-projects.

Vibrant, Dynamic, Forward Looking Aberdeen (VDFL)

Community Signature actively develops the delivery of VDFL under the aspects of Education, Economic Development, Culture, Arts and Sports, and the Built and Natural Environment as it brings together key organisational and support staff from the partner and community organisations.

The development of the initiatives outlined in this report will be in accord with the Interim Business Plan as adopted by the City Council at its meeting on 16th December 2009.

Single Outcome Agreement (SOA)

Community Signature will also assist delivering on the SOA related to National Outcomes 11 and 15.

- *Our public services are high quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive to local people's needs*
- *We have strong, resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others*

Equality and Human Rights implications

A full equality and human rights impact was been completed. Community Signature will record and give visual representation on strengths, weaknesses and opportunities in community viewpoints through a range of structured statements that require discussion and debate by group participants. The evidence gathered will be shared with partners and community organisations, and will be used to challenge and reduce impacts of negative issues

REPORT

6.1 Context of the study

The City Council entered into a one year Service Level Agreement (SLA) in April 2009 with Aberdeen Foyer to deliver the Community Signature in Torry . However, an extension to the SLA is now going to make the total contract value £75,000. This is well over the Council's threshold at which a competitive tendering exercise must be undertaken in terms of the Standing Orders (previously £30,000 and now £60,000). Members are therefore being recommended to agree to a request for an exemption from Standing Order 5 (non-EU Competitive Tendering). A full EU Procurement would not be required as the threshold for that is 10% less than £156,442. However, even for below threshold Contracts the Council must still adhere to its EU Treaty obligations which require some degree of advertising and transparent process in awarding a contract and there could be a risk of legal challenge for failing to do this.

The special circumstances described in this report which justify not tendering for this contract are that the Community Signature is a unique product and is only available from Business Lab. There are no other providers of this product/service. Furthermore, the project has been up and running for one year now, good progress has been made and it would be beneficial to be able to continue with the SLA for a further two years without the need to go out to tender at this critical stage.

Alongside the present SLA, the Foyer has a three-year Licence with Business Lab to utilise the Community Signature for the project. The project shall shortly progress to year two of the agreed programme, which commences in April 2010, and the second year will continue to focus on Torry. However, under the terms of the Licence arrangement there is capacity and opportunity to expand the initiative on a City-wide basis i.e. capacity for 1,000 Signatures but only 100 being utilised within Torry.

This progress report for Members is to highlight lessons learned in the first year and how these will be applied in years two/three. The report notes:-

- key milestones achieved
- progress against the project timeline
- emerging findings from Signatures to date
- challenges and lessons
- future plans.

6.2 Background

The aims of the Community Signature project were defined in Terms of Reference for the Project Steering Group (PSG) established to oversee the project. These were defined as to: -

- establish a structured benchmark of community capacity in Torry which can be used to monitor development ;
- gather data on community capacity that may be used by the project partners to support their engagement and development strategies in Torry;
- develop a deeper understanding of the community in Torry, numbering some 10,000, which can be shared by Community Planning Partners;
- help evaluate community generated ideas to help build community capacity in Torry;
- build a bank of data, which can support the ongoing economic development, environmental, and social regeneration plans for Torry; and
- support the Aberdeen City Council Single Outcome Agreement, with particular reference to National Outcomes 11 and 15, namely,
 - *Our public services are high quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive to local people's needs*
 - *We have strong, resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others*

In addition, in considering the establishment of the project the Locality Planning Forum were consulted and noted its interest in the initiative, and will receive a report back in due course.

