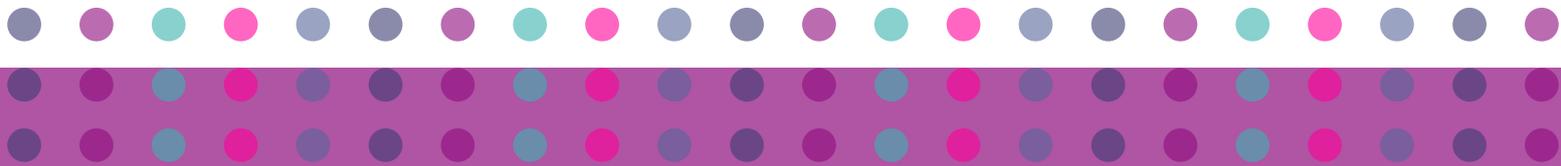
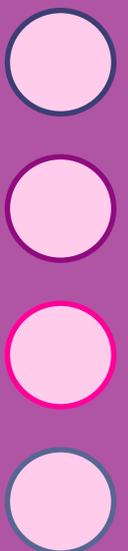


# COMMUNITY PLANNING TOOLKIT



## OUTCOMES APPROACH



Developed by Community Places through  
the support of the BIG Lottery Fund  
2014

[www.communityplanningtoolkit.org](http://www.communityplanningtoolkit.org)



## Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| 1. Introduction  | 03 |
| 2. Why focus on outcomes?  | 03 |
| 3. Emergence of outcomes   | 05 |
| 4. Outcomes about what?  | 06 |
| 5. Comparative experience:<br>Community Planning Outcome<br>Agreements in Scotland | 07 |
| 6. Putting the CVS in the lead   | 09 |
| 7. Championing community and<br>voluntary sector outcomes                          | 12 |
| 8. Establishing community<br>indicators  | 14 |
| 9. Selecting Outcomes  | 16 |
| 10. Finding and using evidence of<br>outcomes                                      | 18 |
| 11. Summary of Key Points  | 20 |

## 1. Introduction

This section of the Toolkit:

- Explains the logic of an outcomes-based approach;
- Suggests how it should be applied to Community Planning; and
- Provides tools and pointers to good practice.

Clarity about outcomes is essential for any purposeful activity. Outcomes do not exist in isolation - they are part of an overall plan. Nor are they mysterious and technical. They simply mean '**clearly stated results for the people and organisations who are supposed to benefit**'. We will first unpack these reasons and then examine how to establish clear outcomes or

improve poor ones.

## 2. Why Focus on Outcomes?

**Why is it worth looking at outcomes more closely?**

1. Clear results for beneficiaries are often surprisingly neglected in plans for social projects. Instead there may be quite vague aims which hide a good many problems once you try to carry them out;
2. Stating results clearly is trickier than it may look at first; and
3. Once projects are in progress there are so many things to think about that it's easy to lose sight of what it's all for and whether there is steady progress towards results.

Establishing outcomes has both intrinsic value in terms of improving practice and external value for communicating with stakeholders:

### Four Kinds of Value

- **Purpose** - clearer about where you're heading;
- Knowing what **evidence** to collect to see if you're getting there;
- Stronger **partnership** through clear agreement on goals; and
- **Communication** – with funders, practitioners, stakeholders

Diagram 1: Four Kinds of Value

To people working on a project on the ground, the intentions often seem clear and obvious. They are tackling poverty, building people's confidence, delivering childcare or pursuing some other worthwhile cause. But their intentions may be far from clear to people a bit more distant from the action, whose support and understanding they need – funders, public authorities or community members who are not part of the project or group. A clear statement of outcomes establishes good communication with stakeholders and enables supporters and co-operators to understand what the project is aiming to do.

Similarly, clear outcomes guide what evidence to collect. Collecting evidence of achievement and of how things happen is often neglected in the thick of action. Again, to the people taking the action it often seems obvious at the time what is happening and why, and diverting effort into collecting evidence can seem like a waste of time when there are pressing social needs to be met. But the result is that at the end of the project it is often difficult to reconstruct what happened or even to show that things have improved as a result of the actions taken. It is very common, for example, to overlook the need for a baseline of how things were, in order to show how they have improved.

This is not just a matter of satisfying external audiences, for example showing funders that their money was well spent (though that is important enough, especially when you are seeking new resources for further work). It is also a matter of being able to check whether your methods are working, whether you are really making progress as you go along. Expending effort can easily be mistaken for achieving progress. To check whether progress is really happening we need to periodically stand back from the process and ask whether the conditions or problems which we were addressing in the first place are really changing. For that we need evidence beyond our own perceptions (though including them). Add to this the fact that people move on, both in the community, among project staff and in supporting agencies. If the project's work is passed from hand to hand and without clear outcomes it is easy for the original aims to be lost sight of and the action to become muddled.

