

**COLLATED RESPONSES TO REVIEW OF COMMUNITY COUNCIL SCHEME  
QUESTIONNAIRE**

*The following responses were gathered from members of the public in the East of Edinburgh. A total of 25 responses were received.*

**1. NAME OF COMMUNITY COUNCIL ...Portobello Community Council**

*24 responses were in respect of Portobello Community Council. One respondent was unsure of which council covered their area – Willowbrae.*

**2. To what extent are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the Edinburgh Community Council Scheme?**

Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Don't know
		1	4	19	1

**Please give reasons to support your answer.**

*"The Portobello Community Council has been run by a small 'cabal' of people who behave in an undemocratic way. It is impossible to vote them off, because they vote each other on., time and time again. Some members have served for 15 years. Community Councils should have a LIMIT on the amount of time any one individual is allowed to serve (suggest two terms max and then at least one full term of three years before they can stand again). They should also be OBLIGED to evidence how they consult with the community before making representations."*

*"I do not believe that the community council is representative of the community it represents. I do not believe that the community council seeks to consult the community in a meaningful way, rather is driven by individuals who have their own agenda and political bias. I think there could be an improved format for the totally mundane and systems led meetings. eg. they could have the feedback from cec elected representatives, police, neighbourhood partnership reps, etc, in written form prior to that meeting so that any issues relevant can be put on the agenda instead of wasting time with routine verbal feedback. Issues of significant local importance have been dismissed or side lined."*

*“No consultation with local people. Important decisions made on our behalf with no mandate and in some cases appear to support the interests of cc individual members “*

*“The portobello community council has been so unwilling to be a voice for the community that I did not know it existed until recently. They have never consulted any decision to anybody in the community and take decisions on behave of all of us based in their own personal views and interests. A total mockery of grass roots democracy.”*

*“Portobello cc do not represent the views of the vast majority of portobello. They operate as a closed shop, never soliciting views outside of their secret society, using it to suit their own ends. A sham.”*

*“Never hear from our community council to find out, only second hand information via Talk Party.”*

*“The present scheme has allowed my local CC not only to fail in representing the wishes of the community but to actively subvert those wishes.*

*"Point 2 of the document refers to ""the general purpose of a community council shall be to ascertain, co-ordinate and express to the local authorities for its area, and to public authorities, the views of the community which it represents, in relation to matters for which those authorities are responsible, and to take such action in the interests of that community as appears to it to be expedient and practicable". As long as I have been a resident here (12 years) there has been no consultation with the public and indeed in the case of the Portobello High School our Community Council have deliberately ignored the views of the the majority in our community.*

*“In Section 3 of the scheme it is noted that the role of the Community Council will include to ""(S)eeK to broaden both representation and expertise by enlisting associate members onto the community council for specific projects/issues.*

*“and*

*“Make particular efforts to encourage young people and other under-represented groups to attend/participate in community council meetings and activities to ensure equality of opportunity in the way the community council carries out its functions.*

*“In my experience of Portobello Community Council these points have been wilfully discouraged.*

*“I make these comments as a community member who has attended a few Portobello Community Council meetings and the Emergency Community Council Meeting which was called earlier this year.*

*“I feel the CC does not truly reflect the wishes of the majority in Portobello, and the committee can be heavy handed in pushing through their own personal views.*

*“The local community Council does not represent local opinion and does not consult with local people to establish what local opinion might consist of.*

*“Our community council has a cabal who control decision making. This is evident at any meeting when you see how certain members rally round the 'quiet people' telling them how they want them to vote. It is a complete joke and I will never return to a meeting so long as*

*that behaviour continues and we have the controlling influence of the Secretary behaving as she does. It is quite awful.*

*"The Community Council in Portobello have a track record of ignoring the community and of being dominated by a select few individuals treating it as a personal hobby horse.*

*"The community council in my area does not seem to routinely consult the community on the big issues facing Portobello. They should be required to do so, e.g. via on-line poll or ballot box in the local library.*

