

A Summary of Community Planning Arrangements in Wales

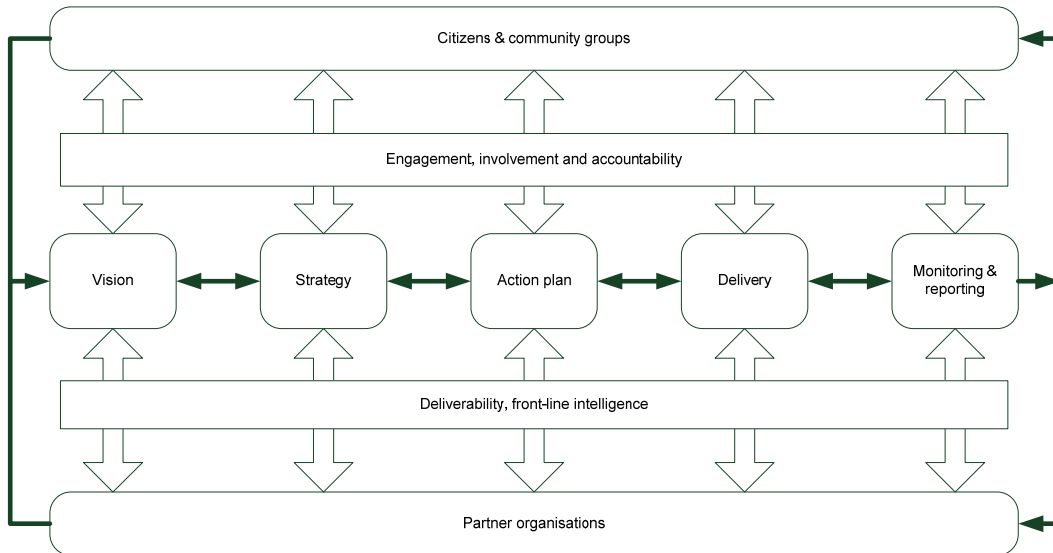
1. Introduction

- 1.1 Under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 (the Measure) a local authority must initiate, and having done so, maintain and facilitate a process known as community planning. The local authority should have a leadership role in this process and should be supported by their community planning partners.
- 1.2 Community planning is the process by which a local authority and its partners develop, define and deliver a set of priorities for improving local wellbeing over a 10-15 year period. The main principles of it are as follows:
- i) the emphasis should be on community planning as a continuous process, rather than the production of a community strategy as a static document;
 - ii) that process entails all local partners deliberating on open and equal terms to reach a consensus about (a) objectives for improving social, economic, and environmental wellbeing of the area over the next 10-15 years; and (b) the actions which will tend to deliver those outcomes and (c) who will undertake those actions;
 - iii) that consensus should capture objectives and actions which are distinctive to the area and which have been discussed and negotiated with local citizens, communities and their leaders;
 - iv) that consensus is documented and published, including what actions will be taken and by whom to deliver the outcomes - this is the community strategy. The local authority, on behalf of the participatory bodies, should account for these outcomes; and
 - v) visible implementation of the strategy, and reviewing and accounting for progress in doing so, will be fundamental. Periodically, community planning partners should assess the progress they have made, individually and collectively, in discharging the commitments in the community strategy. This progress should be publically reported and it is recommended that it be the subject of a local scrutiny process

Community Planning

- 1.3 Community planning is, fundamentally, about understanding, responding to and meeting the long-term needs of local citizens and communities and involving those citizens and communities in the development and design of the vision for better outcomes for the area and their delivery. The Measure, and related statutory guidance issued by the Welsh Assembly Government, describes several formal elements to that process, such as producing and reviewing a community strategy and accounting for its delivery. However, the strategic improvement of local wellbeing cannot be reduced to a set of

project steps or compliance requirements. There is also a need continuously to consider local needs, changing local, regional and national context and how the capacity to address them will be realised. This should be reflected in ways of working and priorities for action across, within and between community planning partners.