At the time of establishing the project, the proposal to do so was considered and approved by the then Interim Board of the South Urban Regeneration Company (URC) on 28th October 2008. City Council funding of £25k for the first year was agreed under delegated powers agreed by full Council on 25th October 2006 to the then Area Director (South). In addition to this funding, the Foyer were able to attract additional financial support from Job Centre Plus (JCP) - £7.5k, Grampian Police - £5k, Shell -£5k, Foyer - 7.5k (Petrofac had previously agreed to provide financial support, but this was later withdrawn)

6.3 Critical milestones achieved

Project set up phase efficiently managed

Aberdeen Foyer's trading company Foyer Enterprise secured the licence to deploy the Community Signature and engaged the interest and commitment of a range of stakeholders representing the voluntary, statutory and private sectors. A Service Level Agreement has formalised the arrangement between the City Council and the Foyer. Since September the Foyer has secured the support of the Scottish Community Foundation (SCF) who has become involved in the last six-month period to contribute to project co-ordination. The link with SCF has the added advantage of promoting the foundations small grants scheme locally.

Project Steering Group established and meeting regularly

Membership of the Project Steering Group includes Aberdeen City Council, NHS Grampian, Grampian Police, Jobcentre Plus, Aberdeen Foyer and Business Lab. The project has also secured corporate support from Shell. Petrofac Training had previously agreed to provide support but this was later withdrawn as a result of changes in the company.

This group (chaired by the Regeneration Manager-South) was formed to offer advice, support and direction to the project and to support effective action as a result of the Signature programme; the group has met regularly on a monthly basis for approximately 1 and half hours.

Cohort of Agents trained

Six agents have been trained by Business Lab in the use of the Community Signature. Four are Foyer staff members and two are City Council staff members (CL&D and Adult Ed). These staff have been able to successfully align the work utilising the Signature alongside other responsibilities. Training involved a three-day process including practical work with local groups. All six agents have since been involved in delivering or co-facilitating Signature sessions.

Project infrastructure developed

Systems of communication and reporting are continually being refined to ensure for effective communication/information flow between the various parties involved. In addition processes for securing, allocating, delivering, recording and reviewing actual Signatures within Torry are also being continually improved. For example the project has now established a common resource to aid with capturing evidence from Signatures and ensuring a full profile of the group is recorded.

6.4 Emerging findings from Signatures to date

At the meeting of the Torry Community Council held on 18th March 2010, a presentation was given on the first years work, and after a full discussion, the Community Council has agreed that it will undertake to create its own Signature for inclusion within the emerging pattern of Signatures. A copy of the Signature work to date has been placed for inspection in the Members Library.

To date, forty-one Community Signatures have been completed by a diverse range of groups from across the community of Torry. This represents 200+ people and approx 2% of the local population. Signatures representing the perceptions and experience of young people, older people, residents, community activists and community agencies have provided a rich and variable picture of community capacity for change in Torry. The Signatures, therefore, display a diversity of opinion and experience, yet there are also areas of consistent response. So what do they tell us?

- There are clear opportunities to improve participation and neighbourliness in Torry.
- A primary focus for communication and community-based activity should be through the neighbourhood's informal networks.
- Consideration should be given on how to improve the perceived lack of responsiveness of the local agencies working to deliver services in Torry.
- There should be closer engagement of community groups by public sector agencies leading to greater responsibility and ownership of programmes and initiatives designed to improve community capacity.
- There is untapped interest in broadening access to learning across the community.
- There is an opportunity to build on a relatively positive sense of wellness and health.
- Key aspects relating to community commerce such as enterprise, production, reinvestment and wealth suggest the opportunity for a multi stakeholder effort to stimulate economic activity and the improvement of services available in Torry.
- The project highlighted significant short-comings in engagement between statutory agencies and local groups and individuals. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the project itself has provided an opportunity for residents and groups to feel listened to. It is essential to build on this as the project develops.
- A programme of mapping services available and delivered on the ground in Torry should be mapped to the Signatures on a segmented basis to understand what needs to be done to a) improve awareness of the services available, b) improve take up of services or c) amend services to reflect the needs of the community as identified by the Signature process.
- Ways should be explored to embed the initiative in the Council's organisational transformation programme as well as new ways of working for the Community Planning Partnership.

