

**Scrutiny and Audit Committee –Community Planning Investigation
Collated Evidence**

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Lead Service Briefing – 16 Feb



Aberdeenshire Community Planning Partnership

Working together
for the best
quality of life
for everyone in
Aberdeenshire



WHAT IS COMMUNITY PLANNING?

The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 describes the two main aims as:

- *making sure people and communities are engaged in the decisions made on public services which affect them;*
- *a commitment from organisations to work together, not apart, in providing better public services*

Put simply: Community planning gives people a say in how public services are delivered in their area. Through a range of local groups, people can influence and inform decisions on what is needed by when and by whom

History

- Aberdeenshire CPP formed in 1998 – only public sector partners
- First Aberdeenshire Community Plan published in 2000 – joint vision
- Local Government in Scotland Act (2003) - provided a statutory basis for community planning
- Evolved to include community councils, rural partnerships, voluntary sector, others
- 6 Local Community Planning Groups

Partners

- Aberdeenshire Council
- NHS Grampian
- Grampian Police
- Grampian Fire and Rescue
- Scottish Enterprise
- Community Councils
- NESTRANS
- Local Rural Partnerships
- Aberdeenshire Voluntary Action
- ACSEF
- Aberdeenshire Alcohol and Drug Partnership
- Skills Development Scotland

- Aberdeenshire Youth Council

Governance & Structure

COMMUNITY PLANNING BOARD: Strategic; Scrutiny; Spend

COMMUNITY PLANNING EXECUTIVE: Tactical; Develops;
Coordinates; Implements; Monitors CP & SOA

TASK AND FINISH GROUPS: Issue Specific

MULTI-AGENCY PARTNERSHIPS: Community Health;
Community Safety; Tackling Poverty & Inequalities

LOCAL COMMUNITY PLANNING GROUPS: Tackle local
Issues; Develop and progress local community plans

COMMUNITY ACTION PLANS: Planning for Real;
Making it real

Elected member involvement

Community Planning Board – senior political group members; chaired by council Leader

Local CP Groups – each Area Chair is invited to be a member

Local Community Plans – Based on previous Area Plans with additions from partners. Area Committees are involved in the production of and monitoring of the plans

Where We Are Now

- Much progress since community planning established
 -
- Single Outcome Agreement 2007 - Outcome based approach has helped focus and refine partnership approach
 -
- Aberdeenshire one of first to link SOA to CP through local outcomes
 -
- 2010 SOA report favourably received by Scottish Government
 -
- SOA formally integrated with new Aberdeenshire Community Plan 2011-15 – monitoring tool
- Local Community Plans 2010 -14 – revised every two years

How can we Improve?

Audit of Best Value and Community Planning 2007

Recommended:

- Council needs to provide clearer leadership
- Council active in seeking community views but could be more effective in informing policy and service delivery

Improvement Plan:

- Elected members provide more active leadership of CP
- Work more closely with partners in doing so
- More co-ordinated and systematic approach to community

Engagement activities

Actions:

- Engagement with Area Committees
- Increase Councillor awareness
- Partnership community engagement plan

Aberdeenshire Performs

- Council's new performance reporting and management framework
 - Continuous improvement and best value
 - Links all of council's plans and strategies through 'Golden Thread'
- Explicit links made from Service Plans through SOA to Community Plan
- New community plan formally approved by service directors
 - CP performance reporting to follow same format
 - Local community plans to be brought into line

Working in Partnership

- Decisions taken at appropriate level of CPP – whether Local CP Group, Executive, or Board level
- Board and Executive meet quarterly, Local CP Groups meet approximately every two months
 - Issue-specific partnership groups can be formed
 - Board has never required to use voting option
- Partnership operates with minimal budget from public sector partners
 - Partnerships draw down other funding streams

Community involvement

- 6 Local Community Plans - input from local communities, Area Committees, community councils
 - Community Action Plans – communities across Aberdeenshire supported to plan for their own future
- Encourage communities to get involved in engagement and consultation activities
 - Marr Ward Forums, Aberdeenshire Citizens' Panel
- Build on interest – communities could take more active role in developing assets and local service delivery.

Building on successful initiatives

- Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership – efforts made by ATP to become more integrated with the CPP, community-led trusts linking in with Local CP Groups
- Planning for Real – communities often supported by members of Local CP Groups e.g. Local Rural Partnerships, Community Learning and Development
 - Tackling Poverty and Inequalities – work continues
 - Reaching Out Project
 - Hotspot Peterhead
 - Maud Village project – NHS/Dial-a-Bus/BITES
 - Community Safety partnership
 - Community Health Partnership
 - Pitcaple Environmental Project

Communication, awareness and promotion

Current tools / mechanisms:

- Aberdeenshire community planning website
(www.ouraberdeenshire.org.uk)
 - Monthly community planning e-bulletin
- Community planning newsletters – led by CVS
 - Consistent brand

Top Down: New Aberdeenshire Community Plan 2011-2015

Bottom-up: local level e.g. through Local Community Plans,
Community Action Plans

Challenges: Sustainability of community planning

- Financial challenges – economy, reduced funding, reduced resources
 - Opportunity rather than threat
- Approach makes best use of existing resources - minimal extra resource required
 - Shared services/premises – Change Fund
- Community empowerment / ownership – assets/services
 - Positive outcomes for Aberdeenshire
 - General election
 - Public sector reform

And finally:

- More strategic role for Board e.g. Christie Commission
- Board approval of national initiatives e.g. local implementation of Health Change Fund
- More focussed approach at CP Executive level – discussions around single issues e.g. youth engagement; employability; Health
 - Greater emphasis on shared delivery
- Drive and facilitate partnership approach within member organisations – closer links to services
 - Prioritise partnership activities
 - Shared budgets?
- Greater influence from local areas/partnerships
 - Capture and share best practice/expertise

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**SCRUTINY AND AUDIT COMMITTEE
Community Planning Investigation – Evidence Gathering Session
Wednesday 16 February, 2011
Woodhill House, Aberdeen
Community Planning – Lead Service Briefing**

Present: Councillors Bellarby (PB), Allan (AA), Duncan (SD), Fleming, (TF), Hood (FH), Sullivan (MS), Thomas (RT), and Tait (IT),

Officers: Jan McRobbie, Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny and Audit) and Jackie Buchanan (Committee Officer)

Doctor Colette Backwell, Assistant Chief Executive,(CB), Mr Chris White, (Buchan Area Manager), (CW), Mr Willie Munro,(Kincardine and Mearns Area Manager), (WM), Mrs Erin Wood and Mr Ally MacLeod, Corporate Policy Officers (Community Planning).

Dr Colette Backwell gave a powerpoint presentation to the Committee, as detailed above.

Any questions and relative answers provided are included as below:

IT I know of occasions where reports have gone to both a Council Policy Committee for approval and the Community Planning Board. What if the Board didn't approve a report which had already been approved by the Council Policy Committee?

CB It tends to be the case that such reports go before the Community Planning Board to be noted rather than approved. The Community Planning Board tends only to get involved in approving a report / initiative when the funding comes direct from the Scottish Government and is channelled through the CP Board rather than through local authority. There are occasions, however, where the Community Board will be in a position to approve a project which is partly funded by the local authority.

E.g. Fairer Scotland Fund.

IT You mention that CP Performance Reporting is to follow the same format. Does this also apply to the partnership organisations?

CB Yes it does. In fact if anything it is more appropriate for some partners such as police, fire and NHS as generally they have a much more rigorous target-focused reporting system in place so they are used to working in this way. In relation to Local Community Plans, the situation is a bit more challenging. We are still having the discussion as to whether such a rigorous framework would be appropriate.

SAC asked for further details on the Marr Ward Forums.

WM Three Ward Forums were set up in Marr which input into the Local Community Planning Group. There is a mixture of community representatives and public sector partners and this facilitates coverage of a wide area. They

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have been very successful and could be rolled out further. The Forums are chaired by a local Councillor. Other Community Groups are involved, not just Community Councils.

CW I, for my part, would say that although they have been very successful in Marr, this set up would not work everywhere.

CB Yes I would agree one size does not fit all. It really depends what would work locally.

IT Is there a connection between the Community Planning Groups and the Area Committee?

CB The feedback appears to indicate that the relationship is not working well. It is difficult to tell whether this is a perception or the reality.

WM In Kincardine and Mearns a Community Planning Group was set up locally. Although the legislation provides that the Council must lead such a group we need to get a balance and make sure that such a group is not Council dominated. There is a joint meeting every year between the Community Planning Group and the Area Committee which is very important. The Community Planning Group plays a representative role so there needs to be a conduit between that Group and the Area Committee. Consequently the Chair of the Area Committee informs members about what's happening in relation to the Community Planning Group. In relation to other partner organisations, they're represented at a senior level on the Community Planning Group.

MS How does this fit in with the Community Development Groups (CDGs)?

WM There is a lot of good community planning activity generally and CDGs are a good example. The subject scope of CDGs is recreation, leisure community learning and development, arts and culture. It is a good example of Community Planning within the scope of those subjects where service users and interest groups can come together with service providers to look at hard evidence and feedback from the community to determine needs and then work together to best meet the needs. There is a requirement, however, to improve linkage between planning groups, local area committees and CDGs to ensure that we don't reinvent the wheel.

TF Mearns Community Council is community led.

WM The Mearns Area Partnership was set up in the early 1990s. A number of locations across the Grampian area were flagged up as having a level of deprivation. Representatives from the NHS, Council Services and various representatives from communities came together and identified need so as to target resources. It led to the pooling of resources of different organisations. It is a good example of Community Planning in action. We now have various area wide Rural Partnerships. There is a potential for duplication and we are aware of this. Where such a potential is identified, groups need to talk this through at the Local Community Planning Group and agree who is doing what.

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FH All areas seems to have a Rural Partnership other than Garioch, why is that?

CW It is based around personalities. The impetus really needs to come from the local community. Not all partnerships are at the same stage of development. The Garioch issue is an interesting one. Initially there was an Insh initiative and also work in locations such as Kintore and Kemnay. So the building blocks are there, but to-date, it has not come together as a partnership.

FH There is an excellent Community Planning Officer in Garioch.

WM There requires to be a need from within the community for such a partnership. Historically it was a way to source funding and this has led to the creation of various partnerships. Perhaps the current situation is bit cluttered and not ideal.

As a Council, however, we need to work with what is there already and we can't really come in and decide which partnerships should or should not exist unless these are directly set up by the Council. We can decide whether or not to fund them but that may not alter their existence or role.

CB I agree. The impetus needs to come from a need in the community. There is a lot of good practice around Rural Partnerships.

IT I understood that the Banff Partnership had obtained a lot of funding. At an Area Committee meeting, I asked that the Council explore having a Community Planning Partnership in the Fraserburgh area as there was interest among local people in Fraserburgh to set this up. The Area Committee voted against this proposal. I, therefore, suggested that the Banffshire Partnership be re-designated to include the whole of Banff and Buchan. Understandably, the Chair said that this would not be possible as their primary interest was in Banff and they did not want to dilute funding.

Various initiatives have been set up in Fraserburgh but to my mind many of them turn into talking shops and some simply disappear. As I see it, Community Planning is not working well here. An example of this is that the Area Committee are asked annually to approve the Community Plan proposals. My experience is that they come to us so late that it is too late to change anything. I note that the Chair of Area Committee sits on the area/local community planning group. Why is this appointment not rotated around the whole Committee?

CW The Chair is the logical person with the Vice substituting on occasion. There is no reason why other members cannot act as a substitute either.

IT I did not mean for members to substitute for the Chair but for the representations from the Area Committee to be rotated around the Area Committee on a formal basis.

CW I think it was simply decided that the Chair would be the best person.

CB I think we would need to look back in order to check the rationale for this.

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WM If I recall it was because it was recognised that there was a need to get Councillors better engaged with Community Planning. It was therefore recommended that the Chair be the appropriate representative but this was not essential. It is a matter for the Area Committee to appoint somebody.

IT It is not prescribed therefore that the Chair be the representative?

WM To be honest this would need to be checked.

CB This discussion has been very interesting. As I see it, there are two main factors in the success of Community Planning Bodies; firstly you need to have the correct personalities involved and secondly community support is essential.

MS Community Planning Groups, Area Committees, Community Development Groups, Community Councils and Area Partnerships, are there too many groups?

CB I recognise the point you are making. There is a cluttered landscape. In my own view it does need to be rationalised. We need to ask, however, how many of these groups fall within “our” responsibility. Many of the groups do in fact establish themselves.

MS Most of the organisations involved in these groups are public bodies. The transport companies e.g. the bus and train companies are not public and so have completely different priorities/agendas, their main concern being to make money for their shareholders. In my opinion, NESTRANS is a bit of a toothless tiger. Until something can be done about this, there will be major issues in relation to the transport infrastructure. The transport system is a major part of community planning but it is not integrated. There is no joined up writing in relation to the bus service and the train service.

PB What part does transport play in Community Planning?

CB Transport is the biggest single challenge we face, it is so fundamental. It impacts on, amongst other things the ability of the unemployed, particularly young people, to take up employment. The question is how do we deal with this. One way is for communities to lobby the transport providers.

MS In my opinion lobbying doesn't work. Integration just isn't there.

WM This is a very interesting one. In order for Community Planning to work properly we need to look at things like transport. The evidence shows that community engagement plays a big part.

We also need to infiltrate the bigger public sector organisations in order to have an influence. The re-opening of the Laurencekirk Station is a prime example of Community Planning in action. At the time its reopening did not appear in any

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strategies, however, continued efforts by the community to engage with appropriate officers and politicians and to conduct their own studies to provide evidence led to a situation where the reopening of the station became part of the strategy and was implemented. Without community involvement, this might not have happened.

IT The Council has a Public Transport Unit who liaise with travel operators so this exists already. We already have an Area Bus Forum, perhaps we should have a Travel Forum?

PB A Travel Forum does in fact exist already.

IT Is there sufficient fiscal control in the Council in relation to funding projects/groups in the community?

CB We recently looked at the issue of financial control and you yourselves as a Committee have looked at duplicate funding in public sector groups. All indications are that duplicate funding does not exist as there are fairly rigorous systems in place to counter this. We are currently putting the funding of all Community Groups in one place so that it is easier to monitor this situation.

There are little pots of money given out to a huge number of groups and it is important to remember that while the sums may seem small, every £1.00 donated can bring in additional funds of between £2.50 and £10.00 as it opens up doors to other sources of funding. The Scottish Government have encouraged CVS and the Volunteer Centre to come together. Initially this caused major problems at a community planning level as other third sector bodies felt excluded but the situation has been rationalised by way of a Service Level Agreement so each organisation knows what it is to do.

AA Community Planning worked very well in Westhill through the Planning for Real initiative. It seems now, however, to have lost momentum. What could they do next? They need guidance. There also seems to be a gap. Perhaps a Rural Partnership would be good?

CB Some initiatives are not badged as Community Planning but are in fact community planning. We need to ask the question why the Making it for Real initiative stopped in Westhill and if there are still local issues to be addresses before considering whether further action is needed.

AA Various issues have contributed towards this, a lot of them outwith the control of the actual group.

CW Groups need to focus on issues that they can control.

WM Groups go through many cycles. Some cycles involve actually facilitating things but at other times groups simply need to adopt a more monitoring/observation role.

CB In my opinion there cannot be too much discussion on these things. We need to ensure, however, that we manage perception. Community Planning is

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intended to provide a framework to facilitate the delivery of public services locally but not actually to provide the services. The initial impetus and then the support to carry it through must come from the community.

IT It is clear that officers are aware that things are not perfect in Community Planning.

CB Local Community Planning in Aberdeenshire is one of the best developed in Scotland. We experience issues locally but may sometimes forget the successes and it does evolve over time. There is no blueprint.

WM If I could just give you brief details on the Community Safety Partnership, (CSP), which was set up in 1998. All 32 local authority areas in Scotland set up such partnerships as we were encouraged to do so by the Scottish Government on the back of a similar scheme in England which was successful. We set up a Steering Group and a representative from the Council's Management Team was the Chair. Various bodies were involved including the Police, Fire Service, NHS, Crimestoppers and the Fiscal Service. The local Community Safety Groups initially mirrored the six areas we had at the time.

The action plan that we came up with was pretty wide ranging. There was a requirement to prioritise spending on need. The Scottish Government asked us to concentrate on up to 3 themes which would have been identified locally on the basis of evidence. It carried out annual audits and now more recently a strategic assessment, and current themes are Promoting Safety and Preventing Accidents, (in particular road safety for young drivers), Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour, Violence Reduction. The local Community Safety Groups were asked to do this. Some of partners drifted because the themes were not relevant to them. When Community Planning became a statutory requirement, the CSP was used as a model and influence Community Planning structure.

CSP is more focused on determining priority based on need. There is a very robust process to determine need. Any initiatives are monitored and they have been successful in reducing antisocial behaviour and focusing on educating young drivers. We try to ensure that there is no duplication / cross-over with other groups. The Chairs of the local Safety Groups sit on the local Community Planning Groups and vice versa. The CSP comes together with relevant groups and focus on what can make a difference. It has been integrated into the Community Planning framework and works with other partnerships including CDGs, and the Alcohol and Drugs Partnership. There is a need to share information.

MS Is SCARF a member?

WM No but it could be invited to attend meetings if there were any relevant issues.

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18 February, 2011

BUCHAN

MAUD

- Part 1** Dawn Brodie, Buchan Development Partnership
- Part 2** Visit to BITES, the computer training social enterprise next door to the Café
- Part 3** Visit to Buchan Dial a Community Bus the community transport project across from the Cafe
- Part 4** Visit to Maud Village Trust Resource Centre next door

PETERHEAD

Visit to the Hotspot

- Part 5(a)** Tour of the Building - Coffee/Internet Bar, Garden Project, Displays of work and Sandra Ross, Community Learning & Development - Reaching Out Project Liz Scott, Development Worker - Theatre Modo, Twilight Basketball, Confidence to Cook, Community Signature and developing our partnership Sandra Ross, Community Learning & Development - The International Association including the Public Inclusion Forum
- Part 5(b)** Ayotunde Bisi, Adviser – Healthpoint
- Part 6** Karen Brown, Project Manager - 2Reuse Project

**Community Planning Investigation – Evidence Gathering Session Wednesday
18 February, 2011
10.00 hours Community Planning – Site Visit to Buchan**

Present: Councillors Bellarby (PB), Allan (AA), Fleming (TF), Hood (FH), Sullivan (MS), and Tait (IT)

Officers: Jan McRobbie, Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny and Audit) and Jackie Buchanan (Committee Officer)

Part 1. SITE VISIT TO BUCHAN DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP, MAUD

The Committee met up at the on-site Old Mart café Maud. Evidence was provided by Chris White, Area Manager (CW), Steph Swales, Community Planning Officer (SS), Maureen Stephen, Area Committee Officer (MS), and Dawn Brodie, Development Officer with Buchan Development Partnership, (DB).

CW The Development at Maud is one of the biggest Community Planning ventures undertaken in Aberdeenshire. It was very much led by the community and was not imposed by the Council. It started approximately ten years ago before Community Planning had an official title.

DB Buchan Development Partnership is one of a number of rural partnerships in Aberdeenshire. It is very community led and managed. It was established in 2000 and is a company limited by guarantee with charitable status. There is a Board of Directors and a Support Group. In total there are between 110 and 115 member groups across Buchan including Community Councils, Community Halls and organisations such as the Scouts, Sea Cadets etc. The Partnership encompasses organisations both small and large. We have been selected as one of the good practice examples in the Scottish Government's Scottish Community Empowerment Action Plan. We have an online tool box which is an online resource for communities to use providing helpful advice and links. We also produce a bulletin. We have a good relationship with Shell due to the location of their St Fergus Gas Plant in the area. Shell finance our quarterly forums where various community groups come together to meet. There is always a good informal atmosphere and they allow us to exchange ideas and report on initiatives that have been successful as well as those that

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have not worked. We have a Service Level Agreement with Aberdeenshire Council and we have obligations to fulfil in terms of this. As part of the Service Level Agreement, we administer an area top-up budget. As the photos around this room show, BDP have been involved with Community Planning from the start – before the Local Government in Scotland Act came into force. In the early days it was a case of BDP raising awareness of what Community Planning was all about and how they could be involved. Communities do this naturally but Community Planning gave them a formal structure to link it all together. As Buchan Development Partnership, we sit on the Community Planning Executive representing the Local Rural Partnerships and on the Local Community Planning Group. This ensures generally an exchange of information. The Planning for Real Initiative has been ongoing since 2002. We work through a model within a community and have provided action plans for various communities within Buchan. It is a very participative process, any one can attend. We gather information and invite experts to give advice in relation to particular issues so that we can come up with solutions. There is a checklist of who needs to get involved. With financial help from Shell we have established a more formalised action plan. The top four priorities from each Community Plan are included in the Buchan Community Plan.

FH How do you keep the community on board?

DB It is really up to the people in the community themselves. We can facilitate the projects but it is the people in the community who run them. It can take a while but we do encourage them along.

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MS That is a very important question you have asked Councillor. I would say that the support organisations play a very important role in keeping the community involved.

DB Yes, that is right. Communities can do great things but need support. There needs to be long term sustainability and this depends on the people in the community.

IT The B-Bridge Project and the Peterhead Development Trust, how have these worked?

DB They do keep in touch with each other to ensure there is no duplication and they work as efficiently as possible.

IT How much funding do you get from the Council?

DB We are funded through the Service Level Agreement. At the moment, we receive £33,500. We prioritise funding based on need. Communities need to show that there is a need for something and also show a willingness to raise funding themselves.

FH From my experience communities are not good at leveraging in grants. Often they are not aware of grant sources.

DB Our online tool box helps there. You are right though in that funding sources change all the time.

FH Lloyds TSB had a number of grants/funds available. These were closed for a while but have now re-opened again.

DB Yes there have been Road shows promoting these.

IT Do you do any work in Peterhead?

DB Yes but I tend to focus on the rural side of things as others do the urban side.

IT Yes. This links into avoiding duplication of funding.

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CW We need to ensure that there is a different focus for each group.

IT Is there a list providing the composition of local community planning groups across Aberdeenshire?

CW Yes there is.

IG There are big problems around funding. I know of a Community Council that folded recently because of a funding issue.

IT Before the last election there was a presentation given on funding software which was available. This has not been backed up. It needs to be shown to the various communities.

DB To be honest I found the grant funding software quite difficult to work. This why we have a similar thing on our own tool box. It is tailor-made for Buchan/Aberdeenshire.

IT It would be useful to look at that.

DB This site at Maud started with one man coming in to our office and asking about buying Maud Old Mart for the community. He got the mandate to proceed from a packed public meeting and a price of £50,000 was agreed with Aberdeen and Northern Marts for the site. A grant of £45,000 was obtained from the Scottish Land Fund and the Trust managed to raise the remaining £5,000 at short notice. The community has developed the site itself. This has included the garden, the building of the Community Service Centre which houses the community bus, Community Cafe, Units to let and BITES (Buchan IT E-Learning Service). Funding comes in and out at different times. The Trust borrowed money to put up the Community Service Centre building – this was based on a visit the group made to the Social Enterprise Fair in Manchester. The Cornerstone site was then sold off. Through a Scottish

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Government Initiative, the Rural Resource Centre was built. This is owned and managed by the Trust. It has a GP surgery, NHS staff and council staff working there providing a wide range of services. It facilitates a lot of joint working. There is also a community gym which has been very successful. The gym runs a wide variety of classes which encourages a wide range of users. And the trust is now looking at working with the GP to run a GP referral scheme using the gym. The café here opened recently and I would say in relation to its turnover, it is certainly washing its face.

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Part 2. VISIT TO BITES, (BUCHAN IT E-LEARNING SERVICE), MAUD

The Scrutiny and Audit Committee then went on from the café to the adjacent project, Buchan IT & E-Learning Service (BITES) where they met Denise Belshaw, (DB), General Manager. BITES forms part of the development at Maud and comprises a reception area together with a classroom which had ten work stations with full computer facilities for each. Staff are housed in two separate offices, one for DB and the other for trainers.

DB BITES was constituted in 2005. It is a company limited by guarantee and has charitable status. It is now considered a social enterprise. Its ethos is to deliver IT Training in a stress free relaxed environment. Its outcomes are to reduce social isolation, increase confidence, life skills, well-being and belonging, and promote community understanding. BITES is in the last year of a five year Big Lottery, Supporting 21st C Life, funding package of £256,315. Funding was granted to allow BITES to move into the unit within the MVT site, buy equipment, some staff costs and rental for five years. Approximately 1,500 people have received IT training during the past five years. All milestones and outcomes have been met. BITES has been a showcase for BL, (“Big Lottery”) and have a good relationship with our grants officer.

Computers within the training room are set up to offer Microsoft Vista, Microsoft XP and also Microsoft Windows 7 courses. Many of the courses do not make profit, however the team use a Social Enterprise ethos to sell a product, of IT training, to public and private sector customers at FCR plus, (Full Cost Recover plus).

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A recent successful funding application has allowed the BITES team to take the project out into the community and six laptops and associated equipment have been purchased to form a mobile classroom. This will initially be used to deliver a pilot project of IT training at a basic level to people living within Aberdeenshire Council Sheltered housing complexes in St Fergus and Maud, thereby taking ICT into the community. This is a pilot project and will start in March in Maud. As part of an inclusive agenda BITES has encouraged two school pupils who are at the moment not engaging with school to take up a volunteering opportunity and assist with the pilot project. These two young people have been attending BITES regularly for training, to increase confidence and skills, and are therefore already known to the staff. The team see this initiative as fitting in well as part of the Curriculum for Excellence initiative which is developing in schools at the moment. Volunteering gives the young pupils a sense of worth and community understanding whilst helping to build their confidence and self esteem. Following the completion of the pilot project, the equipment will be used to deliver training within other community areas in Aberdeenshire such as community halls and libraries. BITES already works in partnership with the Aberdeenshire Library Service. BITES is governed by a voluntary Board of Governors with currently eight active members on the management team. BITES links into Buchan community planning with regular interaction taking place between Chris White, Maureen Stephen and Steph Swales. BITES has three action items within the Community Planning Programme. The General Manager is invited regularly to the Community Planning Group meetings in Peterhead where she is encouraged to partake of discussion around lifelong learning within the area.

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There are no IT training centres similar to BITES in the area. BITES pay £1,000 per month rental for their unit which is on a five year lease, due for renewal in April 2012. BITES is an ILA accredited centre and has been since 2009. Cost of courses start from as little as £20 for a 2½ hour session and £60 for an eight week course. The management team at BITES is looking toward long term funding and will be applying to BL for future funding, however DB reported there are many other funding opportunities and they will also be investigating them in conjunction with BL. As part of their social enterprise BITES offers a bespoke service to businesses in relation to ICT training both at the Maud facility and onsite at company premises.

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SHELTERED HOUSING PILOT.

To deliver 8 x 3 hour sessions in basic computing for up to six residents at any one time.

Renouard Court, St Fergus
The Haven, Maud

Grant funding received from

- Awards for All £7000.00
- Community Planning Partnership £3500.00
- Shell Small Grants £ 500.00
- TBM £1000.00
- Six Laptops with associated equipment
- Camera with associated equipment
- Wireless printer
- Adaptive aids (as required)
- Software, including anti-virus + internet access
- Stationery etc
- Resource costs
- Presentation tools, Overhead projector / screen (unfunded – potentially Total Oil Marine)
- In-kind engineering services

Once pilot is complete BITES will use as evidence for further grant funding and to deliver training to other homes and within community buildings / schools etc.



©Buchan IT & E-learning Service, Unit 2, Community Service Centre, Maud, Peterhead, AB42 4NH
Telephone (01771) 619181 www.bitesonline.org Recognised Scottish Charity No:
SCO36224

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Part 3. VISIT TO BUCHAN DIAL A COMMUNITY BUS

Scrutiny and Audit Committee then visited the Dial a Community Bus office/premises within the development at Maud where they met Rachel Milne, (RM).

RM I am the General Manager for Buchan Dial a Community Bus (BACB). The project began eleven years ago providing a shopping service for those who could not use public transport. We were 75% grant funded initially although this funding has since reduced. I would like to stress however that community transport is not sustainable, it cannot pay for itself. We do not apologise for this; major commercial bus operators receive grants; they just call them government or local authority bus subsidies! However, we understand that grant reliance must also be sustained in other ways. We opened a social enterprise; DAB Plus c.i.c (Community Interest Company). We obtained community planning funding for market research and saw a niche market. We were able to obtain third sector enterprise funding. Through this funding we have an employee. We approached the Scottish Investment Fund and have obtained funding of £150,000. We have three Aberdeen City contracts which are profitable and three Aberdeenshire contracts which are grant funded. We have a training academy and a taxi.

Currently we are 57% funded but this is to reduce year on year.

PB Has there been any adverse reaction from private business as a result of this service?

RM We keep all our businesses separate from the charitable arm and run them within the DAB plus social enterprise so this does not tend to be a problem.

PB Who does Dial-a-Community Bus actually help?

RM The Dial a Bus service is for all vulnerable people who wouldn't be able to get

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out of their homes otherwise. It gives people independence. Our main aim is to provide that independence rather than the transport.

TF I understand you offer Midas training?

RM Yes at a cost of £70.

TF For Dial a Bus do the public phone here?

For the A2B Laurencekirk service, the public were to phone Woodhill House and this didn't seem to work.

RM When we ran the A2B dialabus for the council we did have some issues there in relation to phoning Woodhill House as locals did not want to phone Aberdeen but it is sorted out now.

RM Can I ask with regard to the Laurencekirk project did the community want the bus service or was simply put on without any consultation?

TF It was put on with no consultation.

RM We feel that projects need to be community led or they won't work.

I must say that there are real funding issues however at the moment. If everything goes to plan and everything is marketed correctly, we should be okay. We are always going to need between 50% and 57% funding, otherwise we can't sustain the service. Our SROI (Social return on Investment) proved that for every £1 that is spent on this project, £3.13 is ploughed back into the community through for example the shopping service.

IT Can I ask how much the bus service would cost from Mintlaw to Fraserburgh?

RM It is about £5 - £7 return at a patient rate. A patient rate applies where the person is getting the transport to access healthcare facilities. The shopping service is free. Aberdeenshire Council will only provide concessionary/free travel for social trips on the basis that NHS should pay for health trips.

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PB What is the involvement with Community Planning?

RM Community Planning is core to what we are doing. We keep in touch with Steph Swales all the time.

CW Rachel is involved in our informal Partner/Officer/Councillor workshops in relation to the Community Plan. There are a lot of links that deliver other parts of the CP agenda.

Part 4. MAUD VILLAGE TRUST RESOURCE CENTRE

The Scrutiny and Audit Committee then visited the Maud Village Trust Resource Centre and spoke with Victoria Brown, General Manager.

VB This is the third phase of the development of the Old Mart Site. The NHS work in partnership here which is unique to Scotland. We provide services through the partnership of three groups. The funding for the building came from the Scottish Government through the NHS so we actually own the building and have a direct influence on the services here. The services included Community Nurses, Health Visitors, Doctors, Physios, OTs and Mental Health Practitioners together with Community Health Teams. We have a gym which interacts well with the health side of things. We have a hot desk policy and can rent out rooms and charge for this. We have not adversely impacted on any bookings for the village hall in Maud. In fact through our existence we have provided bookings for the hall. We are open until 9.00p.m. At night. Mart is a great location as it is central in Buchan. The NHS Group provided most of the funding. Going forward, costs will be shared between the Trust, the Council and the NHS Group. There is no duplication of services. In fact because the groups work so closely together I would say that

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we provide more efficient services in many ways.

**Part 5(a) SCRUTINY AND AUDIT COMMITTEE VISIT TO HOTSPOT IN
PETERHEAD**

13.30

Following on the visit to Maud, Scrutiny and Audit Committee went on to visit the Hotspot in Peterhead. In addition to the members, Jackie Buchanan and Jan McRobbie, the following people were there:- Liz Scott, Regional Officer for Peterhead (LS), Sandra Ross, Senior Community Learning Officer in Community Learning and Development (SR), together with Chris White and Steph Swales.

CW The Hotspot offers a range of facilities and resources. It is the physical part of the Reaching Out facility in Peterhead. People feel comfortable coming in. It acts very much as a hook. It is viewed not just as a Council project. The location is ideal as it is in the centre of Peterhead, in the area of greatest deprivation as evidenced by indicators.

SR We opened in October, 2007. We had an empty building. There is multi-agency team and the project is very much partnership driven. It includes a health point, a credit union and an internet café which is free, interview rooms, a conference room and also a café. It is not simply for people in need, our service is available to everyone. It's open six days a week, Monday to Saturday and also some evenings for adult learning and youth work.

LS We looked to the Friends of Hotspot to provide a seed for an idea. I help them out to start off and then pull back. We work with a huge range of groups. We help identify which information/agency can help them.

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SR There is a small group of dedicated staff and we have input from the volunteer agencies as well. The projects are really diverse from twilight basket ball to careers advice, to cookery programmes. The twilight basket ball project has been particularly of interest to the immigrant population. All the teams are mixed and some of the participants train up as coaches. This is assisted greatly in the assimilation of different groups within the community. The Police are delighted with how it is working as it helps reduce antisocial behaviour. The project has really grown and it is now on several nights a week.

TF Are you involved with the support group for alcohol and drug misuse?

LS Yes. We really encourage this group to come in. Coming here really helps build confidence and makes a person feel part of the community again. We are funded partly through Fairer Scotland. We encourage groups to raise funds and help them identify funding streams.

CW The Fairer Scotland Fund is no longer ring fenced. It comes from the Scottish Government and is now vested in Community Planning and is administered by Aberdeenshire Council's Policy and Resources Committee. Previously the fund amounted to £1.3 million. It has now been reduced to £1 million.

LS We encourage local community groups to do as much as they can in relation to funding. A lot of Council help is required however. Around funding help and support on funding advice to groups, this does not come from the Council. We have a small pot of money of £33,000 which can be bid into from local groups and organisations in both Fraserburgh and Peterhead Sometimes though a particular group only requires a small amount of funding in order to achieve their aims. In general groups are only looking for up to £1,000. The

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maximum bid permitted is £5,000. Funding is overseen by a range of agencies and community members. We assess what can be funded. If we cannot fund a particular project we will see if there are other funding streams available. The range of work done through this has been amazing. Sometimes the work is done through a development worker and sometimes it is by the people within the project themselves. Quite often work is done in close association with CDGs. We have groups who have been supported with funding from the CDG. The ROP and CDG complement rather than conflict with each other. In the past CDGs generated income from the programme and classes run in the community centres. The ROP do not run activities or classes, the funds do not go to the CDG then onto us, they are two very separate allocations.

IT I appreciate that funding goes to the CDGs and then onto yourself. Would it be advantageous if it came direct to you?

SR CDGs deal with a huge range of groups whereas we do not.

LS There are people with a whole range of skills within the CDGs who could offer support.

SR CDGs can raise money through the classes.

TF Do you get Leader funding?

LS We have not done any work with Leader funding. It only applies to communities where the population is less than 5,000.

IG It is still difficult for people to know what community planning is.

CW It is about key people and it's about trust; allowing communities to decide for themselves what they need and not impose it on them and bringing the right skills to the table. There are still issues around these matters and it all takes

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time.

LS The community's view is important as they are the partners at the table. Hotspot offers a life line for some people. They come in every day and it's their only social contact.

CW It helps develop relationships and partnerships.

LS Partnerships are very strong here. Some dip in and out. Partnerships change all the time.

SR We really promote shared services here.

LS The local Councillors are aware of what we do and they are all invited to any events we hold. We had an arts project "Theatre Modo" involving young people. It started in Peterhead. Shell sponsored it for three years. Its location alternated between Fraserburgh and Peterhead. This meant it involved young people from Fraserburgh and Peterhead working together. Hard to reach groups got involved and we managed to breakdown some barriers between Peterhead and Fraserburgh. Our funding comes from different sources on the art side. We now have people who can breathe fire and they are going to the International Youth Festival in Aberdeen in the summer. We also have a couple of groups of dancers. We had a parade which was watched by 10,000 people. The total budget for this and also for the film project we undertook was £68,000. We spent £2,298 on fireworks and these went down extremely well. We had positive feedback from the Police in relation to the reduction in antisocial behaviour. We also had a project where individuals with drums went in and around different parts of Fraserburgh, simply setting up their drums outside and playing them. Through this we managed to engage a lot of the young people who then got

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involved. Press coverage for the positive things we do on the art side is getting better.

CW The Halloween event of the parade was a fantastic press opportunity but really there was limited press reporting which is a pity. There is also an international group that meet here. There are 400 members. There is a literary tutor who provides information and advice. A lot of our regulars want to get involved with the international group in relation to their social events and visits. A lot of the immigrant community want to be part of the local community. This all helps integration.

SR All the children seem to mix well with the local kids. There are no issues here.

LS The children from immigrant families are really bringing something else that we can benefit from. They are very keen to be part of the local community while at the same time they can project their own festivals/culture.

LS We run confidence to cook courses and these have been very successful. We have managed to maximise delivery at affordable cost. We deliver it as a partnership and have no minimal numbers. The Credit Union has a multi-agency approach and works very well.

CW I suspect that the Community Centre is looked upon very much as an institution. The advantage of the Hotspot is that it is not.

SR The Hotspot is looked upon as a café with additional/added in bits.

Deleted: cafe

IT Should the Council then divert funding away from the Community Centres somewhere else such as a place like this?

CW You would need to ask the community to decide.

LS We used the Community Centres as well and the relationship is developing.

IT Why not use schools?

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LS Schools facilities are maximised.

SR Yes and there are limitations on space.

End of Evidence from witnesses

Note

*One of the witnesses copied in their line manager, **Kevin McDermott**, to the evidence who made the following comment in response to Councillor Tait's question which starts, " I appreciate that funding goes to the CDGs and then onto yourself.....*

"In reality there is no link in the way suggested. Funding for the Hotspot comes directly through the Tackling Poverty and Inequality Group from the Fairer Scotland Fund. Some projects within the Hotspot have had additional funding through the CDG eg International Association have had funding in the past as well as leveraging in money from other sources such as The Allen Lane Foundation, the NEWS Project etc."

Part 5(b) SCRUTINY AND AUDIT COMMITTEE VISIT TO HOT SPOT IN

PETERHEAD

15.00

Healthpoint within the Hot Spot Peterhead

Scrutiny and Audit visited the healthpoint within the building. There they met Ayotunde Bisi.

AB At the healthpoint free, confidential information and advice on a wide range of health related issues and concern is provided to the general public and local professionals. Also healthpoint signposts people to local support groups or organisations where appropriate, such as Smoking advice service, Samaritans (suicide helpline), ila Scotland, Parkinson's support group etc.

Healthpoint is a joint initiative by the NHS Grampian and Aberdeenshire Community Planning Partnership. It aims to provide the local community with easy access to health information and access to support groups. No appointment or booking required.

Scrutiny and Audit then went on look at the community garden at the back of the building and the meeting room within the building which is sub-let to the local college amongst others. It is booked out all of the time and is a very well used facility.

6. 2REUSE PROJECT –PETERHEAD

Scrutiny and Audit Committee members then went on to visit the 2Reuse Project in Peterhead which was at a different location to the Hotspot. There they met **Karen Brown, Peterhead Projects' Project Manager.** (KB). The Project comprised two large adjacent shops selling all kinds of second hand goods from furniture to clothes and toys.

KB We opened this shop in September 2010. The focus is to divert waste from landfill and encourage people to take responsibility for their waste. Waste can be re-used and re-sold. We diverted 31.7 tonnes of waste between September and December 2010. We monitor every item. Everything is also weighed. Community Recycle Network Scotland (CRNS) provided us with weights for a huge list of household items and we used their template figures for these. Aberdeenshire Council allow us to have a large container (20 ft by 8 ft) at their recycling centre. Currently, we have eighteen volunteers on our books. Initially we started with thirty-three volunteers. Part of our Service Agreement with Aberdeenshire Council is to look at the social and economic impact of having volunteers. We link in with three other charities. The first one is Nathans, commonly known as Ragbags. They take what we don't want. If they can't recycle it as it is they will shred it, pulpitise it and make it into recycled insulation for roofs. Everything they take is recycled. We are also involved with CRNS. As they are a Scottish company, any income that they generate stays in Scotland. We are also involved with a charity called Recycle for Charity who receive money from used ink cartridges and mobile phones so we pass these items on to them. We are looking to link in with more projects. One of our main aims going forward is to get more involved in

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providing starter packs for home starts. We need to extend this and develop it as soon as possible. We looked at the box room in Banchory and got a lot of support from them. We also looked at the project in Buckie and in Fraserburgh. In addition to that we went to Dundee to see how they did things. It is very important to share resources and partners are so important in all aspects whether sharing information or ways of doing things. Aberdeenshire Council has been very supportive. They gave us a discretionary reduction on rates which saved us £1,500. Although we haven't had any money as such from private companies they have helped us out. For example a local company donated a 20ft by 8ft container and another company agreed to transport it for us. We have had a positive effect locally where the shop is I would say. The units where we are sat empty for a while and had got very run down with graffiti and such on the front. The Council arranged for it all to be painted and tidied up and there has been no problem since with graffiti. I think as well we have encouraged business for the other shops as there are more people coming and going here now for our shops.



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Planning for Real®

Do you want to see your community thrive? Do you have a good idea for an activity in your village but don't know if anyone shares your view? Do you want to make sure that services are delivered in a way that you would like to see as a community? If the answer to these questions is "Yes" then Planning for Real® (PFR®) might just be the answer.



But what is it? PFR® is an eye-catching, "hands on" method of seeking people's views on what needs to be done to improve their community, working around using a 3D model of the community (like they used to do in Blue Peter!). Working out what is best for the community depends on bringing together two kinds of expert knowledge. On one side there are the "inside"

experts – the local residents. On the other are the "outside" experts – the planners, the Community Planning Partners eg The Council, NHS Grampian, Police etc). You bring together all members of your community (the inside experts) to form an Action Plan for the community. You then bring in the outside experts and discuss together how your Action Plan could best be advanced taking in to account existing strategies, plans etc. It is not about making a wish list that you hand on to others to do but rather a plan that the community can work on developing in partnership with and with the support of the outside experts. Your Action Plan can then be printed which is useful when applying for funding and can also be added to the Community Planning website (www.ouraberdeenshire.org.uk) which makes it accessible for Agencies and others to view.

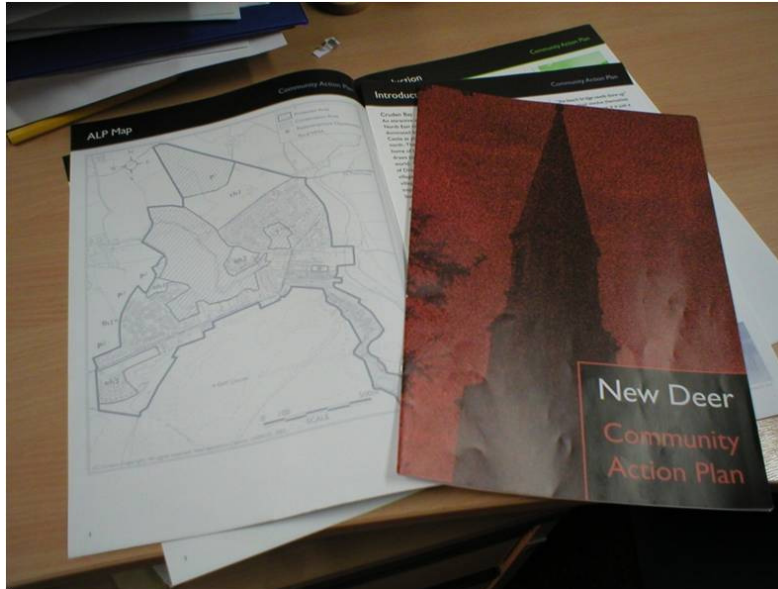
Many communities in Buchan have already done PFR® exercises and these have been crucial in helping them develop sustainable, well supported projects in their communities. Funding bodies always expect evidence that community consultation has

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taken place before they award any major funding and this is a tried and tested method of demonstrating community support for a variety of initiatives.

