

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE  
PUBLIC SECTOR REFORM AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT  
SUBMISSION FROM FALKIRK COUNCIL**

**Objectives for the three short inquiries**

**Strand 1 – Partnerships and outcomes**

To examine the on-going development of community planning partnerships and the community planning process and assess how these could be built upon to support outcome-based approaches to service planning and delivery in local areas.

Key questions for this strand of the inquiry:

- How could councils better integrate their partners into the process? How could the degree of commitment to the process amongst other community planning partners be improved? How can any legislative or administrative barriers that make partnership working more difficult be overcome?

The overall vision and outcomes for an area must be explicit and understood by all partners – individually and collectively if community planning is to be successful. Local Authorities can promote better integration by ensuring there is clarity of what contribution the partnership and individual partners makes to achieve that vision and outcomes. Equally, Councils can seek to engage other partners beyond the core statutory partners to ensure added value.

While there is great commitment to partnership working and achieving common outcomes, Councils understand the variety of accountability frameworks other partners must work within and must show performance against. It is important that commitment to achieving local outcomes is considered by scrutineers as being of paramount importance.

As public sector reform gathers pace and the number of organisations which are organised at a national level and with accountability at this level increases the risk of local accountability also increases. Any partner organised at a national level or with national accountability needs to ensure that priority continues to be given to local priorities and local accountability.

- How can local authorities and their partners move further towards real, integrated working?

It is important that integration is seen as a way of achieving better services and outcomes rather than an end in itself. Integration must add value, ensure a better service for clients / customers and have demonstrable improvements in long and short term outcomes.

- What steps would facilitate the sharing of budgets in pursuit of shared outcomes?

Shared budgets must ensure the achievement of shared outcomes. Where there is a view that sharing budgets or combining budgets makes sense and

achieves common agreed objectives, barriers can be overcome. However it is important that resources are tracked and during times of financial pressures there are clear arrangements to withdraw from such arrangements or indeed ensure the protection of such budgets if there is a common agreement to do so. It is also important that although budgets may be shared each of the partners involved in this continues to have accountability for their portion of this to their own organisation.

- How can the partners further improve on the progress that has been made and overcome the remaining challenges on engaging communities and voluntary sector organisations in the process?

Falkirk Council's Community Planning Partnership engages in a variety of ways with the community and voluntary sector, in addition to direct engagement with communities and interest groups. Much of our engagement is progressed in conjunction with our third sector interface which appears to work very well. We have also taken a view of engagement across the public sector and are seeking to integrate engagement practices. Community engagement must be focused on what needs to be asked when with a commitment to reporting the results back to participants. Efforts should also be made to avoid duplication of community engagement activity across different Community Planning partners.

- How can the community planning arrangements be adapted and developed to promote outcomes-based and preventative approaches?

It is important to understand that community planning provides a common framework for service delivery and place shaping; as such it is working practices of partners organisations that must be more outcome and preventative focussed. Partnerships themselves should seek to continuously improve and evolve their approach. This may be aided by self assessment using such tools as the Public Sector Improvement Framework.

- How is the work of delivery on SOA outcomes managed, coordinated and driven through the various community partnership structures and agreements? How could Single Outcome Agreements be improved to deliver on community planning targets?

Single Outcome Agreements note the outcomes agreed by the community planning partners and usually articulated in the Strategic Community Plan. The SOA is a way of measuring collective and individual contribution to those outcomes through specific PIs. It is important to understand this context in that SOAs do not deliver on outcomes but rather the partnership through a complex range of underpinning plans and strategies, as well as core statutory services delivers on outcomes as suggested by the question above. There also appears to be a misconception that we undertake community planning alongside other activities. Community planning is a context for everything we do and deliver for our local communities.

- What is the purpose of a Single Outcome Agreement in assisting the delivery of improved outcomes? How are local Single Outcome Agreements developed, and how do they relate to national priorities?

Single Outcome agreements provide a framework for measuring progress on local outcomes. SOAs can give Government a view on how locally partnerships area supporting the achievement of national outcomes but they are not ways of measuring local partnerships achievement or otherwise of national outcomes. Community plans have the predominant role in setting out an area's vision and local outcomes with the SOA providing the performance management framework to facilitate accountability on progress.

- How could local authorities and other public bodies contribute more to influencing and improving outcomes in their area?

This would suggest that local authorities and other public bodies are divorced from setting the outcomes in their area. If Councils and other key public bodies are not integral in setting outcomes then their commitment to achieving these must be doubtful.

