

FIFE FORUM ACTION GROUPS

Annual Report 2024



Fife Forum

Making Community Contributions

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Background

According to the National Records of Scotland (2020) the population of Fife is some 374,130 with 78,169 people aged 65+, which is around 21% of the total population. This demographic is rising and is projected to reach 25% of the population by 2030.

Fife Forum was originally designed with the intention of providing this segment of the population a platform upon which they could be afforded a voice on the matters and issues relevant to them. In this sense, this was a pre-cursor, for this particular population grouping, to the wider all-encompassing programme of 'Participation & Engagement' supported by the Fife Health & Social Care Partnership. Fife Forum remains a platform upon which older people are encouraged to participate and engage and contribute to the Participation & Engagement programme supported by the Fife Health & Social Care Partnership, in relation to the issues and processes relevant to them. We hope by supporting this we allow older people opportunity to express their thoughts, voice their opinions and influence the issues that matter to them alongside the policy areas which direct health, well-being and care.

Traditionally this work was undertaken via local Forums for retired people aged 55+ and local User Panels for frailer elderly older people 70+. The Covid pandemic had significant consequences for these groups and post-pandemic the service is in the process of recovery; being reformed and reconfigured to best support the continuation of providing the older people of Fife a relevant platform upon which they are enabled to participate and engage in the processes which impact their lives and daily living.

The Covid Pandemic & Post-Covid

Historically Forums and User Panels operated in 12 local areas (8 Forums and 4 User Panels) within the 7 Fife localities. These were supported by two part time project staff with oversight provided by the then CEO (prior to the expansion of the charity the CEO was the Fife Forum Co-ordinator whom in addition to his management responsibilities co-ordinated these groups). The Forums operated as individually constituted groups under the umbrella of the Fife Elderly Forum (now Fife Forum) and contributed to the governance of Fife Forum via Board Membership (trustees).

Prior to and during the Covid pandemic the operation of these groups were impacted by staff vacancies and then significantly were disrupted by the mandatory national shut downs imposed by the pandemic for public health grounds. The subsequent anxieties post-pandemic in relation to re-emerging from this and, sadly, the death of members had a significant detrimental impact on the groups with only 3 Forums emerging from this (Benarty, Dunfermline and Cupar).

Commencing September 2023 to support the service area and to assist recovery a full-time staff member was employed in a new guise as a 'Support & Development Worker'. Unfortunately, progress was halted as the post became vacant 9 months later. This report will, therefore, present data from the period of Jan-June 2024 alongside a summary for the 2nd half of 2024 with a view to presenting how Fife Forum will move the service forward during 2025.

Forums

Are open to any person over 55. The group members can share good practice but also identify gaps in services.

At the monthly meetings, opportunities are created to hear from, but also to ask questions of, a range of statutory and third sector services providers and organisations. On occasion service planners maybe invited to attend future meetings to discuss the issues raised by the Forums. Three groups emerged post-pandemic.

It is worth noting anecdotally, members whom remained partially engaged during the pandemic and those engaged after emerging post-covid, believe a primary purpose of the Forums is to provide social contact. Whilst, this is a recognised benefit of the groups and should not be dismissed or diminished, Fife Forum must be mindful this is not a core role of the service and that social engagement is not in itself a prescribed purpose within the context of our Service Level Agreement with the Fife Health & Social Care Partnership.

User Panels


Are geared towards older frailer people 70+ and group meetings are more supported with transportation provided. These are directly facilitated by the Support & Development Worker and are not individually constituted. The meetings follow the same format of the Forums, however, the group members must be service recipients of Health & Social Care Services and discuss issues that they face as a demographic group within this context.

These groups host smaller numbers than Forums and the members are amongst the most vulnerable. As a consequence, this service area was impacted wholesale by the pandemic. None of these groups emerged post-pandemic.

