Working Group on the Re-design of Neighbourhood Community Planning

Foreword

The value of Neighbourhood Community Planning has been affirmed but there is a need to improve the process.

The proposal set out in the attached paper has been prepared by a working group established by the Locality Planning Forum. It is based on their own deliberations and feedback and discussion from a range of sources involving members of all the stakeholder groups, and all aimed at learning from the first few years of neighbourhood planning and applying these lessons to a simpler and more effective approach to the neighbourhood community planning process.

Feedback is now sought from all interested parties to inform and finalise a revised framework for the neighbourhood community planning process.

Background

Community Planning in Aberdeen is organised and implemented at four different levels (ie Regional; City; Communities of Interest [equalities]; and local). Community planning at the local level is known as Neighbourhood Community Planning.

Outcome 11 in the Single Outcome Agreement says "We have strong, resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others" Our primary means of delivering on this outcome is the Neighbourhood Community Planning (NCP) process.

The Locality Planning Forum (the challenge forum that oversees the NCP process) reviewed progress in the light of the impact of re-structuring within the City Council, Grampian Police and Grampian Fire and Rescue Service; budget savings; and feedback from stakeholders. The conclusion was that NCP has achieved positive results for neighbourhoods across the city but that it was seen as being too bureaucratic; too complex and not achieving the required levels of community engagement. As a result a Working Group was formed and remitted to make the process simpler and more effective

Since December 2005 all of our 37 neighbourhoods have had a published Neighbourhood Community Action Plan and a process governed by the Framework for Neighbourhood Planning and Service Delivery. Further information about the present approach can be viewed on the community planning website
http://www.communityplanningaberdeen.org.uk/Internet/NeighbourhoodInformation/NeighbourhoodInformation.asp

Working Group on the Re-design of Neighbourhood Community Planning

**Re-design of Neighbourhood Community Planning
Consultation Paper   September 2009.**

1. Introduction

1.1 **Aim**
To plan and deliver interventions which improve the quality of life for residents in neighbourhoods

1.2 **Objectives**:
  • Identify and address priority issues in each Neighbourhood
  • Contribute, in the longer term, to promoting equality for regeneration areas
  • Address immediate 'hot spot' issues, causing problems for residents
  • Improve performance of Services to meet service standards and outcomes

1.3 **Description**
Our neighbourhood community planning **process** involves local public and voluntary service managers; local elected members of the City Council and local residents and community groups for each of our 37 **neighbourhoods**. It produces an agreed plan for a joined-up response, from local services and communities, to local priority issues. **Community engagement** ensures that services effectively respond to the particular needs of each neighbourhood. **Neighbourhood Community Plans** are built into wider service plans and the community plan so that neighbourhood actions are resourced and to ensure they are in line with city and national priorities. This is mainly done through an annual **planning cycle** that sets neighbourhood **priorities** for the forthcoming year at the start of the budget setting process for that year. Communities are fully engaged in an ongoing **dialogue** with local services through their community council and other community groups and service user groups. The implementation of Neighbourhood Community Plans requires active **partnership working** by the Community Planning partners (particularly the City Council, Grampian Police, NHS Grampian, Grampian Fire & Rescue Service and relevant voluntary organisations).

1.4 The key features of Neighbourhood Community Planning that should be sustained are:
  • **'Natural' communities** as identified by local residents rather than bureaucratic boundaries – ie 'the neighbourhoods'.
  • **Ongoing dialogue** between communities and local services that identifies neighbourhood priorities; action to address them and a means to do this; and to report on and monitor progress.

- **Neighbourhood priorities** that are based on a consideration of: community experience, objective data, strategic priorities and promoting the concept of 'well being'.
- **Integrated service planning** that ensures that neighbourhood priorities are built into the service plans and budgets of all partners, and that there are the means for services to work together to maximise impact in the community.
- **Neighbourhood Community Plans** composed of SMART[1] actions to demonstrate and report progress on neighbourhood priorities through partnership working.
- **Actions** that fall into three categories
  - improving local services
  - community development
  - addressing complex, long term issues
- **Governance arrangements** to ensure that both the community planning partnership can monitor the implementation of Neighbourhood Community Plans and ensure that neighbourhood planning links into each agency's service planning and delivery arrangements. This should extend to include performance monitoring to ensure local quality of life indicators and SOA targets are being met.
- **Improving** the well being of communities in greatest need and meeting and improving service standards across all neighbourhoods.