- How can arrangements, processes and accountability be improved?

Accountability to the local community by having clarity of vision, outcomes etc is critical. However due to the multiplicity of arrangements for accountability it is hard for some agencies to see these as being the most important focus for accountability. National agencies and those that deliver beyond the boundaries of a community planning partnership have particular issues of accountability but these must be overcome and not dismissed.

## Strand 2 – Benchmarking and performance measurement

To examine the development of work that has taken place over the last two years in relation to the development of benchmarking and comparative performance data and cost measurement and assess how it can contribute to the performance of local authorities in Scotland.

Key questions for this strand of the inquiry:

- What are the main challenges (cultural, technical, geographical or other) in developing performance measurement and benchmarking systems for local authorities across Scotland?

There are a number of challenges in terms of developing benchmarking. These include recognising that services have developed and evolved very differently in support of different challenges and priorities. It is therefore hard to draw a direct comparison between one authority and another. Services serving different communities with different socio economic and demographic make ups will inevitably be delivered in very different ways. Without an explanation of the measures they can be very misleading.

However that is not to say that benchmarking to improve services is not a useful exercise.

- To what extent has the work undertaken over the last two years by the Improvement Service, SOLACE and others contributed to developing a common approach to benchmarking across Scotland's local authorities?

The SOLACE benchmarking is still in its early stages and therefore it is a bit early to say how this will develop to allow benchmarking to improve services.

- What technical or other resources are needed to continue and complete the development of recent work on benchmarking?

It is important that the basic information used for benchmarking is comparable. The LFR's need to be refined and developed to allow them to be used for robust comparisons. While the work to standardise LFR's has been highlighted, again this is in its very early stages of development.

- To what extent can the developing work on benchmarking be extended across community planning partnerships? How can data derived from benchmarking influence the future direction of community planning and the contents of future SOAs?

All organisations, Councils and other public sector agencies should not only be looking at the performance of services but also the profile of their customers. It is important that we understand the context within which we are working current and the likely future challenges and demands that will impact on our communities. Each partnership should therefore have produced a context statement that should in turn influence the things the partnership does. While this is not technically benchmarking we must measure our

achievement against some common indicators e.g. unemployment, deprivation, health, safety, economy, environment etc.

As a result of such work we know the demographic profile of the Falkirk Council area is different from many other areas. We therefore have to frame our outcomes and resources to address those challenges.

- How can the development of benchmarking help improve the performance of local authorities in Scotland?

It is important that benchmarking is used to examine differences in cost, quality, quantity, timescales etc and seek answers for those differences. Benchmarking should allow authorities, officers and importantly Elected Members to ask questions about why differences are occurring

- Should the Scottish Government have a role in providing national impetus to the development of benchmarking and performance measurement?

It is unclear what locus the Scottish Government has in measuring the performance of local authorities. It is potentially more important that if benchmarking is seen as being important that this is extended to other parts of the public sector that are accountable to Government with the condition that such an exercise does not cut across locally determined performance indicators or measure of performance.

### **Strand 3 – Developing new ways of delivering services**

To examine progress in relation to the development of shared services and other innovative ways of achieving economies of scale and harnessing the strengths and skills of key public sector partners to deliver the best possible quality services in local areas.

Key questions for this strand of the inquiry:

- How can cultural and organisational change be promoted to ensure that local authorities and community planning partners are able to work together to develop the kind of integrated services that are aspired to by local communities?

There are many ways of promoting cultural change the most important being clear leadership and clarity of objectives. It is important that change is worked through and given the nature of some services we are seeking to potentially integrate that the process is not rushed but measured and staged. In order to ensure appropriate outcomes, it must be recognised that change does take time. An example of this is the establishment of the integrated children's teams in Falkirk. These integrated teams took time to develop and be established but now provide a sound basis for taking forward integrated early intervention for children and young people.

- How can the tensions between shared services creating savings through potential reductions in the number of staff involved and the economic impact brought about by any resulting job losses be resolved?

The business case for shared services has to be clear. What has always been unclear with shared services plans, are what savings that will occur in the short, medium and longer term and how these will be realised. A number of business cases have been developed for shared services but not all have show the level of savings that would be required to offset the potential for disruption to services.

- Is there scope for further national shared services along the lines of the shared recruitment portal for local authorities, 'myjobscotland'?

Each initiative once identified must be underpinned by a robust business case that clearly identified costs and benefits. The pathfinder project for pensions underlines this point. If benefits are not identified then there may be little if anything gained by pursuing such initiatives.

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