The Highland Community Planning Partnership	Agenda Item	3ii.
Community Planning Board 3rd June 2015	Report No	CPB 07/15

Progress with Local Discussions on Reviewing Local Community Planning Arrangements and Council Area Committees

Report by Head of Policy and Reform

Summary

This report provides an up-date for the Board on progress being made with reviewing Local Community Planning arrangements and Area Committees. Initial discussions have been underway in the last round of District Partnership meetings and by the time of the Board meeting discussions will have taken place in 12 Wards with elected members.

1. Background

1.1 At the CPP Board meeting in March 2015 partners noted that the scope of District Partnership work was expanding and in some cases leading to duplication in reporting with the Council's Area Committees. With the Council pursuing a review of Area Committees it was agreed by the CPP and the Council that reviewing both together would enable proposals for local community planning to emerge. The Board also agreed:

- for their staff and Board members to be creative in developing proposals to encourage local experiments, while accepting that one size would not fit all areas and that the pace of change may vary across the region.
- that up-dates of local discussions would be reported to the Board with any proposed changes to governance arising being considered appropriately through partners' governance arrangements.

1.2 The CPP Board also agreed that principles and values to support the reviews locally would be produced by the Chief Officers Group (COG). These are attached at Appendix 1.

1.3 This report provides an up-date of the discussions so far and some of the local community planning ideas emerging.

2. Progress with local discussions at District Partnerships

2.1 The Director of Care and Learning and Director of Adult Social Care or Chief Operating Officer at NHSH have led discussions in the 9 District Partnerships (DPs) on taking stock of their progress and in the context of the need to reduce health inequalities and the Community Empowerment Bill. Further meetings are being arranged with District Partnership Chairs and another is to be arranged for DP Chairs and Area Leaders for the Council.

2.2   While discussions at this stage are not conclusive, they have reaffirmed that services for children and adults are recognised as shared partnership business, and that there is an interface with other community planning themes, such as community safety, transport, employability and the economy. Each Partnership has reflected that it has a role in ensuring there is effective local collaboration and active planning regarding these matters, and also that there needs to be greater linkage with the Community Planning Partnership Board.

2.3   The District Partnerships are continuing to reflect on how they take this forward, and this includes:
- making the transition from talking about what is happening, to influencing what is happening;
- achieving a fit between Council decision making and Partnership business, in terms of political and operational structures and local geographies;
- how to engage with people better, and especially people not used to being engaged;
- how to engage with communities and Community Councils better; and
- how to bring third sector providers together and help them to network.

3.   Ideas emerging from discussions with elected members

3.1   Conversations with elected members have been held for members in:
- Nairn on 2.4.15;
- Lochaber on 13.4.15;
- Skye, Ross and Cromarty on 22.4.15;
- Badenoch and Strathspey on 12.5.15; and
- Sutherland on 1.6.15.

Conversations with members in the remaining wards will take place by the end of June 2015.

3.2   The conversations have included the principles and values in Appendix 1 and have been structured around:
- A briefing on participatory budgeting and whether Members locally want to use it as a way of encouraging greater participation in spending decisions, initially with discretionary grant;
- Describing a day in the life of an Elected Member and the roles they currently have;
- Clarifying the new expectations of Members and staff given the Community Empowerment Legislation and budget outlook and what this means for their roles going forward;
- Reflecting on what works well in the current arrangements and what needs to change (thinking about Area Committees, Ward Forums, local community planning and other forums and partnerships);
- Imagining local democracy for the area in 2020 and identifying what needs to change to enable that, including specific actions by 2017; and
- Considering how to find out what other partners and people in the locality think too.

3.3 The feedback from the initial conversations with members locally is shown below for different localities. This shows different models emerging in different places. This seems appropriate given their different local contexts.

3.4 The first model emerging is for a new local community planning partnership to be created that would deal with Council business as well as partner business and have a new partnership focus to deal with issues that matter to people locally. This is the model proposed in two areas so far – in Nairn and in Badenoch and Strathspey. In each of these partnerships there would be some different partners reflecting topical issues. This model would need governance arrangements to be clear for each partner participating. Views are shown below.

3.5 **Feedback from the conversation with Nairn Members**
Members felt that for Nairn to be a shining example of local democracy, they needed to make sure that:

- They get positive relationships with the community;

- Public agencies work together with the community;

- They lead on projects and push on ideas and strategies – linked to priorities;

- They scrutinise the process for all public services;

- They make decisions for things they are elected for;

- They facilitate the community to deliver for the town;

- They address inequalities and include the harder to reach communities; and

- They build trust with community groups.