1.5 Terminology

In the future each Neighbourhood Community Plan will be given the name of the relevant neighbourhood (eg Middlefield Community Plan) and the process will be referred to as Neighbourhood Community Planning.

In this document 'services' applies to any or all of the specific services delivered by the community planning partners (eg Grampian Police's 'Operational Policing' service; NHS Grampian's 'Health Improvement' service; Aberdeen City Council's 'Housing & Environment' service), similarly 'service manager' refers to any of the partner agencies' operational managers responsible for local services (eg Police Inspector, Health Improvement Officer, Housing Manager, Station Manager).

2. Neighbourhoods

2.1 The original 37 neighbourhoods were identified on the basis of what most residents would identify as their local area. This has been borne out as an approach that is more meaningful than any of the bureaucratic boundaries such as wards and school catchment areas which are not based on 'natural' communities and in any case are subject to change.

2.2 There are a handful of neighbourhoods which may require amendment because they do not accurately reflect local residents' perceptions of their community. These include the conglomeration of

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[1] **SMART** : The acronym SMART stands for Specific, Measureable, Achievable, Realistic, Timed. It is used, in the context of actions, to indicate that actions are detailed enough to ensure implementation, and enable evaluation and accountability.

Braeside/Mannofield/Broomhill/Seafield; and Old Aberdeen. Views are sought on this during the consultation phase. It is also accepted that changes may occur in the future especially where new house building occurs.

2.3 Adjacent neighbourhoods can share the same issue and so the same action may appear in different Neighbourhood Community Plans. This does not cause duplication of effort when partnership working arrangements focus on a cluster of adjacent and similar neighbourhoods.

3. Community engagement

3.1 Residents and community groups have a key part to play. Community engagement in Neighbourhood Community Planning should enable public services to meet local needs more effectively and also promote community participation in addressing local issues.

3.2 The basis of community engagement in Neighbourhood Community Planning will be an ongoing dialogue between local service managers and community representatives. This will be augmented with specific initiatives aimed at involving larger numbers of residents and specific arrangements to hear the views of communities of interest (ie minority ethnic groups, young people, people with disabilities, the LGBT community, women, older people, Gypsy/Travellers).

3.3 Detailed arrangements to organise community participation can be developed in each neighbourhood but they must conform to the following criteria to ensure fair and effective governance and accountability:
1. The purpose will be to bring together different community interests in each neighbourhood to engage with public services through an ongoing dialogue to support the neighbourhood community planning process.
2. Participation will be open to all representative community groups (eg community council, parents' forum, tenants' association, community centre management committee), other bona fide community groups (eg youth club, sports group, 'in bloom' group, pensioners club, adult learning group, etc); interested individuals and the local elected members of the City Council. A membership list should be kept up to date and made public.
3. Details of the meetings and decisions of the group must be made public and circulated appropriately.
4. The community views fed into the neighbourhood planning process must aspire to be demonstrably and accurately representative of the community.

3.4 Within these criteria each neighbourhood will be free to organise itself as agreed by a majority of the members. Different models may develop such as: the creation of a Neighbourhood Network with an elected chairperson; or, a community council taking a lead organising role; or, the creation of a group that also takes action within the community. Support will be available to communities to develop their preferred arrangements.

3.5 Use of the National Standards for Community Engagement will support good practice. Particular attention will be given to use of a range of engagement techniques to suit different purposes and reach different sections of the community (eg road shows, walkabouts, surveys, workshop meetings, community arts, 'Planning for Real', community radio, Community Signature, communities of interest forums, etc).

3.6 Sustained two way communication between all of the participants in neighbourhood planning is also required. Again, a range of methods will be most effective. Written communication can be through direct mailings (post and email), progress bulletins; press releases; community newsletters and website postings. Face to face contact can be through staff attending community meetings and a range of informal contacts. 'Frontline' staff can make a particular contribution by feeding back community views, perceptions and experiences that they pick up in the course of their everyday work but this requires a process to collect, analyse and respond.

3.7 A range of staff is available to support residents and community groups to take advantage of the opportunities for community engagement. Principally they are Community Learning & Development workers but also include Tenant Participation Officers, community police officers, health improvement workers, etc. Partners will identify the support staff available for each neighbourhood or cluster of neighbourhoods.

