

Digital engagement workshops for Community Councils and Registered Tenant Organisations

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1 Overview

In October and November 2015 Edinburgh Napier University (Napier) hosted a series of workshops on digital engagement for Community Councillors and representatives of Registered Tenants Organisations. These ‘#digiCC’ workshops were held in Ayr, Elgin, Forfar and Newton St Boswells.

The workshops mixed presentations by subject experts with round-table discussions by the attendees.

This report is intended to be read by all interested in community councils and Registered Tenants Organisations, including the Scottish Government (SG), Improvement Service (IS) and Local Authority Community Council Liaison Officers (CCLOs).

It summarises the most significant findings from these workshops.

In summary, the events were well received and felt by delegates to be of immediate benefit. There is clear demand for more events of this nature, in particular for one in Glasgow. We would of course be very happy to offer more #digiCC workshops, and to contribute to training programmes building on the needs we have found.

The rest of this short report covers:

- a discussion of the broader issues raised by the workshops
- a summary of key findings together with possible responses
- an outline of the workshop process and contents.

Appendices contain links to further reading and resources.

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2 About the workshops

In 2015 a programme of four workshops on digital engagement for CCs and RTOs was commissioned by the Scottish Government's community empowerment team, on the strength of a workshop run by Edinburgh Napier University [in January 2015](#).

They took place in Ayr (9 October), Elgin (30 October), Forfar (13 November) and Newton St Boswells (20 November). They were organised and presented by Bruce Ryan and Peter Cruickshank of Napier's Centre for Social Informatics, in conjunction with the CCLOs of the host Local Authorities (LAs).

Each workshop consisted of small-group discussions, facilitated by staff from the local LA (Ayr, Elgin, Forfar) or the SG and IS (Newton St Boswells). The workshops were attended by 66 delegates representing 45 CCs and 6 RTOs from 17 LAs – see box.

LA's represented at the workshops

Aberdeen
Aberdeenshire
Angus
Dumfries & Galloway
Dundee
East Ayrshire
Highland
Moray
North Ayrshire
North Lanarkshire
Perth & Kinross
Renfrewshire
Scottish Borders
South Ayrshire
South Lanarkshire
Stirling
West Dunbartonshire

The discussion and recommendations are based on delegates' evaluation forms as well as findings recorded on flipcharts and videos.

The topics covered were:

- What are the major barriers to CC/RTO digital engagement?
- How can CCs and RTOs best use the internet?
- Topics chosen by delegates, which included
 - how to develop a shared platform on the web
 - what training is available? What training is required?
 - what should be the content of a CC social media toolkit?
 - legal liability, especially around use of social media
 - data protection
 - how to react to media enquiries
 - how to set up a web-page and get younger people involved
 - how to get more/younger people involved in CCs and subgroups
 - local workshops & training for website building
 - confusion between terms 'community council' and names of Local Authorities
 - the particular problems of small CCs.

These were interspersed with expert presentations on

- the background to the workshops and Napier's research into CC digital engagement
- SG work on community empowerment
- IS work on the KnowledgeHub, and the national CC website
- the Democratic Society's work on participatory budgeting
- the *Chewin' the Fat* Facebook group
- setting up websites using Weebly and Wordpress.com
- a talk by staff of Scottish Borders Council's Democratic Services team on their support of CCs
- the forthcoming upgrade to the national CC website and its CC location finder.

Appendix 1 gives further details of and links to the online resources mentioned here.

3 Discussion

The findings mostly confirm on a much wider basis those of a similar [workshop held at Napier](#) in January 2015, though delegates were more positive about digital engagement, although less skilled.

3.1 Networking and resource sharing

A key finding is that most CCs find it difficult to recruit sufficient members to develop and maintain digital engagement channels. Especially in rural areas, they tend to suffer poor internet connectivity, and LAs are generally not in a position to offer extensive support. One answer has to be better people networking between community councillors within and across LA boundaries. To enhance impact and save resources, CCs could use space on other community online presences, rather than seeing these organisations as competitors.

There is reluctance to go beyond providing information such as minutes or news about local events. For instance, while many of the CCs and RTOs at the workshops use Facebook, less than a third have enabled multi-way conversations.

3.2 General support needs

Current funding systems for CCs may not reflect their desires for IT resources. However, as made clear in [development of a model CC online presence](#), blog-based websites, Facebook and Twitter are free to use, and online presences should not cost more than £50 per year to maintain.