*"There doesn't seem to be sufficient diversity in the make up of the community council - in age, ability, 'class' or ethnic group. Therefore I wonder whether the range of perspectives put forward is broad enough to represent our community.*

*"It is also not clear how groups are chosen to 'nominate' members to sit on the CC.*

*"At present, it seems like there are a lot of groups on our CC which are issue specific campaign groups with no broader / long-term agenda or positive vision for Portobello's future. One might go as far as to say it looks/feels like a cartel of those who do not want any kind of new development to take place. We need a balance between opposing inappropriate development and encouraging positive, sustainable development."*

*"I believe that many members of PCC do not follow the code of conduct, for example, they do not actively engage with the community they allegedly 'represent'.*

*I am of the opinion that the PCC do not represent the community accurately.*

*I understand that many of the members are not elected and simply get a place on the council by creating an interest group, and that voting, for example for a chairperson, is meaningless. I have attended meetings and found them to be intimidating and very much a closed group. In my opinion a cabal is a fairly appropriate description."*

*"Our community council does not consult the community and are consistently at odds., especially when it comes to planning matters. For example they recently objected to a new build home, which attracted a large number of letters of support from the community. Support letters outnumbered objections by a factor of 5. And our CC objected on grounds that were proved to be spurious and the application was passed unanimously by the DMSC. Our CC is in the grip of a small number of activists who despise our City council and do their utmost to thwart anything positive."*

*"The council have failed to represent the majority of the community on the issue of the building a local high school due to the personal views of individuals on the community council. They have failed miserably to represent the community on this issue in any meaningful or fair way and as result have earned the derision of the majority of the community and brought the potentially meaningful role of community councils into disrepute."*

*"They don't consult with or listen to the community and often the opinions which they pass on to CEC can have very real and Devastating effects on the people concerned"*

*"While the rules governing the actions of community councils and community councillors seem reasonable and clearly presented, the scheme appears to lack any sort of ability to enforce these rules or to take action when the scheme is abused."*

*"Over the 9 years I have been resident in Portobello, the PCC has been largely invisible. On discovering the PCC mid 2012 I learned that several of its key members were also key activists in the PPAG campaign. This struck me as an obvious conflict of interest and undermined my confidence in the current PCC to objectively represent the community. It*

*also appears that key figures within the PCC exert an undue influence and appear to have been members of the PCC for a very considerable time. I would have thought, in the interest of equal opportunity and fair representation, that PCC membership would be limited to a fixed period of time / terms. “*

*“Besides this the PCC do not appear to have grasped their responsibility to adequately consult the community on local issues. There is no engagement with commonly used social media technology, e.g Facebook, Survey Monkey, which could readily be utilised to connect and more effectively engage with the community . The absence of transparent engagement has led me to the conclusion that the PCC has become a personal fiefdom for a proportion of its members who misuse their office in pursuit of a personally motivated agenda. The result is in my opinion, an ineffectual PCC, which is very disappointing as there is a wealth of talent within Portobello, who given the opportunity would revitalise and give genuine purpose back to the PCC and the contribution it could make towards Portobello's continuing development.”*

*“This is based solely on the experiences of our local CC, but in over 13 years here we have never once had our views actively sought on any crucial area and in recent months have found the CC to be at complete odds with the vast majority of local community, with particular regard to the Portobello High School and the Sainsburys developments where CC have not represented the views and indeed, needs of the community at large. It would appear, on the basis of these issues and historically many others that CC have proposed a view of position which is dearly held by by them as individuals, but not widely agreed and approved by the community they propose to represent.”*

*“Seems to be a little cabal of people who have little interest in representing the views of the community ( esp in light of the high school debacle) and use their position to promote their own self interests. There is little in the way of consultation, nor is there much consistency in what they comment on ( e.g objecting to solar panels in one location and not in another). Through their various "Protest" groups, each one of which has some acronym, they have become something of an embarrassment to the wider community.”*