3.6 To achieve this vision, Members propose:
1. Taking forward participatory budgeting in 2015/16 so that people in Nairn decide how 50% of their ward discretionary budget is spent. Members were open to identifying other potential discretionary funding to be distributed in this way in the future, possibly including the Nairn Common Good Fund.
2. To no longer have the Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee, District Partnership and Locality Planning meetings. Instead the governance model proposed would be a local community planning partnership model. Potentially branded as the Nairn Community Partnership it would cover the issues of local importance (i.e. health and social care, transport, economy, town centre regeneration, community safety and possibly arts and culture) along with any other Council business. Meetings of the Nairn Community Partnership would be themed to make workload manageable and to encourage community interest and involvement. Ideally the resource for running the partnership would be shared across the partnership.

3.7   In developing this model, each partner's business would have to be dealt with appropriately with the right governance arrangements in place. This would include being clear on the respective roles of members and of partners during partnership meetings, making sure e.g. that Members know when they alone are responsible for making decisions, when their role is to scrutinise, when their role is to be informed.

3.8   Following the workshop Cllr MacDonald shared the idea of the new model with some of those involved in locality planning and has received positive feedback so far. Conversations are underway with NHSH regarding the potential changes to the District Partnership.

3.9   **Feedback from the conversation with Badenoch and Strathspey Members**
Members felt that for Badenoch and Strathspey to be a shining example of local democracy, they needed to make sure that:

- All the public bodies in the Badenoch and Strathspey area come together to focus on solutions and share resources for Badenoch and Strathspey communities. This includes national and regional public bodies. The decisions they make locally are adhered to.
- We have full engagement of the third sector and communities building on the community work done through Voluntary Action Badenoch and Strathspey (VABS) and we engage fully with commercial organisations.
- Many more people want to stand for election, e.g. for Community Councils and local government.
- People have a voice and can influence decisions affecting them.
- Resources target inequalities – including rural inequalities and improving transport.

3.10   To achieve this vision, Members propose:
1. Taking forward participatory budgeting in 2015/16 initially with £30,000 of Ward Discretionary Budget, and with the scope to bring in the Carbon Clever Community Grants (capital) to be explored. To ensure a fair geographic spread across the Ward, Members want to experiment with £10,000 being agreed by communities in each of three areas. Community events would take place in 2015/16 in Newtonmore, Nethy Bridge and Carrbridge and if the approach is successful the locations in future years would move around. Members are keen to explore how communities can be involved in the planning of the local events. They are also interested in how this model of community participation could be used in future for allocating some mainstream funding, especially in community services.
2. To no longer have the Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee, District Partnership and Locality Planning meetings. Instead Members proposed a local community planning partnership model. In addition to the partners involved in the Highland CPP, members have noted the need to involve land based partners too e.g. Forestry Commission, SEPA, the Cairngorm National Park Authority and local commercial enterprises. The issues of local importance to communities are well documented through the VABS Action Plans and these would

help shape partnership agendas. Council business would be included in the partnership meetings but with clarity on the specific role of elected members to deal with those items.

3. In keeping with feedback from other areas, Badenoch and Strathspey Members are interested in a review of the Council's scheme of delegation, especially in community services.

3.11 A different approach is proposed in Lochaber, where the focus is on building on the current arrangements for local community planning and for the Area Committee, but keeping them distinct with links through annual reporting.

3.12 **Feedback from the conversation with Lochaber Members**
Members felt that for Lochaber to be a shining example of local democracy, they needed to make sure that:

- They build on the good progress with community participation and enhance the way they interact with people in Lochaber;

- Constituents get the answers they want quickly and accurately;

- All public bodies respond to local people's questions/needs;

- The Council and partners communicate in new and better ways with people given their needs and preferences;

- Resources are better targeted locally, in a local forum and with equalities in mind for people and places (including rural poverty);

- Local communities have more power to decide public budgets;

- Local democracy is improved with more local decisions made for key Council services (initially focusing on planning, licensing and capital programmes);

- Transport is improved to make services more accessible for everyone.

3.13 To achieve this vision, Members propose:
1. To introduce participatory budgeting in 2015/16 for their youth budget to build on the engagement with young people to date. Members are also keen to use this method of distributing their ward discretionary grants for 2016/17 (with amounts agreed for rural and town areas) and with a view to looking at how this might work with some mainstream spend in the future (e.g. winter gritting priorities).
2. To build on the success of the Lochaber Partnership, the most mature local community planning partnership in the Highlands, by making it more participative. This would include carrying on with a review of the current forums in it, changing the frequency of partnership meetings and holding alternate meetings in different communities to encourage more community participation. Other ideas members want to discuss with partners include webcasting some partnership meetings, running themed ward forums after partnership meetings and inviting partners to attend ward business meetings for informal briefings.
3. To retain the Lochaber Area Committee and to review the scheme of

delegation to broaden local member involvement. Areas members are interested in being more involved in locally include planning matters, licensing and capital programmes (including for housing). New arrangements for the annual reporting of progress from the Lochaber Partnership to the Area Committee are proposed.

