Scottish Parliament Local Government and Regeneration Committee
Public Sector Reform and Local Government in Scotland

Dr. Stephen Sinclair, Senior Lecturer in Social Policy, Glasgow Caledonian University

This response to the Scottish Parliament Local Government and Regeneration Committee's call for evidence on public sector reform and local government in Scotland focuses on the first of the three strands outlined in the notification of Monday 19th December 2011; i.e. partnerships and outcomes, specifically how the ongoing development of Community Planning Partnerships and the community planning process could be built upon to support outcome-based approaches to service planning and delivery.

1. While 'there is no secret formula to delivering improvement in the local government sector'[1] nevertheless the general characteristics of the best performing local authorities are widely known and can be applied to Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs). Among the most important characteristics are the following:

    *   a clear vision and purpose of what the organisation wants to achieve;
    *   organisational leaders who are able to communicate their vision so that there is a clear 'line of sight' from overall aims to the activities of front-line staff;
    *   effective communication with stakeholders and high levels of trust between partners who are committed to sharing responsibility;
    *   investment in organisational capacity and skills development;
    *   evidence is used to improve performance (rather than merely report accomplishments), and effective feedback systems provide opportunities to challenge ineffective practices.

2. CPPs are examples of complex organisations better regarded as comparable to organisms rather than rational systems amenable to technocratic interventions[2]. Research examining the most important influences of multi-member partnerships conclude that the 'human aspects' of partnership working are decisive[3]. It is important to appreciate that developing effective multi-organisational partnerships is a resource intensive activity which does not necessarily reduce short term costs[4]. Investing resources and time is required to establish effective partnerships and subsequent improvements may not be apparent to service users, e.g. the benefits of sharing or streamlining back office functions.

3. Partnership working also entails risks as officials may have to depend upon partner organisations to deliver outcomes for which they remain accountable[5]. Evidence from long-term evaluations of local partnerships confirm that building trust and mutual understanding is a prerequisite for organisations to accept the potential vulnerability

[1]. IdeA. (2005). *What Makes For Improvement?* IdeA / Local Government Association. http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/aio/1727032
[2]. Seel, R. (2000). 'Culture and Complexity: New Insights On Organisational Change'. *Organisations & People.* 7 (2)
[3]. Schmuecker, K. and Tehrani, E. (2011) Drawing On All Resources? - The Involvement Of The Voluntary And Community Sector And Social Enterprise In Northern Local Enterprise Partnerships. Institute of Public Policy Research.
[4]. Russell, H. (2010). *Research Into Multi-Area Agreements: Long-Term Evaluation Of Local Area Agreements And Local Strategic Partnerships.* Department of Communities and Local Government.
[5]. Wimbush, E. (2011). 'Implementing An Outcomes Approach To Public Management And Accountability In The UK - Are We Learning The Lessons?' *Public Money & Management.* 31 (3)

involved in this loss of control[6]. The commitment of organisational leaders is a first requirement for relationships of trust to develop: a strong drive from elected members and senior managers is required for commitments agreed between organisations to be reflected in the priorities and activities of staff in individual agencies.

4. This commitment is substantially reinforced if performance targets and staff appraisal, incentive and reporting systems within member organisations are reformed to reflect the emphasis on partnership working. Neither agreed strategic programmes nor statements from senior managers will be effective within organisations unless they are reflected in performance management arrangements and definitions and measures of 'success'[7].

5. It is important not to conflate community engagement in local governance partnerships with voluntary and private sector participation as these pose distinct challenges. The level of voluntary and third sector engagement in local governance partnerships often reflects the strength of local infrastructure, i.e. whether there are well resourced collective organisations and representative mechanisms able to co-ordinate this highly diverse sector. Some CPPs have encountered challenges in including third sector organisations in the development of Single Outcome Agreements (SOAs)[8], and many of the most effective local partnerships have invested in the development of collective third sector bodies. Local partnerships led by public sector agencies may have to adapt their decision-making process to accommodate the particular requirements of third sector partners (e.g. allow additional time for such partners to consult their sector), and appreciate that many such partners have nether the resources nor experience available to public sector organisations engaged in strategic policy-making.

6. Local governance partnerships throughout the UK have encountered difficulties in maintaining consistent private sector involvement, and in many cases a dedicated resource is required to support business sector participation[9]. Representatives of the private sector often do not feel any compelling interest nor duty to participate in local governance partnerships as a standing commitment, and prefer to engage on specific issues on an *ad hoc* basis[10]. Reflecting this, CBI Scotland noted that the participation of the local business sector in developing SOAs had not been raised members as an issue of concern[11]. The operation of CPPs would have to significantly reformed to increase the participation of the business sector.

7. Progress is evident in the development of an outcomes approach in CPPs, but it is also apparent that embedding an effective outcomes approach within partnerships is a long-term and demanding process, and that even the most advanced CPPs are still at an early stage of development, involved in tackling such basic issues as prioritising

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[6]. European Institute for Urban Affairs et al. (2011). *Long Term Evaluation Local Area Agreements And Local Strategic Partnerships, 2007 - 2010: Final Report.* Department of Communities and Local Government.
[7]. McGuire, A. (2010). *Outcome Focused Targets.* Learning Point 57. Scottish Centre for Regeneration
[8]. Herbert, S. (2010). *Single Outcome Agreements 2009-10.* SPICe Briefing 10/18
[9]. IdeA. (2011). *Business Involvement in LSPs.* http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=15367555
[10]. Sinclair, S. and Lindsay, K. (2008). *Presence Or Partnership? - Voluntary And Private Sector Influence In Community Planning In Scotland.* Scottish Poverty Information Unit.
[11]. Johnstone, R. *et al.* (2008). 'Vested Interest' *Holyrood Magazine.* 192. June. p.13.

outcomes, identifying appropriate performance indicators and establishing a relevant evidence base[12].

8.   The initial SOAs produced in 2008 reflected the limited preparation time available, and often drew together statements and targets in members' existing corporate plans rather than undertake a strategic reappraisal of priorities and how organisations could work in partnership to deliver these. Some of the weakness apparent in this first wave of SOAs are still apparent; including a lack of detail about the assumed causal links between aspirations, activities and outcomes; the extent to which targets are actually measurable; and the tendency to select outcomes which reflect existing activities and services rather than develop outcome strategies following a systematic consideration of local priorities13.

March 2012

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[12]. McGuire, A. (2011). *Embedding An Outcomes Approach In Tackling Poverty And Regeneration.* Improvement Service / Scottish Government.

[13]. Midwinter, A. (2009). *Single Outcome Agreements: A Critical View.* Paper for Social Services Research Group. Telfer, C, Dickie. J. and Fraser, M. (2009) *Single Outcome Agreements 2009: An Analysis By Members Of The Campaign To End Child Poverty In Scotland.* End Child Poverty.