LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

PUBLIC SECTOR REFORM AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

SUBMISSION FROM NORTHERN CONSTABULARY

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.

a) 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?

A clearer vision of the range of partners would add value to existing partnership arrangements. This should include the voluntary sector. Part of the reason for current low level of engagement by some partners is a lack of understanding of the need to cooperate in areas of work that have the potential to bring about mutual benefits. Changes in legislation to incorporate a duty on other public bodies to actively participate in and be accountable for community planning, would help to ensure partners are participating in CPPs.

Effective partnership working is on occasion hampered by the constraints imposed by Data Protection legislation and the limited scope of existing information sharing protocols. At present in the community planning/community safety arena, only the key agencies are signed up to formalised protocols - other key stakeholders are legitimately involved but are outwith the protocols. Linked to this is the subject of electronic data transfer - again not an issue with the key agencies with secure networks. However, e-data sharing beyond secure networks poses significant difficulties, particularly when linked with GPMS marking.

It is important to recognise that the way public bodies are funded and controlled varies, meaning that flexibility of decision making on local spend and targets is more problematic for some partners. There needs to be a shift in the accountability on the work of CPPs to all the partners, rather than just the local authority. Local Authorities as the lead partner will inevitably be scrutinised for delivery of the CPP and SOA, but other public bodies and third sector partners should also be accountable for their delivery on SOA targets and outcomes.

Incorporation of SOA targets and outcomes into partners' business plans at strategic level is also key and can be encouraged at local as well as national level. Accountability for these targets at a national reporting level could also help.

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

Clearly, key to this is full engagement and buy-in by all stakeholders. This can be piecemeal based on individual organisational agendas and perception and understanding of benefits.

Working towards a Single Public Authority model would move this agenda forward. National programmes are useful and requirements on funding streams (i.e. Change Fund) to integrate working and share budgets help make aspirations more realistic. Public bodies should be encouraged and permitted to devolve budgets to other partners to deliver on integrated services. Working more closely with the third sector on the design of local services will ensure that the delivery of services better meets the needs of service users.

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

Effective partnership working demands that input is not confined to physical resources and time but that each stakeholder should make a financial contribution to ensure the achievement of shared outcomes. Many partnerships are constrained by having no allocated budget and this is further exacerbated by a lack of coordination in identifying potential sources of external or central funding for particular projects and initiatives. Outcomes cost money and each partnership would benefit from a proportionate contribution from each individual stakeholder. There are however problems with such an approach, particularly if third sector and charitable organisations are to be fully engaged.

As referred to previously, flexibility on decision making on local spend and targets is more problematic for some partners and some of these barriers need to be addressed at a national level. There is a need to have a form of direct financing to be able to spend on preventative measures to save in the long term, while financial pressures and demand for services continues to grow. This will also require a cultural shift in how budgets are set and results reported as both are generally managed on a short to medium term basis.

The maturity of partnerships and current challenges around the public sector funding limit the appetite to develop new approaches; the main concern must be to protect the delivery of front line services. There is a need to align partner outcomes at a national level and develop new approaches to outcome measurement and the funding structure to support this. A collaborative approach to measuring impact and outputs by Scottish Government of national organisations could assist in overcoming this.

d) 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?

The Third Sector are eager to be part of collaborative working and delivery of services, but they have identified a need for improved relationships between the voluntary sector and the public sector through longer term partnership agreements (rather than SLAs) and improved community engagement in budgetary decisions.

Again, a cultural shift is required to enable communities and the third sector to be more involved in the design of services, as well as the delivery. It also needs to be recognised that although social enterprise has brought good learning and new ways of working for the voluntary sector, the use of social enterprise as a delivery mechanism for preventative spend interventions is not realistic as these are not self-sustaining and so do not suit the social enterprise business model.

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

A clarity of understanding is required by some partners around the meaning of 'outcome-focussed service delivery. It is essential that each partnership understands its place in a structure and that it's overarching objectives are coherently linked to tangible outcomes.

A move to a more outcome-based approach will assist in identifying priority areas that will lead to achieving local outcomes using planning tools which starts with the outcome rather than the activity to identify what partners need to do.

SOAs need to be based on agreed outcomes by the CPP partners, but as indicated above there are barriers to changing ways of working - whether this is the current economic climate, protection of current service delivery, jobs, different reporting systems, varying delivery arrangements or the need for cultural shifts in service delivery.

f) 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?

The work of the SOA is managed and coordinated through different partnership forums and structures for e.g. community safety and public protection, the environment, the economy, for children's' services and for adults with care and support needs.