Support & Development Worker Role

From January-June 2024 the Support & Development Worker continued to try and re-energise the remaining groups and worked towards exploring opportunities to develop participation and engagement in other guises. During this process, it was apparent pre-existing groups remaining had shared and different expectations including how they might be supported. The themes emerging were:

- The need for an administrative role such as minute/note taking
- Sourcing and organising speakers
- Increasing membership
- Liaising with Fife Forum with reference to constitutional matters



"It's been good having the Development Worker doing the minutes, suggesting speakers and promoting the group around the area.

We've increased our membership and are looking forward to growing over the next year".

Member

- To support the social aspect of the group
- Keeping groups informed of financial, welfare, social and health developments locally, Fife-wide and nationally

The challenges which presented included:

- Re-igniting/generating new interest in the Forums and User Panels and their intended purpose
- Competing with a wide range of clubs/groups for potential members' time particularly where other activities offered more socially-centred opportunities which included free lunches or areas of specific interest
- Reaching people – particularly those whom do not engage in social media
- Overcoming post-covid reluctance/hesitancy for some older people whom are or remain fearful of engaging with groups

For those already engaging, there was a general consensus emerging amongst members suggesting the traditional method of separating the groups based on age and frailty should discontinue particularly as most members were already 70+. Given User Panels had already ceased owing to the aforementioned external impacts it, therefore, made some sense to amalgamate groups and/or refocus towards sourcing alternative ways of engaging frailer older people. A method for consideration would potentially be to tie in to pre-existing groups of people which might already host this demographic (for example: sheltered/retirement complexes). With this in mind, groups would begin to be retagged as 'Action Groups' as a way to highlight their intended role as having a more targeted function, helping to realign their primary purpose with the view to presenting social engagement as a benefit rather than a primary objective.