Buchan Development Partnership ensures that the key priorities coming out of these exercises are fed into the Buchan Community Plan – where they are then monitored by the Local Community Planning Group. We believe this process demonstrates genuine bottom up community planning in action!



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**COMMUNITY PLANNING INVESTIGATION – SITE VISIT TO BANFF AND
BUCHAN**

WEDNESDAY, 9 MARCH, 2011

**PART 1 – VISIT TO FRASERBURGH NEIGHBOURHOODS AND RESIDENTS
ASSOCIATION (FRANRA) 57 – 61 HIGH STREET FRASERBURGH**

Present: Councillors Bellarby (PB), Allan (AA), Cullinane (NC), Fleming (TF), Gray (IG), Hood (FH), Sullivan (MS), Thomas (RT) and Tait (IT).

Malcolm McAuslin, Area Manager (Banff and Buchan) (MM), Caroline Clark (Public Health Co-ordinator) (CC), Graham Murdo, Promotions & Fund-raising Officer,(GM), Fiona Alderson (Community Planning Officer, Banff and Buchan) (FA), Ken Kilpatrick (Chair of FRANRA) (KK), Treasurer of FRANRA, Diane Marshall (Reaching Out Project Development Officer (DM), Alison Kennedy (Reporter from Local Newspaper).

Jan McRobbie, Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny and Audit) and Jackie Buchanan, Committee Officer.

SAC were made to feel very welcome at FRANRA and were provided with tea and coffee with butteries and biscuits on arrival. PB thanked FRANRA for such a warm welcome.

GM FRANRA started as a standard Residents Association but has developed a community aspect. We moved into this building in July, 2010. Up until January, 2010 we had no outside funding but in January we secured funding through Fairer Scotland. We are sitting at the moment in the community café area. Towards the back of the building there is a large hall which is used by different groups and as you can see there is a large shop area to the front where we sell second-hand furniture. We discovered that there is a real market for second-hand furniture particularly as new furniture is so expensive. We recently extended across the street and we sell second-hand clothing there. In another part of this building which we can look at the youth café is being developed. It's in what was previously a bar and we have retained the bar features as the youngsters really like this.

SAC then were taken to the hall area towards the back of the building.

GM This area was previously a soft play area for the bar. The soft play equipment has been left and we do intend to use that and have a soft play area during the day. This will allow parents to come in and have a tea/coffee while their children can play. At the moment the hall is used as a gym two nights a week for boxing. On average we have about 20 – 30 people who come. All age groups are there. We have both male and female participants. The minimum age is 12. We have just started an aerobics class too which will take place on a Tuesday and a Thursday night. As you can see this is a huge space and we are hoping to develop it as much as

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- IG possible. We charge the users a small amount to cover heating and lighting.
Are the groups that use this self-funded?
- GM Yes. They found that it was costing them more to rent the leisure centre than the charges they received from the participants. We charge each group £7.50 an hour. This covers our costs. Each group takes down any equipment they use after use. The various groups that come in here all got together by themselves. There is of course still a long way to go to develop this facility properly.
- SAC were then taken to the front of the building which comprised a shop selling second-hand furniture.
- IG We collect furniture diverted from the Council's recycling point which is a great initiative. We would like to develop this further as there is a huge demand for second-hand furniture but basically we don't have the space. We do sell a lot of items and there is a problem keeping up with demand. In fact we keep a book of requests for items so that if something comes in that a person has requested we can get in touch with them. We don't have a van for collecting and delivering furniture so that does restrict us. We have also found that there is a huge demand for kids clothing / baby clothes which as I mentioned is dealt with across the road in our other premises. We are an outlet for CFINE. We are hoping to turn our kitchen into a training kitchen. A lot of young people are interested in cooking. Irene who you met earlier is in the process of becoming qualified to do this. We don't keep a note of the tonnage that we get from landfill. Everything that we sell is written down though. Apart from anything else this allows us to keep an eye on what items are in demand. Everything that we sell has been donated.
- SAC were then shown the bar area which the youngsters use as a café. Part of it also was a computer area where there were 5 laptops available for use including internet connection free of charge.
- GM We will offer computer training at the end of the month. I am going to do this myself. It will simply be basic computer training. There are a lot of people who are keen to use computers but are not particularly comfortable with the idea of going to college. I think that here the environment is more user friendly. I am already a voluntary tutor at the community centre on a Thursday morning in relation to computers. The community centre cannot keep up with demand and by offering computer training here I feel that we can help deal with the demand.
- IT Where did you get funding for the equipment?
- GM It was part of our bid to Fairer Scotland as I mentioned earlier. We asked for funding for 5 laptops. I thought that was a good number. It is not too many for a group lesson.
- PB Do you run sessions for particular groups?

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GM We are hoping to set this up once we start the training at the end of the month. We will very much be led by demand. If I can't myself provide the appropriate training, I will get someone in who can.

With regard to the bar area, we did a survey and found out from the youngsters that what they wanted most of all was basically a place to meet. This bar / café area has just opened this week. The youngsters run it themselves as we have a junior committee at FRANRA. The Chair is a 19 year old girl she takes charge. The youngsters did all décor themselves. One of the youth groups raised the money to do this including providing the screen you can see. They have made a really good job. The target age group is 12-18 years old. There are limited places available for this age group where they can socialise. At the moment we are opening from 6-10 pm Monday, Wednesday and Friday although it does depend on the numbers. If it is not busy, we close early. We hope to be able to open 7 nights a week and perhaps at the weekend close a bit later that we do at the moment. We also hope to be able to open during the day during the school holidays. It is just a trial at the moment. We are trying to find a balance to see what works. We are looking for feedback so that we can gauge this. We decided to open on a Monday evening in particular because from what we heard that was an evening where in particular the youth were getting into trouble. We have a lease for 3 years initially and have an informal option to purchase the premises. There are funding sources that we could tap into in order to buy the premises. We would like to look at this as a community resource that will be here permanently. We have had very positive reactions from residents nearby. They were used to the premises being a pub. Even with the youth café therefore they were used to a much greater level of noise which continued a lot later in the evening. The position is better for them now that we are in.

IG Do you have a code of conduct for the youngsters?

GM We have a basic one. It is a list of do's and don'ts which were drawn up by the youngsters themselves. As I have indicated we pretty much let them work it themselves. It means that they feel it is theirs. The youngsters love the idea of the bar environment and don't seem to mind at all that there is no alcohol.

FH I see that there is a range of leaflets in the bar area. Do the youngsters take these?

GM We don't push the leaflets onto the youngsters but if they want they can certainly take them. Many of them focus on alcohol and its side effects. We are also looking to have sexual health information leaflets which ties in with the NHS.

CC Once we have the health point open across the road this should help.

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GM The Police and community wardens themselves quite often come into the café when the youngsters are here. This means that the youngsters can interact with the Police/Wardens in a neutral environment. Unfortunately some of them have a very negative view of the Police but with the Police coming in here and chatting to the youngsters we have managed to break the barriers down a bit.

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Part 2 - NHS GRAMPIAN FRASERBURGH DEVELOPMENT TRUST HUB
56 HIGH STREET, FRASERBURGH

SAC were taken to Fraserburgh Development Trust Hub premises across the road from FRANRA. They had clearly been recently refurbished. Part of the premises at the front of the building were going to be opened very soon as a healthpoint similar to the healthpoint which existed in Peterhead which SAC visited. SAC were provided with evidence from Caroline Clark (Public Health Co-ordinator) (CC).

Fraserburgh healthpoint

CC I work for NHS Grampian and cover north Aberdeenshire. I feel that I act as a bridge between the NHS and the community and I focus on the preventative side of things. I try to remind the NHS that prevention is the key and I focus on the community aspects of health. I look at health inequalities / needs and promote health improvements. I am involved with local health improvement groups. A lot of my work is based in Fraserburgh, Banff and Peterhead as these are the areas where need is greatest. I am based in Banff. I know that you visited the healthpoint in Peterhead and the plan is for a similar healthpoint in Fraserburgh. Healthpoints were developed initially in Aberdeen as a way of getting health information out into the communities. We are extending this into Aberdeenshire. We got Fairer Scotland funding through the Community Planning Partnership. The Peterhead choice of venue was simple as there was already the hotspot there and it was an ideal place to have the health point. There was not a comparable venue in Fraserburgh and there were initially difficulties getting a site. When the Fraserburgh Development Trust got this site it seemed an ideal place to have the healthpoint. The ethos of the Trust fits in well with what we do. The bureaucracy has taken time ensuring that all the paperwork was in place for example the lease etc. We are hoping to get contractors in next week so that we can get the premises kited out for use. As you will see from the note that I have provided, the Fraserburgh healthpoint mobile service is already up and running. It started in March last year.

PB What will you have here at the Healthpoint?

CC It will be basically be the same as Peterhead but we have the advantage that the unit will be stand alone. We will have an area for leaflets and the health worker will be able to provide basic health checks for example check blood pressure, weight, height etc and deal with any queries. Our experience has shown that the queries can be very wide ranging. It is very much a responsive service.

PB Will it be staffed by one adviser?

CC Yes, on a part-time basis but holiday cover will also be provided.

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- MS Will it be flagged up outside the building as a healthpoint so that the public can be made aware of it?
- CC Yes, there is going to be a big launch in April or May, 2011 when we will have an official opening.
- TF Was the healthpoint concept developed locally or is it from a sort of national idea?
- CC The healthpoint is a Grampian wide concept. Our aim is to target areas where there is the most need rather than have a healthpoint in all parts of Aberdeenshire. In an ideal world we would like to be available for everyone but as you will appreciate due to funding restrictions we need to target our resources where the greatest need is.
- FH Will there be healthpoint leaflets provided in different languages?
- CC We haven't done this so far but we have developed posters in Peterhead in different languages. We also have someone available on specific Saturdays in Peterhead when the international group meet.
There are a small selection of health improvement leaflets in different languages.
- IT I think this is a first class initiative and appreciate what you are saying about targeting groups. It is important to persuade the local community to come along. Is it a drop in service or do you need to make an appointment? Also will there be a level of confidentiality?
- CC It is a drop in service and there is no need to make an appointment. The service is confidential and because it is a stand alone unit it is more private.
- IT I hope the healthpoint will be made known to the whole population locally.
- CC Yes. We plan to open on Saturday to ensure that we cover as many different people as possible. This will help include those who work during the week. Specifically we are tailoring our hours and our marketing so that as many people know about the health point. Based on a survey that we did, we are planning a Tuesday to Friday service at the moment. The intention is to try and include Saturday too. What we need to do is to capture people's experiences of the healthpoint and how it helped them specifically. We can then use that evidence to persuade the NHS to release more funding.
- TF How are you going to show that you are delivering results?
- CC We already have a database that captures numbers and types of enquiries. What we need to do however is to have a user survey / audit. My hope is that we can bring in a research student in September to do this for us.
- IT Where is your funding coming from? Is it from the Community Health Partnership or are NHS Grampian funding you directly?

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- CC We have funding from Fairer Scotland and also some NHS funding.
- PB Are you a member of the local Community Planning Group?
- CC Yes. We discussed the whole proposal with them from the start. It has been very helpful liaising with them.
- FH How do GPs view the healthpoint? If you are finding that people have similar types of problems are you discussing these issues with GPs with the view to having some sort of health awareness strategy?
- CC In Peterhead links with GPs have already started. There have been cross-referrals by GPs to us and from us to GPs. At the moment we rely on the patients going to the GP if we suggest they do this and we have no way of checking if this is actually happening. We are also considering if we could possibly use data collected at the healthpoint (such as blood pressure readings etc) and transfer it to the GP records. This would allow the GP to have additional information on patients which can only be of help. With regard to responding to community health awareness projects and arising issues, I would say that the healthpoint is much more able to respond to these kinds of issues than the GPs.
- FH Obviously there is a real problem with young people and drugs. There was an event recently in Inverurie where a young lad was on methadone and wanted to come off it. No one had approached him to suggest that he do this. Basically it was left to him to initiate things. He had to find the help himself to do it. Would you get involved in that type of thing?
- CC No, not really. It would be part of the GP's role when reviewing medication. With the healthpoint, we rely on people themselves coming in and asking for help, however if someone came in and asked for support with this we would help them.
- IT On a related matter how does the healthpoint interact with the Drug Addicts project in Kessock Road?
- CC The healthpoint is an advisory service. We have discussions about life style. We don't intend to provide clinical information. That's not our function. Basically we advise people where they can get more help and provide information for them. The Kessock Road project is a treatment centre. That's completely different from what we offer.

Fraserburgh Multi Agency Equally Well Early Years Project

You will see that I have provided in my note information on the Fraserburgh Multi Agency Equally Well Early Years Project. This is a multi-agency approach to tackling health inequalities. Fraserburgh has the worse health record in Aberdeenshire. Various agencies got together in September, 2009 to see what could be done to improve the situation. As you can imagine a

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whole host of issues have contributed towards this problem. When we looked at all the evidence, it was felt that early year's intervention would have the biggest impact. By early years we mean intervening in the age group zero to eight years. Clearly, this means making contact with families who have children in this age group. You will see more information on this from the note that I provided. Last year a public health consultant trainee carried out a review of evidence and consultation and produced a list of priorities for the area. The Community Health Development Officer, who was appointed in March, 2011 will use the priorities to determine what needs to be done, things like a healthy food initiative etc. Andrew will be very much the person on the ground delivering the services. This project is of interest nationally. As part of it we will be looking at health inequalities as a whole. This should not be seen as solely a NHS role but as a community role since the NHS alone cannot tackle health inequalities.

IT How does this fit in with Link Up?

CC Link Up is part of it too. Link Up has a lot of good initiatives.

RT How long do you have funding for?

CC The Community Health Development Officer post has been funded for 14 months. We would very much hope to extend it. Fourteen months is nowhere near long enough, it will only scratch the surface. I still intend to keep the initiative going after the 14 months period if at all possible. I want to try to get more partners on board so that we have a full multi agency response.

FH You mentioned earlier that alcohol abuse is a problem in Fraserburgh. Why is it such an issue here?

CC I don't think alcohol abuse is an issue that is particularly prevalent only in Fraserburgh; it's the same throughout big towns in Scotland. There are many reasons why this is the case both culture and social. Historically there was a tendency to ignore alcohol problems and focus on drug addiction. Alcohol abuse is very widespread.

FH Would you say that the issue was made worse by a lack of NHS facilities?

CC I couldn't say that. Fraserburgh certainly has NHS facilities. There needs to be a balance between costs and logistics to ensure that the Health Service meets demand as far as it can. There is a gap in sexual health advice as it is only offered by GPs which doesn't really offer the anonymity and choice some people need in small towns and rural areas. I would say that we need a Sexual Health Service here which is outwith the GP service. Teleconferencing is used to specialist services which is a scheme whereby NHS provide tele conference facilities in order that patients can access specialists which gets round the logistical problem of travelling to access services. Clearly this is only appropriate in certain circumstances.

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- IT Part of the initiatives you spoke about involves disseminating services from Aberdeen to the local communities such as Fraserburgh. This principle is very good but it needs to be managed properly or it will be a disguised poor service.
- CC The Scottish Government is looking in particular at that and they are putting an emphasis on NHS Boards to ensure that services are provided within local communities. They have also set strict time limits for treatment so that between referral and treatment the wait should only be 18 weeks maximum. Although this sounds a long time it is a huge improvement. This has led to NHS Boards looking at delivering their health service in different ways so as to meet the targets.
- FH I knew of a surgeon who did come out from Aberdeen Royal Infirmary to do a clinic in Banff. Would you be able to refer patients from Fraserburgh to Banff in such a situation?
- CC Certainly if there is a risk in the target treatment times not being met, it may be that such a patient would be asked to go to Banff instead of going to Aberdeen.
- FH Can you ask for an appointment locally?
- CC You can ask to get an appointment but you can't be guaranteed that it would be within your specific locality. It could however be offered outwith the city.
- TF I see that amongst papers provided there is a financial proximity which details the value of time spent walking as £12.34.
- CC This actually belongs to someone else's report. I wasn't involved in that one.
- MM This will be explained in the afternoon.

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Banff & Buchan Scrutiny & Audit Committee Visit
9th March 2011

Fraserburgh healthpoint



The Fraserburgh healthpoint mobile service commenced in March 2010. After consultation with the Local Community Planning Group and the Reaching Out Project, the service runs as follows:

Tuesday 11am-3pm - Broch Community Centre
Wednesday 10am - 3pm – Fraserburgh Hospital Concourse
Friday 11am - 3pm – Fraserburgh Library

In addition the healthpoint adviser raises awareness of healthpoint and offers support to local groups and events on a Monday or Thursday. Examples of groups supported in 2010:

Robertson Road Day Centre, Fraserburgh Street Sports, Young Carers, Migrant Workers and Fraserburgh Academy.

The permanent site for the Fraserburgh healthpoint will be at the Fraserburgh Development Trust building in 58A High Street. Lease negotiations are in their final stages and we hope to officially launch the new healthpoint in April or May 2011.

Fraserburgh Multi-Agency Equally Well Early Years Project

Following an Aberdeenshire CHP/CPP health inequalities workshop in September 2009, it was decided to pursue a multi-agency approach to tackling health inequalities through early years provision. Fraserburgh was chosen as the initial site for this approach as it is known that there are significant social and health inequalities in Fraserburgh.

Public Health Trainee Consultant Chris Littlejohn carried out the first phase of the project and reported regularly to the Local Community Planning group for guidance and updates. See summary report in your pack of the identified priorities.

Andrew Mackie, Community Health Development Officer was appointed in March 2011, by the Fraserburgh Development Trust in partnership with NHS Grampian and funded by the Fairer Scotland Fund. This post will help deliver and co-ordinate actions arising from the identified priorities, with the support of the Public Health Co-ordinator.

Banff & Buchan Local Community Planning Group will act as the steering group to this project and will offer support and guidance for project planning. In addition group members will be asked for support for various actions as they arise.

Caroline Clark, Public Health Co-ordinator, Aberdeenshire CHP,
email: carolineclark2@nhs.net

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WEDNESDAY, 9 MARCH, 2011

PART 3 – NHS GRAMPIAN FRASERBURGH DEVELOPMENT TRUST HUB
56 HIGH STREET, FRASERBURGH

SAC then heard from Diane Marshall, Project Development Officer (DM) with Bridge CVS in relation to the Reaching Out Project at Fraserburgh.

DM I'm Diane Marshall and I've been Project Development Officer for the Reaching Out Project in Fraserburgh for almost four years and I really enjoy it.

It was suggested when I was invited to speak today that I do a typical day in the life of a Development Officer so I checked my diary for inspiration.

In one particular week last year, I had the role of

Event planner – Volunteer Fair,

Facilitator at a Community Planning Event (with inclusion in mind),

Alcohol free Bar Person/Bouncer at Audacious Disco,

Labourer; loading & unloading donated tables & chairs from Shell to various community projects,

Information Giver – advising groups on sources of funding & helping with applications

Funder; part of the partnership group making decisions on allocation of Community Voices funds

& I also did a bit of face painting.

So there is never such a thing as a typical day in this job.

We deliver to the objectives of

Inclusion - reducing barriers by providing advice & support

Lifeskills – widening & encouraging community participation

Wellbeing – working together to empower community groups building capacity. In achieving each of these outcomes we work with different partnerships. We have worked alongside community planning, the voluntary sector, residents associations and youth groups. The nature of our partnership working is dependant also on the actual project itself. The Reaching Out Project is all about working in partnership. Our partners are many & vary from project to project, but without this approach it is unlikely that we could have such an impact.

I'm going to demonstrate this in action by showing a few of the initiatives we have been involved in:

My colleague Liz, gave an overview of Fantasmagoria when you visited Peterhead so I won't labour the point, however it's worth having a look at the lead up to the main project. Peterhead Pirate Pandemonium was a huge success the previous year, but it was recognised in the evaluation that it took a week or so to set up the partnership group & get buy in from the harder to reach groups.

In Spring last year, we applied for funding from Community Planning

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Partnership to deliver a Mini Modo. This would let Modo come up for a week, identify & start working with groups & set firm foundations with other organisation in advance of the main project in November.

Contact was made with Fraserburgh Academy & ASDAN & SEN classes were identified as likely to get the most from the experience. Youth Groups from the Community Centre, Foyer Lifeshapers & Fraserburgh Junior Arts also came on board and we linked into existing events: TESCO Fundraising Day; Lifeboat Open Day & Moonlight Prowl which gave the participants an audience of a few thousand. Each of these groups put on a great show and you could see many of the young people blossom. Teachers reported that one of the participants had gained so much confidence & was more focussed as a result.

One of the groups that got involved in Theatre Modo is a theatre dance group, Step ups. It comprises quite a varied group and includes new Scots and youngsters from deprived areas. They recently performed at Rock Challenge at Aberdeen Exhibition Centre and report an increase in numbers.

We also have fire eaters, a group called Inferno. They came together to do performance at Theatre Modo. They are very impressive. They now have their own bookings and will be appearing at the Aberdeen International Youth Festival. They were mostly from Fraserburgh Music Group & Friday night drop-in at the Community Centre. After three workshops with MODO, the organiser pronounced them as the best group he had ever worked with. They have now constituted as an independent fire entertainment troop & have performed at events in Fraserburgh, Peterhead & Mintlaw as well as at the Fantasmagoria project. Stewart Aitken of Aberdeen International Youth Festival saw them at Fantasmagoria and has invited them to perform at the Youth Festival. We have secured a bit of funding for them to allow them to do Health & Safety training & get insurance & they are now raising money to pay for their weekend at the festival.

Fraserburgh Junior Arts have learned skills they would otherwise not have had access to – plate spinning & poi.

Back in 2009, I contacted various local agencies & groups to set up a Youth Workers Network. This was to share resources, good practice & be general support for each other. We took a bottom up approach, that is rather than us decide what the young people wanted we wanted them to tell us. From the responses, it was shown that young people wanted somewhere that they could hang out and although we couldn't solve that immediately we could organise some events. In partnership with local businessman Mark Forsyth, Community Wardens, Police, CLD, FRANRA & young volunteers, we were able to run Audacious Discos - held within Dee Jays night club with a proper bar selling mocktails. We've had shorts & sunglasses nights, band nights, Halloween fancy dress & Christmas themed nights. The Police and the Community Wardens coming in has broken down barriers. Lots of partnerships have given assistance to this. Last year we were lucky to

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receive a Certificate of Commendation from Community Safety Awards. Proof of what can be achieved by working in partnership.

Reaching-Out Project also operates community fund which gives out small grants of between £1,000 - £5,000. This can be used for start up or piloting smaller projects, allowing existing groups to try something new or pay for community engagement events.

These are a few that have recently been funded:

- OUR SPACE Christmas shop
- Youth Bash- Fraserburgh
- Enterprise
- Volunteer Fair
- TheatreModo –
- Workshops& Performance
- Jolly Wrinkles & Walking Group
- Kinship 4 Kids
- Lighthouse Rocks
- All Weather Garden Project
- Confidence to Cook
- CFine
- FRANRA

- PB Can you kindly confirm who provides the governance for these projects. Is it “Reaching-Out Project”
- DM I am employed by Bridge CVS but on behalf of the various partnerships. My work is very much in the community. I look for gaps and duplication and mould the two together.
- IT FRANRA and Link-Up have similar aims. Do you link with these two groups?
- DM Link-Up is a bit of an anomaly. During the day it is Link-Up but at night it's Aberdeenshire Council who have the let so it is not used as a drop-in centre as there are other groups operating who are already booked in. FRANRA compliments Link-Up.
- TF What do you use as a measuring stick?
- DM We are doing a social audit at the moment and this will show how well we have done. As various partnerships are working together, it is not a case that one size fits all. There is not one mechanism that can be used for measuring the success of all the projects. A report does go back to the Scottish Government every year and we do keep statistics.
- MM Reaching-Out Project was originally based on a postcode area but it is much more flexible now.
- IT Early intervention seems to be a solution to a lot of problems. Do you deal

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with existing problems or do you try to get in early?

- DM Both. Theatre Modo was an example of early intervention. The children really appreciated the offer of involvement.
- IT Theatre Modo seems to be a very good project but also costly.
- DM We have a commitment from Shell for three years. That it is not enough to run the project. We have applied for funding elsewhere. The great thing is that kids buy into it and it does so much for them.
- IT You can not self fund?
- DM No, not directly.

PART 4 - SAC VISIT TO GREEN TREE PREMISES, CASTLE STREET BANFF

OCCUPIED BY BANFF AND MACDUFF COMMUNITY TRUST

SAC were provided with lunch and were then given a presentation by Leanne Carter (LC), Operations and Development Manager for Banff and Macduff Community Trust. SAC also met Nick Dolphin (ND) and Lynn Lawson (LL) both of whom are Directors on the Trust Board.

Much of the information provided on Banff and Macduff Community Trusts Activities is detailed in the booklet provided to SAC members and also in the presentation slides similarly provided. The followings additional comments were made and questions asked during the session.

LC One of the great advantages of the Green Tree premises is that they are very accessible for prams and wheelchair users. Several of the cafes available in Banff are on hills. We are on the flat and also have good double doors for access. Banff Job Centre has said that we have been a positive addition to the employment situation in Banff. The staff here feel that they are benefiting the community. The area where we are sitting just now is going to become a sandwich takeaway bar along the same lines as Subway. It's also going to be a Community Hub Centre which will provide local information and computers with internet access. We also intend to use this area to expand our sale of goods from local artists. We work in partnership with Coast Visual Arts.

Our intention is to reach self-sustainability. One of our successful schemes over the Christmas period was the Green Tree Scheme where we helped 160 families over the Christmas period and also provided assistance to an old folks home. We get involved in a whole range of activities from book signings to jumble sales. We are even running a rag dolls making workshop this weekend.

The In Bloom project has been very successful.

IT I see that you mention that the "in kind value" of the project was £7,978.00 based on 838 man hours being donated to this project. What does "in kind value" mean.

LC We determined how much it would cost us to employ someone who charges for these hours of work – in fact we used Aberdeenshire Council rates and thereby worked out what the value of this was. We have had discussions with using Community Services for litter picking and light maintenance work. In fact last year Community Services assisted us in taking the flower baskets down.

IT The employees that you provide work for, do you include in this the In Bloom workers?

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LC No. In Bloom workers are all volunteers. On that point there are people who have indicated an interest in volunteering for working in the Green Tree here. This will be happening in the summer season once we train up the volunteers.

Another project we have been involved in Shop Art. This looks at the problem of tackling run-down buildings. From the survey that we did, it was clear that the public had a great dislike of run-down buildings. You can see from the slide that we replaced the chipboard on the front of the Banffshire Maritime Heritage Association shop with a photo montage of Duff Harbour at night. It looks so much better and in fact there has been no vandalism on the premises since then. We are looking for a property in Banff to repeat this initiative.

With regard to the community wind turbine this is more of a long-term aim. We are bound by a confidentiality agreement so that we cannot provide too much detail on this. I can say that the feasibility study is in its final stages. If the project is successful there will be a significant benefit for the community by way of income which will allow us to fund other projects. In particular we want to set up a Trades Training Centre in Banff / Macduff so that residents can learn a trade locally and don't need to travel to Aberdeen.

TF Will it be a full windfarm or a single turbine?

LC It will be a single turbine site which will be owned by the community and we will then sell electricity to the grid.

ND If successful this project will ensure long-term income. This is very important particularly in the current economic climate when funding is being reduced. We would lose a substantial amount of income if we were to go into partnership with a private company for this venture so we decided to go it alone. It will take about 2 – 3 years to get it started as it is very complicated. If it takes off we will set up long-term funding for the towns communities which is very important.

TF You mention communities?

ND Yes the Banff and Macduff Community Trusts.

TF What sort of power are you looking at?

LC About 330 or 500 kW power.

PB You make reference in your presentation to a survey. Who took part in the survey?

LC Stakeholder groups, members and non-members of the trust, community groups too and local groups, our customers and volunteers. There was a

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paper base survey and an on-line survey. This feedback forms part of our social audit.

IT How many respondents did you have?

LC I don't know exactly but I think approximately about 200.

PB How do you work with the Community Planning Partnership?

LC We work very closely with them. We believe that you get a lot more done if you work together. We have a very good relationship with the Community Planning Partnership. We go to each others meetings, we help each other out and we get involved in each others projects.

IT How open can you be with each other?

LC We are very open with our partners. Basically anyone can come to our meetings. The only aspect which we keep confidential is in relation to the community wind turbine that I mentioned earlier and this is only because we have signed a confidentiality agreement.

IT Would you agree that there is a downside to not co-operating with each other?

LC Absolutely. We would not have the support we have without our partners. In fact, it would be a pretty awful situation.

LC We are involved in the Eden Garden project. We are looking to buy vegetables from them for the Green Tree. This is part of our ethos, to source produce locally. We are also hoping to get a community allotment too for our own use in the future. This will reduce our costs.

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**PART 5 - SAC VISIT TO LEADER FUNDED LIFT PROJECT AT PRINCESS ROYAL
SPORTS AND COMMUNITY TRUST, AIRLIE GARDENS, BANFF**

SAC then visited the Leader Funded "Lift Project" located at Banff and Deveronvale Football ground. Details of the project are provided in the booklet. The project makes use of both the gym and the astro turf pitch. SAC were met by Velvet Staton, Fitness Instructor (VS) and Alan Still (AS). SAC were shown round the gym/equipment suite and then taken to a room upstairs.

VS The Lift Project engages children and young people from local primaries and from Banff Academy. There are four local primary schools where P6 and P7 pupils come in during school time and use the gym. I go out to each of the primary schools and collect the children and bring them to the gym. Logistically it's been a bit tricky as it needs to fit in with the school timetable. I induct pupils on how to use the equipment then they simply use the gym equipment themselves under supervision. When the weather is better I prefer to take the children outside onto the astro turf. We do things such as play hockey. We need to ensure that the primary school children are of a certain size before they can safely use the gym and we tend to focus on cardio exercises with them rather than using the weights although we do do some weight training. So far we have had good feedback from the Head Teachers. There is one primary school locally that doesn't have pupils coming to the gym but they are involved in multi sports. It is a colleague who runs the multi sports initiative rather than me. It involves actually going out to the primary schools and providing sport. All five local primary schools are involved. It works really well and we have had very good results.

PB How was the Trust set up?

AS The Trust was set up in 1997. The impetus really was through Health and Safety legislation which outlawed the use of wooden stands. We had a wooden stand at the football ground. I think the legislation came about as a result of a fire somewhere in England. There were also social problems locally which needed to be addressed. As a consequence of that we decided to go for lottery funding. Initially it was simply a mainstream gym and the football club Banff and Deveronvale FC. The appeal is a lot broader now. There are people coming along of all ages and abilities. Our oldest is 94 years old and our youngest is 3 years old. Up until this year, there was funding available to provide five gym sessions for the S4 to S5 kids. There is no funding now for this. The driver for most of the initiatives here was through the football originally. Now it is multi sport. The Leader project is a great project. The P6 and P7 children who participate have a fitness regime and get regular fitness tests.

MM The Trust formed from a number of community groups and sporting groups coming together in the community.

PB Are members of the Trust individuals or groups or a mixture of both?

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- AS The Trust has a number of organisation members and a number of local groups as well.
- IG Where has the funding come from?
- AS Previously we had Service Level Agreements in place with the schools but schools always seem to run out of money. For the junior gym we charge a one-off fee of £5.00 for each member and an additional charge of £1.00 per session.
- VS We have hoping that P6 and P7 children who have been inducted in the gym will continue to come along to the after school sessions when they go on to the academy. I appreciate that there is a lot pressure on teenagers at that age and it is so beneficial for them if they can maintain a good level of fitness. The Leader project is a really good project. We try to develop good life skills. As well as simply giving them time in the gym, I try to encourage and give advice on healthy eating and also information on the beneficial effects of exercise on their bones and muscles etc. I also give advice on the health risks of smoking. Believe or not it is a problem for children as young as that. In effect I try to give them the whole package. We also try and bring the community in here. We have a sexual health clinic which works really well, a slimmer's club, an over 50's fitness club which over the last 7 years has really grown. We have also started a GP referral system. As of this week a couple of GPs have phoned and asked for GP referral forms so that they can refer patients here. We give patients 8 free sessions and induct them into classes depending on their need. An example of this is cardio re-hab. I will take on any patients from cardio clients to diabetics, mental health to osteo-arthritis. Sometimes these people like to work on their own; sometimes they prefer the more social setting of a class. There was a lady who got involved and was part of the initial project and she is still coming 7 years on. I also go to local residential facilities to provide exercise such as carpet bowls. We also run the Busy Bees which is for a very young age group. It is very popular now and we only started with about 6 or so children. We also run very successful holiday programs for ages 3 through to 16. These are usually very well attended with waiting lists for most.
- TF Is there a squash facility?
- AS No there is one in Macduff though.
- FH How does this initiative link into the Community Planning Partnership?
- AS I now represent the Trust on the Community Planning Partnership Committee. It helps me to know what is going on locally. A lot of people have gone on to gain employment after being with us either on the old 'New Deal' or through volunteering.

A partnership with SCVO and the Job Centre sees us help people back into work through work experience. A similar scheme is in place for students

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who are at Moray, Banff and Buchan and Aberdeen Colleges. We have also helped reduce vandalism and anti-social behaviour amongst young people.

- IT The Leader Lift project what is this?
- VS The Lift project involves joint working between the Princess Royal Sports and Community Trust, Aberdeenshire Council, Leader and the NHS. Lift stands for Life skills, Involvement, Fitness and Transition.
- IT How many pupils are involved?
- VS There are 216 in total from all the primary schools that's the P6 and P7 pupils and also from the curriculum support unit, (CSU), in the academy. The children in the CSU unit have different needs that can range from downs syndrome to autism and behavioural problems. They may find it difficult to get into a mainstream gym without support.
- IT Is the Council not providing facilities for theses children themselves at the moment?
- VS I know that the children have PE in school but I offer more than that. Both the primary school pupils and the pupils in the academy from the CSU unit have the fitness / sports provided during school. I also go and collect the children from the CSU unit at the academy and bring here as I mentioned I do with the primary school children. The mainstream pupils at the academy come here out of school of their own accord between Monday and Friday. They get access to the gym at a much reduced price and we are here to give them help and guidance. Many participants are continuing to access gym facilities even when they leave the school.
- IT This cheaper rate that you charge these pupils is that paid through the Leader Lift Funding?
- VS To be honest I deal with the fitness part and I have little knowledge on finance side.
- JMcR We can get a financial detailed breakdown later.
- PB What was the impetus for setting up the Leader Lift Initiative?
- AS We looked at the statistics and the limited PE being offered at schools and it was really just something that Velvet and I came up with together. We are also looking to rekindle projects which we ran in 2002 as they hit all the right targets.
- RT I see that the Leader funding ends this year. Will it be renewed?

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- AS No I don't think so. We are looking at other areas of funding to develop further initiatives however.
- TF Would you say that the projects are self sustainable?
- AS Not in Banff. There is basically not enough money here. For example we tried to run a Fitness in the Workplace initiative before and got money to do this from the Towns Partnership. The problem was that although local business could see the benefits, they just could not match the funding.
- VS The Fitness in the Workplace project was aimed at 18 – 60 year olds, basically all the local workforce. We tried to improve their lifestyle by giving them advice about the dangers of stress, smoking, drinking alcohol and also by encouraging them to do sport. We didn't just encourage use the gym either but really any type of sport / physical activity which would improve health. To be honest, the take up was not as good I would have liked. Our initiatives with young people and the other age groups have worked really well but I found that the 18 – 60 year olds were much less enthusiastic. They lacked motivation. For those who did take part there were definite benefits both personally and in relation to work. A healthier person suffers less illness and has better productivity. One particular success I remember was someone who came along who was overweight and a smoker. They have stopped smoking and although they don't come to the gym they have taken up other physical activities and have reaped the rewards. This lady has completely changed.

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PART 6 - SAC VISIT TO BANFF DAY CENTRE

**Community Planning – Site Visit to Banff & Buchan
Banff Inclusion Project – Banff Day Services
Mark McDermott, Day Services Manager, Housing & Social Work**

Present: Councillors Bellarby (PB), Cullinane (NC), Duncan (SD), Fleming (TF), Gray (IG) Hood (FH), Sullivan (MS), Tait (IT) and Thomas (RT).

Apologies: Councillor Allan.

Officers: Fiona Alderson, Community Planning Officer, (Banff & Buchan); Malcolm McAuslin, Area Manager (Banff & Buchan); and Jan McRobbie, Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny and Audit).

Mr McDermott welcomed members of the Committee to the Day Services facility; he expressed delight at being able to present the social inclusion project to members. He indicated that several of the participants in the event were present and would be happy to answer any questions which members would have. Some had disabilities and not all were younger people; the project group had also included members of staff.

Members were asked for consent to have their pictures taken so that the event could be recorded on the Banff Inclusion Project blog and all agreed.

Mr McDermott gave a powerpoint presentation on the evolution of the Banff Inclusion Project.

In 2008, the Scottish Government Mental Health division had provided funding for a roadshow, "With Inclusion in Mind". This was based on sections 25-31 of the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003 and was intended to explore local authorities' role in promoting wellbeing and social development. This roadshow toured Aberdeenshire.

In October, 2009, the Banff Local Community Planning Group, working on developing a local community plan, hosted an event in Banff. It covered the themes of Communities, Healthy Living, Lifelong Learning and Local Area Needs, and sought to identify local priorities on each of these issues. Taking as its starting point the declaration that, "No one survives without community and no community survives without the individual". A prime focus was to establish a relationship between the many community groups that attended, to set personal challenges and foster team work across the groups of people. Individuals were asked to share their stories and experiences of what "Community" meant to them. They also shared experiences of exclusion which had impacted on them.

Two groups identified, as part of this process; issues about young people "hanging around" on the streets; and issues relating to people with disabilities. Both were seen to be excluded from various aspects of community life. It was seen that the two very different groups were challenged by the same issues, so efforts were made to

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link the two together in a specific project to address the issues jointly. An agreed action from the day was for Brighter Horizons, a local youth group involved in street work to engage with more isolated young people and a group from Banff Day Services to explore opportunities for peoples with disabilities and local teenagers to work together which would also have a benefit for the wider community. The “Banff Inclusion Project” was born as a direct result and immediate response to the research shared on 28 October, 2009.

The working group formed comprised representatives from Community Planning, Public Health, Community Learning & Development and Housing & Social Work. Mr McDermott reported that it was determined, after discussing various options, that an activity programme, encompassing several different stages, be pursued. The event ultimately chosen was participation in the Garioch raft race – a charity event organised by the Inverurie Lions club which attracted a wide range of participants – community networks, businesses and social groups. A 16 week programme heading towards the event was prepared.

The initial step was to identify people who might be interested in the project. They were encouraged to participate and to contribute ideas to what should happen.

In March 2010, a group of 8 teenagers and 9 people with learning disabilities held their first meeting at Banff day Services and decided to enter the Garioch Lions Club Charity Raft Race on the River Don, from Kemnay to Inverurie.

To foster team building and cooperation between the two groups and assist participants in meeting personal challenges, a multi-activity day was held at the Badaguish Centre, near Aviemore. Individual events included a high ropes challenge and walking along a 4 inch beam suspended 30 feet above the ground; team building skills included plank walking, bridge building and problem solving.

Over the Easter holidays, the teenagers and day services group worked in small teams to produce drawings and designs for two suitable rafts, each to carry 8 people. Designs were based on a tri-hull raft with the hulls, and the spaces between them, filled with reclaimed 25 litre plastic bottles. The Banff Environmental Action Team (BEAT) premises at Macduff were used to build the rafts. A number of businesses sponsored the build.

Health & Safety was crucial to the project, so work was also progressed on acquiring buoyancy aids and head protection for the participants and completing risk assessments. Water confidence sessions were held at Banff Swimming Pool and all participants passed their swimming assessments. A practice day for the raft operational procedures was held at Loch Park Multi-Activity centre for the crews of the raft. Mr McDermott reported a degree of success – it wasn’t a case of paddling round in circles all the time! These sessions also assessed how the groups were working together as teams in difficult situations, included an impromptu water fight and social event.

At the same time, consideration was given to thinking of ways to raise funds for the Kidney and Cancer research charities which the raft race supported. A charity car

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wash was held from the BEAT premises in Macduff. 45 cars were washed in a four hour period, raising £300. Individual members also circulated sponsor forms and, in total, over £1100 was raised for the raft race charities – the project was the highest contributor to the charity.

On the day of the raft race, the river was running higher than normal, needing an additional risk assessment to ensure that participation was safe; it was agreed that the teams could go ahead. The rafts were deliberately held back from the chaos of the 29 rafts at the starting line, allowing a more calm start. The course was 4 ½ miles, with some tricky bits and white water – but the crews of both rafts completed the course singing and chanting and looking very happy. One team was placed 10th (finishing in 2 hours 9 minutes and 40 seconds); the other 13th, coming home in 2 hours 13 minutes and 17 seconds. In addition, the Banff Inclusion Project was awarded second place in the fancy dress competition.

Mr McDermott advised members that the project had been entered into and had been awarded Bronze in the 2011 CoSLA Quality Awards. The project had also received a commendation in the 2011 Aberdeenshire Community Safety Partnership's awards.

Although these awards were appreciated, Mr McDermott was more delighted by the outcomes which the project had delivered: there had been an increased number of people participating in local activities and driving the project forward; there had been an increase in the range of social networks for people; there had been a mutual awareness of problems faced by young people and people with disabilities; participants had experienced increased self esteem and confidence; people felt safer from anti-social behaviour and had experienced an improved way of life; people with disabilities now saw young people as experiencing similar issues to themselves – name calling, being “moved on” etc; and people engaged in developing a safer environment with less anti-social behaviour.

Participants had gone on to participate in “Citizen Leadership” training and had made presentations for example to the Northeast Learning Network and to the Chief Executive of the Scottish Social Services Council.

Members of the Committee viewed a DVD presentation of the project, with video footage capturing the various stages of the process; team building, skills attainment, working together, design and construction and the race itself.

The Chair (PB) commended the project, saying the success of the project was obvious, with the growth in confidence and working together captured on film.

Mr McDermott indicated that the project had generated its own enthusiasm and momentum will little need for a hard sell. He was looking forward to the next project.

Cllr Hood asked if there were future projects being planned?

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Mr McDermott spoke of a possible project between waste services and Banff Environmental Action Team (BEAT) to recycle used furniture and household goods that otherwise would have been sent to landfill. Day services were also promoting a ongoing arts project called Artsability which engaged with people across Aberdeenshire and adopted a multi arts approach to developing confidence, self esteem, respect and community participation. A redundant Victorian Walled Garden was been brought back into use and the fruit from the project was been used by other community initiatives e.g. The Green Tree Café and other outlets.

Cllr Tait thought that the project and its outcomes were first class and congratulated participants on what they had achieved.

Mr McDermott indicated that to take part in, and complete, the race was a great outcome in itself, but that there were added bonuses for all participants through the processes.

At the conclusion of the presentation, Mr McAuslin summed up the events of the day.

It had been intended to give a diverse presentation of community planning activity across the Banff & Buchan area. The Committee had seen the links between the various projects, and that all were evidence of agencies working together with their local communities to address locally identified needs. This, he felt, was community planning.

The synergies between the various projects were demonstrated; every project had been delivered by a partner/ partners on the local community planning group, had been funded by a partner/ partners on the local community planning group, or otherwise supported by a partner/ partners on the local community planning group. He was often impressed by projects but also very aware that they only existed because of partnership working being in place and taking place.

The Chair, in closing the session, thanked Mr McDermott and the Banff Inclusion Project participants for sharing their experiences with the Committee. He had been very impressed by all he had seen and heard of the projects.

Powerpoint presentation available as a DVD – too large to be included.

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THURSDAY 17 MARCH, 2011, SITE VISIT TO FORMARTINE

Present:- Councillors Bellarby (PB), Allan (AA), Cullinane (NC), Duncan (AD), Fleming (TF), Sullivan (MS), Tait (IT) and Thomas (RH).

Officers: Jan McRobbie, Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny and Audit) and Jackie Buchanan, Committee Officer.