The management of these different partnership forums and the co-ordination required to ensure that each organisation is working towards a shared vision at a tactical and operational level currently proves challenging.
Some local partnership groups, particularly in relation to community safety, struggle to find their place within a hierarchical structure and this tends to cause gaps or voids in delivery of outcomes. A clear understanding of the contribution required from each stakeholder and accountability for each against specific local target outcomes is essential to minimise this risk. Each level in the structure needs to understand its place (Strategic, tactical or operational) and each stakeholder at every level needs to be represented by individuals who can operate successfully at that level.

g) 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?

The development of the SOA is informed by the community and helps focus partners on key issues raised locally as areas of concern. Through the development of the SOA, opportunities for partnership interventions are identified. Local outcomes all link to the national priorities and by delivering on local outcomes there is a contribution to the delivery of the national priorities.
Any change in direction, resources or working arrangements requires approval within individual partner organisations, given their different accountabilities and governance arrangements.

We understand that community planning is to be subject to a detailed reviewed in 2012 by the Scottish Government in association with Cosla and SOLACE.

Although there are guidance, SOA performance templates and a menu of local indicators to use, the content across CPPs varies and there has been limited feedback from Government on performance; although Government Directors have a place on every CPP and feedback is now improving.

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

 A shift towards prevention rather than cure will have an impact on the outcomes for an area. This will bring challenges but the benefits should be clear. Some public bodies' choice of activities is sometimes constrained by the reporting requirements on them from a national level and these can be additional to local priorities. Freeing up public bodies to be able to prioritise at a local level first and national second will help have an impact on local outcomes.

The priority of the SOA in business planning will also affect the input, resources and funding a public body will put into delivering on local outcomes.

i) How can arrangements, processes and accountability be improved?

Public bodies and The Third Sector interfaces need to be accountable for their contribution to the delivery of the SOA and role within the CPP. It will vary for each public body as to the best way to take this forward as national/regional organisations will need to take a different approach to those operating in a local authority area.

Achievement of local outcomes will be influenced by national policy, socio-economic changes, geography, local information sharing protocols and international events. CPPs operate within the opportunities and constraints these provide. CPPs should be able to critically reflect on how the partnership is performing against the outcomes it has set.

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

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

In general benchmarking could be used to influence the SOA and community planning. If best practice is found and can be implemented locally then plans could reflect this.

Challenges to this could include:

• finding agreement from all Local Authorities on what should be measured
• the provenance of data/statistics – including ensuring they are relevant to diverse Local
  Authority areas (i.e. city and rural)

• Is a simple comparison across 32 areas enough?

b) 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?

As previously identified by Highland Council, The SOLACE project is aimed at understanding costs and efficiency better. Helpfully the SOLACE benchmarking project is considering 'families' of local authorities for comparison which should take local context into account better and be more meaningful in terms of identifying where improvement might be needed. Benchmarking has existed for some time through Audit Scotland's SPI process, where all Councils are compared against a core set of indicators and these are reported to the public. Other approaches to benchmarking are supportive too; for example through professional associations and through self-assessment frameworks. Highland Council has adopted the Public Service Improvement Framework, supported by the Improvement Service, and that includes scoring how well performance is measured in terms of benchmarking, prompting its use more widely.

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

Following on from b) above, Local authorities will need to review their corporate performance frameworks to integrate the SOLACE benchmarking indicators. The use of better local data should be encouraged. It should be noted however that the SOLACE project is focused on costs and efficiency and does not attempt to measure outcomes.

d) 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?

Benchmarking CPP performance can provide one way of understanding relative performance and highlight areas for improvement for a CPP. The SOLACE benchmarking indicators focus on local authority unit costs and customer satisfaction and partner bodies may already have something similar, for example comparing unit costs and satisfaction across different Police services and Health Boards. Comparing costs for back office services across partnerships may help develop a business case for more shared services and to measure any savings made from shared services put in place and similarly for any planning around integration of front-line services.

A practical difficulty may arise in trying to apply the SOLACE benchmarking indicators to partners or to the partnership as a whole and that relates to how indicators are defined and data disaggregated.

Considerable work has been done since 2008 on developing outcome indicators

to support CPPs and their SOAs leading to the production of a menu of local outcome indicators for each CPP to consider. Further refinement and support to use and improve these indicators should also help CPPs understand where improvement should be prioritised.

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

Benchmarking is one way of considering where performance is strong and where it needs to improve based on comparing performance with others. It should encourage seeking out best practice as a way of identifying improvements. It is not a new practice however given the history of SPIs, encouragement by professional associations, the focus on improvement through Best Value requirements and as supported through self-evaluation frameworks such as the Public Service Improvement Framework which seeks evidence of benchmarking in place.