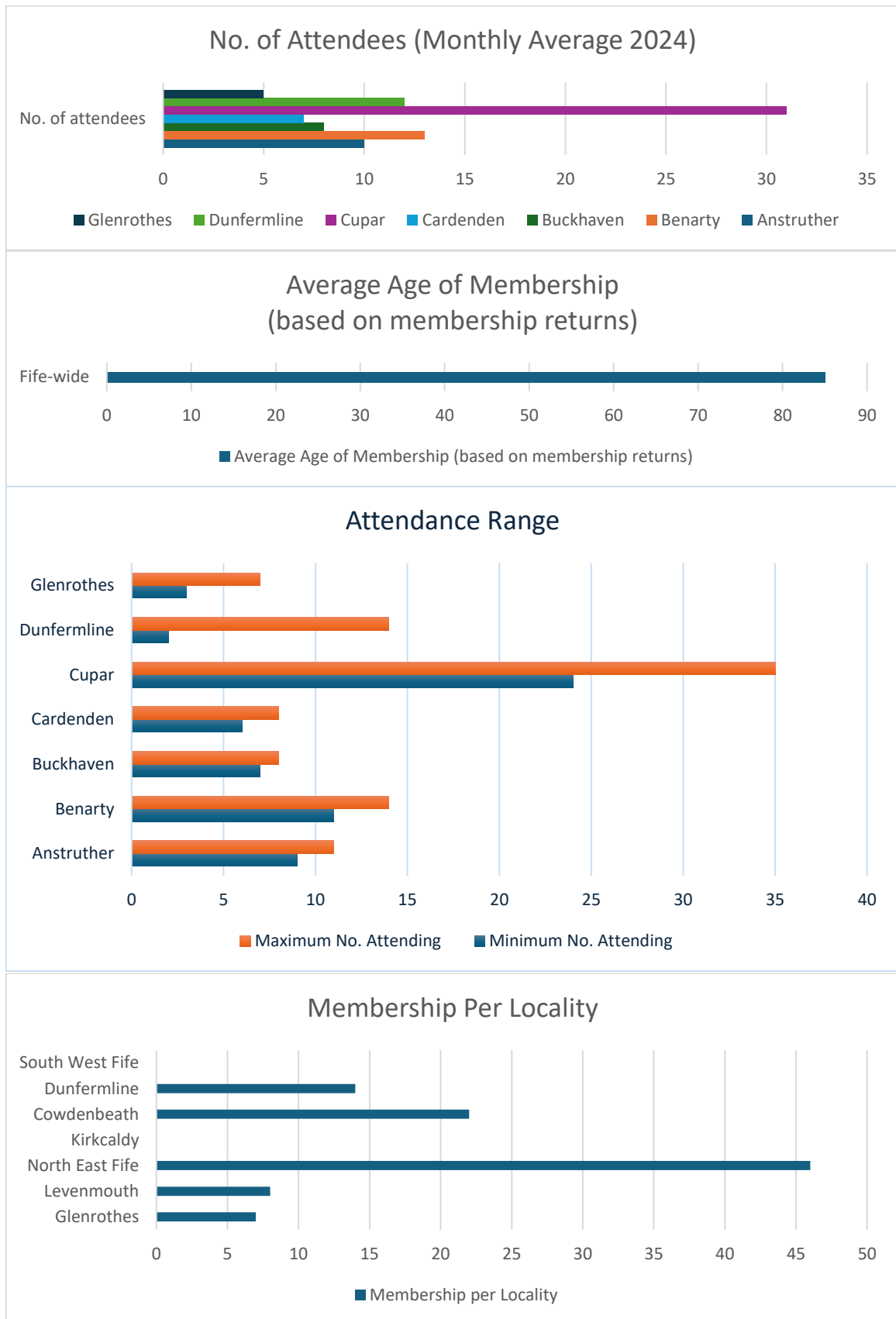
Group Membership

During the reporting year, average monthly attendance at each pre-existing group ranged from 5 (Glenrothes) to 31 (Cupar). All groups break during the summer months and Christmas period as per the request of the groups themselves (this might also be linked to historical reasons). The groups are facilitated in 4 of the 7 Fife localities and the aim is to hold these in all 7 in some guise (development).

Each of the existing Forums operate within the parameters prescribed to them historically, with the exception of Glenrothes. Whilst the Glenrothes Forum previously operated with its own constitution this re-emerged from the pandemic with flagging membership and with this during 2024 the group was reformed as a new entity with a view to being supported by the parent body directly. The new group is in its infancy and is currently being developed as a platform for older people engagement in Glenrothes. This is being guided with support from a sibling Fife Forum service (Older People Team, Local Area Co-ordination Fife) and, in the future, by the newly appointed Support & Development Worker. The model for this that Fife Forum wishes to develop will hopefully provide a skeleton blueprint for existing Forums as we move forward.

In addition to this, the development of 4 other groups was supported working alongside existing provisions in Anstruther, Buckhaven, Cardenden and Kirkcaldy (the latter did not progress). These largely centred on Sheltered/Retirement Complexes. During the reporting year, average monthly attendance at each group ranged from 7

(Cardenden) to 10 (Anstruther). This allowed Fife Forum to operate in 5 of the 7 Fife localities with one failed (Kirkcaldy) and one untested (South West Fife).




In relation to the other Forums which were inherited, there are some localised challenges which, in part relate to responsibilities, perception and expectations. Fife Forum is committed to supporting these groups to continue alongside developing new provisions under other guises, however, this must be undertaken in line with equity, good practice and in line with the funding requirements.

Challenges include:

- Concerns fewer members wish to take on leadership roles with local Forums which creates issues when existing office bearers step down
- An ageing membership whereupon participants do not wish to take on any leadership roles
- Financial responsibilities and banking requirements
- Understanding the intent of the Forums as the groups developed in relative isolation with an evident movement towards being more social in nature
- Better linking the groups to the wider parent body and participation and engagement programme

These challenges have been at points felt prohibitive; however, Fife Forum believes they are not insurmountable. The role of the Support & Development Worker will be to explore how existing Forums can be best accommodated with the clear objective of participation and engagement in mind; whilst new platforms will be developed with this key objective as the foundation on which to build. This might be supported by the creation of new groups sheltering under the auspices of Fife Forum or by working with existing stakeholders where the demographic can be captured. Key will be working more closely with the Fife Health & Social Care Partnership Participation & Engagement Team.