Part 1 – Visit to Balmedie Library 10.00

Keith Newton, (KN), (Area Manager),
Annette Holland (AH), Community Learning Development Worker (Qualified),
Mark Mitchell (MM), Community Planning Officer,
Rosie Nicol (RN), (member of Better Balmedie Project)
Ian Nicol (IN) (member of Better Balmedie Project)
Sandra Knight (SK) – (member of Better Balmedie Project),
Sally Sheehan (SS), Community Learning Development Worker (Qualified)

SAC met at Balmedie Library. The Chair introduced SAC to the witnesses and explained its purpose. Keith Newton then went on to say that during the day SAC would get a flavour of the activities in Community Planning which were being carried on in the Formartine Area focusing particularly on those in Balmedie and Meldrum.

KN We have a local Community Planning Group which includes representatives from partnership agencies. We also have localised Community Planning Groups, some of which are transient. The local Community Planning Group has bi-annual meetings in Balmedie. The focus of attention has moved on in the last couple of years in Balmedie. With the success of Balmedie Projects, we are looking to introduce similar projects in Newburgh and across at Rothienorman. There was a very positive and successful approach taken in Balmedie and this model can be used elsewhere. Through consultation work at the local Community Planning Group, issues around autism were highlighted in the Ellon area. Ellon appears to have a higher than average number of residents within the autism spectrum and there was a need to have facilities to allow such residents to socialise and participate in recreational activities.

With regard to Oldmeldrum, there has been set up a Community Interest Company which has taken on a lease of the Town Hall. This is not a Development Trust but a Community Interest Company so that any surplus goes back into the community. The intention at the moment is for the Community Interest Company to refurbish the Town Hall. Meldrum Projects came out of the Planning for Real Initiative which took place a few years ago. We will also be hearing later on today from Udney Community Council about their community wind turbine. They have established a full size wind turbine and any profit from this will be reinvested in the community. We will then hear from Inspector Steve Pratt who will speak about the “Kill Your Speed” campaign. Formartine has a high level of road accidents, a large number of which often involve young males.

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Formartine doesn't have a large concentration of deprived areas. It's fairly prosperous so the social issues are different but are just as real.

AH There has been an increase in education amongst young drivers particularly in Turriff.

TF Was this part of the Safe Drive Stay Alive campaign?

AH Yes. This was run by the Community Planning people but we didn't become involved in Ellon.

IT Why is that?

AH It is not such a big issue for us.

MM All the schools are involved in any event.

KN We need to find a way to reach young people who have left school. That is why we have a multi agency approach to Motorfest which is to take place on 15 May 2011. The key target of this event is to reach that group.

IT How do the local community planning communities work as a group?

KN You will hear more from Inspector Steve Pratt on this in the afternoon but this is done through, for example, the Motorfest event. We provided leaflets on this. It is designed to attract people interested in driving.

IT Is this related to Pass Plus?

KN Pass Plus is done by the Community Safety Group.

Balmedie was a hotspot for small scale crime/vandalism. The young people were disconnected. Geographically Balmedie is situated on the edge of Aberdeenshire. A number of issues needed to be looked at. These issues were not major on a national or even on an Aberdeenshire scale but were all significant in and around Balmedie.

IT What is the population of Balmedie?

KN I understand the population is over 2,000. We need to look at the community on its own and not be prejudiced by what is happening in other communities. Every community is different. We set up a group from the Community Planning Partnership Group.

AH From this group we developed a Steering Group and employed three researchers. We did a questionnaire that went to every house in Balmedie. It took weeks to get it quite right. We put up a graffiti board in areas such as the playgroup where people could write down comments. We also held a Young Peoples World Café Event. Some of the youngsters of secondary school age in Balmedie go to Ellon Academy and some go to Aberdeen for school, there is a

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real mix. It was important for us to get young people's opinion as well as older people. As well as the Young Peoples World Café Event we had an Open World Café Event too. A lot of the issues/problems that people raised we could not sort on our own e.g. issues relating to health. Also there was a desire to have a Chinese/Indian restaurant in the area; again we couldn't do this. From the World Café Event, we tried to match people with other people that could perhaps help them. This was a main outcome. Balmedie is a community village/town but it was felt that lacked a centre. We got local groups involved and promoted what was happening already. This didn't involve a lot of work. We also issued a newsletter. Initially this was simply an update on the research/questionnaire and the resulting report. However, since then a group had taken on the newsletter. We have a book club and three new volunteers for the uniform groups. It was a great success and had a positive effect on the community spirit. I would say that with regard to young people we have not had a great success. We did try to engage with them. We don't have an issue with young people walking the streets but they simply just didn't seem interested. We secured funding to do the research but struggled to get the young people on board. We suggested a community café but they were just not interested. I would say however that crime has fallen since the report. This may be due to better community spirit and communication.

KN The researchers came from Balmedie, they were not outsiders.

IT Were they employed or was it on a voluntary basis?

KN They were employed on a part-time short term basis. I would say however that they put a lot more in than they were paid for since they were part of the community. The fact that they were local helped improve the engagement with the public. It was not an expensive exercise and I would say that value definitely out weighed the cost.

IT What is the demographic breadth of the population?

AH I can't quite remember exactly but there are a lot of young families.

IN There was not a lot of integration between the different age groups in the community previously. Unless you had children at the local school you would be unlikely to hear about some activities. The Balmedie Views report highlighted the lack of activities available for older people. There is now more. There is also a lot of exchanging of information. We found that initiatives have led to more initiatives.

AH We were not known to young people so that was a bit of an issue. If they don't go to Ellon Academy, we have non-involvement with them. We have developed a different approach. We started to get involved with them at a young age in the local primary school at P7.

RN There is more opportunity now for groups to get involved with younger children. An example of this was the bulb planting we did with the primary school

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children. There are so many things that we could do.

- IN There is a lack of integration geographically in Balmedie. Each housing development has been completed with little connection with the neighbouring one. As a result Balmedie is still very car orientated. We need more footpaths between the different housing areas and we need to make Balmedie more attractive visually. The recent excellent work carried out by leisure services to improve some of the footpaths is an example of how things can be made better.
- IN From a community perspective we have the White Horse pub which provides a focal point. There is a restaurant, bar and café facilities there. Various groups meet there and it hold discos etc.
- RN Other than that we have the library and leisure centre, primary school, co-op, pharmacy, chip shop and a small store.
- KM Although there are over 2,000 people living in Balmedie there are not a huge number of facilities.
- MS It's a bit like Portlethen which developed sporadically and then struggled with its infrastructure.
- KN That's a fair comment. There were very few groups in Balmedie when we set out.
- RN I would just like to emphasis that we are not struggling now.
- MS There is a new town planned on the south side of Aberdeenshire which will be an integrated development. Hopefully this will be a success.
- KN It is great to see how the new groups are springing up. We were very fortunate with the planning gain money. Through this for example we managed to resurface the all weather courts and an extension to the leisure centre is planned.
- PB Will Balmedie Projects be ongoing?
- KN The focus on Balmedie is moving away. We will review what is happening in the future. There is a danger in being drawn into a situation where a planning group goes on indefinitely. There needs to be a point where you draw a line and determine that a group has achieved its purpose and there simply requires to be an overview going forward. Other issues need to be looked at.

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Better Balmedie

Rosie Nicol (RN), (member of Better Balmedie Project)

Ian Nicol (IN) (member of Better Balmedie Project)

Sandra Knight (SK) – (member of Better Balmedie Project),

- RN Before the Balmedie Views projects came about, I contacted the Community Group in Ellon explaining that I was nearing retirement and I wanted to do something for the community. The first meeting of Better Balmedie came after the World Café event. It was clear that a separate group to the Community Council was required as they have enough to do with statutory responsibilities. We had a huge range of requests and initiatives put forward and we decided to try to do them all. We have been in existence since August 2009. There are two parts to Better Balmedie. We have monthly gardening club meetings and we carry out improvements around the village. We have 24 members together with 6 or 7 other people who help out from time to time so we have core group of about 30. Some people just come along to the talks and to do their own gardens. Many want to be involved in the community. We have done things such as built the big planters which came from old railway sleepers and been involved in other planting initiatives as well as litter picks.
- IT I have found that there is an attitude to litter picking where people think this should be the Council's responsibility.
- RN We got that too but the Council just doesn't have resources to do this so we just need to accept it.
- IN When we had the local community orderly around the streets were clean but that doesn't happen when the community orderly isn't here. We appreciate that resources are limited and it's not just a problem caused by young people.
- RN The community warden was great last year. He worked with us but from what I understand we are not going to have him any more.

We started out with no funding. Initially our first funding came from charging a £1.00 a meeting for attendance. We had a plant sale which brought in over £400 and a stall at the gala which brought in another £200. We were very lucky with the weather. Something magical happened at the plant sale, people came and talked to us, there was a real sense of community. We did cream teas too. It was a very good day. We applied to NESTA (National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts). We went to Dundee to a NESTA Workshop and submitted a business plan along with a lot of other information that was required. We then had to do a pitch in Edinburgh. There were 120 organisations that applied for funding and only 4 got funding. We were one of the lucky ones and we got £4,500. NESTA was very specific as to what the money was for. Originally the plan was to involve older people e.g. installing planters at the sheltered housing. A lot of people from the sheltered housing shop at the Co-op and they wanted a bench put next the bus stop. We've put planters there too. We have bought a poly tunnel also which is arriving

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tomorrow. This involved applying for planning permission. We hope that people locally will use the poly tunnel as it is a community resource. It will be situated at the back of the leisure centre. The leisure centre has been very supportive of us. There is also included a plan for a play area for the "Two's Group". The support in kind has been great. We have had great support from Aberdeenshire staff at Ellon. We got bulbs and plants from the Council.

IT Have you had any other funding from the Council?

RN We got money from the Formartine Partnership for a second bench. With regard to our plants we got a "highly commended" certificate from the Formartine In Bloom competition.

KN The Area Committee provide us with part of a top-up grant and we get £500 per annum. The initiative however is from Balmedie so it is very sustainable.

IN At the moment the Council provide grass cutting etc. Our concern is what will happen if this service is stopped? We have bought a mower and a strimmer but we can't replace the Council's grass cutting team. It is a worry.

RN Membership comprises mostly the over 50's. It is a bit difficult to get young people involved.

IN We would like to improve un-kempt areas. For example there is an untidy area beside the library here that is zoned for a Health/NHS facility and apparently we can't do anything with it. There is no funding available to build a health centre and it may therefore remain undeveloped for many years. We want to improve this bit by some planting but we cannot. For example we would like to have a community garden somewhere in the village, perhaps near the Tarts and Crafts Cafe. As I understand it although the land belongs to the Council for the land is zoned for development so consequently it must be left as is in an untidy state. It would be good if there was some flexibility in how these areas are handled.

IT Various agencies should work together in community planning.

SD Would you say that the consultation process that has worked better than the Planning for Real Initiative? It certainly seems to have been more comprehensive.

RN Yes.

SD When was the Planning for Real Initiative done?

MM 2007/2008.

KN Consultations are not successful unless something happens.

IT Community led initiative are perhaps better.

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- KN The Planning for Real Initiatives are done by the local communities but are supported by officers.
- IT There were two consultations then?
- KN Yes. There was the Planning for Real consultation and the one in terms of the Balmedie Views Project.
- IN They were conducted in different way and their intention was to do different things although they may meet up at points.
- KN Planning for Real is about physical things on the ground. The two should complement each other.

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Autism Community Planning Group

Sally Sheehan (SS) CLD Worker (Qualified), Ellon Community Centre
Mark Mitchell (MM) Community Planning Officer for Formartine Area

- MM I came into the post of Community Officer as the Autism Community Planning Sub-group got going. The initiative came from colleagues going to engagement events and seeing that there was a need there.
- SS Autism is a devastating life-long development condition. It has the classical triad of impairment – communication, social and physical. It ranges from a very mild condition to an extreme condition. It may or may not involve learning difficulties. Generally it makes it difficult for those affected to engage in mainstream activities. The issue was how to accommodate these difficulties. Schools are very good at coping with autism. Leisure and social activities pose more of a problem. I am a parent of a young person with autism and I am also on my local community council. The Formartine Area Forum listened and this led to the Autism Sub-group being formed. It is still evolving. Partnership working has built up and there are a lot of new partners involved. The building that was previously Esslemont school is used significantly by community groups. The Autism Sub-group is involved in upgrading the facilities so a young person's space can be developed for those with additional support needs including autism. Social Work are setting up an after school group. The Field of Dreams report was commissioned by the Ellon Community Planning group to try to identify the numbers of young people affected by autism but due to a number of factors specific figures were almost impossible to collate. (see the relative report)
- PB How was need identified in the community?
- SS Mainly from anecdotal evidence. Ellon seems to be a hotspot for autism as is Peterhead. No one knows why.
- TF In Mearns if there was such an issue, a researcher would be employed to look into this through the Local Area Partnership. Does Formartine have an Area Partnership?
- MM They were involved at the beginning but as the group felt they didn't want to pursue a whole building takeover and renovation of Esslemont School, the Area Partnership withdrew a bit. One of the main problems is that parents did not have access to the appropriate facilities or were aware of the benefits they were entitled to.
- SS The Ellon Family Directory has now been produced to help families in this regard. Some times there is too much information out there and people get overwhelmed, particularly when coping with the fact that their child will not have the future they had envisaged. The best way we found is through the families of those affected sharing information.

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- IT Your group is a sub-group of what?
- MM The Community Planning Group.
- IT What degree of sharing of information has there been among other areas?
- SS We will be sharing for example the Directory I mentioned is going to be used as a template in order to avoid other groups reinventing the wheel.
- MM We will put it on the Aberdeenshire website as it is not solely Ellon based.
- KN We need to share. That's a very good point.
- SS Future employment opportunities are also a major problem for people who suffer from autism. Parents have highlighted this issue and it has been picked up officers.
- KN There is now support for the group and the offer of advice and assistance. The Formartine Partnership does assist hugely in the community but the likes of the Autism Group it is better run by itself.
- TF In Mearns there is a Healthy Living Network which is now self-sustainable. Is the Formartine Area Partnership producing a likewise initiative?
- KN It is not part of the Partnership but it is coming out of other groups.

Members of SAC had a walk around Balmedie to view some of the projects The Better Balmedie group have been involved in.

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VISIT TO OLDMEDLRUM 12.30 HOURS

PART TWO

The Scrutiny and Audit Committee then met up at Meldrum Town Hall where they were provided with lunch prepared by Meldrum Community Café. There was then a short discussion with representatives of **NHS Grampian**, **Cameron Matthew (CM)** and **Mike Ogg (MO)**.

MO We recognise that community involvement is crucial to health and that the NHS needs to support the Community Plan and work together with the local authority. Historically the NHS and local authorities have had good working relationships together. We are now looking at closer working. We are intending to divide our Service into six areas to reflect the local authority's 6 areas. Both strategically and operationally this can work well.

CM From an operational point of view, we have paired managers with Social Work/The Children Service. They don't sit within the six areas but within communities for example at health centres. We need to have joint working to ensure that people get the appropriate services. The geographic area that I cover doesn't sit within the Local Authority areas but that is the plan for the future. The emphasis for community planning is very much on the preventative side of medicine – the aim is to educate people about health.

PB We saw joint initiatives between the NHS and the Local Authority when we visited Fraserburgh.

CM Increasing there are a number of older men in the community and the concept of a men's shed has been developed where men can socialise. This will include information and advice on men's health issues. The space and location is critical to the success of such a project.

PB When we visited Balmedie we were told that there was a site earmarked for the NHS but that this was a long term project. Meantime an initiative to turn this into a community garden has been blocked. Were you aware of this?

CM Yes and no. The NHS cannot block it as we don't own it. Such initiatives shouldn't be stopped now. It involves physical activity for people which we are keen to promote. As far as I am aware the block doesn't sit with the NHS.

KN There also seems to be an issue about provision of health information with regard to the autism spectrum. Sally Sheehan is trying to reconcile the different sources of information.

CM So many different groups collect information it makes it really difficult. NHS Grampian have a traffic light system through Health Intelligence. You can go to a specialist consultant and get information and if you have a specific question the NHS can go and find out the answer. I will speak to Sally and

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see if we can get something sorted out.

- MO Yes if there is a specific question we can certainly get an answer.
- CM Also it is important to ask the GP Service about their information. If you make an appropriate request you can get anonymised information from a practice. There is a bit of an issue however around residents using city medical practices which makes it a bit more difficult.
- MO In Balmedie there are people who tend to use the Aberdeen City medical practices.

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**13.30 – MELDRUM - DISCUSSION WITH ISABEL PAGE (IP) MELDRUM
COMMUNITY CAFÉ**

PART 3

IP Initially we leased the room downstairs which now forms the Meldrum Café. We have now initiated a second project to take over the management of the whole building from Aberdeenshire Council. The café has around 15,000 customers per year. We got start up funding of £17,000 including £10000 from Lottery and Planning Gain. There is no ongoing funding, we are self sustainable and make a profit for local good causes. The project arose from a Planning for Real exercise when two or three things were taken on board to be delivered locally. We formed a Community Interest Company to do this. There are no paid employees apart from a cleaner and all assets belong to the community. Our prices are affordable. We are not looking to maximise profit. We are open Wednesday to Saturday 10.00 – 16.00. We set up a second company with charitable status which takes our profit so we pay very little tax. With regard to the rest of this building it should also start making a profit but we can cross-subsidise from the café if necessary.

Isabel Page showed a presentation in relation to Meldrum Community Café project and the new project taking on the rest of the Town Hall.

TF Do you think this project would have happened anyway or was there an individual who was the prime mover?

IP As you will have seen from the presentation there were four of us involved and it really took all four of us to make this happen. The Town Hall has been deteriorating for some years and is underused. There had been a long term unmet need for a cafe. All four of us contribute in different ways bringing a range of professional and personal skills to the table. I would say it is best not to have too many people. We did in fact lose one person as a director who got frustrated with the delays.

IT You said that the only employee is a cleaner and that you make £14,000 profit. Surely the whole project would fail if you left because you are the manager on the ground. This would lead to an impossible situation.

IP I would hate to think that no one could step in. I make sure that all that I do is transparent and documented.

IT Obviously you have brought a lot of professional skills into the project.

IP While I was away the project ran without any problem for two months.

IT The fact that you charge cheaper rates than those charged locally has that caused a problem ?

IP Yes a bit of comment. On saying that however there is no private sector equivalent here in Oldmeldrum, only hotels. Inverurie provides a large

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number of seats in cafe venues. We take a tiny share of this market with only 28 seats in the cafe. There is an argument made that we are perhaps denying someone a paid job. We would argue that we have between 50 and 60 people who, though unpaid, are getting enjoyable work/life experience by helping out here 2 hours per week.

- MS You mentioned when you were showing us your presentation that there was delays in finalisation for the lease. Was this caused by Legal Department?
- IP The delays appeared to us to be caused by the Property Department. Legal Department then redrafted what was agreed but renegotiated fairly quickly to earlier position. We are still waiting for agreed structural repairs.
- KN I am very conscious of this issue. As there is a move to transfer assets to local communities we need to make sure we get the process right.

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Part 4 Meldrum Play – Sarah Storer (SS) and Jackie Insch (JI)

Present: Councillors P Bellarby (Chair); A J Allan; N Cullinane; S Duncan; T Fleming; M Sullivan; I Tait; and R Thomas.

Officers: Keith Newton (Formartine Area Manager); Jan McRobbie (Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny & Audit)); Mark Mitchell (Formartine Community Planning Officer); and Arlene Kelday (Assistant Committee Officer).

Also in attendance: Rod Gunson, Development Officer, Formartine Partnership Ltd

The Chair welcomed Ms Storer and Ms Insch to the meeting and invited them to make their presentation on Meldrum Play.

Meldrum Play is group of local parents with young children who felt that the children's play facilities in Oldmeldrum were inadequate, outdated and in poor condition. Meldrum Play decided to try and find out what others in the local community felt about the provision of facilities and raised funds to revitalise the park, working in partnership with Aberdeenshire Council's Formartine Landscape Services.

SS I am a founder member of Meldrum Play. Meldrum Play began in 2009 when the Wicksteed Horse in Meldrum Park was vandalised and we were advised that there was no money available to repair the damage. We knew that there was money within the community so we looked into methods of raising funds. We chatted initially with Isabel Page of the Meldrum Community Café about possible sources of funding.

The project was undertaken in partnership with Aberdeenshire Council's Formartine Landscape Services as they had knowledge and the expertise necessary to complete the project and the contact details of contractors which would be required.

As we were working in partnership, Formartine Landscape Services were prepared to use £25,000 from their capital expenditure to enable us to have a basis for any match-funding we could get.

JI We received match funding from LEADER which helped reach the target of £74,000.

In June, 2009, we undertook a consultation exercise at Meldrum Sports to ask the community what they wanted at the park. We also chatted to people at a community art event in Meldrum Square. The responses were used as a springboard for the project and to gain support for the cause.

SS The funding for the project was received from Aberdeenshire Council Landscape Services (£25,000); Awards for All (£10,000); LEADER (£21,000); Planning Gain (£14,000), Grampian Police (£1,000); and

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through our own fund raising and generous donations from local groups (£4,200).

We have four active members, and over 80 supporters.

We have also received a lot of support and information from Rod Gunson. Hazel Simpson from Formartine Landscape services was a huge help with her expertise finding quotes for play equipment and contractors and with managing the project.

JI Phase Two of the project could be to build a path around the park, which will enable wheelchair access, along with access for pushchairs and bicycles. The park is currently split into two halves.

We also hope to become part of the Park Users Group.

SS Meldrum Play hopes to facilitate families going to play in the park and encourage adults to use it as a place to go for a walk and get into the open air to

Following the presentation, the Committee asked a number of questions of Ms Storer and Ms Insch.

TF You mentioned that you received a grant from the Formartine fund. Was this from the Area Top-Up budget?

KN No, the grant came from the landscape fund for play equipment. We allocated all of the funds for the year to Oldmeldrum as it was a substantial project. Oldmeldrum was also fortunate that the Wimpey housing scheme brought in a lot of Planning Gain funds. These funds are not allocated to specific projects but to assist the community with projects. It was been well used. The grant from Landscape Services was used specifically to enable to the project to receive match funding [from LEADER].

SD Can you tell us where the park is?

SS Yes, the park is situated to the east of the town. Meldrum Sports is held there.

SD You mentioned that the park was split in two halves. Are there any issues with young people crossing the road (A947)?

SS We would love for there to be a pedestrian crossing but there is not one.

Thereafter, the Chair thanked Ms Storer and Ms Insch for their interesting presentation. Mr Newton commented that local groups to raise their own funds and not to rely too heavily on grants.

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Part Five Udny Community Wind Turbine – Brian McDougall

The Chair welcomed Mr McDougall to the meeting and invited him to make his presentation on the Udny Community Wind Turbine.

BMcD The Udny Community Wind Turbine is a wholly owned community wind turbine project. We received no private funding for the project and 100% of our profits will go to our trust company. The Udny Community Wind Turbine was the first project of its kind on mainland UK.

The turbine is an Enercon E48 turbine and is similar to other turbines which can be seen across the North East. There is no gear box and the turbine is a direct-drive turbine which makes less noise. It is also more reliable. There is a lot of wind in the North East and there are lots of turbine clusters because of this.

The turbine is expected to be 34.6% efficient (P50 figure). However, the bank calculated that it will be 29.2% efficient (P95 figure). We expect it to run at 28% of capacity.

The total cost of the project is £1,400,000 and we started raising finances in 2006. We have been allocated £249,000 from the Big Lottery Fund, £136,000 from CARES/EST and £95,000 from LEADER. We also took an initial bank loan of £900,000. This loan will be repaid over 10 – 15 years at 6%.

The turbine is expected to make a profit of £100,000 per annum during the third and tenth year and £250,000 per annum during the eleventh and twentieth year.

We needed a long term plan for the future funding of the project. There are five people who are driving the project forward, each with skills which compliment the others.

Over the twenty year life span of the turbine, we expect to make a profit of £4 – 5 million – which is a good investment.

A Pitmedden, Udny and Tarves (PUT) Group began a composting scheme which enabled money to be put into the community fund to allow the project to start.

The planning stage was costly and the most risky. For example, in order to ensure the grid connection was available we were required to put down a £54,000 deposit. We received a loan from SIS but the deposit would be returned if the project didn't go ahead.

We also received £15,000 from the Lottery Fund, £6,000 from LEADER, £16,000 from EST and £3,000 from Aberdeenshire Council for planning activities.

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Before we began planning the turbine we had a meeting with the near neighbours of the proposed site. Not all of them were as enthusiastic as us about the project. We realised that we needed to undertake more public consultation. We held a number of consultation events and meetings with the near neighbours. As a result of this the turbine was moved a quarter of a mile away from the original site. It showed that we listened to the concerns of our neighbours and took action – even if it meant losing some wind speed. Public support is also important so we held a “Planning for Real®” event. Approximately 300 – 400 people attended this event, with 95% supporting the project. We also involved the local schools by discussing renewable energy with the pupils and inviting them to make 3D models of the turbine. We also consulted with the wider community and surveyed 853 households in the area. Of those, 460 households responded, with 91% of those supportive of the project. It is also important to keep people up to date with the progress of the project. We did this through local and regional press. We recently held another “Planning for Real®” event; however only 100+ people attended. The key throughout our project has been being open and honest with the local community.

The Community Trust will allocate the profits made from the turbine. We have proposed that 50% of the profits will go to community action projects, such as walks and paths; 25% will go to community organisations. The remaining profits will go to good causes out-with the parish, youth scholarships and environmental action.

We received planning permission in December, 2009, and have confirmed Green Cat Renewables as our project engineers. They supported us in determining which package (ROC or FIT) and which turbine was most suitable for our project. The Feed-In Tariff (FIT) scheme is the best option for us. This means that, over twenty years, we will make £4 – 5 million profit but we will have to payback any grants we received. Whereas the ROC scheme would give us a profit of £2 – 3 million, over twenty years. The finance required from the bank has been secured. We started work on the site on 8 March, 2011, and the turbine is due on 2 May, 2011.

Although we are now seeing a light at the end of the tunnel, we wonder if our hopes and aspirations will be realised. We hope that the community will take advantage of the funds. There are 150 members of the Community Trust. We also hope that we can register and secure the Feed in Tariff scheme.

In conclusion, I'd say that other communities can do what we've done. There is funding available for joint ventures and taking pro-active ownership of a community wind resource makes a difference to attitudes.

PB What was the involvement of the Community Planning team in your project?

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- BMcD** Community Planning helped organised the “Planning for Real®” events, as did the Formartine Partnership. Community Planning also kept other groups involved in the process. Their involvement will be a continual programme and won’t stop. They have helped all the way through and we’ve shared knowledge.
- TF** You said that the Community Fund will be used to assist project within the Parish. What about projects outwith the Parish?
- BMcD** 10% of the funds will be allocated to projects outwith the Parish.
- KN** There are lots of linkages to Community Planning. One objective is to help communities become self-sustaining. Community Planning, with its partners, can provide support. This is to everyone’s advantage. Communities can’t rely on the Council to do everything. We need to strengthen their capacity to do things for themselves.
- IT** You have a very large bank loan. What kind of underwriting did you require?
- BMcD** Banks see the advantage of turbine projects. If the project was to fail, the bank would take it over and run it as a commercial enterprise. The bank had to undertake due diligence, for example, looking over the project, looking over the contracts which were in place, collecting data, looking at the terms of the planning consent and the lease with the site owner.
- IT** Can you tell us more about the five directors who are leading this project?
- BMcD** My background is in engineering. I was an engineer for British Telecom. There is also an architect, a geochemist, a rural economist and a business manager from the oil & gas sector.
- SD** Can you tell us about the insurance which you are required to have?
- BMcD** Yes, we have public liability insurance for £10M which costs £8000 per annum. We also have insurance for the technology between the turbine and the electricity supply as this is vulnerable.
- RT** When the turbine was moved location, did you have to undertake new tests for this site?
- BMcD** No, it was not essential.

Thereafter, the Chair thanked Mr McDougall for his interesting presentation.

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Part Six Kill Your Speed Campaign – Inspector Steve Pratt, Grampian Police

Present: Councillors P Bellarby (Chair); A J Allan; N Cullinane; S Duncan; T Fleming; M Sullivan; I Tait; and R Thomas.

Officers: Keith Newton (Formartine Area Manager); Jan McRobbie (Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny & Audit)); Mark Mitchell (Formartine Community Planning Officer); and Arlene Kelday (Assistant Committee Officer).

Also in attendance: Rod Gunson, Development Officer, Formartine Partnership Ltd

The Chair welcomed Inspector Steve Pratt, Grampian Police, to the meeting and invited him to make his presentation on the Kill Your Speed campaign.

SP I took up post in Ellon in 2003 and have been involved with Community Planning for eight years. Community consultation is key and I visit all twelve Community Councils in Formartine each year. I also meet with the eleven Formartine Councillors bi-annually. We have a mobile police office so that we can reach more rural areas, such as Udney Station and Cuminestown.

Anti-social driving and speeding are the most common complaints in Formartine. There is not a problem with anti-social behaviour, serious crime or vandalism. Driving is an issue for the public. We therefore sought funding from the Formartine Community Planning Group in order to progress the Kill Your Speed campaign.

The Kill Your Speed campaign took place over a two month period and for twelve days during this period, Officers dedicated time to enforcing the speed restrictions in built-up areas. Fifty motorists were detected for speeding and for other offences, such as drink driving, offences relating to the use of mobile phones and driving with no insurance.

It is difficult to measure how successful the campaign was because there has been a reduction in the number of road traffic accidents involving injury but there have been more accidents where damage has been caused. The campaign has not finished and we will continue to promote the cause as we still have a number of leaflets to distribute. Some of our Officers are trained to use the hand-held equipment. When a driver is stopped they will be given one of our leaflets. This is being done because the community want us to do it – not to raise money through fines.

Following Inspector Pratt's presentation, Members asked a number of questions of those present.

TF You mentioned that there had been more accidents which caused damage.

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Do you know why this is?

- SP** Unfortunately, it is not clear why this is.
- SD** Can you tell us how data and statistics are analysed?
- SP** Crime rates plummeted when we had snow and often there are times when there is no need for the Police to be involved. For example, drivers exchange their names and addresses. There are lots of things which affect driving.
- PB** Can you tell us what was done in relation to publicising the campaign?
- SP** There was lots of publicity before and after the campaign. We issued a press release through local press. The Press & Journal didn't run with it. We are continually highlighting it.
- PB** What has the reaction from the public been?
- SP** We received good feedback from residents in Fyvie and Methlick. We sometimes got positive feedback from the drivers – although, sometimes it was not good.
- IT** You sit on the local Community Planning Group. Can you tell us how much funding you received?
- SP** We received £4000. It took some time to run the campaign. The enforcement of speed should be day-to-day work and we tend to concentrate on the open road. This campaign concentrated on built-up areas. We therefore required additional Officers, over and above the usual numbers we have.
- TF** Can you tell us if you used Special Constables during the campaign?
- SP** Two of our Special Constables are trained to use the hand-held equipment but they were not used during the campaign. This is because they are only available during the weekend and the campaign was targeting drivers during commuting time.
- KN** There is a clear action in the Community Plan to ensure that people in Aberdeenshire are safer travelling on our roads. This is the number one priority.

Thereafter, the Chair thanked Inspector Pratt for his interesting presentation.

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Part Seven Question and Answer Session with Councillors

Present: Councillors P Bellarby (Chair); A J Allan; N Cullinane; S Duncan; T Fleming; M Sullivan; I Tait; and R Thomas.

Officers: Keith Newton (Formartine Area Manager); Jan McRobbie (Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny & Audit)); Mark Mitchell (Formartine Community Planning Officer); and Arlene Kelday (Assistant Committee Officer).

Also in attendance: Rod Gunson, Development Officer, Formartine Partnership Ltd; and Bob Leonard, Team Leader, Community Learning and Development.

Following the presentations, there was an opportunity a question and answer session.

AA Bob, can you tell us about your role?

BL I work with the Community, Learning and Development team. We do a lot of work with young people in relation to driving. We give a lot of information and provide opportunities for learning. For example, the MotorFest in Turriff has been developed in response to a series of road fatalities in the area. It will provide an opportunity for young people to see impressive cars and this is the hook to attract young people but there will be a clear message about road safety.

MM The local Community Planning Group goes to the Turriff Show and this year we are working with Grampian Fire and Rescue Road Safety Unit and we plan take along the Seat Belt Convincer and Subaru Police Car.

MS Do young people in Formartine have the opportunity to attend Safe Drive Stay Alive?

MM Yes, all schools participate in Safe Drive Stay Alive. However, it is difficult to capture pupils who leave school after fourth year. That's why community learning is so important.

MS It would be interesting to get more information on this.

PB Keith, how do you work between the local Community Planning Group, the Community Planning Board and Community Planning Executive?

KN All local community plans go to the Board. I have no great dealings with the Board or Executive on a day-to-day basis. The Community Planning Groups are empowered to act as they see fit. I would say that more work could be done to improve local and strategic links. The relationship between the Groups and the Board needs to be tidied up and clarified. Local groups are becoming more self-sufficient and are becoming more aware of how to do things and integrate better with partners in the area. However, there are

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things they can't do. There needs to be a mechanism to ensure that issues are fed to the Board, then out to agencies and then back to the local Community Planning Group.

- IT** How does the local Community Planning Group link to the Area Committee?
- KN** It is better than it was but there is still room for improvement. One member of the Area Committee sits on the Community Planning Group. Ward Forums have recently been established, bringing together Council services, partner organisations and local community groups to discuss local priorities, needs and aspirations; there is one in each of the three wards. Two have been very successful, particularly in Turriff and District. These Forums provide the opportunity for communities to discuss local issues. In Turriff, the Forum involves people who are not the "usual suspects" for these types of meetings. There has been a tradition of an annual event, covering the whole of Formartine, in Oldmeldrum which enables homogenous, Area wide issues to be discussed.
- At Ward level, local issues are raised and this helps greatly with increasing knowledge. There are regular meetings between the local Community Planning Group, the Area Committee and the Area Manager. The local Community Planning Group reports to the Area Committee on the progress of actions within the community plan. All Members can see, input into and challenge the plan.
- IT** Have there been any issues with the local Community Planning Group being made up of too many Officers?
- KN** There needs to be a link with local Councillors and the Groups. There needs to be a balance between the two. This can be challenging at times.
- PB** We have discussed lots of successful projects in Formartine. Have there been any projects which weren't so successful.
- KN** It is the enthusiasm of the volunteers which helps to progress the projects. There are some internal timing issues which must be scrutinised. There have been no outright failures but some projects have been more successful than others.
- IT** Everywhere we have visited today has been a tremendous success. There is lots of good work being done in the area.
- KN** Nobody likes giving up and we like to get things to happen. There are areas which can be improved. We need to get all services and partner agencies to "buy-in" which can be challenging.

Thereafter, the Chair thanked everyone who attended the meeting, with particular thanks to Keith Newton.

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WEDNESDAY, 23 MARCH, 2011

PART 1 - VISIT TO WESTHILL POLICE STATION, WESTHILL

Present Councillors Allan (AA), Cullinane (NC), Fleming (TF), Hood (FH), Gray (IG), Sullivan (MS) and Thomas (RT).

Apologies Councillors Bellarby, Duncan and Tait

Also present Ian Fowell (Area Manager, Garioch/ Chair of Community Planning Group) (IF), Jan McRobbie (Corporate Improvement Officer - Scrutiny & Audit) (JM) and Jackie Buchanan (Committee Officer) (JB), Jill Sowden (Community Planning Officer) (JS), Maureen Strachan (Volunteer Westhill Well-being Forum) (MAU S), Vicky Morris (Service Point Adviser) (VM), Audrey Findlay (Deputy Chair of Westhill Community Council) (AF), Inspector Bob Thomson (Grampian Police) (BT), Angela Allan (Senior Community Learning & Development Worker) (Ang A), Lorna Forsyth (CLD Worker Qualified, Westhill Community Centre) (LF).

SAC were made to feel very welcome at Westhill Police Station and were provided with tea, coffee and biscuits on arrival.

Background

IF The Garioch area is the most geographically compact in the Aberdeen area. It comprises 9% of the whole area of Aberdeenshire, yet has 21% of the population. The economy is strong. It has the lowest unemployment rates in Aberdeenshire and in Scotland. There is a huge development pressure in Garioch and also huge growth. This is very good but it does have a down side. With such development pressure places such as Blackburn have grown by 89% and Kintore by 110%. There are new people coming in to the area and that puts great pressure on the local infrastructure. It can also split communities between the established residents and the newcomers. It is very important to sustain a healthy community within these localities and have community involvement. To see examples of the various pressures on infrastructure you need to look at schools, sports facilities, traffic, etc. The public sector has not invested to the same extent as the private sector. It is difficult to get European funding or lottery funding as in Garioch we don't have social need compared to other areas. It is really down to people's enthusiasm to get things moving. Every bit of land is under pressure so it is difficult to get space to build or rent. It is expensive too as you're always looking at a commercial rent figure. Certainly growth can be a nice problem to have but it does have a down side. How do we as a Community Planning Partnership get the community engaged? The local Community Planning Group is very strong and enthusiastic and the partners are keen to work together to get things done. Not everyone who is here from the Group will make a presentation but please, if you can, take a moment to speak to them. There are a lot of projects in the pipeline. We can tell you about these and about the things we've done. Some of the initiatives are not physical but simply involve community engagement, which is really important.

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The best thing about the Community Planning Group is that it allows that spark of creativity. About this time last year, we had a meeting of the local Community Partnership Group, where someone made a comment about there being space available in the reception area of the Police Station and suggested that a Service Point could be created there. There never really had been a Council presence in Westhill before, and this was such a great idea that we went ahead and created a Service Point right here in the Police Station. It is a prime example of community planning in action that also supports the Police and allows them to support us. This is our first Service Point in Aberdeenshire and it is unique in being situated in a Police Station. Other ones are proposed to be in established Council offices.

Service Point/Police Bikes

Vicky Morris (Service Point Adviser) (VM)

Inspector Bob Thomson (Grampian Police) (BT)

VM I started work in November 2009. The Service Point opened in December 2009 and was publicised in January 2010. It was really the first Council presence in Westhill. We advertised in The Westhill Bulletin and used word-of-mouth to let people know we were here. We have had good feedback from the public users so far. We offer the same service as the Contact Centre in Fraserburgh except it is face-to-face. We basically deal with general enquiries about what the Council can do. It's really good that it's in the Police office as there is a cross over but we are looking to do something more publicly to advertise our presence. We need to ensure that people are aware of our existence so that they could do things such as hand in forms, pick up recycling boxes, etc. In fact collection of recycling boxes has been one of the main things that we've done here as well as taking details of road defects which have been reported. We are clearly anxious not to lose this Service Point and the numbers are increasing. It is simply a case that some people are not aware that we are here yet.

AA It is good to see the numbers are picking up. Has it been advertised in the local newspaper?

VM Yes it has. We're looking to advertise more. I'm sure that will allow the numbers to pick up.

MS Have you contacted Northsound Radio?

VM That's a good idea. I don't think we've done that yet.

FH Perhaps Kintore Radio would be more appropriate.

TF There are a lot of private houses in Westhill. Are there many council houses?

VM No, there are not many.

BT There are some registered social landlords.

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IF The shopping centre is private too. It gives a different feeling where the Council has a presence in a shopping centre. Westhill has changed over the years. It has grown and expanded as a community too as well as physically. A lot of people are coming in now, even if it's simply to do shopping in Marks & Spencer's. This has all helped to build the importance of the town centre.

BT I believe in a Community Policing model. I came to Westhill about five years ago. There were problems then and we seemed to be tackling the symptoms not the causes. It needed partnership working. The school/youth workers and we, the Police, were saying the same things. It was the same people causing problems. You cannot achieve things working in isolation. It was a slow process. Five years ago in Westhill there were between 40 and 50 incidents of vandalism per month. There has been a 70% reduction. To my mind partnership working achieved this. Community planning has taken off in the last couple of years. We can match up things we do now, for example youth diversionary work, we can collectively address that. It is not as effective when you work individually. Sometimes the Police are not the right people to deal with the situation; you need to call on partners. The Service Point is a real example of community planning producing a tangible result. This idea came from the Community Planning Group. The Community Planning Partnership also funded two bikes for Garioch for the Police. The Police really like them as do the public.

TF Is the Service Point just to be Westhill based or do you intend to expand it elsewhere?

BT The Service Point is the first in this area and the first in Aberdeenshire. I don't know of any other combined ones in Scotland. There are funding issues so we need to look at innovative ways to sustain services. Through the Service Point we've managed to expand the service to the public; the rent being paid for it is nominal.

IF There is only one other Service Point proposed for Garioch, which is at Gordon House in Inverurie. It will bring the public facing side of all Council services under one point. The Service Point is a Council initiative but not a community planning initiative as such. In Westhill we couldn't have done it any other way as we cannot afford to rent or buy property to sustain a Service Point. We only really have staff costs with this one.

FH Aberdeenshire Council is the main partner in the Community Partnership Group. Who else is there?

BT There is the Police, CLD, the Community Safety Group (the Community Safety Group works at different levels and we have had funding from the main Community Safety Executive to target specific issues), and the Voluntary Sector. We've started an initiative where we've passed on gardening equipment to the Voluntary Sector. This came from gardening equipment we were storing in relation to a criminal prosecution for cannabis cultivation. Normally what happens is that such equipment goes to landfill but now we can pass it on and it can be used for a good purpose. This has been done through Jill Sowden, the Community Planning Officer. It's gone to help in community gardening initiatives including those targeted

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at people suffering from mental health problems. We need to wait of course until after any relative Court case until the Fiscal signs a Release Note.

FH What other links do the Police have into the Community Plan - is it part of the Police Service Plan?

BT At my level, I'm responsible for all operational policing in Garioch. I talk to the Community Planning Forum and provide them with updates and get updates from them. For example, we want to increase visibility by getting information on issues and then deploying a presence where required so we discussed this initiative with the Community Planning Partnership before we launched it as it involves a major policy change.

TF There is a Mearns Area Partnership. Is there an equivalent in Garioch?

IF Not in the same form. We want to create one. We did have one with a theme of youth and it was quite successful. The group wanted to focus on youth projects rather than what the Council wanted to do through a Service Level Agreement. We could gain from other area partnerships' experiences and from the Planning for Real initiatives. Small community work in different geographical areas would be good and this would feed into the Community Plan.

Menshed/Well Being Forum

Jill Sowden (Community Planning Officer) (JS)

Maureen Strachan (Volunteer Westhill Well-being Forum) (MAU S)

JS In 2009 we were approached by Social Work to help the "With Inclusion in Mind" project which was Scotland-wide. It was to ensure that the Council and their partners were complying with mental health requirements. We decided that it would be better if the input to the project came through Community Planning and not through Social Work. Aberdeenshire Council were the only area in Scotland which did it this way. Garioch was first, the other five areas within Aberdeenshire followed. We looked much wider than Social Work. We had an event and came up with twenty actions. Some we dealt with immediately because we thought they were so important. We took them to a whole range of other organised groups not just mental health and we asked if they had similar issues. They added bits on but on the whole agreed with everything. This formed the basis of the Garioch Community Plan. We ended up with eight actions in the Plan. What we discovered was that recently retired men were very much a marginalised group and suffered from low level mental health problems. They seemed to have a lack of social networks. A prime example would be a retired oil worker. We looked at this issue and built projects around it. We held a Retirement Fair. This involved various things leading to a taster session of local activities which were available, a Dementia Café and a monthly Tea Dance. It also led to the idea of the Men's Shed. This idea originated from Australia and there are a few in Cheshire in England. It's for men only and it offers things like woodwork, etc. and a chance to socialise with other men. It also includes information and demonstrations in relation to DIY. We have a Steering Group which includes three tradesmen and we are interested in taking over the old Library

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building in Westhill. There are a lot of people who don't have basic DIY skills and this ties in with the Shed idea. Banff & Buchan College have also offered to help with DIY courses. At the Retirement Fair there was a lot of local activities advertised and we got really good feedback, e.g. the CAB recruited seven new volunteers. People want to repeat it.

