



Centre for Public Policy and Management

Working Papers

4: Community planning in Scotland

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The process of community planning is not greatly innovative; it reflects patterns of working which had already become widespread in Scotland before its institution. Broadly speaking, community planning does two things. First, it outlines strategies for action. Local authorities and their partners are invited to lay out a general approach, or “vision”; to identify key themes for action; and to devise an action plan, including the key actors engaged in realising the policy and suggesting target outcomes. Second, it involves a partnership approach. The scope of a community plan is not confined to local authorities; it implies a commitment to work with others, usually including other government agencies like health boards, Communities Scotland and Scottish Enterprise, and sometimes (if more rarely) extending into cooperation with independent groups, voluntary agencies and representative organisations.

Community planning is generally understood as a process, rather than a prescription for policy. The test of whether it succeeds is not whether the plan works, but how it affects governance; it should make policy explicit, help people to identify service priorities, and bring people together to work in partnerships. These are the kinds of test applied by the team evaluating community planning for the Community Planning Task Force.¹ The tests are legitimate and valuable in their own right, and I have little useful to say about them beyond the work which has already been done. However, this shows only part of the picture. If the test was only that councils had to be explicit about policy, and had to work in partnership with others, most councils in Scotland would have passed that test anyway. Corporate planning has been in place since the 1970s; housing plans date from the same period; community care plans, after a faltering start in the early 1990s, are now universally undertaken, usually in concert

with health authorities. Other strategies have become part of the routine process of local government: for example the Housing Act 2000 requires local authorities to develop homelessness strategies, including action plans. North Ayrshire lists 35 related strategies and plans; Falkirk lists 59. If community planning adds any value, it has to be because it is making something happen which was not happening otherwise. That does not include the planning process.

Community planning has two distinct features which distinguish it from other planning processes being undertaken in local government in Scotland. The first is the attempt to develop an overarching strategy, bringing together features of a range of policies, cutting across conventional boundaries to offer “joined up” thinking. The second is to identify priorities, offering a distinct set of policies to corporate level. In other words, the content matters, not just the process. In this paper I aim to review the structure and content of community plans, focusing specifically on the issues which are distinctive to them - joined up thinking, and priority setting.

The material in the paper is based on examination of community plans from 30 of the 32 Scottish local authorities. Most were examined in paper copies; others were obtained from the Internet. Two were not available.

Planning in principle

The academic literature on planning relies heavily on a 'rational' model. Rational decision-making follows a process which allows the examination of each stage in a policy, and feedback from results into further decision making. The model is stated differently in different places, but the basic stages are as follows:

1. *Evaluation of the environment.* Decisions have to be taken in the light of existing situations.
2. *The identification of aims and objectives.* Aims and values have to be identified and established as criteria by which decisions can subsequently be

¹ S Rogers et al, 2000, Community planning in Scotland: an evaluation of the pathfinder projects commissioned by CoSLA, CoSLA; R Stevenson, Getting “under the skin” of community planning, Scottish Executive Social Research 2002.

evaluated.

3. *Consideration of the alternative methods which are available.* This is a question of what is possible.

4. *Examination of the consequences.* The possible consequences are judged against the aims and objectives in order to decide their likely effectiveness.

5. *Selection of methods.* The selection of particular methods of working is guided by consideration of efficiency and practical constraints.

6. *Implementation.*

7. *Re-evaluation.* The consequences of policy are monitored, and fed back into a re-assessment of the environment - at which point the process begins again.²

This model has been heavily criticised.³ The first problem is that it is likely to gloss over problems; there are conflicts in values and intentions, and conflicts relating to administrative method, have to be negotiated and compromises arrived at. Second, it demands more of policy-makers than may be practical or feasible; the examination of alternative approaches and their consequences is time-consuming, expensive and often speculative. Third, it ignores the practical difficulties of implementation. In the real world, the process of working with problems has a way of changing what is happening. Policy is not just made in policy documents, but by people working in offices trying to interpret a fog of rules and guidelines.

The main argument for the rational model is a simple one: it is better than the alternatives. It helps to make policy explicit, it helps policy-makers set standards by which their actions can be judged, and it puts the onus on officers to explain why things have had to be done differently.

