

## **EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES - BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The Empowering Communities Pilot Project, originally called Sustainable Communities, is an OIC led initiative which will provide Community Councils in fragile island communities the opportunity to have a greater responsibility for the management and delivery of Council run services in their area. Local input could provide a new way to support and develop communities across Orkney, developing services which are more responsive to local demand, while also creating a more efficient means of delivery for the Council. It is anticipated that there could be significant opportunities for other local community groups to contribute to, and benefit from, this innovative approach.

This project has been developed as a response to the feedback from OIC's Tough Times Tough Choices public consultation sessions held in 2010 where responses suggested that Community Councils should play a greater role in administering Council services as an alternative to reducing the Council services provided.

A conference, involving Community Councillors, Elected Members and Council Officers, was held in April 2011. Feedback from the Conference was extremely positive where many innovative suggestions and approaches emerged on how the Council could improve services and introduce efficiencies within service provision particularly in island areas.

Following an initial assessment of the conference feedback a more comprehensive consultation was undertaken with Community Councils. This confirmed that there was a demand for Council services to be shaped and tailored to suit the communities with opportunities for Community Councils to become involved in the delivery and management of those services at a local level.

In late 2012 Spyria Partnership was engaged by OIC to undertake a feasibility study and prepare a business plan for the Empowering Communities project which would include the identification of resources required to establish pilots within two island communities. Community Councils also fed into this process by identifying a range of skills available in each community.

Spyria Partnership undertook an extensive engagement exercise over approximately a six month period with community groups, Council officers and partnership agencies and regularly provided the Sustainable Communities Member/ Officer Working Group (MOWG) with updates and progress reports of the work undertaken.

Part of the remit of the MOWG was to identify two islands where pilot projects could be established and, as a result of a thorough evaluation process, using a complex matrix developed by Spyria Partnership, Papa Westray and Stronsay were identified as being best placed to participate in the first stage of this pilot process.

A centrally based project co-ordinator, Shaun Hourston-Wells, was recruited in November 2013 to develop a business plan for each pilot island, in consultation, with the Community Councils and other community groups. The objective was to establish options and activities which involved more local input into service delivery and which would also achieve efficiencies. Shaun moved to another post in July 2014 and, since the project had moved quickly into an operational phase, the remit of the post was revised and a new Empowering Communities Liaison Officer post was created to support the pilot islands and Democratic Services in general. Jackie Montgomery took on this role in January 2015.

An Island Link Officer post was established in each of the pilot islands in June 2015. Lynda Sharp took up the role in Papa Westray and Colin McAlpine in Stronsay. A community office has been established in the former Library, Papay Schoolhouse and the Fish Mart, Stronsay.

## KEY OUTCOMES

The key outcomes of the project are to develop and assess options which will:-

- create efficiencies in terms of resource and/or cost;
- increase employment opportunities in island communities;
- up-skill the island based workforce;
- increase sustainability through building capacity to manage and deliver local services and improve access to services
- enable locally based community groups to work together to maximise the potential benefits to island residents.

The Empowering Communities project demonstrates a unique partnership approach which will support a number of the outcomes identified in the Orkney Community Planning Partnership's Single Outcome Agreement including National Outcome 11:-

***“we have strong, resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others”***

## HIE SUPPORT

HIE works closely with island communities primarily through the provision of support to the Local Development Trusts which is a feature of HIE's Community Account Management (CAM) approach. Over the past four years HIE has provided support to seven Development Trusts through CAM and this has enabled them to employ part time Community Development Officers and Administration and Finance Officers and has allowed them to pursue projects identified in their local development plans.

HIE supports community groups to develop income streams from community owned assets but recognises that this approach has limitations and that other opportunities for improving the sustainability of fragile communities should be supported. The Empowering Communities Pilot Project is an alternative approach and is a strategic fit with HIE's priorities in a number of areas:-

- It will help to build the resilience of communities in fragile areas;
- It supports community led development; and
- It supports the creation and development of social enterprises.

HIE is participating in the Empowering Communities Pilot Project for a number of reasons:-

- The project will devolve responsibility for the provision of some services to individual communities and will enhance local decision making;
- The sustainability of local businesses and service providers will be improved as they will have the opportunity to bid to carry out some of the devolved services; and
- There will be an opportunity for Community Councils, Development Trusts, Community Associations and other local groups to play a part in the project. This will build capacity and will foster close and more effective working relationships. Each group may play a different role but collectively they will enhance the sustainability of their community.

Papa Westray has not been involved in HIE's CAM but has had the support of a Development Officer funded by OIC.

HIE has recently confirmed that they will continue to contribute funding towards the EC Liaison Officer post up to a total project cost of £48,000.

## **NATIONAL AWARENESS**

The Orkney Community Council system has long been recognised as an example of best practise and consequently there have been several occasions in recent years where OIC staff have been invited to participate in Scottish Government Working Groups to establish national CC policies and guidelines.

The Democratic Services Manager was invited to present a workshop on Partnership working with Community Councils at the Scottish Community Planning Annual Conference in June 2014. Feedback was very positive and other local authorities are regularly advised by Scottish Government officers to contact OIC for advice on engaging with communities.

The OIC Empowering Communities project fits all the objectives of the Scottish Government's Community Empowerment Scotland Bill 2015. During a visit to Orkney in June 2015, Marco Biagi, Minister for Local Government and Community Empowerment was impressed with the variety of partnership projects involving community groups, which were taking place in Orkney. He has since promoted the successful partnership between OIC and Orkney Community Councils at national community empowerment events.