- 1.4 Formally, the Measure defines community planning as a process by which the authority and its community planning partners:
- Identify long-term objectives for improving the social, economic and environmental well-being of an area;
 - Identify long-term objectives in relation to the area for contributing to the achievement of sustainable development in the United Kingdom; and
 - Identify actions to be performed and functions to be exercised by the local authority and its community planning partners for the purpose of meeting those identified objectives in the community strategy.
- 1.5 Community planning is also the process by which local partners develop and deliver a community strategy. Local authorities are formally responsible for publishing the strategy but it should reflect a consensus among partners. A strong and credible community strategy depends on high quality community planning. It is the responsibility of the local authority to initiate, maintain, facilitate and participate in community planning for their area.
- 1.6 Community planning is necessarily a local activity, grounded in the interests, concerns and aspirations of an area, its citizens and communities, and the capacity of local organisations to address them. Accordingly, the Measure gives very considerable flexibility to local partners to decide how to undertake community planning, and on

identifying the objectives they will develop and pursue. The Welsh Assembly Government has no power to direct local partners in this regard, or as regards community planning generally.

- 1.7 The statutory guidance issued by the Welsh Assembly Government on community planning aims to outline and clarify this flexibility, not to constrain it. It explains the options open to local partners and the sorts of decisions that need to be taken. But it deliberately does not suggest particular approaches or solutions, other than for illustrative purposes, nor does it require community strategies to cover particular issues or objectives. That would both exceed the Welsh Ministers' powers, and would be contrary to the fundamental purpose of community planning.
- 1.8 However, that also means that it is not possible to undertake effective community planning 'by the book' or by simply complying with a standard template or set of approaches. Local partners need to take advantage of the flexibility offered in ways which will best meet the needs of their areas and their own capacities to address them.

2 Membership and Structures

- 2.1 As noted above, effective community planning requires collaboration between a local authority and other local agencies. The Measure designates the main such agencies as *community planning partners* and sets out in broad terms what is required of them. Overall, the local authority and its community planning partners should participate in community planning and assist the local authority in the discharge of their duties relating to community planning.
- 2.2 Under Part 2 of the Measure, the following are community planning partners:
 - community councils;
 - fire and rescue authorities;
 - Local Health Boards;
 - NHS Trusts;
 - National Park authorities;
 - police authorities; and
 - chief constables.
- 2.3 Each authority's community planning partners are all of the above bodies any of whose areas fall within the local authority's area. However, in some areas overlapping boundaries and the existence of multiple organisations of the same type may cause issues to arise that can only be addressed by agreement locally

Other Bodies

- 2.4 Under the Measure, only the bodies listed above have the legal status of community planning partners. However, under section 44 of the Measure, local authorities and their partners have a duty to consult with a number of other bodies as part of the planning process. As a bare minimum this ought to include representatives of local business interests and the third sector¹. Local partners may also wish to consider consulting other public bodies such as higher and further education institutions, JobCentre Plus, the Environment Agency, the Countryside Council for Wales and the Ministry of Defence, where such bodies are responsible for issues of particular local interest. These are again matters for local discussion and agreement.
- 2.5 In all such cases, local partners may wish to invite other bodies to become involved in community planning to any extent that seems useful. They may, by agreement, become community planning partners to all intents and purposes, or they may be engaged only on particular issues or at particular times. However, there can be no compulsion in these cases: other bodies participate in community planning by invitation, not under a legal duty.

Role of community planning partners

- 2.6 Local authorities and community planning partners have three main duties under the Measure:
- to develop the vision, objectives and actions which together form the community strategy;
 - to carry out those actions to implement the community strategy that fall within their remit; and
 - to engage with, and account to, local citizens and communities for the above

Relationship with Other Partnerships and Plans

The Local Service Board in each local authority area is responsible for ensuring that the range of local partners work effectively in integrating the different strategies that affect their area and in providing services to local people. Detailed arrangements will depend on local circumstance.

There are five over-arching strategies/plans that Local Authorities and partners are required to produce:

- (i) the Community Strategy;
- (ii) the HSCWBS;
- (iii) the Children and Young People's Plan

¹ This is a specific requirement of s44(2)(c)-(d) of the Measure. While making private and third-sector bodies statutory community planning partners would exceed the powers of the National Assembly for Wales, we would in practice expect both sectors to be fully involved in community planning across Wales.