6.5 Challenges and lessons

During this initial implementation phase the project has run Signatures with any willing or interested group rather than targeting particular sectors, ages, issues or geographical areas. In part this was because the project was in an early phase, testing the process within the Community and also learning how to most usefully engage people with it. However there is a strong sense that, across the different age spectrums, **people do want their voices to be heard**. Over a three-year period therefore the project has real potential to develop a stronger citizen voice across Torry and ensure that the project aim around supporting the Aberdeen City Council Single Outcome Agreement (National Outcomes 11 and 15) is met. Further thought will be also be given to ensuring **harder to reach** groups are involved in the project; a good start has been made to engage with what are often more marginalised/isolated/vulnerable groups.

Ongoing identification of new groups is a critical feature of this initial phase. This helps ensure that a broad constituency informs the data being gathered and that the benchmark of community capacity established is a meaningful reflection of the diverse Torry community. However, even with some Agents on the ground within Torry, this still takes time since those Agents have other duties to fulfil beyond time dedicated to the Signature work. The PSG have reviewed the practical co-ordinating arrangements for the project which have been undertaken by SCF to date and this is to be revised to locate this role locally.

Having '**agents**' already located in the community where they work adds significant value in terms of liaising with groups and promoting the project generally. However some agents have indicated that maybe they are too close and it could at times be more appropriate for someone with less familiarity with the group to actually run the Signature session.

The Signature session itself can function, as a useful form of **needs assessment exercise for staff or volunteers who support or service local groups**. During some of the set-up conversations agency staff, for example, will often readily see the value of 'clients' being facilitated through such a reflective session and suggest it will have value for their own work in the short term.

For information, it will be of interest to Members to note that in parallel with the deployment of Community Signature in Torry, Wokingham Borough Council (a district just outwith the London area) have been deploying the Community Signature in the Norreys - a Borough Ward with higher than average levels of deprivation for the Wokingham area, and a population of 8,140. Most recently, Wokingham Borough Council has been nominated for a **Total Place Award** for their work with the Signature. An offer has been made from Wokingham to share their planning methodologies, organisational strategy and operational experiences in the deployment of the Community Signature.

6.6 Future plans – year two

From the data collected to date this will begin to be fed back to participating agencies to consider actions as required but also feed back to participating local groups, individuals and organisations to inform local community action.

It is planned that **two** BIG Signature events will run in Torry between Easter and Summer along side an ongoing schedule of individual Signature sessions with local groups.

Of particular interest will be links with local retailers in support of the Retail Rocks initiative and further work with local Schools in support of improved community engagement linked to the Health Promoting School.

Refresh and enlarge the 'agents' group to increase capacity to undertake more Signatures over the course of the coming year. Embedding the practice with local staff can be considered to be cost effective, sustainable and builds capacity of agencies/organisations locally. A training programme will be developed to facilitate this, and the PSG will explore mechanisms to involve local contributors in analysis and interpretation of data coming through Signatures, with Aberdeen Foyer taking responsibility for leading this.

Lastly, Aberdeen Foyer and the City Council have agreed to the deployment of the Family Learning Signature as part of the Foyer's work on early interventions and prevention, funded by the Venture Philanthropy fund, Inspiring Scotland. This new work will compliment the existing Community Signature project providing a focus for young people and families around the MCMC and LAC agendas.

This work will reach in the Craiginches Prison and is regarded as a new and vital means by which family issues can be explored, informing other work based in the Prison and the Community, including the emerging Pier to Pier Project, and links to employability initiatives which includes Retails Rock

6.7 In Summary

The Community Signature initiative has demonstrated ability to evidence needs and viewpoints in one locality, especially amongst hard to reach groups, offering invaluable insights into local values of the community.

There are also invaluable links to other local initiatives in Torry (and the City) involving the Pier to Pier Project involving the Prison, and the employability themed work around Retail Rocks.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

Report to South of the City Urban Regeneration Company Interim Board – dated 28th October 2008.