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**Community Planning in Scotland –
an Evaluation of the Pathfinder Projects
commissioned by COSLA**

January 2000

COSLA

Promoting Scottish Local Government

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**The School of Public Policy
University of Birmingham**

Community Planning in Scotland

**An Evaluation of the Pathfinder Projects
commissioned by COSLA**

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and
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September 1999

FOREWORD

Community planning has a key enabling role to play in renewing our communities, and COSLA and the Scottish Executive have a central role to play in encouraging the development of the Community Planning process. In this context we commissioned the University of Birmingham to undertake an evaluation of the five Pathfinder projects. These projects - in Edinburgh, Highland, Perth and Kinross, South Lanarkshire and Stirling - were established following the publication of the Scottish Office/COSLA Community Planning Working Group's report in 1998. This evaluation provides a clear and encouraging appraisal of the progress made and the lessons to be learned from the pathfinders' experience.

The report highlights that the actual and potential value of community planning is beyond doubt, and that there is a high level of agreement about the fundamental value of Community Planning within local councils and their partner organisations.

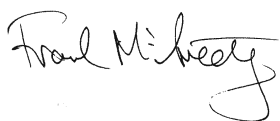
The potential for community planning to:-

- overcome the increasingly fragmented landscape of public policy and service provision;
- establish a joint vision shared by partner organisations; and
- streamline, integrate and improve partnership working and community consultation and involvement are clear benefits of the emerging approach to Community Planning.

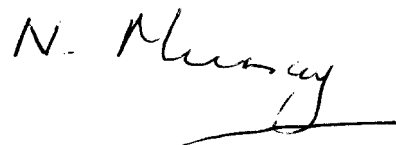
The Scottish Social Inclusion Strategy, published in March last year, also recognised the importance of Community Planning as an effective tool for integrating service delivery actions designed to promote social inclusion. This Pathfinder report now confirms the potential for community planning to deliver “joined-up” action in tackling social exclusion.

As the Scottish Executive, local government, other key public agencies and local communities seek to develop Community Planning, it will be essential to carefully develop the process of strategic thinking, partnership leadership and community consultation and involvement. As the report states, this *process* of bringing the key players together is crucial. It is not something which can be rushed or prescribed from above – it needs to grow organically within each community and take root on the basis of a common sense of ownership and trust among partners. If this process is got right then the resulting community plan will follow as a matter of course and will be genuinely effective.

We are greatly encouraged that progress on Community Planning has not been confined to the 5 “Pathfinder” areas and we commend the good work being done by other councils and their partner agencies in taking forward Community Planning across Scotland. In the Spring COSLA will stage a conference on Community Planning to mark the publication of a progress report which will outline the achievements of councils, their key partner organisations and local communities in advancing this work throughout the country.



FRANK MCAVEETY, MSP
Deputy Minister for Local Government



NORMAN MURRAY
President, COSLA

1. Introduction

Following the publication of the Scottish Office/COSLA Community Planning Working Group's Report in 1998, five 'Pathfinder' Community Planning projects were set up to assist the development of Community Planning in Scotland. The Pathfinders (Edinburgh, Highland, Perth and Kinross, South Lanarkshire and Stirling) were asked to produce Community Plans by December 1998 and a conference to discuss what lessons could be learned from their experience was held on 11 March 1999. Subsequently COSLA commissioned the School of Public Policy at Birmingham University to undertake a short evaluative study of the Pathfinder Projects.

This report of that study is based on research carried out during a two day visit to each of the Pathfinder projects in July and August 1999 during which relevant documentary evidence was collected and individual and group interviews were conducted with council officers and councillors and with representatives of partner organisations and community and voluntary organisations. The report also takes cognisance of the views expressed by representatives of the Pathfinder Councils and their partners at a roundtable discussion of a draft version of the report on 31st August 1999.

The report is not based on a direct comparison between the five Pathfinders. The diversity of their circumstances, starting points and objectives makes such a comparison of doubtful validity. Rather we have based our evaluation on the main themes of Community Planning - Partnership, Community Consultation and Involvement, and Vision and Strategy. In so doing we have aimed to distil the experience and learning from the Pathfinders.

The report is likely to be of primary interest to local authority councillors and officers but it is important to recognise that it contains important implications and lessons for the partner agencies of local authorities, for the community and voluntary sector and, perhaps most importantly, for the Scottish Parliament and Executive, without whose involvement it will be more difficult to realise the full potential of Community Planning as a means of creating a radically new approach to the governance of local communities and the best use of total public resources.

We would like to thank the officers and councillors of the five Pathfinder councils, the representatives of the partner organisations and the community and voluntary sector representatives who provided us with information, views and ideas. In particular, we would like to thank the lead officers in each of the five councils who organised our visits and supported our evaluation.

2. The Development of Community Planning in Scotland - the background and some key characteristics

Community Planning as a concept originated in a consultative draft version of the Labour Party's policy statement for local government ('Renewing Democracy, Rebuilding Communities', 1995). The concept at that stage closely resembled what has since become known as the 'Performance Plan' within the Best Value regime. At the end of 1995 the Labour Party invited local authorities to take part in a pilot project programme. 14 English councils and one Scottish council (Clackmannanshire) took part in the pilot. Perhaps because of the way the term originated the pilot projects focused on an approach to Community Planning that was primarily concerned with developing new approaches to consulting communities about the local authorities' own strategies and service planning and delivery. Partnership arrangements, although included in some of the pilot projects, were generally given a lower priority.

While the pilot projects were underway thinking about Community Planning was developing within the context of the clarification of the Best Value regime and the increasing focus on partnership as a key mechanism for delivering public policy objectives. This thinking was best represented in England in the report on the pilot projects and the Report of the SOLACE Working Group on Community Planning and Engagement. (S. Rogers et al, 'Community Planning and Engagement', School of Public Policy, University of Birmingham, 1998) in which Community Planning was defined as 'a multi-organisational, community-based process, led by the Council, for creating a shared vision of community-identified priorities expressed in an action plan which demonstrates the commitment and support of the organisations and groups involved.'

The thinking was also represented in the report of the Scottish Office/COSLA Working Group which placed a much greater emphasis on Partnership and on the role of Community Planning as the vehicle through which local authorities could make a reality of their role of Community Leaders. In this latter respect the Scottish Office/COSLA report very much reflects the role accorded to Community Planning by the Government in its green and white papers on Local Democracy and Community Leadership. Community Leadership was seen as an increasingly important role for local government, a role that could only be developed and made meaningful by working in effective partnership with other organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors - and with local communities. Community Planning was the vehicle through which this approach could be developed.

In both the English and Scottish developments of Community Planning it is noticeable that an additional concept became increasingly important - the concept of Strategic Vision. Community Planning was increasingly seen as the key vehicle for developing a vision for the area - a vision that was both partnership-based and community-based.

Community Planning, in terms of the development of public policy concepts under the Labour Government, can therefore be seen as a fulcrum for implementing four emerging concepts:

A Strategic Vision for the whole area - a means of creating a holistic approach to the social, economic and environmental needs of the area and its communities.

Community Consultation and Involvement - resulting in the extension of representative government into more participate forms of government and ensuring that the agreed vision should be that of the

community as well as that of public, private and voluntary sector agencies in the area.

Partnership - between not just the main public sector organisations but also the private and voluntary sectors. It has also been recognised that it is important that the commitment of partners needed to be expressed not just through agreement with a strategic vision but also through an action plan expressing the actions that each partner agrees to undertake to achieve the vision.