4. Planning cycle

4.1 Neighbourhood Community Planning is an ongoing process and much of it is not confined to the timetable set out below. In particular action to address 'service standards' issues and 'day-business' issues will occur, for example, when problems arise or when new funding becomes available or in response to a new government request, etc. However the integrated service responses required to address the more complex and long term issues will be governed by the annual planning cycle.

4.2 The basic planning cycle as applied to neighbourhood community planning has a key milestone at the point when public services are beginning the process of setting their budgets for the forthcoming financial year (ie September). It is at this point priority actions must be agreed and lodged with the appropriate service(s). Each service must have a procedure for taking appropriate neighbourhood actions into its own service plan and its budget setting process.

4.3 So, the planning cycle should be:

Jan - March: review progress of Neighbourhood Community Plan for the year ending 31 March.
April: review all relevant data that informs local needs
May – June: consult residents and community groups on priorities for next financial year
June – August: service managers and community reps agree evidenced priorities and practical actions required

September: submit priority actions to relevant services
March: actions with budget support entered into Neighbourhood Community Plan for the forthcoming financial year

4.4 The annual planning cycle will also help to set dates for community engagement events, the publication of reports, the monitoring process and the identification of evidenced priorities.

Officers from a range of services have a role to facilitate this process and will help prompt and organise actions at agreed times.

4.5 The following diagram shows the links between plans at various levels and specifically how Neighbourhood Community Plans inform local (city) outcomes (in the SOA) and Service Plans.

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│ SOA                     │
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│ National Outcomes       │
├─────────────────────────┤
│ Local Outcomes          │
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            ▼
   ┌──────────────────┐
   │ COMMUNITY        │
   │ PLAN             │
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┌─────────────────────────┐
│ CORPORATE PLANS    (1)  │
└─────────────────────────┘
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│ SERVICE PLANS      (2)  │
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   │ NCP     │  │ SERVICE  │
   │ ACTIONS │  │ DELIVERY │
   └─────────┘  └──────────┘

        NEIGHBOURHOOD
        COMMUNITY              NEIGHBOURHOOD
        PLANNING               COMMUNITY ACTION
        PROCESS

