



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

Executive Summary

People, Plans and Partnerships

A National Evaluation of Community
Strategies in Wales



Executive Summary

Chapter 1: Background and Policy Context

S.1 The research study opens with an introductory discussion on the prevailing policy context both in the UK and Wales. It positions community strategies within a wider reform programme in local government that includes community leadership, service improvement and performance management, democratic renewal, joined-up governance and political re-organisation. It examines the policy context and institutional arrangements that are peculiar to Wales, in particular, devolution and the creation of Welsh Assembly Government with its particular style of inclusive and participatory policy making. It notes the large number of major strategies that have been produced by the Assembly and the difficulties involved in implementation, and it refers to the importance of the 'Making Connections' agenda which sets out the policy approach adopted by the Assembly and the linked action plan.

S.2 This chapter also considers other significant elements of the institutional structure in Wales. It discusses key features of the local government system, including Wales Programme for Improvement, policy agreements and shared outcome measures. It refers to the potential impact of two ongoing reviews in local government - the Beecham Review of local service delivery in Wales, and the Lyons review of local government financing.

S.3 Finally, this opening chapter focuses in detail on the statutory duty on local authorities to prepare community strategies. It draws on the statutory guidance to highlight the expectations of national government and details the advice that is given on various aspects of the process in relation to local partnership working, engagement with the community, having a long term vision but also an action plan that specifies short term priorities and mechanisms for monitoring and review.

Chapter 2: Research Objectives and Approach

S.4 The purpose of this research study is to provide an evaluation of the effectiveness of community strategies in Wales. It is commissioned by the Local Government Policy Division of Welsh Assembly Government and undertaken by a partnership of independent research institutions based at the University of Wales Swansea, the University of Birmingham and the University of the West of England.

S.5 The scope of the evaluation includes both a retrospective assessment of the progress that has been made to date on preparing the strategies particularly in relation to the approaches that have been taken, the effectiveness of local community strategy partnerships and the mechanisms that have been deployed to engage with people and communities. It also includes a prospective analysis of the implementation structures that have been put in place to deliver community strategies together with the ways in which these are linked to performance management and other evaluatory frameworks.

S.6 The evaluation approach is grounded in identifying and engaging with a variety of stakeholders and in taking account of the resultant multiple perspectives and the varied bases of stakeholder knowledge and expertise. The 'Theories of Change' approach provides a coherent and robust framework for this form of evaluation. The preferred methodology is qualitative to take account of the fact that the researchers are not just interested in what is happening but why, and how different stakeholders perceive the same events and what might account for the differences in perception. The analytical frame that categories the evidence interrogated and generated from different sources enables different weights to be attached to those sources. Therefore, the researchers place considerable weight on secondary research/evaluation data based on a demonstrably systematic and robust methodology, as compared to secondary data that simply seeks to report 'what is happening' and offers no critical filtering of the quality of that activity.

S.7 The research design involves a multi-method approach consisting of a number of interrelated components consisting of appraisal of community strategy documents, telephone interviews with community strategy officers, 3 case studies, discussions with national policy networks, interviews with national stakeholders and 3 research workshops. The fieldwork took place over a period between March and July 2005.

Chapter 3: Lessons from Theory and Practice

S.8 There is very little literature that directly relates to community strategies. However, the concept of a community strategy encompasses three integral processes and this enables a deep reservoir of knowledge to be explored in relation to public participation and collaboration, strategic management in the public sector and working in partnership.

S.9 The review of the literature on public participation considers the approach that New Labour has adopted since 1997 which is largely echoed in the priorities of Welsh Assembly Government. It explores a number of fundamental questions including who to involve and how involvement happens at different levels - strategic, sectoral and neighbourhood. It refers to the notion of community leadership and the role of community leaders especially in relation to the different forms of legitimacy between representative and informal leaders. The discussion highlights the problems associated with community leaders in relation to selection, representation, accountability and sustainability, and touches on the thorny issue of power relationships between elected councillors and other community leaders.

S.10 The review proceeds to examine in detail the issues associated with the capacity of the public to engage meaningfully with public bodies and highlights the significance of skills, confidence, trust, time and money. Finally, this section reflects on the important power relationships which surround collaborative exchanges between people and government together with the issues associated with engaging the whole community and the problems of accessing the 'hard to reach'. These include considerations of who is included in the so-called 'hard to reach' category, the resources implications both in time and money of devising appropriate strategies to secure effective engagement, and the role of intermediaries in relationship building.

S.11 Community strategies are complex exercises in strategic management. There is a large body of literature on this subject, the most relevant of which is summarised in this Chapter. A notable feature of this body of knowledge is its diversity and contestability. There are a range of different approaches that can be detected which Mintzberg et al (1998) consolidate into ten schools of thought. However, the design and strategic planning approaches have been very influential in the public sector, and as this evaluation discovers, continue to be very persistent despite the potential appeal of alternatives.

