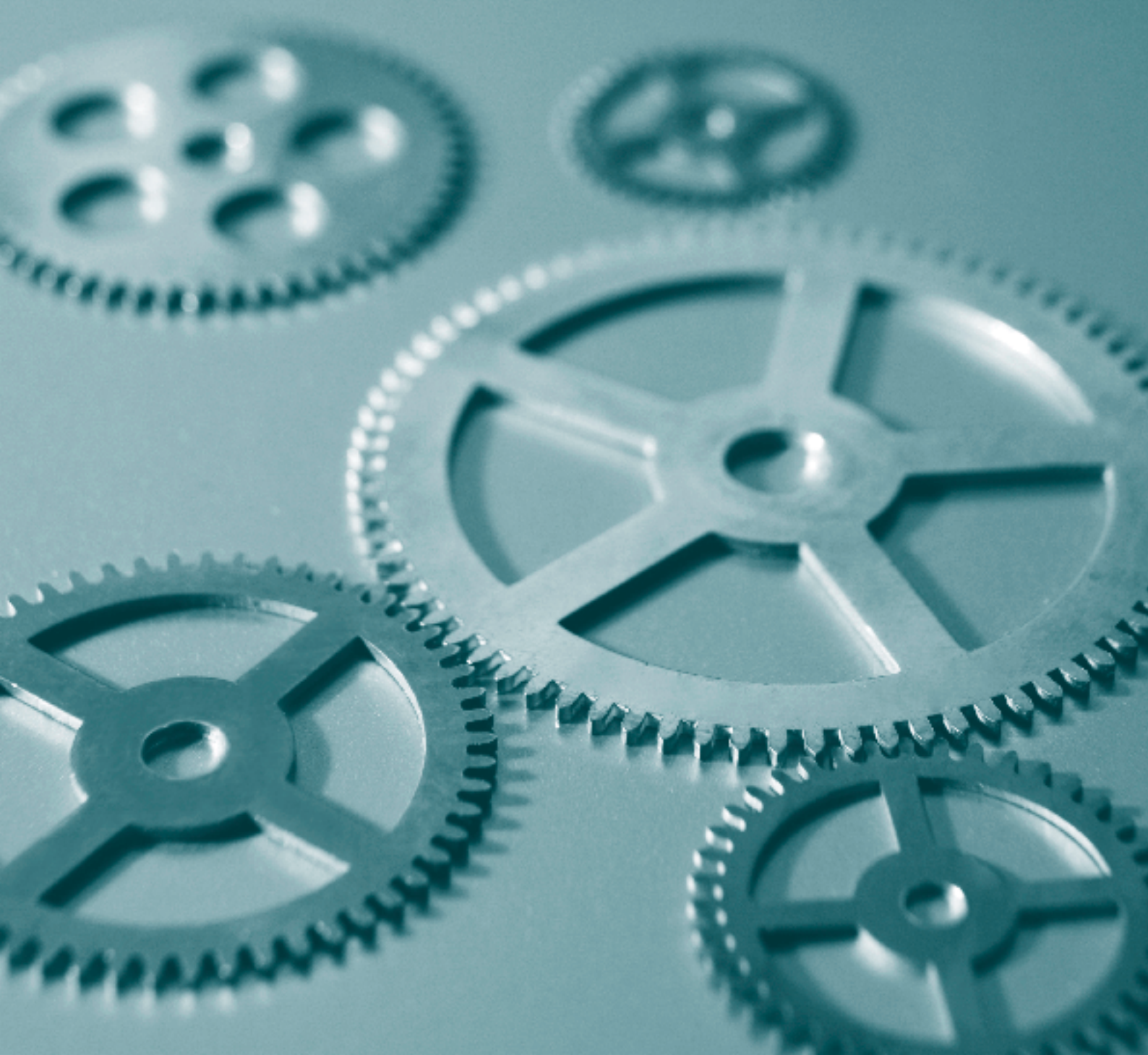


Community planning: an initial review

Key messages / Prepared for the Accounts Commission and the Auditor General for Scotland

June 2006



Key messages

Introduction

Community planning is the process through which public sector organisations work together and with local communities, the business and the voluntary sectors, to identify and solve local problems, improve services and share resources.