- (iv) the Local Development Plan and
- (v) the Community Safety Plan.

During preparation and implementation, the five strategies/plans should be interlinked and cross-refer to one another, and their overall impact should be continually reassessed. It is important that all partners, stakeholders and the local community are clear how the plans inter-relate, to provide a clear and convincing vision for the future of services for the population and the action to be delivered.

3. Setting Objectives and Actions

- 3.1 One of the basic purposes of community planning is to develop a long-term strategy for the area and all its population based on a thorough analysis of needs and priorities, and opportunities for addressing them. That should generate a 10-15 year vision for improving local social, economic and environmental wellbeing, and contributing to sustainable development.
- 3.2 Freedom to determine that vision in the light of available evidence and intelligence is fundamental. It is not the place of the Welsh Assembly Government to require the inclusion of particular themes or objectives. This section rather sets out the processes that we consider local partners should follow, and some of the issues that they are likely to face.
- 3.3 In determining their vision, local partners may wish to consider the following critical questions:
 - What is the current state of the area – what are the main issues, problems and citizen and community aspirations that need to be addressed?
 - To what extent are these likely to persist in the foreseeable future?
 - What is known about likely future trends over this timeframe, whether demographic, socio-economic or environmental?
 - Where there are gaps in knowledge, what can reasonably be done to solve them?
 - To what extent will partners be able to address current and future issues over a 10-15 year timeframe, and to what extent is that best done jointly?
 - In light of the above, how far does the current community strategy provide a valid basis for developing a refreshed and revised vision for improving wellbeing?
- 3.4 Community planning should also inform, and be informed by:
 - the national priorities of the Welsh Assembly Government (and the UK Government for non-devolved issues);

- regional priorities, including those of Spatial Plan groups and regional partnerships / boards;
- Local priorities as identified by the area's Community Safety Plan; Health Social Care and Well-being Strategy; Children and Young Peoples' Plan; and the Local Development Plan;
- community strategies for neighbouring areas (including, where relevant, areas of England); and
- plans or strategies for areas, towns, communities or neighbourhoods within the local authority's area; including those which community and town councils or Communities First Partnerships may develop.

Formulating Actions

- 3.5 Having agreed on the vision and objectives, local partners then need to develop a set of actions which will give visible effect to them over a shorter (maybe 3-5 year) timescale. This is a fundamental difference from the old regime: community planning must have a strong and clear emphasis on delivery, rather than just on developing a strategy.
- 3.6 Those actions should clearly be ascribed to one or more of the community planning partners set out in the Measure, including community and town councils. The community strategy should not only shape the local authority's financial and business planning processes but also those of all its community planning partners. While all partners will each have priorities which are not set out in the community strategy (perhaps because they are more short-term or more specific), they should all at least ensure that none of these serve to undermine or obstruct delivery of community strategy objectives.
- 3.7 Actions should flow logically from the objectives that partners have identified. They should make an obvious and optimal contribution to attaining that objective, ideally with specific milestones or targets. Figure 2 gives an example of this.