S.12 Community strategies are characterised by forms of inter-organisational working and, although there is no consolidated theory on this subject, there is a rich stream of literature and research on this method of organising from many different disciplines. Some of the important messages that emerge from this disparate body of knowledge include:

- The problems associated with the different meanings and understandings of partnership working.
- The intensity of partnership behaviour that varies between co-operation, co-ordination and collaboration.
- The effect that different motivations prompting people and organisations to work together have on the nature and course of the collaborative process.
- The dynamic component of partnerships that move through different phases, stages or life cycles.
- The association of effective partnerships with critical success factors.
- The existence of barriers to, and drivers of effective collaboration including issues relating to structure, procedure, finance, professionalism and organisational culture.
- The importance of key individuals in the partnership process, and the need to develop a distinct set of collaborative skills, competencies, abilities and behaviours for this type of management.
- The leadership styles that are appropriate to partnership arenas based on facilitation, empowerment and catalytic behaviour.

Chapter 4: Lessons from Community Planning in Scotland and England

S.13 Community planning also occurs in both England and Scotland and this offers the possibility of gathering useful learning for community strategy partnerships in Wales. This chapter summarises the main lessons and learning from these countries. In England, the discussion is prefaced by an examination of the policy and institutional differences between England and Wales, in particular the centrality of the Local Strategic Partnerships and the local neighbourhood renewal strategies. The experience of the local government modernisation agenda which includes community strategies has been the subject of extensive evaluation and the key findings from this and other sources are outlined in relation to partnership working, strategy making, implementation, performance management, and governance and accountability. In relation to partnership working, some of the most important conclusions relate to:

- The importance of context in shaping the experiences of LSPs.
- The need for sufficient time to allow for the development of strong and effective partnerships.

- The influence that the amount, source and type of resources had on the efficacy of LSPs.
- Type of membership and quality of involvement of different stakeholders within LSPs particularly the role of local government, the involvement of the voluntary and community sectors and the engagement of the private sector.

S.14 In relation to strategy making, the evidence confirmed that few LSPs had gone beyond the dominant models of strategic planning; vision statements were remarkably similar; most were structured around common themes, and reference was made to cross cutting issues. In addition, evaluators were critical of the lack of evidence-base in many community strategy plans and the confusion and lack of clarity in target setting. The lack of integration between community strategies and other key strategic frameworks at regional, national or European level was highlighted as an area of concern, as was progress on mainstreaming.

S.15 As in Wales, most activity in England has been concerned with strategy design. The focus on delivery raised a number of issues including questions about what constituted delivery in the context of community strategies, and the role of and capacity for delivery within LSPs. Evaluators referred to delivery in terms of three sets of outcomes - process, governance and service outcomes. Performance management was found to be a key challenge for community strategies especially in relation to moving away from performance monitoring to the active management of performance and the generation of collaborative frameworks. Evaluation evidence suggests that the role of the local authority is the most important local factor in the success of the LSP and community strategy. Local authorities are important for the community leadership role they play in providing infrastructure support for the operation of the LSP and the development of the community strategy, and in ensuring 'good governance' of the activities of the LSP and the delivery of the community strategy. However, as has been indicated above, local authorities need to be able to strike a fine balance between leading and dominating LSPs and community strategy working. Key governance issues for local authorities and their partners to address include developing partnership structures and processes that are fit for purpose and establishing clear accountability arrangements. Evaluation findings indicated that stakeholder attitudes to the value and appropriateness of government guidance are divided.

S.16 In Scotland, there are important contextual and legislative differences from both England and Wales. Community planning had a long gestation period in advance of the legislative requirement allowing the build up of a substantial body of experience; the statutory duty lies not just on local authorities but on other public bodies although there is no explicit evidence of the impact of this; and the Community Planning Task Force and Implementation Group have been proactive and instrumental in ensuring a continuous focus at local and national levels.

Chapter 5: An Overview of Community Strategies in Wales

S.17 This chapter examines the effectiveness of the organisational arrangements for managing community strategies at a national and local level. At national level, it notes that responsibility for the function rests within the Local Government

Policy Division although few staff resources have been dedicated to the role. Two annual reports have tracked the progress of community strategies, and other outputs include statutory guidance, seminars, web site and meetings with Scottish and English counterparts. A Community Strategies Working Group consisting of wide stakeholder representation has met since 2001 although its value and effectiveness were raised during the course of the evaluation specifically in relation to the lack of output, low profile and lack of influence. More recently, the organisational structure for managing community strategies has been augmented by the establishment of a network of community planning officers.

S.18 At a local level, the management of community strategies is invariably located under the umbrella of the Chief Executive's department. However, comparatively little staff resource has been dedicated to this function, a number of officers combine it with other duties and in many cases the officers responsible are relatively junior in terms of organisational status, experience and expertise. The financial resources available for community strategies have been relatively small. In many cases, general corporate strategy unit budgets have been used for items such as public consultation exercises. Financial contributions other than from local authorities have been limited with public bodies usually able only to make a contribution in terms of staff time. Local stakeholders argued strongly for the Welsh Assembly Government to make resources available nationally for community strategy partnerships to help with the costs of employing community strategy co-ordinators and to fund capacity building programmes.