*“The council do not seek to understand the views of the community, they have their own agenda and do not represent the community”*

*“It does not seem to take on board the views of the majority. And certain pressure groups seem to wield power.”*

*“I resigned from the CC, partly due to time constraints, but also due to the complete lack of interest of the PCC in the views of the community.*

*Basically, it was a cherry picking exercise, not consulting the community where the community disagreed with the inner sanctum of the PCC. Then where there was support asking the community to gather round and fight for an issue.*

*There is evidence where the PCC have taken a stance completely at variance with the community. The PCC does not represent Portobello.”*

*“I am not aware of community councils operating in my area - Willowbrae - do I get info, is there one?”*

### 3. How often should community council elections be held?

4 yearly cycle	3 yearly cycle	Other (please specify)
1	14	2 yearly = 3 responses

### 4. In your opinion which of the 2 options do you consider most appropriate?

National Model Scheme	Edinburgh Scheme	Other
12	9	

#### Reasons for response:-

*“why do we have something s few of us know about I only found out about them because of the furore over the Portobello High School. I am too busy working full-time and running my family life but it would seem my taxes pay for something I know very little about yet which appears to have a big impact on y life. It seems to be another layer of admin/govt that we do not need and are not representative.”*

*“The question is framed in a jargon which makes it unclear. Also it is not clear what is directing us to consider.”*

*“Cost”*

*“For clarity it would be preferable to have a national scheme for elections*

*“Seems more likely that an appointed officer would remain unbiased if there are local disagreements”*

*“Greater independence and impartiality would be reassuring and people would have more faith in the outcomes.”*

*“someone independent would get confidence back into PCC”*

*“Fulfils two key principles for elections - independence and consistency.”*

*“The City council are best placed to organise CC elections”*

*“ Given the poor performance of the current community council regarding the crucial community issue of a new high school I do not have confidence in the independence of a CEC run scheme, as there are too many overlaps of interest between the local community council and the city council. “*

*“I have no strong feeling on this, but a national model would allow returning officers from outwith the city, which could be seen as fairer.”*

*“Appointing an Independent Returning Officer would seem the most transparent and democratic approach to such elections.”*

*“I think in the interests of transparency CEC CCs should be in line with all others.”*

*“The question asks for 2 answers but only allows one to be netered, but basically I am happy for CEC to administer the elections, however, more info on the run up would be useful. Whilst very few people vote in these elections, I suspect the general feeling towards the currency Portobello CC will genberate a lot more interest in the future.”*

*“That way there can not be any accusations of collusion.*

*”*

*“I do not think it makes much difference, there has never been an election.”*

**5. Do you agree that Community Councils should continue to have provision for both elected and nominated members?**

Yes	No	Don't know
10	14	1

**6. Should nominated and elected members have the same rights on community councils?**

Yes	No	Don't know
3	20	2

**7. Does the Scheme provide sufficient information on a nominated member's role on the community council?**

Yes	No	Don't know
2	14	8

**8. Is the process for the appointment of nominated members clearly outlined in the Scheme?**

Yes	No	Don't know
3	9	13

**9. Are there any types of groups which should not be represented on community councils?**

Yes	No	Don't know
17	4	4

**10. Please give reasons to support your answers above.**

*"Busy, young people who are put off by the set up and behaviour and bullying that goes on in PCC"*

*"My belief is that the whole notion of nominated members is fraught with difficulty and the source of many issues regarding how our CC operates. It has allowed for 'astro-turfing' - where to those outside the community it may look like a uniform view has been put forward by a range of local groups, but rather than showing unity of position amongst a diverse population, it is actually a result of the same people sitting on most / a large number of the groups. Much better to simplify the whole system and just go with open elections alone, allowing local people to decide directly who represents them."*

*"If a nominations system is to stay, those groups set up to conduct short-term campaigns around specific issues (e.g, a specific planning proposal) with no broader / long-term agenda or positive vision for the area's future, should not be allowed in."*

