Best Value toolkit: Community engagement

AUDIT SCOTLAND

Contents

Introduction

The Audit of Best Value

"Achieving Best Value is about ensuring sound governance, good management, public reporting on performance and a focus on improvement"

The duty of Best Value applies to all public bodies in Scotland. It is a statutory duty in local government, and in the rest of the public sector it is a formal duty on Accountable Officers.

Best Value has already been a powerful force for improved performance and accountability in local government, and it will play an important role in supporting the Concordat and the development of Single Outcome Agreements between the Scottish Government, councils and their partners, and in streamlining and coordinating the scrutiny of public services. It also has the potential to underpin the National Performance Framework and the 'management scorecard' elements of Scotland Performs.

On behalf of the Auditor General and the Accounts Commission, Audit Scotland has identified a set of principles that form the basis for a consistent approach to the audit of Best Value across the public sector, although its application will differ to reflect factors such as the different accountability regimes and reporting arrangements in place in different sectors. This will enable us to apply a consistent set of expectations across all the bodies that we audit, and to reflect and support the reality of partnership working between organisations.

The Best Value toolkits are a key part of the practical application of the BV audit. They provide an evaluation framework that will help auditors to reach robust judgements on how public bodies are delivering Best Value. However, they cannot generate Best Value judgements on their own. They cover only part of the process. Judgements about Best Value also involve consideration of service standards and performance, outcomes and how effectively continuous improvement is being achieved. The framework through which the various elements of the Best Value audit are brought together to arrive at an overall conclusion on the extent to which an organisation is achieving Best Value is outlined below:

Exhibit 1

Framework for a BV audit of a public body
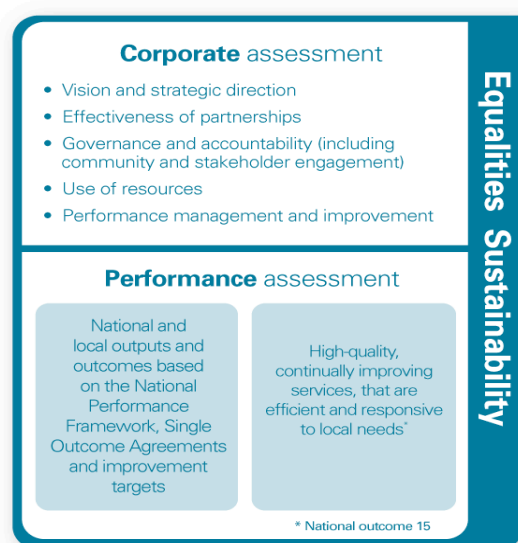
Source: Audit Scotland

As the diagram demonstrates, Audit Scotland's approach to the audit of Best Value entails both corporate assessment and performance assessment elements. The former focuses on how an organisation plans and conducts its business and manages its resources while the latter looks at the quality of those services and the outcomes for service users.

Audit Scotland is committed to ensuring that Best Value auditing across the public sector adds value to existing arrangements, is risk-based and builds on our existing knowledge of individual public bodies, and that of our scrutiny partners. Specifically we aim to:

- report on the delivery of outcomes for people who use services
- protect taxpayers' interests by examining use of resources
- put an increasing emphasis on self assessment by public bodies with audit support and validation
- work collaboratively with other scrutiny bodies to ensure our work is aligned and prevent duplication.

The Best Value toolkits

The Best Value toolkits are a series of audit diagnostics, which will help reviewers to establish the extent to which public bodies' arrangements are designed to achieve, and are actually delivering, Best Value. They have been developed to support the corporate assessment process around the five corporate assessment areas noted in Exhibit 1, and the two cross-cutting themes of equalities and sustainability. However, as each toolkit also incorporates a series of questions on the impact of the

area under review, they will also provide some evidence to support the assessment of service performance and outcomes.

The Best Value toolkits have been developed as audit tools in consultation with specialist practitioners, and representatives of public bodies and professional groups.

The toolkits take the form of structured key questions, with a matrix of possible levels of performance, ranging from basic to advanced practice. The matrices cannot of course capture all of the ways in which a public body may address the requirements of Best Value, so there is clearly scope for auditors to exercise balanced judgement and for public bodies to respond flexibly in demonstrating how the key areas of challenge are addressed. Individual evaluations are made about the level a public body has attained in each question or area. However, these have not been weighted and it is not intended that these be used to determine an overall scoring for any Toolkit. They are designed to contribute to sound professional judgements, not to replace them.

Using the toolkits

The toolkits are designed for application by Audit Scotland's auditors when carrying out Best Value audits of public bodies. In practice, the toolkits will be applied as part of an audit process, whereby the auditor makes enquiries, seeks supporting information and forms conclusions based on the evidence obtained.