S.19 Views on the appropriateness and usefulness of statutory guidance on community strategies varied. Some welcomed the lack of prescription and the opportunity for local flexibility, while others considered that there was insufficient detail particularly in terms of implementation and evaluation. Certainly, there is a case for updating the guidance in the light of a changed policy context. However, the balance of evidence does not support statutory guidance at the expense of other instruments.

S.20 Some stakeholders were strongly of the view that the duty to cooperate with community strategies should be extended to all public bodies, as this would encourage more consistent engagement throughout Wales. Evidence from elsewhere suggests that a wider duty to co-operate is not as important as underlying co-operative relationships between partners, a sense of mutual interest in the outcomes of community strategies and a belief on the part of all stakeholders that community strategies are a sufficiently important instrument to engage with.

S.21 21 local authorities had submitted community strategies by May 2004. The majority of documents were designed for a general public audience - glossy, concise, bilingual and relatively short. A number of strategies were accompanied by action plans, and there was much similarity in terms of content relating to background material, partnership arrangements and details of the process. The structure of the documents, too, reflected the statutory guidance - vision statements, goals and objectives, 5 or 6 policy areas and reference to values, ways of working and cross cutting issues. In summary, the community strategy process to date has delivered three major outputs - the community strategy and action plan, a public consultation programme and the establishment of a local partnership.

Chapter 6: Models of Change

S.22 This chapter examines the effectiveness of community strategies through six main models of change generated in an iterative process using the literature alongside evidence from interviews, case studies and rapid appraisal of community strategy documents. The approach underscores the many different purposes that are ascribed to the notion of a community strategy, to the fact that different stakeholders and interests place a different emphasis on different purposes, and to the situation being dynamic with purposes varying over time. The models are not necessarily mutually exclusive and elements of them can be detected in various permutations in a single community strategy.

Model 1: Rational Planning - Co-ordination and Integration

S.23 This model seeks to promote joined-up approaches to government and policy making through better co-ordination and integration. Its interpretation in the context of a community strategy envisages it providing an over arching framework to both shape and be informed by a whole range of associated strategies. It is seen to offer a single vision and set of strategic priorities to guide resource allocation across all sectors. This model is particularly engrained in all community strategies, but is pursued with mixed effectiveness.

- Evidence-based approach: practices vary considerably in relation to the identification and prioritisation of need. Some authorities refer to local trends and issues but, in the main, evidence of need within the community strategy documents is sparse and basic. In addition, the weight and value placed on research as opposed to publicly expressed views is difficult to judge, as is the way in which this evidence has been used to shape the formulation of the strategies.
- Vision, Goals and Objectives: all community strategies set out a vision to catalyse and guide the strategy making process. However, these visions tend to be bland, similar and at a high level of abstraction, without sufficient attention to the spatial dimension. Strategic direction is provided through the medium of goals and objectives corralled around key policy areas and supplemented with cross cutting themes. There is a tendency in some documents to generate an overly long 'wish lists' rather than provide a framework for strategic prioritisation.
- Vertical Integration: the process of securing vertical integration is premised on a hierarchical and nested arrangement of strategies at different levels - the community strategy at the apex, then themed strategies followed by service delivery plans and finally down to individual plans. Partnership and strategy mapping exercises have been undertaken in an attempt to secure alignment and co-ordination. However, the first iteration of this approach has mainly led to a mapping of existing behaviour rather than a framework that contributes to a re-shaping of the way organisations conduct their business and resource prioritisation. One major deficiency is that many strategies simply do not provide a set of strategic priorities and outcome-focused performance framework. This coupled with the fact that community strategy partnerships often do not have the power to influence other partnerships, is a matter of concern. Some authorities are seeking to align their community strategy with their improvement and business planning processes, and in the future, it may be possible to move from models that simply reflect existing activity to

models that embrace more co-ordinated and integrated approaches. There was evidence of an alternative approach to integration based on a bottom up perspective involving the use of selected projects or activities to act as exemplars of good practice. This also has the effect of raising the profile of community strategies although generating whole-system change from small scale intervention is likely to prove challenging.