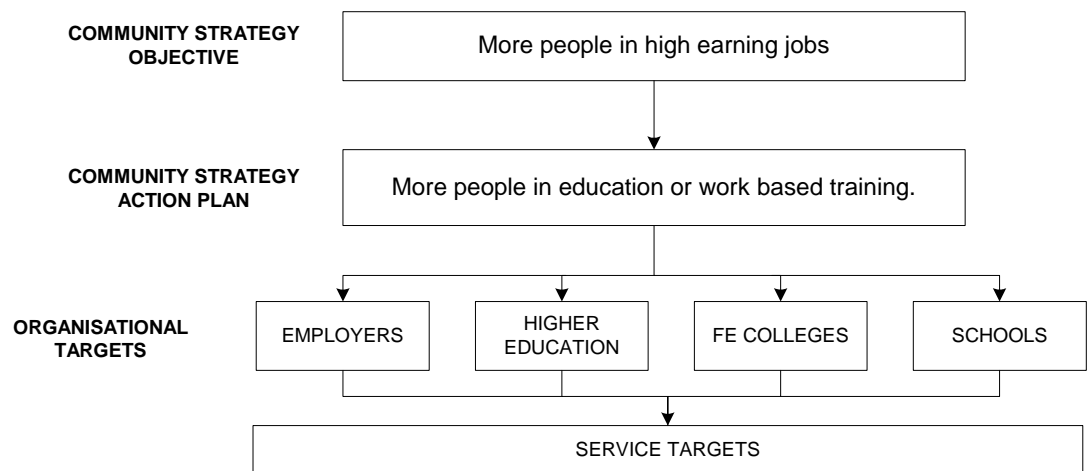


Figure 2 – translating objectives into actions and targets

- 3.8 Section 43 of the Measure requires local partners to take all reasonable steps to deliver community planning actions which fall to them. It is therefore absolutely essential that those actions are actually and practically deliverable by the organisations concerned. In this context it is vital to note that all public bodies are subject to numerous externally-imposed constraints on their actions – for instance legal duties, resource limitations and accountabilities to other parts of government.

4. Publishing the Community Strategy

- 4.1 Once a local authority and its community planning partners have reached a consensus on their community strategy objectives and actions, a local authority should produce a community strategy capturing that consensus.
- 4.2 There is no statutory deadline for producing community strategies but we would expect them to be in place during 2010. They should be reviewed by the local authority and its community planning partners at least every four years to consider the progress made in meeting their objectives and actions. As a result of the local authority and its community planning partners may consider it appropriate to amend the community strategy objectives and actions or possibly agree to new ones. If this is the case the authority should amend the community strategy and republish it as soon as reasonably practicable.

Content of a community strategy

- 4.3 A community strategy should have 6 basic components:
- a long-term vision (10 to 15 years) for the area focusing on the outcomes that partners aim to achieve;

- a prioritised action plan identifying shorter term priorities and activities that will contribute to the achievement of the long-term vision;
- a clear, shared and equal commitment from community planning partners to implement the action plan, and proposals for doing so;
- arrangements for monitoring, scrutinising and accounting publicly for the implementation of the community strategy action plan, and for periodically reviewing the community strategy;
- arrangements for coordinating the work, and actions, of the community planning partners, local service boards and the other key thematic partnerships towards delivering their objectives;
- details of how the community strategy is complementary to neighbouring strategies, details of any joint projects and how the strategy has been developed in the regional context as set out in the Wales Spatial Plan (this process should also work in the reverse).

Delivering the Community Strategy

- 4.4 It is vital that local people are engaged in the development, and where appropriate delivery of the community strategy but, to maintain legitimacy and accountability, it is equally vital that they are kept informed about its delivery. This includes: keeping people informed about the reasons why particular decisions or actions were taken (or not taken), reporting on the outcome of the community planning process – and, later, on the progress that is being made.
- 4.5 It is for overarching strategy partnership to decide how best to meet both their own need for performance information and its frequency, and also the best format or formats for reporting to the public. A summary report should be produced, or updated, at least every two years. This report should contain a broad restatement of the long-term aims of the community strategy and a balanced summary of delivery and its effectiveness since the last report in terms of:
- the progress that has been made on delivering the community strategy outcomes and the well-being of communities;
 - progress that has been made in carrying out community planning actions, including those which form part of the local delivery agreement;
 - a summary of what action local partners are taking to address potentially negative developments; and
 - future plans for engagement and accountability in relationship with communities and other stakeholders and, the scrutiny arrangements for the coming year.

Measuring Delivery

- 4.6 It will be for each partnership, as part of the community planning process to determine the most appropriate indicators of progress from any source, or sector, supported by targets or milestones where appropriate. This includes looking for opportunities to better align sectoral performance management systems, reduce duplication and inefficiencies in reporting processes. Performance management of the community strategy is not about creating a new bureaucracy or performance framework, it is about better management and alignment of existing systems
- 4.7 The focus should shift from cross organisational data collection and reporting to the constructive use of the information by partners to manage their collaborative performance and deliver results for citizens.