At the most basic level, a strategy document needs to have three elements. It needs to have a statement of aims. Most community plans begin with a statement of their "vision", but there may be other, collateral aims, such as promoting participation, partnership and social inclusion. These aims have to be 'operationalised', or translated into practical terms: services need to have not only aims, but objectives and goals to reach. The second element is a consideration of methods: what is being done to meet the aims now, and what else needs to be done. Third, there has to be an action plan. There are two parts to this: an implementation strategy, where the local authority says what is going to be done, when and by whom, and the setting of standards by which performance can be assessed, which implies the adoption of targets and indicators. Many of the community plans did not identify

an action plan, but that does not mean that an action plan does not exist; it means only that the community plan is seen as relating to the first part of the process.

The plans

Most of the schemes had a combination of three main elements:

- a statement of vision,
- identification of principal themes, and
- some consideration of courses of action.

The content beyond that core is variable. It may include background information about the area; statements of principle; targets for evaluating outcomes; action plans, which identify the partners responsible for action and the timetable for implementation. The absence of these factors in the community planning documents does not mean that they have not been taken into account; usually they are in other related documents, which some councils sent in response to my request for information. This paper is concentrating on the common factors running across community plans, elements, and the three elements listed here are enough to identify the key issues I wanted to look at - joined up thinking, and the identification of priorities.

Aims and values

The aims of the community plans are usually stated in terms of a "vision". Some plans also add principles, either explicitly or in some cases implicitly (for example, by writing an extended statement on partnership or participation). It was not clear that the vision had much effect in shaping the courses of action. In some cases, there was very little direct link between the broad aims and the specific themes which were identified. Aberdeen, for example, identified three main elements in its vision: people, the City environment, and identity. Two other principles are identified: social inclusion and sustainability. Following that, fourteen categories are identified as "challenges". This is too many to be offered without some kind of structure or hierarchical organisation; effectively, it is a list. The challenges include such themes as cleanliness, involvement through voluntary action and "leading the city"; the relationship between the challenges and the vision is vague.

Fife's vision is a long list of attributes.

"Our vision is of a Fife in 2010 that is ambitious, highly skilled, creative, caring and able to make and take advantage of opportunities. Ambitious not just to help each individual achieve what is best for him or her, but ambitious to improve out environment, health, services, products and infrastructure. Above all, our vision is of a Fife where quality of life is improving for everyone, and where inequalities between individuals and communities are narrowing".

² See e.g. A Faludi, 1973, *Planning Theory*, Oxford: Pergamon; N Gilbert, H Specht (eds) 1977, *Planning for social welfare*, Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice-Hall, part 2; S Leach, 1982, *In defence of the rational model*, in S Leach, J Stewart, *Approaches in public policy*, London: George Allen and Unwin.

³ See A Faludi, 1973, *A reader in planning theory*, Oxford: Pergamon.

This raises the question of whether the “vision” is more than a compilation of themes. But the plan goes on to say that Fife’s goals are

- “To deliver an inclusive Fife
- To deliver a sustainable Fife
- To deliver Best Value for Fife”.

These look more like supplementary principles than goals; their relationship to the vision is indirect. The actions proposed relate to the economy; health; education; leisure; the environment; and “stronger, safer communities”. Some of these are listed in the vision, but some (leisure and community safety) or not.

By contrast, some plans did go out of their way to define a relationship between aims, values and themes. Clackmannanshire went for a neatly hierarchical model, which is fairly representative of this type:

The economy

- Improving connections and communications
- building smarter businesses within a competitive location
- encouraging creative and enterprising people and communities
- developing leisure and tourism
- Innovation in personal learning and development (for employment)

Social inclusion

- Tackling the causes of exclusion
- Community safety
- Community engagement and capacity building
- learning from the Social Inclusion Partnership

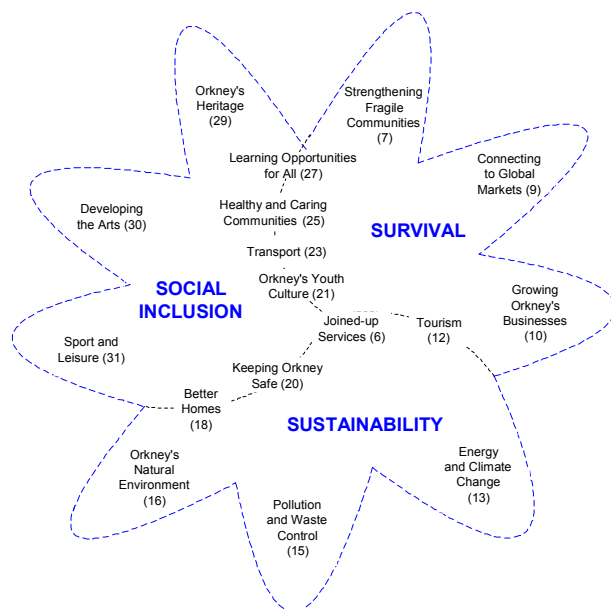
Health

- Healthy lifestyles
- Health inequalities
- (Health for) children, young people and families
- (Health for) people in communities

