



Department of the
Environment

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Draft Statutory Guidance
For The Operation of Community Planning
Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014

Consultation Document

December 2014

DRAFT STATUTORY GUIDANCE
FOR THE OPERATION OF COMMUNITY PLANNING
LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2014

This Consultation Document seeks views on the Department's proposals for statutory guidance on the operation of community planning from 1 April 2015.

Comments should be sent by 09 March 2015 to:

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PURPOSE OF THE CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

1. The Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 (“the 2014 Act”) makes provision for the new duty of community planning on councils and their community planning partners. The 2014 Act provides the high level framework for the operation of community planning, and states that a district council must initiate, and having done so, maintain and facilitate a process known as community planning. The district council should have a leadership role in this process and be supported by their community planning partners. This guidance is intended to assist councils and their community planning partners in the introduction of this new duty from 1 April 2015.
2. The Department of the Environment is seeking comments on the draft guidance. The purpose of the proposed guidance is to provide councils and their community planning partners with further detail on the implementation of the legislation and to explain the terms of the new duty.
3. The draft guidance is attached at Annex A.

BACKGROUND

4. Underpinning the reform of local government is the Executive's vision of:
 “.....a strong, dynamic local government creating communities that are vibrant, healthy, prosperous, safe, sustainable and have the needs of all citizens at their core.”
5. Central to the Executive's vision for the local government sector is the provision of high quality, efficient services that respond to the needs of people and continuously improve over time. Critical to the delivery of this objective will be an effective, statute-based community planning process led and facilitated by the new councils.
6. The objectives of local government reform include bringing decision making closer to communities and citizens, creating a stronger and more effective local democracy, and improving service delivery by influencing place shaping and facilitating greater integration. It will provide for more effective service delivery, by transferring functions from central to local government and giving councils some powerful tools with which to shape their areas and communities.
7. The Local Government Act (NI) 2014 conferred a new duty of Community Planning on councils from 1st April 2015. The Local Government Act (NI) 2014 sets out the framework for the operation of community planning. It sets out the high level key aspects of the community planning process, including monitoring and review, and the content of the community plan.
8. In October 2013 the Department of the Environment (DOE) issued a Community Planning Foundation Programme which provided non-statutory guidance to councils on preparations they could make for the introduction of community planning and funded tailored capacity building support, ahead of the full implementation of local government reform in April 2015.

9. The Foundation programme draws on the experience in the rest of the United Kingdom, where community planning has been operating for the last 10 – 15 years. Councils in Northern Ireland have been using the collaborative approach it offers to problem solve and implement projects at the local level over a number of years, and as a result some good practice examples have emerged. However, the challenge now is to mainstream community planning across the public sector, and to use it as the strategic planning process for which it is intended.
10. DOE are now preparing statutory guidance to assist councils and their community planning partners, in their new duty of community planning. This guidance is to be ready for use by 01 April 2015 and will be underpinned by appropriate research and information on community planning that is in operation in other UK jurisdictions.
11. The next step in the process is to consult on the draft guidance.

DETAIL OF THE PROPOSALS

12. Community planning involves integrating all the various streams of public life (such as the services and functions that are delivered in an area) and producing a plan that will set out the future direction of a council area, with a focus on improving service delivery for the benefit of citizens.
13. The new duty of community planning will require councils as lead partner to be responsible for making arrangements for community planning in their areas. They will work with statutory bodies and their communities to develop and implement a shared vision for promoting the well-being of an area, community cohesion and improving the quality of life of its citizens.

14. Over the past year DOE has been engaging with other government departments and agencies on the implications of the introduction of community planning and local government reform, and how it will influence the new central –local relationship.

15. The learning from these two programmes of activity, the council preparations and engagement with other Government Departments and agencies, has informed the development of the guidance. The Department recognises that significant learning will occur within the first year of the statutory duty taking effect and it intends to ensure the guidance is reviewed on an ongoing basis.

Question 1	Is the guidance clear, specific and proportionate?
Question 2	Do you feel the guidance will help you implement community planning?
Question 3	Do you feel one year is a sufficient time frame to develop a community plan and if not what alternative would you suggest?
Question 4	What would you define as a reasonable degree of consensus reached to enable decision making?
Question 5	Is the guidance clear in respect of equality and good relations duties?
Question 6	Does the guidance sufficiently define partner roles and responsibilities?

HUMAN RIGHTS

16. The Department believes that the guidance is compatible with the Human Rights Act 1998.

EQUALITY

17. Under the terms of section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the Department carried out screening for equality impact and is satisfied that the proposed legislation will not lead to discriminatory or negative differential impact on any of the section 75 groups. A copy of the screening form can be viewed on the Department's website:

http://www.doeni.gov.uk/index/information/equality_unit/policies_screened_out_-_october_to_december_2014.htm

REGULATORY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

18. The Department has not conducted a regulatory impact assessment as the proposed guidance does not give rise to any associated costs or savings on business, charities, social economy enterprises or the voluntary sector.

RURAL PROOFING

19. The Department has assessed the proposed measures and considers that there would be no differential impact in rural areas or on rural communities.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT – 2000 confidentiality of consultations

20. The Department may publish a summary of responses following completion of the consultation process. Your response, and all other responses to the consultation, may be disclosed on request. The Department can only refuse to disclose information in exceptional circumstances.

Before you submit your response, please read Annex B on the confidentiality of consultations. It gives guidance on the legal position about any information given by you in response to this consultation.

ALTERNATIVE FORMAT

21. This document is available in alternative formats. Please contact us to discuss your requirements.

CONSULTATION

22. Comments should be received by 09 March 2015 at the address below or by e-mail to:

Johanne.mullan@doeni.gov.uk

23. If you have any queries in relation to the proposals, you should contact:
Nichola Creagh

Nichola.creagh@doeni.gov.uk

Tel: 028 9082 3391

24. This consultation is being circulated to persons and bodies and is available to view at:

http://www.doeni.gov.uk/index/local_government/local_government_consultations.htm

Local Government Policy Division 1
Department of the Environment
Level 4, Causeway Exchange
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**Statutory Guidance for the Operation of
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Foreward [to be agreed and inserted]

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Community Planning will come into operation on 1st April 2015 as part of the full implementation of local government reform.
- 1.2 The new duty of community planning will require councils as the lead partner to be responsible for making arrangements for community planning in their areas. They will work with statutory bodies and their communities to develop and implement a shared vision for promoting the well-being of an area, community cohesion and improving the quality of life of its citizens.
- 1.3 The Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 provides the high level framework for the operation of community planning, and this guidance provides further detail on the implementation of the legislation.
- 1.4 Irrespective of the specific requirements set out in this guidance all organisations involved in community planning must have regard to their legal obligations and the potential impact on the community planning process.

2. Background

- 2.1 Underpinning the reform of local government is the Executive's vision of:
“.....a strong, dynamic local government creating communities that are vibrant, healthy, prosperous, safe, sustainable and have the needs of all citizens at their core.”
- 2.2 Central to the Executive's vision for the local government sector is the provision of high quality, efficient services that respond to the needs of people and continuously improve over time. Critical to the delivery of this objective will be an effective, statute-based community planning process led and facilitated by the new councils.
- 2.3 The objectives of local government reform include bringing decision making closer to communities and citizens, creating a stronger and more effective local democracy, and improving service delivery by influencing place shaping and facilitating greater integration. It will provide for more effective service delivery, by transferring functions from central to local government and giving councils some powerful tools with which to shape their areas and communities.
- 2.4 The Local Government Act (NI) 2014 provides the legislative framework for a modernised, strengthened and streamlined system of local government administered by 11 councils, and includes provisions for effective governance arrangements, an ethical standards framework, a modernised performance management framework, the introduction of community planning and a general power of competence.
- 2.5 The new councils will bring together a number of key functions such as planning, urban regeneration and community development, local economic development and local tourism, along with their existing responsibilities of providing services and facilities in relation to leisure, recreation, waste

management, cemeteries, business and community projects and facilities, the regulation and licensing of activities relating to environmental health, consumer protection, building regulations and public safety, supporting the Policing and Community Safety Partnership, and promotion of culture, the arts, sports and tourism.