MAU S With regard to the taster sessions which we organised we recognised that there was a need to get isolated people involved in community events. There were plenty of groups already in Westhill but we wanted to simply engage people hence the reason why we had the event. Most groups came along and showed us what they did; clubs were keen to get new members whether it be singing, crafts, dancing, memory box etc. We were aware that if we could get people involved in groups it would also act as a respite for their carers. We have a Dementia Café in the morning which is open to the public in the afternoon. We can get both carer and cared involved. It is good for both of them and has proved very popular. At the Retirement Fair it became apparent that there was no real support for people with Dementia and this was why we set up the Dementia Café. There is a representative from Alzheimer's Scotland there from time to time and we have four volunteers. We mingle and talk to people. The carers support one another. One of the most popular things that came out of the Retirement Fair was John Selby's Social Dancing. John Selby agreed to run a one-monthly session in Westhill. There was a concern that the actual proper dancers would take over so what we have is a half hour at the start in which dancing is taught. Alzheimer sufferers come too. Some just come and sit and have a chat and a cup of tea, others engage with the dancing. Dial-A-Bus runs a service to the dancing. It allows great social interaction and involves exercise too. The participants enjoy it and it gives us an opportunity to ask what people want/need. We've spoken to various agencies who can input into this section of the community through this channel. This allows people to help themselves.

TF This is exactly the same as the Mearns Healthy Living Partnership.

MAU S Resources are scarce. It's best to ask what the public want. We charge £2.50 per person for the dance and refreshments. John Selby does it free of charge as do the volunteers. We were supported by the Council to start with. We keep prices down so we don't put anyone off attending. Dial-A-Bus is a great service. We now have a Kid's Ceilidh on a Saturday and some of the older people attend too.

IF This idea might be successful elsewhere. It is important that we learn from each other.

MAU S We are fortunate in having Ashdale Hall to use.

RT What sort of numbers do you get at the Dementia Café?

MAU S Including carers normally about twenty. If a person is in a home or has been hospitalised the carer can still come. We could cater for greater numbers. The Café only started at the end of last year and should develop.

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TF Do you have a community bus?

MAU S Yes we have. In the summertime we hope to run short outings. The participants only have to contribute a bit towards the running of the community bus. We have volunteer drivers. Some local groups have been very generous.

Westhill and Elrick Community Council

Audrey Findlay (Deputy Chair of Community Council)

AF I have lived for thirty-five years in Westhill. It is a very different place from when I moved in, I think the Dementia Café encapsulates that. There were very many houses put up in the 60s and 70s with little infrastructure if any. Now we have 3rd generation families. This in itself creates a sense of community and since 1968 there was the Westhill and District Residents' Association and this continued until 2008. The Residents' Association has evolved into the Westhill and Elrick Community Council. In my opinion this should have been done many years ago. We are now a statutory body and can have an overview and get involved in consultations. We have young and old people in the community now which provides a balance. There is an imbalance however in the style of housing. In my opinion there are too many expensive houses and not enough affordable houses. Previously there were Council-owned houses but these have all been bought up. The privately owned shopping centre is a big issue. It means that we don't have the luxury to use it in a community way. There were plans to improve the shopping centre but this fell by the wayside. Many people come out from the city to shop at Marks & Spencer's so the car park can be very busy at times. Because Westhill is on the edge of the city this creates both opportunities and problems. There are a large number of people who live here and work in the city. There's also a huge industrial area now which creates traffic issues. Since 2008, Westhill and Elrick Community Council meetings have been well attended and very active. We have a Police report every time and at most meetings a police presence as well. Clearly there are issues to cope with despite this being generally an affluent area. It is fantastic that we have the Police Station located here now and the Service Point. These will have a huge beneficial effect including bringing awareness to people of partnership working. It would be good to have links with other groups, for example the NHS and the Fire Service which would allow communication with the public in a more meaningful way. A representative from TESCO comes along too sometimes to our meetings as does the local representative of the company who manages the shopping centre. This allows us to facilitate links there.

There are various sub-groups of the Community Council and they connect with other groups in the community. We do find it a bit confusing as to where the Community Council sits within Community Planning. I met with the Christie Commission and saw Aberdeenshire Council's completed response on Community Planning in Aberdeenshire. There was no mention of Community Councils. I raised this at the Garioch Community Council Forum meeting and they said they would investigate this. Some Community Councils create a bad press as they can be "Council bashing". This is not the way to work. We must work in partnership. It is very important that Community Councils play a role. There needs to be communication and consultation. This is the key. I would say that consultation with Aberdeenshire

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Council is not always ideal. For example, in the case of the Library, consultation was a sham. This needs to be improved. Also, at the opening of the Service Point within this building, no-one from the Community Council was invited and there were concerns about that.

BT Maybe there is an issue with the Community Council Forum.

FH Audrey made a good point about the NHS connection. NHS do not appear to be willing partners - they should be but they are involved in a lot of stuff we've heard about. The NHS is guilty of not using the Shire Community Health Partnerships. There needs to be a greater flow of information. It's not working as well as it should.

TF The NHS is very active in the Mearns Healthy Living Group. They are aware of the beneficial effects of preventative measures being taken. They started a gardening service where volunteers do gardening work.

AF Can I just add that I would like to see more young people involved in the Community Council.

Making It Real/Compass H' Art Project

Angela Allan (Senior Community Learning & Development Worker) (Ang A), Lorna Forsyth (CLD Worker ,Qualified, Westhill Community Centre) (LF).

ANG A I am a Senior Community Learning & Development Worker and was involved in the Making It Real project which came from the Planning For Real project. It didn't get continued straight away. Over a period of two years there were thirty-seven participants in the Making It Real programme. We took the action plan from the Planning For Real project and made our own one. We met on a regular basis. Maureen Strachan reported back to the Community Council using the action plan. We are just at the moment doing the Project Report. Not everything has been achieved. Some of the issues were massive. Examples of what people wanted are as follows:

- Community Resource Centre including a coffee bar for the elderly/those suffering from mental health issues/the youth,
- More NHS dentists,
- A new library,
- Road crossings,
- Reduction in vandalism,
- Reduction in dog fouling,
- Affordable housing,
- More sports facilities,
- More public toilets, and
- More information on health issues.

IF Well over half of the initiatives have been achieved and the other half are on their way. I would add that other groups have taken on some of the issues.

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LF The Westhill Art Project began some 4 years ago when we became aware that there were monies sitting in the planning gain pot. The Arts Development Officer and I made presentations to local groups to attract volunteers interested in art to work towards employing an artist to help deliver a consultation exercise to determine where the 'heart of Westhill is'. There were five areas identified in the centre, north, south, east and west of the town. The volunteers were supported to employ an artist who would create the first piece of public Art for Westhill. The compass was created and shows the growth of Westhill as it consists of rings (like a tree), the flora and fauna that has grown in the Arnhall Moss, where it is situated, throughout its history and the compass points indicate the international community Westhill has become and the global interaction it has within oil industries and businesses.

LF then passed around pictures of the final art piece.

LF The art piece was unveiled on 10 November 2010 by Westhill's oldest resident. We are now looking at doing a new piece of art.

SAC members then visited the art piece which had been erected.

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PART 2 - VISIT TO KINTORE HUB, NORTHERN ROAD, KINTORE

Also present Ian Fowell (Area Manager, Garioch/ Chair of Community Planning Group) (IF), Jan McRobbie (Corporate Improvement Officer - Scrutiny & Audit) (JM) and Jackie Buchanan (Committee Officer) (JB), Jill Sowden (Community Planning Officer) (JS), Audrey Findlay (Deputy Chair of Westhill Community Council) (AF), Inspector Bob Thomson (Grampian Police) (BT), Reid Hutchison (Community Economic Development Coordinator) (RH).

SAC members were made to feel very welcome at Kintore Hub and were provided with lunch. Graeme McDonald, Director of Kintore Hub, then provided a presentation on the Hub.

PART 3 - SAC SITE VISIT TO THE BOTHY SITE, KINTORE

On the bothy site a community building is to be erected later in the year.

RH Through the Community Partnership we engaged with the wider Garioch area. The Garioch area is the least successful in applying for funding that is part of the reason a local rural partnership would help.

AF Is setting up a Rural Partnership the best use of funds? What role do other groups play; for example the Community Council?

RH Part of the Rural Partnership role is finding out what the community wants so the Community Council can feed into this. We need to determine what Garioch wants as a whole.

AF The landscape is already cluttered but something is required to knit it together.

BT At the moment there is a small bothy in the Town House. It is seen as a collective way to make things better and reduce antisocial behaviour.

IF There is tension between the established residents and new residents. About four years ago there was a public meeting. Around 100 local people attended and came up with actions. One proposal was that there would be a Youth Café and the young people decided that it should be an eco-building made with straw bales. It has taken some time but a charitable company limited by guarantee was formed. A community building is planned here on the site which was formerly the Community Library. It will be a Youth Café/Youth Centre and the site will be leased from the Council. It is hoped that the building work will take place in the summer and that it will be operational early 2012. As Bob Thomson mentioned there are rooms currently let in the Town House and on a couple of evenings there is work done there with youngsters. This is a joint project which is community led but with Hub involvement as well as CLD and Community Planning.

GM We don't open the Hub at night for youngsters as they weren't interested. The adult supervision aspect put them off.

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WEDNESDAY, 23 MARCH, 2011

COUNCIL CHAMBERS, GORDON HOUSE, INVERURIE

Also present **Elaine Kivilichan** (Senior Community Learning Development Worker - Garioch Community Centre) (EK)

Jack Hendry (Community Development Groups) (JH)

PART 4 – YOUTH CAFÉ

EK

(Along with members of the Area Committee, we have been looking into getting a suitable site for a youth café in Inverurie for around 5 years now, but either the buildings we looked at or the locations available were all unsuitable. A year or so ago we looked at the possibility of extending the existing Community Centre into the spare area of ground at the back, as that looked like the best and most sustainable option in the long run. We commissioned the services of architect Willie Lippe and together with the young people a design for the Café was drawn up. The costs were higher than expected so the plans were modified and the new costs are around £275,000 and although still quite high, the young people are confident they will secure the money through a variety of means

The extension will be built over two floors. Upstairs there will be a café and an internet area which will provide amongst things careers advice. There needs to be somewhere for the 16-18 year olds to go. They don't fit into any particular group. Other agencies will be able to use this area to meet young people in an informal setting, which is lacking at the moment. You tend to find also that other agencies book out all available rooms. On the ground floor there will be a dance and art studio. The next step is to establish a Youth Strategy Group for Inverurie which will really be a sub-group of the CDG. We will be holding a meeting of Community Groups in June, to feedback the findings of the Respect Research project and we will be asking people at that event to sign up to be part of the Youth Strategy Group. The idea is to target adults who were previously involved in the community centre and other interested individuals or groups. I would like the music school for example to come along and give workshops etc. and the Gaitherin are also interested in getting involved. The young people have been the key drivers in this project from the start, by getting involved with designing and undertaking the surveys and also by working with the architect on the final design. The young people will continue to take an active part in the whole process, and are enthusiastic about their role in this, even although they may not be around when it is finally completed.

JH Because the extension will be joined to the existing community centre it can share toilets with the community centre so that avoids additional costs.

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- EK There will be a link from the upstairs coffee bar in the community centre to the new youth café. The community centre was bought in 1974. This extension will add to the facility although it will slice off part of the kitchen in the community centre.
- AA How long will it be before you start building?
- EK Once the Youth Strategy Group is established, we can start funding. We have for example a hip-hop dance group who will do fund raising. We can then determine the time frame.
- IF It took four years for the Kintore project to be completed. We have been looking here for a site in Inverurie for some time and the best option we could get was at the back of the community centre. Although there are advantages with this, it could still take a long time to complete as funding may take a while. It is difficult to determine the time frame in advance.
- IG Who will own the building when it is complete?
- IF The Council will own it.
- NC Could you amend access so that you have one access to the new part of the building rather than having access through the community centre?
- EK Yes but we will have separate access to a certain extent. It is not ideal but at least at night there are not many people using the coffee area within the community centre. Also young people will have a committee to decide things and determine how everything is run.

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**PART 5 – The Community Development Group's RESPECT programme
– JACK HENDRY**

JH As part of their programme of Community Integration the CDG recognising a lack of communication between the social, sporting and religious groups in Inverurie had already instigated a campaign to bring these organisations together for their mutual benefit. When we were invited to attend a meeting at the Douglas Hotel to discuss our participation in the government funded RESPECT programme designed to bring communities together it was grist to the mill. When the Locomotive Works closed in 1969 with the loss of hundreds of jobs Inverurie went into decline as families moved South to take up employment in the factories and steel works in England. However as fate would have it within months oil was discovered in the North Sea and the population underwent a massive cultural and racial change with people from all over the world taking up residence in the town and district to work both offshore and onshore in the firms set up to service the oil industry. Over the next 40 years Inverurie's population shot up from 4000 to the 14,000 of today. Many new clubs, organisations and societies were formed and the committees of the existing clubs were saturated with newcomers. Unfortunately because most of these people were incomers and therefore unfamiliar with the indigent population there was minimal co-operation and even an apathy between the groups to work together. For the past few years the Community Development Group has been working to establish a rapport between all these local organisations from the "under 2's" to Age Concern by holding meetings to bring them together for their mutual benefit and to establish a strong resilient community in the town . When the RESPECT programme was created and sponsored by the Scottish Government, this was all the encouragement we needed to increase our efforts to succeed. With the help of ODS a Glasgow based firm of researchers sponsored by Edinburgh we held " World Cafe Type" meetings which attracted representatives from over 50 of the local organisations where we invited the delegates to write down and debate the things they would like to see happen in Inverurie, the existing features they thought were beneficial to the enjoyment of life in the town and also the things they thought were poorly managed. Parallel to this we sent out a group survey to all the organisations we could identify locally and also a personal survey asking the participants to detail what they would like to see happen to enrich life in the town and district and also those things which they thought could be improved. We have now collated and tabulated the answers received on the surveys on computer and intend to call a meeting of all the representatives of the many organisations in June to discuss their answers and to form a core group to discuss the way ahead to help them to achieve their ambitions. "Working Together to Build Stronger Community Networks" - Copies of the survey documents , our programme statement and the analysis of the survey results can be obtained from the Community Centre , Chelsea Road , Inverurie Tel No 01467 -620353.

PART 6 – GARIOCH HERITAGE SOCIETY – JACK HENDRY

We were gifted for a peppercorn rent the whole old Loco Works building on both floors over the first four saw tooth sections. It is our intention to lease out half of this to a commercial enterprise and the rent money will pay for the running costs of the proposed heritage centre/social history part of the building which will comprise a 100 seat lecture theatre and a work area. We are currently designing the inside. Basically it will provide details on the social history of Inverurie. Another benefactor and keen enthusiast is Thomas Tait, late owner of the Paper Mill.. The Loco Works was a godsend to the people of Inverurie. It brought employment and new residents. The Loco Works closed in 1969 after the demise of the railway. Because of the new employment opportunities through oil, however, more people continued to come to Inverurie from all over the world. It is still growing today. I would say it's the centre for a lot of the surrounding villages. The Garioch Heritage Society basically wants to show the social history of Inverurie.

- EK It's important to educate people about the history of Inverurie. This has been done as part of the Respect project and through the Youth Forum.
- JH Our own programme dovetails in. It brings different sections of the community together and there are lots of groups coming together.
- IF The project is an opportunity and has a very strong business plan. Through the let, the project will generate income to run the Heritage Centre. It is not strictly speaking a community planning project but it is a way of working which gets people working together locally.

Jill Sowden provided a presentation on IHIG projects.

- JS There are 17 agencies on the Inverurie Health Improvement Group. Each of the groups already had an art group. We got external funding and brought in 2 artists. The project centres on barriers people have experienced in local communities. This has been captured on film and will be made into a DVD in an artistic way. We will take this to the local committees.
- JH It means that in the future people will be able to see what happened in Inverurie through history from visiting the heritage centre. We hope to have access to the building at the end of the year.

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PART 7 – INVERURIE HEALTH IMPROVEMENT GROUP PROJECTS

Jill Sowden provided a presentation on IHIG projects.

JS There are 17 agencies on the Inverurie Health Improvement Group. Each of the groups already had an art group. We got external funding and brought in 2 artists. The project centres on barriers people have experienced in local communities. This has been captured on film and will be made into a DVD in an artistic way. We will take this to the local committees.

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PART 8 – ALAN YOUNG, CHIEF OFFICER FOR THE COUNCIL OF VOLUNTEER SERVICES (AY)

AY I advise charities and other community and voluntary sector groups, and get involved in many Third Sector projects.

Phil Hanlon who is Professor of Public Health of the University of Glasgow made the following comment:

“Top down does not work but all too often bottom up does not scale up”.

He was talking specifically about community health promotion initiatives, but I think that the point he is making is true of a great deal of voluntary sector activity.

We do exceptionally good things in small packets. A huge number of small, ‘grass roots’ Third Sector groups make an enormous contribution to the facilities and quality of life in communities up and down the country, and win the commitment and respect of people within those communities. But very many of them have no ambition to extend the work they do beyond their own particular village or community.

Now we face a whole new challenge. Public services are under extreme financial pressure. Many services that have up to now been provided across the board by national or local government are having to be scaled back, and the call is out (under the banner of ‘the Big Society’) for communities to take on new responsibilities and come up with new projects and facilities to take the place of public services that are having to be scaled back.

One particular area I’ve been asked by the Council to work on comes under the umbrella of the Scottish Government’s ‘Change Fund’. For brutal economic reasons as well as human reasons we need to enable far more older people to stay in their own homes and minimise stays in hospital. We need to look at how the third sector in Aberdeenshire can build up community life and develop informal, community-led services to support and include older people living in their own homes and neighbourhood facilities.

Aberdeenshire is fortunate in already having a number of ‘Over 50’s type clubs, along with organisations such as the Mearns & Coastal Healthy Living Network in the south and the ‘Silver Circle’ up in Strathdon. But such groups don’t exist everywhere within Aberdeenshire (or for that matter throughout the country). We need to ensure that there is more even and equitable coverage so that older people in certain communities don’t suffer because there doesn’t happen to be a voluntary group in the village or neighbourhood where they live, or because a group has lost interest or has folded.

That doesn’t mean the same service has to be provided in every community. Any activity where people get involved is good and it doesn’t need to be

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exclusive to older people. Not only does this help people physically but also mentally.

We need to build on what's there so that we do have a minimum level of coverage throughout Aberdeenshire. Community Planning is the ideal mechanism for tackling issues such as this. It's as much about ways of working as about structure. We need to work together through the Community Planning structures to tackle Phil Hanlon's dilemma. Community planning needs to look at where statutory services are having difficulty maintaining coverage, and where the Third Sector is best placed to come up with viable alternatives. Often the key to this will be seeing what the Third Sector is already doing successfully in particular parts of the Shire, and looking seriously at how these successful projects can be 'scaled up' or replicated across the whole of the area.

- MS I must say I don't like the term the third sector, the voluntary sector is much better.
- AY We use the term because that's how we've been designated by the current Scottish Government. It's just the terminology that is has been given.
- AF There are certainly challenges ahead. We should learn from others where things have worked. There does need to be linkages between the big players the NHS, the Council, the Police, Fire Service and the Third Sector To my mind, Community Health Partnerships are not developing in the way they could do.
- AY Community Health Partnerships seem to represent an information cascade rather than actually initiating any action themselves. We've got our first Change Fund steering group meeting on Friday where plenty of voluntary sector activists will be taking part. It will be an opportunity to see how people are already being looked after and sustained in their local community.
- IF In summary in answer to the question is Community Planning working, I would say yes. Could we do more? The answer is also yes.
- TF I think that the term Community Planning isn't quite right. It should be Community Engagement or Community Involvement.

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THURSDAY 24 MARCH, 2011

10.15 am – Meeting with Area Managers:

Ian Fowell, Garioch Area Manager; and Malcolm McAuslin, Banff & Buchan Area Manager.

Present: Cllrs P Bellarby (Chair), A Allan (Vice-Chair); N Cullinane, I Gray, F Hood, M Sullivan and R Thomas.

In attendance: J McRobbie, Corp. Imp. Officer (Scrutiny and Audit)

1. We've visited your areas and seen some of the "community planning" AA projects on the ground. But what, in your opinion, is Community Planning and what should it do?

MM Basically it is public service partners and the community working together to deliver services in communities as efficiently and effectively as possible and in accordance with the identified priorities of the communities. This would be mainly social and economic improvements.

It's essential that people are genuinely engaged in the decision making and the level of service delivered. They also have to accept that there are other pressures on the public sector to deliver whole heartedly. Other community wishes may not be permitted because of legislation – for example, the allocation of council houses, where sometimes a local community may seek to have the allocation delivered in a way that is non-pc.

It's also important to get a commitment from the organisations with which we work that they will work with us to better serve the communities we all serve.

IF I think it's a way of working – not a separate service, or "add-on" to the Council, but an attitude; an approach. It's joint work – agencies pulling together for community benefit. It's nothing new – we've been doing it for years – but Community Planning embeds it in a statutory system. It sounds easy and straightforward; but it's not – it could so easily get caught up in red tape and systems (e.g., Single Outcome Agreement; groups becoming a talking shop) – with so many people it could become a bit of jargon or a dumping ground, and that needs to be resisted. There are pitfalls to be avoided. People need to be singing from the same hymn sheet – but it's not just about joint talk – it's about joint action. Of course, there needs to be discussion between agencies so that we agree our approach and build the necessary trust and understanding, but the focus should be on working together to provide a better outcome for communities.

For me, the best examples of what Community Planning is about are when there is that spark of creativity, when something happens which perhaps would not have happened through each individual agency on its own – e.g., Westhill Service Point. This is a prime example – in the 11 years I've been in post, the Council has been looking for an opportunity to have a Council access point in Westhill. As a stand alone standard office, it was expensive, in terms of property (build or lease) as well as staff and infrastructure.

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However, there was a chance remark at the local Community Planning Group of “spare desk space” at the Police Station in Westhill, and within 9 months the germ of the idea had been approved by the Chief Constable and the Council’s Chief Executive. The agreement triggered funding; the funding made it happen. Westhill got a service in shared facilities which had been sought for years. There are other projects which get funding from a number of sources, including the Police’s “Diced Cap” charity; others happen where a shared priority is agreed. For example, in Kintore the police raised an issue where a large development of affordable housing had come on stream at the same time which led to local unrest. The problems were actually attributable to 2 or 3 families, but the existing community saw it as “those new people”. The Police worked with various agencies, including the Community Council and the Registered Social Landlords, and applied a solution. While this did not specifically arise from discussion round the Community Planning table, the necessary climate for the joint approach had allowed the groups to act together effectively.

Perhaps Community Planning is rather like a catalyst in a chemical reaction - it is not itself one of the chemicals which are consumed but it needs to be present to make the reaction happen.

- IG I agree. There is nothing new – I think it is the essence of how communities have evolved over time. The title is still confusing and I wonder if more could have been done to help organisations and individuals know more about it?
- IF I think that we have worked hard to explain it – the appointment of local Community Planning Officers has gone a long way. But it is a complicated concept. I believe we are past the “not knowing” stage – groups are happy to work with us.
I think we are stuck with the label. I didn’t agree with the title “Community Planning” when Aberdeenshire first took part in the pilot. Other suggestions included “community budget” – it seemed an extension of what we were doing there was still the question, why “budget”. But now, at both a national and Aberdeenshire level, it’s almost an accepted code/ jargon.
What is important is not the title, what we call it – but rather the actions and what is being done.
- IG In my experience, action is needed before communities get involved.
- MM Communities have been doing it for a very long time. At the start of the formal Community Planning launch, I held briefings with the communities in Banff and Fraserburgh. I was questioned; “What’s new in this? We already do that”. The only thing that had changed was the new statutory provision.
I think the situation was only complicated because there were often consultations relating to Town and County Planning legislation going on at the same time. In an early Community Planning event in Fraserburgh, four members of the audience walked out when they realised it wasn’t about land use zoning and the Local Plan.

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This distinction is still lost on occasion – it’s all very well for us – we deal with the concept and reality on a daily basis. For the standard resident of Aberdeenshire, with a job, wife, family and other interests, the distinction between community planning and land use planning is often lost and people find it confusing.

I agree we’re probably stuck with it as a title; and also that we were doing “community planning” long before the statutory system was established.

- IG I feel that there’s a role for us as Councillors too, to make sure people understand.
- PB I would draw an analogy with the “Scottish Government”. Officially it’s still the “Scottish Executive” – but from 2007 it has been referred to as “Government.” Could we use a different term, except for official times – e.g. “Community Action” (as suggested by Cllr. Sullivan on a previous occasion?).
- IF If it were to be called “Community Empowerment” and Aberdeenshire added, we could call it “Aberdeenshire Community Empowerment” – it would be ACE!
- MM Why not “Partnership”? I believe that’s what it’s all about. However there are statutory duties relating to Community Planning and the Single Outcome Agreement. However, when we engage with the communities, I think we should call it what we want!
- PB Perhaps Legal and Governance officers could be asked to provide guidance about what could, or could not, be done in terms of badging and titles.
- FH I was impressed by the quote from Paul Hanlon yesterday¹ “Top down does not work – but all too often bottom up doesn’t always scale up.”

I’ve been involved with local government for many years, first as a community councillor and now as a councillor, and believe that the vast majority of the population expect “the Council” to provide all the services we need. There have been exceptions I’ve seen, usually where individuals are driven to take a particular issue or project forward, take the bull by the horns and deliver.

I feel that there is a step-change needed. Communities need to be taken on the journey as to how to come forward with ideas then have those ideas progressed to delivery.

I agree that Community Planning is a mechanism, a way of working. We’ve missed a trick though, communities still expect the Council to do everything for them. They need to be empowered to do things for themselves – and not just rely on an occasional bright spark to take things forward. We should get that message out – the Council needs to inform, put in place structures and procedures to support communities to come forward with viable projects for

¹ used by Alan Young of the Council for Voluntary Services (CVS)

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themselves. Funds are limited – communities need to be aware that some projects (e.g. Inch 50 m swimming pool) are not deliverable. Projects need to be deliverable and realistic. I know that at several good Planning for Real exercises, communities have been advised that some of their expectations or wish lists are unrealistic.

MM I think this may be more the case in larger settlements – the smaller communities of Aberdeenshire have developed a culture of self help and self motivation. There are lots of examples in Banff & Buchan where communities have self provided for their own requirements, such as bowling clubs, pavilions and other sports facilities.

I agree that we need to “grow” them to be more resilient and receptive to the idea that we can’t do everything for them.

IF Despite this, when it comes to providing services to the community, or enabling communities to self-provide, it’s still top down. “Community Planning” is seen as an add-on to what the agencies are expected to provide. But if Community Planning is really about how we do things, we have a budget of £500M, the NHS £1000M, and over 14000 Council staff – it should all be a resource for Community Planning.

I’ve only had one Planning for Real consultation in Garioch. It raised a number of issues. Some issues identified in the exercise were service requests, e.g., road crossings needed, which we as a Council could sort out alone. The real question is how can communities can influence Council and NHS policies and plans: there’s not a very clear link at present.

RT I broadly agree with Cllr Hood. I don’t think there’s much point in changing the name at this stage – it may only lead to further confusion – and costs in re-badging. I don’t think we would be able to get the statutory terms changed. Locally we could call it something that provides more of an explanation of what it is, how it works.

IF A suggestion might be to drop “Planning” and make it “Aberdeenshire Partnership”, as Malcolm suggested. I know that several of the urban based successors to the previous Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership (ATP) have kept “Partnership” in their title – e.g. the Inverurie Partnership. I think this makes a slight change in emphasis which provides clarity.

2. How should the relationships between local members and the local Community Planning Group work?

MM There are tensions around that concept. All councillors are democratically elected to represent community views to the authority. Then all at once there’s a new statutory duty and another body to do the same. I think the role is therefore to support groups and participate as, and when, necessary. We can only have one member from the area committee on the community planning group – and that representative may not always be able to attend

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every meeting.

I feel that the role for single councillor is to be the link between the group and the Area Committee. This interface is augmented by twice yearly meetings of the area committee with the local community planning group.

Single representation sets challenges, and one way to address the problem would be to have more than member on the community planning group. However, if there were more councillors the group may be seen even more as an “arm of the Council”, with people invited to attend solely to assist the Council deliver its agenda. Everyone needs to have an equal share for the group to work.

The basic problem is that you, as Councillors, are elected to do something that a later structure is designed to do. This leads to tension. Both sides need to take a gentle approach. It's quite clear that local councillors have the connections to assist local groups achieve their aims; also groups have the potential to help the councillors on delivery.

The challenge s that if a local member plays a more proactive role, with a particular aim in mind, this can lead to volunteer members being less engaged and having less enthusiasm for the project.

- FH Have you been aware of resistance from communities in having more local members?
- MM It's an individual thing and I think, depends on how relationships have been built up between the councillor and the local groups.
- IF I think it's the same everywhere. I also think there's been the same tension with Multi-member wards versus single-member wards. I can think of examples where individual councillors in a multi-member ward have more of a link with parts of the ward than other ward councillors. There are situations where things work better with a link to a particular Councillor, and others where the contact should be with all the ward Councillors.
- IG I agree entirely with Malcolm – it depends on individual councillors. It's the same with Community Trusts, where they exist. They need councillors there to support them, but not to direct them.
- AA It can also be hard for councillors if there are more of them on the local community planning group. There would be difficulties if they feel obliged to stand up for their ward and not the work of the group as a whole. Our own communities expect you to work hard for them and it's hard to justify supporting projects in other areas before those in your own ward.
- MM It very much depends on the councillors. Partners often may join us to have their own agenda and want to input to help deliver the outcome. This is different from “Here I am, giving up my own “precious things” to help others in

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partnership.” There to help others will not necessarily cause difficulties.

I think the solution is to make sure that there is always someone there to represent the area committee at the local community planning group meetings.

IG In my experience in working with the Banff Trust, they are never sure how many councillors to expect. At the last meeting, no members attended; the previous meeting there had been five. This variation could make it hard for the groups.

IF I think the relationship issue is a difficult question for all partners taking part in local community planning groups. How does the representative of any agency take back all the relevant information to their organisation, or even collect all the relevant information from their agency to share with the partnership? As Chair of the local community planning group, I expect those who come to the meetings to know what's going on in their agency and provide appropriate feedback. This is the same for the Police or NHS representative as it is for a single Councillor representing the whole Area Committee. This may be more easily achieved easily within a hierarchical structure such as the police, but it is challenging for a number of other agencies.

I'd also expect there to be the same representative participation and feeding back by those participating on the Community Planning Board or Executive. It's a genuine issue – although we have a particular responsibility as “lead”, the Council is just one of the partners and does not own Community Planning.

In Garioch the elected member representative on the local community planning group is the Area Chair. I can understand how he picks up on what the Committee thinks and feeds that into the local community planning group - but there is no easy mechanism for him to feedback to the local councillors.

We've tried a number of things. We usually hold two meetings a year between the local community planning group and the Area Committee, to look at the area community plan, progress etc, but there is a question about how to make it interesting. We could have a boring meeting, spending one hour on the first page, then 10 minutes on the next 6. There's a real difficulty on how to engage and keep the discussion live and fresh. We've tried speed networking on occasion too. The Community Planning Officer issues a monthly bulletin on local community planning matters which is widely distributed to local groups and interested bodies. In addition, I hold ward meetings with Councillors where community planning issues can come up and are freely discussed.

I would resist strongly any move to have more than one councillor on the local community planning groups. As Chair of the group I'm trying to get all partners to contribute to it, and if we have all 14 Garioch councillors, or even one per ward, the group will be council heavy. It's a constant balancing act to get all partners seen as equals.

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FH I assume there's an agenda for the local community planning meetings? If so, would it be possible to share this with the members of the area committee before the local community planning group meet? In that way, councillors could consider any items which they'd want to feed into the group via the area chair/ council representative. It would be a good mechanism both to share information and invite comment.

It wouldn't be a case of the Chair having to say, just a way of suggesting comments.

RT I agree. In the Committee's recent consideration of decentralisation, there was a clear disconnect between local councillors and the local community planning group. Similarly, I've never been at a meeting of any community council where they've reported back on local community planning to their group.

There's also an issue about the area community plan and the former area plan. Most of the actions still fall to the council; partners may contribute vocally but have no resources to share to community plan projects.

IF In dealing with the first Garioch local community plan, I was a bit too strict. Whilst the former area plan might have included items such as "tar footpath at x or y", I only included multi-agency projects action plan. There were about 30/40 of them as compared to perhaps 250 actions in the former area plan. In the next iteration of the plan, I eased off and there are now 100 actions - most are still multi-agency, but with the lead partner(s) highlighted and a box to report "other partners". This box is rarely empty. But it is not the Area Committee's own plan. The Area Committee comments on it as a partner. Its comments will be taken into account in the same way as those from the police or the NHS partners.

The previous environment was that the area plan was the area committee action plan. The local community plan is a very different animal. On the separate issue of allowing local members to comment on Community planning issues, rather than issue the agenda *per se* I'd prefer to use the ward pages to invite comment.

I'd also report that Cllr Kitts-Hayes is a very regular attendee at the local community planning group – and if he cannot attend, he invariably asks the Vice Chair to substitute.

3. How is agreement reached amongst partners on the best way forward and resource allocation for specific projects and initiatives?

IF The matters are discussed and agreed at local community planning meetings. The agenda covers (new) topics of interest, the monitoring of area community plan actions, community planning budget and projects, and agency updates. Resources are allocated to projects in the plan, but the local community planning budget is only £10,000. When you think about this in the context of

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the scale of projects arising, such as the planned Youth Café at Kintore which costs £150/180k, it's clear that someone else makes it happen.

- FH If projects all have a named lead partner, this is good, as the actions are tied to someone specific.
- MM Agreement is by consensus, along the same lines as Ian detailed. Partnership agreement is required to partners to involve in pre-work for a proposal before it comes to the local community planning group.
- FH Is it a long term plan? For example, does it allocate ½ way through the year to a particular issue? If you start with a certain programme and number of projects, is there any flexibility to respond to opportunities?
- MM The programme is reviewed every six months and at times reassessed if, for example, a project is completed ahead of schedule, when a new project may be added in. Please note – this has never happened, perhaps because of budget issues. However we've always said the plan is flexible – it's a long document; all you can see at any one time is a snapshot.
- IF The plan is officially a four year document, reviewed every two years. This can lead to confusion where there may be overlap with a previous version. For example, at present the old document is two years old and has two years still to run – and its replacement was due to go out for consultation. However, the local community planning officer was uncertain about how to proceed with budget cuts on the horizon. On that basis, it's now being proposed to local Community Planning Groups that a rolling plan be prepared which might last 4 years. This would be done by removing old and adding new projects and aims. The rolling document would be kept up to date on the website and publication in hard copy reduced to once every four years. This would be in line with the Aberdeenshire Community Plan and also tie to the Council election period.
- RT Is there a problem ever with partner representatives attending not being able to commit to projects on behalf of their organisation, or make decisions at the meeting?
- IF That depends – we all struggle at times with that. I have no staff or resources at my direct disposal – everything I do is by influence. I can persuade Education, Learning & Leisure or Landscape Services colleagues; I see this as the Area Manager's job.

There are certain things the police can do – but the Inspector in Garioch is clear that he only commits to what is in his control.

The NHS also struggle – attendees are generally middle managers – how can they commit the NHS?

The commitment is through the plan itself – all agencies should be behind a

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project for it to get into the plan. It is not always immediate – sometimes it takes six months for things to get in the plan; sometimes six months later things have changed and it's a "sorry".

MM I find the question difficult to relate to. I can't think of anything surprising which the group did not expect to see. For example, there's a general issue on underage pregnancy/ underage drinking in the plan. NHS (?) will come forward with a proposal indicating what they can deliver and looking for support. The issue may come forward as being about sex education and precautions. Another possible initiative might involve other partners, for example the police, re underage drinking. On both of these Education, Learning and Leisure may have a role within the general school curriculum. What is crucial is the timing of projects. Things that might previously have been taken forward as single projects by a single agency can be taken together in a suite or complementary or shared effort. This can give a strong message.

I can only see this ever being a problem is someone came up with a brilliant solution for which there was no possible budget.

4. IG How does Aberdeenshire seek to empower its communities to ensure that all are assisted in participation in community planning – are there lessons to be learnt from the legacy of programmes such as Villages in Control, Aberdeenshire Towns' Partnership and Planning for Real?

MM I remember the Villages in Control, lead by Bill Pardie, although I wasn't involved in it. He'd a hard job, took over from two former officers and was not initially well received by the community. Bill managed to overcome that – he stimulated real "community planning" in certain communities.

If the question is about what sort of structures can support community planning, I think that the root has to start with engagement exercises leading to the production of a plan with community input on priorities. This should be sent to the local community planning group to facilitate the projects' implementation through partnership funding. It doesn't always have to be a formal Planning for Real exercise – these are very costly both in terms of time and labour and can often lead to unrealistic expectation. If the question is asked, "What would you like to see?" you get replies based on an ideal situation, not reality.

The "Making it Real", a smaller version, I've seen in action twice, and it's amazing how people can identify their priority community needs which then inform a published report. These exercises do give communities some feeling of being involved and being smaller scale, can take place in a short time and allow a fast response.

I take the outputs of Making it Real exercises to the Banff & Buchan Area Management Team on the basis of "what can we do...". That allows me to respond to the community what we can/ can't do. The can dos are priced and

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taken forward if possible. Sometimes some issues can be solved from within existing Council service provision, delivered directly from service budgets. Communities may feel a bit of a disconnect with the Council and its budget processes – do we ever consider, at the early stages of building a budget, what the communities have said are their priorities? Sometimes it may seem that those delivered are by good luck rather than good guidance? Or have we manipulated the public to think their priorities are ours?

The system struggles as it is both top down and bottom up – but doesn't seem to meet in the middle. From the top there are pressures such as Government priorities or statutory requirements; what comes from the roots are the local community priorities for localised areas. I don't know the answer to this disconnect.

- MA This is surely the role of the local councillor – to take part in and be aware of local community priorities and to pass them up to inform colleagues and officers.
- MM I agree – but is there a formal mechanism for us to consider these issues as part of the budget allocation process?
- IF I'd agree with Cllr. Gray's point – Community Planning itself does not have a big budget – it's more to do with working with partners outside the Council. It can't be a main plank of the Council's budget process as schemes draw funding from elsewhere.
- MM I should clarify; I meant those projects which are entirely within the Council's remit. I would like to think that the police and NHS are also, particularly in times of restricted resources, looking at what the local communities have said are their priorities when they set their own budgets. If we don't have funds to deliver, we need to say so.
- IG Communities feel they have positive ideas but can't finance them themselves so ask the Council to help. We don't have the funds either. I think support is more about helping to find funds rather than help to find ideas – there are plenty of good ideas.
- FH I agree – but the Council is just one of a variety of routes to funds – it's not just about Council money and resources.
- IF I would repeat, it's not about funding; I think the process is more about engaging and empowering communities. It's an approach rather than a procedure – it's openness, willingness to listen, and empowerment. There are techniques – community engagement, Planning for Real, community action plans etc. I learnt a lot from the Aberdeenshire Towns Project – that started off as a capital / infrastructure project but quickly became a community engagement process – an early specific form of Community Planning with Scottish Enterprise Grampian and Health colleagues based on specific towns. Some of us argued that if ATP and Area Top Up funds were combined, this

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would give each Area over £100k for community planning or town centre projects – but this was not to be.

There's a lot happening in Garioch, whether through Community Learning and Development, the local Community Planning Officer, and groups such as the Inverurie Partnership, but we're not very well developed in some techniques – there's only been one Planning for Real exercise, no community action plans etc. Community action plans could be very useful and interesting. A formal Area Partnership would help and I am fully supportive of that – it could go into what has been done, what has not worked, and what is being done. We're waiting to hear back from Economic Development what they are doing about this.

However, many of these actions and techniques are for geographical communities – communities of interest can easily be overlooked. Some of the work you heard about yesterday in Westhill came from working with the mental health community of interest.

Also yesterday, one of the community representatives raised the question of how Community Councils link to community planning.

As Malcolm mentioned already, there's also the issue of how communities influence agency policy, both the Council and its partners. Is Community Planning top down? As Council representative I feel I can give community groups advice and a bit of funding, but often little more than that. I see the police genuinely listening and responding to community needs where they can, for example, there are now more police on bicycles in Westhill and other parts of Garioch. I'm aware that NHS partners are speaking about this matter. But I can't think of a single example where local community needs have informed the Council's Housing & Social Work Service Plan, or the Council Plan, or even the Single Outcome Agreement. The Single Outcome Agreement is very wordy and operates at a high level to satisfy the Scottish Government – but it is top down. This again raises the question – how can local communities influence the Council's plan and the plans of other Community Planning partners ?

PB I've seen community comments and concerns about it being top down and not roots up.

IF The question is, do we do it on a community basis. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) Small Town Group asked the question, in the context of the national audit of all Single Outcome Agreements, why very few SOAs mentioned towns. Towns are the powerhouses of Scotland, not the cities and the rural areas. We could empower towns to have a local partnership to promote community action plans for each local community's aspirations. I feel that there could be ways to do this, and we need to find them.

5. How can we ensure future sustainability, in terms of people as well as

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MS fiscal resources, in community planning?

IF Why is this a question, a concern? If Community Planning is a separate process, competing with traditional statutory services for staffing and financial resources, then I suspect Community Planning will always come second. But if it's a way of working, an attitude, then all the staff and resources of the Council, and the NHS and Police and Fire Service, can be used in Community Planning. That's a bit trite – but you get the point. For example, Landscape Services talk to local communities to develop local parks such as play areas and paths. Social Work consult on new care homes; Education, Learning and Leisure on new schools. I feel that this is how to engage with communities across all agencies and services – Community Planning is not just the staff in Woodhill House and the area offices plus a small budget, it is overarching across all agencies.

However, Community Planning needs some staffing (i.e. the local Community Planning Officer) to focus attention and stimulate/ support projects and joint working. Also, money helps bring, and keep, people to the table. £10k per Area Community Planning Group is an insignificant sum in the context of a £500M Council budget. Yet in your visits, you've seen what has been achieved with a local dedicated officer and £10k per Area. I didn't think sustainability of Community Planning is under threat. If the Council were to cut this allocation, there's more to lose than gain.

MM I was thinking along the same lines – provided we continue to work in partnerships, with the partners and the community attempting together to deliver fit for purpose services meeting the needs of the community. If that continues, there are no threats.

In the context of budget constraints, there is, however, a need to develop a range of supports to enable and empower communities to address cuts, and possibly take ownership of projects in their locality.

FH I'd make reference to the current scenario with play groups, where the Council previously funded places that are now being delivered from council funded nursery places first. This was a budget change and there's an opportunity here for community planning to support local communities in keeping their local playgroups open. I heard this morning that Newmachar Play group hopes to continue and are trying to encourage local parents to continue to use the group.

MM There's a very basic example; as a wee boy if you saw litter, you picked it up and binned it – whether it was yours or someone else's. There was a recent email from Ewan Wallace, Head of Transportation & Infrastructure about possible community intervention in the de-littering of bus stops.

FH As a councillor I've been aware of two specific community litter pick up days. Perhaps this is something that could be extended, with community councils having more or a role in this?

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- IG There's still a huge perception that the Council do everything. For example, the issue of dog fouling is often raised and people don't want to accept that it's not the Council's responsibility to pick up after dogs, but rather the dog owner's responsibility.
- MS In our visit to Formartine last week we were told about the renovation and restoring of Oldmeldrum Town Hall by a small but determined group of volunteers, with four principal players. They experienced great difficulties with the Council in trying to get services to respond in a coordinated, timely manner. It could have been so easy for them to give up. The real issue in the question I think is about the sustainability of the volunteers in the communities prepared to work with the Council and other agencies in taking forward initiatives and projects. We need to encourage and respond to their enthusiasm.
- NC It's the same in Kintore with Graeme McDonald at the Hub – he's been so involved in the set up but he will eventually move on.
- IF I think there are times when projects reach their natural end and should close. There may be a gap till something else starts up – but that's only natural. I have a concern about the lottery which seems to be tending to only fund projects if the group owns the asset. For example, in Blackburn the local community project developed a Hall as community facility. It was a local initiative and pulled together planning gain monies, local fund raising, council funding, Scottish Government support and the church into a £1m project. The land had been gifted to the Council and was leased to the group for 175 years – the group raised money and built the hall and so owns the hall. But if something were to happen and the hall were to be lost, for example, purchase and lease back, so the whole asset could be lost. This is too great a risk, so the ground stayed in council ownership yet the hall is owned by the community. This provides continuity. For example, it would be difficult for Inverurie or Stonehaven Town Halls to be gifted outright to a local group, without risking the community's asset.
- MM That may not necessarily be so – there are ways to write the disposal which could add conditions relating to the asset's future use.
- IF Laws change – and if it's about people, it's a perennial problem.
- FH I spoke with Walter Taylor (of Education, Learning and Leisure) regarding the Lottery "Growing Communities Fund" which I understood does not insist on a group having outright ownership of the land. Walter had no definite answer. When in Maud we were told that the lottery had insisted in the site being in the ownership of the community, as opposed to the Council.