Another pitfall that can be avoided by clear outcomes is the trap of unrealistic expectations. People who create or deliver social projects are often more than a little idealistic and want to improve everything in a short time. Funders and commissioners are often only too keen to believe that more can be delivered for less, and politicians like to promise results. Projects often therefore set out very wide-reaching goals with limited resources, which later on will make them look as if they have failed. Setting down outcomes within a realistic plan, and proportionate to the resources available, can help to avoid this, leading to a deserved record of success when results come in.

No-one wants to spend a disproportionate amount of time collecting evidence, but for that very reason it is a good idea to set down early on a guideline about the proportion of time and resources to be allotted to this purpose. Something like 3- 5 % of the total budget would normally be reasonable. This will more than justify itself in terms of guiding action and ensuring good communication amongst partners and external stakeholders.

The difference made by focusing on outcomes more clearly is in driving better-thought-out solutions, better use of resources and better cooperation between partners. By starting with a clear vision of outcomes and then working out what actions would bring those about, there is less likelihood of adopting arbitrary and ineffective methods, less likelihood of wasting resources on unproductive action and less likelihood of getting bogged down in a process which has no clear direction.

Focussing on outcomes has a key role in establishing and running partnerships: it shifts attention from the daily problems of getting and keeping things going to the bigger picture of end results. Discussion and clarification of outcomes is a major part of communication between the partners, and then again between the partnership as a whole and its external stakeholders. Everyone feels clearer if they know what the whole activity is aiming to achieve.

However, commitment to outcomes does not mean having tunnel vision. Plans should always be open to rethinking, new information and changing circumstances. But any major changes in outcomes should be recorded with explanation.



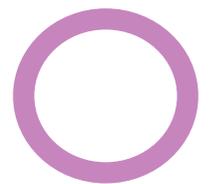
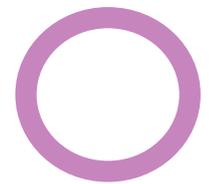
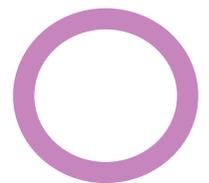
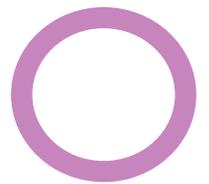
### 3. Emergence of Outcomes

Public services have a long history of being provision-centred rather than outcome-centred. The history of the development of state services over the past century and more has mostly been a struggle to get adequate provision to meet stark and obvious needs: for housing, employment, food, education, security. Most political discourse in this long period was about resources and provision. It seemed obvious what the provision was for, and therefore that once provision was made, meeting the needs would follow naturally. However, once significant provision was made, it became clear that results could vary widely according to exactly how the provision was used. There are abundant examples both recent and longstanding where major provision has not led to the expected results.

Learning partly from management theory in the private sector, governments gradually learned to disentangle the assumptions built into the political debates and focus on the fact that provision is much more likely to meet needs if planning envisions as clearly as possible what detailed results are expected for the end-beneficiary. One of the main reasons for this is that all social provision entails a chain of actors, from the original decision-makers to service planners, from planners to managers and from managers to front line workers. It is easy for original intentions to be lost in the Chinese whispers that link this chain. Equally, it is easy for high level service planners to be unaware of, or underestimate, the conditions on the ground that affect implementation in practice. There is a natural tendency to conflate problems and solutions: to jump to what seem like obvious solutions before we have properly diagnosed the problem.

The community development side of the equation has some added obstacles to overcome in adapting to a culture of outcomes. As a visionary social movement it emphasises long-term ideals which cannot easily be reduced to single timebound steps. As a form of practice which highlights process, it is sometimes less than clear about product. But it shares the need of all public services to be transparent about its intentions, and in practical reality its actions have

short as well as long-term outcome implications which benefit by being made clearer and more concrete. An outcomes basis therefore has the added value of putting the evidence for community development onto a stronger basis, which raises credibility alike with colleagues, decision-makers and communities.



## 4. Outcomes about What?

What should the outcomes be about? The ultimate changes sought by community planning are in material quality of life issues such as whether people have jobs, whether they have decent housing, their state of health, education and welfare.

Other objectives are about the community planning process itself:

- Are all sections of the community involved?
- Do all partners have equal opportunity to influence decisions?
- Does the wider community feel a sense of ownership of the partnership and its actions?
- Above all, is the community itself strengthened in various ways, both as individuals and groups?

Community Planning has to take account of all these factors, whilst recognising that improvement on such a wide front can only be achieved by the concerted efforts of many partners, not least the community itself. Community planning implies a 'co-production' approach: active cooperation between communities and public agencies. Even so, community planning alone cannot wholly determine material outcomes – there are other factors that are outside its control.

To get a handle on such a wide variety of possible objectives it is useful to divide outcomes into three types:

- **A - Material Benefits:** e.g. Whether people are getting jobs; whether houses are improved; whether health is improved
- **B - Structures:** e.g. Whether a partnership has been established; whether it has inclusive representation; whether it is functioning well; whether communities are able to influence decisions
- **C - Capacities:** e.g. Whether people are more confident and involved; whether community groups are able to achieve their goals; whether public agencies are able to engage communities; whether community groups and organisations are able to work together.