- 2.6 Linking service delivery, long term objectives of an area, and physical planning and regeneration will change the way areas are planned and will bring sustainable development into sharper focus. Social, economic and environmental issues, and the well-being of citizens, can all be considered together within the framework provided by the collaborative approach of community planning.

An Evolving Process

- 2.7 Community planning is an evolving process. As can be seen from Fig. 1 community planning is the key over-arching partnership framework helping to co-ordinate other initiatives and partnerships and where necessary acting to rationalise and simplify a cluttered landscape. It has the ability to improve the connection between national priorities and those at regional, local and neighbourhood levels.
- 2.8 Community planning should act as the key over-arching framework for other partnerships and initiatives at the regional, local and neighbourhood level rather than be seen as an additional or parallel process to the various strategies or partnership structures already in place. Existing networks and partnerships should be built upon where they are working well. Where they are not working well, community planning provides an opportunity for all agencies to consider how they can be improved.
- 2.9 Community planning partnerships bring together key participants, and so can act as a 'bridge' to link regional and local priorities and resources more effectively. This should be a three-way process whereby local community planning partnerships can influence regional direction, but also can help to co-ordinate the delivery of regional priorities, as set out in the Executive's Programme for Government, in a way that is sensitive to local needs and circumstances. Local or neighbourhood priorities should be considered when setting the priorities at the community planning partnership level.

Fig. 1



A Long Term Process

- 2.10 Community planning is not envisaged as a new mechanism or new initiative to deliver public services in its own right. As a process, it is a "means" to the "end" of delivering more responsive public services and improved outcomes. However, the process should not dominate the outcomes. The legislative basis for community planning will provide a solid platform but in many ways it represents the beginning of the real challenge for community planning - for the partnerships themselves and the bodies and agencies that comprise these partnerships. The necessary cultural changes will have a longer timescale. This guidance is intended to assist this process.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

- 3.1 Community planning aims to improve the connection between regional, local and neighbourhood levels through partnership working and more integrated use of resources, with a focus on collaboration between organisations for the benefit of citizens.
- 3.2 Community planning places duties on councils, departments and community planning partners. The process provides a platform for the integration and planning of public sector services and investment. It is vital that the Community Planning Partnership shows strong and sustained shared leadership and commitment to delivering the vision set out in the community plan.

Duty on Councils

- 3.3 The Local Government Act (NI) 2014 requires the council to **initiate, maintain, facilitate and participate** in community planning for its district. The council is the lead partner and is required to put in place a process where it works with bodies to develop and implement a shared vision for promoting the well-being of its area, community cohesion and improving the quality of life of its citizens. As lead partner the council is responsible for making arrangements for community planning in its area.
- 3.4 The council as lead partner is responsible for:
- Facilitating and managing the process including putting in place appropriate governance and management structures;
 - Ensuring that the commitments set out in the council equality scheme are applied in the development, implementation, monitoring and reviewing of the community plan.
 - Working collaboratively with its community planning partners and identified support partners to reach consensus on the content of the community plan, and publishing the plan;
 - Working with community planning partners and identified support partners to monitor and review the plan; and,
 - Ensuring that community involvement is an integral part of the full community planning process.
- 3.5 Management of the community planning process is the responsibility of the council. The council manages the production of the community plan, sets up a strategic community planning partnership in collaboration with their partners which will provide leadership to the process, and may set up other supporting structures such as thematic or local area partnerships that focus on addressing more specific detailed issues.
- 3.6 The production of a community plan depends on the council and its partners reaching consensus on the objectives and actions, and the responsibility of the council as lead partner is to work to build consensus

among the partners, and produce the plan when the consensus has been reached. The council will have to make a judgement as to when this point has been reached. As lead partner the council must also put in place systems to monitor progress on the community plan and report to the public on progress.

- 3.7 It is the responsibility of the council to ensure that the needs of citizens are understood and are considered during the formulation and review of the community plan. The council should actively encourage local people and organisations to become involved in the community planning process, demonstrate the benefits of community planning, how it assists with delivering better outcomes for citizens and more efficient and effective service delivery, and report to them on progress. The council and its community planning partners should work to ensure that collective public consultations are carried out where possible to reduce confusion and consultation overload.
- 3.8 As the lead partner, the council should champion the process within their own organisation and work to integrate as fully as possible the functions and systems within their remit. They should work to build knowledge and capacity with all groups involved in their community planning process.

Duty on Community Planning Partners

- 3.9 The Local Government Act (NI) 2014 requires community planning partners to participate in community planning, to the extent that it is connected to their functions, and the partners must assist the council in carrying out its community planning duties.
- 3.10 The Local Government (Community Planning Partners) Order 2015 names the organisations that are required to participate in community planning. They are: [this order is currently out to consultation and the final list will reflect any changes agreed as part of that process]
- The Education and Library Board relevant to a council area;
 - The Health and Social Care Trust relevant to a council area;
 - Public Health Agency;
 - Health and Social Care Board;
 - Police Service of Northern Ireland;
 - Fire and Rescue Service;
 - Northern Ireland Housing Executive;
 - Invest Northern Ireland;
 - Northern Ireland Tourist Board.

- 3.11 Bringing together the key public sector organisations is a necessary part of an effective community planning process. Community planning partners will be involved at all stages of the process. They will work with councils to reach consensus on the long term objectives of the community plan and key objectives to be delivered upon, assist with monitoring and review of the plan, and seek participation of the community in carrying out their community planning duties.
- 3.12 Community planning partners work in partnership with the council on the following aspects:
- Development of the community plan;
 - Delivery of assigned tasks identified in the community plan;
 - Monitoring and review of the community plan; and,
 - Seeking community participation in the community planning process, including production and review of the community plan.
- 3.13 While the council has responsibility for facilitating and managing the community planning process, the development of and delivery on the community plan is a shared task between all partners and the council. Community planning partners will be members of the council's community planning partnership and will attend the partnership meetings. Those attending the meetings will be expected to speak authoritatively for their organisations and commit them to agreed courses of action.
- 3.14 Partners will work collectively to identify the vision and long term objectives for the social, economic and environmental well-being of the area. The further development of key themes, identification and delivery of actions is envisaged to be a shared task. It is expected that partners will take a lead role on delivering actions where they are appropriate to the responsibilities of their organisation. It is the responsibility of community planning partners and the council to reach consensus on the objectives and actions contained in the plan.
- 3.15 Community planning partners are effectively "champions" for the process. They are responsible for demonstrating the benefits of collaborative approach of community planning, and how it assists with delivering better outcomes for citizens and more efficient and effective service delivery. Partners should also encourage local people and organisations to become involved in the community planning process, which will influence decisions on the direction and policy of local service providers with which they interact.
- 3.16 Partners can use their learning through their role in community planning to gain a better understanding of local issues. This will enable them to consider the needs identified by various councils when developing policy and planning services at the regional level. They should actively seek to integrate community planning into their corporate and business planning regimes.