- **Horizontal Integration:** this is an area where community strategies can make a unique contribution although the evidence to date reveals limited progress. This conclusion is reached using examples from Communities First, Local Development Plans, Health, Social Care and Well Being Strategies and Crime and Community Safety. There is a recognition by different interests that integration is desirable but it is difficult to evidence how this has been translated into meaningful practice. The meetings of partnership co-ordinators in a number of areas is a potentially fruitful mechanism for prompting better co-ordination and integration in the future.
- **Cross Cutting Themes:** cutting issues are variously framed around target groups, principles of working and issues such as equality and sustainable development. The proliferation of cross cutting themes, the marginal involvement of cross cutting specialists, problems of definition and high complexity conspire to make the management of such issues very problematic. It is questionable as to whether community strategies are currently fit for this challenge. However, there are some pockets of interesting practice such as the use of the generic policy integration tool and quality of life indicators.
- **Outcome-Focused Approach:** such approaches were not found to be a feature of the majority of community strategies. Many action plans were output fixated and dominated by targets and indicators invariably extracted from existing strategies. Devising effective outcome focused frameworks was acknowledged to be difficult because of problems of timescale, combining qualitative and quantitative data, taking account of factors outside of the control of local areas, reflecting a very wide policy agenda and reflecting the impact of collective action. The emerging frameworks for shared outcome measures and the quality of life indicators were considered to be promising steps forward.

Model 2: Civic Renewal

S.24 All community strategies have been undertaken in association with efforts to involve local people and communities. This has been undertaken in different ways and to varying degrees of effectiveness. People are framed in a number of ways - as citizens, members of area-based communities, as members of interest groups and as members of 'hard to reach' groups. Techniques of engagement reflect this implicit or explicit process of framing. A number of conclusions have been drawn from the strategies interrogated including:

- **Traditional and Innovative methods:** with few exceptions, public involvement strategies deployed familiar methods and encountered the well known and reported difficulties in terms of response and representation.
- **Hard to Reach Groups:** practice in this area was very limited although attempts to engage young people in some areas were promising.
- **Resourcing:** the cost of funding high quality public engagement strategies was reported to be significant and consequently a barrier. In addition, problems of

capacity building and expertise were identified as ongoing issues. Many initial budgetary allocations were one-off items and future involvement processes are unclear.

- Area Based Approaches: because of the dispersed geographical nature of a number of local authority areas, a key focus was the promotion of community involvement through local areas forums. These offer the opportunity to discuss local needs but in practice generate tensions between representative and participatory form of democracy.
- Real or Tokenistic?: voluntary and community groups raised the question of how real and sincere public bodies were in reflecting community opinion. A view was that the process in many areas was merely cosmetic and consultative rather than participatory and empowering. Undoubtedly, aspirations have been raised and the problem for community strategies is to manage and realise these in the future.

S.25 Further discussion points were raised at the research workshop including the extent to which it is realistic to secure universal engagement; the question as to whether it is possible to engage people on so-called complex strategic issues or whether they are only concerned with local concerns; the dangers of over-participation; the need to use existing mechanisms for engaging the public; and the importance of promoting transparency in public engagement processes and continuity into the future stages of the community strategy process.

Model 3: Network Governance

S.26 Community strategies are all prepared through local community strategy partnerships involving public, private and voluntary organisations working together. The concept of partnership is open to wide interpretation and the motivation to act co-operatively can be stimulated through different sources - resource exchange, altruism and mandate. Community strategy partnerships faced a number of systemic hurdles to overcome, including the absence of any new resources, the lack of focus from a community of interest and a power imbalance with other partnerships. A number of issues emerged in the examination of the effectiveness of the partnerships:

- Structure, Representation and Purpose: the structure of community strategy partnerships varied somewhat in response to the problem of balancing the need to include as wide a cross section of interests as possible but at the same time being able to manage the process efficiently. The majority were new partnerships, although some metamorphosed from existing arrangements. A major area of concern relates to the lack of clarity around the role and purpose of the partnerships - advisory, consultative, learning or executive. The move to the implementation stage makes the resolution of this issue a key priority. However, views differ on what the purpose should be, and how it relates to other policy based partnerships. In terms of representation, the evidence indicates that the partnerships generally reflect the main public, private and voluntary interests in an area.
- Reflecting community interests: the extent to which community strategy partnerships fairly represented the range and diversity of voluntary interests was a keen topic for discussion. This role was usually discharged by local CVCs although there were issues of accountability and capacity.