Environment

- Protecting and enhancing landscape and nature
- Ensuring effective transport and access
- managing waste and energy production and usage
- Ensuring an attractive and quality built environment
- Dealing with the effects of climate change

Orkney developed a “starfish”, linking three main themes - social inclusion, the survival of marginal communities, and sustainability - with both subordinate themes and overlapping themes.



These two later schemes are rather more elegant than many others, but that is not the test. For schemes of this sort to work, they have to do at least two things. First, they have to show the relationship between the things which are included. Anyone within the partnership, and any worker, should be able to relate what they do to the plan overall. The plan should mean something to (for example) a housing manager, a teacher dealing with special needs, or a health visitor. Either a carefully worked out plan or a long list can do that; a short, selective plan can't. The second test is more challenging: an effective plan has to make a difference. That means that it has to do more than to identify what is being done; it also has to identify what is not being done, and what needs to be done. Lists are inadequate; it is only possible to fill in those gaps if the plan has some kind of structure.

Themes

The apparent prominence of topics depends on the way in which they are presented. Most have some sense of hierarchy: because “visions” or general principles come before more specific “themes”, broad categories (like sustainability, prosperity and social inclusion) tend to be put above others (like environmental improvement, training and urban regeneration). This ordering probably has more to do with presentation than with content; it does not follow, because social work or housing are not high in the hierarchy, that they are not being treated seriously. Equally, there is a certain arbitrariness in the allocation of topics to different themes. The needs of young people are considered in Highland under community safety, in South Lanarkshire under social inclusion, and in West Dumbartonshire as a theme in their own right. Transport, for example, is put by Fife in environment, by Highland in economic development, and by North Lanarkshire in the distinctive theme of “connecting Lanarkshire”. The inclusion of issues by some local authorities and their apparent omission by others may say something about relative priorities, but is largely a question of presentation rather than substance.

The plans can be difficult to classify. Stirling, for example, identifies 13 priority areas for development, three principles - social inclusion, sustainability and quality services - seven themes, three of which are the same as the three principles, and three working groups - health and well-being, development and community safety, and lifelong learning and citizenship. Allowing for the difficulty in classification, The topics which are included by most local authorities are

the economy (26)
health (22)
the environment (21)
education and lifelong learning (21), and
community safety (20).

Topics mentioned by smaller numbers of community plans are

social inclusion (14)
communities (10),
citizenship and participation (7) and
caring communities (5, with three more referring to "health and care").

Those mentioned by only a few authorities are

culture and identity (4)
equality opportunities or social justice (2)
housing (2)
modernising government (2), and
a range of topics only mentioned by specific councils, such as connectivity, best value and service delivery.

The principal themes

Economic development. Economic development is a long-standing traditional area of local government activity, but its prominence in the community plans is striking. The prospects of attracting employment from inward investment have receded in recent years, and previous work for the CPPM has identified four main elements in current local economic development strategies in Scotland. These are plans

- to enhance the skills and capacity of the workforce;
- to build the physical infrastructure;
- to encourage the development of business and enterprise; and
- to build the capacity of local communities.

Some authorities also mention a fifth element, which is the development of tourism and the environment.

By contrast, some other options are not really considered. Local government has limited powers to shape local economies, and no authority pretends to have the ability to regenerate the economy. The role of local authorities as an employer is not treated as central, and local government is seen as a means of fostering independent development, not as the point of development of employment and industry in its own right.