Duty on Departments

- 3.17 The Local Government Act (NI) 2014 requires departments to promote and encourage community planning, and have regard to community plans.
- 3.18 With councils now having a wider remit and greater role in delivering on commitments in the Programme for Government, departments will be working more closely with councils on the delivery of central government strategies and programmes.
- 3.19 The community planning process provides a platform for the integration and planning of public sector services and investment, with the focus being on tackling cross-cutting issues that require a collaborative approach for the benefit of citizens. Therefore, departments should engage with councils when developing their strategies and delivery structures on the relationship with community plans and community planning structures at the local level.
- 3.20 Departments should seek to integrate community planning outcomes into their corporate and business planning. They should learn from the local service providers for which they are responsible about how community planning assists with delivering better outcomes for citizens and more efficient and effective service delivery. Gaining a better understanding of local issues will positively influence their forward planning processes. It will enable them to consider the needs identified by various councils when developing policy and planning services at the regional level.
- 3.21 Within the context of the changing working environment between local and central government, more integrated working will be taking place on a number of fronts including the creation of the Partnership Panel. It is possible that departments which directly deliver services locally may be invited to participate in community planning at the local level, and it is for each department to consider the implications of this in consultation with local government. It is anticipated that departments will make every effort to respond positively to such requests. At the same time, councils should recognise that departments have responsibilities to their Ministers and that that is their first priority. However, taking into account Ministerial responsibilities, departments should ensure that community planning is included in corporate and business planning documents and reflected in their strategic planning structures.

The Community

- 3.22 The Local Government Act (NI) 2014 requires the council and its community planning partners to seek the views of the community, encourage them to express their views, and take their views into account in the community planning process including those matters relevant to the statutory equality and good relations duties (i.e. presenting the equality and good relations screening/assessment with the proposals). The Community Planning Partnership should ensure they make full use, where possible and appropriate, of the statement of community involvement prepared for the

local development plan process. The community planning process includes the production and review of the community plan.

3.23 The legislation reflects the Department's understanding of "community" in its widest sense. It states that the council must seek participation and views from:

- Residents in the district;
- Persons who are not resident but receive services in the district from the council or its community planning partners;
- Representatives of voluntary bodies whose activities benefit any part of the district;
- Representatives of businesses in the district;
- Other persons interested in the social, economic or environmental well-being of the area.

3.24 **The wider community:** The community has the opportunity to provide input on their views of the area and their needs, which will assist the council and its community planning partners with formulating the evidence base upon which decisions on the content of the community plan and its review can be based.

3.25 Through the community planning process the community can expect to be consulted and engaged on the social, environmental and economic issues of the planning and development of their area, and on the planning and delivery of services.

3.26 **Community and voluntary sector:** Community and voluntary organisations have a crucial role to play in improving the quality of life for local communities through their expertise in effectively engaging citizens, services users and potential users; through service design, commissioning, procurement and evaluation; through joint delivery partnerships; through contributing to a mixed economy of service provision and through engagement in scrutiny and review of services.

3.27 The sector is often best placed to reach and involve those sections of the community that the mainstream public sector may find hard to reach, and to access funding that is not available to public bodies. Specific efforts should be made to involve representatives from under-represented groups in the wider community planning structures, so that minority and hard to reach groups such as ethnic minorities, women, faith communities, older people, young people and children, and disabled people have a voice in the process.

3.28 Community and voluntary organisations speaking on behalf of others in the community planning process should ensure that they have a fully representative and accountable structure that mandates them to do so.

- 3.29 **Business:** The private sector should be fully involved in the community planning process, as it is a significant user and supplier of local services, as well as a key provider of local employment. Business activity contributes both directly and indirectly to community prosperity and quality of life.
- 3.30 Councils and their partners should build on approaches to business involvement that have already been shown to work and should ensure that local businesses, economic development agencies, local chambers of commerce, trade union councils and other representative organisations are properly engaged in community planning.

Support Partners

- 3.31 It is recognised that there are a wide range of businesses, voluntary organisations, community and other groups which make vital contributions to promoting the social, economic and environmental well-being of an area and which may be involved in the process. These partners may have an interest and level of influence that is more locally or theme based, or have a particular skill that can assist with certain aspects of the community planning process.
- 3.32 Partnerships can invite other support partners to join their community planning process according to the priorities and needs of their particular area. These support partners may be organisations that can assist with the development and/or delivery of the community plan.
- 3.33 Partnerships should ensure that private sector interests are properly represented and should aim to include local business organisations as support partners.
- 3.34 Their role is on a voluntary basis, and the support partners should agree their role and extent to which they participate in the community planning process with the partnership. Their role will be similar to the statutory community planning partner's role, and they may be invited to join the strategic community planning partnership or a sub-group in relation to a particular theme or area, or to input at certain stages of the process due to their particular expertise, for example facilitation or community engagement. A representative will be expected to attend the relevant meetings, speak authoritatively for their organisation and commit the organisation to agreed courses of action.
- 3.35 In determining support partners to participate in the community planning process partnerships should ensure they use a clear criterion that is reflective of the organisations role in the delivery of community planning outcomes. Partnerships may wish to consider drawing up an assessment tool to assist in such an assessment.

4. Partnership Structure and Governance

The Community Planning Partnership

- 4.1 It is for each council to decide upon an appropriate governance structure for its area. This could involve the establishment of a strategic partnership board. There are a variety of possible operating models for a strategic partnership, for example, it may have a broader membership with a consultative remit or it may have fewer partners with a narrower focus on delivering key outcomes. Membership of the strategic partnership is likely to involve elected members, council officials, statutory community planning partners and other additional partners such as the business community. It is likely the partnership board will consist of representation at a senior level within an organisation able to set the strategic direction for the local area.
- 4.2 The process will be led by this strategic Partnership, the purpose of which is to provide strategic direction and drive of the process, support, encourage and pursue joint working where it will mean better outcomes for citizens, based on ambitious joint planning and delivery of services.
- 4.3 Below the strategic Partnership there is the option of setting up other supporting structures such as thematic or local area partnerships that will focus on addressing more specific detailed and local issues. The support partners are likely to feature prominently at this level, where their interest and level of influence is more locally or theme based, or relevant to a particular stage of the community planning process.
- 4.4 There are some key issues that the council and its community planning partners may wish to consider when setting up the Partnership structure and its operation:
- **Ensure effective participation of all groups.** The council and its community planning partners will need to ensure opportunities for the full participation of women, ethnic minority groups, disabled people and all section 75 groups.
 - **Optimise information and expertise from existing partnership structures to inform the Partnership:** There will already be many existing partnership structures in operation in the council district. Where groups are operating well it would be beneficial to establish links between existing structures and the community planning structure. There could be opportunities to integrate the new structure into the community planning structure model, to seek officials or elected representatives that provide dual representation in existing structures and within the community planning structure to optimise their expertise, and bring existing information to inform the evidence base for community planning. Existing Policing and Community Safety Partnerships are an obvious example of an already established partnership that could be incorporated within community planning, utilising key personnel and evidence base information.