Diagram 2: Three Types of Outcomes

Outcomes of Type **A** are about **actual improvements** in local quality of life: material benefits such as new jobs or improved services. These may take longest to achieve, and will also be most affected by factors outside the Community Planning partnership's control.

Type **B** is about **structures** that will facilitate wider benefits over time. The main structure would be the community planning partnership itself. Here the outcomes could be framed in terms of whether a partnership has been established, whether it is working well, whether the members are cooperating effectively.

Type **C** is about **capacities**: improvements in the ability of the different players to carry out their roles more effectively. This would include the ability of public agencies to understand how communities work, and vice versa; the ability

of community organisations to take on wider responsibilities; the ability of public agencies to work more flexibly across their traditional boundaries; and the ability of residents as individuals to take part in these developments and benefit from them.

Outcomes of types **B** and **C** should be more within the control of the Community Planning partnership and achievable within a given timeframe. Addressing such a wide variety of issues at the three levels may require many branching working groups and sub-projects. This may have both advantages and disadvantages. An advantage is that more community members and groups may be able to participate directly in the action. A disadvantage may be that it is difficult to maintain overall coherence.

## 5. Comparative Experience: Community Planning Outcome Agreements in Scotland

It is useful, before focusing on specific actions, to look at the role of outcomes in Community Planning in Scotland.

There are 32 local authority areas in Scotland, each of which leads a Community Planning Partnership (CPP). After the 2007 election, the Scottish Government committed itself to a 'single purpose' [www.scotland.gov.uk/About/scotPerforms](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/scotPerforms) to create a more successful country where all of Scotland could flourish through increasing sustainable economic growth. The government and local authorities agreed on a new relationship: government would set the direction of policy and overarching outcomes whilst standing back from managing service delivery, freeing up local authorities and their partners to meet varying local needs and circumstances through the CPPs.

A central element of the new relationship between central and local government was the creation of a Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) between each Community Planning Partnership and the Scottish Government, based on 15 national outcomes. **This illustrates how clear outcomes can serve to link different stakeholders without impeding flexibility about how the outcomes are to be achieved.**

SOAs were said to be 'a partnership with the people and communities whose quality of life and opportunity we want to be improved. We cannot "do" outcomes to people: we need to work with them to support positive outcomes in their lives. This goes beyond conventional community engagement and is about a fuller partnership with people in pursuing outcomes. This will take time, effort and commitment but key outcomes like improved health, economic opportunity etc can only be achieved this way.' See for example, the Dundee Single Outcome Agreement and Delivery Plan at [www.dundeepartnership.co.uk](http://www.dundeepartnership.co.uk).

These 15 outcomes form the Scottish Government's National Performance Framework

R1 <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/scotPerforms/outcomes>

1. We live in a Scotland that is the most attractive place for doing **business** in Europe.
2. We realise our full economic potential with more and better **employment opportunities** for our people.
3. We are better educated, more skilled and more successful, renowned for our **research and innovation**.
4. Our **young people** are successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens.
5. Our children have the best start in life and are ready to succeed.
6. We live longer, **healthier lives**
7. We have tackled the significant **inequalities** in Scottish society.
8. We have improved the life chances for **children, young people and families** at risk.
9. We live our lives safe from **crime, disorder and danger**.
10. We live in well-designed, **sustainable places** where we are able to access the amenities and services we need.
11. We have strong, resilient and supportive **communities** where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others.
12. We value and enjoy our built and natural **environment** and protect it and enhance it for future generations.
13. We take pride in a strong, fair and inclusive **national identity**.
14. We reduce the local and global **environmental impact** of our consumption and production
15. Our **public services** are high quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive to local people's needs

Diagram 3: Scottish National Outcomes

Each of these outcomes is measured by a specific suite of indicators: the link for each outcome provides these together with baseline information and technical information on how the indicator is measured. For example those for the children, young people and families section include:

- Increase the proportion of pre-school centres receiving positive inspection reports
- Decrease the proportion of individuals living in poverty
- Reduce the rate of increase in the proportion of children with their Body Mass Index outwith a healthy range by 2018
- 60% of school children in Primary 1 will have no signs of dental disease by 2010
- Increase the proportion of schools receiving positive inspection reports
- Increase the proportion of local authorities receiving positive child protection inspection reports
- Reduce number of working age people with severe literacy and numeracy problems
- Increase the proportion of school leavers in positive and sustained destinations (FE, HE, employment, training).

## What reflections for Community Planning in Northern Ireland are suggested by this system?

**Firstly:** the main *outcomes* are general statements about improvement on a major social issue, whilst each of the *indicators* is about a specific detail of that kind of improvement, with implications for action.

