

BEST VALUE AUDIT: DRAFT COMMUNITY PLANNING SUBMISSION

The Community Planning Manager (CPM) was requested to draft a short submission that could be included in the self assessment pack to be submitted to Audit Scotland as part of the Best Value Audit. The CPM was asked to look at the Community Planning Statutory Guidance and draft a submission detailing what the CPP has achieved from a Council perspective for each of the sections outlined in the Guidance. The Management Committee is invited to discuss the draft submission.

COMMUNITY PLANNING STATUTORY GUIDANCE

Local Government in Scotland Act 2003

The Argyll and Bute Community Planning Partnership (CPP) was established in September 1999 when the Rural Partnership was transformed into the CPP, thus well ahead of the requirements of the Act. The CPP was formally launched at a media event on 2 April 2001 and to date comprises 25 statutory and voluntary sector partners.

Duty to Initiate and Facilitate Community Planning

The CPP is chaired by the Leader of the Council as it was recognised from an early stage that the Council has a major role to play in initiating and facilitating the community planning process. The underlying ethos that has made the Argyll and Bute CPP successful, has been the real focus on partnership working. Although the Council has taken the lead in many aspects, the Council does not dominate the process. For instance, the Management Committee which is responsible for the day to day running of the Partnership, was firstly chaired by Argyll and the Islands Enterprise and is currently chaired by Scottish Natural Heritage.

The fact that the Community Planning Manager is appointed jointly by the Partnership and is accountable to the Partnership, is also viewed in a positive light as well the fact that the CPP has a dedicated budget funded by 10 of the partners and a separate identity and logo. This lends an air of independence to the process and ensures that it is jointly owned by all Partners.

Duty to Participate in Community Planning

The public bodies mentioned in the Act, except for SPTA and the Fire Board who became involved at a later stage, have all been strategic partners since the CPP was established in 1999. The Enterprise Companies and NHS also Chair the remaining two Theme Groups and have played a pivotal role in shaping the priorities and realising the objectives of the CPP relating to promoting health and well-being (Theme Group 1) and improving opportunities for learning employment and skills development (Theme Group 2). A significant recent development has been the amalgamation of Theme Group 2 with the two Local Economic Fora (LEF) operating across Argyll and Bute. This has eradicated duplication and now the LEF are truly the "economic arms" of the CPP as envisaged by the Guidance relating to LEFs.

Engaging Community Bodies

The voluntary sector and Community Councils have been strategic partners since the CPP was established in 1999. The CPP realised at early stage that increased public involvement was a prerequisite for good governance and essential for an effective Community Planning process and therefore established a Citizens' Panel comprising 1,000 local residents in 2001. The Citizens' Panel has recently been amalgamated with the SIP People's Panel and now comprises 1,200 members. The broadly representative membership of the Panel means that particular groups such as the elderly, minority ethnic groups, people living in particular locations, etc. can be specifically targeted for their views on various issues.

One of the strengths of the Panel is that it is used jointly by the Partnership and is not dominated by the Council. The Citizens' Panel consistently achieves high response rates and is a cost-effective consultative tool used by the Partnership to consult a broad spectrum of the population on a wide range of issues. Partners are also continuously challenged to indicate what the results mean for their organisation, what action they need to take as a result and how they are using the results to improve their service delivery. Feedback is given to the Panel by way of a Citizens' Panel Newsletter.

However, it is recognised that consultation alone is not sufficient and that communities need to be fully engaged in the community planning process. Due to the requirements of the Act and other national policy directives, the CPP took a fundamental look at its structure and how it engages with communities at local level and subsequently a Local Community Planning Pilot was launched in the Bute and Cowal area towards the end of 2004. The Pilot is chaired by the Chair of the Council's Area Committee and Co-ordinated by the Council's Corporate Services Manager. The pilot will be evaluated on an annual basis and if successful, will be rolled out to other areas of Argyll. The Partnership has, however, realised that a flexible approach is needed to engage with communities and that different methods and levels of engagement are needed at the different levels of the CPP structure and that the community should participate in the following ways, namely:

- As watchdogs of organisations providing services (a community conscious/scrutiny role)
- As development partners (more active participation)

Engaging Other Public Bodies

Membership of the CPP is wide and varied and comprises 25 of the main public and voluntary bodies operating across Argyll and Bute. Depending on their focus, some public bodies are more actively involved at theme group or local level rather than at a strategic level. One of the major difficulties in trying to co-ordinate the community planning process, is the fact that boundaries of partners organisations are not co-terminous. For instance, Argyll and Bute has two Enterprise Companies operating within its boundaries and some agencies like SPTA only cover a section of Argyll and Bute whilst others like the NHS cover 5 different Council areas. This has led to competing priorities especially in terms of funding arrangements.

Mainstreaming Community Planning within the Organisation

The Council's Corporate Plan has been amended to reflect the three strategic themes of the CPP. However, ongoing work still needed to firmly embed CP within all levels of the Council and other Partner organisations. The CPP Communications Plan should help to raise the profile of Community Planning within Partner organisations.

Leading on Community Planning Themes

Three strategic Theme Groups with wide ranging membership have been established to address the Partnership's priorities, namely:

- Promoting Health and Well-Being (Theme Group 1)
- Improving Opportunities for Learning, Employment and Skills Development (Theme Group 2)
- Sustaining and Developing our Communities, Culture and Environment (Theme Group 3)

Detailed Action Plans outlining targets, outcomes, timescales, resources and partner involvement have been jointly developed for each of the CPP's priority areas. As mentioned earlier, only one Theme Group is chaired by the Council.

Some of the successes of the Theme Groups include:

- Drivesafe in Argyll and Bute – an initiative to reduce the number of road crashes in Argyll and Bute
- Joint Local Health Improvement Plan – the CPP's shared vision for health improvement
- Formation of a Construction Alliance – to maximise opportunities for skills development and economic benefit in the construction industry

Community Planning Partnership – Fit for Purpose

One of the key strengths of the CPP is its wide and varied membership and the fact that it has a clear structure, remit and reporting mechanisms for each operating level of the Partnership. This has enabled it to respond well to national initiatives and address cross-cutting partnership issues.

Mainstreaming Equal Opportunities in the Community Planning Process

The two underlying principles that underpin each strategic theme and priority are sustainability and equity. Both are central to achieving the overall vision of the Partnership and have been endorsed by all Partners.

Reporting on Community Planning

The CPP produced its first Community Plan in 2001. The vision, strategic themes and priority areas were jointly agreed by the CPP in conjunction with local communities through the Citizens' Panel. Progress on meeting the Partnership's objectives has/will be reported in the following ways:

- Community Planning Leaflets/Community Plan:
 - Two leaflets outlining the CPP's strategic themes and priority areas were distributed to all households in 2001 and 2002.
- CPP Biennial Conference:
 - Attended by partner organisations and representatives from other strategic partnerships, MP's/MSP's, the Scottish Executive, business communities, voluntary sector organisations, community councils, youth forums, Argyll and Bute Citizens' Panel and the media
 - Forum for reviewing progress and identifying new strategic CPP priorities
 - Acts as a "community watchdog/sounding board" for the CPP
- CPP Website:
 - Website developed in 2002 and is in the process of being revised. Although the Council hosts the site, it has an independent address and is a valuable tool for communicating to a variety of audiences, including partner agencies and groups/individuals working within them, the Scottish Executive, other CPPs and the general public. It provides a platform for both sharing information and informing others. It has the potential for supporting two-way communication through forums, surveys and e-mail.
- CPP Communications Plan:
 - Developed for the Partnership by the Council's Communications Manager, in collaboration with PR officers from key partner organisations. The aim of the Communications Plan is to raise the profile of the Community Planning Partnership, both internally and externally and to improve opportunities to share information between partnership agencies
- Annual Progress Report:
 - The first "public facing" Annual Progress Report focussing on the successful outcomes of individual projects, linked by an overview from the CPP is currently being finalised and will be published in June 2005.

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