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News release

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Community planning needs a major effort to realise its full potential

Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) have not met the ambitious goals set for them but with the right leadership and support could make big inroads to achieving them in the future, says a new report published today.

Improving Community Planning in Scotland is a national review which draws on detailed pilot work. Community planning was introduced a decade ago with the aim of bringing councils, health boards and other public, business and voluntary bodies together to tackle complex problems in local communities.

The report says community planning is now at a cross roads. A fresh drive to realise its full potential, particularly in the light of severe budget pressures on all public services, has been outlined in a Statement of Ambition from the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities.

There have been many examples of partners working together and delivering good results at local level but these have been largely based on one-off project funding, rather than from involvement of CPPs. Overall, however, partnerships have not been able to show that they have had a significant impact on delivering improved outcomes across Scotland.

Community planning has also been seen as a council-driven exercise and not a core part of the day job for other partners who have had little incentive to get fully involved.

The report says CPPs have not set clear objectives and priorities. CPP boards have no substantial authority to make decisions that commit partners to action and allocating resources from their organisations' budgets.

Some progress has been made in consulting communities but there is a long way to go before the potential of local people to participate, shape and improve local services is realised.

The report says there is now a unique opportunity to establish a new system enabling partnerships to make a real difference on the ground. But this will not be straightforward and requires fundamental changes in culture, shifting mainstream resources and seeing the wider benefit of necessary changes to make it work.

John Baillie, chair of the Accounts Commission, said: "Community planning in Scotland now stands at a cross roads. There is now a real opportunity to seize the nettle and make it work effectively. This report sets out the many challenges ahead. It is now up to councils and all their partners and the government to make this a reality."

Auditor General Caroline Gardner said: "There is a new appetite from the Scottish Government to put community planning at the core of public service reform. Delivering this will require strong and sustained leadership at both national and local level."

The report draws on detailed pilot work in three CPPs - in Aberdeen, North Ayrshire and the Scottish Borders. Each has strengths and weaknesses. They are all working hard to improve their performance but none is yet fulfilling the wider role envisaged when CPPs were established in 2003.

Reports for the three pilots are also published today. The Accounts Commission said all three should be seen within the national context and the lack of evidence that CPPs across Scotland had made an impact on deep-seated problems such as reducing inequalities in health, education and access to employment.

Community Planning **Aberdeen** has improved but commitment from all partners, particularly NHS Grampian, has to be clear and consistent. The Commission said it was encouraged by recent changes and an emphasis on prevention but the momentum needs to be maintained.

The **North Ayrshire** CPP was well-established and had made good progress in some areas. As one of the five most deprived local authority areas in Scotland, it faced considerable challenges but the partnership had recognised the need for changes to improve its effectiveness.

The **Scottish Borders** CPP had also demonstrated effective joint working in specific initiatives but was seen by some partners as still largely a council-run body. It has had some weaknesses in leadership which it was now seeking to address.

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Notes to editors:

1. The national review and three pilot reports are available at www.audit.scotland.gov.uk
2. Audit Scotland provides services to the Accounts Commission for Scotland and the Auditor General.