"We are delighted to start this new group in our residential complex. We will encourage more residents to come along. We most definitely want any older people in our community to come along to the group to get information that will benefit their life – and to meet new people".

Housing Manager

Areas of Interest

“Thank you for making us aware about Attendance Allowance. And thanks personally from me for helping me fill it in. I was awarded the top rate. It’s made a big difference to my life. I have, and still am, encouraging my friends to look into it”.

Member

During 2024 the following areas of interest were explored by the groups:

- Fife Forum
- Community Safety
- Elder Abuse
- Adult Learning
- Energy Efficiencies
- Memory Loss & Reminiscence
- Income Maximisation

In addition to this one group specifically wished to explore an issue pertinent to their locality and sought conversation with a locally elected representative and Health Manager which Fife Forum facilitated. The issues explored were:

- Access to a Health Centre
- Travel costs associated with health treatment
- Accessibility to information (electronic/web-based)

“The Practice Manager at the Health Centre came to speak with the tenants today. The meeting went very well and we learned a lot about each other and the systems at the Health Centre, which is partly what we asked for. She is going to send me a list of information re what chemists can do, and various other useful topics. This will be distributed to the tenants and added to new tenant information folder at sign-ups.

Thank you for helping set this up.”.

Housing Manager

In addition to these more generalised issues, the group were encouraged to engage in the following processes/consultations:

- Scottish Community Orientated Medicine Programme
- Community Care Services – Home First & Community Care Services Programme
- Community Hospital Review Workstream
- Fife-wide Public Engagement Forum

From July-December 2024

During the second half of 2024 operations were limited by the resignation of the Support & Development Worker. This did not materially impact the groups during the summer months as the groups closed during the period returning September and closing again during the Christmas period. The three existing Forums and the reconfigured Glenrothes Forum were supported during the transitional period from October/November whereupon each was appointed an Older People Local Area Coordinator (LAC) whom would act as a link to the parent body. Each LAC afforded the groups concerned a nominated/dedicated contact with a view to providing guidance and support. A new Support & Development Worker was appointed during December with a view to commencing January 2025.

Those groups which are affiliated to other stakeholders were withdrawn from owing to wider constraints, with a view that these links might be rekindled once the new appointment is in situ.

The Year Ahead

It is evident that whilst the participation and engagement of older people remains relevant and crucial in relation to ensuring their voice and opinions are heard and matter; the vehicle for doing this requires to be re-examined, re-invigorated and repurposed in order that it remain relevant and fit for the purpose intended. Fife Forum is committed to working with existing members and wider stakeholders to support this direction of travel during 2025. This will not be without its challenges, not least shifting the expectations of existing members as to the purpose of their engagement.

Fife Forum, and by extension, the new Support & Development Worker will aim to:

- Work with existing Forums to repurpose these and connect them more closely to the parent body
- Help to transfer operational responsibilities (financial, organisational and governance) away from those groups impacted by operational issues and where support is requested, required and/or deemed necessary
- Aim to work with those groups which cannot for whatever reason repurpose as an action group to work towards an exit from Fife Forum (for example: should a group wish to be purely social in nature this group could be supported to become a self-sustaining social peer group)
- Develop existing and new groups in all 7 localities as either directly supported Fife Forum groups or in conjunction with existing providers whom have direct contact with the demographic concerned
- Develop and implement monitoring and evaluation processes which record relevant data and feedback which support funding requirements and outcomes
- Work closely with our Participation & Engagement partners (Fife Health & Social Care Partnership) to ensure the demographic is more fully engaged in relevant processes within localities, Fife and where appropriate Scotland-wide

Key to success will be planning, co-operation, consultation and dedicated staffing which should support a fuller and more relevant return to the engagement of older people in relation to the issues, matters and policy areas relevant to their overall health and well-being.

14 January 2025