Community Leadership - essentially the belief that local authorities, while needing to act increasingly in partnership, have a key role in providing leadership for their communities in general and for the Community Planning process in particular. The role is based on two premises. First, that as democratically elected bodies their position in relation to the communities they serve places them apart from all other local public service organisations. Second, that because of their wide ranging powers and responsibilities for planning and services they are the local organisation most suited to having an overall concern for the social, economic and environmental well-being of the area.

It is also possible to identify an additional characteristic that has emerged - that Community Planning should be a multi-layered process, both in terms of geography and issues. Both the Scottish Office/COSLA and the SOLACE reports refer to the need for Community Planning to operate at the level of the whole local authority and for more localised communities such as towns, villages and neighbourhoods.

As a vehicle for implementing these different concepts it is not surprising that Community Planning may be seen as a very complex process that raises problems as well as opportunities. At the same time it is clear that many senior officers and councillors perceive Community Planning as the key to giving meaning to the often poorly defined and understood concept of Community Leadership. For some it is seen simply as a refinement, development and integration of existing approaches. But amongst others there is a recognition that Community Planning contains the seeds of a much more fundamental change in the ways of working and the culture of local authorities and their partner organisations - a change that will impact on the role of elected and appointed representatives as well as on managerial and operational staff.

3. The Tensions Inherent in Community Planning

In attempting to combine different public policy themes within one vehicle it is inevitable that certain tensions will arise. Indeed, it is possible to view Community Planning as a vehicle for resolving the limitations created by the failure to adequately integrate both concepts, processes and organisational arrangements for delivering public policy and service provision at the local level. The history of the Pathfinder projects up until now can therefore be represented as a saga of their individual attempts to confront and resolve the following inherent tensions:

- The tension between **visioning** and strategic thinking and then making the vision an **operational reality**. The skills and processes involved in visioning are different from those of putting the vision into practice - as are the individuals who are likely to be involved.
- The tension between a **focus on partnership** and a focus on **community involvement**. Partnership, particularly if it is strategically oriented, could become a rather exclusive and top-down process. Community involvement needs to be inclusive and bottom-up.
- The tension between an emphasis on **partnership** and especially the development of a strategic partnership process, and the emphasis on the development of a council's role as a **community leader**.
- The tension between providing **leadership for partners** and **leadership for the community**. Leadership and partnership are not mutually exclusive concepts but councillors and officers will need to develop new leadership styles. The role of the Council is pivotal in this respect.
- The tension between a focus on **process** and **strategy** and on **outcome** and action. Given their remit, the Pathfinders have, inevitably and appropriately, had to concentrate on developing the processes - of partnership, of consultation, of strategic thinking - in order to create a draft Community Plan. At the same time they recognise that they will be judged primarily by their communities on the basis of the outcomes that flow from the process. There is a need to get the processes right and to review and improve them, and the lesson from the Pathfinders is that it takes time - generally more time than anticipated. At the same time they have been aware that the process must achieve results if it is to be perceived by all stakeholders as being of value. There is an awareness that the length of the process can result in there being a delay before the results become apparent and that some 'early wins' need to be included in the process.

The five Pathfinder projects provide valuable examples of the way in which five Councils have attempted, in a short period of time, to resolve these tensions within a complex process.

4. The Five Pathfinder Projects - An overall evaluation

The five projects have all contained their share of successes, achievements, frustrations and disappointments. Given the very short timescale they were given to develop and implement their ideas it is fair to say that they have all achieved significant successes. Our overall conclusions about the Pathfinder process are as follows:

- **The actual and potential value of Community Planning is beyond doubt.**

There is no evidence from the Pathfinder projects of there being any basic dispute about the fundamental value of Community Planning - within either the councils or their partner organisations.

- **The primary benefits that have been identified are:**

- the establishment of a vision shared by the main partner organisations.
- the opportunity to both rationalise, integrate and improve community consultation and involvement.
- the opportunity to rationalise and to develop partnership working.
- the opportunity provided by Community Planning to overcome the increasingly fragmented landscape of public policy and service provision at the local level.

- **Mechanisms for Community Planning**

While the value of Community Planning is undisputed, finding the most appropriate mechanisms is more problematic. While the Pathfinders were confident that they had developed relevant and useful mechanisms with their partners there is clearly more exploration and learning needed before it is possible to become prescriptive and certain. Many of the local mechanisms created stemmed from initiatives that were already in place and therefore had particular local significance.

- **Timescale**

The expectation that the Pathfinders could complete a full process of Community Planning in the timescale they were given was unrealistic. To develop both partnership arrangements and appropriate methods of community consultation as the means of producing a strategic vision can, depending on each authority's starting point, take a period of two to three years.

- **Process not product**

There was general agreement that it was the development of the processes of strategic thinking, partnership, leadership and community consultation and involvement that was more important than the production of a plan.

- **Diversity**

Although there were a number of similarities in the approaches adopted by the Pathfinders there were also numerous differences. The view from the Pathfinders is that the diversity of approach is legitimate and necessary in order to meet the widely differing local circumstances and conditions.

- **A Learning Experience for Everyone**

The Pathfinder councils recognise that they have undergone a process of rapid learning - as do many of the partner and community organisations. Given that the Pathfinder councils are still developing and extending some aspects of their approach to Community Planning it is particularly important that the process of learning should continue and be extended to wider groups of elected and appointed members and to staff at all levels in the councils and their partner organisations.

- **Community Leadership**

Developing a community leadership role for the Council was seen as an important part of the process in each of the Pathfinders. But doing so during a period of political uncertainty resulted in a relatively low level of direct councillor involvement. This raises some questions about the way that Community Leadership may develop in Scottish Councils. In some cases officers appear to have achieved considerable progress without a great deal of direct input from councillors but it seems inconceivable that Community Planning can develop fully without more political input and involvement.

- **Elected and appointed members**

There is a need to find appropriate ways of directly involving members in the processes of Community Planning. The direct involvement of elected and appointed members in the Pathfinder projects did not appear to be widespread, in some cases being limited to those in leadership positions. It is therefore unclear whether Community Planning has had a real impact on the majority of elected and appointed members. In some of the Pathfinders the development of more localised approaches is seen as the main opportunity for the wider involvement of councillors. Community Planning provides a useful vehicle for taking councillors beyond the service committee boundaries within which they so often operate.

- **Dominant Concepts**

The dominant concepts within the Pathfinder projects have been partnership and strategic vision. The other themes have been less clearly developed except in the case of Stirling with the creation of the Stirling Assembly as an important consultative mechanism. The aspect that will need the most evaluation in the future is the development of more localised approaches to Community Planning as this is likely to be both diverse and complex. It will also be the level that will be most visible to the community and will therefore be the basis on which they will make their judgements of councils and their partners.

- **Pragmatism - build on what you have**

The Pathfinder projects have generally been pragmatic in so far as they were based on existing initiatives. Indeed it is likely that they became Pathfinders because of those initiatives. This raises a question about the relevance of their experience for other Councils - particularly those that do not have similar initiatives already in place. However it is important to recognise the importance of building on what is already in place. Community Planning should not be regarded as a blank sheet. All councils and their partners will have had some experience of strategic thinking, partnership and consultation.

5. Discussion of Key Themes

a) Partnership

The most significant outcome of the Pathfinder projects has been the creation and/or development of strategic partnership structures and processes. The significance of this should not be underestimated for while there are many existing examples of partnerships that have been set up to fulfil specific and limited objectives - examples that have led to a greater understanding of partnership working in specific contexts - there have been fewer examples of strategic partnerships that have as broad a remit and purpose as that implied by Community Planning. The partnership arrangements in the Pathfinder projects all constitute significant developments that can be adapted by other councils as models of a development that will increasingly be required at the local level - whether or not Community Planning becomes a statutory duty. The key value of such strategic partnership arrangements lies not just as a mechanism through which Community Plans can be progressed but also as vehicles for developing joint vision and joint action in a variety of contexts. As the Highlands Wellbeing Alliance illustrates, they can be the basis for responding to the increasing tendency of funding agencies to demand a partnership approach when bidding for funds.