**Secondly:** the kind of evidence needed to show those detailed improvements needs to be collected by government or official bodies with resources for systematic data collection. It is not the sort of evidence that could or should be collected by the community and voluntary sector (CVS). Indeed, most of this kind of information is already collected by official bodies. But this does not mean that only official bodies need be concerned with it. The CVS can gain leverage in decision-making by taking the trouble to find out about available hard information on indicators like these, and using it to help make the case for whatever issues most concern them.



## 6. Putting the CVS in the Lead

There is special value for the Community and Voluntary Sector (CVS) members in taking a lead on outcomes. By boldly taking a lead on discussion of outcomes within the partnership rather than waiting for the statutory bodies to do so, the Community and Voluntary Sector partners are asserting their central rather than marginal role. It will help them establish an equal position in driving the direction of the partnership as a whole. And it enables them to ensure that the outcomes reflect the perspective of their members as well as that of the statutory bodies.

It is up to the CVS to assert that, alongside the usual well recognised social issues, outcomes specific to community strengthening are also possible and necessary. These would include for example the strengthening of community groups and networks, improvements in social capital, increases in volunteering and increases in the capacity of community groups and networks to engage with service providers.

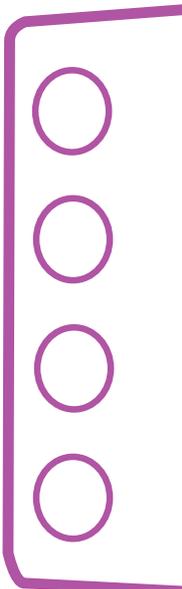
### Exercise: what makes a good outcome statement?

The following exercise will help you clear your mind about the definition and purpose of outcomes. Read through the 20 statements in the worksheet below and fill in the columns next to them. A good way to do this is individually first, then go through it in small groups comparing answers. Finally have a whole-group discussion about what conclusions you can draw from this.

In the whole-group discussion ask: what are the characteristics of a high quality outcome statement?

Points to look for are:

- Does this focus on outcomes or on inputs and processes?
- Is this specific enough to guide action or rather vague?
- Is this too detailed – is it an indicator rather than an outcome?
- Is the outcome implied rather than stated? Could it be stated more clearly?
- Is this an outcome that would be helpful in focusing action or just add unattainable aspirations?



**Worksheet: What makes a good outcome statement?**

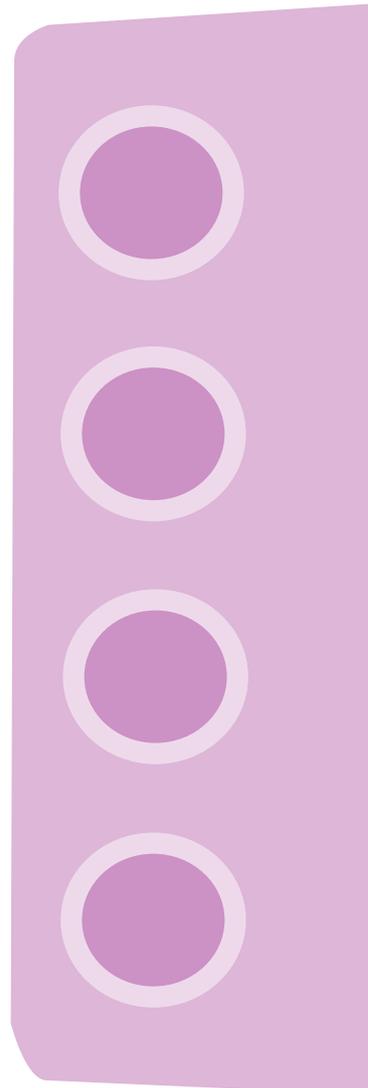
| <b>Statement - Is this a good Outcome Statement?</b>   | <b>YES</b> | <b>NO</b> | <b>Comment and review</b> |
|--|------------|-----------|---------------------------|
| 1. We will involve the community in decision-making  |            |           |                           |
| 2. We will provide grants to community organisations   |            |           |                           |
| 3. We aim to lobby the local authority to provide grants to community organisations  |            |           |                           |
| 4. We are committed to improve community sustainability by greater opportunity and cohesion  |            |           |                           |
| 5. Improved local economic opportunities, environment and safety through the work of the partnership   |            |           |                           |
| 6. Two years after the start of the project 25 new jobs will have been created in the locality   |            |           |                           |
| 7. The objective is to train community leaders in negotiating skills   |            |           |                           |
| 8. Different communities will work together for the common good  |            |           |                           |
| 9. Community leaders will acknowledge a marked improvement in their negotiating skills by the end of the project as a result of partnership activities |            |           |                           |
| 10. We will train community workers in building community leaders' skills  |            |           |                           |
| 11. Community groups will become more inclusive of the diversity of the local community  |            |           |                           |
| 12. Put on a training course for councillors in understanding the dynamics of local communities  |            |           |                           |
| 13. Number of people who attended a training course and were satisfied with it   |            |           |                           |
| 14. People will feel safer in their neighbourhoods   |            |           |                           |
| 15. Accredited increase in skills acquired as a result of attending a training course  |            |           |                           |
| 16. Disadvantaged school pupils will be better motivated and qualified as a result of the partnership's support for single parents                     |            |           |                           |
| 17. Regular partnership meetings will be set up to discuss improvements in housing conditions  |            |           |                           |
| 18. A new job creation scheme will be set up   |            |           |                           |
| 19. Number of people finding jobs following attendance at the job creation scheme  |            |           |                           |
| 20. Number of previously unemployed people finding jobs following participation in the job creation scheme and remaining in them for a year            |            |           |                           |