- **Utilise existing partnerships to deliver on the community plan:** Existing partnerships that are already delivering successfully can be incorporated within the delivery structures and asked to deliver/lead on actions contained in the community plan. For example, there may be a health partnership that is already established and successfully delivering on health outcomes for the district. Actions contained within the community plan could be taken forward by the same partnership and added to their existing commitments.
- **Maintain an agreed and effective Partnership:** To ensure the Partnership achieves optimum impact it is necessary to keep the strategic Partnership and any supporting structure under review, and to allow the structure to evolve and be refined. Review of the structure could be undertaken at key stages of the process reflecting the Partnership's priorities, whether it is formulating the plan, delivering on actions, monitoring and evaluating performance, or conducting a review of the plan. Any changes should be agreed between the statutory partners. Over the longer term the Partnership can review the roles and responsibilities of existing partnerships that sit within the overall structure, and consider how rationalisation of existing partnerships can be achieved where they are not operating effectively.
- **Nominated personnel from participating organisations:** Those attending the meetings will be expected to speak authoritatively for their organisations and commit them to agreed courses of action. It is the responsibility of the statutory body or other organisation participating in the process to ensure it has appropriate representation at meetings. Representation can also change during the course of the process, depending on whether the focus of activity is to formulate the plan and agree to actions, or to deliver on actions where managerial responsibility for service delivery is important. The important issue is that the person attending meetings should have an influential senior role, be able to agree to targets and actions and ensure they are implemented.

4.5 Managing and co-ordinating the process: The strategic Partnership should ensure that the development and implementation of community plans becomes firmly embedded into partners' managerial cultures, corporate, resource and business planning, and budgetary decisions. It should ensure that engagement is co-ordinated across the partnership and, where appropriate, between organisations involved. A co-ordinated process for evidence collection should be established to underpin the development of plans and that analysis of this evidence is shared across and between organisations. Also, the experience of citizens accessing services should be sought with a view to solving problems and removing barriers to integrating delivery across sectors. Effective performance management arrangements should be put in place, including arrangements for scrutiny

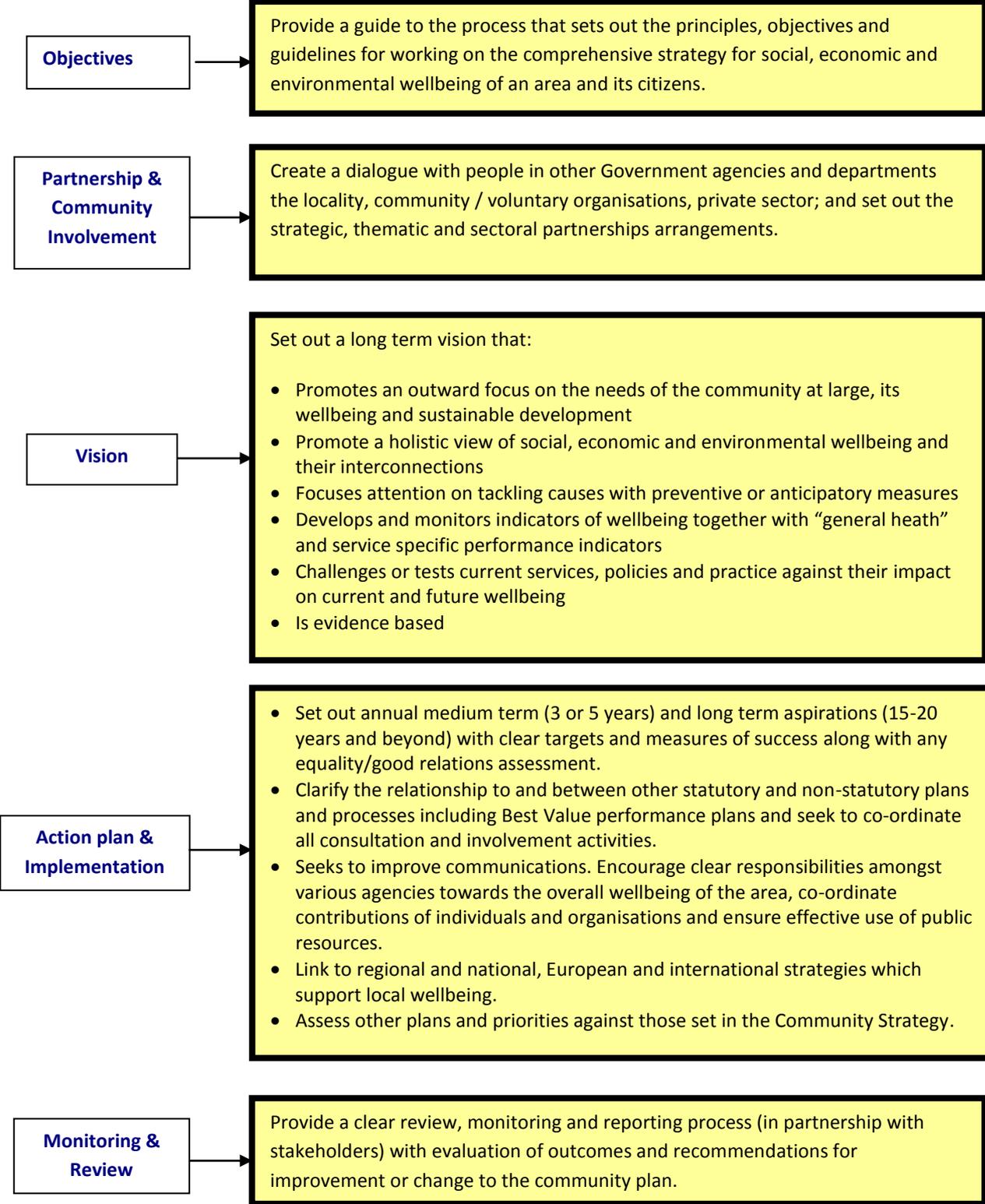
5. The Partnership Panel

- 5.1 The Partnership Panel was established by the Executive under the Local Government Act (NI) 2014 as part of the local government reform programme. Its aim is to improve co-ordination between Departments and the 11 new councils thereby helping to deliver better outcomes for local communities. It is a strategic forum, where key decision makers from central and local government can come together to develop joined up solutions on tactical issues aimed at improving the delivery of local services. It is the Executive's view that joint policy development and better operational collaboration between both tiers of government, will help tackle the issues that really matter to local people. Working collectively, the Panel will be focused on harnessing the new challenges and new opportunities provided by the reform programme that will support local government in delivering results, particularly through programmes such as community planning.
- 5.2 The duties of the Panel may involve giving advice to any Northern Ireland department about matters affecting the exercise of any of its functions, making representations to any Northern Ireland department about any matters affecting, or of concern to, those involved in local government, and giving advice to those involved in local government. Whilst it will provide a forum for political discussion on matters of mutual interest and concern, its role will be advisory. Nevertheless, the Minister intends that the Panel will be productive in supporting the delivery of improved outcomes resulting from RPA, particularly in supporting delivery of the Programme for Government and the local government agenda.

6. The Community Planning Process

- 6.1 The purpose of community planning is to develop a long term strategy for the area and all its citizens based on a thorough analysis of needs and priorities, and opportunities for addressing them. This should generate a 10 to 15 year vision for improving social, economic and environmental wellbeing, and contributing to sustainable development.
- 6.2 The community planning process should achieve (see Figure 2):
- The community planning process should achieve development of a baseline of the existing conditions in the council area which includes an equality/good relations analysis or enables the Council to fulfil its equality scheme commitments to future monitoring requirements.
 - An integrated view of the social, economic and environmental needs of the area in the context of regional, national and European policies and strategies, and taking into account communities and issues that extend into neighbouring council areas and jurisdictions;
 - A long term vision for the future;
 - A set of outcomes against which progress can be monitored and evaluated; and
 - A clear focus on delivering in the short to medium term to achieve the long term vision.