However, there can be a tension between the need to assert or reassert democratic leadership as part of a council's Community Leadership role, and the requirements of successful partnership working. It is necessary, as the Pathfinders have demonstrated, for both council officers and councillors to adjust some traditionally held perceptions of their roles. This will be particularly important in those cases where some councillors remain unconvinced as to the appropriateness of partnership, seeing it as a curtailment or emasculation of their right to challenge partner organisations on behalf of the communities they represent as part of the process of democratic scrutiny. Officers may also hold a perception of their role that stresses their right to take unilateral and independent action.

Community Planning highlights the need to strike a balance between working in partnership with a range of other organisations and the need to exercise a right of appropriate scrutiny of their activities. The notion of a Community Leadership role for councils would be reduced if the right to scrutinise and comment on other organisations was excluded from it. At the same time an inappropriate or unduly aggressive form of scrutiny will make it difficult or impossible to develop effective partnership working. The challenging and conflictual style of relationship that is characteristic of some political activity does not accord well with the style that is needed to initiate partnerships - which is characterised by an need to develop understanding, trust and areas of agreement rather than to challenge and focus on differences. There is a need to find ways of convincing councillors and officers that facilitating a partnership approach is, in the current climate and circumstances, both inevitable and necessary. The board members and staff of partner organisations need to be similarly convinced.

An important issue in developing Community Planning is whether partner organisations accept that councils should have a leadership role within the partnership. Our evidence from the Pathfinders is that the majority of partners accepted that it was appropriate for the Council to take the lead for reasons of:

- a) pragmatism (Community Planning emerged from the local government environment);
- b) resource availability (Councils were perceived, rightly or wrongly, as having the resources to support the process);
- c) breadth of responsibility and service provision; and

- d) because of their democratically elected basis. In some instances the inevitability of this was accepted with a degree of resignation and a concern that the councils might try to impose their own agenda. However, the Pathfinders generally demonstrated that, while it was appropriate for the Council to initiate Community Planning, they were aware of the need to ensure that they did not attempt to dominate proceedings.

The important issue may not so much be one of who leads but the style of leadership adopted, The key lessons appear to be:

- to ensure that even where it is necessary for the Council to take the initiative and to lead initially it is important to correct this balance as the partnership develops.
- to strike a balance between taking the initiative and adopting an inclusive approach by drawing partners in and allowing them to adopt leadership roles in some aspects of the workings of the strategic partnership.
- involvement by, and agreement amongst, the chief executives of the partner organisations is an essential ingredient in helping to clarify respective roles and relationships.
- partnership working arrangements also need to exist at several levels in the partner organisations. ‘Partnership at the top’ is a necessary but insufficient basis for ensuring success.
- There is a need to be aware of the emergence of situations where two or more partners genuinely perceive their role as being of key strategic significance. This is mainly a question of perceptions of organisational role and mission but in some cases it may be that the statutory remit of the organisations involved does make competition for strategic leadership a possibility.

The other issues needing to be highlighted are:

i) Co-ordination, Rationalisation and Simplification of Partnerships

The audits carried out by the Pathfinders revealed a very large numbers of existing partnership arrangements in each case. They also highlighted the need for some rationalisation to take place and the moves to achieving this were seen as an important benefit. There is a need for Councils to develop better communication, information and networking skills that will allow them to co-ordinate, cross-fertilise and monitor what is going on in their own areas. However the extent to which councils and their partners can go in rationalising and simplifying partnerships may be limited by the extent to which funding bodies, including the Scottish Parliament and Executive, are prepared to review and rationalise their requirements for partnership working in different contexts and for different purposes. There has been an inexorable rise in the demand for partnership working at the local level with little evidence of an attempt to co-ordinate the different demands.

ii) Few or Many Partners?

The speed at which partnership arrangements had to proceed within the Pathfinder projects meant that it was understandable for Councils to seek out partners who were perceived as being of central importance and who were also perceived as being reliable and supportive. The problem in the long term is that this leads to an exclusive rather than inclusive approach and ultimately to a challenging of the legitimacy of the basis of the partnership. Conversely,

strategic partnerships that have a wide membership are more difficult to manage. Some of the Pathfinders began the process with a relatively small group of partners and then enlarged the group as the process developed. While this approach can be justified on several grounds it can also lead to problems in fully integrating the later members. The absence of, or slowness to include, representatives of the voluntary and community sectors is recognised, in some cases, as a failing that should not be repeated. Equally, there is evidence to suggest that it makes sense to commence the strategic partnership with the key big-spending public agencies. Not only do they exercise full or partial control over most of the public resources going into the area but also the creation of such a partnership sends a signal to other organisations and to the community that the ‘big-spenders’ are serious about working together.

iii) The Activities of Strategic Partnership

In the context of the Pathfinders’ approach to Community Planning the key activities of a strategic partnership can be summarised as being:

- consensus building
- trust building
- developing a clearer understanding of each partner’ s role and responsibilities - particularly at a time when the role of some major public sector agencies is changing
- reviewing the existing strategies and plans of the partners
- developing a shared vision and priorities
- contextualising and clarifying community planning
- auditing existing partnership arrangements
- auditing existing community consultation and involvement arrangements
- data collation and analysis
- plan production.

iv) The Basis for Strategic Partnership Thinking

The ability of a strategic partnership to think in visionary or strategic terms will be partly dependent on the extent to which the partner organisations themselves operate in a strategic or visionary way. This can be a problem where councils continue to operate through service-based, operationally oriented planning and management procedures. It is more difficult to agree a joint vision if the partners have no vision of their own. This problem is in contrast to the more usually perceived problem of the partners having visions or strategies that conflict with each other. The extent of internal visionary and strategic thinking in the Pathfinders may have been a factor in the way each project developed.

b) Community Consultation and Involvement

The objectives of the Pathfinder projects and their short timescale resulted in there being less concrete experience of community consultation and involvement for us to analyse in most cases. Where consultation has taken place the councils and their public sector partners have generally regarded it as “being as good as they could achieve in the circumstances”. Given more time they may have developed more extensive and intensive processes. Community representatives were, not surprisingly, more critical - both of the lack of consultation and the processes used. We do not consider that we have obtained sufficient detailed information from the Pathfinder projects for us to draw general conclusions - this is likely to come in the future. However, the projects helped to identify the fundamental importance of auditing and co-ordinating existing consultative arrangements and of ensuring that Community Planning does not result in the addition of yet more layers of consultation. The notion of ‘consultation fatigue’ can be used as a bureaucratic excuse for

not consulting but the projects have revealed that fatigue is being experienced in the community and voluntary sector as organisations and groups struggle to respond to the increasing consultative demands of their public sector partners.

The Pathfinders have also revealed, in terms of their thinking if not yet their practice, an awareness of the need to involve the ‘harder-to-reach’ disadvantaged communities and community interests and that to do so will require a variety of methods - some of which may demand the acquisition of new skills.

The creation of the Stirling Assembly and its use as a key consultative mechanism provides an exception to some of the above remarks. The existence of the Assembly meant that it was possible to engage with the community at an early point in the Community Planning process and involve them in discussing, revising, agreeing and ratifying the key strategic priorities to be included in the draft Plan.