## Review of the Exercise

Some conclusions you might come to as a result of this exercise:

- The clearest outcomes are statements of concrete results (e.g. 5, 6, 9, 11, 14) rather than statements of inputs and processes (e.g. 1, 2, 10, 12, 18)
- But inputs and processes may imply outcomes, and could be rephrased to be good outcomes, e.g. 2 '*Community organisations will receive more adequate grants*' rather than '*We will provide grants to community organisations*'.
- Some of the statements are very specific and would rather serve as indicators than outcomes (e.g. 13, 19, 20).
- Outcomes are clearer if limited to one main objective at a time rather than bundling several together (as statement 5 does).

For further guidance see **R2** LEAP Tips on Outcomes and **R3** LEAP Developing Outcome Indicators.



## 7. Championing Community and Voluntary Sector Outcomes

In the last section we suggested that CVS partners should take a lead in framing partnership outcomes. The perspective of public agencies naturally reflects their particular responsibilities, and tends to treat the CVS role as just a means to those ends. All will usually agree that community involvement is important but may not see that in addition to contributing to their departmental outcomes, it also has authentic outcomes of its own. In addition to being proactive about outcomes on common social issues, the CVS should make a point of getting commitment from the public services to support outcomes for social capital and the strengths of the community itself.

Statutory bodies may tend to equate a strong community simply with the sum of material conditions (housing, environment, jobs etc). They may not see that these are paralleled by the inner life of the community – its relationships, networks and the state of its confidence, optimism and energy as reflected in its groups and organisations. When community attributes are raised, statutory bodies may tend to marginalise them by saying, or assuming, that they cannot be measured and are therefore not objective, and therefore not suitable subjects for outcomes.

Public agencies may also fail to see that achieving the CVS outcomes is a precondition for the ways in which they want the CVS to contribute to the departmental ones. This has major implications for whether the CVS gets adequate support and recognition from the public sector. Much policy narrative tends to assume that the community and its organisations are simply ‘there’ to be tapped into. But community networks and organisations can be in a strong or weak state, sparse or abundant, inclusive or limited.

Outcomes about the community itself are suggested below:

### Examples of outcomes about the strengths of local communities

- The locality contains a range of community and voluntary organisations which cover all the main social issues
- All sections of the community have access to participation in a wide range of community and voluntary groups
- Local CVS groups and organisations feel they are achieving their objectives and are optimistic about their future role
- Local voluntary and community organisations have access to funding opportunities and support
- Local voluntary and community organisations feel they are valued by local statutory bodies and that their voice is heard and influential in public decision-making



An important resource in showing that factors like these are measurable is the national CVS survey carried out in England in 2009 and 2011. Originally called National Survey of Third Sector Organisations and full results displayed on [www.nstso.com](http://www.nstso.com). The survey was repeated in 2010, renamed National Survey of Charities and Social Enterprises and the website renamed [www.nscsesurvey.com](http://www.nscsesurvey.com).

This is probably the largest and most systematic survey of the CVS ever carried out anywhere, but it is nevertheless not well known, and Councils may not be familiar with it. CVS partners can gain credibility in the partnership by making themselves familiar with it and being able to cite it to demonstrate the measurability of the condition of the local CVS. This does not necessarily mean using the survey as it stands but borrowing or adapting the most relevant questions or creating others of that kind.

For this purpose it is not the results in England that are important, though these can be seen for each English local authority on the website, but the questionnaire- See **R4** National Survey of Third Sector Organisations.

An example of a partnership which made a priority of building and making visible this 'social capital' element amongst local residents is the Manton Neighbourhood Management 'Pathfinder' in Nottinghamshire- See **R5** Manton Community Alliance Annual Report and **R6** Making Social Capital Count. Communities Scotland has also published guidance on how those involved in capacity building and community development could identify and articulate the outcomes of their work **R7** Delivering Change.



## 8. Establishing Community Indicators

It is notable however that official 'hard' statistics rarely include any measure of the strength of communities themselves. This is something which CVS organisations may need to lobby for and help formulate. Looking back at Diagram 3 we see that one of the 15 outcomes in the Scottish system is 'strong, resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others'. However, the related indicators don't bear out the concept very well. There are just three indicators, two about crime and one about satisfaction with neighbourhood:

Reduce overall crime victimisation rates by 2 percentage points by 2011  
 Increase the percentage of adults who rate their neighbourhood as a good place to live  
 Increase positive public perception of the general crime rate in local area

This gap in indicators of community strengths is common all over the world. It comes from a long history of neglect of hard outcomes about community life itself (as distinct from the material conditions of communities) both by governments and the community development field.