Figure 2: The Process of Community Planning



Community Involvement

- 6.3 The Local Government Act (NI) 2014 requires the council and its community planning partners to seek the views of the community, encourage them to express their views, and take their views into account in the community planning process. The community planning process includes the production and review of the community plan.
- 6.4 The legislation reflects the Department's understanding of "community" in its widest sense. It states that the council must seek participation and views from:
- Residents in the district;
 - Persons who are not resident but receive services in the district from the council or its community planning partners;
 - Representatives of voluntary bodies whose activities benefit any part of the district;
 - Representatives of businesses in the district;
 - Other persons interested in the social, economic or environmental well-being of the area.
- 6.5 **Transparency:** The partnership structures needs to be clear about the purpose of engagement and the purpose of the community plan. The main aim of community engagement should be to improve the planning and delivery of services by making them more responsive to the needs and aspirations of communities. However, it is important to be realistic and honest with the community in that the community plan is not a tool to address all of the community's local issues. This will assist in keeping expectations about the process realistic and provides ongoing capacity building at the community level.
- 6.6 The partnership should operate in an open, democratic and accountable manner. Transparency in decision making will be assisted by feedback from the partnership after consultations, reassuring the community that they have been listened to and their views taken into account. Community bodies should also operate in an open and transparent and accountable manner. Organisations should be clear about how what communities of interest they represent, and those that they do not represent.
- 6.7 **Inclusiveness:** The community planning partnership should work to ensure that all section 75 groups have the opportunity to participate from the early stages of the process and have their needs and views taken into account. In seeking to engage with all sectors of the community, attention should be paid to engaging hard to reach groups that may not necessarily have their needs identified through the evidence base which provides information on a broad basis. In order to ensure equal opportunities, good relations and improvement of quality of life for all citizens, views should be sought from groups with a particular focus on women, ethnic minorities, faith communities, older people, children and young people, and disabled

people. Practicalities such as venue accessibility, timing, transportation, methods of communication including the obligation to take account of the needs of speakers of minority languages will be important considerations as will ensuring the obligation to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people is met. The voluntary and community sector will have information on the nature of the local community and, in particular, information on and routes to reaching hard to reach groups.

Although it is vital that the partnership engage fully with all groups in society and that they meet their commitments in relation to consultation and engagement set out in the council Equality Schemes as regards all section 75 groups they have, in light of specific government commitments, a particular responsibility to encourage and promote the role that can be played by children and young people in community planning. The Community Planning Partnership should seek to do this through reference to the structure set out in the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People's (NICCY) proposal for a Northern Ireland regional model of engagement.¹ The Partnership should also consider an appropriate method of engagement to involve children and young people and should use a mechanism such as youth forums or other similar arrangements. [NICCY can provide partnerships with valuable advice and guidance in this area]

Partnerships should also have due regard to the need to promote the participation of disabled people in public life as part of their statutory disability duties.

- 6.8 **Range of views:** The Partnership should consider preparing an engagement strategy to ensure that they engage with a wide range of interests across all sectors of society from development to evaluation of the community plan. There is an often untapped pool of ideas, knowledge, skills, experience, energy and enthusiasm among individuals, groups and communities as a whole which, if realised, can be a real driver for change. A variety of methods should be employed to garner views from communities of place and interest to ensure the full range of perspectives and contributions can be accessed and included. Existing mechanisms, developed by the council and its community planning partners that have already been proved to be effective can be a starting point. A range of methods should be employed such as public meetings, workshops and focus groups, discussion forums and citizen's panels, web-based engagement, future search 'visioning' process, interactive displays and community questionnaires. The Partnership should consider the appropriateness of the method to the stage of the community planning process, the strengths and weaknesses of the method, and which sectors of society to which it will appeal. The Community Planning Toolkit provides information on a wide range of methods that can be employed and how to ensure the range of views are captured.
<http://www.communityplanningtoolkit.org/>

¹ For further information on NICCY's NI regional model of engagement and benefits for participation please follow the link - www.niccy.org/Participation/community-planning-

Identifying the Vision, Outcomes and Actions

- 6.9 A vision is a statement of purpose or intent that sets the overall direction for the area over the long term, and will drive the actions of the partnership in the short to medium term. The vision and outcomes identified should be high level, informed by a shared evidence base, and should set the context for local priorities and not be driven by them.
- 6.10 The community plan is a strategic planning tool that should be used to focus on long term district-wide issues where partners can collaboratively add value over the longer term. A community plan, due to its strategic nature, cannot realistically cover every issue that may be relevant to a local community. More localised issues should be addressed through other relevant themed or area-based strategies that sit within the framework of community planning. Also, there may be issues of critical importance locally that are either short term in nature or are wholly the remit of one particular organisation, and are not appropriate to be contained in the community plan. Rather, the emphasis should be on identifying within the plan the broad priorities and themes that require a long term solution and collaborative working across a number of organisations².
- 6.11 The general move in both local and central government is to use an outcomes based approach. The community plan should use such an approach.
- 6.12 As partners will be expected to take all reasonable steps to deliver on the actions assigned to them, it is important that the actions identified are practically deliverable by the organisations concerned. Therefore, it is of benefit to the representatives of councils, statutory partners and support partners to gain an understanding of the various roles, remits and responsibilities of their respective organisations including their legal duties, resource limitations and accountabilities to other parts of government as early as possible in the process. Partner organisations should also raise possible concerns about deliverability at an early stage. This will assist in formulating actions with those constraints in mind.

Creating a Baseline

- 6.13 The evidence base will provide a baseline upon which decisions can be made and against which progress can be monitored. Qualitative and quantitative information gathered should include:
- Census information and statistics from NISRA on population patterns, housing, economy, health and well-being, crime etc and existing survey information.

² ECNI Advice Note: Setting outcome measures, March 2011

- Scoping relevant central government and service provider strategies and priorities for the area, progress reports on these existing strategies and service delivery improvements.
- An assessment of the key characteristics and assets unique to the area eg. environment and natural resources, heritage and tourism destinations, retail and leisure, industry and IT, transportation, health and sport, education campuses etc.

6.14 The evidence base should be pooled and shared by all those involved in the community planning process including the council, its community planning partners, support partners, service providers in the area, the community including the business, voluntary and community sectors, and central government departments. A shared, solid and reliable evidence base based on objective need will assist the organisations and people involved reach a common understanding of issues affecting the area and assist with transparency in the decision-making process.

6.15 The aim is to provide a baseline upon which decisions can be made and against which progress can be monitored. A solid, reliable evidence base that community planning partners and the council can agree upon will assist with reaching consensus on the vision and outcomes for the area.

7. Key Issues to be Addressed

7.1 The Local Government Act (NI) 2014 requires that the community planning process identifies:

- The long term objectives for improving the social, economic and environmental well-being of the district.
- The reference to social well-being includes promoting equality of opportunity (in accordance with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998) and without prejudice to this having regard to the desirability of promoting good relations.
- The reference to economic well-being includes tackling poverty, social exclusion and patterns of deprivation;
- The long term objectives for contributing to the achievement of sustainable development; and,
- The actions to be performed and functions to be exercised by the council and its community planning partners (including actions and functions related to the planning, provision and improvement of public services) for the purpose of meeting the objectives.

7.2 Social, economic and environmental well-being, sustainability, equality and good relations, and tackling poverty, social exclusion and deprivation are themes that permeate across central and local government policy and service provision, and therefore should be embedded in the community planning process. The following strategies, which provide guidance on these cross-cutting issues and are relevant to all sectors of society,

represent fundamental considerations that should be tackled in an integrated way and reflected in the community plan appropriate to the circumstances of the individual local context.