In view of the McIntosh Commission Report recommendations concerning **Community Councils** we sought to find out how their role was perceived within the Community Planning process. We received a fairly uniform message that they were not perceived as appropriate bodies to act as the key conduits of community involvement and consultation. Their role as being one of several forms of representation was clearly recognised but it was not felt that they should have any special role in the process. In some cases there was some disquiet expressed by all partners at the general thrust of the McIntosh Commission Report.

The key messages that have emerged from the pathfinders are:

- the need to engage in consultation before the draft plan is produced.
- the need to have some representation of the community and voluntary sector on the main partnership body as early as possible.
- the need to use multiple methods of consultation and involvement that are appropriate to the needs of different needs and circumstances of different communities and interests.
- the need to convince community and voluntary organisations that councils and their public sector partners have the capacity to deliver their visions and priorities.

c) **Vision and Strategy**

All the Pathfinders were successful in developing a clearly stated joint vision with their partners. Despite the different contexts there was, not altogether surprisingly, a degree of commonality in the themes they used to express their vision in their Community Plans (See Box 1 below). The timescale of the visions varied significantly however. There also appeared to be agreement that realising the vision was likely to be more difficult than agreeing and expressing it. In that sense there was an acceptance that the Community Plan was only a first step in the process and that a great deal of work lay ahead in comparing and rationalising the multitude of plans within the Councils and within their partner organisations. There was also a realisation (and an apprehension?) that the implications for all partners’ budgets and resource allocation procedures would need to be analysed in some detail and that this could prove a test for the partnership relationships that had been built up.

Three key issues have arisen in relation to the **resource implications** of the process. These are:

1. *Resourcing the direct costs of the Community Planning process.* In the Pathfinders the

councils appear to have borne the majority of the direct costs with varying degrees of support from their partners. This approach appears to have been taken largely for granted. However we are unclear about whether the costs have been incorporated in core budgets or treated as one-off project costs.

2. *Staff Resources.* The main staff resources put into the projects has been focused on a few lead officers in the partnership and particularly on the council lead officer. All the Pathfinders recognised that considerable time was needed to develop the trust and understanding necessary to make Community Planning successful. They were also aware of the need to involve more staff as the process developed. For some of the partners there was the additional problem of needing to support more than one Community Planning process (See ‘coterminosity’ below). We gained the impression that, because of the speed with which the Pathfinder projects were set up and their short timescale, the councils and their partners had not had the opportunity to plan for the staffing implications. As a consequence some staff were placed under considerable pressure.

Box 1. Community Plan Themes

Edinburgh	Highland	Perth & Kinross	South Lanarkshire	Stirling
Social inclusion		Social inclusion	Successful and inclusive communities	Social inclusion
Community well being	Safe, healthy communities	Health and welfare	Safe and healthy communities	Community safety Caring Community
Economic growth	Prosperous communities	The economy	Working and learning communities	Prosperity, income, jobs, opportunities
Information and learning	Learning communities			Environmental and sustainable development
Environmental sustainability	Sustainable communities Capable and confident communities	Young people Older people		Quality services Local democracy and accountability
Major development projects				

3. *Alignment and adjustment of budgets and investments.* Although this had not yet occurred to any significant degree the Pathfinders were all clearly aware that this needed to take place and was likely to be a difficult process. There was also an awareness that some of the budgetary and resource planning processes imposed on the councils and their partners by their respective funders could impose constraints on the extent to which this could be achieved.

Problems relating to the **coterminosity** of boundaries also emerged and may be categorised as follows:

1. Differences in **geographical perspective** created by different organisational boundaries and different forms of area and divisional structure within those boundaries.
2. The problem created for some partners of potentially needing to find appropriate staff support for **multiple processes** of Community Planning. Strathclyde Police, with an area covering 13 councils, represents an example of this problem.
3. A more fundamental problem is likely to relate to **the ability of the larger partner organisations to respond** in resource allocation and service delivery terms, to the different visions and priorities that may emerge from the various Community Planning processes within their area. This potential problem needs to be addressed not only by the organisations themselves but also by the Scottish Parliament and Executive.

Some difficulties were experienced in obtaining and analysing data from the main partners. The reasons for these difficulties have not been sufficiently explored in this research but it may be surmised that the following factors played some part:

- the different definitions of, and ways of organising, basic data.
- the inability of organisational representatives to collate information from within their own large and diversified organisation - an intra- rather than inter-organisational problem.
- the perception of the need to maintain confidentiality of data .
- the reluctance of some organisations to make available data which could form part of the process of translating the strategy into action.

There are many information issues arising from community planning that require the kind of more detailed further exploration that is currently being undertaken by COSLA with the Community Planning Officer Network.

6. Community Planning and Best Value - Two Big Issues

The Scottish Office/COSLA Working Group identified that one of the benefits of Community Planning was in “helping to achieve Best Value from the sum total of public resources devoted to an area.” The Pathfinders have demonstrated that, even if their activities in this respect have not yet produced specific end results, Community Planning has provided a very clear stimulus to local authorities and to their partners to thoroughly examine their service delivery arrangements and their resource allocations and investments in the light of their agreed visions and priorities. It may therefore be assumed that in all five areas changes to service delivery and resource allocations will occur and that such changes will represent a better use of the totality of public resources.

The Best Value regime on its own is less likely to create such a stimulus because it is focused primarily on local authorities and it has been designed as a regulatory process as well as a self improvement process. The main pressure will inevitably be on local authorities to justify their own use of resources rather than to consider the crosscutting and wicked issues that involve other agencies. Without such considerations Best Value will become little more than a continuation of past governments’ policies to improve the performance of local authority services. Community Planning can be seen as a more positive route to the exploration of a broader concept of Best Value - a concept that is likely to have more far-reaching impact than if it is pursued unilaterally.

The relationship between Best Value and Community Planning inevitably raises the question of whether it is necessary to place some formal obligation on partner organisations to co-operate with local authorities on both Best Value and Community Planning. This issue is explored further in the next section.

It may also be necessary to reach some agreement as to the relationship between Community Plans and Performance Plans - and their relationship to the range of other statutory and non-statutory plans produced by local authorities. One conceptual model of the relationship would suggest that a clear **hierarchy** of plans is required. In this case the Community Plan could be seen as being at the top of the hierarchy and individual service plans at the bottom. However the different nature and focus of the plans that a local authority has to produce make it difficult to construct a neat hierarchy that defines the relative status of each plan. An alternative model is one which focuses on **plan alignment**. This model of the planning process gives more credence to the complementary nature of plans and therefore suggests the need to create processes for ensuring that different plans do not contradict each other. A third conceptual model is that of a **jigsaw** in which the planning environment only achieves coherence if Community Planning informs and steers the whole process and thereby enables other plans to be appropriately located and ‘fitted together’.