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

One area of further support may be in the provision of data to local authorities from the Government where the data relies on national data sets. This would be a more efficient process than each partner seeking the information separately. It should be noted that local authorities will have local priorities set by its members and Council and performance frameworks need to reflect those priorities. Not all performance is appropriate to be gauged at a national level.

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

a) 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 is a raft of issues that need to be addressed for partners to work together effectively. Some of these have been mentioned in the response to Strand 1 of the Inquiry, but also includes: leadership and drive at strategic level; the need for common aims; effective systems and procedures such as for communication and involving the relevant people; ensuring adequate resources in terms of funding, staffing and time; and the more personal qualities of the professionals involved such as their commitment and drive and understanding the roles and responsibilities of other agencies.

Partners need to agree what needs to change and why and then have a change plan in place to make it happen and see that through. This requires effective local political
and officer leadership. If the need for change is not clear then structural reform could assist or the Government could provide clearer direction and set out its expectations explicitly.

b) 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?

In the current economic climate it is going to be extremely difficult to resolve these tensions. During more prosperous times it might be possible to redeploy staff into other areas, find employment within similar private sector companies or re-train people for different sectors. The creation of a vibrant and thriving economy which is not so reliant on the public sector may be key to resolving this tension, but in the current climate and particularly in the rural areas where opportunities are limited by population size and peripheral location, this is currently not an option. Investment by Government (both UK and Scottish) into sustainable economic industries may contribute to a rise in job opportunities outside the public sector.

There needs to be an acceptance that one driver for shared services is reduced cost and that will potentially lead to reductions in staff numbers. Reducing the workforce requires proper management and support for staff.

c) How can any legislative or institutional barriers to developing shared and innovative service delivery models to their full potential be overcome?

In some areas there is an aspiration to a Single Public Authority, which may assist in overcoming these barriers.

Local partners should find local solutions to these issues and be able to seek Government support where that is required. If CPPs are not seeking to develop shared and innovative service delivery models the Government should provide clearer direction on this expectation.

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

There is always scope for national shared services, but has to be balanced to ensure that it is not seen as stripping rural communities of much needed job opportunities and as a result impact the local economies etc.

Myjobscotland has been successful in delivering efficiency savings across the public sector and presents a model that can be developed further. The current project to develop a portal for statutory notices required for planning, licensing and highways presents a further significant opportunity to reduce costs for local authorities while improving the effectiveness of service delivery to communities and businesses. Government support to change legislation is required to ensure the benefits are fully realised.

The work currently being undertaken to develop a National Broadband Plan and National Public Sector ICT Strategy has significant potential to create and encourage more collaboration in the design, procurement and deployment of technology with the potential to share across multiple public sector organisations. The development of common ICT platforms will also enable collaboration and shared service delivery across organisational boundaries. There is potential to do this around other core systems running, for example, financial services, Human Resources and Payroll.

e) What can be learned from elsewhere, for example from initiatives such as the Nottingham Early Intervention City or the Birmingham total place pilot?

National programmes are helpful in focussing attention and accelerating progress but are not sufficient in themselves. Change requires local leadership, political backing, accurate data, a local incentive to improve and access to ways to rethink and redesign services.

Relationships are crucial, as are clear processes for developing ideas. The ability to hold the tensions that will occur in the partnerships as part of the processes so the partnership does not break down is essential. Programmes need to be responsive to local needs and lessons learned and afforded 'permission' to change if something is not working.

f) How can innovative delivery methods for services and collaborative arrangements (as mentioned, for example, in the Christie Commission report) help to improve outcomes and tackle embedded social problems focused in defined geographical areas?

The removal of legislative constraints on organisations and giving a shared responsibility and accountability for the delivery of service will help to focus delivery on where it is required as opposed to the focus on spending on what is measured. Too much time and effort is spent on delivering on the areas that are measured and not on dealing with the root cause of problems and this needs to change.

g) What scope is there for developing ways of delivering services, such as the personalisation of care, in order to mitigate the effects of shrinking resources while also promoting improved standards of care?

There is always scope to develop ways of delivering service in order to mitigate the effects of shrinking resources while improving standards of care. However, it has to be acknowledged that there are limits as to how far this can go in a geographically dispersed area, if the same standards are to be delivered and improved across Scotland. It can cost more to deliver the same standard of service to three homes in the North of Scotland as it does to 20 in the central belt due to the travel costs etc.

Northern Constabulary
February 2012