Sometimes these issues can be identified too late for the local groups to address – so I'd reiterate the concerns about property, especially as the Council may be looking for greater community ownership of facilities.

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PB Stonehaven Town Hall is being transferred to a community group and the property service is currently a bit of an obstacle. In Stonehaven, the lottery have indicated they could accept a 80 year lease as satisfactory for the project to go ahead.

RT It was different for MacBee (?) at Mintlaw – the Council offered a 99 year lease and the Big Lottery Fund were not content.

It was agreed that Education, Learning and Leisure be asked to provide clarity on the asset ownership criteria for the various strands of lottery funding.

6. How can greater awareness be raised on the role, remit and operation of Community Planning?

MM Through every officer in the Council being committed to work this way – from top to bottom. There are officers who currently participate in Community Planning at a local level but they sometimes say that no-one talks about Community Planning in our service. We need to raise awareness in the Council – it's in the documents – make it real.

Quite often it's the same representatives who come to the area management team and the local community planning group – they are seen as the people in the service with responsibility for Community Planning. I'm not sure whether the council acts as it should regarding the local group. The Mission statement says that each member should act as a conduit to/ from the local community planning group and their organisation. This is the main issue I would like to see addressed. The next thing would be to do more to explain to communities what community planning is and does. Having said that, I think we now engage better with communities than we previously did, although I think there is still general public confusion about it. The payback for this better engagement is greater buy in to the projects.

FH Do community councils get the local community planning newsletters and reports?

IF Yes – they get the newsletters regularly.

FH I attended Newmachar Community Council last night and asked about their role in community planning. The response was “we don't have much to do with community planning”. If they are getting the bulletins it would seem that they see no great relevance for them.

IF It may be that the newsletters go to the Community Council representative on the local community planning group. I'll check and confirm this. *(Note: since then it has been confirmed that the monthly bulletins are sent to all Community Council Secretaries in Garioch.)*

On the issue of greater awareness of community planning, I read this as raising awareness in the communities themselves. Again, I'm in two minds

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about how important a question this is. At one level, why do we need to divert time, energy and resources raising awareness? Actions speak louder than words. I agree with Malcolm there are there may be gaps in internal communication but in Garioch the local groups are happy to met with our local Community Planning Officer and liaise through her. The priority should be for Community Planning to be effective in practice. However, some badging of Community Planning is necessary – it's a statutory function and we need to recognise its achievements. There is already a logo, website, badging and display banners, and too much time and effort on awareness could be unproductive introspection.

However, there's another point of view. Within the Council, if you took a straw poll of staff on Community Planning - what is it, what does it do, have you heard of it - I think the result would be surprising.

I think it's the principles behind the label "Community Planning" which are important, and these can be seen when a service goes to talk with local residents about a new school or care home. It's not always necessary that "community planning" techniques are used.

MA There is an issue about consultation – a community representative yesterday gave the impression that the community often felt "done to" and not "done with". This related particularly to a service rearranging its service provision in the area. It was felt that the decision had been made and there was not even any information as to "this was determined to be the best choice because....." The service did not take the community with it at all.

IF That can be one of the problems of partnership – there's a tendency to work at the speed of the slowest. Sometimes Community Planning throws up opportunities (such as the Westhill Service Point visited yesterday), which need to be grabbed with little time for new consultation. A lot of what we do is opportunistic – triggered by time, funds and enthusiasm. If such work is undertaken within an established context of trust, this kind of thing would be less of an issue.

7. Are there areas where improvements could be considered?

PB

MM I think that there is more that could be done in terms of communication in partner organisations; information needs to pass up and down within structures, not just between partners.

Also, I believe more could be done to clarify the roles of the Board, the Executive and the local Community Planning Groups. There would also be a benefit in making clear the links between the three groups. It seems at the moment that the local group just goes ahead and does what it feels is right. It would be useful to know if what's going on is what the Board or Executive feel the local groups should be doing. This could be compared with the local Community Safety Groups. The Executive agrees priorities for a three year period. These are very general and give local groups flexibility to apply them

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as best suits local circumstances. Having said that, I understand the difficulties— there will be different priorities for issues such as health and road safety in the different areas, given the diversity of the different areas.

It seems as is the Executive and local groups operate in a vacuum. It would help if there were better and more obvious links between the two – or is there merit in considering getting rid of the Executive?

IF As I said yesterday when you were on site in Garioch, I hope that you have seen that local community planning is working in action. However, you are looking across all aspects of Community Planning and there are some issues worthy of examination.

There is a structural gap between the local Community Planning Groups and the Executive or the Board. The Executive used to be agency representatives, chairs of the themed groups and chairs of the local Community Planning Groups. The Chairs of the local groups are presently the six Area Managers. This may have led to a rather large and unwieldy Executive Committee, which might be seen to be top heavy, but it operated as a network. My perception at the time was that most of the input to the Executive came from the Area Managers. There was a workshop about three years ago when some felt that there were too many Council staff on the Executive, so the Area Managers were taken off, with only one left for liaison. That immediately cut the links with the local Community Planning Groups. I'm not arguing that there's a need for all the Area Managers to sit in yet another meeting, but it would be helpful if each of the local Community Planning Groups were able to send a named representative to the Executive. With clever selection, it would be possible to get a range of agencies, and the right people as well as geographic coverage. If local Community Planning Groups are the visible aspect of community planning for communities, then surely the link with the Executive and Board ought to be strengthened, rather than weakened. I do get the Executive minutes – but I don't really know what's going on – that networking link has been severed. Partially, I think the local groups are keeping their heads down and just getting on with it in discussions between themselves and their local Community Planning Officer.

There's an issue about the themed groups – how effective are they? Do they meet, or are (some) email groups only? What value to they add? Again, there is no apparent link with the local Community Planning Groups. Again, as Chair of the Garioch Community Planning Group I don't really know what they do, in the same way I'm not aware of the Executive's work.

Leadership of Community Planning – at officer, not councillor level – is a concern. It's always been an issue from the start when the Executive was led by a Head of Service. It needed a shake up and so the new Assistant Chief Executive took it over. I don't know how much she was able to achieve, but it's now been handed to a Director. It's not been made clear to us what advantage, what added value, that will give, when Community Planning has been led by Area Managers at an operational and strategic level. Is it a

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matter of status or organisational thinking? Whichever, it doesn't seem to forge links with the localities.

From the perspective of the local Community Planning Groups the role of Community Planning staff at the centre is not clear. I am sure they make a useful contribution but the current system is not integrated enough for us to see what they all do and what their contribution is at local level.

FH How many community planning officers are there at Woodhill?

IF I don't know. I once heard about a local Community Planning Group that had some issue about a particular community of interest. They passed the question to the theme group for advice and resolution. The theme group passed it to the Executive, who returned the matter to the local group to sort out.

There's also an issue about how we keep Community Planning at the forefront of the mind of all partner agencies – for example, the Council has 14,000 staff – are they all aware of Community Planning? Especially at this time of budget cuts it will be tempting for all agencies to focus on their own core business, and view Community Planning as an extra – which it isn't. This is a perennial problem. There again is the issue of how to disseminate Community Planning throughout partner agencies.

Community Planning Officers feel hamstrung by the lack of carry forward of unspent budget and the cut off of 31 March. This is not helpful as a significant part of the funding is on projects where spending can slip beyond 31 March. In Garioch, this means we're at risk of losing funding set aside for the community kitchen project. It's not likely to be concluded by 31 March and if at that point the funds are lost, then the project folds and we all start again from scratch on 1 April. There are opportunities in some cases to get round the deadline by finding a third party who can hold the funds "overnight". If the previous year end flexibility were reinstated, we would be better able to manage projects.

FH I thought that finance officers had discretion to carry forward 5% of budgets?

IF This was removed by the Council last year and I expect the same will happen this year.

FH Is it a Scottish Government or Council instruction?

IF It's a Council decision.

FH In that case, it's within our remit as members to say we think it should be carried forward to the next financial year.

IF It is, but it would not be reasonable for Council to say "no carry forward except Inverurie Community Kitchen (etc)". However, there might be a class of funds

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which could be excluded from the 'no carry forward' rule.

- FH In the private sector you don't run companies with a cut off of 31 March for spending – if a commitment is made, and the finance is not charged, there's a specific process on the accounts which show it as "accrual".
- IF It's not just a case of losing council funds, but also losing community support and confidence.
- IG I have reservations about the future of Community Planning in the Banff & Buchan area. Malcolm is going and with him the council loses invaluable links which have been forged over the past years.
- IF It took me fully a year to get into the role – the core of the Area Manager function is about building relationships – who you know and trust. It takes a while to build up and there's a long lead in time to be an Area Manager. If I were asked to cover the role over 2 areas I would not be able to do it as I can do now for one – I could only do it for less, and therefore less well.
- MM I'm not trying to justify the decision for cover of the Banff & Buchan area manager post, but we all have very good local Community Planning Officers and they have very good relationships with their local communities. Some of the local groups have understood that the Council is not the sole resource. There is clearly going to be a lot of pressure on Chris White as he covers both Buchan and Banff & Buchan – it will be very labour intensive and relationships take time to build up.
- IF I share this concern. I don't know if the other members of the Committee know, but I will also be leaving the Council in June, 2011. There will therefore be a second Area Manager post to be taken into the calculations.
- PB On behalf of the Committee, may I thank you both for your support and assistance in this investigation, as in so many before, and wish you both well for the future.

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EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION THURSDAY 21 APRIL, 2011

10.00 HOURS, SITE VISIT TO KINCARDINE AND MEARNES

Present: Councillors Allan (AA), Bellarby (PB), Cullinane (NC), Duncan (AD), Fleming (TF), Sullivan (MS) and Thomas (RT).

Officers: Jan McRobbie, Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny and Audit), Jackie Buchanan, Committee Officer, Karen McWilliam, Committee Officer, and Lindsay Dougall, Scrutiny and Audit Assistant.

Apologies: Councillors Gray, Hood and Tait.

Part 1 – Site Visit to Dickson Hall, Laurencekirk

The Scrutiny & Audit Committee (SAC) met on site at Dickson Hall, Laurencekirk. Evidence for this session was provided by William Munro (WM), Area Manager, Kincardine and Mearns, Susie Brown (SB), Chair of Mearns Area Partnership, Emma Kidd (EK), Community Planning Officer and Karelia Wright (KW), Community Planning Officer.

Councillor Bellarby gave a brief introduction. He introduced himself as the Chair of the Scrutiny and Audit Committee and explained that the Committee would look at how Community Planning in practice impacts on the community. This would include an examination of how Community Planning is implemented and any improvements which can be made.

William Munro then spoke to SAC about the Kincardine and Mearns Local Community Planning Group and provided a PowerPoint presentation to aid his explanation. This can be found separately- see K&M Presentation 1.

WM Dickson Hall is an example of Community Planning in action as it has recently been refurbished with cooperation of the community, the Council, Scottish Government and a funding package from various sources. Today we will look at Community Planning in action and all opinions are welcomed. We aim to show Community Planning in Kincardine and Mearns with an honest view and focus on the areas which need improvement. Hopefully SAC will help the whole Community Planning framework to improve.

The population of Kincardine and Mearns is approximately 40,000 and increasing. The largest town in the area is Stonehaven with approximately 10,000 residents. Laurencekirk is another one of the main towns which has approximately 2,000 residents but the area also includes many smaller villages. A new station was built in Laurencekirk two years ago and it is an excellent example of Community Planning in action, where it did not appear in the strategy but the community gathering evidence and working together with agencies led to it happening and being a great success. Although it benefits from a very active community, Kincardine and Mearns covers a wide

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area, with each individual village having its own issues. This in itself produces a challenge regarding Community Planning because each project must be tailored to the needs of the area.

MS Will Elsick fall within Kincardine and Mearns?

WM Yes. If the Local Development Plan goes ahead there will be a new town of Elsick created. This could result in the eventual integration of Portlethen and Newtonhill with the idea that it will eventually be bigger than Stonehaven.

A lot of communities will see development projects. There are also 900 houses due to be added to Laurencekirk.

Community involvement and engagement is another important aspect of community planning in Kincardine and Mearns. Mearns Area Partnership has worked over the last 15 to 20 years on what is now known as Community Planning, identifying issues in the area and working across communities and agencies to tackle the issues. A few years back we had the Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership in Stonehaven. This is another example of community planning in action. We then participated in a European project SUSSET (Sustaining Small Expanding Towns). This looked at other European countries and how they deal with the problem of balancing local tradition with increasing populations in small towns. From this has evolved the Stonehaven Town Partnership, which Councillor Bellarby chairs.

The coastal area is a regeneration priority area and there has been a sub group created to formulate plans on the matter. A Community Engagement and Action Plan were created in the autumn and it used Mearns Area Partnership's previous work as a good model of cooperation. Kincardine and Mearns Area Partnership represents community groups from across Kincardine and Mearns. They have been asked to focus on the northern areas within the area and the Regeneration Priority Area.

TF The Slug Road link to Deeside hasn't been noted on the map.

WM That is correct, only the A roads have been noted on the plan. Many strategically very important roads such as on the coast haven't been noted as well. Transport and access issues around Laurencekirk and the coast is something that needs to be looked at.

Membership of Kincardine and Mearns Local Planning Group is similar to other community groups, but also includes two more local partnerships Mearns Area Partnership and Stonehaven Town Partnership. Different groups have different priorities however, such as those which focus specifically on one town in comparison to Kincardine and Mearns Area Partnership which focuses on the whole area.

MS There is nothing in the slides about transport, this is a severe shortcoming.

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WM I recognise this but not all Partnerships were represented at a community level. We do however correspond with additional partners such as NESTRANS and they will have input as and when this is needed.

Referring back to the slides – we produced this organogram as it has always been difficult to explain Community Planning although often people are working in community planning without recognising it. We have been doing community planning for years but now legislation formalises it. There are five themes and we will break down the themes to look at what issues are included as well as what we need to do to improve in the future.

First of all there is Lifelong Learning. This includes education within schools, colleagues and other community learning and development services. Some work directly with the community for example the Community Development Group which shows Community Planning in action. It involves service users in recreation, lifelong learning, cultural services to come together with service providers, identifying needs and work together to meet those needs. Specific groups involved include Aberdeen College, Angus College, Parent Councils, Mearns Area Partnership, Council Education Learning and Leisure and the Children Service Network.

The next theme is Jobs and the Economy. Stonehaven for example pays particular attention to the role of tourism within the town, with a tourism subgroup of the business association, an example of how diverse the needs of different towns can be. Small businesses, the Federation of Small Businesses, the National Farmers' Union and farmers, have particular importance within this theme as well. All our criteria aim to pick up on issues in the community and assess how they can most effectively be tackled.

Groups that are involved in this second theme include Scottish Enterprise, the Aberdeen City & Shire Economic Forum, Community Councils, Villages in Control, the Federation of Small Businesses and Transport Forums.

Sustainable Development is the third, equally important theme and has a strong environmental aspect. This includes groups such as the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, Scottish Water and Scottish National Heritage as well as involvement at a local level from sources such as Community Councils and Sustainable Energy Community Groups.

Developing our Partnership is another important aspect which looks to the future and represents the fourth theme. Providing training is an important aspect of this as well as engaging with communities, building networks, formulating community action plans and evaluating these action plans. Good communication and links are an essential part of this theme.

Community Wellbeing is the final theme to be addressed. To start with we look at health, social care and health inequalities. Groups which are engaged in this include the local Community Councils, Mearns Area

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Partnership, the Community Wellbeing Network and GP Practices, Hospitals, Health Care Centres and Healthy Living Network.

It is important to interact with the users as well as providers of these services at a variety of sources to identify the issues. There is also a very active Youth Forum. The community is important to youths as well as other groups and so their input should never be overlooked.

Housing is another issue which must be addressed under the Community Wellbeing theme. Working with Housing Associations, local Community Councils, Citizens Advice Bureau, Financial Institutions and Charities such as Shelter we aim to tackle housing issues. It is important to ensure that all groups are represented even where interests conflict such as tenants and house owners.

Community Safety is another aspect of Community Wellbeing - it is important to work with Police, Fire and Rescue, Aberdeenshire Council, Maritime and Coastguard Agency, Maritime Rescue Institute and Community Councils to address and identify the needs of the community with regards to safety.

Community Planning should be thought of as an overarching umbrella identifying issues and needs of communities through engagement and analysis of hard data. Having identified needs, we aim to review services, looking and evaluating and making sure that any gaps in service are plugged. This includes knowing who to go to for the services to fill these gaps and if necessary initiating action.

In my view the planning and delivery of services must have three aspects. The first is community engagement, the second is using statistical evidence and the third is professional experience. Over my career, the relative balance of these has changed.

Community engagement nowadays carries more weight. The statistical evidence includes data such as census, indices of multiple deprivation, employment and access to services. Professional experience is important but should be used with guidance from the first two rather than imposing something on a community.

It is sometimes a challenge to get professionals to look at how services are provided from a different perspective, taking account of community views.

It is also important for all to understand each others challenges, for example problems with funding and resources.

The right balance of these three aspects should lead to the right outcomes in the Community Planning for any community and service. Community Planning is not a new idea but is now a requirement under legislation, therefore Councils and Partners must engage further. This also means there is now a need for Community Planning to be addressed on a more formal

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level although we have been doing it for years. This does bring us new opportunities as now more partners are willing to participate and it is also easier to harness resources now there is a statutory duty on partners to contribute.

PB Today we are focusing on how Community Planning can be improved, keeping this in mind does anyone have any questions?

What are the difficulties you face? Especially regarding the wide range of partners involved.

WM At some levels, yes there are difficulties in creating and strengthening links. It is difficult to harness resources at a wider level, for example a major agency such as the NHS has national priorities but need to help Community Planning. This may mean having to realign resources and priorities to address a local need but often they do not have the resources available to do this. There have been other questions raised on this matter of cooperation but if problems are identified they will be dealt with remembering the resource constraints of all the organisations involved. Also the process should be looked at as an iterative process and therefore not all stakeholders have to be involved immediately and can be refined and improved over time. The Community Planning process must be able to work around but also to influence the priorities and budgets of partners. We also need all public sector staff to understand their part in community planning.

TF Community Planning sometimes invokes a glazed look of confusion in people's eyes. Shouldn't it be called community involvement or engagement?

WM Yes, it is raised frequently. Community Planning however are the words used in the legislation and I like the name and think it accurately reflects what we are about. I feel very strongly about this and I think to change it would add to confusion. Unfortunately some people associate the word planning with new building developments. I see it as more about looking to the future, identifying what needs to be done for a community and 'planning' how it should be done. Perhaps planning for new building developments should be the one that changes its name, it might be more appropriate to call that property development for instance.

PB We sought advice from a Council solicitor as to whether the name of Community Planning can be changed. He found that the legislation doesn't mean we have to use the name Community Planning in order to fulfil the requirements under the legislation so we are currently thinking about changing it.

TF Are you happy with the connection between Community Planning at a local level and the Community Planning Executive?

WM At the moment one Area Manager is not enough to correspond with the

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Community Planning Executive and there is a need for more communication and improved links between local Community Planning Groups and the Community Planning Executive.

Ally McLeod produces a good brief after each Community Planning Executive meeting.

AD How do you encourage people to get involved with the project?

WM It is a two way dialogue. There is engagement with communities, so that we understand their needs and they understand the constraints under which we work, as well as the process of Community Planning. It is important to identify the scope of any engagement and talk to the right people.

Across the Council partner agencies and Community Planning as a whole we need to focus more on involvement, there needs to be better cooperation and consultation. This means involving all staff, not just those who sit at the community planning group. What we all do as public sector employees is community planning – trying to deliver the services that are needed in the most effective way.

The new academy is an example of an area where there needs to be increased clarity of engagement. There are different levels of consultation e.g. on community facilities, a statutory pre-planning application consultation and school closure consultation are examples of how it can get confusing for all members of the public involved.

KM Area Planning and Community Planning revolves around robust engagement of all members of the community, not just select groups.

WM We must use the connections already available. For example on-line surveys and standard questionnaires show some of the better methods of engagement. Hopefully more community engagement and a better two-way dialogue will improve the process as a whole.

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EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION THURSDAY 21 APRIL, 2011

10.00 HOURS, SITE VISIT TO KINCARDINE AND MEARNS

Part 2 –Dickson Hall, Laurencekirk

Presentation by Susie Brown (SB), Chair of Mearns Area Partnership

Present: Councillors Allan (AA), Bellarby (PB), Cullinane (NC), Duncan (SD), Fleming (TF), Sullivan (MS) and Thomas (RT).

Officers: Jan McRobbie, Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny and Audit) and Jackie Buchanan, Committee Officer, Karen McWilliam, Committee Officer and Lindsay Dougall, Scrutiny and Audit Assistant.

Apologies: Councillors Gray, Hood and Tait.

Susie Brown then spoke to SAC about the work of Mearns Area Partnership and provided a PowerPoint presentation to aid this explanation, (as attached).

SB Established in 1992 with support from Grampian Regional Council and Grampian Health Board, Mearns Area Partnership focuses on disadvantage in rural areas. It has a Multi-Agency Partnership approach within Mearns involving a wide range of key Community Groups and individuals. It includes the communities of Laurencekirk, Fettercairn, Auchenblae and Marykirk amongst others.

The Partnership involves many groups such as the Community Councils of Mearns and St Cyrus, Aberdeenshire Council including the Social Work and Housing Group, NHS Grampian, Laurencekirk Villages in Control and Mearns Youth Forum. It is very important to engage with the youth community in the area and they are very active in their participation. The Partnership also involves Mearns and Coastal Healthy Living Network and CVS Aberdeenshire.

Mearns Area Partnership has statutory, voluntary and community members which receives some funding from Aberdeenshire Council, this is linked to a Service Level Agreement. Mearns Area Partnership responds to identify issues and seeks funding to tackle them. So far, they have levied in £850,000 of additional funding.

We aim to fill gaps in Services that no one else provides in the area. There are many examples of our work such as community transport. The Partnership also has a research function which included work on the project which resulted in the Kincardine and Mearns Area Partnership.

Mearns Area Partnership also acts as a Focus Group for many consultations across the UK. The Partnership sees the key to their success as the

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community development approach used. This involves getting local people involved in identifying issues as well as devising solutions. It does this through many routes such as community conferences, community surveys, social audits, local consultations and public meetings.

There are many ongoing issues within Mearns Area Partnership for example transport. The Partnership is taking a lead on transport and they want further investigations on the matter. They are now six months into a project on transport in the Regeneration Priority Area. It is important not just to focus on the coast but also to focus on transport inland for an integrated approach.

Volunteering is also an important aspect of the ongoing work within Mearns Area Partnership. Recent work on village halls has been carried out by various volunteers. Other ongoing work carried out by Mearns Area Partnership includes identifying a budget for an artist in residence who may then do some work for the new academy which will open in 2014. They are also looking to improve the open door network.

In summary, Mearns Area Partnership is a local project with local focus and local results. So far engagement has been very good. Over 2,000 people came to the opening of the new station in Laurencekirk, highlighting the strength of community involvement within the area.

- PB When you are trying to find ways of improvement are there any barriers?
- SB Money is a major barrier. There is a strong community voice in Mearns so if they want something done they know they have to do it themselves. Time is also another issue. The positive aspect is the people. They can dip in and dip out according to how much time they have to devote to projects. In that way it is very inclusive and flexible.
- PB What is the relationship with Kincardine and Mearns Area Partnership?
- SB The two partnerships have very different remits. Kincardine and Mearns Area Partnership are made up of many different areas whereas Mearns Area Partnership is more specific. The work is also done very differently and therefore it does not represent a conflict.
- TF With regards to village halls, there have been lots of issues lately with public entertainment licences lately, how have you dealt with this?
- SB We just focus on Mearns, our remit does not include looking at licences. We look at funding and how work can be done with volunteers. Kincardine and Mearns are the one that deal with licences. This is an example of how the two Partnerships cooperate without conflicting.
- MS With regards transport, are you trying to get more stations opened?
- SB Yes. Villages in Control are dealing with the campaign for extra stops.

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- MS Are you addressing any issues regarding Flyover problems?
- SB We would support an application but that's not within our remit.
- WM The budget for Community Transport has now been issued and we are identifying problems. This is a test case for how Community Planning can influence the willingness of Councils to alter process according to public consultation.
- SB We are arranging meetings with Public Transport Agencies at the moment.
- PB Are there any issues with the stopping patterns of the trains?
- SB It is something Villages in Control are addressing.
- WM I was involved as the Area Manager with Villages in Control and other groups who looked at Laurencekirk Station reopening. After 10 years of campaigning, it reopened and it was much more successful than had been hoped. It shows that if you challenge the bigger picture you can make a difference.

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EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION THURSDAY 21 APRIL, 2011

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Part 3 - Dickson Hall, Laurencekirk - Presentation by Karelia Wright (KW) and Emma Kidd (EK), Community Planning Officers

Present: Councillors Allan (AA), Bellarby (PB), Cullinane (NC), Duncan (SD), Fleming (TF), Sullivan (MS) and Thomas (RT).

Officers: Jan McRobbie, Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny and Audit) and Jackie Buchanan, Committee Officer, Karen McWilliam, Committee Officer and Lindsay Dougall, Scrutiny and Audit Assistant.

Apologies: Councillors Gray, Hood and Tait.

Karelia Wright and Emma Kidd then gave SAC a review of the Kincardine and Mearns Community Planning Group and provided a PowerPoint presentation (see K&M Presentation 3) to aid this explanation as well as various summary handouts, these can be found separately.

KW Last year we carried out an internal review of the Kincardine and Mearns Community Planning Group to find ways to improve performance in the future.

There were no serious concerns raised but the review aimed to respond to concerns of the Community Representatives who question the membership and whether the Kincardine and Mearns wider population should be consulted more on issues. The McDermott Report was also used to make suggestions on how to improve Community Planning Groups in general and to identify which issues need to be reviewed. The Group hope to achieve a clear understanding of the role of Community Planning and the responsibilities of the constituent members.

I also hope to identify channels and structures for improved communication and engagement between the Community Planning Group and the communities of Kincardine and Mearns.

The first review sessions looked at the agreed shared values. These need to be identified to allow groups to work better together. It is also essential to clarify the remit of the Group and assess performance by identifying scope for improvement and prioritising issues. To carry out these functions there needs to be a wide range of discussion on how to improve performance. It is also essential that the group work as a team and have a wide skill set in order to be effective.

Going on to the Kincardine and Mearns Community Planning Group second review session, the question asked was whether the group was fulfilling their remit. The remit priorities were identified as leading Community Planning

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locally, to influence and enable action and to raise the capacity amongst the group itself including its officers and its volunteers. For example this would include improving skills, knowledge, resources and confidence.

Another aspect of the remit is to coordinate action including gathering and analysing data relating to community needs. Another function is to monitor, this involves consultation and engagement on projects and lastly to evaluate their effectiveness. This involves a lot of project planning within the community.

Once this remit was looked at and all questions addressed a twelve month plan was produced from the results. The group attempted to reach out to all areas of Kincardine and Mearns to identify their concerns. This plan was formulated using feedback from the community which was gathered via workshops as well as recommendations from the McDermott report.

Areas which were identified as requiring improvement included communication. There was some dissatisfaction expressed at review about the format, volume and effectiveness of communication. There was also a need to raise awareness, something which was singled out by the McDermott report as essential. Raising awareness is also seen as an essential part of Community Planning. The new communication strategy is now in place to deal with these issues and there has already been positive feedback on this change.

Participation was another area which was identified as requiring improvement. There were concerns about the membership of the group and whether or not the wider community bought into the idea of Community Planning.

There were also problems identified with the lack of induction for new representatives and the arrangements for the meetings. There was a requirement for increased support and training on Community Planning. A Working Group has now been set up in response to this and as required meetings are now shorter and more frequent. This will allow issues to be addressed quicker and may allow more individuals to attend meetings. There is also a new induction pack issued, like that which already existed in Buchan.

A final area which was identified as needing improvement was engagement and action. It was said that there were gaps in consultation and engagement. The McDermott report highlights that there needs to be concrete responses to issues. It was identified that the Group needed the ability to initiate action on every matter even if they are not necessarily the driving force behind the action. In response to this there was a Working Group set up on the Community Plan Development and the recommendations will be agreed by the Group. Their actions are intended to make a difference to the quality of life of the people within the community.

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The Group continues to make good progress and hopes to develop further in the future.

PB Can you elaborate on the communication strategy in particular?

EK We are looking at what the Community Planning Group need to do to interact with the wider community. Aberdeen Council has a wide communication strategy which we have used as guidance. One aspect of it is to promote a clear brand. We have continued to use the same logo throughout and have increased its use, developing it along the way. As Community Planning has been established for many years it is therefore essential to further develop on this already established brand. The hope is that this will improve understanding and demystify confusion amongst the community and as well as providing consistency.

The wider communication strategy also encourages public participation. The right information needs to be available to the right people in the right way. The strategy looked at different stakeholders, targeting participation and information to particular audiences according to what kind of information will be useful to them. For example information about funding and training would be useful at a local level.

KW We looked at public media, for example the Kincardine and Mearns Observer which we now have a monthly column in. The information in this monthly column must be current and relevant to the readers of the paper using the aforementioned system of targeting the audience. In some situations these articles are then followed up with an interview about the project on Mearns FM.

PB Mearns FM is very successful which is unusual as it only has three transmitters.

TF I still don't know much about Mearns FM as they have so little advertisement.

EK Supporting the radio is very important to the Community Planning Group.

SB You can listen to Mearns FM live on-line.

KM What we should take away from this discussion today is we need better access to radio.

KW Going back onto the subject of public media we regularly send articles which are relevant to the residents of Kincardine and Mearns directly to the residents themselves.

EK As well as looking at public media we looked at using an E-Bulletin. We have found in the past that sending out articles and updates in individual emails can lessen their effect so the idea is to tie them together in a monthly bulletin. This consistency may encourage people to get more involved.

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Currently we are consulting on what information is useful to the recipients of these E-Bulletins and continuing to develop it further. The idea is to link the people with the opportunities and raise awareness of the actions that they are carrying out. The E-Bulletin links with the website if someone would like more information than that which is contained in the Bulletin.

Further developments which are planned include the use of user names to improve the website access and to include community progress and statistical information. In general all of this is about improving awareness and links between the projects and the community as well as between the projects themselves. We are also looking at what technology can be used to help this. Voice for example is an online place to share information between different partners working together at different places. It cuts down the time needed for the partnerships to work with each other.

PB The website allows Community Planning to contact the public, how do the public contact you?

EK We are considering setting up a Facebook account for Community Planning. This is another way of developing methods of targeting certain groups but yes, sadly at the moment the project is not very interactive.

Success - Community and Agency Representation and Involvement are the next topics to be looked at.

The first question she asked is what does success mean? We need to identify clear points of representation and we need to expand community representatives. Going into the next Community Plan we need to pilot increased representation.

Another essential aspect is improving understanding of Community Planning and how individuals can get involved. It is about the flow of information and telling people what the priorities are.

SB One of the things that have come out of away days is that people should be able to take constructive criticism and allow this to result in full communication between all participating parties.

EK We need to develop the trust within teams to allow this.

KM As a negative, we are still reliant on representatives actively attending and buying into the programme. For example, the Fire Services and NHS Services sometimes do not attend the meetings.

SB Greater community presence is now felt than ever before so we are obviously making positive steps.

PB Does the lack of representation from the Fire and NHS Services present problems?

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- EK These Services are experiencing problems with capacity as they have a very large workload but it is an area which needs improvement. Looking to the future we plan to integrate the services into the plans and improve links.
- WM The Fire Service has recently been going through a lot of restructuring changes so that people responsible for attending the meetings have changed. It should also be considered which projects the Fire Service need to be involved in. Maybe their focus should be on Community Safety Meetings? Also, the Fire Service get into peoples home to help them with safety matters and Social Workers also have this direct link to individuals homes. The project should consider how we can make use of these links.
- The NHS attendance at the meetings has not been great. I sometimes wonder how effective a change intimated by Community Planning would actually be implemented within the NHS and whether such changes would have any effect within such a large body. I also wonder whether the funds would be available for any of these changes.
- PB Are there any changes to Doctors Out of Hours Services?
- WM We have asked for it to be discussed and a paper is currently being circulated on the existing standards. However, there is a disconnect on how effective any changes initiated by Community Planning could be on such a large public service as the NHS, as previously mentioned.
- TF How do vulnerable people make contact with the Group, for example drug addicted parents?
- EK There are direct points of contact available through Social Workers and Doctors. We are looking at encouraging those people who don't normally engage with the Committees to be further integrated into the consultation process.
- KM Through education we will also help contact hard to reach groups but it should be remembered that sometime people don't want to be reached.
- TF Has there been any use of health checkpoints?
- WM Kincardine and Mearns have high health standards and we have a clear picture of the needs of the community. If there is a gap in services then Community Planning will step in. We aim to provide a network of support for vulnerable people rather than direct contact.
- KM This is part of the remit and so is being dealt with at the moment.
- EK Going on to the Kincardine and Mearns Community Plan.
- The first plan was active from 2008 to 2010. In October 2010 a summary

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monitoring the progress of the plan was issued. The report shows some great partnership work. Area Management and Committees and the Community Council have helped the plan and there has been positive feedback.

There has also been some negative feedback such as the requirement for wider consultation and some single agency actions rather than actions involving Partnerships. This negative feedback was then taken into consideration when formulating the second Plan to come into effect in 2011. This second plan pulls together the consultation and other evidence such as statistics. There has already been an Action Planning Workshop held to identify information which should be included in the Plan.

This Action Plan then needs to be negotiated with the Partners. More stakeholder participation would have been useful in formulating this Plan. There was however a wide range of individuals consulted but this in itself held difficulties. One of the issues which arose when formulating the second Plan was that not every issue which arose can be tackled due to resource constraints. Therefore there is a need to prioritise issues and time the Plans accordingly.

The October 2010 Summary Monitoring Report for Kincardine and Mearns Community Plan 2010 -14 showed a great overview of activities and allowed the problems to be identified. The Community Plan and Priority Setting Sub-Group Report then set out the proposals for the future.

Proposal one, which is Aberdeen Wide- Aberdeenshire Council are proposing a revision of the framework for developing Local Community Plans. This proposal requires agreement from the six Local Community Planning Groups before being put to the Community Planning Partnership's Executive on Board and Aberdeenshire's Policy and Resources Committee.

The second proposal, which involved Inspector Golightly, Susie Brown, William Munro and was administered by Emma Kidd, will establish a review and development procedure for furthering the Kincardine and Mearns Community Plan. There will be a focus on data collection and gathering evidence as well as further partnership engagement.

There is also a plan to employ a PESTELLO Environmental Scanning Model to assess the current situation and forecast future impacting factors for the duration of the Plan. The use of this was advised by Inspector Golightly to forecast which issues could be raised. For example political issues, economic issues and technology issues should be expected.

Going forward the development of the Plan will be highly dependant on improving links between different partners and the wider community.

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EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION THURSDAY 21 APRIL, 2011

12.45 HRS, SITE VISIT TO KINCARDINE AND MEARNS

Part 4 –Mearns Area Partnership Office, Laurencekirk

Presentation by Ed Garrett (EG), Mearns and Coastal Healthy Living Network

Present: Councillors Allan (AA), Bellarby (PB), Cullinane (NC), Duncan (SD), Fleming (TF), Sullivan (MS) and Thomas (RT).

Officers: Jan McRobbie, Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny and Audit) and Jackie Buchanan, Committee Officer, Karen McWilliam, Committee Officer and Lindsay Dougall, Scrutiny and Audit Assistant.

Apologies: Councillors Gray, Hood and Tait.

After lunch SAC and the other attendees of the Session travelled the short distance from Dickson Hall to the Mearns Area Partnership Office, situated on the High Street in Laurencekirk. Here Ed Garrett spoke about the work of the Mearns and Coastal Healthy Living Network and the Kincardine and Mearns Community Well-being Network.

WM This project was started as a sub-group of Mearns Area Partnership but is now a stand alone body.

PB SAC seeks to find methods of improvements through these investigations, we are looking to identify any problems or barriers.

EG The Healthy Living Network was started in 2002 after securing five years of funding from the National Lottery Healthy Living Programme. In 2007 we then set up as an independent body and now exist as a charity.

Once the project became independent we were able to expand and now our services extend beyond the Mearns to the coast. This is possible due to our funding from various sources such as the Local Council and the NHS as well as other smaller grants. This expansion includes taking on new staff and an increased workload, the project now has six part-time staff members and over 80 volunteers.

The work carried out by the Network mainly involves helping older people. Our definition of older people includes all those over 50 but in reality most of the people we help are over 75.

The Network reaches over 200 people each week and helps with a

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variety of their needs. For example, volunteers will do gardening, buy shopping or do any general job around the house which the person has difficulty doing themselves.

There are also group activities arranged to tackle the problems of social isolation. This includes walking groups, lunch groups and specific groups to help those people with dementia. These groups are very interactive and always give older people a say in community activities.

Another aspect of the work carried out by the Network is training. Capacity building is an essential aspect of keeping older people active and involved in community activities. There is an older people's network specifically set up to represent older people in consultations and act as an interface to guide this project.

PB Do you cover a smaller area than the Council region?

EG Yes, we work from Stonehaven to the Angus border.

TF Is Mearns Healthy Living Network a mechanism for helping people to help each other?

EG Yes, we build from the bottom up, starting with help from the communities.

PB How do people get involved?

EG There are a variety of different ways, for example through social workers and word of mouth. Now we have this shop front on the High Street it provides an excellent method of contacting the public and raising awareness.

PB How does the network interact with Community Planning?

EG We work in a similar way as we are led by the views, needs and interests of the people as well as centring on engagement with the public.

We have carried out some sessions with Emma and Karelia (Area Community Planning Officers) on how to work together and we represent a lead contact on links for health, wellbeing and education.

WM Both Community Planning and the Healthy Living Network aim to improve the quality of life for members of the community by working together. They both aim to do a lot of work with relatively small funding by working with a large number of volunteers.

Community Planning may use the Network as a means of immediate engagement and as a mechanism for strengthening links to the

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community.

One of the concerns I do have about the Network however is the funding, as it comes from such a wide variety of sources there is the danger that if one was to withdraw the Network may not be sustainable.

- EK From the last plan it showed that another issue is that there is not enough information on the services available within the Community Wellbeing Network.
- EG The Network is about partnerships, we must identify ways to work together. This is why the Community Wellbeing Network was set up.
- PB You said you help around 200 people per week, are these the same people every week?
- EG We have a certain turnover but yes most of that 200 are made up of our core people.
- PB Could you help more people if you had more funding or awareness?
- EG We are pretty well known in the local area and I would say we are operating to fulfil the needs of Laurencekirk and the surrounding area but we could certainly do a lot more on the coastal strip.
- TF Am I right in thinking you helped establish some projects which are now self-sufficient?
- EG Yes, all but one of the lunch clubs are now independent although we are always here for support when it is needed.
- TF So further improvement could decrease your workload?
- EG To an extent yes but some of the services will always need to be supported.
- TF Do the people you help have to pay for the services?
- EG Yes, the gardening for example is run as an enterprise and we charge a small amount to cover core costs but most services are free.
- PB Who funds the office?
- EG It is very well used and the cost is apportioned across all the services.
- PB What sorts of things are dealt with in the office?
- EG All the Healthy Living Network matters are dealt with here and the sub-group dealing with the Community Transport Project is also currently

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using some of the space.

EK It will be interesting for SAC to hear about the links within the project.

EG We are working with Aberdeenshire Council and now we have a wider reach. The aim is to set up forums for discussion and engagement for the development of services for older people.

We have met with Community Planning Officers this week to see how capacity building projects can be linked into their work.

PB Are there any barriers other than funding?

EG Working in different communities brings different challenges. Mearns has civic pride and a culture of volunteering but in Inverbervie for example it is harder to find the volunteers, maybe because we don't have the shop presence and the awareness that goes with it.

KM Do you do any work with young people?

EG Some of our volunteers are quite young and we do have some intergenerational projects although most of our volunteers are quite old themselves. We do have some helpers from the local High School who are undergoing their Duke of Edinburgh training. Also, some Primary seven students have been acting as IT tutors for some of the older people who want to learn how to use computers.

KM Are there any vulnerable families involved with the Network?

EG Yes, we had a great cooking project which involved some vulnerable people.

PB What is the relationship with the Kincardine and Mearns Community Wellbeing Network?

EG We are a member of that Network.

PB Are there any similar projects in the area?

WM Not at the moment. There is a problem in getting the volunteers for a similar project in Ward 17 (North of Stonehaven).

EG There was a proposal to extend the shopping services to a wider region.

PB Who are the other members of Kincardine and Mearns Healthy Living Network?

EK NHS Grampian, Kincardine and Mearns Befriending, Community Learning and Development, Alzheimers Scotland, Social workers and

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many others.

- RT Is there a charge for the shopping services?
- EG It depends on the mileage, we usually cover the volunteers' petrol costs. Although it is not based on a person's ability to pay - as a charity we will accommodate if someone could not cover the costs.
- TF Who decides where to buy the shopping?
- EG We have a policy of supporting local shops as much as possible.

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EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION THURSDAY 21 APRIL, 2011

13.45 HOURS, SITE VISIT TO KINCARDINE AND MEARNS

Part 5 – Stonehaven Town Hall, Stonehaven

Present: Councillors Allan (AA), Bellarby (PB), Cullinane (NC), Duncan (SD), Fleming (TF), Sullivan (MS) and Thomas (RT).

Officers: Jan McRobbie, Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny and Audit) and Jackie Buchanan, Committee Officer, Karen McWilliam, Committee Officer and Lindsay Dougall, Scrutiny and Audit Assistant.

Apologies: Councillors Gray, Hood and Tait.

Presentation by Fiona Murray (FM), Kincardine and Mearns Regeneration

After visiting the Mearns Area Partnership Office in Laurencekirk, SAC and the other attendees of the Session travelled to the Town Hall in the centre of Stonehaven. Here Fiona Murray spoke to SAC about the Kincardine and Mearns Regeneration Project and provided a PowerPoint presentation to aid her explanation, this can be found separately- see K&M Presentation 4.

FM The regeneration area covers the region south of Stonehaven to Angus. Last year we secured funding for the project and began to consult the community on the issues that are a high priority for the area. This coincided with the completion of the Health Needs Assessment which identified areas of inequality within the regeneration area.

Part of this included discussion on how best to move the project forward. These discussions took place at the local Community Planning Group meetings.

We centre around Partnerships and have held workshops involving all partners working together to identify gaps in services and improve knowledge on the work currently taking place. This identified specific areas which needed to be worked on including the themes of transport, physical planning, social enterprise and health and wellbeing including education and childcare. We then gathered data and used this to develop a community consultation survey. The results of the consultation were used to develop the regeneration plan.

KM Partners worked together with people to gather data, for example helping people to fill in the forms. So far we have collected 125 completed forms as well as many additional letters.

FM We then processed funding applications on each theme and funding

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was agreed in December 2010.

There were challenges presented from the Health and Wellbeing theme. For example there were calls for longer opening hours for libraries but no staff and resources to cover this. Also, there were difficulties in engaging certain target groups.

There were many benefits however which flow from this improved partnership working including an unmanned Healthpoint being put in place in the local library. It also provides opportunities to attract funding from other sources.