7. The Wider Context of Community Planning - some issues for the Scottish Parliament and Executive

Although none of the Pathfinders have yet completed a full ' cycle it is already apparent that the potential of Community Planning is considerable and should lead to changes in political and organisational cultures, in strategic and operational planning processes, in resource planning and allocation processes, in the way services are delivered to citizens and communities and in the development of genuine processes of joined-up thinking and action. There are however a number of barriers to the achievement of these changes, some of which are local and have been addressed elsewhere in this report. Other barriers have a wider relevance, relating to the government of Scotland and require the active involvement of the Scottish Parliament and Executive. The main issues we have identified are as follows:

1. **Acknowledging the complexity.** At the most general level it is important that the Scottish Parliament and Executive acknowledge the complexity of the process - and in particular that it is the process itself which is of greater importance than the production of a plan.
2. **Further clarifying the purpose and role of Community Planning in relation to other major initiatives such as Best Value** While each of the Pathfinders has developed its own understanding of Community Planning there is a need to promote a more wide-ranging debate that should include all the major public sector agencies.
3. **Assisting in the rationalisation of the planning environment** Local authorities can only go so far in rationalising the plethora of plans and strategies they are required to produce - often in pursuit of resources that have been earmarked by funders for specific purposes. Community Planning provides an incentive for the Scottish Parliament to work with local authorities and their partners on this aspect of joined-up thinking.
4. **Responding to the shared visions and priorities** The Pathfinders have developed joint visions for between 5 and 20 years. There is a need for a mechanism to be developed whereby the Scottish Parliament can acknowledge, consider and respond to these visions.
5. **Responding to the resource implications of Community Planning-** for both councils and their public sector partners. Funding and budgetary regimes will need to be sufficiently flexible to allow organisations to respond the Community Planning processes with which they are involved. The benefits of Community Planning in terms of real joined-up thinking and action will not be fully realised unless public sector organisations can respond to locally identified needs and strategies.
5. **A statutory duty?** Community Planning is currently a voluntary activity and the Pathfinders were self-selected volunteers who were eager to implement the concept. The same eagerness may not be found in all local authorities and therefore the question arises of whether it should be made a statutory duty. The question has also been raised of whether there should be a statutory obligation placed on other public sector agencies to co-operate in both Community Planning and Best Value. The evidence we obtained from the Pathfinders was mixed in relation to these questions. In general there appeared to be more support for having a statutory duty amongst local authority chief executives and senior officers than amongst the partners and the voluntary and community sector who tended more towards being ambivalent or opposed to legislation. However everyone agreed that a statutory duty should not be prescriptive as to the process but should provide Parliamentary affirmation of the need for a strategic partnership and community based planning process.

7. **A statutory rationale?** Although we gained no direct evidence from the Pathfinders we would support the view that we understand has been put forward by COSLA that a duty of Community Planning needs to be underpinned by a power of general competence or community initiative. An explicit power (and duty) of general concern for the area and its communities provides the legislative justification for undertaking Community Planning. Without such a power local authorities are more likely to be regarded only as providers of defined services and, as a consequence, their Community Leadership role can be open to doubt and uncertainty. A clearly defined power of community initiative would provide not only the statutory **justification** of their role as community leaders and community planners but would also provide an **incentive** to councils to rethink their organisational arrangements and ways of working.

Conclusion

Our brief study of the five Pathfinder projects has confirmed some of the views expressed at the COSLA conference in March 1999 and has identified some additional issues. It is important to recognise that it is very much a study of 'work in progress'. Each of the Pathfinders has made considerable progress but all are continuing to develop and implement different aspects of their process. It is important that local authorities, their partners and communities, and the Scottish Parliament and Executive continue to learn from the experiences of the Pathfinders and of those other councils in Scotland that have initiated their own approach to Community Planning. In some respects it is in Scotland, through the Scottish Office/COSLA Working Group report and the Pathfinder projects, that the lead has been taken on Community Planning within the United Kingdom. The opportunity to significantly transform the local public policy landscape has been created and should not be ignored.

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September 1999.

Appendix

A Description and Analysis of the Five pathfinder projects

The following short descriptions of the five Pathfinder projects is structured around the three main themes of Community Planning used elsewhere in this report:

1. Partnership.
2. Community Consultation and Involvement.
3. Strategy and Vision.

The analysis of each project focuses on the key strengths of each approach and the main lessons that have been learned.

THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

Partnership

Community Planning in Edinburgh has been developed both as a plan and a process with the emphasis placed on the development of a strategic partnership built on existing partnerships in the city. The Edinburgh Partnership Group (EPG) was formed at the very beginning of the process and has steered the development of Community Planning. The members are:

Edinburgh Council; East of Scotland Water; Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce and Enterprise; Edinburgh and Lothians Tourist Board; Lothian and Borders Police; Lothian Health; Napier University; Scotsman Publications Ltd.; Scottish Homes; Lothian and Edinburgh Enterprise Ltd.; and Edinburgh Voluntary Organisations Council (from January 1999).

The Partnership Group brought together key public service chief executives together with those who have a wider or particular perspective with the aim of adopting a strategic perspective on managing the city and overseeing the development of the Community Plan. It was based on a network previously formed by the Council's Chief Executive and Community Planning was seen as giving a language to what was already happening and as providing a coherent framework for the partners to address the challenges of local governance within the new public policy agenda.

Community Consultation and Involvement

Following an audit of existing consultation activities a leaflet was distributed in November 1998 to provide information and to raise awareness about the Community Planning process amongst a variety of stakeholders. The draft Community Plan 'A Vision for Edinburgh - Towards a City Plan for the Next Five Years' was approved in December and between February and April 1999 a consultation exercise was undertaken that included:

- Distribution of over 10,000 copies of the Plan, and a summary of it, to a range of community, voluntary, public and private sector interests
- A press advertisement with a freephone telephone call centre
- A survey of the 300 members of the Citizens Panel
- Focus groups with specific communities of interest
- Use of the Internet
- Meetings with the voluntary sector and business community
- Meetings with Community Councils and other representative forums
- Letters and e-mail communications.

From June 1999 the feedback from the consultation activities has been analysed.

It is generally considered that the community consultation and involvement, whilst subject to some criticism, was as successful as it could be given the constraints of time and the initial differing perceptions of what Community Planning.

Vision and Strategy

The draft 5 year City Plan has a vision based on 6 themes:

- The Capital City and the role of government
- Social Inclusion
- Community well-being
- Economic growth
- Information and learning
- Environmental sustainability
- Major development projects

The emphasis of the Plan is on addressing strategic issues in a ‘joined-up’ way rather than as separate, fragmented and discrete problems. The Action Plan framework for the partners attempts to develop processes and initiatives to secure the joined-up approach. An appendix identifies the range of partnerships operating in the city, specifies headline resources and identifies key questions for consultation.

A range of actions has been agreed by the partnership group in order to deliver Community Planning that includes:

- production of a final plan by autumn 1999
- Development of city-wide multi-agency performance indicators
- Development of an annual review process
- Review of existing partnership arrangements
- Arrangements to promote better co-ordination between agencies
- Review of the partnership group
- Development of further mechanisms for stakeholder involvement
- Council-specific implications of Community Planning and future engagement of elected members

All partners agree that the next stage of development is the review and rationalisation of their respective plans, over 40 of which have been identified.

Key Strengths

- The creation of a single set of shared priorities
- Commitment to the process from the partner organisations
- Creating the basis of a high level process of accountability amongst the partners for public investment in the city
- The consultation process can be considered a success given the time available - despite the valid criticisms expressed by some communities of interest.
- The need to communicate success better has been highlighted, as has the need to rationalise existing joint planning and partnership activities.

- The process has generated a new and heightened awareness of the issues involved in partnership working.

Key Issues and Lessons for the Future

- **Timescale.** This is a long-term process that cannot be rushed. There is a need to allow adequate time to involve stakeholders and take them with you, for group dynamics to resolve themselves.
- **The starting point** How Community Planning develops will depend on where you are starting from. Past experience will determine how things develop and it is therefore essential to audit and understand that experience.
- **Definition** There will be many different definitions of Community Planning and there is therefore a need to use the development process to explore and resolve the differences.
- **Consult** before drafting the plan - even if it is not a full process of consultation.
- **Action and Outcome.** The Plan and the process have to be tangible to lay people. Include action and outcomes as well as process issues and, although it is a long-term process, try to demonstrate some early successes.
- **The Partnership** needs to be as representative as possible but it is necessary to recognise that this may be genuinely difficult to achieve.
- **Voluntary sector** involvement is needed from the start.
- **Leadership** The commitment and leadership of the chief executives of the partner organisations is crucial.
- Middle managers also need to become involved
- **Councillors** There is a need to involve more than just leading councillors and to ensure that it is on a cross-party basis.
- **Community involvement** should be as proactive as possible.