Equality, Good Relations and Social Inclusion

- 7.3 Under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 all public authorities have a statutory duty to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and without prejudice to this regard to the desirability of promoting, good relations. The Local Government (NI) Act 2014 explicitly makes reference to this duty in relation to community planning. Equality of opportunity and social inclusion should be embedded into all stages of the process along with the desirability of promoting good relations. **The partners should consider how the promotion of good relations can be applied to all section 75 groups as** community planning should reflect and respect the diversity in a particular area. Tackling longer term issues and problem areas will be assisted by the community planning process, which focuses on a long term view. It provides an opportunity to consider how equality and good relations can be addressed more cohesively through linking existing equality and good relations programmes with physical planning projects, economic development, tourism and leisure, within the framework of community planning.
- 7.4 The Community Planning Partnership should actively engage with the policies and strategies set out in Together: Building a United Community and consider how these might be enhanced and integrated into both the final Community Plan and the community planning process. As part of their commitment to promote equality and good relations Partnerships should actively consult with both the Equality Commission and the Community Relations Council throughout the development of the plan Partnership should also consider the inequalities identified in their audit of inequalities which will have been undertaken in order to inform section 75 action plans.
- 7.5 Community planning will also make a clear contribution to the development and delivery of social policy and partnerships should ensure they fully engage with the policies set out in the delivering social change agenda.

8. Sustainable Development

- 8.1 The Partnership should set out sustainable development and integration of social, economic and environmental priorities as a key principle of their community plans and should have regard to the Executive's sustainable development strategy in the development of their community plan.

9. Spatial Planning

- 9.1 The Executive's spatial strategy is prepared under the Strategic Planning (NI) Order 1999 which states that the Department for Regional Development (DRD) is responsible for formulating a regional development strategy for the long term development of Northern Ireland. Departments

must have regard to the regional development strategy in exercising any functions in relation to development.

Statutory Link between the Community Plan and the Local Development Plan

9.2 The local development plan system aims to move away from a narrow land use focus towards a 'place shaping' approach which incorporates a spatial analysis and visioning process. It provides a unique opportunity for the council to shape places for local communities and enable them to adopt a joined up approach, incorporating linkages to other functions such as regeneration, local economic development and local tourism, within the framework of community planning. Therefore, it provides the spatial strategy for the community plan, flowing from the vision for the council area and its communities, and linking public and private sector investment through the land use planning system. In preparing their local development plans councils are required to take account of both the Regional Development Strategy and their own current community plan. However there is no requirement to prepare a community plan in advance of the local development plan. If a community plan is prepared after a local development plan is prepared it must then be taken into account when the local development plan is reviewed.

9.3 The local development plan should fulfil the following functions:

- provide a 15-year framework to support the economic and social needs of the district in line with regional strategies and policies, while providing for the delivery of sustainable development;
- facilitate sustainable growth by co-ordinating public and private investment to encourage development where it can be of most benefit to the wellbeing of the community;
- allocate sufficient land to meet society's needs;
- provide an opportunity for all stakeholders, including the public, to have a say about where and how development within their local area should take place;
- provide a plan-led framework for rational and consistent decision-making by the public, private and community sectors and those affected by development proposals; and,
- deliver the spatial aspects of the council's current community plan.

9.4 Common to both the local development plan and community planning processes is that they aim to provide a long term vision/framework to support the social, economic and environmental needs of the area, require an evidence-based approach to decision-making, and seek the engagement of the community throughout the process. Councils are

reminded that they have duties in relation to consultees as a result of equality scheme commitments. The following aspects of the local development plan process could assist/be co-ordinated with the preparation of the community plan:

- **Community involvement and statutory consultees** - the council must prepare a statement of community involvement which will contain the strategy for how and when the community are to be involved in the local development plan process. In preparing this, the council can consider how this will align with community involvement in the community planning process, such as the early stages of shaping the vision and high level outcomes. The council is also required to engage early with a number of statutory consultees in the preparation of their local development plan in order to generate alternative strategies and options for the future development in the council district. The council must take account of any representations from statutory consultees in preparing the plan. This approach will provide councils with information for the evidence base, and ensure appropriate environmental considerations are taken into account throughout the plan preparation process. This information and expertise can feed into the evidence base, identification of the vision and outcomes and environmental considerations of the community plan. The council may wish to consider if representatives of these bodies should be included in the of the community plan.
- **Sustainability appraisal (SA) incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)** – the purpose of the sustainability appraisal is to promote sustainable development through the integration of social, environmental and economic considerations into the preparation of plans and programmes such as the local development plan. It must be carried out from the outset and throughout the process, and will help to ensure that decisions are made that contribute to the objective of furthering sustainable development. The SEA process flows from the SEA Directive which aims to integrate environmental considerations into strategic decision making. The sustainability appraisal will assist with ensuring the spatial plan for the area is prepared, taking to account its wider context. It will use baseline data to inform the appraisal of the likely significant social, economic and environmental effects of implementing the local development plan, including reasonable alternatives, taking into account the evidence base. This information can also underpin the decisions on the vision and high level outcomes for the community planning process. The SA process extends to monitoring the implementation of the local development plan.
- **Monitoring and review of the local development plan** – after adoption, the plan must be monitored annually and reviewed every five years, or sooner if circumstances require it. The indicators by which the local development plan will be monitored should align with the high level vision, outcomes and actions contained in the community plan. Review of the community plan will assist in determining whether the local development plan also needs to be reviewed.

10. Collaborative Working Across Boundaries

- 10.1 While the council must produce a community plan for its area, it should take into consideration issues outside its boundaries, where they contribute to the social, environmental and economic well-being of the area and quality of life of its citizens. There may be services located outside its boundary

that are accessed by its citizens, or conversely there may be communities that lie outside a council boundary, including the Republic of Ireland, that depend on that council for services. Community planning partners and neighbouring councils should assist each other in providing relevant information to inform the community planning process. Neighbouring councils can also choose to work together to share resources, and where relevant, **establish protocols for working together e.g.** Memorandums of Understanding.

- 10.2 Councils are already working together on issues such as health, energy, IT, and environmental resources, which can be considered within the cohesive framework of community planning. The Framework for Co-operation identifies priority areas for co-operation on spatial planning issues, and states that a key factor in facilitating better joint working is more detailed and consistent information at the local level. It states that co-operation should take place at the regional level in the development and implementation of the Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland and National Spatial Strategy for the Republic of Ireland, and at local authority level through incorporation of regional guidance into development plans, community plans and regeneration schemes, and cross border projects.
- 10.3 Reforms in the Republic of Ireland include the introduction of a similar process to community planning called “local and community planning”. While there are differences in the structures being set up and timeframes for their, both systems being introduced position local government as the democratically accountable lead partner who will collaborate and co-ordinate with other public service providers to provide for economic, social and environmental well-being at the local level. Since both processes are in the early stages of development there is an opportunity for border councils to consider how they can achieve some alignment and establish mutually beneficial working structures and processes.