Serving a related but not quite identical purpose as outcomes, Scotland has produced a set of National Standards for Community Engagement. These are standards of how community development and involvement should be done rather than the outcomes that can be expected - See [Toolkit: Community Engagement](#)

We have said that indicators are not outcomes, but what then is the relationship between them? It is that outcomes describe the main impact you are looking for on particular groups of people, organisations or issues, whilst indicators are a way of measuring whether the impact is taking place. But you can't measure everything, so indicators are usually just the tip of the iceberg of the overall impact.

A breakthrough in integrating community strengths into the mainstream outcome culture was made in England between 2007 and 2010, in relation to Local Strategic Partnerships (parallel to Scottish Community Planning Partnerships). Taking a similar 'hands off' approach to local government, the Westminster administration set up Local Area Agreements by which each local authority made a selection from a suite of 198 indicators. A group of seven indicators of community strengths were embedded right at the start of the set of national indicators - as shown in Diagram 4.



## Diagram 4: Community strength indicators from the Local Government Performance Framework 2007-10. See **R8**

| Number and name of indicator  | The question/s asked or definition of evidence  |
|---|---|
| 1. % of people who believe people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area. (Cohesion) | To what extent do you agree or disagree that your local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together?   |
| 2. % of people who feel that they belong to their neighbourhood   | How strongly do you feel that you belong to your immediate neighbourhood?   |
| 3. Civic participation in the local area (Equalities)   | In the last 12 months have you been: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- a local councillor (LA, town or parish);</li> <li>- member of a group making decisions on local health or education services, regeneration, crime, tenants' committees or services for young people?</li> </ul> |
| 4. % of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality  | Do you agree or disagree that you can influence decisions affecting your local area?  |
| 5. Overall satisfaction with the local area   | Overall how satisfied are you with your local area as a place to live?  |
| 6. Participation in regular volunteering  | Overall how often over the last 12 months have you given unpaid help to any group(s), club(s) or organisation(s)? Please only include work that is unpaid and not for your family' (at least once a week/ at least once a month/ less often/ not through any organisation)                    |
| 7. Environment for a thriving third sector  | How do the statutory bodies in your local area influence your organisation's success?   |

Evidence for the community indicators was mostly collected through a large scale 'Place Survey' of resident perceptions throughout the country. Indicator 7 however was collected through a nation-wide survey of the relationship between the local voluntary and community sector and local public bodies.

The Big Lottery Fund supported Community Planning Pilot Project in Derry and Strabane Council areas used some of these indicators (and others) when conducting a survey of community groups in two local areas see **R9**. The findings of which were drawn on to inform the design of local community engagement by the Pilot Project.

## 9. Selecting Outcomes

The emphasis on outcomes does not mean that outcomes can make sense in isolation from inputs and processes. Outcomes are meaningful within an overall sequence of action. We must also ensure that emphasising outcomes does not lead to tunnel vision on what action to take. A single area of action can contribute to several outcomes. For example strengthening a community group can contribute to all five outcomes shown in Diagram 5.



Diagram 5 : Multiple Outcomes

A useful way to think of the action sequence as a whole is to conceive it in terms of a 'theory of change'. This is not a single theory applied everywhere but your theory as to how things can be changed for the better in your locality. This means thinking about:

1. What is the situation now? (baselines)
2. Why is it not satisfactory as it is?
3. Therefore what needs to change?
4. What will the situation be once these changes have taken place? (Outcomes)
5. What actions are likely to bring about these changes?
6. Who needs to carry out which parts of the action?
7. What support or contribution do they need from other partners?
8. How will we know if the action has had the intended effect? (Indicators)
9. How long do we think it may take to have that effect?
10. What are the risks of taking this action, and how can they be counteracted?
11. How will we recognise along the way whether things are moving in the right direction? – especially if the current project is really just part of a much larger or longer term process? (Milestones)
12. How will we notice and recognise other effects we hadn't thought of, both good and bad? (Unanticipated outcomes)

Choosing outcomes inevitably involves some simplification. A limited number of priorities have to be chosen from a huge field of possible issues. All issues are interconnected in reality on the ground, and isolating a limited set may give them an unwarranted solidity and separateness. To help ensure strong focus no more than six to eight main outcomes should be selected. Subsidiary outcomes can if necessary be chosen by subgroups. The choice should be guided not only by the intrinsic importance of the issues but by the need to ensure that all partners feel involved and committed, both on 'their own' issues and in supporting others. An impression of the multiplicity of related issues that can be found in a single place is provided by ODPM (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister) **R10** p.39.