        NEIGHBOURHOOD COMMUNITY PLANS
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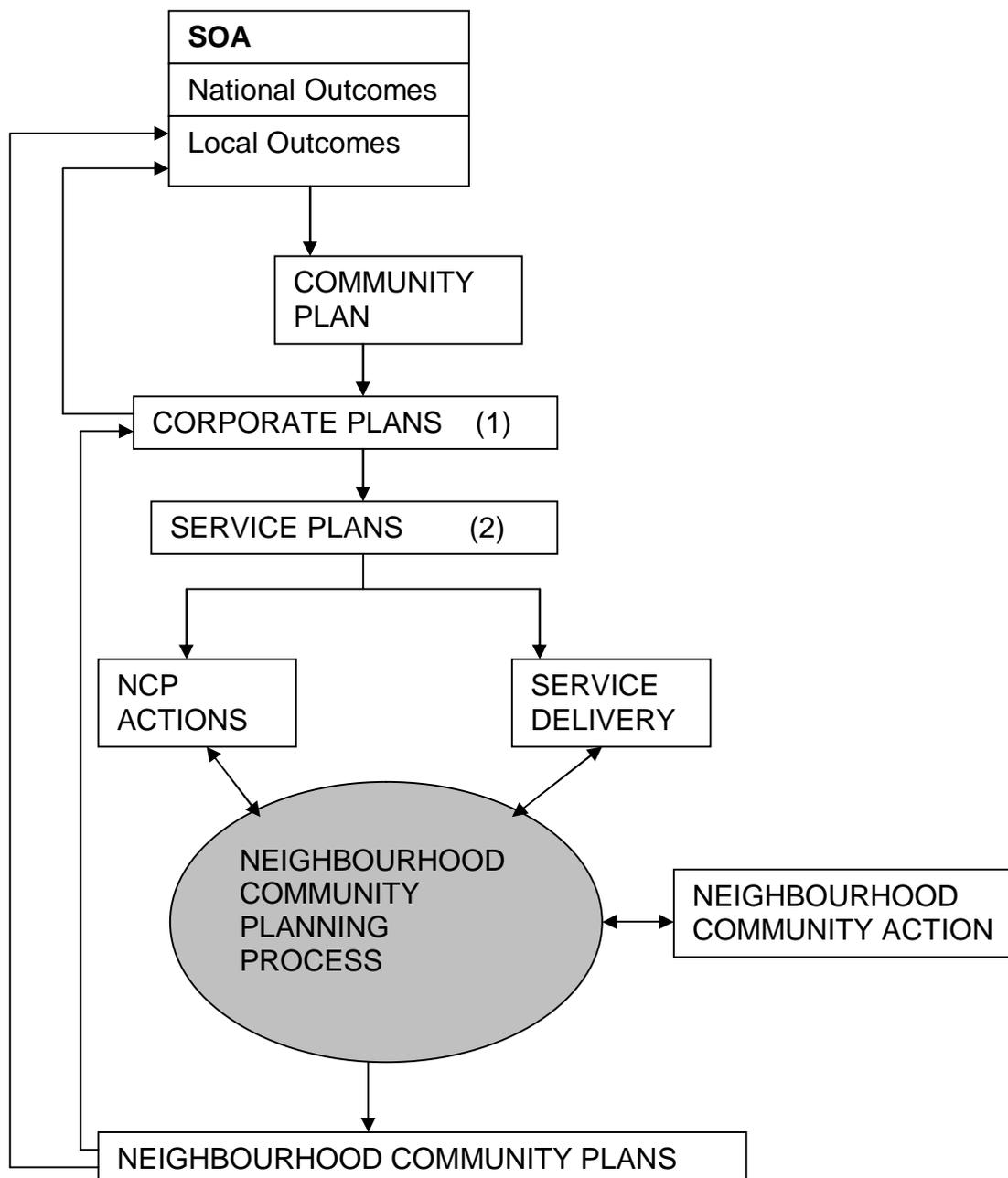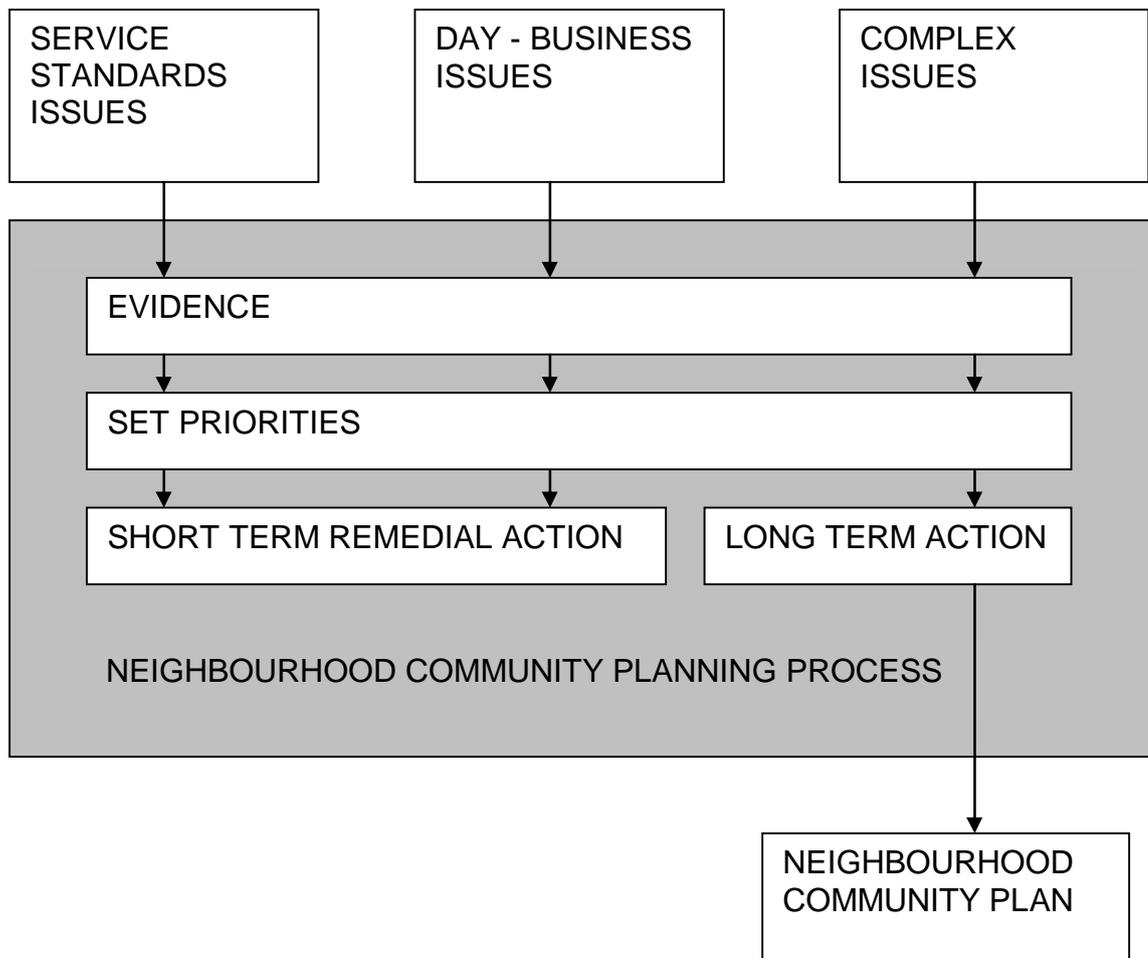
(1) High level strategic plan for each partner agency (e.g. ACC)
(2) Management plan for each service within a partner agency (e.g. Housing)