There is clearly wide variation in LA support for CCs, with some community councillors unaware of the supporting role of CCLOs and other relevant LA officials. (RTOs are supported by other structures.) Some delegates were concerned that the differences between Community Councils and LAs are not understood. It was suggested that the problem is actually lack of public knowledge about CCs' roles and positions, and that more engagement and self-publicity would help solve these issues.

The fact that LAs are responsible for oversight of CCs means that while the SG can support and listen to CCs, it cannot act directly. However, the SG and IS can have a role in providing resources and models for LAs to use, and they can publicise examples of good practice.

3.3 Need for long term planning

There are already many lapsed CC online presences ([Ryan and Cruickshank, 2014](#)), so while there is a clear appetite for hands-on demonstrations and guidance about how to create online presences, training must start with planning for the human resources necessary to maintain them. A time budget is needed for adding content to websites, in addition to the time taken to find appropriate content.

Secondly, modern blog-based platforms enable creation of websites with no requirement for coding skills, but the content and structure do need to be carefully planned. Models and templates can be useful here – as can a directory of good examples.

3.4 Other training needs

Attendees called for 'digital workshops in community centres', 'more prolonged/intense induction for CC/RTO members', and for training around complex subjects such as data protection, legal liability around social media use, dealing with disruptive members and handling media enquiries about online material. Most CC and RTO members do not have IT backgrounds, and most are out of formal education, so training should take into account ideas around lifelong learning.

4 Feedback

The events were well received and delegates felt that they were of immediate benefit.

Delegates acknowledged learning around

- finding out that CCs and RTOs have similar problems around digital engagement
- website creation and use
- how other CCs operate, and differences in their adoption of digital tools
- use and context of social media
- tools for community engagement and local democracy, e.g. participatory budgeting, charettes, Facebook polling
- availability of support and resources, e.g. national CC website, the KnowledgeHub, grants
- variations in support for CCs between LAs
- the need for succession planning
- data protection and security
- the Community Empowerment Act.

Other delegates stated they were now at the beginning of work to improve their digital engagement. Hence it would be valuable to investigate the ongoing effects of the workshops in the future.

Delegates scored the events highly for organisation, networking and learning. Most positive comments were on the small-group discussions and networking opportunities. There were also positive comments on the presentations, website-building demonstrations, and ‘the whole day’. Other suggestions, such as provision of handouts and reducing time spent moving between discussions and presentations, were used to improve subsequent workshops, leading to increased scores and feedback such as

‘Thanks for the workshops yesterday, they were informative and interesting. Happy to learn that [our CC is] one step in front, two steps sideways and about three back from others.’

While there was not enough time between individual workshops to create full reports on each of them, links to the outputs were sent soon after each event to all people who had booked places. These too garnered favourable comments such as

‘Thanks for the workshop – I found it very useful and apart from the FB and the Big Lunch, it has energised me to get our younger residents involved more in the community if possible!!’

There is clear demand for more #digiCC workshops. In particular, a workshop in Glasgow, to be funded by a small contribution from all Glasgow CCs, was suggested by an ‘activist’ CC member at the [Fairer Scotland event for CCs](#). Such an event could attract delegates from over 170 CCs within Glasgow and neighbouring LAs.

5 Main findings

Findings	Next steps and training needs
Before the workshops, only a third of the delegates had heard of the national CC website and only a quarter had heard of the KnowledgeHub.	These channels need more promotion if they are to underpin Scotland-wide discussion and support of CCs.
There is a substantial fear of IT in general and Facebook in particular leading to lack of will to engage digitally. For instance many delegates expressed concerns about complying with the Data Protection Act 1988 (DPA) and other laws.	<p>Demonstration of the benefits of digital engagement, as part of a suite of tools to engage with CCs' and RTOs' citizens.</p> <p>Clear advice on DPA compliance for community councillors</p>
Some CCs find it difficult to set up 'official' email addresses (e.g. secretary@myCC.net).	LAs should be encouraged to provide such email addresses. Training should recommend packages that include domains and email addresses.
<p>CC and RTO members who maintain their online presences are often unsupported.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On average, fewer than 2 people are able to directly add content to CC and RTO online presences. In practice even fewer actually do so. • Slightly more people provide content for 'digital engagers' to publish. • Most organisations do not have succession plans. Existing plans are not robust. 	<p>Internet training must include planning the human resources needed to maintain online presences, including succession planning and processes for creating the content to be shared.</p> <p><i>Ideally, at least two people per CC or RTO should be able to create online content, to allow for holidays, illness and retirement/succession.</i></p>
Facebook is the delegates' organisations channel of choice, despite its relatively low use by CCs in general.	Training must include consideration of the audiences CCs and RTOs need to reach, and how digital fits with traditional channels such as noticeboards.
Delegates appreciated demonstrations of developing websites on free-to-use platforms such as Weebly and Wordpress.com .	Tailored training for community councillors is needed to show exactly how online presences can be developed and maintained.
There is a need for example templates and accompanying good practice guides	Training must also cover the types of content appropriate to CC/RTO online presences.
CC and RTO online presences do not support comments by citizens or multi-way public discussions.	Training and support needs include the software and human resources needed for engagement.