Audit Scotland recognises that bodies may find the toolkits helpful in carrying out general organisational reviews or specific service reviews and are therefore available in the Audit Scotland website www.audit-scotland.gov.uk. It should be stressed however that public bodies using the toolkits do so at their own discretion. The toolkits are designed principally as audit tools that are part of Audit Scotland's overall Best Value audit methodology and are not expressly produced for self-assessment purposes.

Any organisation using the toolkits to inform their own corporate or service-based self-evaluation processes will need to consider the local context when applying them, and also the indicative rather than conclusive nature of the findings when interpreting the results. The toolkits were designed to elicit contextual information and provide evidence for arriving at professional audit judgements. They are not intended to be, and cannot be, used in a "tick-box" fashion.

The Best Value toolkits are generic in nature, in that they are not specific to any one type of public body or to any one sector and are designed so that they can be applied to all public bodies. Auditors will require to be sensitive to the differences between organisations both in terms of different sectors and varying scales of operation.
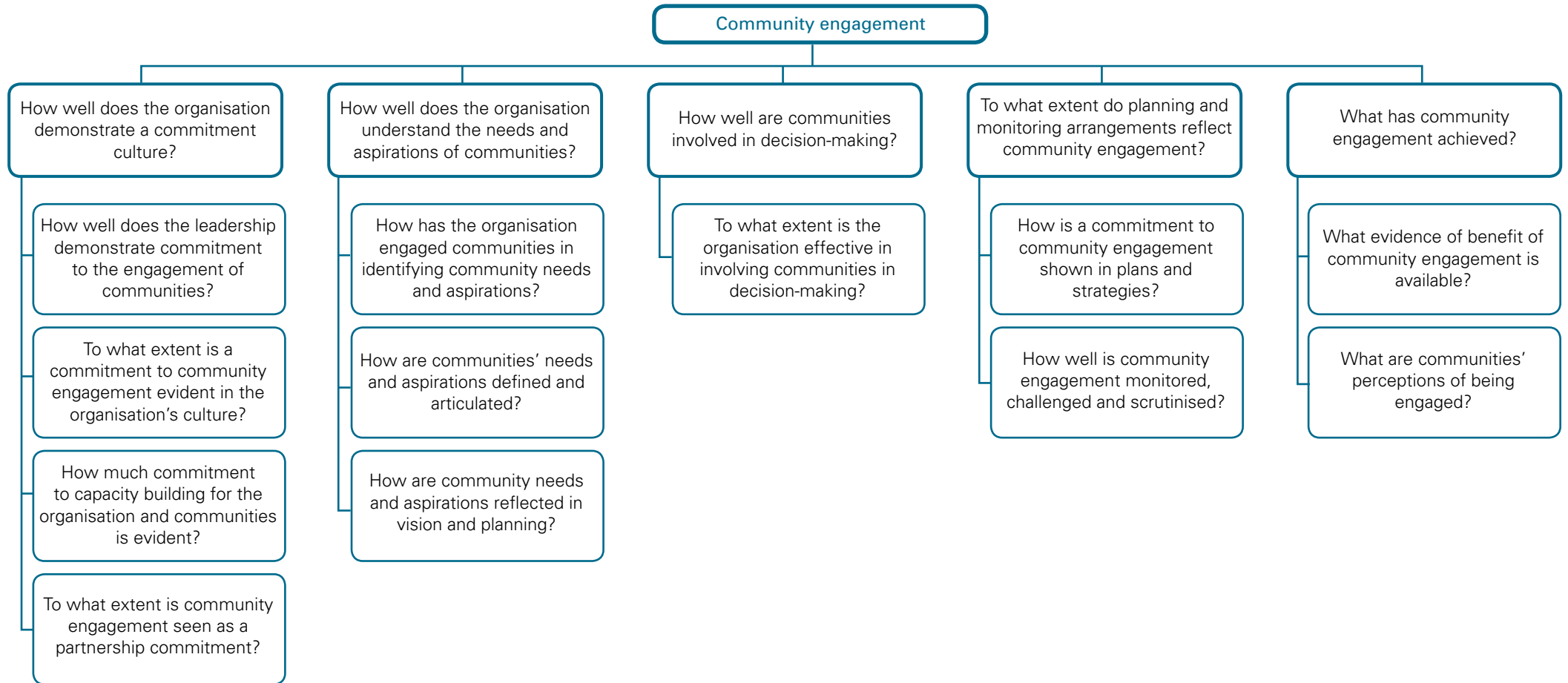
This toolkit forms part of a suite of audit products that will be applied, over time, to support a structured, evidenced based, judgment on an organisation's approach to the use of the resources with which it has been provided and its achievement of Best Value.

