

MEETING: 13 MAY 2019**REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF PERFORMANCE AUDIT AND BEST VALUE****PRINCIPLES FOR COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT**

Purpose

1. This paper introduces the attached Principles for community empowerment document.
2. The Principles document responds to a request from the Strategic Scrutiny Group (SSG) for Audit Scotland to work with other scrutiny bodies on this important topic. The Principles document is a joint output produced by local government scrutiny bodies working together to get a shared understanding of community empowerment and an agreed framework under which to carry out scrutiny work.

Background

3. The Commission has had a long-standing interest in the community empowerment agenda and has received regular updates about ongoing work.
4. The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 confers a number of duties on a wide range of public bodies and community planning partnerships, alongside local authorities. While the Commission has no specific audit responsibility in respect of the Act, there is a resonance with the Commission's powers in relation to Best Value. Current Best Value guidance requires councils to consult and involve communities. The Scottish Government and CoSLA are currently revising this guidance, and it can be expected that revised best value statutory guidance for local authorities will be consistent with the requirements of the 2015 Act.
5. One of the Commission's strategic priorities is empowering local communities and involving them in the design and delivery of local services and planning for their local area. The SSG also recognises that community empowerment is relevant to all parts of the public sector and is an area of increasing importance given evolving legislation and policies. The SSG asked Audit Scotland to work collaboratively with scrutiny partners to develop a shared understanding of community empowerment, considering what it means for scrutiny work.
6. The Community Empowerment Advisory Group (CEAG) was set up in 2017, including experts in the field of community empowerment, alongside representatives from scrutiny bodies (membership attached). The CEAG held a series of discussions around community empowerment to understand the various organisations' roles and agree how they could work together. During late 2018 and early 2019, a smaller working group carried out more detailed work to develop the Principles paper. Audit Scotland group members drafted the paper, liaising with the rest of the sub-group.

Purpose of the Principles document

7. Scrutiny bodies have an important role to play in holding public bodies to account and helping them to improve. The Principles for community empowerment document aims to raise awareness of community empowerment and promote a shared understanding across scrutiny bodies, and to support high-quality scrutiny of community empowerment.

8. Although the document was primarily developed for scrutiny bodies, it will also be of benefit to public bodies, and their partners, to be aware of the expectations of scrutiny bodies when carrying out audit and scrutiny work and provide a framework of what good community empowerment looks like.
9. We are agreeing a statement from the SSG to replace the current introduction so that the purpose of the document is clearer. We will make clear that it is not intended to be guidance or a checklist for public bodies, rather a useful tool as they develop approaches to community empowerment.
10. The Principles document provides:
 - the current overview of what we mean by community empowerment
 - summarises some of the opportunities and challenges experienced by communities and public bodies
 - identifies some principles for public bodies to help them make the most of the opportunities
 - highlights some good examples of what is already happening across Scotland.
11. The SSG recognises that scrutiny bodies have different remits and approaches to their work. Each scrutiny body is responsible for determining how and when they will examine and report on aspects of community empowerment, coordinating their work programmes with other scrutiny bodies. There may also be opportunities for joint working across scrutiny bodies on specific pieces of work.
12. The full CEAG met on 16 May 2019 and agreed the document. The SSG met on 28 May 2019 and supports the Principles and agreed it is a useful document to share more widely with public bodies and their partners.

Areas still in development

13. We are still finalising the case studies, references to key work and the graphical presentation of the information. We have based the format of the document on the Audit Scotland document [Principles for a digital future](#). We are also still implementing some of the SSG and CEAG's comments, including:
 - Risk – need something in about inherent risks, public bodies will have to take risks, but manage in a sensible, proportionate way. Risks in not doing anything.
 - Outcomes – being more explicit about links to improving outcomes and National Performance Framework.
 - Other areas to build into document: community development principles, how to involve disenfranchised parts of communities, be more explicit about involving children and young people and making sure they have a say.
 - Case studies – emphasis on learning and transferable lessons rather than the process, don't need to be finished product.

Potential for promoting the Principles

14. We will explore ways to promote the Principles paper through our wider stakeholder engagement in relation to community empowerment, and BVARs and relevant performance audits. We are also discussing with contacts at COSLA and the Scottish Government about organising an event later in the year on Community Empowerment/ Participatory Budgeting/ Digital, which would be an opportunity to promote the Principles paper. The document could also be shared on scrutiny bodies' websites and promoted via blogs, videos or social media.

Conclusion

15. The Commission is invited to:
- a) provide feedback and endorse the Principles paper
 - b) consider proposals for promoting the principles.

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