- **Dialogue with Business:** the difficulty of engaging this sector was a common problem across Wales. Many existing partnership arrangements have little appeal to business interests, and future engagement needs to be more focused and innovative. The question of scale is important with economic perspectives being more amenable to regional or national level deliberations in many instances.
- **Public Sector Commitment:** local authorities often questioned the commitment of other public bodies to the community strategy process. In response, public bodies pointed out that they had difficulties in devoting resources to 22 local partnerships, and the first call on their limited resources had to be their core business. This was not the case with all public bodies with the Environment Agency Wales being a notable exception. The merger of some of the main ASPBs into the Welsh Assembly provides an opportunity for addressing the main issue.
- **Council Domination:** community strategy partnerships were invariably seen as being council-dominated. This is perhaps to be expected given the local authorities' community leadership role and the difficulties other partners experienced in devoting sufficient time and resource to the partnerships. Experience from England suggests that effective community leadership requires that local authorities be able to balance driving change to achieve shared goals and supporting others to take action. Achieving this balance is very difficult and requires considerable investment of time and resource as well as high level political and managerial input.
- **Political Commitment:** this was seen to be problematical in some areas. In particular, the changes in focus and commitment to community strategies by successive political administrations were seen by some to be counterproductive. The strength and visibility of political leadership and the extent to which community strategy matters were integrated with formal political processes are areas of concern. Again experience from England suggests that securing political commitment at all levels is vital if community strategies are to be sustainable over the long term.
- **Experience, Expertise and Status:** the importance of getting the 'right' people on the partnership was emphasised because of the role of personal relationships in partnership development. Regular engagement of high level political representation was considered to be important but the question of power imbalances was also raised.
- **Leadership:** local councils have taken the lead in most instances, although efforts have been made in some to share that role within sub-groups.
- **Accountability and Reporting:** accountability is a major source of confusion and major tensions exist between single and collaborative forms. The relationship to other partnerships is not clear in many cases, and the task of 'holding people to account' needs further attention.
- **Servicing and Resourcing:** this burden has fallen, in the opinion of local Councils, disproportionately on them. Partnership processes require servicing, support and resources and these remain as important issues for many local partnerships.
- **Training:** partnership working requires a distinct set of competencies that are different to managing in conventional organisational hierarchies. There was little evidence of a coherent and sustained approach to building these capacities at both an individual or group level.

- Organisation and Profile: although most community strategy partnerships were seen as being efficient in terms of organisational arrangements some concerns focused on the lack of forward planning, the dominance of the council in agenda-setting and the ephemeral attendance of some representatives and constant delegation. In terms of overall profile, there were issues relating to the lack of awareness of community strategy matters, poor communication, and most worryingly, a lack of penetration of issues into local councils and other major public bodies. The locus of ownership was seen to be narrow and there was a disjuncture between service departments and the corporate centre in terms of interest.
- Partnership Performance: a number of community strategy partnerships recognised the importance of assessing the quality of the process outcomes they generated through working together, including trust, collaborative capability and inclusiveness. Partnership health checks were for this purpose.

Model 4: Multi-Level Governance

S.27 One role of a community strategy is as a mechanism to mediate and manage the relationships between different levels of governance. Community strategies are conveniently placed between the lower level of Community and Town Councils and the higher levels of the region, nation, UK and Europe.

- Welsh Assembly Government and Local Government: a number of assertions were made in relation to the Welsh Assembly that inferred that it was producing too many strategies and that these lacked coherence and consistency at a local level. The extent to which there is integration across Welsh Assembly government on major issues such as Communities First, Health, Social Care and Well Being, and the Wales Spatial Plan is also open to some scrutiny. Equally, there is evidence to suggest that awareness and recognition of community strategies is only loosely embedded in some divisions. It is difficult to see how individual or the collective body of community strategies are helping to inform or change national priorities. One positive development in the relationship between national and local government that should assist community strategies is the proposal for plan rationalisation. The new arrangements formally ascribe the over-arching local strategic role to community strategies, and allow local authorities considerable flexibility in terms of how they design and implement local service plans which are the key delivery mechanisms. Policy agreements and new performance management frameworks with shared outcome measures are policy instruments that need to be integrated with community strategies.
- Community Strategies and other Public Bodies: the merger of key ASPBs with Welsh Assembly government affords national government more control over the type of engagement with local community strategy partnerships in the future. The WLGA has to date focused its attention on other more pressing aspects of the local government modernisation agenda. This is now changing with its focus on community leadership and the future development of local government. The Wales Audit Office is an important player in the context of community strategies, both in terms of regulation but particularly in terms of improvement.
- Community Strategies and UK Government: a few public bodies operating in Wales such as the Police are currently accountable to UK government. This inhibits local flexibility.

- Community Strategies and Regional Perspectives: there is no evidence in the first round of community strategies of collaboration with adjoining authorities on common policy issues. This is set to change with the Wales Spatial Plan and the implications it has for regional levels of organisation. If the six new spatial divisions become influential in terms of determining policy priorities and resource allocation, community strategies could become marginalised. To avoid this, efforts need to be taken to integrate the two frameworks.
- Community Strategies and Community and Town Councils: interests representing Community and Town Councils considered that they were not being fully acknowledged in the community strategy process, and their role was being squeezed by direct participatory methods. As a part of the formal democratic system, they have a legitimate part to play in any effective engagement and governance arrangements.

Model 5: Learning

S.28 This model is premised on the view that strategic management is essentially a process of individual and collective learning over time. It suggests that there are limits on the ability to devise and implement deliberate strategies and that, in the context of complex initiatives such as community strategies, strategy should be emergent with the role of leadership being to facilitate learning throughout all levels and sections of the organisations. There are useful concepts in the literature around notions of learning - tacit and explicit and single and double loop - and of the learning organisation. In many ways, learning has been one of the major products of the community strategy process so far. It has occurred as a result of enhanced communication and exposure to others, networking, meetings and other forms of formal and informal exchanges. In the future, the main issue is how to formalise and promote this learning through coherent learning strategies at individual, organisational and inter-organisational levels.

