

**Chairperson's Report to the Annual General Meeting
of Glenfarg Community Council
11th May 2015**

When it comes to preparing a Chairperson's Report, it's always useful to remind yourself of what it is we should be doing as a Community Council and making an assessment of how we're doing against that criteria. What we should be doing is laid out in the Scheme of Establishment handed down to all Community Council in Perth & Kinross by the local authority in 2011, when Community Councils were reformed and their system of accountability and governance changed.

So what should the Community Council be doing?

- It is to be a voice for the local area
- It should articulate the views and concerns of people in the local area
- It must involve the people of the community
- It should give views on planning matters in the community council area and,
- It should carry out activities that serve the interests of the community

So, what does our report card say? I'd suggest it says something like, "Very good in some areas. Trying very hard in others, but still room for improvement."

I have said before and remain of the view, that I think our contribution to decision-making in terms of planning matters has always been measured, constructive and objective. It is regrettable that there is still a legacy whereby the impression given is that planning officials of the local authority seem to regard Community Council representations as something of an irritation. I think the fact that our recent submission in respect of an application for a solar power development informed both elected members and, it seems, officials of matters that had not been taken into account, is evidence of the constructive role that this Community Council has taken on planning issues. It would be nice to think that might be acknowledged one day by the planning authority.

I think this community council has and continues to strive towards, meaningful and purposeful engagement with the community and works hard to encourage all sectors of the community to express their views and concerns. That bit about 'all sectors' is so important because at a community level, it would be so easy for one or two specific interest groups or sectors to dominate consultative processes just as a result of their interest and willingness to be involved, not through any intent to dominate. So, it is vital that the Community Council continues in its efforts to make sure that the voice of everyone in the community is able to be heard.

The fact that this Community Council does engage in consultative processes must be regarded as a huge strength. It's not an simple thing to do and the easiest answer would be to say 'It's too hard' and just not do it.

As we go into the autumn of 2015, the Community Council will be undertaking a major consultation. This will be part of the process of creating a vision for the community. There are a couple of things to note about this.

Firstly, the idea of developing an overarching vision came from those involved in the Glenfarg Renewable Energy Association. If even just some of GREA's plans come to fruition, it opens up the opportunity for this community to benefit significantly. Importantly, it will create an income stream for the community to sit alongside all those other fund-raising and income-generating activities that go on. So, to help decision-making about how we should use resources that might be available for the longer-term sustainable development of our community, we want the people in the community to develop a vision for what we want for our community over, say, the next 5 to 10 years.

Secondly, the creation of a vision will happen with a solid launching off point already in place. The Glenfarg Conversation produced a very clear set of priorities – those things that people said they wanted to see happen/be developed in the community. The idea of creating a vision wants to build on that and use the outcomes of Glenfarg Conversation as its reference point.

So, later in the year, every person in every household, along with all the groups and associations in the community will be invited to complete a questionnaire. That will then be followed up by an event here in the Hall to which everyone will be invited, so that we can start to bring the ideas together into a statement of what we want the community in which we live, to achieve.

The Community Council does not, of course, have a role in the direct delivery of services within the community. But it does have a voice and can use that voice to argue the case of our community. The savage cuts that have been brought to bear on public services have an effect on the community and many of the people in it. We know, for example, that the local authority has been forced to cut back on its ground maintenance work, that questions are being raised about the viability of subsidised bus services, that individuals are experiencing hardship because of welfare benefit cuts.

With a General Election just having taken place, we know, in general terms, what economic policy will look like over the next 5 years. As a Community Council we need to use our voice to make sure that the needs and aspirations of our community are known and understood by our elected representatives and the officers who are accountable to them.

So, there are challenges as well as many opportunities for the Community Council. What I hope is that people in the community will want to play a part in meeting those challenges and grasping those opportunities. The Community Council needs new figures coming on to give it energy and to challenge existing practices and processes. I, for example, have been a member of the Community Council since 2007 and the chairperson since 2011. I'm not good at walking away from things, feeling as if I'm letting people down. But that has, arguably, been too long and I'd be delighted if there were a queue of potential Community Councillors for the election in November and I could graciously take a back seat. Similarly, if one of the present group of Community Councillors would like the

opportunity to chair this body, then I would be happy to step aside to enable that to happen.

With Sheila's death in December my world has changed and you do see things in different ways and begin to develop different aims and objectives for yourself. But, in the meantime, I hope I can contribute constructively to the activity of the Community Council.

It is customary in this report to thank Community Council members. And I do. But just to say thank you is not enough when you know the dedication to the task shown by this group of Community Councillors. We have a knowledgeable and skilful group of people who are committed to serving and meeting the best interests of this community. In times when the dominant view in society seems to be more and more about 'Me' and 'What can I get out of it?' it is a credit to that there are people who think 'What can I do for my community?' I have said in previous Annual Reports that I think it's remarkable that people are willing to give of their time for no reward other than the hope of doing some good for the community. I do think that is a wonderful thing. Long may we hold on to and cherish such values.

Thanks are also due to those who serve their community, but not necessarily so obviously as being members of the Community Council. One example of that is the editorship of the Newsletter. And we should all be very grateful to Robin Watson for stepping in recently to take over on this. Another example are those who organise the annual fete. There are others and all of those involved deserve praise and thanks, even though that is not what they seek.

We have an extraordinarily vibrant community. Social, sporting, cultural needs are catered for. And it takes a lot of time and commitment from people to deliver these opportunities. But it's those things that make our community what it is. A place in which I am very proud to live.

Donald J MacKenzie