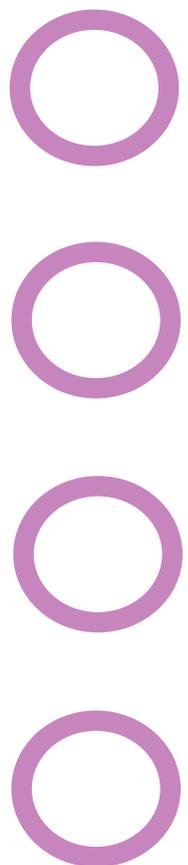
Public agencies and their departments are specialised, and will tend to seek to deal with their specialist issue in its own terms. Even specialist voluntary organisations may have similar boundaries. Communities however will readily understand that school attainment is also to do with poverty, housing and health; that housing is also to do with employment, transport and disability; and that all issues are to do with the relationships between the people in the place. When they are asked to specify outcomes, community organisations may feel they are being artificially hemmed in. Meanwhile specialist agencies may appreciate the interconnections in principle but are likely to have difficulty in working out how to bring the issues together.

This is one reason why community planning partnerships are so important. Between all the partners it should be possible to activate many issues so that they are mutually reinforcing and raise quality of life as a whole. But communities and public agencies naturally have very different cultures. Selecting outcomes is part of the art of bringing those cultures together. Trying to deal with all issues at once, all given equal importance, will lead to an impractically large agenda, and little new action will take place. Having too few issues will lead to some of the main partners, and main parts of the community, feeling that their concerns are not included, and they may lose interest.

Lead issues should therefore be chosen not only for their intrinsic importance in the life of that locality but with an eye to making sure that all partners feel their role is recognised and they have a contribution to make. But the temptation to bundle many issues into a single outcome should be resisted – it will only cause confusion. One Neighbourhood Renewal guide asked partners to judge whether there had been

'Robust, in-depth analysis of local problems, underlying causes and a range of solutions'.

This is a conflation of three, four or five different factors, each of them quite complex to start with! It would be difficult to reach any clear conclusion on such a dense bundle of issues.



## 10. Finding and Using Evidence of Outcomes

It is useful to distinguish between **four types of evidence**:

**First hand evidence**: where the facts can be ascertained from the direct knowledge of the partners. For example, minutes of meetings have been distributed or a consultation event has been held.

**Measurable indicators**: where the facts can be ascertained by collecting external evidence through surveys or other research. For example, whether a partnership's actions have had an impact on local conditions over a year as perceived by residents.

**Testimonies**: where key informants are in a position to give an informed opinion about cause and effect even though this can rarely be proved. For example local teachers might be willing to say that the actions of a community plan have created better conditions for children to concentrate and so indirectly improved their attainments.

**Judgements**: where the statement is too complex for a single type of evidence, and a conclusion has to be reached on the basis of impressions or a variety of second-hand or incomplete evidence. For example whether all appropriate sections of a community have been involved in identifying priority issues.

Judgements can be made **individually** or **collectively**, and they may be made **internally**, i.e. by the partners themselves, or **externally**, i.e. by stakeholders and /or users. Internal judgement is self-evaluation. External judgement can be turned into a measurable indicator, for example by carrying out an objective survey of levels of agreement with a statement about results amongst a representative sample of the partnership's stakeholders. The Big Lottery Fund supported Community Planning Pilot Project in Belfast uses these approaches to design its Evaluation Framework. This presents different Project outcomes against indicators and different sources of evidence for each indicator **R11**.

The first rule about assembling evidence is: don't expend effort on creating new evidence until you have found out what evidence has already been or is being, collected. Since community partnerships deal with the whole profile of local issues, many of their concerns will already be the subject of surveys, research or regularly collected data (as we saw for example in relation to the Scottish National Outcomes).

Indeed, on many issues existing data will have already played a part in defining the problems being addressed, such as unemployment, poor housing, low educational attainment or crime. Yet such information is often under-used, or only used by the agency that holds it. Partnerships should be looking to make best use of data from all partners. The Big Lottery Fund supported Pilot Project in Belfast drew on a wide variety of data sources to identify health and well-being priorities across the city. These included analyses of official health statistics, community surveys and qualitative research at both area and city-wide levels. This scoping exercise enabled the Project to identify commonalities across different sources of data and take a more robust and broadly based approach to the prioritisation of issues.

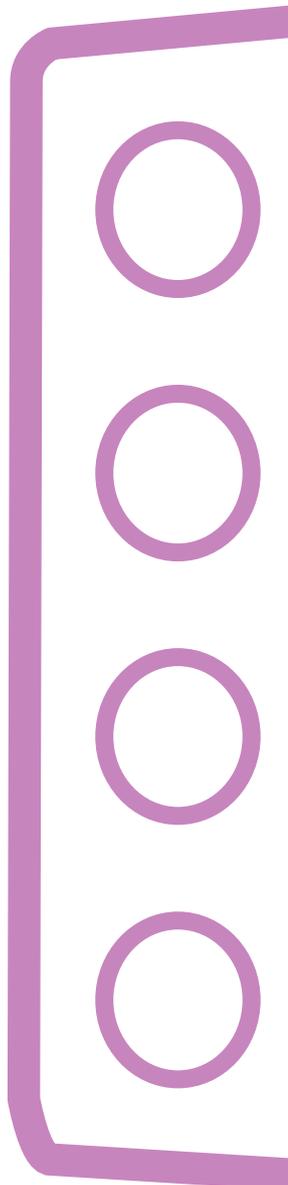
A second preliminary action should be to create a map of all intended or regular surveys and research. Agencies, including CVS organisations, often don't think of informing partners about their future or regular research plans. As well as avoiding duplication this type of aligning may also offer opportunities for enhancement or 'piggybacking'. It is very much less costly, where it is possible, to negotiate the addition of two or three questions to a planned survey of local residents than to undertake a new survey. Once you have exhausted these avenues you will know how far it is necessary to create new evidence.