Model 6: Public Relations

S.29 This final model is a description of what a number of stakeholders frankly considered to be the purpose of a community strategy as currently constituted. In this model community strategies are cosmetic documents serving a public relations function and adding little value to local public management.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

S.30 The concluding chapter pulls out the main lessons for practice and reflects on the added value of community strategies. In terms of the former, the discussion centres on the following:

- Strategic management and the policy process: the approach to community strategies is based on a strategic planning model. This model has a number of inherent difficulties which centre on its over-formalisation, its predetermination and its separation between the formulation and implementation stages. Many of these problems are already evident in the evaluation. There are many other approaches to strategic management that emphasise entrepreneurship, learning, culture and political processes. It is important that the value and potential of these other approaches are explored.

- **Implementation and Performance:** the timing of this study was such that comparatively little evidence was able to be collected on implementation and performance. Therefore, the conclusions reflect existing practice and literature rather than learning on the ground. A few messages are clear. The policy process should be seen as an integrated one and not one consisting of a set of distinct and linear stages; and implementation and performance are dependent on the main purpose that underpins the community strategy.
 - The implementation challenge of the rational planning model is dependent on being able to specify clear and consistent strategic goals, to construct an outcome focused performance framework, to build an inter-organisational delivery structure, to negotiate clear forms of accountability and to shape resource allocation processes.
 - Working in partnership requires an understanding of what that actually means to different organisations, and involves addressing and resolving a number of important questions that relate to the role, function and purpose of the partnerships; the representation of the group; appropriate and effective leadership style; organisation; resourcing and arrangements for servicing; accountability and governance; individual and group training and overall performance.
 - Engaging with people and communities requires a plurality of methodologies appropriate to involve people in different roles; techniques need to be more creative and innovative particularly in the context of those sections of the community who are disengaged with formal political processes; there needs to be a better understanding of the tensions between representative and participatory democracy, a more seamless, continuous, co-ordinated and transparent approach to public involvement; and lastly a commitment to funding the process.
 - Managing performance and outcomes is complex. There is the question of timescale - arrangements for gauging progress against 10-15 year time horizons and frameworks for management performance within the timeframes of action plans. Critically, the type of performance management undertaken needs to reflect the prevailing model of change adopted for the community strategy.
 - Community strategies as multilevel governance concerns efforts to secure co-ordination across organisational boundaries and tiers of government. The search is for coherence, integration and complementarity to ensure the efficient and effective use of limited resources. The key principles of an effective framework include openness and transparency, leadership and commitment, participation and stakeholder involvement, efficient knowledge management and specific institutional mechanisms to steer integration. Some elements of this exist in some form for community strategies, in others it is deficient.
 - Organisational learning and capacity building are important outcomes to emerge from the community strategy process so far. The key issue now is how to further develop this through formal strategies designed to promote individual and collective learning, particularly on an inter-organisational basis.
- **Leadership for Community Strategies:** leadership is a critical factor in the evolution of community strategies. It has implications that permeate all facets of the process, structure, people, culture and strategy. The literature

on leadership is extensive but contested which unfortunately offers conflicting messages about the right styles and approaches in different situations. Current debates centre on the effectiveness of catalytic and empowering styles as opposed to more directive and strong leadership. Both are likely to be important, particularly in the delivery of the local authority's community leadership role, and the balance of each will depend on circumstances, context and task.

S.31 Undoubtedly, community strategies are one of the most complex strategic management challenges facing local government. Their breadth and purpose can be overwhelming and it is difficult for them to add value in already congested policy spaces. The absence of an associated resource allocation framework and the questionable status of community strategy partnerships represent considerable barriers for their future development. The evidence from this evaluation indicates that community strategies have not yet made a significant impact on local and national governance. There are concerns over power and profile, a failure to change the way agencies do business, an absence of strategic prioritisation, a view that things like partnership working and community engagement would have happened anyway, that change is only occurring at the margins of organisations, and that community strategy partnerships are primarily advisory and cannot invoke executive action. The future of community strategies is uncertain unless more energy, focus and commitment are invested by a whole range of stakeholders involved in their preparation and delivery.

Recommendations

1. Welsh Community Planning Officer's Network

The Welsh Community Planning Officer's Network should consider widening its membership to include practitioners from a range of policy areas and agencies other than local government

2. Resources for Co-ordination (for local government and Community Strategy Partnerships)

We understand the arguments on both sides for resources to fund the costs of the co-ordination and servicing of community strategy processes. Our balanced view is that central government should not be expected to accompany every new initiative with extra resources. Community strategies are a legitimate responsibility of local government, the costs of which should be met via more effective and collaborative forms of working.