PB The regeneration area although it covers the area from Stonehaven to Angus it does not include Stonehaven itself.

How many people are involved?

FM We have staff from many different areas involved.

KM We are fitting the work of the regeneration project into the workload of existing staff. We need to remember however that services need to be prioritised according to funding and resources.

PB What are the plans going forward?

KM There are many different projects ongoing at the moment including work on transport, flexible working hours, social enterprise and economic developments such as the Inverbervie caravan park. These were all initiated by the community and we are looking for a way forward.

PB Are there any projects which need funding at the moment but do not have it?

KM We have an extra £68,000 this year but there are still some things with no funding. They haven't been dropped from the agenda and they will be considered again next year taking into account the different priorities.

WM The discussion groups addressed the issues theme by theme and identified which projects need to be prioritised.

FM We have kept in contact with those partners whose project do not yet have funding to maintain the links for when we are in a better position to tackle the issue.

AD How are the projects scored to decide which one gets funding?

KM Bill Clark helped us come up with a scoring system already tried out in

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another area, mainly based on economic development but keeping in mind the tight timescale and consultation needed.

- WM This is an example of good practice in one area being used in another.
- RT Have you carried out any matching to get extra funding?
- FM Last week's meeting addressed this and we are preparing to begin matching in the next financial year.
- KM We will also be applying for the European Fisheries Fund.
- PB A large part of what SAC aims to do is identify areas for improvement, what do you see are the main areas on this front?
- FM There are no significant problems but trying to maintain the momentum of the projects can be an issue.
- WM We had the skills and experience there but the funding arrived late. We are trying to work faster but harnessing the resources can be a challenge as the Council is so busy.
- It should be remembered that this is a rolling project and so if something is not tackled immediately that does not mean it will not be tackled at all.
- FM Geography can also be another challenge as we are dealing with a series of small towns which all need to have their own contribution.
- WM This is why looking at things from a local perspective is so important, even villages with very similar priorities can have different requirements.

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EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION THURSDAY 21 APRIL, 2011

SITE VISIT TO KINCARDINE AND MEARNS

Present: Councillors Allan (AA), Bellarby (PB), Cullinane (NC), Duncan (AD), Fleming (TF), Sullivan (MS) and Thomas (RT).

Officers: Jan McRobbie, Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny and Audit), Jackie Buchanan, Committee Officer, Karen McWilliam, Committee Officer, and Lindsay Dougall, Scrutiny and Audit Assistant.

Apologies: Councillors Gray, Hood and Tait.

Part 6 – Stonehaven Town Hall, Stonehaven

Presentation by Michael Morgan (MM) and Diane Collinson (DC), Newtonhill Community Council

Michael Morgan and Diane Collinson then spoke to SAC about the implementation of Community Planning within their local area of Newtonhill.

MM In 2009 we began the project called Planning For Real to engage with the community. We began this formal process with a sort of open day which included a model of the village and a climbing wall for the children. 10% of the local population attended.

We gathered input from the local people on what should be included in the community plan. This included reopening the station which will hopefully be completed soon, resurfacing the roads which has now been completed, reopening the tennis courts which are about to be resurfaced and providing safer routes to school which has also already been addressed. Although another point of parking at the school was raised and is still to be addressed, as you can see most of those points raised have since been addressed.

From the consultation we formulated a development plan, working in cooperation with the community council and reporting back to the community on the process.

The next part of the process is called Making it Real and this involves gathering public comment on the consultation. It also represents a huge opportunity to bring the community together and match the volunteers with the work needing to be done. The idea is that the community should take ownership of the project and that they can then become self-sufficient.

The methods of implementing these changes include networking to

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ensure duplication of services is minimised and creating displays to improve local awareness of the work and how people can get involved. Karelia and Emma have also helped with this.

DC We want to invite the community to become involved to show that Community Planning is not just words, there are actual actions.

Other areas already have Community Action Plans and we want to encourage openness and communication when coming up with ours.

Volunteering is another very important aspect and we need to tell the community how they can get involved and that more should be expected from them. We have volunteering fairs planned for later this year to address this. However, we are still finding it challenging to get the input of hard to reach groups.

MM Those in their twenties are the hardest to reach.

PB What partnerships have been involved?

MM Community Planning have supported the project with a grant and we are planning an even to improve links with partners soon, the Police are amongst those so far confirmed to be attending.

EK The idea is that Community Action Plans feed into the community and then up to the Service Plans. This allows more localised actions which then feed into the partnerships.

PB Are there any obstacles in formulating and carrying out these plans?

EK It has taken a relatively long time to see the outcomes of the plans.

MM This is because things get thought about thoroughly and done properly.

DC Some projects, for example clearing up the dog mess and resurfacing the tennis courts, were relatively quick to implement but others take much longer.

MM It's important that when people ask for things to be done they know it will actually get done. At the moment we are continuing to get more involved and feeding back to the community so that they know we are achieving what we set out to do.

WM There are a range of quick fixes such as the dog mess but other projects on a larger scale such as the station reopening needs more time. It is important that we have a Community Planning outline for this whole process and we need mechanisms to influence the major spending decisions and big ambitions as well as the smaller ones.

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- MS Is the Newtonhill station reopening feasible as there is no parking?
- MM It will have to reopen in a new location and one which is convenient for people. The residents must be able to walk to the station from the town.
- DC My initial thought is that it should be on the outer edge of the town, either to the North or South as the existing site is unsuitable as it is surrounded by houses.
- MS As long as you realise that it cannot reopen in the existing site.
- DC We do realise this although there is never enough parking at stations, just look at Stonehaven or Aberdeen.
- PB This is an ongoing issue which will need to be addressed
- KM I've been involved in quite a few Planning for Real projects and they tend to have little effect on larger scales. This should be seen as an opportunity to raise expectations although it can be difficult to engage partners.
- In the past there has been a failure to feedback information to communities especially when too wide an area is included as this brings about many diverse issues.
- MM It's best to tackle issues locally as then resources can be focused.
- PB Here in Stonehaven there has been a trust set up to take over the Town Hall in an effort to improve it. Some improvements have already been effected with help from the Town Centre Regeneration Fund. This is an example of plans in action
- MM Community engagement can be made easier for the communities, like ourselves, by providing more time from the Community Planning Officers who are doing an excellent job. There also needs to be a stock of display boards that we can borrow for these engagement events.

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EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION THURSDAY 21 APRIL, 2011

14.45 HOURS, SITE VISIT TO KINCARDINE AND MEARNS

Part 7 – Stonehaven Allotment Association Site by Baird Park, Stonehaven

Present: Councillors Allan (AA), Bellarby (PB), Cullinane (NC), Duncan (SD), Fleming (TF), Sullivan (MS) and Thomas (RT).

Officers: Jan McRobbie, Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny and Audit) and Jackie Buchanan, Committee Officer, Karen McWilliam, Committee Officer and Lindsay Dougall, Scrutiny and Audit Assistant.

Apologies: Councillors Gray, Hood and Tait.

Presentation by Gillian Lomas (GL), Secretary, Stonehaven Allotment Association

After visiting Stonehaven Town Hall, SAC and the other attendees of the Session travelled the short distance to the Stonehaven Allotment Association Site at Baird Park on the outskirts of Stonehaven. Here Gillian Lomas spoke to SAC about the work of the Allotment Association over the last five years.

GL It has taken Stonehaven Allotment Association 5 years to reach the point which we are at today. We exist as a non-charitable organisation with a written constitution, a management committee and tenancy agreements.

We have 35 half-size allotment plots complete with sheds, compost bins and rainwater collection systems. The project was paid for by grants and resources were supplied, as far as possible, by local businesses. All these plots are now tenanted and some even already have food growing on them. These tenants include individuals, schools, pensioners, church groups and charities. There is also a waiting list of 11 people who wish to rent a plot with requests for full sized plots, this will be our next priority.

We remain focuses on finding more suitable land in the surrounding area for another 30-40 full sized plots and hope the local Council will support us with this. This site was originally offered to the Association over 4 years ago but was rejected as it was thought to be too small and have inadequate drainage. It was then discover that the cause of this was a broken drain which the Council subsequently repaired. Following this in Autumn 2009 we asked to use the land and it took 8 months to get planning permission for the site. The Association then had to wait for the Council to erect the perimeter fence (which the Association gave them £5,000 towards) and at the end of 2010 work on the site began.

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Until the Association took it over, the land was used by dog walkers and for the local tug-of-war team as a training site. The Council therefore had to bear the cost of maintaining the land. The rent paid is £45 per annum for each plot with the total cost for the project being £35,000 which includes a 25 year renewable lease, all plot furnishings, water installations, rabbit proof fencing and legal fees. These furnishings belong to the Association and will pass on to the next tenant in time.

This finance came from a variety of sources including £17,400 from the Climate Change Fund, £10,000 from Awards for All, £1,000 from Aberdeen Council's Top Up Fund and £6,000 raised from a Grand Auction in Stonehaven Town Hall last year. The project therefore represents good value for money for the Council considering the maintenance costs they would have had to pay, not to mention the goodwill and media attention which comes with such a success. The Association has been praised for its persistence of purpose and focus.

The project has added to the value of the land and helped the local economy. We exclusively used local contractors and suppliers. The rope used to separate the plots, for example, has been recycled from a local crab fisherman who has suggested a barter agreement of his crabs for our vegetables. No one within the organisation has been paid for any development work and the spirit of neighbourly assistance has been remarkable.

PB Have there been any barriers to your progress?

GL The timescale has been an issue, for example getting planning permission took a while although SDCC helped with this.

WM Looking to the future of the project, the Council has to provide the sites if enough people request them. Although they had no choice but to provide them, as relationships improved the process was much easier.

That is what we should learn from this project, better communication means the process is quicker and easier.

GL We weren't allowed to talk directly to the Council which caused delays. The Committee are much more trusting now and we hope to make use of this to get more land in the future at an affordable price.

PB There was a site near Ury House which was identified but the developer went broke so the project fell through.

GL There are lots of good intentions. We are looking to get a map from the Land Registry to show ownership of the surrounding land to help find a suitable site.

WM We also needed the Feudal Superior's permission as the land was

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gifted for recreational use and we needed a legal opinion as to whether allotments were recreational.

- GL There have been a few difficulties but now we have done this process once we will know for next time.

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**Part 8 – Portlethen Moss Community Woodland Project, Portlethen
15.45 Hours**

**Presentation by Mary MacLeod (MMc), Environmental Planner with
Environmental Services and Toni Watt (TW), Portlethen Moss Project**

After visiting the Stonehaven Allotment Association site SAC and the other attendees of the Session travelled to the Portlethen Moss Community Woodland Project site situated on the coastal side of Portlethen. Here Mary MacLeod and Toni Watt spoke to SAC about their work in creating the project as an example of Community Planning in action.

MMc I will give you the Planning and Environmental Service's perspective of the project and a brief rundown on how the land you are standing on went from an underused agricultural field to a new community woodland park.

The project started 6 years ago with a letter from a member of the public to the Area Manager, requesting that the area, which amounted to about 1.8 Hectares, be used to establish a Community Woodland Park. Part of the justification for the proposal was that the new Academy in Portlethen had been built over some of the existing parkland.

The request was passed to the Environment Team and following detailed consideration and consultation with other Services planning permission was granted in 2008.

Throughout 2009 the design stage took place, and funding sought with a high level of community involvement. 2010 saw the start of the implementation, which included work to create paths erect fences and gates, improve wet areas and other landscape features and plant thousands of trees and hedging plants.

The benefits of the work within the community include the sense of ownership felt from the high level of community involvement and consultation. This included raising some funding as although the Scottish Development Fund covered much of the costs there was a significant shortfall. This will hopefully lead to less vandalism, especially as the local primary schools were involved in designing the woodland park and in planting the trees. It also allows the project to harness the skills held within the community and allows a shared sense of achievement.

Probably the main challenge which faces the project, is time and resource constraints. Getting the whole community involved also presents a challenge, the local Primary Schools were involved for example but the Academy wasn't.

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Another issue faced is keeping up the momentum of the project as peoples priorities change. To help tackle this we needed continual improvement and management.

The vital elements of the project were commitment, enthusiasm, clear aims and vision and a realistic plan. We also see Community Planning as playing a vital role as it allows everyone to pull together towards the same goal.

TW We started Portlethen Moss in 2005 and have built the project on good working relationships. The design for the project for example came from the local Primary School and involved first educating them on types of woods, this included making trips to see other woodlands. The children were also involved in planting the trees during our community planting days.

The project has also received top-up grants to help with the continued development. These include flowers from Bob Davis and the donation of nature play equipment from Talisman.

PB Were there any other Council Offices involved?

TW Yes many, such as the planning office, landscape services, dog wardens and Community Planning helped to advertise the project.

MMc There has been lots of support, everyone likes a success story.

TW Especially as the area is so widely used by the community.

MMc The area used to just be a field used by dog walkers and we have followed the paths they created.

TW There are also plans to create an amphitheatre which can be used as an outdoor classroom.

MMc There are many trees here such as Oak, Ash, Willow, Adler, Birch, Rowan and Scots pine although we have been told that may not be suitable for such a coastal area. The trees can be altered or amended to suit future generations.

PB What is needed to keep the project going?

MMc We need a management agreement to set out who does what with regards the Council and management services. The group is very enthusiastic about the long term future of the project but they need support.

PB Does the volunteer group have a wide skills set?

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- TW Yes, and there is a large amount of help from outside sources. The project should be seen as an educational resource.
- AD How long has the hedge been in?
- TW About one year, it's looking very good.
- PB Have there been any obstacles in the project's progress?
- MMc As described the main challenge has been the long term sustainability of the project such as keeping the members involved as well as attracting new members. Improving awareness is also something we need to improve.
- WM This site was available as it is a coastal zone so there is little chance of any other development. If the community hadn't driven this change it would still just be a field owned by the Council with little purpose.
- MMc The path which has been built is for all abilities including pushchairs and links both sides of the town so hopefully it will be widely used.
- AD Why is it called the Portlethen Moss project?
- MMc That was the name of the original site for the project at the other side of town but sadly the land turned out to be in private ownership. We also had support from the Forestry Commission for this site.

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EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION THURSDAY 19TH MAY, 2011

10.00 HOURS, SITE VISIT TO MARR

Part 1- Site Visit to Huntly Community Kitchen, Linden Centre, Huntly

Present: Councillors Allan (AA), Bellarby (PB), Cullinane (NC), Duncan (SD), Fleming (TF), Hood (FH), Gray (IG), Sullivan (MS) and Tait (IT).

Officers: Jan McRobbie, Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny and Audit) and Lindsay Dougall, Scrutiny and Audit Assistant.

Apologies: Councillor Thomas.

SAC met up on site at Huntly Community Kitchen in Huntly's Linden Centre. Evidence for this visit was provided by Leslie Allan (LA), Area Manager of Marr, Donald Boyd (DB) of Huntly Development Trust, Mike Powell (MP) of Marr Area Partnership and Calvin Little (CL), Public Health Co-ordinator.

Also present were Hazel McLaren (HM), Area Community Planning Officer, Vivienne Tegg (VT), Manager of the Volunteer Centre Aberdeen, Elizabeth Squires (ES) of NHS Grampian, Karen Thomas (KT) CLD Team Leader and Inspector Andrew Todd (AT) of Grampian Police.

Councillor Bellarby gave a brief introduction. He began by introducing himself as the Chair of SAC and explained that the purpose of this investigation is to seek improvements by studying the implementation and delivery of community planning across Aberdeenshire. He further explained that SAC would like to hear about the success stories in the area as well as anything they would have done differently and any barriers the community has faced.

Leslie Allan then gave SAC an introduction to Marr Community Planning Group, of which he is Chair.

LA Welcome to Huntly. This is a lovely town and it is our intention not only to keep it this way but to develop it further. The intention of today's visit is to look at community planning not just in Huntly but in the entire area of Marr. However, this area is too large to tour so we will focus on Huntly to give SAC an idea of how we work on community planning.

Community planning is about engaging the community and delivering improvements. Today we would like to show you some examples of good practice in and around Huntly.

All the people in this room were involved in these improvements and we work together to achieve the goals of the community. The building

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we are currently in is an example of this. It represents a substantial resource for the residents of the surrounding area, along with other similar buildings in Huntly. The room we are currently in is a particularly good example of community planning in action as this kitchen is used by many members of the community and has helped to achieve significant outcomes for the benefit of the public.

Donald will now talk about Huntly Development Trust.

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Part 2- Huntly Community Kitchen, Linden Centre, Huntly

Presentation by Donald Boyd (DB) of Huntly Development Trust

Donald Boyd then spoke to SAC about the work of Huntly Development Trust with regards community planning. He provided a mind map to aid his explanation, this can be found separately- see MindMap 1.

DB This mind map shows the work of Huntly Development Trust and tries to explain what it is we are trying to achieve. Our success is made possible by all those people in this room as well as many others within the community.

Firstly, I will give you a brief introduction to Huntly Development Trust. Previously Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership encouraged community development in Huntly and once this ended we emerged as a community-led response to keep the momentum going. We used fact-finding visits, consultations and business planning to come up with our current vehicle. We formed in May 2009 and exist as a company limited by guarantee. We currently have 6 volunteer directors, 2 paid staff and 234 members and operate from a rented office in Huntly Business Centre. We also issue a standard invitation to local elected members to our monthly Board meetings as ex-officio members of the board.

Our mission statement is "to work with others to build a resilient, inclusive, enterprising community capable of dealing with ongoing change".

We work on an outcomes basis and focus on working in partnership with other groups within the community. Other values include integrity and sustainability. We have identified certain outcomes which we are working towards, these include:

- A stronger, more cohesive community
- A regenerated Huntly town centre
- More effective promotion
- A healthier community
- A better environment
- Improved infrastructure
- A justified reputation as an attractive visitor destination
- Improved understanding of and access to the area's cultural heritage
- A more skilled and better educated community
- Greater community involvement in shaping the town's future
- Increased community confidence in its ability to meet the challenges of the future.

Looking to what we actually do, our objectives are similar to that of community planning. These include:

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- Develop and promote Huntly as a good place to live, work and visit
- Develop our local economy
- Strengthen the capacity, well-being and resilience of our community
- Investigate the feasibility of future projects to help secure the financial future of Huntly Development Trust.

At the moment however, the Trust is trying to accomplish too much and this is an issue we are addressing currently. Like our counterparts in Banff and Peterhead we have had much support from Aberdeenshire Council including funding although this will run out in March 2012. Our intention is to carry on the Trust as a self-sufficient project with funding from alternative sources. We already have funding from other sources including LEADER, Scottish Natural Heritage, Forestry Commission Scotland and we have access to planning gain for specific projects.

Our relationship with community planning is central to what we do as we work with other agencies, community groups and businesses to deliver better opportunities and developments in our area. It is also essential to engage with the community to assess what their needs are.

Examples of our work have included helping with the community consultation on the Huntly Traffic Management Review, allowing them to make use of our connections within the community. We also engineered a response to the November 2009 floods including raising funding and distributing resources as manager of the Huntly Flood Appeal Fund. We acted as an anchor organisation to focus the community on the action needed and worked alongside the local Churches to help provide relief.

We have worked with SEPA and Scottish Natural Heritage to explore the feasibility of small micro hydro systems in local rivers, something which is being driven by increased focus on renewables in energy policy. We have also been in communication with Scottish Water over the possibility of water treatment plants in the area.

Another significant project is working on the development of a Regional Cycle Centre in Huntly to attract tourism and improve the local economy as well as encouraging healthy lifestyles in the area. We are working with Scottish Cycling and Snowsport Scotland to develop this project which would include facilities for mountain, road and BMX bikes and could be based at Huntly Nordic and Outdoor Centre. Aberdeenshire Council has announced its intention to transfer the management of the Ski centre to another community organisation; Huntly Ski Club and Snowsport Scotland are therefore looking into the short-term future of the project.

With regards the future we need to discuss the asset transfer agenda

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and we are looking into new service contracts. We are also looking forward to working with the new Administration. I would like to point out that Huntly Development Trust cannot function alone and Les Allan in particular has been an indispensable help to us.

- IT Looking at the diagram, schools appear twice, once in the purple section and once in the green section. Why is this?
- DB This mind map was produced a couple of years ago so I cannot give you a direct answer. I think one branch refers to the asset of the schools whereas the other refers to the service it provides.
- LA One branch is about culture and heritage; it goes back to the times of Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership.
- IT Do schools interact with other services?
- DB Absolutely, we don't work directly with them but we know we can go to them whenever they're needed.
- IT Do you co-ordinate with them?
- DB Yes, the Finch project on Monday was an example of this.
- LA Another good example is the project which took place this year as part of the Curriculum of Excellence and involved making postcards to sell in the local shops. Third year students approached us for funding which we provided on the understanding that any profits would be re-used by the school for similar projects.
- IT You mentioned that finance will become an issue as of next March and you already have two staff. Do you see job creation as one of your priorities?
- DB Absolutely but we have not had the capacity to create jobs ourselves, we are still trying to get fully established and become self-sufficient, this is our current priority. Our work aims to provide conditions within the community to provide employment so indirectly job creation is still a priority with us as the enabler.
- IT At the end of this year the lack of funding could jeopardise the Trust as most of the initiatives are non-profit. How do you plan to raise funds and is there ever a conflict in what you are trying to achieve?
- DB At the start of this session Councillor Bellarby asked what we would do differently and I would say an increased focus on financial stability and less focus on large scale projects. As we came from Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership people expected large projects which benefit the community not the Trust itself.

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One option of funding would be to develop profit making projects such as the renewables schemes I mentioned.

Although the Council are removing funding next year they have helped us massively and 2 ½ years should have been long enough to establish ourselves. If we fail once the funding is removed the only one to blame is the Trust itself.

PB How is the membership made up?

DB Currently it is only open to individuals but we are due to open up to organisations soon.

PB Are there any difficulties in getting the members to join?

DB Yes, originally there was a large take-up but membership has slowed considerably. They have to pay £1 since we are a company limited by guarantee although the cost is not an issue. We hope to attract new members in the future with the aim of having 40% of the local community as members of the Trust.

PB What do you plan to do to encourage membership?

DB Improving awareness and letting people know that what they stand to get out of the Trust is a better community for them and their families. We are encouraging people to take ownership of the project, we are the vehicle but the ideas come from them. We have seen the success stories in other towns and there is no reason why the same success can't be repeated here.

LA It doesn't really matter how many members the project has it is the co-operation between the groups in Huntly that delivers the benefits.

The community is heading in the same direction due to the focus of Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership and the work beyond this, led by Donald. There is also trust between the partners and the members of the community which really helps. The success is partly due to personalities and persistence but mainly it is down to the town working together towards common goals.

PB Grant awarding bodies often want a large membership to show that the group represents the community.

FH With regards the asset transfer agenda, do you have a list of assets you want to take over and if so do you have management agreements prepared?

DB The asset transfer plan is still in its early stage but I have a mental picture of what I want to achieve.

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A Huntly Hub is a priority at the moment and this will require a community building to focus the work within Huntly, similar to that which exists in Fraserburgh.

IT Fraserburgh was given a quarter of a million pounds from the Government, we don't have that.

DB A Huntly Hub would mean increased footfall and centralisation of the services provided.

Another aspect of asset transfer is that we are discussing with Grampian Housing Association about building eco-friendly homes.

FH The Trust will need management and a stable source of income to take over assets.

DB Yes, that's correct.

FH I am interested in the possible hydro micro system, where is the capital coming from for that?

DB We are looking into a bank loan since the marginal return is 6 or 7% and granting is another option. The cycling and skiing projects face the same issue, they require capital but will then generate revenue. The plan is that 75% of the funding will come from Scottish Sports since there are two sports involved in the development. We will be required to come up with the further 25% but that won't be for a couple of years yet.

FH The mind map has a huge range of activities, what sort of effect has this had on the crime levels in Huntly? I ask this because many communities blame high crime levels on a lack of activities for the young especially.

AT The crime level has reduced lately in Huntly more than it has in other areas but alcohol use in the town centre remains a problem.

Vandalism is another issue but we are tackling this using increased community communication. We can benefit from the fact the town is small and most people know each other and are willing to pass on information to the police. We do face capacity issues but we are tackling this by minimising overlap with other groups.

ES From an NHS point of view we have seen a definite reduction in substance abuse in Huntly.

TF If I was to ask someone in the street in Huntly what Huntly Development Trust means to them what would the answer be?

DB The response would be positive I hope, I have 3 or 4 people within the community I use to informally gauge such opinions. I think people are

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aware that the community would be a lot worse off without us. However, we could do more and some of our projects, such as wind energy generations, are not supported by everyone.

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EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION THURSDAY 19TH MAY, 2011

SITE VISIT TO MARR

<u>Present:</u>	Councillors Allan (AA), Bellarby (PB), Cullinane (NC), Duncan (SD), Fleming (TF), Hood (FH), Gray (IG), Sullivan (MS) and Tait (IT).
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<u>Officers:</u>	Jan McRobbie, Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny and Audit) and Lindsay Dougall, Scrutiny and Audit Assistant.
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<u>Apologies:</u>	Councillor Thomas.
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Part 3 - Huntly Community Kitchen, Linden Centre, Huntly

Presentation by Mike Powell (MP) of Marr Area Partnership

Mike Powell then spoke to SAC about the work of Marr Community Planning Group and their support for community engagement and capacity building in Marr. He provided a handout on Community Action Planning and a handout on Marr Community Ward Forums to aid his explanation, these can be found separately - see Handout1 and Handout2.

LA We now move away from Huntly and look at the wider area of Marr which holds a relatively small proportion of the Aberdeenshire population compared to its geographical size. This brings about its own challenges when it comes to engaging the wider community. We have however received positive feedback on our work so far. We have learned from our past mistakes and are delivering what the community wants.

MP I've been asked to give you a brief presentation on the Marr Community Planning Group's support for community engagement and capacity building, with particular reference to the development of community action plans and our community ward forums.

Firstly to introduce the Marr Area Partnership and our involvement in community planning. We're one of Aberdeenshire's Rural Partnerships, an independent community run organisation, a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. We work with the communities of Marr to support their economic, environmental and social development and sustainability. As such, we don't have our own agenda but work to the agenda of the communities we serve, an essential part of community planning. We're a committed and enthusiastic member of Marr Community Planning Group and contribute to the community planning partnership at all levels. We receive funding under a service agreement with Aberdeenshire Council and Marr Community Planning.

Now to focus on Community Action Plans. A community action plan is an assessment undertaken by a community to reflect the needs and aspirations of

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local people. It should be seen as your assessment, your needs and your plans and represent actions which are actually carried out, not just a wish list. We see it as about getting people to think positively and get things done within the community, raising the profile in the process and therefore attracting more people to join. The consultation also allows us to provide evidence of community needs. I bring to the project a lot of experience of working with other communities, but each is so different they should develop the process themselves to reflect the way they work.

We aim to involve as wide a range of people as possible as the more input we get the better we can assess the needs of the communities. For example, we like to involve local primary schools as this engages both pupils and parents. I provide the time and energy to support this as well as arranging the funding for projects. We have a grant scheme and I also provide advice on how to apply for larger grants. Despite my help the projects are very much run by the community.

The handout you have been given, which describes the process, is what I present to community councils and community associations, who are usually the sponsors and leaders of the process. I see development of community action plans as the bottom up approach to community planning. This is communities doing community planning. It involves community engagement and capacity building to enable the process to be owned and managed by the community itself. Within Marr in the last two years, seven communities have gone through this process; Aboyne and Torphins are about to launch their plans; Kincardine O'Neil is at the writing up stage; and Ballater, Alford, Banchory and Tarland are working on their actions.

Now to look at the Community Ward Forums. These are very much a combined effort of the agency partners with the Council taking a lead role and Marr Area Partnership organising and coordinating events. The purpose is to ensure the views of the community are fed into community planning and also to engage with service providers.

Concentrating on practical and local issues, we ask the communities what they consider beneficial, as the activities we arrange must be what the people want, if we want to attract the numbers to make them worth while. My colleague Lizzy Shepherd works on this part. She prepared the handout which represents an analysis she did for the Community Planning Group of the attendance and feedback from the forums since they were started in 2008. The forums are held in each of the multi councillor wards in Marr once every three months, and chaired by one of the Councillors. Attendance fluctuates, partly depending on content and breadth of interest, between low twenties and mid thirties. This makes the total attendance in one year around three hundred.

Last night was the third of the May forums. We had a presentation on community health needs and three different discussion workshops including a focus on how to involve, retain and recruit members to community groups. One attendee commented on the benefit of such wide community engagement

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including the recent example of Roads Officers being prepared to consider communities' views, as a result of undertaking a community action plan, rather than just relying on council officers' opinions as they would have done previously.

In summary, and using these two processes as examples, there is a high degree of support in Marr for communities to contribute in a very real and practical way to community planning. This is also reflected in the membership of the Marr Community Planning Group and the leadership of Les as the Area Manager.

PB You mentioned the Community Councils - some of the things you mentioned as being done through Ward Forums could also be done through Community Councils. How do you decide which one should act?

MP Ward Forums are there to interact with the community but they don't get into the business of actually carrying out the work. Therefore, I think the two are entirely complementary.

LA Ward Forums apply to a much wider area than Community Councils which is a huge benefit as Community Councils cannot necessarily carry out consultations themselves. The Ward Forums also help groups to understand there is support there is they need it and shows communities how to work together, sharing good practice.

There is no evidence to shown that Community Councils consider Ward Forums to be threatening in any way. The Forums were created in response to the ineffectiveness of Council consultations due to too wide an area being covered which made it impractical for many people to travel and get involved in the consultations.

IG It is easy to come up with a wish list of what communities would like but enthusiasm often wanes once the reality of the costs and availability of funding sets in.

MP Yes, there are a number of issues which need to be addressed. We do not come up with a wish list but focus on what is practical and possible. Some aspirations are encouraged however as they can be productive. We aim to get the maximum amount of people involved to get as many ideas as possible.

It is also important for steering groups to consider the costs of projects at the outset although the true costs sometimes cannot be identified until later.

AA Is there a big difference between Planning for Real and community action planning?

MP The two are very similar. Planning for Real is a process that contributes to community action planning.

AA I have been told that Ward Forums aren't suitable for Garioch and Community

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Councils have to be used for all consultations.

- MP The added value of the extensive consultation which Ward Forums bring is valuable. A number of groups will become involved in all consultations where as others will only attend when it applies directly to them.
- LA In Banchory, the town itself set up a forum independent of community planning which helped to gather the initiative to deliver the plans. In relation to the process of delivery, it depends on what the community requires.
- VT I think this has allowed for better transparency.
- FH What communication is there with Council Officers and Community Planning Officers?
- MP The community action plans are produced by the community then given to local community planning. In terms of how it is done the community action plan can be used to inform community planning partner agencies, and some actions are incorporated in the Marr Community Plan. One of the key principles is working in partnership with other groups.
- KT To support this, the youth engagement projects have used community action plans as an instigator for some of their work.
- HM We all work very closely together which helps.
- FH Can you tell us more about the Marr Area Committee angle?
- LA Every six months there is a joint meeting to monitor the Marr Community Plan. The chair of the Committee is a member of the Marr Community Planning Group so there is lots of interaction between the area committee and community planning. There are a number of strands with both formal, and informal, discussions between the two, for example communication regarding funding applications and lease agreements.
- There is a whole range of ways Councillors are involved in community planning. The question we must ask ourselves is, have we got it right? I think the answer is no, it's not yet perfect. A monitoring report will go to Councillors next month and will be followed by meetings to discuss this.
- IT Can you describe the process of formulating the Marr Community Plan?
- LA It is long and drawn out process. From the point of consultation to the actual plan normally takes around one year and is very labour intensive. We are now starting a rolling process and have put the plan online as an electronic document so that we can constantly develop it. When actions have been successfully delivered, or are no longer possible, we remove them and roll in new actions which have become important to the community. This rolling process will also be more inclusive and take into consideration changes in the

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community's needs.

- IT Do you get feedback on the Marr Community Plan eventually or is it all based on consultation arranged by community planning?
- LA There is a whole range of intelligence used, some aspects must be provided by agencies so there should be a constant flow of information. What we usually try to do is formally and informally gather as much information as possible from as many difference sources as we can.
- IT Are projects supported by community planning more likely to get funding and does community planning act as a sieve for the community's ideas? For example, eliminating those which are not possible due to funding constraints?
- MP We must identify what is realistic and achievable but no, we do not limit the aspirations of the community. If there is energy and enthusiasm within the community for a project then we respect their aspiration.
- IT Are you considering the Ward Forum information?
- KT Yes, we are present at the meetings so we include these consultations.
- LA We come up with a draft plan and then consult with the community and amend it until all the viewpoints are considered.
- HM We are careful not to guarantee funding from community planning but we always support the projects even when we cannot fund them.
- IT This seems like a good way to work if the projects are thought up by the community. I have seen issues with community planning coming up with ideas and following them through, even when the community is not behind the idea.
- KT We work very hard to know the community and their views are at the forefront of everything we do.
- IT Is this the key to your success?
- KT Yes I think so, and a lot of trust.
- HM Yes, we are very well connected.
- IT What is the balance between paid and voluntary work?
- LA I can't give you an accurate answer to that. We've worked hard to develop trust between each other and the community. Where we can't deliver the projects ourselves, we will provide support to facilitate the community themselves to do it, for example showing them who to talk to about funding and permissions.

We see community planning as being about working hard and creating

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confidence within the community so they know that people can make a difference and things will get done. For example, when I started in this position I was told that the aim was to protect Huntly from Aberdeenshire Council and we had to build that trust back up.

- TF Mearns Area Partnership has a shop front; does Marr Area Partnership have anything similar to this?
- MP No but we don't feel we need one. It doesn't matter what name you put on things, or where it is, as long as people know who to contact. All our officers work from home which allows us to focus all of our resources on the projects we support. We also spend most of our time out in the community and we have a website so we are always available for contact.
- SD Can you envisage a merger between Marr Area Partnership and Huntly Development Trust when their funding runs out in March?
- MP Probably not, our roles are very different. We support and facilitate groups – they deliver the projects.

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SITE VISIT TO MARR

Present: Councillors Allan (AA), Bellarby (PB), Cullinane (NC), Duncan (SD), Fleming (TF), Hood (FH), Gray (IG), Sullivan (MS) and Tait (IT).

Officers: Jan McRobbie, Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny and Audit) and Lindsay Dougall, Scrutiny and Audit Assistant.

Apologies: Councillor Thomas.

Part 4- Huntly Community Kitchen, Linden Centre, Huntly

Presentation by Calvin Little (CL) of Huntly Food and Health Group

Calvin Little, a Public Health Coordinator, then spoke to SAC about the work of Huntly Food and Health Group in promoting health and tackling health inequalities in Huntly.

LA Huntly has had some issues with health inequalities and Calvin Little has headed a drive to tackle this.

CL I am going to tell you about how we have tried to tackle health inequalities in Huntly and how services can work with the community.

Back in 2005 Huntly Food and Health Project came into fruition as a multi-agency project. Despite appearances, there are significant pockets of inequality in Huntly as shown by health indicators. This includes suicides, cancer rates and substance abuse.

In response to identified issues relating to the diet and lifestyles of the community where, despite external appearances, there is considerable deprivation. (Evidenced by 2005 Community Health & Wellbeing profile.)

Intermediate Datazone 088 Health Indicators more than 5% worse than the Scottish Average:

- Early Death from Cancer, CHD and stroke.
- Alcohol related hospital admissions
- Low birth weight babies and deaths from suicide.

We know that a diet rich in starchy carbohydrates, fruits and vegetables and low in fats is likely to delay the development of morbidity and mortality (namely CHD, cancer, strokes, obesity, non-insulin dependant diabetes and dental decay). Optimal diet across the whole population is a major challenge and particularly so in low income groups/households.

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Main modifiable risk factors;-

- Unhealthy diet
- Physical Inactivity
- Tobacco use
- Alcohol and substance misuse

Food in Focus provided a small amount of funding to start the project, which aimed to raise awareness of good nutrition, improve diets, increase food skills and tackle food access issues. The practical work the Group supported was received positively and helped to give the agency motivation.

In 2007 we (the Huntly Food & Health Group) held a local health and wellbeing consultation event on how to improve further. A social capital evaluation showed that Huntly has a major asset in terms of social connectedness. Using this asset we have continued our focus in improving people's health through food skills, mental health improvement and inclusion.

To look at our food and health focus. NHS Grampian provided some funding and was interested in opening a training kitchen in the West of Grampian. We took this opportunity and moulded it into a community kitchen. We choose to work in this way as the connection between diet and mortality rates is so well established. People were very supportive of the project and our aims were clear.

It was relatively easy to access funding. We accumulated £46,000 which was enough to establish the kitchen and cover the initial running costs. Groups of people could then come in to cook in the kitchen, then eat and sit around the table to discuss matters. One of the cooking units is suitable for disabled access. Timeslots in the kitchen are allocated by a booking system and we are very busy. We saw this as a great opportunity to promote inclusion within the community as food is something everyone can take part in.

We visited several buildings in the town to find the most suitable venue. The Linden Centre came out top as there are already other services provided here such as a crèche.

We held a launch day to publicise the opening of the kitchen and had a busy programme of events. This included a shortbread competition which Mr Deans from Deans Shortbread came to judge.

We were very fortunate that NHS Grampian were enthusiastic about the project. Fiona Matthews who works with NHS Grampian as a Catering Adviser was seconded for six months to develop the project. Being able to endorse effectiveness allowed us to access further funding. This additional funding has allowed us to employ a Health Development

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Worker on a longer term basis working three days a week.

There is a broad programme of activities including a project called Healthy Wednesdays with the Gordon Primary Schools. We worked with the Scottish Government on this as they have "Heat" targets on childhood obesity. This is a good example of communities taking ownership of a government health target. We consulted with parents on how best to deliver these targets and decided that working at a local level would be most successful. We are using opportunities like this to develop local solutions to national targets.

Huntly Mental Health has a Big Lunch project on 5 June. This ties into an Eden Project initiative. The kitchen has attracted a lot of interest and is used by many groups of people, for example those with mental health issues to carry out information sessions.

The mental wellbeing aspect of the kitchen is very important. Promoting awareness and linking to other projects such as the healthy reading scheme established at the local library. These are self help resources to help people with a variety of issues such as depression, anxiety and bereavement.

There is a peer mediation group in local primary schools to help children learn how to solve their disputes themselves. This promotes responsibility and compromise at an early age and develops longer term lifeskills.

In addition, we are now starting to look into the potential of gardening to promote wellbeing, for example using the allotments. The project has worked with the local Rotary Club to access some allotments.

To summarise we aim to build on the strengths of Huntly to promote a healthy environment, allowing people to make good lifestyle choices. We offer general and specific support in the broader communities using partnerships. We need to take a joined up approach to tackle the issues.

- TF You didn't mention older people. Mearns Area Partnership promotes the independence of older people using volunteers and small amounts of NHS funding. You seem to focus on the young, is this true? Also, are you funded solely by NHS Grampian?
- CL I don't think I did justice to the work we do with older people. For example, we work a lot with people in sheltered housing and like Mearns Area Partnership we use volunteers to help.
- ES Although it is still at an early stage we are looking at intergenerational work.

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- CL We are aware of the work of Ed Garrett of Mearns Area Partnership to try to identify what is working well there.
- ES The two communities are however very different and so will have different needs.
- FH It's surprising that Huntly has lower than average health in pockets of the community. The community kitchen is an excellent way of tackling this but do you think there has been a loss of parenting skills?
- KT We have had a huge focus on community based support for families, especially those who have younger children or vulnerable people. This includes those in poverty or with substance abuse issues. We see the kitchen as a method of tackling this; it is a vehicle to help improve parenting standards.
- AT There is not a lack of parenting skills in Huntly. I also think that there is a greater sense of community spirit than places nearer Aberdeen where many people commute and are less concerned with their local areas.
- PB Are there any other similar projects in the area?
- HM There is a Deeside project in development which focuses on older people.
- ES Marr is quite good in relation to the rest of Scotland regarding health and we must keep that in perspective. In comparison to how it was Huntly is unrecognisable, there is a greater feeling of buoyancy and inclusion.
- We also plan to include more health consultations in the next community action plan.
- PB Can you identify any issues you have faced and how you plan to tackle them?
- AA When I left Huntly in the mid-1990s there was a feeling of no hope, especially with many people having lost loved ones to road accidents. Another issue was substance abuse. Are there any other specific issues you are trying to tackle?
- AT Road safety is such an important issue and we are aiming our campaign at young drivers. For example the Driver Training Community Roadshow. We are always willing to work with the community on the matter and are open to any new ideas on how to tackle this. There is also an enforcement aspect to road safety and that is something we ourselves will have to look at.
- LA We had a screening of a film on driving safety in the park a few years

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ago which was tied into a police safety event. We have found that this community is good at using other themes and events to tackle this issue.

- AA Trying to engage the young is very important as they are the future of the area.
- KT Working with Robert Gordon's University we produced community road safety DVD's which were handed out to local schools.
- DB Devon Arts is a strong local agency which brings a different angle to the issues we are trying to tackle. We also had German artists who came to help with our healthy eating programme. They used a creative and cultural viewpoint to tackle issues. It is important that we continue to tackle obesity even though it isn't felt to be the issue it once was.
- IT With a limited budget we must identify priorities so we can tackle the problems at the earliest opportunity and get to the root of the problem. Since the agency group is funded by NHS Grampian could the funding be terminated at any point? Also, what do you think of the current diet education carried out in schools?
- CL Although the project is led by health we are not solely about that, we also want to bring people together. With regard to funding we have found it relatively easy to achieve since we tick a lot of boxes. For example we improve mental and physical health standards and improve employability.
- IT Health inequality remains an issue in the area but you seem to address all pupils, not just those from disadvantaged areas or backgrounds.
- CL Yes, we don't tackle issues in isolation especially regarding mental health as inclusion is an essential aspect of helping people and removing the stigma attached to mental health issues. The whole community has a shared responsibility to help and we believe the best way to tackle health issues is inclusively, using the projects to support those who need it.
- ES Regarding your question about diet education in schools: in the last few years a permanent nurse has been established in the Gordon Schools to tackle this and she has made a lot of progress.
- FH What input, if any, do local GPs have?
- CL We do tie into their work. I go along to local GP meetings but GP referrals are something we need to work on. The initial plan was for a GP referral process to provide a link to those who need help. However, this didn't seem to work and word of mouth has been our best method of reaching out to the community.

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HM GP referrals have always been an issue, especially since far fewer people now have a long term relationship with their GPs.

ES Practice nurses often do a lot more health promotion than GPs since they have such a heavy workload. We also face other issues such as sustainability of these relationships and self-awareness; many people do not realise that they have an issue.

Also, if someone has an issue their GP won't often be the first point of contact. We should try to reach people before it gets to the point where they need the help of their GP.

AA The service seems to be quite clear in what they aim to provide. I know the cancer support centre has had issues in knowing what service they provide.

SD Do the substance abuse issues which are tackled include smoking?

ES No but we run very successful stop smoking groups and all health workers are trained in helping people to stop smoking.

CL Trying to confront health issues in isolation can often be less effective as many people have multiple issues. We therefore take a more holistic approach and try to support people to improve. For example, previously there were issues with the smoking cessation support in Huntly since the service came from Aberdeen and so wasn't available when the people needed it. We have resolved this so support is more readily available.

ES People on high incomes often have these same issues, such as smoking and alcoholism, but we find these people much harder to reach.

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**Part 5- Deveron Dental Centre, Huntly
13.30 Hours**

Visit led by Adam, LUD Technician.

After lunch SAC took a short bus journey to the newly opened Devon Dental Centre in Huntly. On this journey Les Allan spoke about some of the issues Huntly faces. Once at the Dental Centre SAC were given a tour of the NHS facility by LDU Technician Adam and spoke to representatives of Childsmile, the organisation responsible for improving dental standards among children in Scotland.

SAC on bus

LA Aberdeen Town Partnership had to deal with the major issue of three large supermarkets opening in Huntly in a short period of time. The companies opening these stores contributed to local infrastructure development via Planning Gain finance. Some of the money was spent on improving the town centre as there were fears these new stores would have a detrimental effect on the smaller businesses there.