The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 (the Act), provides the statutory basis for community planning. It requires local authorities to initiate and facilitate community planning, and NHS boards, the enterprise networks, the police and the fire and rescue services to participate. Regional Transport Partnerships now also have a statutory duty to participate. Other public bodies, voluntary organisations, community groups and business organisations should also be involved.

Under the statutory guidance accompanying the Act, Scottish ministers have a duty to develop mechanisms within the Executive and agencies to ensure they are joined up in developing policies, performance frameworks and indicators and to promote and encourage community planning.

The aims of community planning are to promote:

- community engagement – making sure people and communities are genuinely engaged in the decisions made on the public services which affect them
- joint working – organisations working together to provide better public services.

And community planning should support:

- rationalisation – community planning partnerships (CPPs) should help to coordinate other initiatives and partnerships
- connection between local and national priorities – a mechanism to balance national priorities and those at regional, local and neighbourhood levels.

This report looks at the early progress made by CPPs since the Act was introduced.

The study

Audit Scotland undertook this study on behalf of the Accounts Commission and the Auditor General for Scotland.

Evidence for our findings has been drawn primarily from interviews with staff involved in community planning across a range of organisations in ten partnership areas, and with officials in the Scottish Executive and other national bodies. This qualitative work was supported by a survey of all 32 CPPs. In three further areas we analysed the management costs associated with community planning. We also examined current community plans and reviewed information from other audit work, including Best Value audits.

The report reviews:

- the national context within which community planning operates
- local arrangements for community planning
- planning and performance management in CPPs.

Key findings

The national context

- 1 Community planning can improve services and benefit local communities. However, the wide range of national policy initiatives and structural differences in partner organisations make it difficult for partnerships to achieve their full potential.

Public services in Scotland are delivered by a range of organisations. Many of our most important public services are characterised by joint working. For example, community care, regeneration and community safety. When organisations work well together, there can be real benefits to service users, local communities and the organisations themselves.

The evidence from our case studies suggests that in some areas community planning is adding value to existing joint working by providing a local strategic framework and supporting a culture of co-operation and trust.

However partner organisations have different geographic boundaries, accountabilities and financial regulations. This limits the flexibility of some partners to respond to local needs and creates administrative difficulties.

In addition to these structural problems, CPPs and partner organisations have to respond to the national policy agenda. The Scottish Executive has a wide-ranging and ambitious policy portfolio aimed at improving public services in Scotland.

However the lack of integration and prioritisation of national policy initiatives creates additional work for partnerships. For example, The Highland Council has estimated

that 29 separate plans and strategies are required for different Scottish Executive departments, many of which require input from community planning partners.

CPPs have to prioritise these different national policy objectives and reconcile them with local priorities. This is a continuing area of tension for CPPs.

The fragmented nature of funding to support national policy initiatives also creates an administrative burden on CPPs. We estimate that in the last two years, the Scottish Executive has provided around £1.2 billion intended for partnership working, through about 40 different funding streams (outwith the core funding of partner organisations).

All CPPs operate in this complex policy and organisational environment. Some demonstrate real commitment and willingness to work around the problems. In others these difficulties seem to impede progress. Partnerships with clear priorities find it easier to implement national policies effectively at a local level.

While the overall aims of community planning are shared by both the Executive and CPPs, this fragmentation of policy and funding makes it difficult for partnerships to achieve these aims effectively.

For community planning to achieve the potential envisaged in the legislation, national and local organisations need to agree what community planning should be delivering.

Local arrangements for community planning

2 There is wide variation in the size and membership of CPPs. More needs to be done to rationalise the number and complexity of partnerships and to engage elected members.

Each local authority has established a CPP, and most have the same broad structures in place:

- Boards, with strategic responsibility.
- Implementation groups that drive the work of the partnership, identify gaps and duplication and monitor progress.
- Theme groups, taking responsibility for the implementation of specific policy priorities.

There is wide variation in the size and membership of CPP boards and theme groups. All statutory partners are engaged at a high level. The way the board operates influences the effectiveness of the CPP.

CPPs are putting considerable effort into improving their community involvement. We found many examples of innovative approaches to consultation and engagement with specific communities or service users. However these were often developed in isolation and there were instances of overlap and duplication.