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Partnership

The approach to Community Planning has been built on the existence of a number of existing partnership arrangements - and in particular on the Wellbeing Alliance which was created in 1996 as a series of informal meetings between the chief executives of five key public service agencies and was subsequently extended to include a senior officers' group and several working groups to develop joint thinking and action on topics such as Community Safety, Youth issues and Healthy Living Centres. The members of the Alliance were: Highland Council, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Scottish Homes, Highland Health Board and the Northern Constabulary.

Early in 1998 the key activities of the Alliance were agreed as being: the exchange of information between partners; locality planning; area prioritisation; programme co-ordination; joint delivery of local projects and the joint delivery of services. Given these activities it was agreed that the Alliance formed the most appropriate mechanism through which Community Planning could be developed and an officer working group was set up, led by the Council's Head of Policy and including representation from Scottish Natural Heritage, to take forward Community Planning and to produce a draft Plan. The specific activities agreed by the six partners for the Pathfinder project were; agreeing partnership arrangements for Community Planning; agreeing shared objectives and resourcing priorities; agreeing the issues in 'Looking Ahead for the Highlands' (an earlier strategic vision document); reviewing and simplifying partnership and planning arrangements; and agreeing local community priorities and how they would be addressed.

The approach to partnership is continuing to develop. Two voluntary sector representatives have joined the Wellbeing Alliance and there are proposals to include councillors and non-executive board members of the partner agencies.

Community Consultation and Involvement

The draft Community Plan, published in May 1999, is currently out to consultation and the final plan is due to be published in January 2000. While the need to produce a draft plan in a short space of time has meant that involvement has been concentrated amongst a small group of staff there is a clear recognition that the development of effective and legitimate processes and involvement is a fundamentally important issue. The current proposals for consulting on the draft Plan are based around 3 objectives:

Information - using multiple methods to inform all partners, the voluntary and business sectors, communities and individuals about Community Planning processes and the Plan. methods include: Exhibitions; Web-sites; Briefings; newsletters; Council service points; the media.

Learning - listening to and learning from the feedback from: the written responses to the Plan; the Council's Performance and Community Confidence surveys; the Community Safety survey; reference and focus groups; community networks; the consultation procedures for other strategies such as transportation and structure planning.

Dialogue - debating the issues, vision and priorities, as well as the process, by means of: a website discussion forum; youth fora; area conferences; other existing local participation initiatives such as Dutchas.

The Council has also recently prepared its own Consultation Strategy that highlights the need to use a variety of methods that include: Community Councils; focus groups; a Telephone Survey Panel; Committee Question Times; radio phone-ins; and Planning For Real. It also refers to the need to

make the volume and frequency of consultation more manageable for community groups - an issue that was highlighted and addressed by the fact that the consultation periods for the Community Plan and the Structure Plan coincided

Vision and Strategy

The importance of having a shared vision had been recognised prior to the Pathfinder project and the consultative development of 'Looking Ahead for the Highlands' was an important example of visionary leadership. The need for a shared vision was fully supported by the partnership members.

The vision contained in the draft Community Plan, 'Highland - The Natural Place To Be', is based on 5 themes:

- Learning communities
- Prosperous communities
- Safe, healthy communities
- Capable, confident communities
- Sustainable communities

Within each theme there is a statement of shared priorities and a description of current partnership projects. The plan also contains sections on the relevance of Community Planning to Highland, analysis of current trends and issues, a description of the 6 partners and a statement of how Community Planning will be progressed. The Plan has been based on an analysis of the main strategies and plans of the partners

The partners are currently considering how the process can be extended on a local basis and, while it is not proposed to have a 'Plan' for every area, it is recognised that this development is important for producing community based outcomes. They are also considering the resourcing implications for each organisation.

Key Strengths

- The most significant success has been the consensus amongst the partners about the benefits of having an agreed vision, the rationalisation of partnership arrangements, the rationalisation of consultation arrangements, and the alignment of investments.
- The achievement of producing a Community Plan - despite the very tight timescale and the uncertainties caused by the elections.
- The development of greater trust and understanding between the officers involved in the working group.
- The willingness of partners to contribute to and to remain involved in the process.
- The exploration of a number of key public policy issues that took place during the process - even if some of them remain unresolved.

Key Issues and Lessons for the Future

- **Building on what exists** A great deal of partnership working and community consultation already existed in the Highlands - to all intents and purposes Community Planning was already taking place in a number of areas. It is important to build on these arrangements.
- **The Council's leadership Role** Issues about the Council's role remain to be resolved. The

implications of Community Planning for the roles of partner organisations in the local public policy landscape have not yet been fully addressed

- **Embedding Community Planning** The partner organisations need to articulate how the process and the plan will be embedded in their organisations. This has not yet happened.
- **Timescale.** The timescale of the Pathfinder project was prohibitive. It takes time to develop mutual understanding and trust, to collate and analyse data from each partner and to check out the different assumptions and ways of working of the partners.
- **Resourcing.** It is important to be aware of and plan for the resourcing of both the process and the outcomes of the process. There is a need to analyse the resourcing and planning implications of the Community Plan for each of the partners - particularly in the light of the changing planning and resourcing regimes that are being imposed on them.
- **Involvement.** There is a need to have a core group to drive the process forward but there is also a need to extend involvement to a wider group of staff in all the partner organisations. This requires an inclusive style of leadership. There are, however, significant issues about how ownership of the process can be widened that still need to be addressed.
- **Organisational cultures, roles and procedures** There is a need to think through the implications of Community Planning for political, managerial and front-line cultures, roles and organisational procedures and ways of working.
- **Councillor involvement.** Developing structures and roles for getting more councillor involvement in the process is important. Developing Community Planning to local/area levels provides an opportunity to do this more extensively.
- **Community Involvement.** While the timescale of the project precluded extensive direct involvement in the process this remains an important issue. The opportunity for meaningful involvement of local communities will occur when Community Planning is developed at the local/area level. The diversity of communities in the Highlands will require a diversity of methods and processes of consultation and involvement.

PERTH AND KINROSS COUNCIL

Partnership

This approach to Community Planning has been built upon previous work on developing partnerships and a Strategic Alliance. In October 1998, a Community Planning Steering Group was established with key strategic partners selected on the basis of those who had “sufficient scope, resources and influence to effect the development and regeneration of Perth and Kinross at a strategic level”. It comprised: Perth and Kinross Council, Perth College, Tayside Police, Scottish Homes, and Scottish Enterprise

The process has been managed by a twin arrangement of a Strategy Group and an Officers Group. The Leader of the Council chairs the Strategy Group and the Chief Executive is present as a representative of the Council, thereby ensuring a symbolic equality of status within the Group. The Officers Group was charged with developing and implementing the plan. The overall approach has been to get the partnership ‘right’ through extensive partnership development work. This has led to the production of a protocol for the partnership, which will guide its future actions.

Community Consultation and Involvement

There is an evolutionary process in train for developing juries and panels and other innovative qualitative and quantitative methods to enable community opinions to be registered. A consultation exercise is planned which will be a joint exercise on behalf of the Community Planning Group with partners being asked to undertake responsibility for aspects of the programme. Pooling resources and expertise in this way will deliver one of the main areas of synergy - the co-ordination of actions and avoidance of duplication.