5.1   To reach a point where Neighbourhood Community Plans are focused purely on agreed, evidenced and resourced priority actions we have clarified the types of public services' issues that arise in communities and their appropriate response. There are three categories.

(i)   Issues that are caused by a failure to maintain service standards – when such issues are raised services can be expected to take remedial action ('service standard' issues)

(ii)   Issues that arise on an occasional and unpredictable basis for which there is a routine service response – these issues will be actioned by the appropriate service in accordance with set procedures and available resources ('day-business' issues)

(iii)   More complex and intractable issues which require a response from a range of services – these issues require extended multi-service actions and are the focus of Neighbourhood Community Plans ('complex' issues)

The following diagram shows how different kinds of issues feed into the Neighbourhood Planning Process.

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┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐
│ SERVICE      │   │ DAY -        │   │ COMPLEX      │
│ STANDARDS    │   │ BUSINESS     │   │ ISSUES       │
│ ISSUES       │   │ ISSUES       │   │              │
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│  │ EVIDENCE                                        │ │
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│  ┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────┐ │
│  │ SET PRIORITIES                                  │ │
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│  ┌──────────────────────────────┐  ┌───────────────┐ │
│  │ SHORT TERM REMEDIAL ACTION   │  │ LONG TERM     │ │
│  │                              │  │ ACTION        │ │
│  └──────────────────────────────┘  └───────┬───────┘ │
│                                            │         │
│  NEIGHBOURHOOD COMMUNITY PLANNING PROCESS  │         │
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                                    ┌──────────────────┐
                                    │ NEIGHBOURHOOD    │
                                    │ COMMUNITY PLAN   │
                                    └──────────────────┘
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5.3   Priorities must be evidence based and include discussion of statistical data, service intelligence and community views. This triangulation will both challenge community reps to consider the data about their neighbourhoods and the Services to take account of community perceptions. This approach

requires access to service data and analysis; input from frontline staff; reference to the Single Outcome Agreement; and ongoing dialogue with community representatives. A partnership approach to data sharing and analysis has yet to be developed.

5.4   Dialogue around priority needs of a community will allow services to locate needs within their own strategic priorities (including the Single Outcome Agreement) and for communities and services to advise on the most effective approaches. The identification of possible priority issues may occur at any time but within the annual cycle there needs to be a series of meetings between service managers and local community representatives to review all the evidence and to seek a consensus on the priority issues for action in the following financial year.

As a result only evidenced and practical actions will go forward for inclusion in Neighbourhood Community Plans.

6. Partnership working

6.1   Partnership working arrangements are required that enable service managers from the public services to work collaboratively. This needs to be at an optimum geographical level which takes account of staff capacity and enables a local response to be developed.

6.2   To overcome the difficulties posed by the previously large number of partnership groups (ie the Tasking & Coordinating Groups), it is proposed that partnership working will happen within a variety of existing partnership structures. At the highest level The Aberdeen City Alliance (TACA) brings together senior managers both in TACA meetings and in the Challenge Forums. TACA will take policy and strategic decisions (advised by the Locality Planning Forum which oversees the Neighbourhood Community planning process). The thematic Challenge Forums will consider the annual Neighbourhood Community Plans and ensure a collaborative response to neighbourhood priorities. At a local operational level service managers will use their own networks to facilitate integrated service responses as required.