Community engagement needs to be more sustained and more systematic. The introduction of National Standards for Community Engagement¹ provides an opportunity for CPPs to improve the consistency and effectiveness of community engagement.

Elected members have an important role to play in community planning as both civic leaders and community representatives. Council leaders often play a vital role as chair of the CPP but generally the participation of elected members in CPPs is uneven and in some places minimal. Some elected members see community planning as a threat to their control of council services and funding.

The challenge for CPPs is to involve a range of elected members, without the partnership being seen by other partners as too dominated by the council.

Community planning structures are very complex. This complexity arises from the need to accommodate a wide range of policy areas, integrate other partnership structures and interests, and provide a forum for different groups of people to work together. A recent audit of partnership structures in North Lanarkshire revealed 53 different groups within the partnership, with some supported by further groups.

The legislation has not helped to rationalise the number or complexity of partnerships in any significant way.

There is no one model which creates an effective CPP. The structure adopted should suit local circumstances and provide opportunities for partners to participate in a way that suits them.

¹ *National Standards for Community Engagement*, Communities Scotland, June 2005.

Planning and performance management

3 CPPs need to show how they are improving public services and benefiting communities. Many have still to develop fully their planning and performance management systems.

Community planning is a complex process and CPPs are improving their use of information to inform their planning. All partnerships have produced a community plan.

However the quality of community plans varies. Only a third of the community plans we examined articulated a clear strategic direction with specific objectives, based on an analysis of the challenges facing the area.

There is some evidence that community plans and councils' corporate plans are now being integrated. However CPPs are finding it more challenging to ensure community plan priorities are properly incorporated with other statutory partners' corporate plans.

CPPs are improving their performance management but progress has been slow. Only about half of CPPs outline in their community plan how they will monitor and report on progress. It is difficult therefore to demonstrate systematically their impact on service delivery and community wellbeing, and whether the benefits justify the added costs.

The governance of CPPs needs to be improved by clarifying their accountability arrangements and developing more effective scrutiny and risk management.

From our case study areas, CPPs which were working well shared some common characteristics:

- Committed leadership among all partners.
- A citizen focus to their work.
- A shared vision for the area.
- Clearly resourced action plans.
- Clear performance management arrangements.

We have developed an evaluation framework to help CPPs and partner organisations improve the effectiveness of their community planning, based on these characteristics and recognised good practice.

Recommendations

The Scottish Executive and CPPs should agree:

- a small number of strategic priorities where CPPs can add value through partnership working
- how to measure performance against these policy areas.

The Scottish Executive, with executive agencies and other central bodies, should:

- improve coordination and integration among initiatives
- rationalise the different funding streams accessed by partnerships
- develop a more standard approach to monitoring spend against individual funding streams.

Nationally accountable partners (eg, Scottish Enterprise, the NHS and Communities Scotland), supported by the Scottish Executive, should set clear guidelines for their local organisations (eg, Local Enterprise Companies (LECs), NHS boards), on what they expect to be achieved through local partnership working. This should be supported by allowing greater flexibility and autonomy to accommodate local CPP priorities when responding to national priorities.

The Scottish Executive should review the number of partnerships it requires local authorities and other partner organisations to establish, and ensure there are clear remits and no duplication.

Local authorities and local partner organisations should:

- develop schemes of delegation to streamline decision-making within CPPs
- ensure that all relevant priorities and related actions agreed by the CPP are incorporated into their corporate plans
- consider providing an annual statement to the CPP explaining how the community plan is reflected in their own corporate plans
- contribute to joint risk registers related to community planning.

CPPs should:

- ensure the CPP Board is clear on its remit, and responsibilities, and is structured to fulfil these
- define clearly the role for elected members and members of other partner governing bodies within their community planning arrangements
- ensure that community engagement becomes more sustained and systematic across partners and champion the use of the National Standards for Community Engagement
- review and rationalise structures to focus on delivering services that add value
- consider developing a partnership guide which describes the roles and remits of each element of their structure

- agree a shared vision and a manageable number of priorities for their community plan
- develop processes for managing performance and agree indicators to track progress on key local issues
- develop their arrangements for scrutiny of community plans and expenditure
- develop their approaches to risk management
- review how effectively they are operating as a partnership.

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