*It is my experience that those representing specific groups should not be allowed to hold office, as they may not be seen as impartial in decision-making/minute taking/ representing the views of the community.*

"

*"Groups that lie to the community and those that use lies to raise funds from the community."*

*"The members of the council should appointed by election only. Any local interest group should have to work for their representation through the ballot box."*

*"Nominated members should be there to provide information on the needs and views of the organisations they represent. They should not be allowed to vote or hold office."*

*The issue of an organizations eligibility is a tricky one, but an organisation which exists primarily to represent or lobby a particular view or range or views should not be eligible. When a community council is debating issues it should have the ability to invite and hear from such local groups as required, but they should not be sitting members."*

*"Q9. On issues where there is a conflict or vested interest members should be compelled to disclose and be required to abstain from on voting on such issues."*

*If there are to be nominated members then it would be useful to have some sort of "weighting" of voting rights. It is a travesty that a nominated member representing a small minority, single issue group has the same voting rights as an elected member representing the majority of the community. Perhaps some sort of block voting might be more democratic."*

*“By allowing nominated members, and giving them the same voting rights, you are effectively removing the democratic process and allowing these groups to bring their friends on board and become a clique.”*

*“Several groups are represented by the same people and so it appears that one persons view carries more weight”*

*“As being unelected members they should not have a vote. If they are on the council it should be only on an advisory role.”*

*“Groups which have been proven to misrepresent issue's”*

### 11. Who do you think should enforce and administer the Code of Conduct?

Community Council	Local Authority	Other Community Council	Neighbourhood Partnership	Edinburgh Association of Community Councils	Other Local Authority	Other	Don't know
0	10	0	1	7	2	2	0

**If other, please state:-**

*“The people of the area of the community council”*

*“It should definitely be enforced by a third party.”*

*“A national body would be most ideal, as this makes any personal connection/ bias less likely and also ensures enforcement practice is informed by the widest pool of learning. However, I'm aware the national body for community councils has just been dissolved, so in the absence of this I think the local authority would be next best.”*

*“It should be an outside agency so that there is not any accusations of collusion. There should be someone like an ombudsman.”*

### 12. Is the current CC guidance note on dealing with disputes adequate?

Yes	No	Don't know
4	8	12

**If 'no' what form of guidance and support in relation to dispute resolution would be helpful?**

*“Officers do not appear to be clear on the code of conduct/standing orders - as recent disputes in this area have made abundantly clear. “*

*"I have never seen this CC guidance"*

*"Don't know what the guidance is but in practice, in Portobello, the cc appear to be able to make their own rules and manipulate outcomes without anyone stopping them."*

*"Needs to be easier for the community to challenge the CC"*

*"I do not think that any dispute should be 'resolved' by the decision of the chair alone. For example, the special meeting called in Portobello."*

*"Arbitrators"*

*"Perhaps CEC official could attend local cc meetings, inviting the public to discuss, debate and potentially resolve such disputes, in the open and by transparent means. Certainly one of the recent PCC meetings resulted in some important issues (high school again) and a letter signed by a large number of residents being shoved way down the agenda"*

*"As it is dealt with the City Council its self. It is judge and jury."*

**13. Please use the following space for any comments or suggestions regarding the Code of Conduct and the process for administering this.**

*"Start by informing about the existence, role and guidance of the Community Councils to the population"*

*"I do not believe that the Code of Conduct has been followed by some members of the PCC."*

*"I strongly suggest that prospective community councillors are given a written (on line) examination on their understanding of the code of conduct and its implications."*

*"The code is clear. However, from personal experience, when a CC and/or CC members act in breach the code it is almost impossible to do anything about it. This leads to a great deal of frustration within communities and, ultimately, the marginalisation of the CC scheme."*