3. Revised Guidance (for Welsh Assembly Government)

There is a case for revising the statutory guidance to take account of the policy changes that have occurred since it was originally issued. However, we consider that this should avoid being overly prescriptive in form as no amount of central prescription will substitute for informed and talented local proponents of community strategy practice and management. However, whilst we do not recommend the creation of more prescriptive guidance, we do recommend the provision of more information providing examples and case studies of the community strategy process in action.

4. Capacity Building and Knowledge Transfer (for Welsh Assembly Government and local government)

We believe that considerable investment is necessary in capacity building, network development, skills training and knowledge transfer around key elements of community strategies such as working in partnership, methods of citizen involvement and integrated policy making. This is best achieved in partnership between different levels of government and different sectors, and could attract specific funding from Welsh Assembly Government in the short term.

5. Statutory Duties (for Welsh Assembly Government)

Although there is a clear case for a greater commitment and involvement of different partners in the community strategy process, our view is that this is not necessarily achieved through an extension of statutory duties. The notion of community strategies lies squarely in the realms of a local authority community leadership role, and effective partnership working is more likely to be achieved by organisations motivated to participate through a recognition of collective interests and a commitment to citizen-centred services.

6. Clarity of purpose (for Community Strategy Partnerships)

This evaluation has highlighted the multi-purpose nature of community strategies. We do not presume to suggest which is right and which is wrong. However, we are strongly of the view that there needs to be a much sharper focus and negotiated consensus about purpose and role within the community strategy partnerships. Different purposes require different approaches to implementation and evaluation.

7. Integrated strategic management process (for Community Strategy Partnerships)

The process of strategic management must be integrated with robust implementation structures and outcome-focused frameworks built into the process at the design stages. Community strategy partnerships need to carefully review the merits of applying strategic planning models to community strategies. Alternative models of strategic management should be fully explored.

8. Visions (for Community Strategy Partnerships)

Community strategy visions need to be unique, realistic and capable of being operationalised. They also need to reflect the agreed priorities of central and local government, but this is a difficult balance to achieve.

9. Strategic Priorities (for Community Strategy Partnerships)

Community strategies need to provide a framework for strategic prioritisation to help re-shape or re-configure the resource allocation priorities of key public agencies towards a new consensus.

10. Co-ordination or Integration (for Community Strategy Partnerships)

Although a number of examples of integrated service planning and delivery were noted during the course of this evaluation (albeit not part of the community planning process), it is perhaps an unrealistic aspiration to expect that community strategies can be the catalyst for this form of working across a wide swath of public services. Integrated services with perhaps pooled budgets and joint performance accountability frameworks are notoriously difficult to broker. In the near future, community strategies should realistically strive for better co-ordination of services and an identification of gaps in services rather than integration.

11. Using Exemplars (for Community Strategy Partnerships)

The movement in many community strategy partnerships towards the identification of a small number of action projects to act as exemplars of good practice is understandable given, firstly the difficulty of achieving whole-systems change, and secondly the desire to be associated with clearly attributable results from community strategy interventions. It represents a legitimate bottom up approach to policy change. However, in themselves, they are likely only to contribute on the margins unless the lessons from them are mainstreamed into

organisational budgets and priorities. For this to happen, the lessons from other policy initiatives suggest that the mechanisms to effect mainstreaming need to be considered at the outset.

12. Horizontal Integration (for Community Strategy Partnerships)

It is in this area that community strategies can really stamp their mark, and techniques such as policy integration tools, meetings of co-ordinators, common membership on partnerships should be given attention here.

13. Managing Cross Cutting Issues (for Community Strategy Partnerships)

The conversion of good intentions in relation to equality, the Welsh language and sustainable development into meaningful action requires a concerted effort to integrate cross cutting perspectives into the design, delivery and evaluation of community strategies. Although policy integration tools have a part to play they need to be accompanied by a range of other measures to be effective including training, awareness raising, facilitative leadership and commitment, changes to organisational cultures, the involvement of champions, evaluatory frameworks and adequate resourcing.

14. Outcome-Focus (for Community Strategy Partnerships)

This approach to community strategies must be supported by outcome-focused frameworks to enable strategic level evaluation.

15. Multiple identities (for Community Strategy Partnerships)

Most community strategy partnerships have recognised that citizens present with a number of different identities which need to be addressed in different ways. Also the purposes of public involvement can be varied as can the degrees to which individuals are empowered through particular techniques. There certainly is a need for greater clarity around purpose, and a need to reflect on whether existing approaches offer the prospect of a co-evolution of solutions between people and public agencies.

16. Innovations in practice (for Community Strategy Partnerships)

Whilst there are examples of innovation and creativity in approaches to public engagement, traditional approaches dominated the development of many community strategies. Without championing the virtues of innovation for its own sake, more thought and experience needs to be brought to bear to introduce methodologies that can contribute to a more constructive dialogue between citizens and service providers.