6.3   For the regeneration areas, where the bulk of 'complex' issues can be expected and where Neighbourhood Community Plans will be integrated within local regeneration plans, the proposed TACA Regeneration Sub Committee will provide the partnership management function for neighbourhood community planning.

7. Implementation

7.1   Given the relative simplicity of this framework and the need to embed it in organisations that are themselves in a state of transformation it is important that once approved the framework is implemented in a careful and supportive way. This will need direction from senior management teams and decisions about the staff capacity available to facilitate the process; including a partnership agreement on when to initiate the new process.

7.2 Service plans will need to include commitments to:

- participate in dialogue with partners and community reps - to discuss neighbourhood data, service intelligence about each neighbourhood, corporate/national priorities; and community views - to seek a consensus on the neighbourhood priorities for the next financial year (nb as a failsafe we will provide summaries of relevant priorities for each service)
- identify resources to address neighbourhood priorities, submitted by September each year, through the budget setting process
- designating service managers to participate in the various partnership structures and who are empowered to facilitate integrated service delivery for the more intractable issues that require a multi-agency response
- effective two way communication with operational staff who can provide feedback on the effectiveness of agreed actions and also support community engagement through their direct contacts with 'customers'
- maintain an ongoing dialogue with communities on their Neighbourhood Community Plan priorities
- adopt arrangements to monitor who participates in community engagement, particularly to assess participation of 'equalities groups'.
- ensure staff who have a role to support Neighbourhood Planning and community engagement are supported to fulfill their role
- consider the most effective ways of maintaining ongoing partnership working between service managers within the Council, Police, NHS, Fire & Rescue and Voluntary sector.

7.3 The existing neighbourhood planning support roles have been developed and clarified over time. Principally they are the Neighbourhood Community Planning Officers (ACC) who facilitate the planning process and the engagement of services; and the Community Learning & Development workers (ACC) (and to a lesser degree, others such as Tenant Participation Officers, Community Police Officers, Health Improvement Officers, voluntary organisation staff) who support communities to participate in the process.

7.4 Recent budget savings within the City Council have resulted in a reduction in the number of NCPOs and CLD workers which requires the neighbourhood planning workload to be managed accordingly. However, by taking a more collaborative approach across the partnership and strengthening accountability to TACA and its member agencies, it is intended that a consistent level of support can be maintained.

7.5 The reduction in support staff taken with the suggested focus on complex issues requiring multi-agency responses leads to the likely targeting of regeneration areas. The success of this approach would depend on effective processes to respond to the first two categories of neighbourhood issues in the other neighbourhoods. In other words, if communities in non-regeneration areas were confident that services would respond to service standards issues and were transparent and proportionate in their responses to emerging local issues this would make tenable the concentration of resources on regeneration areas.

7.6 The implication for Neighbourhood Community Plans is that, for non-regeneration areas, the basic process would consist of an annual review of issues and data; periodic contact with NCPOs and specific service contacts; and a directory of service contacts to be used as required. Priority issues in these areas may not attract the same level of resourcing but consideration would be given to identifying practical responses from existing and community resources; and this would be reflected in the Neighbourhood Community Plan.

7.7 For regeneration areas the main concern will be to ensure coherence between all active projects and interventions. It is the Neighbourhood Community Plan that should provide this coherence. In other words it can be anticipated that there will be a range of social, economic and environmental issues and responses involving all of the community planning partners which will all appear in the Neighbourhood Community Plan. It will follow that arrangements for partnership working and community engagement will be more complex and the role of a partnership management group all the more critical. This framework does not seek to prescribe these arrangements beyond the basic process already described. It will be up to the services and communities concerned to devise the most suitable structures and procedures for each neighbourhood or cluster of neighbourhoods.

7.8 It is proposed that full initiation of the new neighbourhood planning process should be in March 2010 once new agency structures are fully operational and to begin a new annual planning cycle.

Consultation

Please provide your views on this proposal document by completing the questionnaire to be found by clicking on the link below.

https://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=0q7kvTHDdSDNjK7pb62vaA_3d_3d

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