**14. Do you agree that the CC AGM shall be held in May each year?**

Yes	No	Don't know
16	0	8

**15. Has your community council organised a special meeting in response to a petition from residents?**

Yes	No
21	1

**If 'yes' do you have any comments on the guidance regarding Special Meetings as outlined in the Scheme, Constitution and Standing Orders?**

*"No"*

*"I am not sure whether the emergency meeting of Portobello Community Council was planned in accordance with the guidance. Which makes a mockery of such guidance"*

*"Don't think the guidance was followed here! Ehat are the sanctions for failing to follow the guidance?"*

*"It was a farce. We were spoken to as though we were stupid and about to break out into a riot. Far too much credence was given to the bullies on the PCC and never again should anyone give a microphone to Stephen Hawkins."*

*"Utterly pointless. PCC completely ignored the core reason for the special meeting because several members of the PCC disagreed with the request."*

*"Our CC organised a special;meeting and broke most of the guidance notes and standing orders. The timing was outwith the guidance, the venue was too small to accomodate all that tried to attend and the chair was unfair, manipulating the outcome to suit his personal agenda."*

*"The petitioners should be able to write the agenda, rather than the community council chair stopping discussion on certain topics"*

*"It should be possible to request an independent chair and scrutineers from those administering the scheme if the special meeting concerns the actions of the CC or CC members."*

*"The chair should not be allowed to decide on the validity of an item or motion. If the special meeting is correctly petitioned, then the matters on the petitions should be discussed and voted as requested."*

*"There would appear on the basis of my experience of this little opportunity for the weight of community needs, prompting such a meeting in the first place to be taken into account. "*

*"The community council decided to ignore the outcomes"*

*"The special meetings should not be chaired by the chair of the CC where it has been requested by petition from the members of the community or at anytime there is deemed to be a conflict with the current chair."*

**16. Should the Scheme continue to include provision for special meetings?**

Yes	No	Don't know
23	0	1

**If not, please state why.**

**17. Should there be a requirement in the Scheme for CCs to demonstrate how they are fulfilling their responsibilities as representative bodies?**

Yes	No	Don't know
24	0	1

**If, 'yes' can you suggest how this could be implemented eg submission of annual report to Community Council Liaison Officer?**

*"Annual report is an onerous thing to prepare. They should simply be made to evidence - with every single representation they make - how they consulted the community and the response they got. This would stop them from interfering in things they should not be bothering with, e.g. individual planning applications.*

*They should have a proper website.*

*"*

*"I think that they should follow a simple process of demonstrating how they have consulted the community they represent.*

*Each decision should include a comment on if consultation is needed, how it was undertaken, why it was not undertaken, etc."*

*"Including proof and publication*

*"With total transparency and accountability"*

*"Think it needs something with a bit more teeth than a report to a CCLO! An officer doing spot checks with owners to force changes might be better. Report writing in Portobello is always manipulated by a select few."*

*"Annual report to both liaison officer and local community."*

*"An annual report might be sufficient."*

*"If the PCC was to set up a webpage on their website which was monitored independently, whereby it could consult with members of the community then material gathered through this could be forwarded to the CCLO as evidence of representation."*

*"Submission of full minutes of all meetings and annual report to a liaison officer*

*Annual report would be useful but also need to explain locally, so quarterly reports in the Portobello Reporter and/or community webpage as well."*

*"they must demonstrate how and who they are consulting when they make representations to the council on planning applications or at public inquiries in appeal situations. To date this has not been done at PCC. They assume a responsibility they have bestowed upon themselves. They do not speak for me or my family."*

*"Surely a simple list of issues and actions can be held online and regularly updated - this would enable the community to see the benefits of having a community council AND prevent abuse of authority by any member."*

*"Requirement for an annual report would help, and should be widely published in the local community to ensure accuracy and accountability. The key thing this should demonstrate is consultation and involvement of local people in decision making/ representing our community's views. Any such consultation must be shown to be using best practice and meaningful. It must demonstrate how it meets equalities and inclusion principles. The CC could also call a broad spectrum of expert witnesses, from a range of backgrounds, to be heard in specific / difficult cases.*