11. Production and Publication

- 11.1 The Local Government Act (NI) 2014 requires the council to produce a community plan, once a degree of consensus has been reached between it and the community planning partners on the objectives of the district and the actions to be taken to achieve the objectives. The community plan must contain a description of the objectives and actions, and produced and published as soon as reasonably practicable after a degree of consensus has been reached.
- 11.2 **Reaching consensus:** It is at this stage that the council will be required to make a judgement as to when a degree of consensus has been reached between the partners. The objective should be to develop a shared understanding of local needs, based firmly on the available evidence and the views and aspirations of the community. The objective is not to accommodate the separate operational outlooks of individual partner organisations which should be captured in their own strategies, and it is not to reach agreement by negotiation. It is understood that consensus may take time to be reached, and that it not be possible or expected that

complete consensus between all partners will be possible on every aspect. However, there should at least be consensus on the vision, outcomes and key actions as the document is the key strategic, long term plan for the local area.

- 11.3 The primary emphasis should be on building relationships and developing understanding between partners over the long term, and where agreement cannot be reached initially, then there is an opportunity to revisit an issue later when the community plan is reviewed.
- 11.4 Prior to publication, the council should ensure that the community planning partners agree to the content and format of the plan, and the council should publish the community plan as soon as possible after the plan has been agreed.
- 11.5 **Content and publication: It is recommended that the first community plan for an area should be published within one year of commencement of the community planning duty.** The first community plan should be considered as an interim plan, as it is understood that it will take some time for councils' new powers and functions under local government reform to fully 'bed in' to their operational and governance structures and organisational culture. However, it is also important that the community planning process gains some traction within a reasonably short timeframe to ensure its strategic significance influences decisions on the operational and governance structures of the council. The council can use the monitoring and review procedures to amend the plan within a recommended two year timeframe after first publication (more information on monitoring and review in section 12).
- 11.6 The title page of the plan should clearly state what it contains, and that it is the duty of the council to publish a community plan for the area under Section 68 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014. It should contain clear information on the evidence base and how the vision, outcomes and actions are derived from it, who is responsible for delivering on actions and when actions will be delivered to achieve the outcomes. The council may wish to consider publishing separate documents for different parts of their area/communities, but the strategy for the overall area should still remain clear.
- 11.7 The plan should be published in both paper and electronic forms, and made available in other formats when requested. The council should consider at the time of publication if the plan could usefully be publicised in other formats (such as Braille, large print, audio or summary form) or in other languages where there is a significant minority presence in the area.
- 11.8 The plan should be widely accessible and the council should use a variety of means to publicise the plan. The council and its community planning partners should consider how to promote broad awareness of the plan to encourage community ownership and interest in its delivery and progress.

12. Monitoring, Review and Reporting

- 12.1 The Local Government Act (NI) 2014 requires the council and its community planning partners to make arrangements to monitor progress against meeting the plan objectives, and the effectiveness of the actions taken for the purpose of meeting those objectives. The council must publish a statement once every two years on outcomes achieved and actions taken, and community planning partners must provide the council with relevant information to enable the council to do so. The first statement must be produced within two years of the community plan being published.
- 12.2 The Act also requires the council and its community planning partners, before the fourth anniversary of the publication of the community plan, to carry out a review of the plan.
- 12.3 The Partnership will need to agree what indicators they will use to measure progress on the outcomes, and what targets they will set themselves for improvement. They should also consider what information they need to collect for the purposes of monitoring their section 75 commitments.
- 12.4 The council must ensure that, along with its community planning partners, it monitors performance against the agreed objectives and actions contained in the plan. Where agreed actions are not being progressed, reasons for this should be reviewed with the partners and appropriate action taken to assist progress or amend the plan. The council is responsible for accountability to the public by publishing a statement on progress every 2 years.
- 12.5 In more detail, and as required by the Act, this means that:
- a community plan should include a set of actions which district councils and their partners publicly commit to carrying out over the short to medium term.
 - those actions should be grounded in a full understanding both of priorities and actions that can be taken within a 10-15 year period and of the scope for local partners to realise them. These priorities and actions may be taken with a view to protecting or enhancing well-being over even longer timescales. That may involve difficult choices: all public bodies are subject to legal, policy and resource constraints on their freedom to act.
 - district councils should develop appropriate improvement objectives accordingly. These will clearly contribute to the “strategic effectiveness” improvement aspect, but other aspects, in particular fairness and sustainability, may be particularly relevant.
 - other public bodies should also integrate community planning actions into their business planning processes, by formulating appropriate objectives, in line with their existing (and continuing) different roles and accountabilities.

- delivery of those objectives should inform the continuing development of community planning. All partners should, individually and collectively, consider the delivery and relevance of community planning actions, as part of the process of monitoring implementation. If it becomes clear that one or more partners are unable to carry out community planning actions, or that those actions or the objectives to which they relate have become irrelevant or less important, partners should consider amending them.

Performance Improvement

- 12.6 Part 12 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014 requires the council to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in carrying out its functions. The council must have regard to the need to improve its performance in relation to strategic effectiveness, service quality, service availability, fairness, sustainability, efficiency and innovation.
- 12.7 There is a clear link between the community planning process and the council's performance improvement regime. Community planning focuses on achieving better outcomes for citizens accessing services, through the collaborative working of organisations to improve service delivery for the benefit of citizens. A successful community plan will consist of a long term vision for the area, underpinned by a set of outcomes identified for key themes, with clear accountability and interim performance measures. The community planning process should achieve better integration of public sector services and investment resulting in performance improvements for organisations involved.
- 12.8 The council is required to prepare an improvement plan containing improvement objectives, which includes the strategic objectives for 10 to 15 years ahead set out in the community plan. The community plan identifies long term outcomes using a solid, reliable evidence base as a baseline upon which decisions can be made and against which progress can be monitored. The council must annually monitor its performance and publicise the information. In order to measure performance against its strategic objectives, the council can consider setting short to medium term objectives through action plans or their existing corporate and business plans.
- 12.9 Community planning partners should also build into their corporate and business planning regimes their commitments contained in community plans.
- 12.10 Performance improvement and community planning should inform, and be informed by, each other. It is expected that that:
- improvement should take full and proper account of the strategic vision as set out in the community plan. This provides the frame within which many short-term improvement priorities should sit. Although there will be other such priorities which do not, either because they are too short-term or too confined to one organisation, they should at least not conflict with the community plan;

- community planning should be based both on an understanding of what appears reasonably deliverable by a district council and/or its partners, and on continual monitoring of how effective that delivery is. If and when it becomes clear, from shorter-term information, that community planning objectives are not deliverable or no longer relevant, those objectives should change; and
- the use of the new flexibilities and freedoms offered by the general power of competence should be influenced significantly by issues identified through the community planning process. Similarly, performance improvement considerations should influence a council's choices in using the general power of competence and how it engages with its community planning partners.

Other Cross-Cutting Strategies

Those involved in community planning should also take into consideration other cross-cutting regional policies that flow from the PfG targets. Partner organisations that are developing and delivering strategies that tackle particular themes will likely benefit from the platform that community planning provides. It can provide an opportunity to share information to inform the evidence base and policy development, gain a shared understanding of local issues, reduce duplication of effort, and identify opportunities to join up service delivery and planning.