The decisions on what the money was spent on came from the community themselves and has included an electricity supply into the centre of the square to support events such as local markets. We have however had issues with the size of the town centre and it would be useful if the buildings on the outskirts of the centre which were once shops but no longer used as such could be transformed into housing.

MS Have the supermarkets had a big effect on the viability of the town?

LA Yes but in a sense they have also helped the town. Previously if people wanted to shop in a large store they would have had to go to Inverurie but now they stay in Huntly.

TF What are the main industries in Huntly?

LA There are quite a few: shortbread, Farquhar until quite recently and there are a few local businesses looking into green industries.

SAC arrive at the Deveron Dental Centre

Adam Welcome to the Deveron Dental Centre. This is a purpose built building which opened one year ago. As well as supporting the normal needs of a dental surgery we have a large amount of storage, meeting rooms and an X-Ray unit which is used for community services on a Wednesday.

We also act as a centre for Childsmile in central and northern Aberdeenshire.

Childsmile I work for Childsmile, the organisation which aims to improve oral health

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- rep among children in Scotland. We also have other offices in Fraserburgh and Laurencekirk. We train children from nursery age how to look after their teeth and apply fluoride to their teeth twice annually in the most deprived areas. We also have a mobile dental unit.
- NC Do you have to notify the child's parents before you do those things?
- Rep Yes, we have a consent form. Most people are very supportive, especially since the children don't seem to mind the van and it puts them more at ease for their next dental treatment. We like to tell them stories about the tooth fairy and superheroes. It also allows us to catch those people who aren't registered.
- IG How do you administer the fluoride? Is it in water?
- rep No, it's a concentrated paste.
- IT Does the Peterhead service extend through to Crimond?
- rep No yet but it will. The problem is that they need a lot of storage space for all the paste and brushes.
- IT Are dental problems quite widespread in the area?
- rep Some areas are worse than others, for example Fraserburgh and Peterhead don't have the same standards as other places. This is partly due to a lot of new people moving to the area.
- ES Dental standards often match deprivation and poverty in areas.
- IT Do you target these areas in particular and how do you identify them?
- rep We use indexes and past dental records to identify the worse areas.
- IT Some of these indexes are ten years out of date.
- Adam These meeting rooms are owned by the NHS and so can be available for a variety of purposes.
- The centre is fully accessible for disabled people, including hoists to help people get into the chair and we have a specific service available on a Wednesday. These patients, including some elderly, are given two nurses and more time is spent since they often need more assistance.
- People who are under 18 or over 80 can register for treatment over the phone and those people who are not registered can still get an emergency appointment. We keep one hour each day free for this as we are legally obliged to see emergency patients within 24 hours. After the initial consultation and the teeth are made-up to an acceptable

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standard the patient will have a check up every six months.

Regarding staff, we have a trainee dentist as well as a full-time qualified dentist. The trainee sees almost as many patients as the qualified dentists.

FH Do you use texts to remind people about appointments?

Adam Yes, and emails. It is quite effective since we have a £15 charge for patients who fail to attend. Last month there were only nine people who failed to attend. This number is very small in comparison to GPs.

ES The GP in Maryhill is one of the worst. Most months the number of missed appointments reaches three figures. I think the £15 charge is what puts most people off.

FH Where does your funding come from?

ES The Scottish Government, partly since we are meeting the targets they have set.

Adam This is an example of one of our surgeries, all of which are the same. They are very flexible regarding the treatments which can be carried out here but are very expensive to run. The metal tools alone for example cost £40,000 and they have to be replaced regularly as they don't stay sharp.

We are lucky as unlike many dental practices we clean most of our tools on site in a specially made room. This is much quicker than outsourcing and takes about one hour per set. We vibrate them, check them under a microscope, disinfect and then wash them which includes a print out of the temperatures.

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**EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION THURSDAY 19TH MAY, 2011
14.00 HOURS - SITE VISIT TO MARR**

Present: Councillors Allan (AA), Bellarby (PB), Cullinane (NC), Duncan (SD), Fleming (TF), Hood (FH), Gray (IG), Sullivan (MS) and Tait (IT).

Officers: Jan McRobbie, Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny and Audit) and Lindsay Dougall, Scrutiny and Audit Assistant.

Apologies: Councillor Thomas.

Part 6 - Community Allotments, Huntly

Visit led by Callum Whitelaw (CW) and Maria Perkins (MP) of Huntly Mental Health

Once SAC had finished their tour of the Deveron Dental Centre, they took another short bus journey, this time to the Community Allotments in Huntly. Here they were met by two representatives of Huntly Mental Health, Callum Whitelaw and Maria Perkins, to talk about how the allotments have been used to tackle mental health issues.

LA Managed by Huntly Rotary Club, the Glamourhaugh Allotments Creation was established for the benefit of the Huntly community. It was partly funded by the Scottish Executive and partly by the European Communities Rural Aberdeenshire LEADER Programme 2007-2013.

Although the Rotary Club helped establish and manage the project, they don't see themselves as being involved long term.

FH Is the project only for certain groups?

LA No, anyone who wants to get involved can apply for a plot.

PB Can you tell us about the mental health aspect and how the allotments have been used to help tackle this?

CW The project is not just for those with mental health issues, we are keen to develop the community aspect of this project. We are planning raised beds and a mesh path which will allow wheelchair access but greenery can still grow through. We have many groups and individuals here including local schools and Alzheimer's Scotland. We have also worked with the Huntly Food and Health Network which can be used to help a number of different groups. From a Huntly Mental Health and Huntly Food and Health Group viewpoint, we see this as an opportunity to provide socially inclusive opportunities and engage the community in a broader responsibility for wellbeing. It is also a great opportunity to

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develop collaboration and joint working within local groups and organisations.

HM We have had a lot of interest from social workers but I am trying to make sure we minimise the overlap in services.

LA The land is a flood plain from the river beside it although it only floods every couple of hundred years.

FH Who owned the land before it was used for allotments?

LA I'm not completely sure, it was either common land or owned by the Aberdeenshire Council. The Council certainly managed it although it was mainly used by dog walkers.

MP It was a three year process to open the allotments and we've worked with many other groups within the community; the local primary and high school have plots here. We will soon also have two raised beds for those in the community who have access issues and receive support services. Also, we have started a buddy scheme to match experienced growers with less experienced ones.

The allotments have a communal shed, summerhouse and a compost toilet. The water supply is pumped from the river which runs along side the site. As you may have noticed around the site there is a hedge growing, this will protect the allotments from the elements and make it more tranquil. There is also an orchard and there are currently talks of some art installations.

LA Deveron Arts are a community based arts organisations which was mentioned before and may be approached to supply these installations. They believe that the town is the art venue.

IT What size are the plots?

MP 16 x 10 m each.

SD Can the members of the group use the plots on their own or do they have to come as a group?

CW That's still under consideration at the moment; we want it to be more of a shared project than an individual one. This can also have issues with people thinking certain plants are theirs.

LA Part of the planning rules for the allotments is that there must be a management agreement between the occupants. We're not sure what form this will take at the moment, although we have talked about it. There is a large community spirit in Huntly so it shouldn't be an issue.

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**EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION THURSDAY 19TH MAY, 2011
SITE VISIT TO MARR**

Part 7- The Meadows, Huntly

Present: Councillors Allan (AA), Bellarby (PB), Cullinane (NC), Duncan (SD), Fleming (TF), Hood (FH), Gray (IG), Sullivan (MS) and Tait (IT).

Officers: Jan McRobbie, Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny and Audit) and Lindsay Dougall, Scrutiny and Audit Assistant.

Apologies: Councillor Thomas.

Led by Les Allan, Marr Area Manager

After the visit to the allotments SAC again boarded the bus and were this time take to the Meadows in Huntly. The bus slowly moved through the area, allowing Les Allan to talk through some of the issues the area has faced.

LA The area, know as the Meadows, is a flood plain and although now building on it is extremely discouraged, in the past it was allowed. We are still dealing with the aftermath of the 2009 floods. It has taken time and we have supported the people who live here in getting their lives back together. For example we offered the use of the community kitchen we were in earlier which has washing machines.

Aberdeenshire Council have agreed £2.9 million of funding for flood prevention mechanisms, most of which will go further upstream.

There is a nursing home and two specialist care houses here which are affected by the flooding. We have had two scares since 2009 and residents have had to be evacuated. During the flooding Fire and Rescue teams had to take people out of their homes in the middle of the night. We want to avoid this happening in the future so are now using SEPA's flood warning system so we can evacuate people early, especially those vulnerable people in the care units in the area.

The flooding has helped to show the huge community spirit which exists in Huntly. The Council has also bought some of the land back from housing developers, Langstane, since it is no longer suitable to develop. As Donald [Boyd] mentioned earlier this area could be used for other things such as cycling.

HM We are trying to support the local economy with the flood defences, sourcing things locally wherever possible.

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- LA Some occupants don't like to admit there is a serious flood risk and don't want the sandbags to be left outside. We are looking at ways of storing them, possibly getting planning permission for a container.
- FH A container is a good idea, if the sandbags are left outside over summer they'll rot.
- LA I think that if we get the flood protection scheme in place soon we can put the residents at ease.
- ES The Meadows Care Home is just to your right; this is one which we had to evacuate.
- LA We also have a five star caravan business here which is a thriving enterprise. This shows how important the flood defences are from an economic point of view.

We are also looking at putting a bus park here for the school at the top of the hill to reduce the congestion in town and we would like to improve and widen the road beside the golf practice area which the Council now owns. The hope is that this will attract more tourism since this is also the route to Huntly Castle.

The Nordic Outdoor Centre is also in the area and has proved to be a great development for the community and tourists. You can also see sporting pitches here which can sometimes flood, causing very little damage.

We have had some issues with funding in the area so we have developed partnerships with various groups including Sports Scotland, Ski Scotland and Cycle Scotland.

- IG Is there a charge for using these facilities?
- LA Yes there is a small hire charge. Also, I think we could market these services better, especially since they would have such a positive health benefit for the community.

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EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION THURSDAY 19TH MAY, 2011

SITE VISIT TO MARR

Part 8 – Youth Café and Cooper Park, Huntly

Present: Councillors Allan (AA), Bellarby (PB), Cullinane (NC), Duncan (SD), Fleming (TF), Hood (FH), Gray (IG), Sullivan (MS) and Tait (IT).

Officers: Jan McRobbie, Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny and Audit) and Lindsay Dougall, Scrutiny and Audit Assistant.

Apologies: Councillor Thomas.

Led by Sharon Scapens (SS), Community Learning and Development

The bus journey through the Meadows came to an end in Cooper Park where SAC visited the Youth Café. Here Community Learning and Development worker Sharon Scapens and some of the young people involved in the project spoke.

LA Cooper Park and the Youth Café improvements have primarily been funded by planning gain money. The projects are heavily used by the people of Huntly, especially in summer.

SS Cooper Park Café opened in 2006 although the building was here before that, having previously been used as changing rooms for the tennis courts. At first it was only open during summer to rent sports equipment and sell food and drink.

After two years, in February 2008, and various grant applications the café was opened as a youth club. We are now open every Friday night for young people. At first, around thirty people turned up but now we can get between eighty and a hundred.

There was a setback in 2009 when the building was flooded. Everything has to be replaced and the project took six months to reopen.

LA This was around about the same time that we carried out engagement sessions with youth groups. Some youth forums came along to the Ward Forum meetings to ask questions, some of which were very difficult to answer.

What came out of this was that the skate ramp needed to be fixed after it was moved and there was a need for young children's play equipment in the park. We also used planning services money to resurface some

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of the park to make it flat. This also meant it was easier for the Council to maintain.

Some of the young people also requested a graffiti wall and were given one. It faces into the tennis courts so it not visible from outside.

ES The school nurse does drop in visits to the youth café on sexual health matters.

LA The community love this park and it serves a very important function within Huntly. It also helps to attract tourism which in turn improved economic and cultural development.

IT So is this a Council project?

LA It is a Council building and they provide the workers but not any other funding. The youth project actually maintains itself; it is led and run by the community. The Council are always here for support should it be needed.

IT Is there a requirement to hold meetings on the progress of the project and if so how many people are present?

SS The youth forum is a constituted group in their own right. They meet each week but this is more a management meeting, it's very informal. As we don't get funding from other sources we don't need to hold regular meetings with anyone.

IT What do the youth workers do?

SS Mainly supervise and make sure everyone is getting along with each other.

ES A similar scheme in Banff has proved extremely successful and has reduced teenage pregnancy rates.

SS The tennis club also use the building, mainly the toilets and as a place to store their things.

LA It's good that this project primarily supports itself. Although it did get money from planning gain we need to prioritise since we only have a limited amount of money.

IT What are the opening hours?

SS During the summer holidays we are open 12-5 every day and the rest of the year we are only open on a Friday evening from 7-10.

LA Considering the youth golf practice area outside, we won't fund the

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project but we will support it as much as we can. We also have a thriving cricket club with a practice net which came from youth consultations during the time of Aberdeen Towns Partnership.

TF What is the population of Huntly?

LA Approximately 4,500.

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**EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION THURSDAY 19TH MAY, 2011
SITE VISIT TO MARR**

Part 9 – Huntly Community Kitchen, Linden Centre, Huntly

Present: Councillors Allan (AA), Bellarby (PB), Cullinane (NC), Duncan (SD), Fleming (TF), Hood (FH), Gray (IG), Sullivan (MS) and Tait (IT).

Officers: Jan McRobbie, Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny and Audit) and Lindsay Dougall, Scrutiny and Audit Assistant.

Apologies: Councillor Thomas.

Led by Les Allan, Huntly Area Manager

After finishing the visit to Cooper Park SAC again boarded the bus and this time returned to the Linden Centre Community Kitchen for a round up of the day's events. Councillor Moira Ingleby (MI), chair of the Marr Area Committee also joined this part of the site visit.

LA We used to have a Huntly handbook from the time of Aberdeen Towns Partnership for tourists but we have found it is more successful to put information online as it can be easily updated. I also doubt we would have the budget to print a handbook now.

IG We have focused today on Huntly, what has community planning achieved in the rest of Marr?

LA It varies according to the area. Banchory has huge aspirations and sometimes communities such as that one find it hard to prioritise and focus funds. We can give them guidance but it's not up to us to dictate how they spend their time and money. For example, the community has really built up their hopes about better sporting facilities and there will be a lot of disappointment if it is not delivered.

Other areas have seen quick results on a smaller scale such as the planting of new plants along certain routes.

MI The fact that Huntly had carried out a lot of work with Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership before community planning came into being meant that plans and ambitions could be developed quite quickly.

LA Local Councillors have also been very active in the projects and the Area Committee sees itself as having an overview of Marr, also attending project meetings. They are a great support and don't take enough credit for what they do.

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- PB Other than these meetings do you interact with the councillors in any other way?
- MI There is a lot of interaction but most of it is done informally.
- LA I send Councillors the information I think that is relevant to them.
- IT Do your fellow Councillors know as much about these projects as you do?
- MI All the Councillors in Marr have an in depth knowledge, especially in Banchory where they can be quite competitive.
- AT The whole structure of how we deliver policing is done alongside community planning although not in a formal sense; we see this as business as usual. Community planning is also a way to get to know people in the community and working closely with them.
- LA We work very closely with the community but it is impossible to know everything that is going on in Marr.
- IT So success comes from shared knowledge and connections.
- LA We work with a lot of different service providers, some inside Marr and some outside.
- IT One of the main points of this investigation is to share good practice, would you agree?
- LA Yes, we have never claimed to generate all the best practice in Aberdeen and we are quite happy to copy the work of others where they have been successful.
- PB Good practice is something which can be adapted and varied according to the needs of the region in question. Can I ask about the connections between community planning in the area and central community planning, based at Woodhill House?
- LA The connections aren't as strong as we would like but I am now the chair so it is my job to change this. The rolling approach which we are now taking should help this and in relation to other areas Aberdeenshire is seen as doing quite well.
- FH What is the spread of population like in Marr?
- MI We have a higher population of older people, especially as many people come here to retire.
- PB May I ask about the local development plan since Huntly is at the edge

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of the strategic growth area for Aberdeenshire?

- LA There are a significant number of houses planned at the moment but some are starting to question whether these will ever be built. Since Huntly is at the end of the corridor planned for expansion the growth may be less than expected; we're at the wrong end of Aberdeenshire to benefit from the main industries.
- PB May I also ask about Alford?
- LA It has a population of about 2,000 and a new academy but we saw a drop in community activity about five years ago due to those who previously led the population growth aging.
- It has some important assets such as the transport museum but it has suffered from a lack of involvement by the community. Luckily we have a very energetic head of community council there who we hope will make a difference. We plan to encourage the Scouts and other members of the community to get more involved.
- ES From a health stand point there are some rural inequalities but no significant issues.
- MI There is a housing development recently been built and there is another one planned.
- LA There are also some business developments planned including a nursing home.
- HM Alford has its own community action plan.
- ES They have a younger population.
- MI One thing which has come out of consultations is that the community would like a better and more direct bus service.

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EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION THURSDAY 2ND JUNE

10.00 HOURS, WOODHILL HOUSE- COMMITTEE ROOM 2

**MEETING WITH AREA MANAGERS (1) - Les Allan (LA), Area Manager for Marr
and Keith Newton (KN), Area Manager for Formartine**

Present: Councillors Allan (AA), Bellarby (PB), Cullinane (NC),
Duncan (SD), Fleming (TF), Hood (FH), Sullivan (MS) and
Tait (IT).

Officers: Jan McRobbie, Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny
and Audit) and Lindsay Dougall, Scrutiny and Audit
Assistant.

Apologies: Councillor Thomas.

On Thursday the 2nd of June SAC met at Woodhill House to present a set of questions regarding Community Planning to the Aberdeenshire Area Managers. This meeting was intended as a follow up to the site visits made by SAC into each of their respective areas. Each Area Manager was given a set of questions in advance of the meeting to allow them to prepare.

PB Good morning and thank you to Les and Keith for coming along to see us today. We have had a look on the ground in your areas in relation to community planning and today we would like to discuss this with you further, away from the public gaze.

We will take it in turn to ask you the questions we gave you in advance and there may also be some supplementary questions which come up. If there's anything else you would like to add once we've finished asking the questions, feel free.

TF Question 1: We've visited your areas and seen some of the "community planning" projects on the ground. But what, in your opinion, is Community Planning and what should it do?

KN I'll go first; I could describe it in a number of ways.

Firstly, the formal definition is set out in statute as public organisations working together to improve outcomes for the community. A second, more informal definition would be service providers working with communities. This is something which has always been done, going back to the Regional and District Council days, but is now rebranded. It's about identifying the needs and aspirations of the community then working in partnership, whether public or private, to meet these needs as far as possible. We aim to work closely with the community to identify needs and maximise resources. I hope this is what you saw when you visited our areas.

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- LA I agree with Keith, community planning is about delivering the best quality of life for everybody through partnerships and working together. The community should feel listened to and supported.
- FH How long did the community plans take to formulate and what input did you have? In Kemnay some volunteers in the community have been campaigning for a swimming pool for twenty five years. Isn't this unrealistic and is it the job of community planning to tell them this?
- LA Marr have two community plans written and others are in the process of consulting with the community to prioritise matters for inclusion. The plans belong to the communities not the Council so it's not up to us to tell them what they can include or even what is unrealistic. For example in Banchory the community wants a separate swimming pool to the one owned by the school and it's not up to me to tell them they can't do it. We do however urge them to have achievable targets which can be delivered quickly as this will help promote community planning and encourage further engagement.
- FH How many areas have plans?
- LA We work on the basis of helping three communities each year to produce a plan. Alford produced theirs two and a half years ago and almost all the points which it contained are now delivered but each community is different and some take longer than others. For example Banchory has been in the consultation process for over one year.
- We use the Marr Area Partnership to financially support the plans and to give advice on how to make the process as easy as possible but ultimately it's up to the community themselves.
- IT The terminology of "planning for real" is very different from "community planning" as the latter can include more aspirational points. Isn't it better to be realistic so that energy isn't wasted on things that will never be achieved?
- LA Yes that is true in some ways but they're all connected. Making it real and planning for real are tools used to deliver community planning.
- IT Do you think individual's time and resources should be focused on what can actually be achieved?
- LA The community plans comprise of a mix of easily achievable goals, medium term goals and long term goals which might not necessarily ever be achieved, usually due to funding. It should be remembered however that just because something takes a long time doesn't mean it's impossible.

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IT What about the earlier example of a pool?

LA It's their plan not ours. We will give our honest opinion on how difficult it will be to achieve and the barriers they will face such as getting wider community support and raising the capital but all we can hope is that they themselves make the right decision.

KN Some groups have incredible ambition and endeavour so who are we to tell them what they can or can't achieve? The wind turbine in Pitmedden took five years to be built and will generate substantial revenue for the community for example. Even without the support of the Council some communities will have the time and effort to drive projects on their own and they should not be told what they can and can't do. It is however important that we are upfront about what we think is achievable and what help the Council can provide but we will always be supportive.

Community planning can only advise the community and tell them what the Council is willing to provide. As long as they are aware that the onus is on them with certain projects and we will not support it in the long term I don't think there is a problem.

SD How do you think budget restrictions will affect community planning? Do you think this will be a wake up call to communities?

LA Community planning will continue irrespective of the budget cuts and I think it will become more successful as time goes on. People will become more comfortable with the idea as it becomes more established and more partners are getting involved. This increased partnership work will hopefully make up for any funding which is removed.

KN There are lots of examples of this improved partnership work and I think it will continue to improve because it has to. Different methods could be used to cut costs such as sharing office space; we just need to make sure everyone is aware of the opportunities. We can already see businesses and individuals becoming more aware of how they can get involved in the local community and this in turn will draw in other partners.

In addition to this the well established community members involved in community planning must try to become more sustainable in the face of the possible funding cuts.

AA Regarding the size of the communities which make the plans, what is the smallest you have experienced? Do you think there is a tendency to focus on those with larger populations so the smaller ones get left out? The example I was thinking of is Garioch.

LA A small community in Garioch is probably bigger than a large

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community in Marr. The communities which we help are not chosen by size, they're chosen according to their enthusiasm. In fact I've found some smaller communities work better together.

KN The problem in Garioch is the absence of a Rural Partnership which means there's no one there to support them. The partnerships are very important, especially in widely dispersed areas. The Council is also always there to support and assist the communities in achieving what they want.

MS From an operations point do you have to arrange meeting around the Community Councils?

LA They are the enabler but they often don't have the necessary resources to achieve things on their own, this means they work with others.

SD Question 2: How should the relationships between local members and the Local Community Planning Group work?

LA The Local Community Planning Group is made up of a range of partners so they don't report directly to the Council but there's a good process of Area Committees and Area Management getting together to discuss and monitor the work going on in the area.

Consulting in the middle of the plan takes a long time so we have began a rolling process of constantly consulting and adapting the plan according to changes in priorities and what has already been delivered. This is the monitoring aspect of the plan and it's important that those elected people involved can be held to account. There have been issues with how much information Councillors receive about what's going on but we are working on an action plan to improve this. The local Councillors can be seen as the enablers and in Marr they also act as Chair of the Local Community Forums so they have a very active role. In Marr we also try to tie in the Area Committee into everything we do. We've learned from past experience and are improving how we do things.

PB What happens in Formartine with regards these processes?

KN There has been a bit of a disconnect between Communities and Councillors, partly due to the way Community Planning structures and processes have evolved from the previous system. As we're learning things are improving and we're finding new ways to involve local members. Ward Forums are also helping this.

The majority of Community Planning falls within the Council remit so they should help in the delivery. As some partners report to others it can be difficult for members to monitor what is going on. We realise that we need to continually improve links with members and continue to

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use meetings as a structured way of looking at matters raised in consultation.

- LA SAC came to Huntly and as you may remember many Community Planning members came along. This illustrates how dedicated they are to delivering the mission and working with the Council.
- SD I've been a Councillor for two years and before this investigation I didn't know about community planning.
- LA It's important to engage as many partners as possible to improve awareness. Grampian Police and Fire and Rescue are regularly present at the forums which also allow the community and the Councillors present to question them about their contribution and progress. This is a very good method of informally identifying any underlying issues and is an underrated tool.
- KN Ward Forums bring everyone together. We've changed the system as we felt the previous one which was an area-wide consultation held annually was becoming somewhat repetitive and whilst still well attended was beginning to lose some impetus and we now focus more on local issues.
- MS The NHS, Grampian Police and Fire and Rescue are all present but there seems to be no representation from transport partners. This is a regrettable shortcoming in such a rural area.
- LA I don't necessarily agree that this is a shortcoming. We have specific bus forums and in Marr we only have two train links so I question how relevant matters would be to rail operators. Buses, walking and cycling are the main forms of transport and I don't think the main bus companies would find community planning very useful. They're commercial enterprises so it's difficult to get help from them without paying for it.
- Saying that, if an issue arises we can arrange a meeting with the relevant groups to focus on this issue. I don't think a regular presence would be useful.
- KN Local Community Planning Groups can't do everything and they must try to avoid duplication. There are many well-established methods of community improvement which don't need reinvented, such as bus forums.
- IT I liked your realistic assessment of the relationships. You've established how communities working together can achieve great things with little help from outsiders. You spoke about the disconnect between communities and Councils. Do you expect anything to change? In Banff and Buchan the local Councillors get the community plan to check

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it over but we have no input into its formation and there is no opportunity to change it. However, as elected members if something goes wrong we are often the ones who are questioned. In Banff and Buchan over three hundred people objected to one aspect of the plan, created by unelected members. Do you think there is a lack of accountability and that elected members should be more involved in the formation of the plan?

KN We definitely need more engagement and discussion before the plan is finalised, a bottom up approach. There will always be some points on the plan though which are more supported than others. I feel regular informal engagement is the best way to deal with this disconnect. When dealing with such a wide range of relationships however there will always be discussion and negotiations needed and not everyone will be happy with the outcome.

IT There seems to be a substantial difference between how you are describing the formation of your plans, in a very organic way, and my experience of unelected members putting in the points they want.

LA Marr has had some top down work such as the contributions of the health and social workers for example and how they deliver services but this is backed up by bottom up contributions from the community.

If I had a criticism it would be that the Marr plan has too much in it and more consultation is needed to streamline objectives. From time to time there can be conflict and objection at the point of delivery; it is our job to address this.

IT Regular consultation is preferable in the formation of the plan. Do you think this is the key to your success and do you think it will work in urban areas?

LA It is certainly easier in rural areas where there is a greater sense of community spirit and urban areas often contain more conflicting views. There can however be an issue with people's egos in rural areas and some people taking the view that their opinions are more important than others, especially in affluent areas.

AA Question 3: How is agreement reached amongst partners on the best way forward and resource allocation for specific projects and initiatives?

KN In a wide variety of ways. For example, we use the evidence that we and the other partners have gathered to identify needs. We identify where the resources are available, my area for example has received a large amount of planning gain money, and then we engage with the community on how best to use it. The projects and work done in the community already also shows us where funds should be focused and

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the strategic outcome agreement can be used as guidance.

It's important to draw all the relevant information together to make an informed decision on where resources should be allocated.

LA I agree. In Marr as the area consists mainly of small rural towns a small amount of resources can go a long way but we need to support and encourage the community to make sure of this. We can also instigate relationships with partners when a need is identified.

To make sure resources are used to the best of their ability we need to agree collective ways forward and promote discussion on all projects.

FH Question 4: How does Aberdeenshire seek to empower its communities to ensure that all are assisted in participating in community planning - are lessons to be learnt from the legacy of programmes such as Villages in Control, Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership and Planning for Real?

LA We are empowering communities all the time and supporting the delivery of the outcomes. We are using the types of techniques which were established by those projects in the past and adapting them to the needs of the individual communities.

In Marr we also have a National Park which is good and bad: it brings in extra funding but can limit out options of what we can do with the land.

FH What are your main tools for doing this?

LA I think Planning for Real and Making it Real are especially useful as they have many similar outcomes to Community Planning but the process is less intensive.

Different communities use different techniques such as questionnaires and online resources to engage a wide range of groups. Banchory held a meeting in a pub to attract a range of people.

TF If I could go back to transport for a moment. Mearns did a dial-a-bus project which failed, partly as people had to call Aberdeen to order it. Maud on the other hand has a similar project which was much more successful. Does Marr have anything like this?

LA There are several similar projects but none exactly the same. We did look into it but they can be very expensive in relation to the use the community actually gets back. We have tried to review how we can make it more cost effective.

KN With regards my answer to question 3, one of the main tools is making use of Council staff who support and enable the community through

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capacity building. Community Learning and Development staff for example are very involved. One of our main challenges is tying everyone together and getting them focused on common goals. We do this using those people already in the community as we've found putting in new people doesn't work; it takes time to build trust. As you saw in Balmedie this approach is working.

FH Community Planning Officers play a big part in what we are looking at today. How do they prioritise when several communities all want to make plans?

KN This can be difficult and we have had several communities approach us at once to request help to make plans. We never want to discourage them so it's a balancing act. Different communities will move at a different pace which helps to stagger the process and other people in partner agencies can help to take priorities forward when we are struggling with resources.

NC Question 5: How can we ensure future sustainability, in terms of people as well as fiscal resources, in community planning?

KN It is impossible to predict the fiscal future so to ensure their long term future community planning projects should aim to become self-sufficient wherever possible. We encourage all those involved to see the value of working together for the future and taking ownership themselves.

People are more important and valuable than money and we will always find ways to carry out aims without the funding as long as we have enough people involved. A group within a community can achieve a lot if they can see the value in what they are doing and they are supported correctly.

Small grant schemes can also be used to instigate imagination.

FH Some communities are good at raising their own funds but others struggle, this is part of the diversity of Aberdeenshire. The small grant schemes may help act as a kick-start. There is however a criticism that the Council fails to help communities who can generate their own funding, we need to avoid this.

KN We are currently working with Aberdeen Volunteers Centre to improve awareness and show people how they can get involved in things which are going on in their area.

LA We're using Marr Area Partnership to help deliver this by using their database to spread information. We are there to assist communities to help themselves and work with them to provide continued support to deliver projects. It's about enabling those groups who want to achieve something and we have seen a huge increase in support for the work of

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the Council.

IT Question 6: How can greater awareness be raised on the role, remit and operation of Community Planning?

- LA Much more important than the remit is that people are aware of the needs of their community and what can be achieved. There is only so much use in explaining the term Community Planning since what most people are concerned with is what is actually delivered.
- KN It's about getting on and actually doing things. Trying to explain the terminology can be complicated and there is little point. If we asked people what Community Planning is I think most would have a better understanding now than in the past but only with reference to the projects they have been involved in. We need to better publicise the projects and what the plans have delivered rather than the concept of Community Planning itself.
- IT Given the increased importance of Community Planning do you think Area Committees are still needed?
- KN Yes I think they are still needed and they play an important role in local planning as well as other areas.
- LA Certainly in Marr the work of Councillors is integrated well into the community plans and the Area Committee plays an important role in this.
- TF Do you promote the local area top-up budget? From my knowledge it is the same people who apply every year.
- KN Our communities are aware of it and its various aspects. There is a general recognition and it is linked to the community planning objectives to justify why they need it. Some groups may not be aware as others but we certainly publicise it through the Community Councils, Partnership and in the Press.
- LA Likewise in Marr it is seen as a method of promoting low level work. It has been used in the past to access Landfill Tax Credit funding.

Question 7: Are there areas where improvements could be considered? was not asked on the day due to time restraints. Subsequent to the meeting the witnesses provided the following evidence:

- KN The more regular updating of Local Community Plans will be a great help, and that coupled with regular six-monthly reporting to Committee on progress will provide an opportunity for local members to influence the plan more directly through that process. Although there may be

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some desire to return to the old "Area Plans" as these clearly set out the Area Committee's aspirations, there is the potential for the new plans to allow members to influence a much wider range of activities and projects.

I would also wish to see the contents of the plans to more closely focus on local issues, all of the Plans contain a variety of actions that local groups have only marginal ability to influence. At the same time, I would continue to encourage partners to be fully involved in setting actions and local priorities in a consistent way across the board.

Internally, we need to strengthen the linkages between Service Plans and Community Plans and formalise the flow of information between the two.

Finally, the CLD service has much to offer community planning as you saw on your visit and it is important that their work programmes have a strong link with community planning actions and activities. This also raises the question of the role of CDGs and other groups and how they interface with the community planning process and where the boundaries sit. between those groups and the local community planning groups

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11.30 HOURS, WOODHILL HOUSE- COMMITTEE ROOM 2

MEETING WITH AREA MANAGERS

Present: Councillors Allan (AA), Bellarby (PB), Cullinane (NC), Duncan (SD), Fleming (TF), Hood (FH), Sullivan (MS) and Tait (IT).

Officers: Jan McRobbie, Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny and Audit) and Lindsay Dougall, Scrutiny and Audit Assistant.

Apologies: Councillor Thomas.

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Part 2 –Questions to Chris White (CW), Banff & Buchan and Buchan Area Manager

PB Welcome to SAC Community Planning investigation. Our aim is to talk to you today away from the public gaze.

We will take it in turn to ask you the questions we gave you in advance and there may also be some supplementary questions which come up. If there's anything else you would like to add once we've finished asking the questions, feel free.

MS Question 1: We've visited your area and seen some of the "community planning" projects on the ground. But what, in your opinion, is Community Planning and what should it do?

CW Firstly I would like to clarify that I am answering these questions today from a number of different viewpoints. I am Buchan Area Manager, Banff and Buchan Area Manager and Chair of the Fairer Scotland Fund.

From an Area Manager perspective, Community Planning started as a central government drive for efficiency through partnerships with public services being the enabler. The term itself isn't very helpful and although from a top-down approach there is a good understanding, from a bottom-up approach the term itself is less important, it is more about engagement.

Since the Local Government Scotland Act 2003 came into force, providing a statutory basis for community planning, we've moved from an efficiency drive to practical delivery.

From a Fairer Scotland point of view the method of delivery is different, partly due to personalities and capacity. When it works well it is the coordination of many different pillars to deliver local services finely tuned to what the community wants and needs.

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SD Question 2: How should the relationships between local members and the local Community Planning Group work?

CW That is a fundamental question and one which I am tempted to ask you. The direction we are heading in is very interesting and some meetings are more valuable than others. Members' involvement is not about making decisions, but about enabling discussion and ensuring representations are made which will add value to the projects. As representatives of multi-agency wards we are clear that we want the input of Local Councillors but I am not convinced we have it right yet.

Inviting partners and Councillors to workshops to develop a consensus approach is a good way forward especially since they are influenced by facts and not opinions. There is however no perfect model yet and as I understand it many Councillors feel a disconnect. It may just be an extra strand of bureaucracy but that's a political issue you can think about.

The practical involvement included the informal Area Committee groups for example. There have been some issues with conflict arising from different political parties.

SD I agree; there used to be a separation, the two travelling along parallel tracks but now I'm starting to understand more. Are the public at these workshops?

CW Yes and also all Councillors and relevant partners are invited but there has been difficulty in getting a wide range of those in the communities to attend since they are held during the day.

MS In Electoral Ward 18 we have four Councillors all from different political parties but we are working well together.

PB Do the Area Chairs get told who to invite?

CW There is no formal advice on the matter but there is informal guidance on who to invite. I still think Council representation within community planning is an issue and presumably one of the reasons why we are here today.

FH What do you feel about local Councillors volunteering to come to meetings rather than just Area Chairs?

CW It's a balance. I have no problem with other Councillors coming but this can intimidate people and cause conflict. It is a different sort of meeting; far less formal than the Area Committee.

TF Most areas have an Area Partnership but some don't. Do your areas?

CW Buchan Area Partnership is very successful and has run very well

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since its formation under Community Development around fifteen years ago. I have a very close relationship with them although we have had to reduce expectations due to funding.

Banff Area Partnership hasn't been around as long and is still developing, also partly restricted due to funding. We are currently trying to extend it further east. I do not have as close a relationship with them but we are trying to improve on this. Both partnerships play a very important role in the engagement side of community planning.

IT Local Area Partnerships contain non-elected members who produce the plan. Is it really the community planning group or just the officers planning group?

CW At an intellectual level there is a logical gap between the needs of the community and tying this into the requirements of the Council. We need good management to tie these pillars together and bridging the gap between legislative requirements and what the community requires.

IT Community planning can work on several levels; one of which is the Area Committee which includes Councillors. How do you make sure the community's requests are actually included?

CW We have identified fifteen communities big enough to have a plan and the key to formulating this is community engagement. They come about largely due to opportunity - the community sees an opportunity then acts on it with the help of community planning and Councillors. Workshops are an essential part of reviewing and discussing the work to make sure the priorities of the community are identified. This is when we step in to give advice and help on matters such as funding.

AA Question 3: How is agreement reached amongst partners on the best way forward and resource allocation for specific projects and initiatives?

CW There are theme by theme workshops through summer to engage with the community and we also use a lot of statistics such as population change and key issue indicators such as social housing. We look at a variety of things to identify what the community is telling us and then the process can begin.

From a Fairer Scotland point of view we try to address inequalities such as poverty. There has been some tension over the delivery of Council funding through Community Planning but we are trying to take a different viewpoint and are looking more at the work of the third sector.

FH Question 4: How does Aberdeenshire seek to empower its communities to ensure that all are assisted in participating in

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community planning - are lessons to be learnt from the legacy of programmes such as Villages in Control, Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership and Planning for Real?

CW Yes there are lots of lessons to be learned.

Regarding Villages in Control: I worked in Inch at the time and people arrived telling us the way we do things in our village is wrong and this is how to fix it. We had a lot of damage to undo from Villages in Control but we did learn a lot about positivity. A lot can be achieved if, instead of putting people down, you tell them what they are good at. To be fair to Villages in Control there were some positives which resulted from it such as the station.

Regarding Planning for Real: it has a very different effect in villages than in towns. Peterhead is too large to consult everyone so the model would not be suitable there; engagement is much more central and involves more groups such as businesses and tourism representatives rather than individuals. It is a very useful tool to help identify priorities but it only works with smaller communities.

Regarding Aberdeen Towns Partnership: this was a really good project especially since it had substantial funding which in turn attracted further funding from local businesses. When it finished and Scottish Enterprise didn't have the funds to replace it, we lost the ability to deliver certain services and a lot of momentum was lost. Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership was almost community planning before Community Planning existed and its end was a major loss.

FH Where does Fairer Scotland fit into this?

CW There are many connecting strands but we identify and tackle inequality. For example, we do early intervention on children with no qualifications and the Reaching Out project in Peterhead and Fraserburgh. We focus on family's health and education but sustainability is also an issue.

AA What do you see happening after Making it Real?

CW It's a question of ownership and who should take on the responsibilities long-term. We have asked the Council to take on some projects while the community takes responsibility for others. This is one of the main messages of community planning; the community themselves must take ownership of the projects they start.

We must be realistic according to funding and balance expectations by explaining what is achievable and what is aspirational, having regard to the capacity of the organisations involved. Planning for Real is just a snapshot in time and things move on at a fast pace. I have also found

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a good Primary School head teacher can be a very useful tool in helping to engage the community long term.

NC Question 5: How can we ensure future sustainability, in terms of people as well as fiscal resources, in community planning?

CW Demonstrating our success is one method and it is not something we currently do well. Success is often attributed to partnerships rather than community planning. I think it is also important that the process is kept going as things of this nature can all too easily lose momentum and people will lose interest. This works both ways however; as more organisations get involved other organisations come forward and want to contribute.

IT Question 6: How can greater awareness be raised on the role, remit and operation of Community Planning?

CW As I already mentioned, this is one of our weak points. We need to improve communication and a lot of effort is needed to get the wider public involved.

There are three groups of people:

1. Those involved in community planning
2. Those who know it exists but aren't involved
3. Those who have never heard of it

Each group needs a different strategy to engage with them further as community planning develops.

There should be a focus on overall improvements and community communications. The Council could be more involved in this and we should develop the marketing strategy further, especially through the partnerships.

PB How do you go about explaining community planning to the wider community?

CW We must explain that community planning is an overall approach but that to deliver the aims we work closely with partners. It is important that people understand the range of community engagement methods which come with it and the issues such as developing capacity.

IT You mentioned confusion about Local Community Planning Groups and Area Committees. Are Area Committees needed or are they just an expensive luxury?

CW They are required for the preservation of democracy in the process; the decentralisation report will no doubt provide some light on the subject. I think the best decisions however are made at the lowest level.

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- FH I attend a few Community Council meetings and community planning is never mentioned. Grampian police is an important link and as I understand it their attendance has been good, especially since they have a big appetite for crime prevention. Can you comment on any disconnect between community planning links?
- CW We use both Buchan Development Partnerships and the Community Council Partnership to help with any disconnect. Also the top-up budget can act as a financial incentive because we can get more if we go through Planning for Real.
- PB Community representatives sometimes say they don't have a big enough role in community planning. Have you experienced any of this tension?
- CW My role is to get these different partners' views and help balance them. There is also an important role for Councillors in community planning as the elected representatives.
- AA Talking of conflicts, have you experienced any conflict between any members of the Council with regards community planning, for example Community Learning and Development?
- CW If I am completely honest, yes. There are fifteen Rural Communities all with very different issues so what is in their best interest is a matter of perception. We try to engage as many people as possible to help with this. The positives of this is that the reason there can be some conflict is that there are so many people working together and this brings in many varied skills. We need to make sure everyone is working together towards common goals to make sure resources are used to the best of their ability.
- AA There needs to be effective communication.
- CW It's natural for people to feel vulnerable when they are working with other groups all trying to achieve the same thing, especially when there's downsizing. We need to have the right people working on the right things and the most progress is made through communication and cooperation.
- PB Question 7: Are there any areas where improvements could be considered?**
- CW I think a key point is to address the term Community Planning. "Partnerships for Aberdeenshire" for example may be more suitable.
- PB We have received legal advice on whether a different term can be used since the words "Community Planning" are used to set out the legislative duties. The answer seems to be yes and various options

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have been thought about including "Community Action Aberdeenshire".

AA We would need to survey those people involved and it may cause damage to the reputation which has been built already.

CW Another improvement is that we need to show the link between the achievements on the ground and community planning. Currently I think many partners are not taking credit for the work they do. It's about communication and what the overall capacity looks like when you transfer it into action.

Also, we need to work on the Community Asset Transfers and some damage limitation once the budget cuts come into full effect. This means looking at the long term future of the various projects and establishing which ones can sustain themselves or exist with minimum help. We want to know in advance where the cuts are going to fall so the organisations can prepare for the challenges this will bring.

SD The previous area manager we spoke to said the budget cuts may help community planning as partners will be forced to work more closely together.

CW That's a possible outcome.

SD Can you identify any weak links in the process?

CW The most important aspect of any drive like this is the people and the partnerships working together. The NHS is an inevitable target for criticism since they are a national organisation and are faced with resource shortages. They help a lot with early intervention however and this helps to improve community planning in a way many people may not realise.

My main worry is continued communication; I am not convinced that the future of community planning is set and we will have to continue to work at it.

PB Thank you for your comments, they have been very useful.

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EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION THURSDAY 2ND JUNE

14.00 HOURS, WOODHILL HOUSE- COMMITTEE ROOM 2

MEETING WITH AREA MANAGERS - Willie Munro (WM), Kincardine and Mearns Area Manager

Present: Councillors Allan (AA), Bellarby (PB), Cullinane (NC), Duncan (SD), Fleming (TF), Hood (FH), Sullivan (MS) and Tait (IT).

Officers: Jan McRobbie, Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny and Audit) and Lindsay Dougall, Scrutiny and Audit Assistant.

Apologies: Councillor Thomas.

PB Willie Munro is here today to talk to us about community planning as an area manager but also through his involvement in the Aberdeenshire Community Safety Partnership.

Welcome to SAC Community Planning investigation. Our aim is to talk to you today away from the public gaze.

We will take it in turn to ask you the questions we gave you in advance and there may also be some supplementary questions which come up. If there's anything else you would like to add once we've finished asking the questions, feel free.

MS Question 1: We've visited your area and seen some of the "community planning" projects on the ground. But what, in your opinion, is Community Planning and what should it do?