*"However, the key thing is that there are sanctions in place should the annual report fall short of a pre-determined standard for local representation. The enforcing authority must be able to introduce sanctions that are meaningful and have 'bite'. e.g. a period of special monitoring if practice is poor or an excessive number of local complaints are made, or forcing early elections, financial sanctions, etc."*

*"They should be able to show how they have actively engaged and consulted with the community."*

*"An annual report would be good. it is relatively easy to set up electronic consultation with the community and an audit trail can be easily demonstrated."*

*"Ongoing, transparent consultation so that the community can see what is being consulted on and also how this is being communicated to the council "*

*"Annual report sounds good."*

*"Community feedback - it's hard to get people to respond and generally it's those who are dissatisfied who will, but some sort of visibility and satisfaction scores within the wider community could be gathered."*

*"An annual / half yearly report would be appreciated. At present there is an information void."*

*"Not only an annual report, but clear and concise examples of community engagement processes, linked to local developments CC submission regarding these. Any CC submission to CEC should contain within it details of how community engagement was handled, examples of community participation and inclusion of public views to support any proposed representation."*

*"Good idea"*

*"Annual reports and they should be published on line."*

*"A set number of community councillors requesting a testing of community opinion on an issue should trigger a mechanism for the above."*

*"The same should be triggered by a petition of, say 50, members of the community to end situations where the CC's follow their own narrow agenda."*

## **18. Are there any other areas of the Scheme which require to be revised or updated?**

*"Length of time any one individual can serve and the number of terms they can serve There should be training for Chairpersons, so that meetings take NO LONGER than 1.5 hours. This - in one fell swoop - would ensure that you got a lot more people taking part. At the moment, the meetings which last three hours, put off everyone apart from the die-hards."*

*"I don't know of any Scheme. To have it distributed and made it known to the people of the community it would be a start."*

*"CCs should be brought into the present age with eg use of social media which would add to transparency and thus fairness. Our local cc is disinterested in the views of the majority and appears only interested in acting as a means of knocking back planning applications."*

*"I'm not overly familiar with the scheme, but if it doesn't already then I think it should include some requirement to monitor the extent to which the CC's make up reflects that of the wider"*

*population, and to attempt to encourage those not currently represented (e.g. from specific age groups or ethnic minorities) to put themselves forward for election."*

*"I would like to see the Chairperson serve a maximum of 12 months and there to be a two year hiatus before they could stand again as Chair."*

*"Community consultation "*

*"See above - there needs to be greater body of evidence by CC when making submission to demonstrate that the views offered are indeed those of the MAJORITY of the community with examples of how this was reached. "*

**19. Please submit any other general comments and use continuation sheet if required.**

*"All the above can be summarized in the following: Edinburgh Council should have made sure that individuals know about the existence and roles of the Community Councils. "*

*"I am appalled by the state of affairs within PCC. That a few individuals can hold so much power and control is criminal. The lack of community consultation is embarrassing. "*

*"We have seen an instance this year where a community council was un-representative of the community on a wide range of local issues. The community found it was unable to do anything to redress the balance. If the CC scheme is to have a future, it must give communities more power to keep their councils in check."*

*"The present PCC is in need of radical shake up. Its appears resistant to change, is slow moving, is technologically behind the times, is ineffective as it is unable to engage and consult effectively, which a simple Facebook Group page could address and worst of all seems to hold little credibility within the community. Reform is badly needed  
CCs in my opinion currently do not represent the views of the community, merely those who sit upon them. If they are to remain as community entities, we need to see more evidence of their community engagement, less involvement of single issue, minority group nominated membership, with equal voting rights and more effort to seek and uphold the views, opinions and desires of the wider community."*

*"My comments relate to my own experience's on the Portobello Community Council where a small group of campaigners, supported by the Chair of the PCC continually dominate the agenda. "*

*"These action's are I believe, in danger of making the said CC an irrelevance."*