The Viewfinder Citizens’ Panel has been established by the Perth and Kinross Council as a means of monitoring public satisfaction with services. It provides a representative sample of 1000 residents who have agreed to provide data. The Viewfinder panel will be a key mechanism through which to consult with the public on the draft Community Plan.

Strategy and Vision

The following definition of Community Planning was agreed:

“The citizens of Perth and Kinross should receive high quality public services from all agencies. Delivery of these services should be informed by both the needs and views of the citizens, communities, and the private and voluntary sectors. Community Planning will provide both the vision for the area and the framework by which high quality public services can be delivered in the most appropriate and effective way”.

It was recognised by the partners early in the process that it was inappropriate to try to produce a realistic draft Plan with full consultation by the original deadline of Christmas 1998. Initial work therefore concentrated on:

- A mapping exercise of all the agendas of the partner agencies.
- Mapping of existing plans.
- An audit of existing partnerships

This work was used to underpin the following actions:

- Develop a common vision for Perth and Kinross;
- Develop shared priorities for the area;
- Co-ordinate strategy and policy development between public sector agencies;
- Examine better ways of delivering services at an inter-agency and community level;
- Rationalise partnership working in the area;
- Maximise the use of available resources at a local level and improve the distribution of resources from a national and European level for Perth and Kinross.

This vision for Community Planning in Perth and Kinross is based on a 20 year time horizon which is regarded as providing a suitably long term perspective.

The overall approach has been to instil greater ownership among partners rather than chasing to meet tight deadlines. It was apparent that an emphasis was placed on process over plan-making: “Community planning is about process rather than product; it’s about sharing information rather than taking over each other’s roles”. It should also be recognised that there is a unique political context within Perth and Kinross. The SNP Leader prior to the elections gave a strong lead to the initiative. In May 1999, the SNP Administration was replaced by “The Rainbow Partnership” of Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat and Independent Councillors. This group is in favour of the community planning approach and the Leader is keen to ensure that momentum is maintained.

Key Strengths:

- **Leadership** – a strong lead has been provided by the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive.
- **Building on existing partnership practice and experience**
- **Political Consensus** – the opportunity to engender wide political support for the initiative is a huge potential advantage. However, it remains a potential at present and much work will need to be done in order to promote ownership of the project to a wider group of ‘Rainbow Partnership’ members and other key organisations and community groups within the Perth and Kinross area.
- **Consensus Building** – the early collective decision not to develop a draft plan in haste has been a positive factor in partnership building.

Key Issues and Lessons for the Future:

- **The need to engage with the wider community** at the stage of public consultation over the draft plan will be critical. The absence of input from the community or voluntary sector at the partnership-building stage may prove a disadvantage.
- **Momentum** - the time-scales and limited resources attached to the project have clearly been unhelpful. There will need to be flexibility to allow quality plans to emerge later rather than settle for mediocre plans sooner. That said, it is important for the momentum to be sustained while the upheavals of the local elections are worked through.
- **The recognition of the role of elected members at all levels within the Council and board members of the partner organisations** is a difficult one to resolve. It is partially being addressed by having a seminar for board members and key elected members at an early stage of the process, but further work needs to be done to address this issue.

- **Integration of other related initiatives** Cohesion is afforded by the co-ordination being given by Strategic Policy within the Chief Executive's Department. It is important that there is an integrated approach, not only within the Council but also in terms of arrangements with the partner organisations.
- **Wider involvement of other public sector organisations**– It is recognised that the membership of the Strategy Steering Group will need to be reviewed and a balance struck between representation and effectiveness.
- **Added Value** – “the project will only prove its worth if both partner organisations and other bodies and the community see improvements in terms of the services they receive.”
- **Resourcing the process** - The process of developing a Community Plan has been resourced largely through goodwill and a commitment to the philosophy behind the initiative. To date, progress has depended on a few key individuals and it is recognised that this will need to be addressed when implementation is considered.
- **Flexibility over budgets**- There is a perception that constraints are also presented by the differing financial regimes within and between partner agencies: “I suspect that the issue of ring-fencing budgets may occur. We're opposed to fixed budgets, this wouldn't lead to creative thinking. Need to decide what you want to do first, then allocate budgets; doing otherwise would lose operational flexibility”.
- **Coterminosity of boundaries**- Some of the national agencies are involved with the Community Planning processes of several local authorities at once.
- **Build on existing partnerships** There are numerous examples to draw on – from community safety initiatives to jointly staffed daycare centres - which demonstrate the benefits of collaborative working.
- **Statutory status** – there was a divergence of view between those who wanted a legislative push and those who wanted to retain the voluntary and flexible nature of the process. The thinking behind these views will need to be worked through by the partnership.

SOUTH LANARKSHIRE

South Lanarkshire identify Community Planning as an ongoing process guided by the contents of a Community Plan which specifies core principles, key issues to be addressed, a future vision, processes to facilitate action on key priorities and future action.

Partnership

A Partnership Steering Group was established in August 1998 and has been responsible for overseeing the development of the Plan. Its members are: South Lanarkshire Council; Lanarkshire Development Agency; Scottish Homes; Lanarkshire Health Board; Greater Glasgow Health Board and Strathclyde Police. The partners were chosen because of their involvement in a well-developed tradition of cross-agency working and because they were key spending public sector bodies. The tight timescale and the need for close ownership and steering of the process helped determine the choice of a small tightly knit steering group. The Group is led by the Council's head of Strategic Services. The main purpose of the Group has been to produce the Community Plan and its main activities have included:

- Consensus building around key issues drawing on key data and documentation.
- Mapping, analysing and rationalising current partnership arrangements.
- Reviewing existing strategies and plans.
- Identifying key documents.
- Contextualising Community Planning within the broad Government agenda.
- Seeking agreement on resourcing and support for the process.

Community Planning was seen as a significant development by the partners because it offered them an opportunity to rethink and review their activities in a way that was consistent with the emerging public policy agenda by focusing on new ways of working, maximising resource use through inter-agency planning and service delivery and by developing new relationships with citizens and communities:

“Community Planning helps to give a focus to the plethora of multi-agency activity that is going on - which paradoxically makes it less likely that we are able to communicate effectively.”

Community Consultation and Involvement

Engagement with interested agencies and communities took place in August to November 1998 before the production of the Community Plan. It included:

- *Informing* - by means of the production of a widely disseminated information leaflet
- *Involvement* - a series of seminars for interested organisations, for Youth Council representatives and for councillors. A conference of all potential partners (over 70) was also held and local prioritising and action planning also took place.
- *Consulting* - a citizens' panel was used to test the initial ideas and perceptions of the partners.

A consultation exercise was commenced after the production of the draft Community Plan in November 1998 and work is continuing on improving community involvement. This has included a workshop in June 1999 to discuss options for formalising the involvement of the voluntary,

community, business and non-statutory sectors in the process. A communications strategy for all agencies will also be developed.

Vision and Strategy

The vision in the Community Plan is built around 3 themes: Safe and Healthy Communities; Successful and Inclusive Communities; and Working and Learning Communities. The processes for implementing the vision are articulated within a Partnership Framework and consist of:

- *Effective Partnerships.* An audit to rationalise partnerships is taking place
- *Community Involvement.* Consultation on how to improve this is underway
- *Communication and Consultation.* A communications strategy is being developed that will enable all partners to contribute to embedding the Community Planning message into their own and other organisations.
- *Joint resourcing.* Initial meetings are being held with key partners to consider how resources are currently allocated, the processes for allocation and the possibilities for more effective resourcing.
- *Impact assessment.* Work is underway to establish a monitoring and evaluation framework that will focus on key indicators and targets relating to progress on the objectives identified in the Community Plan.