Cross Cutting Strategies/Policies

- Racial Equality Strategy
- Sexual Orientation Strategy
- Public Health Strategy
- Domestic Violence Strategy
- Homeless Strategy
- Community Safety Strategy
- TBUC
- Child Poverty Strategy
- Sports Matters Strategy
- Social Economy Strategy
- Disability Strategy
- Mental Health & Wellbeing Strategy
- Suicide Prevention Strategy
- Economic Strategy
- Children and Young People Strategy
- Victims Charter
- Active Ageing Strategy
- Innovation Strategy
- Reducing Offending Strategy
- Youth Justice Strategy
- Food in Schools Policy
- Early Years Strategy
- DSC Signature Programmes
- Higher Education Strategy
- Dementia Strategy
- Essential Skills Strategy
- Organised Crime Strategy
- Families Matter Strategy
- STEM Strategy
- Fuel Poverty Strategy

GLOSSARY

In this Code:

“**the 1972 Act**” means the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972;

“**the 2014 Act**” means the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014;

“**Councillor**” for the purposes of this Code means-

- (a) any person who is elected to office within a council,
- (b) any person chosen under section 11(4b) of the Electoral Law Act (Northern Ireland) 1962 to fill a casual vacancy,
- (c) any person treated as a non-voting member by section 21 of the 2014 Act, and
- (d) any person who is not an elected representative as mentioned in section 32(4) of the 2014 Act;

“**council**” means the council of a local government district established in accordance with the Local Government (Boundaries) Act (Northern Ireland) 2008³;

“**Chief Executive**”, means a person appointed as clerk of a council; and

“**meeting**” means any meeting—

- (a) of the relevant council or of a committee or sub-committee of the relevant council,
- (b) of the executive of the relevant council or of a committee or sub-committee of the executive of the relevant council,
- (c) of a joint committee or sub-committee of a joint committee which includes the relevant council, or
- (d) where members or officers of the relevant council are present, including circumstances where a member of an executive or officer of the council, acting alone exercises a function of the council.

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 – confidentiality of consultations

1. The Department may publish a summary of responses following completion of the consultation process. Your response, and all other responses to the consultation, may be disclosed on request. The Department can only refuse to disclose information in exceptional circumstances. Before you submit your response, please read the paragraphs below on the confidentiality of consultations and they will give you guidance on the legal position about any information given by you in response to this consultation.

2. The Freedom of Information Act gives the public a right of access to any information held by a public authority, namely, the Department in this case. This right of access to information includes information provided in response to a consultation. The Department cannot automatically consider as confidential information supplied to it in response to a consultation. However, it does have the responsibility to decide whether any information provided by you in response to this consultation, including information about your identity, should be made public or be treated as confidential.

3. This means that information provided by you in response to the consultation is unlikely to be treated as confidential, except in very particular circumstances. The Lord Chancellor's Code of Practice on the Freedom of Information Act provides that:
 - the Department should only accept information from third parties in confidence if it is necessary to obtain that information in connection with the exercise of any of the Department's functions and it would not otherwise be provided;

 - the Department should not agree to hold information received from third parties "in confidence" which is not confidential in nature; and

 - acceptance by the Department of confidentiality provisions must be for good reasons, capable of being justified to the Information Commissioner.

4. For further information about confidentiality of responses please contact the Information Commissioner's Office (or see website at: <http://www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk>).

List of Consultees

Action on Hearing Loss

Age Concern NI

All Northern Ireland Departments

All Northern Ireland District Councillors

All Northern Ireland District Councils (26 plus 11 new)

An Munia Tober

Armagh Observatory and Planetarium

Arts Council of Northern Ireland

Association of Local Government Finance Officers

Association of Public Service Excellence

Autism NI

Bahai Council for NI

Ballymoney Community Resource Centre

Balnamore & District Community Association

Barnardos NI

Belfast Area Partnerships

Belfast Butterfly Club

Belfast Education and Library Board

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

Belfast Hebrew Congregation

Belfast Solicitors Association

Bishop of Down and Connor

British Chamber of Commerce

British Deaf Association
Bryson Charitable Group
Bushmills Residents Environmental Forum
Carafriend
Carers NI
Children's Law Centre
Chief Local Government Auditor
Chinese Welfare Association
Chrysalis Womens Centre
Church of Ireland
Civil Law Reform Division
CO3 Chief Officers 3rd Sector
Coalition on Sexual Orientation
Coiste-na n-iarchimi
Comhairle na Gaelscolaiochta
Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland
Committee on the Administration of Justice Ltd
Communication Access
Community Development and Health Network (NI)
Community Places
Community Relations Council
Confederation of British Industry
Construction and Employers Federation
Cruse Bereavement Care (NI)
Controlled Schools Support Council
Council for Catholic Maintained Schools

Democratic Unionist Party
Derry Well Woman
Disability Action
District Judge - Magistrates Court
Down's Syndrome Association
Employers For Disability NI
Equality Coalition c/o CAJ
Equality Commission for NI
Eirigi
Equality Forum NI
Fab Femme
Falls Community Council
Falls Women's Centre
Family Planning Association NI
Federation of Small Businesses
Focus: The Identity Trust
Food Standards Agency for Northern Ireland
Foras na Gaeilge
Foyle Women's Information Network
Gingerbread NI
GMB
Green party
Health and Social Care Board
Help the Aged NI
HM Revenue & Customs
Human Rights Commission

Indian Community Centre
Institute of Directors
Invest NI
Irish Bankers Federation
Irish Congress of Trade Unions NI Committee (ICTUNI)
JNC
Law Centre (NI)
Local Government Reform Joint Forum
Local Government Staff Commission
Local Government Management Services Board
Magherafelt Women's Group
MENCAP
Men's Advisory Project
MEPs
Methodist Church in Ireland
Ministry of Defence
MLAs
MPs
Multi-Cultural Resource Centre
National Association of Councillors
National Museums Northern Ireland
National Society for prevention of Cruelty to Children
Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO)
NI Association of Citizens Advice Bureau
NI Chamber of Trade, Commerce and Industry
Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities

Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education
Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service
NI Council for Voluntary Action
NI Gay Rights Association
Northern Ireland Housing Executive
Northern Ireland Local Government Association
North Eastern Education and Library Board
Northern Health and Social Care Trust
Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission
Northern Ireland Islamic Centre
Northern Ireland Joint Council
Northern Ireland Assembly/Committee for the Environment
Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health (Niamh)
NI Political Parties
Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People
Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions
Northern Ireland Court Service
Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission
Northern Ireland Law Commission
Northern Ireland Tourist Board
Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network
Northern Ireland Screen
Northern Ireland Women's Aid Federation
Parenting NI
Participation and the Practice of Rights Project
POBAL

Polish Association for Northern Ireland
Presbyterian Church in Ireland
Probation Board Northern Ireland
Police Service Northern Ireland
NIPSA
Probation Board Northern Ireland
Public Sector People Managers` Association
Public Health Agency
Public Service Commission
QUB School of Law
RNU – Republican Network for Unity
RNIB
RNID
Rural Community Network
Rural Development Council
Rural Support
Save the Children
Secretary – Catholic Bishops of Northern Ireland
SENSE NI
Society of Local Authority Chief Executives
South Eastern Education and Library Board
South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust
Southern Education and Library Board
Southern Health and Social Care Trust
Sport Northern Ireland
Stronger Together Network

The Cedar Foundation

The Community Foundation of Northern Ireland

The Executive Council of the Inn of Court Northern Ireland

The General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland

The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association

The Law Society of Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities

The Northern Ireland Museums Council

The Rainbow Project

The Senior Citizens Consortium Sperrin Lakeland

The Trans Forum

The Women's Centre

Training for Women Network Ltd

Ulster Scots Agency

ULTACH

UNISON Northern Ireland

Unite

UU – School of Law

Volunteer Now

Waterways Ireland

Western Education and Library Board

Western Health and Social Care Trust

Women's Forum Northern Ireland

Women's Resource and Development Agency

Women's Support Network

Workers Party

Youth Council for Northern Ireland

Youthnet

Youth Action