Appendix 1: Further reading and resources

Most documents linked to here are in the library of the Scottish community councillors' KnowledgeHub group (<https://khub.net/group/scottish-community-councillors-online/library>). Membership of this group necessary to access the documents, but is open to all community councillors and will be considered for other stakeholders.

Other links are to:

- The Improvement Service YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCj0N2FYl2Ljb4oS49pyyqHQ>) and
- The national website for CCs (<http://www.communitycouncils.org.uk>).

Report on January digital engagement workshop

<https://khub.net/documents/10440977/16640080/digiCC+day+outcomes+report>

Current CC website, Facebook and twitter use

643 CCs have websites, 343 use Facebook, 114 use Twitter. These are not exclusive: for example, 157 CCs have websites and Facebook pages.

(Source: <https://khub.net/web/b.ryan/blog/-/blogs/2015-cc-digital-presences>)

Resources created by previous research by Edinburgh Napier University

Criteria for an ideal CC online presence:

<https://khub.net/documents/10440977/16901497/An+%E2%80%98ideal%E2%80%99+CC+online+presence.pdf>

Development of a model CC online presence

<https://khub.net/documents/10440977/16901497/a+model+CC+online+presence.pdf>

Report on 2014 survey of CC online presences

Ryan, B. M., & Cruickshank, P. (2014). *Community Councils online*.

(<http://www.iidi.napier.ac.uk/c/publications/publicationid/13379605>).

Fairer Scotland event for CCs

Report on national CC website

<http://www.communitycouncils.org.uk/read-the-community-council-fairer-scotland-event-report.html>

Some blog-based website platforms

- Weebly: <http://www.weebly.com/uk>
- Wordpress: <https://wordpress.com>
- Blogger: <https://www.blogger.com>

Appendix 2: Workshop presentations and outputs

The table below contain hyperlinks to documents can also be accessed on the KnowledgeHub group (<https://khub.net/group/scottish-community-councillors-online>) and the IS YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCj0N2FYL2Ljb4oS49pyyqHQ>).

Session	Ayr (South Ayrshire, 9 Oct)	Elgin (Moray, 30 Oct)	Forfar (Angus, 13 Nov)	Newton St Boswells (Scottish Borders, 20 Nov)
Welcomes, introductions and presentations				
Welcome	• video	-----	-----	-----
Introduction and background to the workshops	• video • presentation	• video • presentation	• video • presentation	• video • presentation
Scottish Government presentation on community empowerment	• video • presentation	• video • presentation	• video • presentation	• video • presentation
Improvement Service presentation on digital resources for community councils	• video • presentation	• video • presentation	• video • presentation	• video • presentation
The Democratic Society presentation on digital tools for community councils	• video • presentation	• video • presentation	-----	• video • presentation
<i>Chewin' the Fat</i> , a Facebook page for Community Councillors	• video • handout • presentation	-----	-----	-----
Presentation on CC digital success stories	-----	• video	-----	-----
Small group sessions				
Session 1: What are the major barriers to CC/RTO digital engagement?	• video • flipchart – all tables • flipchart – table 5	• video • flipchart – all tables	• video • flipchart – all tables	• video • flipchart – all tables
Session 2: How can CCs/RTOs best use the internet?	• video • flipchart – all tables • flipchart – table 3/4 • flipchart – table 5	• video • flipchart – all tables	• video • flipchart – all tables	• video • flipchart – all tables
Session 3: Topics chosen by delegates	• video • flipchart – table 3/4 • flipchart – table 5	• video	• video • flipchart - topics • flipchart – findings	• video • flipchart – all tables
Final discussion/closing the events				
Final discussion and close	• video	-----	• video	-----