The current work reflects a shift from visioning and conceptualising to action and is therefore critical in determining the ultimate value of Community Planning.

Key Strengths

- The willingness of all partners to become and remain involved.
- Most of what the partners set out to achieve has been accomplished.
- Obtaining agreement that Community Planning is a continuous process.
- Getting young people involved.
- Commencing the process of consultation and involvement as part of the process of compiling the draft plan rather than after its publication.

Key Issues and Learning for the Future.

- **Timescales.** The timescale for the project was prohibitive.
- **Communication.** It is important to communicate the value and purpose of Community Planning as widely, as soon and as often as possible.
- **Perseverance** is important - there will always be hiccups and problems to be dealt with.
- **Resourcing.** There is a need to be aware of the resourcing issues - both for the process and the outcomes of the process.
- **Planning and Administration** needs to be done well and requires dedicated staff in the development phase.
- **Leadership.** While it is inevitable that the Council takes a leadership role sensitivities about the role mean that leadership has to be undertaken with 'as light a touch as possible.'
- **Change.** The message that Community Planning implies change has to be constantly reinforced because some people will fight for the status quo.

- **Multiple methods of involvement** are necessary.
- **Kick-starting** Some important changes need to be commenced as early as possible but it is also important to find the right moment to do so.
- **‘There is no alternative?’** The message has to be sold that “this is the only game in town.” A ‘suck-it-and-see’ approach is not appropriate.
- **Defining Community Planning** It may be necessary for councils to take time deliberating what it is about.
- **Statutory duty?** If so then clarity is needed about how Community Planning relates to all other duties will be needed.

STIRLING COUNCIL

Partnership

Stirling has adopted an approach based on a vision of reorganising the way public services are organised and delivered. The process is driven from the top and afforded appropriate status - the Chief Executive and Leader are closely identified with the initiative lending it credibility and ensuring the active participation of other senior managers within the partner agencies

In August 1998 a steering group was established to manage the Community Planning process and comprised representatives from the following partner agencies: Argyll, the Isles, Loch Lomond, Stirling and Trossachs Tourist Board; Central Scotland Police; Forth Valley Enterprise; Forth Valley Health Board; Scottish Homes; Scottish Natural Heritage; two members of the Stirling Assembly; and Stirling Council

A relatively small cohesive group of key strategic public agencies in the Stirling area was established – small enough to get things done and big enough to contain the relevant actors that “shape community futures”. It was soon decided by the Steering Group to invite membership from the Stirling Assembly and to seek to use the Assembly as a sounding board for the Group’s strategy making. In this way, “community representation was an integral part of the design of the draft Community Plan from the outset”.

A common view was expressed amongst all parties that Community Planning was not solely about producing a plan, but was more about influencing behaviour; the process of collective planning and not merely the production of a joint document. So far the Steering Group has:

- shared information about key plans and policies;
- identified common themes and challenges;
- had the themes and challenges endorsed by Stirling Assembly members and established a shared vision with the Assembly; and
- identified actions for the partner organisations to progress
- produced a draft Community Plan

Stirling has a radical yet pragmatic approach, within the constraints of available resources, that builds on the consultative style of existing arrangements: “Community Planning (upper case) as a formal process is quite new, but community planning (lower case) has been going on at least since reorganisation”.

Community Consultation and Involvement

Stirling has pursued an agenda of developing its democratic base since the council’s formation that has taken the form of investing in and developing its community infrastructure. This is comprised of a hierarchy of participatory structures at various levels within the community of Stirling: the network of local Community Councils; wider, Area-based community forums; and the authority-wide Stirling Assembly.

The Stirling Assembly is central to greater community involvement and was established in 1997 as an authority-wide forum that enables Community Council representatives, the local voluntary sector, community groups, private sector interests and individuals to consider issues of strategic

importance to the area. The Assembly holds open meetings every 6 weeks and generally attracts between 40-80 participants. It is the critical vehicle for the integral involvement of citizens in the Community Planning process and the mechanism through which a wider involvement of local communities can be achieved. A key part of the process involved the Assembly discussing, revising, agreeing, and ratifying the key strategic priorities and the approach taken by the Steering Group.

The Assembly also provides two representatives who sit on the Community Planning Steering Group. The Assembly attaches great importance to the fact that Community Planning in Stirling has sought to engage the wider community and provide a vehicle through which the community can have access not only to the local authority, but also to other local agencies. “Bringing decision making down to the local level”.

Strategy and Vision

The vision for Community Planning in Stirling is primarily focused upon “a good quality of life for all”. The consultative meeting of the Stirling Assembly derived three fundamental principles around which the activities of partners should be conducted: social inclusion, sustainability and quality services.

In order for the Community Plan to deliver this vision, a number of strategic themes have been identified around which practical action will be focused: quality services; local democracy and accountability; social inclusion; prosperity, income, jobs, opportunities; environment and sustainable development; community safety; caring community. The draft plan identifies a vision for each theme together with the challenges faced. There are also key actions with success measures that demonstrate how the theme will be translated into measurable change on the ground.

The Plan is based on a 5-year time horizon, which is regarded as a sensible period over which current decisions can be framed. It should also be noted that in Stirling much of the work towards a community plan was in place prior to the local elections so the inevitable upheaval was avoided. In addition, unlike other Pathfinders where key political ‘champions’ of Community Planning have been lost, there has been a continuity of political leadership.

Key Strengths:

- Leadership – strong leadership both political and managerial
- Existing partnership practice and experience
- Community infrastructure - investment in structures for community to interface with the local authority and partners

Key issues and Lessons for the Future:

- **The need to engage members** - party political considerations will need to be overcome if, as is desirable, the initiative is to proceed with the widest possible political support and ownership. At present, the ownership of Community Planning is restricted to a few key members. Community Planning involves a “fundamental reappraisal of the role of the elected member”. In future“members work will be in the community, not in the Town Hall”.
- **The importance of practical action**- progress to date acknowledged as useful and constructive. Early gains will be diluted and cynicism will take over if expectations raised as a

result of the process are not met. There is optimism and support from partners but an underlying reservation as to the ability of the partnership to deliver.

- **The need to engage with staff** more fully through the implementation stage. For this to be a success the culture of Community Planning will need to be inculcated amongst a wider audience, particularly those involved in the direct delivery of services.
- There are proposals for **deepening partnership working** including: inter-agency secondments, inter-agency sharing of induction and partnership training for new officers and members, and the establishment of joint ‘away days’.
- **“Budgets have to follow needs and not the other way round”** It is recognised by all parties that this will be one of the key issues: how to re-configure budgets in line with new priorities.
- The issue of **coterminosity of agency boundaries** was raised as an issue with implications for resources allocation.
- **The links between Best Value (public performance reporting and consultation) and Community Planning are critical** Likely that development of Best Value will extend to all public sector partners. It is important to note that both the Best Value and Community Planning agendas are led by the policy and strategy function within the Chief Executive’s Department in Stirling affording a coherence of approach.
- **Statutory status** – there is a feeling in Stirling that Community Planning needs to be on the “must do” list.
- **Resourcing the process** – Community Planning involves fundamental change to the orientation of public service in Scotland and will need time (and resources) to become embedded. This will allow the local authority and its partners to “organise with a community focus rather than on a professional basis”. The short lead times for the initiative to date run the risk of raising expectations that will be difficult to meet. The exercise so far may be characterised as a “big commitment by a few people”. For the implementation phase a new focus is required and a capacity needs to be established.