Auditors' evaluations

The toolkit takes the form of a series of questions based on identified best practice. It then offers four sets of descriptors, these being:

Does not meet basic requirements	An organisation may not yet demonstrate the basic practice level in any particular category.
Basic practices	Minimum acceptable standards, which would be sufficient to allow an organisation to demonstrate sound performance.
Better practices	As basic, with some elements of good or even best practice, but not on a consistent basis.
Advanced practices	Consistently demonstrating good or best practice and contributing to innovation.

Best Value toolkit: Community engagement

Community engagement

How well does the organisation demonstrate a commitment culture?
- How well does the leadership demonstrate commitment to the engagement of communities?
- To what extent is a commitment to community engagement evident in the organisation's culture?
- How much commitment to capacity building for the organisation and communities is evident?
- To what extent is community engagement seen as a partnership commitment?

How well does the organisation understand the needs and aspirations of communities?
- How has the organisation engaged communities in identifying community needs and aspirations?
- How are communities' needs and aspirations defined and articulated?
- How are community needs and aspirations reflected in vision and planning?

How well are communities involved in decision-making?
- To what extent is the organisation effective in involving communities in decision-making?

To what extent do planning and monitoring arrangements reflect community engagement?
- How is a commitment to community engagement shown in plans and strategies?
- How well is community engagement monitored, challenged and scrutinised?

What has community engagement achieved?
- What evidence of benefit of community engagement is available?
- What are communities' perceptions of being engaged?

Best Value Toolkit: Assessment Matrix - Community engagement

	Basic practices	Better practices	Advanced practices
1. Commitment and Culture – How well does the organisation demonstrate a commitment to engaging with communities?			
1.1 How well does the leadership demonstrate commitment to community engagement?	Leaders show articulate a clear understanding of what effective community engagement can achieve. They can demonstrate their commitment to making it happen throughout the organisation.	Leaders show point to how their commitment has resulted in positive changes to the way the organisation engages with communities.	Leaders actively promote the ideal of communities as equal partner throughout the organisation. They demonstrate innovative ways of empowering[1] and involving communities.
1.2 To what extent is a commitment to community engagement evident in the organisation's culture?	Most managers and staff across the organisation have a clear understanding of the benefits of community engagement. They can demonstrate their commitment to making it happen but understanding and commitment varies across different parts of the organisation.	Community engagement is a joined-up activity, widely and consistently practised across the organisation.	Managers and staff throughout the organisation share leaders' commitment to the ideal of communities as equal partners. They review and, as appropriate, challenge their own and leaders' approaches. This commitment is demonstrated in learning and in innovative working and activities.
1.3 How much commitment to capacity building[2] for the organisation and communities is evident?	Leaders and managers recognise that participants from the community need support and development to be able to contribute effectively to decision-making. They also recognise that their staff may need support too but there is scope for a clearer programme to achieve this with a more explicit allocation of resources.	Building the capacity of communities is seen as core to building community involvement in decision-making, policy development and service provision Capacity building is supported by clear programmes and explicitly allocated resources.	Leaders and managers champion capacity building and learning and see it as a core activity. Leaders, managers, staff and communities see it as a shared responsibility. Community capacity building activity is led by communities themselves.

---

[1] Community empowerment is defined by the Scottish Government and COSLA as "a process where people work together to make change happen in their communities by having more power and influence over what matters to them" (Scottish Government & Cosla, 2009, *Community Empowerment Action Plan*)
[2] Community capacity building is defined in *Working and Learning Together to Build Strong Communities* (Scottish Executive, 2004) as "enabling individuals, groups and communities to develop the confidence, understanding and skills required to influence decision making and service delivery"

	Basic practices	Better practices	Advanced practices
1.4 To what extent is community engagement seen as a partnership commitment?	Leaders and managers recognise the need to engage with communities jointly with other partners, but in practice this is seen as the exception rather than the rule.	The organisation can demonstrate that it actively collaborates with partners in engaging with communities across a wide range of activities.	Community engagement is led, planned and managed collectively at a partnership level as appropriate, and the organisation plays a lead and active role.