17. Capacity building and Resources (for Community Strategy Partnerships and Welsh Assembly Government)

People and communities need the skills and resources to enable them to converse on more equal terms with public servants and professionals.

This requires resources for capacity building programmes, community development approaches and people to facilitate the process.

18. Integrating participatory and representative approaches (for Community Strategy Partnerships)

The key challenge facing participatory approaches to public engagement encouraged through community strategies clearly rests in the receptiveness of the elected councillors to the challenge to their representative roles. It is highly unlikely that participatory models will replace representative structures or that participatory structures can exist in a vacuum. It is advisable that attempts should be made to dovetail the two and promote greater participatory democracy as a method of both improving the effectiveness of local councillors and enhancing local democracy. The success or otherwise of this is likely to unfold particularly in the context of local area committees and forums.

19. Engagement through the policy process (for Community Strategy Partnerships)

Public involvement should not be viewed as a one-off event. Continuity and transparency are key components in a strategy making process that needs to devise appropriate opportunities to engage with people and communities on a continuous and open basis. Thought also needs to be given to co-ordinating engagement events irrespective of organisation or purpose. The new local development plan is an example of where public consultation needs to be integrated and co-ordinated.

20. Role and Purpose (for Community Strategy Partnerships)

The effectiveness of a number of community strategy partnerships is currently diminished by a lack of clarity around role and purpose. Whilst a degree of ambiguity may have been acceptable around the design stage; delivery requires clear commitment on behalf of all partners. Hence, the extent to which the partnership influences, binds, commits or merely informs its constituents, are matters that need urgent resolution.

21. Community Leadership (for local government)

Community strategies provide the ideal vehicle for demonstrating a local council's community leadership role. This requires a measure of sensitivity to the roles, responsibilities and functions of other public agencies, private sector organisations and the voluntary sector. It demands a style of political and executive leadership that is facilitative and catalytic rather than directive, controlling and stifling. This has yet to be realised in some areas and could benefit from skilled support and development from key bodies such as the WLGA.

22. Accountability and Governance (for Community Strategy Partnerships)

Following on from clarity around role, decisions have to be made about accountability and governance arrangements. They need to be tighter,

more transparent and related to suitable performance management frameworks. These should not attempt to duplicate the monitoring functions of other partnerships but be tailored to the projected outcomes of the community strategy.

23. Reviews (for Community Strategy Partnerships)

Working in partnership is complex, demanding and dynamic. It requires constant reappraisal in view of changing circumstances, legislation and experience. Robust partnerships will need to have in place arrangements to regularly review their performance both in terms of substance and process.

24. Policy Integration at National Level (for Welsh Assembly Government)

There is evidence to suggest that major Assembly initiatives such as Communities First, Health, Social Care and Well Being Strategies, Local Development Plans and Community Strategies are not as coherent and integrated as might be expected particularly by stakeholders who face the challenge of making the connections (or not) at local level. The proposal for plan rationalisation is a constructive step in the right direction. Whether the aim of a fully integrated policy system is attainable is open to question. Perhaps, in the shorter term more effective co-ordination between different policy streams would be a more realistic proposition.

25. Location of Function (for Welsh Assembly Government)

Consideration needs to be given to whether the Local Government Policy Division is the best location to discharge the community strategy function. Given the cross cutting nature of the agenda, a strong case can be made to locate it at the corporate centre.

26. National Outcome and Performance Management Frameworks (for Welsh Assembly Government, the WLGA and the WAO)

Welsh Assembly Government, the WLGA and the WAO can collectively assist the development of community strategies by helping to devise collaborative and consistent performance management frameworks which lean towards outcome measurements. The model of Local Area Agreements currently being piloted in England, and the recent experience of Local Public Service agreements in England, could be explored in this context.

27. Role of the WLGA (for the Welsh Local Government Association)

Given the importance of community strategies to the community leadership role of local authorities, the WLGA might consider ways in which it can enhance its role in terms of advice, guidance, support and training on aspects of community planning as part of an ongoing programme of work supporting the development of community leadership in Wales.

28. Regionalism (for Welsh Assembly Government and Local Government)

There is a powerful argument for considering public services at a level below national government and above that of local government. Many activities such as economic development, tourism and waste management do not respect local boundaries, and mechanisms are already in place to consider them at regional or sub-regional levels. The introduction of the 6 areas of the Wales Spatial Plan gives added prominence and impetus to this trend and one that community strategies ignore at their peril. If the spatial areas become frameworks for deliberating upon strategic priorities and resource allocation processes, community strategies risk being marginalised unless they are able to offer meaningful contribution. Clearer advice is necessary on this future relationship.

29. Continuous Learning (for Community Strategy Partnerships)

Strategies should be devised to promote individual and collective learning within an inter-organisational environment.

Further copies can be obtained from:

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