Your chosen outcomes will guide you to what evidence would be most relevant, but still leaves choices and judgements to be made about what additional evidence it is feasible to collect. An outcome might be for example that community groups are flourishing across the city. It still needs to be asked how one would know that this is the case and what specific **indicators** would show it. Once it is clear what outcomes are being aimed at, further decisions have to be made about what evidence is worth collecting. Since it would be too onerous to collect evidence of everything that happens, a limited set of indicators will be established for a period to capture whether the process is on the right track. It is unlikely to be feasible or cost effective to collect indicators for every possible aspect of a wide outcome statement. Indicators should be as concrete and objective as possible, and limited to a single aspect each. But they can only indicate, not cover the whole description of an issue.

Evidence can take many forms and be collected at different points in the project process. Effective practitioners make judgements all the time as they go along about what is working well or needs to be done differently. But these impressions are only visible to those directly involved, and can soon be obliterated by changing circumstances. For audiences further afield, and for a longer time perspective, it is necessary to collect evidence that can be shared with all stakeholders. This may take the form of workers' reports, reports from community organisations, feedback from residents, observations by other professionals working in the area, or more formal exercises such as

research surveys of residents, councillors and staff, or correlation of any of these with statistics about health, safety, employment, environment, housing and education.

Finally, **expect the unexpected**. Focusing on outcomes should not rule out recognition of unanticipated effects either good or bad. Social action is always complex, and there is rarely a single cause for a single effect. Things may go wrong but they may also go right in unexpected ways, and the value of 'bonus' results should not be lost. Practitioners should be alert for knock-on effects which may open new avenues of development.



## 11. Summary of Key Points

- The value of outcomes is that they clarify purpose, guide what evidence to collect, and strengthen partnership and communication (Section 2).
- The emphasis now placed on outcomes in social planning comes from the realisation that many previous programmes lost their way through being unclear as to what practical, achievable changes they expected to make (Section 3).
- Outcomes are about either material benefits, structures or capacities, but only make sense as part of action planning as a whole (Section 4).
- Scotland provides an example of a succinct set of national outcomes on mainstream issues. These provide the foundations for agreements between the Community Planning Partnerships and the Scottish Executive (Section 5).
- The CVS is in a stronger position in a Community Planning partnership if it takes a lead on outcomes (Section 6).
- CVS partners should ensure that the strength of the local community and voluntary sectors, often overlooked or taken for granted by public agencies, is included as an outcome in its own right, not only to assist mainstream issues (Section 7).
- Establishing standards and indicators which genuinely capture the strength of the community and community engagement is not easy but there are precedents to build on (Section 8)
- Local situations are far too complex and many-sided to be entirely captured by outcomes. Select a limited number but make sure you get the top priorities (Section 9).
- Find out about existing evidence and planned research by all partners before deciding what extra evidence you may need to collect (Section 10).

## Resources

- R1 Scottish National Outcomes <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/scotPerforms/outcomes>
- R2 SCDC LEAP Learning Evaluation and Planning. *Using the LEAP Framework – Outcomes-Tips and Prompts.* [www.planandevaluate.com](http://www.planandevaluate.com)
- R3 SCDC LEAP Learning Evaluation and Planning. *Using the LEAP Framework – Developing Outcome Indicators.* [www.planandevaluate.com](http://www.planandevaluate.com)
- R4 Ipsos MORI *National Survey of Third Sector Organisations* Cabinet Office Office of the Third Sector.
- R5 Manton Community Alliance (2009) *Manton Community Alliance Annual Report 2008/09.*
- R6 Taylor, M (2007). *National Evaluation of Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders Making Social Capital Count.* Manton Community Alliance.
- R7 Communities Scotland Learning Connections. *Delivering Change Understanding the outcomes of community learning and development.* Scottish Executive.
- R8 CLG (2007) *The New Performance Framework for Local Authority and Local Authority Partnerships. Single Set of National Indicators.* HM Government, London.
- R9 Derry/Strabane Community Planning Pilot (2011) *Community Planning Audit Questionnaire for Glenelly.*
- R10 ODPM (2005) *Improving the prospects of people living in areas of multiple deprivation in England.* Prime Minister's Strategy Unit Cabinet Office, London.
- R11 Belfast Community Planning Pilot (2011) *Evaluation Framework*