Best Value Toolkit: Assessment Matrix - Community engagement

	Basic practices	Better practices	Advanced practices
2. Needs and aspirations – How well does the organisation understand the needs and aspirations of communities?			
2.1 How has the organisation engaged communities to identify community needs and aspirations?	Community needs (and perhaps aspirations) have been identified but mainly by the organisation with limited involvement of communities themselves.	The organisation has identified and agreed through periodic dialogue with communities what community needs and aspirations are.	Community needs and aspirations, as identified through engagement, form the core of a dynamic process in which communities and partners constantly review and challenge proposed outcomes at strategic and operational levels.
2.2 How are communities' needs and aspirations defined and articulated?	Community needs have been identified, and are described in terms of high level outcomes. There is less emphasis on community aspirations.	Community aspirations as well as need are identified at a strategic level. Both the organisation and the communities have a clear and consistent understanding of what these are.	Community needs and aspirations are seen as complex and recognised as constantly changing. The organisation and the communities jointly maintain a clear definition as they are reviewed and changed.
2.3 How are community needs and aspirations reflected in vision and planning?	Outcomes related to community need have been identified and are strategic priorities. They feature in vision and plans, but not at their core.	Community needs and aspirations both recognised. They are at the centre of the vision and plans, although there is scope for this to feature more consistently across plans.	Community needs and aspirations clearly and consistently drive vision and plans across the organisation.
	Outcomes relating to community need are reviewed, albeit infrequently, perhaps as a one-off exercise rather than as part of a planning cycle.	Community needs and aspirations are regularly reviewed by the organisation and communities. There may not be a frequent cycle of reviews or the review process may not be comprehensive.	Community needs and aspirations are the subject of continuous dialogue between the organisation and communities. This is an iterative dynamic process as part of the planning cycle with robust intelligence at its core.

Best Value Toolkit: Assessment Matrix - Community engagement

	Basic practices	Better practices	Advanced practices
3. Involvement in decision-making - How well are communities involved in decision-making?			
3.1 To what extent is the organisation effective in involving communities in decision-making?	Although there is a coherent approach to involving communities in decision-making, it is limited largely to consultative activity.	There are some examples of communities being involved in decision-making which go beyond consultation, but these are limited in scope and communities' influence is limited.	There is a strategic, full and clearly understood and articulated partnership role for communities, including that of the voluntary/third sector, in decision-making.
	The organisation is undertaking activities to engage communities and this is in evidence across the organisation, but is limited in number, frequency and scope.	The organisation and its partners are using a number of different methods to engage communities, but this is not consistent or co-ordinated throughout the organisation.	The organisation can demonstrate a co-ordinated approach to engagement using a range of methods, allowing communities various opportunities to engage with it and its partners.
	There is scope for better awareness and publicity about the general opportunity and mechanisms to engage.	The general opportunity and mechanisms to engage are widely advertised and communicated.	Opportunities and mechanisms to engage are not only widely communicated but also targeted routinely at different audiences including hard to reach groups.
	Regular but limited or infrequent feedback to communities.	Regular and systematic feedback to communities	Feedback is part of cyclical two-way dialogue.

Best Value Toolkit: Assessment Matrix - Community engagement

	Basic practices	Better practices	Advanced practices
4. Do the organisation's plans reflect a commitment to community engagement and that progress is monitored and there is sufficient challenge and scrutiny of this progress?			
4.1 How is commitment to community engagement shown in plans and strategies?	Communities are involved in planning processes but with limited evidence of influence in the content.	The organisation can readily show how communities have influenced plans and strategies.	Community engagement is a core, highly visible and widely understood element of strategic planning processes.
4.2 How well is community engagement monitored, challenged and scrutinised?	Monitoring of engagement is limited to measuring high level outcomes and is reported back to communities.	Engagement strategy and its impact is evaluated robustly and on an iterative basis with communities involved in such scrutiny.	Evaluation is seen as multi-faceted involving dialogue with communities as a partner where challenge by all participants lies at the core of the approach.

Best Value Toolkit: Assessment Matrix - Community engagement

	Basic practices	Better practices	Advanced practices
5. Change and Impact – What has community engagement achieved?			
5.1 What evidence of benefit from community engagement is available?	There is some evidence of how policy and service provision have been influenced by community engagement but no clear link between the overall shape of service provision and communities' needs and aspirations.	The organisation can readily show how the shape of service provision has been changed as a direct result of community engagement, but is not part of an iterative process.	There is a clear and direct correlation between the shape of service provision and the changing needs and aspirations of communities. This change is cyclical and regular.
	A range of communities is shown to be engaged but there is scope for wider involvement, particularly from hard-to-reach groups.	A range of communities is shown to be engaged and there is evidence of hard-to-reach communities taking part in engagement activity but scope exists for more systematic and consistent involvement.	There is systematic and consistent involvement with a wide range of communities, so that access issues for different communities can be shown to have been addressed well.
5.2 What are communities' perceptions of being engaged?	Some evidence of greater levels of community awareness of decision-making.	Communities can point to evidence of greater levels of their involvement in decision-making.	Communities can point to good evidence of changes in policy or service provision arising from their involvement and sense of increased community empowerment in decision-making through individual and collective learning.
	Although communities can point to consultation and 'being asked', they cannot see their views reflected in changes to policy or service provision.	Communities can articulate confidently that they have contributed to change in policy or service provision.	Communities feel that they have been empowered as a result of taking part in decision-making.

Best Value toolkit:
Community engagement

If you require this publication in an alternative format
and/or language, please contact us to discuss your needs.

You can also download this document at:
www.audit scotland.gov.uk

AUDIT SCOTLAND