Health. One of the purposes of the community planning process is to encourage joined-up thinking. The recognition of "health" as an issue relates very clearly to

the links between local authorities and health boards, though it is uncertain whether this could be treated as thinking "out of the box". Two areas are frequently linked with health: they are social care (because of the obvious links of health and community care) and safety (because of the association of crime with drug use). This still falls clearly into the conventional patterns of service coordination, and if the links between health and social care and health and safety are clearly identified, the links between health and housing, or health and leisure, are not. The Dundee plan states: "Dundee needs to promote and protect the physical and mental health of communities and to provide effective care for those who need it". East Renfrewshire refers to the theme of "caring and healthy communities", comprising "the health of communities, both physically and mentally", and "the freedom of individuals from poverty and other forms of health inequality".

The environment. The objectives relating to the environment are of three main kinds. First, there are those relating to the quality of life of current residents: the environment is about cleanliness, pleasant environments, good quality housing, tourist attractions and so forth. Second, there are responsibilities for future generations. Third, there are "green" objectives, concerned with the environment as a good in itself, implying measures like "greening" the economy or emphasising the value of recycling. East Renfrewshire's policy is fairly representative. It has six elements: elements for people (a clean and safe environment, transportation and access, quality housing); elements for future generations (sustainable development, and protection of environmental assets); and, seeing the environment as a good in itself, fostering public awareness and involvement "to provide environmental information and promote a responsible attitude towards the environment".

Several Scottish local authorities have bought in to the ideas of Agenda 21: Dumfries and Galloway, for example, aims specifically to integrate the Community Plan with the Agenda 21 strategy. Sustainability is a frequently recurring theme. But sustainability is not self-evident, and it tends to imply a conservatism in development which may not be consistent with Scotland's role in international markets. Building pyramids for a closed society is arguably sustainable; producing semi-conductors for the world market is not. On the whole, when faced with a choice, economic development policies in Scotland have tended to favour the production of semi conductors, and that is not self-evidently the wrong choice. If a local authority wants a "vibrant" economy (a term used e.g. by Glasgow), that economy will generate diverse initiatives, some of which will be temporary rather than sustainable. That, after all, is what a vibrant economy does. No community plan, however, poses these issues in terms of conflicts or tensions.

Education and lifelong learning. Education is one of the only traditional functions of local authorities to be widely reflected in the community plans. Beyond education,

though, the principle of “lifelong learning” is widely adhered to. Highland’s plan, for example, says:

“Learning must become a lifelong activity, enhancing employability, people’s value in the community and their ability to make the most of living in Highland.”

The stress on lifelong learning seems at some variance with the reality of local authority work. Childhood education is a major element of local authority expenditure, and a major element of social inclusion in its broader sense. Adult learning, however, is a small, and arguably a diminishing, part of a local authority’s core functions; higher education has largely moved into non-governmental agencies; training for employment is commonly treated as a peripheral activity. The acknowledgement of the importance of life long learning may say something about one of the perceived uses of community plans: they may not do much for local priorities but by golly, they can help sell the authority to central government.

Safety. “Safety” brings together some of the concerns of local authorities, health boards and policing, offering one of the clearest potentials for agencies to working in partnership. Inverclyde includes crime, accidents, domestic violence, consumer protection and home safety. Several authorities took the theme jointly with health, and some combined it with other aspects of community life, such as community capacity and regeneration. North Ayrshire links the topic to social inclusion.

Social inclusion. Social inclusion has been a principal theme of Scottish Executive activity. In that context, social inclusion has been understood in three main senses. The first is community regeneration: the agenda of social inclusion has been grafted on to previous policies for urban regeneration. Edinburgh’s social inclusion agenda is strongly shaped in terms of excluded communities. There are significant differences between social inclusion and urban regeneration in principle. On one hand, urban regeneration can be done while excluding people. On the other, social inclusion does not necessarily rely on community action; as the agenda of “social inclusion” is understood in Europe, it could be taken to have as much to do with social work and social care as with community action.

The second is social justice. Social justice is a major theme of the Scottish Executive under Donald Dewar, and it might have been expected to occur as a major theme in its own right: it is prominent in the Scottish Borders plan. In practice, however, it is more likely to be seen as a sub-category of social inclusion. Fife’s plan, for example, refers to an “inclusive Fife” as “tackling the barriers of poverty and discrimination”.

Communities. The theme of “community” might be said to occur more often than I have directly stated, because as a principle community underpins many of the other issues, including sustainability, community safety, participation and lifelong learning. There is a strong tradition of community organisation and development in Scottish local

government, partly related to the principles of community activism, and partly to the ideas of community education and capacity. This topic is used as a portmanteau term for participative involvement (Glasgow includes its citizens panel), social problems (Fife includes issues of drug abuse, racial harassment and domestic abuse; Dundee to crime reduction) and health (Edinburgh includes health and safety under community well-being).