4. Members are aware there are still issues to work through such as avoiding duplication of community safety reporting to both committees and being able to resource meetings given the staff resource.

3.14 **Feedback from the conversation with Members in the Skye, Ross and Cromarty Area**

Members benefitted from a presentation from Rory Mair, the Secretary to the Commission on Strengthening Democracy in advance of their workshop. However they did not have enough time to reach conclusions together in their workshop and have agreed to continue the conversations in their Ward Business Meetings. Some shared views emerging included:

- The Skye, Ross and Cromarty Area geography is too big to be local;
- Combining the six current Wards into two or three areas may make more sense, with Wards 6 and 11 potentially as one grouping (but this requires further discussions);
- Members were more interested to try participatory budgeting for local people to decide how some mainstream resources are allocated rather than discretionary grant. Members spoke about Community Services budgets and interest in exploring how to engage the public in prioritising roads repairs and local community works.

3.15 **Feedback from the conversation with Members in the Sutherland Area**

At the time of writing, the conversation with Elected Members in Sutherland is still to take place. Verbal feedback can be provided at the Board meeting.

3.16 **Taking forward the ideas**

It is clear that the discussions with Elected Members show they are mindful of the importance of engaging with partners locally. While Members are contacted about public services that are out with local authority control, they are keen:

- to find a way of bringing public services together locally to enable better responses to constituents;
- to understand how partner services operate; and
- to find more community-based solutions. Members are aware of the budget constraints across the public sector and of the need for us to enable greater self-reliance, have more preventative services in place and to work with the third sector to understand community capabilities and needs better.

3.17 The ideas emerging could support the implementation of the Community Empowerment legislation, particularly around engaging communities better in community planning, responding to participation requests to improve outcomes and working to reduce inequalities locally.

3.18 For the ideas developed in Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey and Lochaber and the next steps are:

- to discuss these ideas with partners locally as they are affected;
- to seek early views from partners at a Highland level through the COG and the CPP Board;
- to develop approaches for wider conversations with communities in the areas affected;
- to start to define the different roles of partners in partnership meetings to ensure governance is clear and appropriate and those participating are clear on their role in participating;
- to share the learning from the participatory budgeting experiments now programmed for 2015/16;
- the Council's Executive Leadership Team is starting work to consider the options for the Council's Scheme of Delegation for Members to consider.

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4. Recommendation

4.1 The Board is asked to note the progress being made in early conversations through District Partnerships and among local elected members.

4.2 The Board is asked to comment on the ideas emerging, note they might support new legislative requirements and to consider how they can support the conversations needed locally as early next steps.

4.3 The Board is asked to identify any benefits and concerns they feel arise from the ideas so far.

4.4 The Board is asked to note that no agreement is sought at this time to change arrangements locally, but with further work and conversations to take place over the summer, a further report will be provided to the Board in September this year. This provides 3 months to develop acceptable proposals for local experiments in some areas to improve community planning. Proper regard will be made to each partners' governance arrangements before any changes can take place.

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Values and Principles to be used in discussion to guide proposals for local experiments. – COG 26.3.15

1. local community planning was about engaging with, listening and responding to communities and there should be a roots-up approach;
2. there should be a bias towards the most deprived communities;
3. there should be a solutions-driven approach;
4. it was necessary to be helpful, positive and make it easy for people to engage;
5. innovative thinking was required in terms of engagement processes – for example, going out in to the community, not having a specific agenda, utilising technology and social media;
6. there should be an emphasis on involving new people, particularly younger people, in local community planning;
7. the CPP should demonstrate effectiveness, accountability and a willingness to share resources;
8. outcomes should be measurable in order to demonstrate tangible benefits;
9. the activities and objectives within the SOA should set the boundaries for decision making;
10. fairness and equality were key;
11. it was important that there was two-way communication between strategic and local forums;
12. Elected Members had different roles at different forums and it was necessary to be explicit about that and support them;
13. it might be necessary to accept that there were different geographical boundaries for some issues;
14. it was essential to avoid duplication and inefficiency; and
15. forgiveness of false starts and wrong turns should be included.