Citizenship and participation. The identification of citizenship and participation as a theme perhaps underestimates its influence, because many other plans referred to the importance of participative methods in the construction of the plans. Several themes are referred to: they include participative processes, the development of active citizenship (including involvement in the voluntary sector), engagement in the process of local government, and ensuring processes of democratic accountability.

Caring communities. The idea of “caring” might be taken as a synonym for social inclusion, or for social care: both are a substantial part of local authority work. Angus explains the theme of “caring communities” as being “to improve the social well-being of the community and promote the development of preventative child care services”. West Lothian explains it as “to promote a more inclusive community by providing housing, health and social care services in an integrated way which allows all groups of people to live as independently as possible.”

The minority themes. A range of other themes and issues, such as social justice, housing, transport and service delivery, were listed as themes by relatively few authorities. This does not mean that other authorities did not consider them, but that most other authorities treated them as sub-themes in other categories. This is an interesting development in itself, because several of the themes can be seen as mainstream local authority activity, while others - like modernising government or social justice - have been the focus of considerable attention from the Scottish Executive. The factors which are considered by only one or two authorities give us an indication of what might have been. Examples might be

- rural development
- poverty
- young people
- the social economy, or
- connectivity.

There are numerous references to these and other themes, and in later work we would hope to develop further discussions of their implications.

Overview

Priorities

The first topic to consider is what the community plans say about local authorities’ perception of their role, and their current priorities. Some of the topics may seem to be beyond argument, like motherhood and apple pie. Hardly anyone is against economic prosperity, for ill health, or for

unsafe communities. Other ideas, like lifelong learning, social inclusion and sustainability, have potentially negative implications to balance against their positive aspects, but they are widely and uncritically accepted. The stress on economic development and environmental issues is defensible in terms of the importance of partnership, but it also represents a significant shift in the perception of the role of local government in Scotland. There is a widespread perception among local authority representatives (reported in previous CPPM research) that local government has lost power to the centre, and has been “hollowed out”. It is striking that many of the priorities which are identified do not seem to relate directly either to the work that local authorities have done most of historically - the provision of social services such as housing and social work, public services like arts, leisure and public amenities, and planning - or to the current spending priorities of local government.

Joined up thinking

The second item of interest is to what extent the community plans give evidence of joined up thinking. Here there are arguments on both sides. There are themes which clearly reflect the influence of partnerships, especially with health boards and the police. Some themes, including the environment and social inclusion, have been adopted partly because of their currency, but also because they offer opportunities for integrated perspectives from a range of different agencies. Against this, there are two reservations to make. The first is that some of the stitching together of policies seems clumsy at times. Several plans give lists, and the role of particular services is not always clear. As this relates to the bulk of local government activity, it is an important deficiency. Second, there is also some evidence of a continuing “silo” mentality. Several of the themes - including health, caring communities, economic development and education - fall clearly in the territory of existing agencies, and some of the minority themes seem to reflect strong departmental cultures.

Directions for future research

This is a preliminary piece of work, which needs to be deepened and broadened. For depth, it is desirable both to look further at the concepts and terminology used in plans, and to drill down through the themes to related planning processes, seeing how these elements. For breadth, there needs to be an examination of the relationship of these plans to other planning activity, work which needs to be undertaken both through examination of the process of joined up working and some assessment of outcomes.

The Centre for Public Policy and Management

This report was prepared by the Centre for Public Policy and Management (CPPM) at the Robert Gordon University. The CPPM is one of Scotland's leading multi-disciplinary research centres, conducting applied policy research. The staff attached to the centre have backgrounds in policy analysis, social administration, management, planning, law, economics and social research. The work of the CPPM is based on the application of a range of academic knowledge and professional expertise to the practical problems of public sector, voluntary and independent agencies. Recent and current research work has been undertaken for the Great Northern Partnership, Scottish Enterprise Grampian, Aberdeen City Council, Dundee City Council and the European Social Fund. The work includes research, consultancy and evaluation. The CPPM's website can be consulted on <http://www.rgu.ac.uk/publicpolicy/cppm/>.

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