WM I see community planning as a process; a way of working and a culture of cooperation. The first aspect is community engagement including understanding the needs of the community and making sure they are aware of our limitations. It's a mutual understanding. We work together to resolve issues and provide the best quality of life for everyone involved.

The second important aspect is the involvement of all the stakeholders. The community and service providers must be committed to the same outcomes and it is essential that there is a clear understanding. This manifests itself in the development of suitable projects.

Community planning is not just about the officers going to village halls and talking to people, it needs local and strategic focus. With this

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everything will marry together and things can be achieved. There must also be the opportunity to influence the priorities and strategies of large partner agencies as well as building capacity within the communities. Building this capacity will mean the community themselves can develop projects on their own or with the support of the Council and other partner agencies.

PB When community planning was first put forward it was seen as a method of trying to tie statutory authorities together with the third sector only coming into the equation later. Some groups still do not feel involved enough at this point. Have you experienced any tension of this sort?

WM Yes. Community planning as a process has existed within Aberdeenshire for years just without the formality brought about by it now being a statutory requirement. Some people have been heavily involved in community planning before it was formally created and can now feel that their good work is not recognised as others become involved. We are not trying to redo their work or even interfere with it, we want to help but this new involvement can create a feeling of disconnect.

I think the community could be even more involved than they are currently but the difficulty is how to do this. Engagement is a challenge we are still working on. There are certain people who are fully engaged with the projects but they don't necessarily represent the community. We need to be careful about this and that conversations and decisions represent the community, especially since there can be less accountability in the process.

PB It is a difficulty. How can we be sure those people taking to us represent the community? There is also a problem with Community Councils inputting their personal opinion rather than the views they have taken from the community at large.

MS We talk about the importance of partnerships such as the NHS and the Council but there is no transport representation. Do you think this is an oversight?

WM There is a statutory obligation for North East Scotland Transport Partnership (NESTRANS) to contribute to the development. They do sit on the Board but not as regular attendees at local groups as many issues are not relevant to them and there is a difficulty in resourcing attendance at 6 local groups. However, if an issue arises which we need their input on we do get their cooperation on the matter.

With transport there can also be a conflict between national and regional interests such as extra train stops which benefit smaller communities but increase overall journey times. Community planning

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has a long way to go but does need to influence national transport policy.

Each of the six areas does have a bus forum which I see as part of community planning even though they were established well before community planning's formation. The forums are attended by bus providers, transport officers and the public and allow issues to be discussed and resolved at a local level. It is a forum where service users and providers identify issues and resolve them. If they face issues which cannot be resolved themselves it can be referred to a higher level such as the Council.

There is maybe an opportunity here for the bus forums to feed more information to local community planning groups and the Executive. This could be very powerful, for example influencing budgets and priorities.

SD Question 2: How should the relationships between local Members and the local Community Planning Group work?

WM In the Kincardine and Mearns Area when community planning was established partners didn't want the Council to dominate matters. I personally would have liked more involvement from Members. We must seek a balance and I think this can be reached by regular meetings with Councillors; whether formal or informal. We want to build on the work of the Ward Forums and could have a greater Council presence although if this involves additional meetings it is unlikely that other partners will be present due to time constraints.

The Area Committee is represented by the Area Chair. I think this needs more of a link and improved two way dialogue. We need better two way communication across a whole range of partnerships and groups where one Councillor represents the Committee. We are looking at how to do this better with sessions for Councillors to brief their colleagues and hear their views. It needs to be the right information to the right people, information overload doesn't guarantee success.

SD Does the Area Chair attend the meeting regularly?

WM Yes but I'm not sure he communicates with the rest of the Committee and there can be a tendency to come to the meetings with a local outlook rather than an area wide one.

AA Do you think you would benefit from additional meetings with the Area Committee?

WM The Area Committee is being consulted more but I think we could go further. My preference would be a more formal approach to increase

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publicity of community planning. The Area Committee is mainly consulted when decisions need to be made but I think we need greater consultation during the process.

AA Question 3: How is agreement reached amongst partners on the best way forward and resource allocation for specific projects and initiatives?

WM It is varied and I don't think it is as structured as it should be. We engage with the public then try to accommodate needs according to the partners' resources but as budgets tighten, taking funding from one place to another becomes difficult.

I think we need to take a more robust approach than we have used in the past. To begin with we are using a strategic approach in Kincardine and Mearns to identify what is needed but at some points in the consultation we didn't have enough information on the needs of the community. We have started an investigation to address this and assess the needs of the whole area through a PESTELO model. This information will also help us agree with partners how the resources should be allocated.

Overall we haven't encountered significant problems with the current system but I think it does represent a limitation on what can be achieved.

I also think it is important that the community is realistic and is made aware of what can be delivered. With regards to community planning it is important that what is requested is reasonable but if they want something beyond this we will support them although they will have to come up with the funds themselves. When deciding what is possible we should look at areas in relation to others but keep in mind that each one is different and capable of different things.

FH Can we use community plans to allocate resources and how many communities have these plans?

WM I can't remember off the top of my head. I think we still have a long way to go and we need continued concentration on capacity building to support the community to come up with their own action plans. The service level agreement for Rural Partnerships has also asked us to identify gaps and those communities which do not have plans. We have developed a structure and now need to go to those communities and ask them to start building these plans according to their needs.

FH Are any of the Community Action Plans published?

WM Some are, for example Newtonhill, St Cyrus, Laurencekirk and Stonehaven although they are currently evolving a new plan.

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FH Question 4: How does Aberdeenshire seek to empower its communities to ensure that all are assisted in participating in community planning - are lessons to be learnt from the legacy of programmes such as Villages in Control, Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership and Planning for Real?

WM Villages in Control and Aberdeen Towns Partnership (ATP) were introduced by the Council and I was involved with the Towns Partnership. If I could go back now and do it all again I would start from the end and work back. At the start of the programme there were significant funds for projects. The more valuable legacy was the community capacity built towards the end of the programme as funding was phased out.

The emphasis by the end was more about the community doing things for themselves than the public sector delivering projects and consulting on proposals rather than engaging the community.

With regards Villages in Control it was set up to empower villages, much akin to what is now being done through community planning.

Planning for Real helps to engage the wider population and leads to an action plan. It allows us to pick out common themes in different areas and we would use this to influence local and national policy.

I think what they all have in common is capacity building. The communities should be the ones who make the decisions about the future not the professionals. To do this we need to liaise more with the community so we, as the service providers, understand their needs and are there to support them.

There is an issue with coordination as some people can be confused as to which partner they need to go to for help. The Council need to also be aware of their statutory obligations, for example we are inspected on our Community Learning and Development work so we must continue to go forward with this.

TF I stumbled across the Buchan Area Partnership which had a very successful dial-a-bus service whereas Mearns Area Partnership tried a similar scheme but was much less successful. Do you think there are any lessons which can be learned here?

WM Yes. I think transport is one of the issues which stand in the way of having the best quality of life but changing people's routine regarding how they travel can be difficult. Our dial-a-bus service was publicised but we needed a greater initiative to explain to people how it works since it's such a new concept and many didn't fully appreciate it. We should look at the success of other areas and learn from their best practice or good practice. This works two ways; we can also show

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other areas where we have had issues and how we have improved this. I think the Area Partnerships are amongst the best at sharing practice like this.

SD Maybe their success was due to the EU finance they received to support their dial-a-bus?

WM Possibly, and if so we should learn from this.

NC Question 5: How can we ensure future sustainability, in terms of people as well as fiscal resources, in community planning?

WM If we can get to the point where community planning is better aligned with overall strategy, the services across the entire area will better reflect the needs of the community. I also think we need to have a better understanding of where the money is coming from, for example should we all pool resources so there is a big pot of money for community planning or should we have specific finance tied to specific services and projects?

In terms of people it does concern me since responses are so varied. In affluent areas there can be a strong capacity for community planning even though in comparison they have fewer needs. In response to this we need to make sure we engage with needy groups. The population demographic is changing and although we have an ageing population we may see a fall in volunteering levels in one sector in the future as retirement age increases and there are fewer people benefitting from early retirement.

As resources are decreasing the community's demands are increasing. We want and need communities to take over management of projects and sustain them, with support, in the long term. I think as we go forward we need continual engagement so we are aware of any changes and we need to make sure those with whom we engage actually represent the community.

FH Have you made use of planning gain money or the top-up fund?

WM Yes we have. Most of the planning gain money is specifically allocated but where there are some unallocated funds we relate it to the community planning themes and objectives and require evidence of engagement and application of community planning principles. We have a similar approach to the top-up budget.

IT Question 6: How can greater awareness be raised on the role, remit and operation of Community Planning?

WM Community planning is something we have been doing for years even though it has not been recognised as such. We need to have a

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community planning framework and a two way flow of engagement. We will have a better awareness if we can infiltrate Council services more than we do at the moment and I think we will benefit if we can get to the point where plans are formulated solely from the community's needs and not statutory requirements with a one size fits all provision. Our job should be to take an overview to identify where there are needs and understand what is required to fill these gaps.

FH You mentioned the Council's statutory duties - we've been looking hard at budgets and the needs of the communities but we need to make sure the legal requirements are delivered first.

WM I agree but we can deliver these duties in a number of ways and the communities themselves may have innovative ideas on how to do that, ideas to which service providers have to have an open mind.

TF Question 7: Are there any areas where improvements could be considered?

WM Yes, there are several and I think I have mentioned most.

We need a wide and common understanding within the community and our partner agencies of what community planning is and, most importantly, people need to understand how it relates to them. It should be the driver behind change which will benefit everyone.

There are some improvements which will help us get there such as infiltrating into service providers to the point that they consider community planning as an important part of their job. This applies to all partners including the Council, Grampian Police, NHS Grampian and the community themselves. One or two activists are not enough to carry out the change we are looking for; the whole community needs to understand and hopefully contribute.

TF What about the name. Do you think we should drop the word "planning" to prevent confusion?

WM Absolutely not. Development planning is often what comes to people's minds when they hear the term as this is what they are used to but this is not what planning means. It would be more appropriate if building planning changed its name.

I think it is too late in the process to change the name now. It would result in us losing a lot of the momentum we have worked hard for. There could be scepticism as a new name could be seen as a new 'fad' to replace community planning. We need to make people understand that what we mean by planning is identifying what we need to do and how we are going to do it in relation to the community involved. I feel strongly about this.

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FH If we had a theoretical pie chart how much do you think the partners contribute to community planning, especially considering that the community isn't paid for their contribution?

WM It really depends on what point in the process you look at. I would say roughly just over fifty percent are paid but there's still a huge amount of volunteers involved. We should also remember that many people will be contributing to community planning who may not realise it.

AA You talked about different services involved in the process. Do you feel there is a lack of engagement with any of the partners?

WM Yes I think we can improve on the engagement at an early stage but we need to ensure that those people within the community who we engage with actually represent the community and do not have a vested interest.

I see three aspects to the process:

1. Community engagement- now the most dominant part
2. Hard evidence
3. Professional experience and opinions - this used to be considered the most important aspect

We need to find the correct balance between these three aspects to give us an accurate picture of the needs of the community. In some parts of the organisation we are good at this but in others we need improvement. For example Community Learning and Development isn't always recognised for the valuable skills they can contribute.

AA I agree, I have seen evidence of this myself.

PB Would you care to comment on the work of Aberdeenshire Community Safety Partnership in relation to community planning?

WM Some people think the two are separate issues but I don't, Community safety is a part of community planning and uses the community planning process. Community safety was established in 1997 and its model helped in the formation of community planning in Aberdeenshire. They share the key elements of using partnership evidence and engagement to improve quality of life. Community safety is now progressed in a much more structured process than before, much more evidence based.

Evidence and results of engagement marry up in a strategic assessment which is essentially a risk management process. We use the seriousness of possible outcomes and the likelihood of the event occurring to come up with priorities and identify needs which can then be tackled through various projects. There is also support to the community in initiatives which they begin themselves, often involving

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projects which are not seen as a priority for service providers and therefore do not yet have funding at a strategic level.

Community safety is a key part of community well-being and therefore an essential part of community planning.

SD How successful do you find the Rural Partnerships?

WM It depends on what Area you look in, some are very successful. I think we need to be especially aware of duplication e.g. rural partnerships, CVS, CLD, community planning officers must work closely together as their respective remits do give scope for duplication if not careful. What is important is that we achieve outcomes and the Rural Partnerships are definitely a big help. They are generally independent of the Council although they receive funding but we can't direct their future.

SD Are there any weak links in the community planning process?

WM Some people don't feel involved and this can create tension especially where work was carried out prior to community planning. There is some tension in Kincardine and Mearns, for example, between Rural and Local Partnerships.

Also, I don't think we have a perfect engagement process yet but this is something we will continue to work on.

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EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION THURSDAY 9th JUNE

10.00 HOURS, WOODHILL HOUSE- CONFERENCE ROOM F

Present: Councillors Allan (AA), Bellarby (PB), Duncan (SD), Fleming (TF), Gray (IG), Hood (FH), Sullivan (MS), Tait (IT) and Thomas (RT).

Officers: Jan McRobbie, Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny and Audit) and Lindsay Dougall, Scrutiny and Audit Assistant.

Apologies: Councillor Cullinane.

Part 1- Community Planning Executive and Board - Officer Input from Ally Macleod (AM), Corporate Policy Officer (Community Planning).

On Thursday the 9th of June SAC met at Woodhill House to present a set of questions regarding Community Planning to various members of Aberdeenshire Council. Each witness was given a set of questions tailored to their role in advance of the meeting to allow them to prepare.

PB Welcome Ally and thank you for coming along to talk to SAC today. To introduce our work, topics are put forward each year by senior Council Officers and Councillors which they think should be investigated. SAC then seeks further information from Directors before deciding which ones warrant further investigation. We aim to have a positive outlook, seeking improvements in the areas of investigation.

The topic we are working on at the moment, as you know, is Community Planning and more specifically Aberdeenshire Council's involvement in Community Planning.

You have seen today's questions and we will take it in turn to ask you these. There may be supplementary questions which come up in the course of the meeting and feel free to add in any other comments yourself.

RT Question 1: What is your involvement in supporting, at an executive and board level, Community Planning in Aberdeenshire?

AM It is my duty to prepare agendas and papers for the Community Planning Executive and Board meetings. I also follow up these meetings with any further actions which are required. In relation to the Community Plan, I monitor and report on the progress of this, which

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ties into the Single Outcome Agreement. As the lead contact within Aberdeenshire Council for Community Planning there are many different aspects to my role such as managing the budget for partners, managing the central community planning team and ensuring a corporate approach towards the implementation of community planning in Aberdeenshire.

PB In terms of finance can you explain your work in relation to the operation of the board?

AM There is a budget of about £100,000 per annum which includes one full time officer, the management of the citizens' panel and funding for smaller projects. In addition to this there is a small administration and catering budget.

PB Who exactly is it that provides this budget?

AM Aberdeenshire Council provides half of it and the remaining half comes from partner contributions. These include NHS Grampian, Grampian Fire and Rescue Service, Grampian Police and Nestrans, the Aberdeenshire and City transport partner.

RT Is this the only budget that community planning has?

AM We did have the Fairer Scotland Fund to tackle poverty and inequalities which was managed through the board. This amounted to approximately £1,000,000 per annum. Although this fund now comes directly to the Council, the partnership continues to take a monitoring and management role given the cross-partner implications the projects it funds can have.

RT Question 2: How many others work with you in providing support for community planning at the centre, and what are their roles?

AM Firstly there is Richie Johnston [Director of Housing & Social Work] who is the senior community planning lead within the Council. At a more operational level there is me and the Community Planning Support Officer, Erika Skinner. She manages the citizens' panel and has a role in supporting a number of different projects such as the Low Carbon Vehicles Scheme which was recently approved by the board. There is also Heather Lorimer who works as an clerical assistant and is responsible for the community planning website and e-bulletin as well as supporting some of the partnership groups.

FH Question 3: What are the distinct roles and working relationships between the executive, the board and local community planning groups?

AM I think the roles have now been clearly identified.

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Firstly, the Board has a strategic view. It is there to consider the long-term future of community planning and to scrutinise what has been achieved.

Secondly, there is the Executive which implements and coordinates community planning. Although the Executive and Board have distinct functions they work closely together. The Board delegates tasks to the Executive but communication works in both directions; many reports will come to the Executive first before going in front of the Board. It is therefore essential that there are close links between the two.

Lastly, there are the six community planning groups in the Aberdeenshire areas. Their focus is on engaging with the community and actually delivering what is in the local community plans.

SD Does community planning at a local level have a separate budget?

AM Yes they receive approximately between £13,000 and £14,000 per annum each for implementation of their plans and any other projects they decide on. They also have a full time equivalent Community Planning Officer each which the Council funds.

TF As a Community Planning Officer are you happy with the different community planning groups?

AM Yes I am quite happy. We did have some concerns at one point regarding our theme forums, so in the new Aberdeenshire Community Plan 2011-2015 we streamlined our structures to cut out duplication. The theme forums no longer exist and we now only meet together when necessary. I think the entire system now operates better as we have identified the different roles and the board and executive in particular now stick to their defined functions.

PB Can you explain the communication process between the board, executive and local community planning groups?

AM The Marr Area Manager, Les Allan, sits on the Executive and represents the local community planning group chairs. It was previously decided to streamline the number of Area Managers on the executive to one, but there have been some concerns raised that this is not enough. We also have meetings every six weeks with the local community planning officers to find out what issues they are facing. The central community planning team is invited to an annual area office get-together to share good practice and identify common problems.

FH Do you have a monitoring role over the work of the local groups?

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AM Yes, the local community planning groups report to the area management team as well as to the Board and Executive.

IT Are all local community planning groups chaired by Area Managers?

AM No, not all of them. Some, such as Buchan and Kincardine and Mearns, have adopted a rotational chair. Although our partnership agreement allows the groups to assign whoever they wish as a chair, generally they have chosen Area Managers.

IG Question 4: How do the relationships between participation at executive or board level and local community planning actions on the ground, work?

AM What we have done up to now is the local community plans were formulated on the ground by the local community planning group. Then only once they were agreed, they were given to the Board to make sure they are happy with the overall direction they are heading. This also allows the Board to see any emerging issues they are facing and any further actions which need to be taken. In addition, the monitoring of the local community plans now goes to the Executive and Board. It provides an opportunity to look at common areas where there has been a lack of progress and which may require senior buy-in from partners to remedy performance.

IG So are the priorities set locally?

AM Yes, the local community plans are bottom-up, owned by the local community planning groups and it is their responsibility to create the documents. Through the Aberdeenshire Community Plan and Single Outcome Agreement, there is an overarching framework of local outcomes and agreed themes for the area. There should be a fit between what happens locally and the outcomes we are working towards within the Single Outcome Agreement.

PB Do you have any concerns about the overall direction of community planning?

AM We have faced challenges in the past and overcome them quite well but there are still some concerns, for example that some actions may not be delivered. This is mainly due to funding constraints .

PB Do you think the plans are realistic given the current climate?

AM I would agree that not all are realistic but some aims are long-term and as such benefit from inclusion in the plan.

SD Do you think both the Board and Executive are necessary, or could some of their functions be carried out locally?

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- AM I think it would be fair to say that either the Board or Executive may work well alone but what we would lose is the strategic level buy-in from partners. The Board and Executive help to bring the partners together at a strategic level, making sure everyone is committed.
- TF In your experience do most communities need to be reigned in or encouraged with regards community planning?
- AM I am in the process of meeting groups at the moment and I am impressed by the enthusiasm and knowledge they have but I think we need to be realistic. We need to communicate the message to partners that we need to be realistic in what can be achieved and put an increased focus on the communities taking responsibilities for the projects themselves.
- AA Question 5: How does the community planning executive relate to local community planning partnerships? Are there any barriers to effective two way communication on the delivery of strategic theme and in responding to specific local needs?**
- AM In addition to the links already highlighted, there are instances of the Executive delegating action to the local community planning groups. For example Grampian Fire and Rescue came to us with their Fire Safety Plan which was a significant step for them. We then fed this down to be discussed in relation to community planning at a local level.
- Some area community planning officers have raised concerns about representation as they think one representative on the executive is not ideal. They need to be in a position to react to the needs within the community and there have been some issues with these links.
- AA Maybe a rolling representation would be more suitable.
- AM That is one possibility. We have had three in the last two years because we are trying to alternate as much as we can. We invited officers to a recent Board meeting to try to improve these relationships and improve the Board's knowledge of what is going on locally.
- PB Do you have any third sector representation on the Board and Executive?
- AM Yes there are representatives present from Aberdeenshire Voluntary Action who are comprised of the Councils for Voluntary Service and the Volunteer Centre. The Scottish Government asked community planning to have a single point of contact with the third sector so this was our response. Community Council representation is on the Executive, Board and local community planning groups but only one representative isn't the ideal solution. I think we need to find a better

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way to represent Community Councils.

- IT One Community Council representative for both urban and rural areas does not seem like enough. It could be questioned whether or not they actually know what is going on in the entire area.
- AM I think we need to be realistic about how much time we expect people to contribute voluntarily, most are extremely busy already. For this reason we need to look at this issue on a case by case basis. We should also remember that Community Councils are equal partners so they will still have a vote should one arise.
- RT How often does the Executive meet?
- AM Quarterly, just before the Board meeting.
- RT What is the attendance normally like?
- AM Generally very good. Most partners attend all of the meetings so they are obviously well committed.
- RT Do most partners send people who are relatively senior within their organisations?
- AM Yes, although there have been some issues with one or two of the partners, most do send people from a director level.
- TF Is there integration between the community plans and the partners' plans? For example Grampian Police annually produce a plan of what they would like to achieve.
- AM That has been a weakness in the past and in the Community Plan 2011-2015 which was published in January, it was stated that partners need to have better integration with local community planning and use it as a means of informing policy and strategy development. There are some good examples of integration such as that done with community safety action plans and their strategic assessment process where they have linked in with issues emerging through local community planning groups. We want to use this good practice as a model for other areas to improve partnerships and minimise duplication. It will also help to make sure partners engage locally.
- TF Do the Board and Executive allow named substitutes?
- AM Yes and this helps attendance significantly.
- IT **Question 6: Proving support at executive level, how are you kept aware of the diverse strands of project work being undertaken in the areas? How closely do you work with the area community**

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planning officers?

AM There are many different methods. Firstly, we link with the area manager who sits on the Executive and represents the six local groups. We also monitor the local community plans which I summarise for the Executive and I meet with the area community planning officers every six weeks to share common issues, good practice and identify anything which needs to be reported to the Executive and Board. We also liaise with Area Managers and I am in the middle of attending local community planning meetings to get a feeling of what is going on at a ground level.

By using this wide variety of different methods we have a reasonable relationship.

IT Do you get interim reports?

AM Not at the moment but that could be useful to feed back to the Executive and Board.

TF Question 7: From your perspective, how has the Aberdeenshire Community Planning Partnership developed and refined its operating practices over time?

AM I have been working in community planning since 2007 at which point the last Aberdeenshire Community Plan had just been released and the Audit for Best Value was being processed. Since then there have been a number of improvements.

There is a better structure now with the removal of the theme forum meetings which struggled to find a purpose. We have also streamlined some reporting processes and removed duplication. Now that we work with the three levels, executive, board and local community planning groups, we have more focus and improved relationships.

The Single Outcome Agreement made a major impact in 2008 and allowed a more robust approach to be taken in monitoring progress because of the introduction of performance indicators. The Scottish Government feedback from this has been positive and I would say generally we are getting better at monitoring local community planning.

Governance has also improved. The Council carried out a review in 2009 which had many relevant recommendations such as establishing Standing Orders and a complaints process. We have incorporated some of the recommendations into the new partnership agreement which the Board signed off at its last meeting.

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- FH How do you think we can get residents more involved in community planning and build closer links with them? Do you think a greater use of the media would help? If we went into an Aberdeenshire community and asked what community planning means to them the reply would be varied and many people do not know of it at all. Even us Councillors struggle to understand the concept sometimes.
- AM Those are some good points. We used to employ a part-time communications officer to help build the brand but when she left that post it was never filled. We need to make better use of the press to get communities more aware and involved in community planning. One way to do this is to make people aware of what has already been achieved. I think this would be more successful than just telling people the Scottish Government definition as the message is more powerful if you give people tangible examples.
- RT Do Corporate Communications attend any of the meetings?
- AM Not the Board meetings, although we do meet with them as a team from time to time. They do attend Council committee meetings but since they are the experts I do think we have missed an opportunity by not getting them more involved.
- RT What is the average attendance at an executive or board meeting?
- AM The Executive normally has between ten and fifteen people attending whereas the Board meetings have more like twenty.
- IT A lot has been said in the past about the term Community Planning. When it first came about there were only three organisations involved but now it is much broader with the wider community at the centre. Since it is now at a community level rather than just an organisational level do you think there has been some confusion created as to what it means and who is included?
- AM We are well aware that including the word "planning" brings about a lot of confusion, but it makes perfect sense to call it that since that is what groups are doing: planning the future of the communities involved.
- We have considered alternative names and carried out focus groups on the matter, but no really striking solution was reached. Even if we did change the name within Aberdeenshire, this in itself could cause confusion since the Scottish Government will continue to call it Community Planning.
- SD To help make the public aware Marr introduced ward forums for debates. Do you think this is a good idea?

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- AM Marr has three ward forums and these are an excellent way to engage the public. I think partners should consider this approach in other areas and have made the area community planning officers aware of this. Most do share good practice such as this anyway.
- IG In my experience local Community Councils were good at coming forward with plans even before community planning as a concept was created but funding can mean parts often do not get executed.
- AM Yes I agree and I think we need to be realistic and prioritise which parts of the plan are most important to the community. Planning for Real is a method of achieving this.
- FH Looking at the positives of community planning, we have seen examples of small amounts of Council finance unlocking finance from other outside sources. Projects are not simply dependant on Council finance to succeed.
- AM That is very true. I think the most important part for the Council is mobilising the community itself as this is the main building block for community planning.
- FH We need the correct leadership, support and links available to the community.
- IG I agree with Councillor Hood, if you have the right connections a lot can be achieved with relatively little finance.
- RT Plans should be a combination of aspirational and achievable goals. We don't want things to be included which are impossible but at the same time if something isn't in the plan then it isn't going to be achieved.
- MS If only we could have the recreation and leisure aspect made into an arms length organisation we would have all the financial benefits that brings. Aberdeenshire Council cannot draw down funds in the same way sadly.
- FH Are community planning officers up to speed with the levels of funding available and how to apply for this in regards to different projects?
- AM There are mixed levels of expertise. There are some good links with groups such as Tackling Poverty & Inequalities and LEADER but I would say this is probably an area we can improve upon. A wider knowledge of the available funding will help community planning in the long term. I think we could do this by improving the links between the Council's funding workers and the officers since they are excellent at information-sharing once they themselves become aware of it.

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- JM This would be a good question to raise when we meet with the community planning officers as part of this investigation.
- IT What is the relationship like between the officers and the Area Managers? Do you think Councillors feel disenfranchised?
- AM Yes. I think there is a strong relationship between the first two you mentioned but Councillors can be left out.
- MS Question 8: How can greater awareness be raised on the role, remit and operation of Community Planning within partner organisations, including with councillors and officers of Aberdeenshire?**
- AM We have a broad communications strategy which includes the website but there are difficulties in getting the information into communities. I think we need to work closer with our colleagues in Corporate Communications to improve this. The monthly e-bulletin has around six hundred readers and this will hopefully help to engage the right people. I think we could also improve engagement within partners as well as the community.
- FH Are there any connections with schools regarding community planning?
- AM Yes but the connection is varied across Aberdeenshire since there is no formal connection with schools being a single agency. We do have outcomes which relate to schools under the lifelong learning theme which involve for example improving results in schools. We work well with some secondary schools especially regarding employability and volunteering. Community safety issues are another area which is heavily involved with schools.
- FH There are over one hundred and fifty rural primary schools in Aberdeenshire and they are often at the heart of the community so I am surprised that there is no formal link.
- PB Primary schools are involved in Planning for Real as they are used to engage parents and children.
- MS You mentioned that some of the organisations use silo thinking. Do you think this is the converse of community planning?
- AM Not necessarily, I think some projects are capable of, and many even be better off, being delivered by a single agency.
- AA There is only one Councillor from the Area Committee on the local community planning group. Do you think this is enough?

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- AM You're right, it's not ideal in terms of engagement but we don't want these groups to get too large or be dominated by Councillors. We could try to get the officers to attend the Area Committee Meetings or, what I think is a better possibility, hold joint meetings every six months.
- IT I think it is very important to keep the Area Committee involved. How do you think they should contribute to the plan; should plans require their approval or just comment?
- AM I agree that we need more regular interaction so increased meetings will help get input from the Area Committee throughout the process of formulating the plans.
- IT Going back to Councillor Sullivan's point, is silo thinking an essential aspect to allow people to proceed without considering others?
- AM Yes, sometimes it is necessary depending on what it is that you are trying to achieve.
- SD Question 9: Are there areas where improvements could be considered – are you aware of good practice in other council areas which Aberdeenshire might consider?**
- AM I am part of a national network of community planning officers so I am aware of other areas but in my experience none are uniquely successful or even significantly ahead of us in progress. I think this is because all areas face the same issues.
- I have been impressed with the Lothian and Borders Council's Strategic Assessment. They have used their resources well across the breadth of their partnerships and have seen a robust outcome.
- MS There is an insufficient input to community planning from the transport partners. For example if we consider trains in Aberdeenshire: Montrose and Stonehaven have been begging for over eight years for more frequent train to Aberdeen but the train organisers have continually refused as this will increase overall journey times despite the landing fee being one of the main reasons for their decision. Do you think this is an example of community planning failing?
- AM We now have Nestrans on board so transport links within community planning are improving. They do however only have a certain amount of influence on private transport operators and only attend Board meetings on a regular basis.

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EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION THURSDAY 9th JUNE

11.30 HOURS, WOODHILL HOUSE- CONFERENCE ROOM F

Meeting with Aberdeenshire Council Economic Development Officers:

**Belinda Miller (BM), Head of Service, Economic Development,
Morna Harper (MH), Business and Community Support Manager, and
Bill Clark (BC), Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership Coordinator.**

**Present: Councillors Allan (AA), Bellarby (PB), Duncan (SD),
Fleming (TF), Gray (IG), Hood (FH), Sullivan (MS), Tait (IT)
and Thomas (RT).**

**Officers: Jan McRobbie, Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny
and Audit) and Lindsay Dougall, Scrutiny and Audit
Assistant.**

Apologies: Councillor Cullinane.

PB Thank you for coming along today to talk to SAC. Our function is to carry out investigations into the work of Aberdeenshire Council with the topics being proposed by senior Councillors then selected by us according to a set of criteria. These concentrated investigations seek improvement and to find out how better services can be provided by the Council. We do around three investigations a year so they are intended to be quite intense.

This investigation looks at community planning and engagement and more specifically Aberdeenshire Council's role within this.

IT Question 1: What is your job and how does it relate to community planning and empowerment?

BM As the Head of Service my relationship with community planning is to make sure economic development plays a part in the decisions which are taken. This also involves making sure our legislative requirements are fulfilled. I see economic development as empowering people and local businesses to be active and improve the wider area for the entire community.

MH In my team I have Business Support Officers who link with groups on the ground and play an important part in the community consultation process. We carried out these functions before community planning was established but the community planning framework has allowed continued improvement especially with regards the employability strategy which it has helped to tie together.

BC Although Aberdeen Towns Partnership was fulfilled three years ago as

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Coordinator there are still some important functions to carry out to wind up the project. We are creating trusts to work alongside community planning at a local level. In addition, I have wider responsibilities regarding regeneration.

FH Has the Fairer Scotland Fund been used?

BM Yes there was an amount allocated and we have chosen to use it to tackle family issues as a method of early intervention and to tackle long term unemployment. It has been used for training, to help people prepare for work such as help in preparing their CV and help with childcare. By using the money to pay for support workers we are helping people to access employment options.

IT Do you find there are any overlaps with other services?

BM Yes there can be but most services are complementary. We are instigating internal investigations to look at how to continue to deliver these services once the Fairer Scotland fund comes to an end. This work centres around employability.

MH We work with partners such as Jobcentre Plus Scotland to come up with the plans and minimise overlap. We are also creating a database to highlight any overlap.

IT How far along are you in creating this database?

MH The Working Families database has been created already and Jobcentre Plus have said they will also use this database as an alternative to creating their own.

IT Is this a Council database?

MH No it's not sitting on the Council server but maybe it would be useful if it was to give a wider access. We are using the same database as Aberdeen City Council.

FH Question 2: In what ways has, and does, Aberdeenshire Council's Economic Development function supported, and support, community planning?

BM Several Economic Development projects were community planning before community planning as a concept was created. I'm sure Morna will explain this further. In general the regeneration projects, the development trusts and the rural partnerships are all work involving Economic Development which supports community planning.

MH The Council funds the rural partnerships and part of our service agreement with them is for the partnerships to help with community

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planning. Another part of their work is helping with community consultation.

SD Can you expand on the work of the rural partnerships? Is their work essential?

MH They are very important as they are a way for of the Council to carry out consulting with the community. In addition they assist community economic development groups with legal, organisational and funding advice.

AA Garioch doesn't have a rural area partnership. Why do you think this is? Could this be because this type of community contains so many people who commute and may not be as interested in local issues?

MH There is definitely a want for it. We used to have EU funding for community economic development in North and West Aberdeenshire, this helped to establish these rural partnerships in that area and it allowed the partnerships to employ people to administer and help other groups in the long term.

The partnerships in central and southern Aberdeenshire did not get that support and as a result the partnerships are less developed.

TF Question 3: What are, in your opinion, the determining factors in making some communities more able to participate in, and even take ownership of, community projects? Can an Aberdeen Towns Partnership/ Villages in Control legacy be seen?

BC That is a very interesting question. There has been a definite difference in those communities who have had access to these projects in the past. A lot comes down to capacity within the community and whether or not there is cohesion and agreement of the aims and priorities. These projects helped to improve these aspects within the community which makes community planning much easier to develop. We should bear in mind that these things take time to build and can often need a catalyst such as an economic downturn, natural disaster or opportunity such as those available for town centre regeneration.

These projects also helped provide many communities with significant resources but with regards this it is best if the discretion on what to spend it on lies with the community themselves as this encourages ownership of the projects.

TF Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership ended three years ago, can you tell us more about Villages in Control?

MH Villages in Control started in the Grampian Regional Council days and was one of the first community economic interventions in the area.

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People went into the heart of the community and helped them to work on what they want for the future. Mearns Area Partnership still works with Villages in Control in Laurencekirk.

BM Aberdeen Towns Partnership always had an end date as we always knew the resources were limited so eventually funding would run out.

BC The model it used is recognised by the Scottish Government as something which should be replicated in some form in the future. The Development Trust movement is well aligned with the Scottish and National Government and plays a similar role. This is another good model which should be followed.

IT Community Planning Partnerships have a lot more partners than the three which existed in the Aberdeenshire Towns Partnerships days and community planning involves a lot more work at community level. To what extent does your department initiate things?

MH I think it is a balancing act as our department is keen on support and involvement of the community. There are other ways we can help than instigating projects. The Council has been leading things but people should be given more power which in turn will lead to a greater sense of ownership and so projects will be more sustainable.

BM Some communities do need us to initiate things. If there is a crisis or something else to stimulate the community to initiate things themselves then that's a good thing but as the Council we have priorities and duties to fulfil. This means that sometimes we must intervene to tackle the needs of the community; for us it's more a question of demand but the dynamics change constantly according to various factors.

IT How many economic development officers do you have?

BM Thirty-two at the last count.

MH That includes Working for Families so we're thin on the ground with regard to the community planning role.

PB Do you work with people who are made redundant in the Aberdeenshire area?

BM Yes it depends on the situation.

We get notified of any significant redundancies in the area and try to take a strategic view of what is required. Morna takes a very direct role and works with bodies such as Jobcentre Plus and Scottish Enterprise to see where they can help.

MH We help people to find new jobs as usually when we find out about the

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redundancies it is too late to help businesses to prevent it.

MS The dynamics of communities and the businesses contained within them changes all the time.

MH This is a factor in the enabling of communities although often one or two enthusiastic and committed people are enough to make a big change.

BC I have found people are often willing to take on a much bigger role within the communities and there is a much bigger capacity than we realise.

IG Question 4: Are there, in your experience, any barriers to ensuring effective round table Council support to community planning and in responding to specific local needs?

BM As a whole Aberdeenshire Council is good at reacting to the needs of the community. There are however two things which slow down the response and support:

1. Timing - sometimes we have reacted too late to make an impact and the processes which the Council is required to go through can also slow things down.
2. People - it is essential that we have enough people on the ground and we must have open investigation channels.

BC Communities will quite often go along as they are unless there is some sort of external force to change the dynamics. For every action which takes place there is a reaction and sometimes this can be in the form of opposition to a project, this represents a barrier.

IG Is finance a barrier to your work?

MH Yes, often a lack of resources means that we do not have enough support workers.

IT Can you explain further what you meant by long processes within the Council acting as a barrier?

BM To give you a current example consider the asset transfers. The Council takes a while to decide on which action to take but in the meantime the community can't make plans and fundraise to support these plans until they know for certain how the Council will help.

IT Are you finding that the departmental interface is impeding on your work?

BM If it is then it is definitely not deliberate. I would say some officers who don't work on the ground as much do not have the same experience

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but this is inevitable.

IT Some officers engage with the community better than others and it is a concern that some may view it as easier not to engage the community at large.

AA Question 5: How effective are inter-service communications in keeping lead officers advised on upcoming or potential areas of shared input? I think you have already partly answered this for us but would you care to elaborate further?

MH We probably could improve on this. When initiatives starts with community planning from an idea round a table it often works better than one individual starting something on their own then others coming in to help later.

FH Does your department have a member on the Community Planning Board? If not how do you get feedback?

BM No, we get a copy of the minutes and we also get informal feedback from those who do attend.

BC I used to attend the Community Planning Executive when it was larger but it has been streamlined as it was thought that too many people attended and therefore it was not practical.

BM Someone from our team always attends the Executive.

RT Question 6: How closely do you work with Area Community Planning Officers and CLD staff in coordinating support for community planning initiatives?

BM We do this on an as required basis. As we are thin on the ground we get involved when there are projects which would benefit from our involvement. The rest of the time we keep up a good line of communication.

MH If the initiative is launched by community planning then communication is good but we are not as good at using community planning as a consultation as we are used to using other methods.

BC We are more involved with officers where we have a specific focus such as regeneration.

IG How involved are your staff in local community planning discussions?

BM We all know each other well and there is always good informal communication as well as the formal channels.

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- BC I agree, the network we have established works very well.
- RT Do you attend the Area Meetings?
- BM A member from Morna's team does.
- FH Do you attend the Local Community Planning Group meetings?
- BM No we don't.
- FH Do you think that is a possible link which could be brought in?
- MH Possibly but the current system seems to work sufficiently. They know that we are there if they need us.
- FH From what I have heard so far during our investigation the right communication seems to be essential to community planning.
- BM Yes it is important that we keep the right people informed of the right things.
- RT The Area Manager is often the person in the know and the one who facilitates the communications and oversees it.
- MS Question 8: How responsive can local government and local public agencies be in supporting community initiatives which may be time critical?**
- BM It varies according to what project you look at. We are quick to respond where we can make a difference, especially in situations where if we do not respond quickly the problem may get worse. It also depends on whether the project is one of our priorities and whether, from an economic point of view, there is any point in getting involved.
- BC Generally I think we are good at responding but one issue is managing expectations. Due to funding and other priorities sometimes we cannot meet the expectations of the community.
- BM I always see better responses under time constraints, especially regarding quality projects which are community led. For example the Strichen Country Park, the community wanted a café and walks but the project faced significant time constraints. We helped the project get LEADER funding and it opened last week.
- SD Are you equally quick to respond to projects which you can't support?
- MH Yes and we support other partners so they can help where we can't. We can also help through supporting the development trusts and rural partnerships which in turn help communities.

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- BM Many communities are delighted to share best practice. For example we learned from Blackburn as their village hall project was run differently.
- IT It is about sharing success so other communities can benefit from this. Are there any specific mechanisms to support this?
- MH There used to be funding called Seeing is Believing which hired a bus to show groups other successful projects but this funding has now gone due to cuts.
- BM We are reliant on informal exchanges of knowledge rather than formal and direct methods.
- BC Effective communication is not a linear process, we have a whole network including the press and Community Learning and Development.
- MH The LEADER website is very good at publicising good projects within the area.
- IT If someone wanted to find advice in a specific project, is there somewhere they could go to see what the outcome of similar projects were?
- MH No but that is a very good suggestion. From an IT point of view however such as database may be difficult to produce and keep up to date.
- BC I think people would be more likely to use that but it would lose a personal connection.
- IT Are you or your team being asked to attend any meeting which you don't feel you get any benefit from?
- BM No we are quite discerning; if there is nothing on the agenda that is relevant to us then we won't attend.
- MH When local community planning partnerships first started they wanted a representative from Economic Development to attend every meeting, as did CLD and Area Management Teams. This meant we had invitations to three meetings in each area where we only had half an officer.
- We do however always attend the Area Meetings.
- PB We should be careful there is no criticism of there being all talk and no action.

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SD Question 9: Are there areas where improvements could be considered – are you aware of good practice in other council areas which Aberdeenshire might consider?

MH Are you solely referring to community planning when you ask that question?

SD Yes.

BM We have a well respected community planning team and over the last few years it has become less bureaucratic. One improvement is that businesses are directly involved in community planning. I think business association involvement will bring in important experience.

MH We would need to have specific meetings in place with only the content which is relevant to them.

Also, I think we can improve awareness of the operation of community planning. There are some good examples of this involving employability.

BC My perception is that other areas have a better network of communications using more informal measures rather than just relying on the executive and board.

IT Does it only go through formal measures at the moment?

BC There are specifically allocated officers so we could have more freedom.

IT Can you give me any specific examples?

BC I don't have the connections in Grampian Police which I would like, this would be an opportunity to get to know more people informally.

PB Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) have been used in other areas of Scotland as a good opportunity. Do you have any opinions on this?

BM BID is a mechanism to allow a levy to be charged on top of business rates which are then reinvested on improving the area, provided the majority of companies in the district agree to it. Aberdeen City recently voted on whether or not they should become a BID.

I think it works best in tight city business areas as everyone has high expectations but resources are finite. In smaller areas a project can be felt more widely. Whether or not it makes economic sense in the areas of Aberdeenshire and would make businesses more sustainable is still an unanswered question.

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BC Academic literature generally supports it if it is used in the correct way. For example some areas have used it mainly for marketing which has little long-term effect. It can however be socially divisional as it separates districts and some of the work it does overlaps with the work of the Council and Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership, for example the work on community safety.

I personally think we should look beyond BID rather than trying to establish it in some of these rural regions.

MH I don't support its use in small towns but it may work in larger cities. I see few positive examples of its use in small towns but the Scottish Government is still driving forward the initiative since they need to be seen to be doing something to help the centres of small towns which have been in steady decline for years.

BM It can also have the effect of just moving problems elsewhere as businesses try to get out of the district and others try to get in to it.

BC The Scottish Government has been using this as a method of regeneration including looking at asset transfers.

SD The scheme only tends to be successful in small areas and I think many rural stores may find the extra levy difficult to fund without getting much benefit.

MA It is also difficult to see how this could have a positive effect on attracting new businesses to the area.

BM The problems facing rural town centres are something which we need to tackle and each one is different and therefore needs a different solution.

SD Elgin currently has a programme underway to tackle decline in their town centre.

BC They are currently on year two out of a total of four so as of yet there are no major economic changes but some small changes have been seen.

TF There does seem to be a lot of village shops closing.

MH Some have felt the effects of stringent environmental health regulations although there are funds of up to £7,500 available to help make any changes required to meet standards. Shop combinations, such as grocery stores and post offices can also help to improve viability.

It is an economic fact that there is less money spent in the local town centres as they cannot compete with the prices or choices available

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elsewhere.

- BC We must try our best to slow down this inevitable deterioration. For example the internet can be used to allow small stores to access a much larger market.
- IT I get a lot of complaints from local stores about the rates they have to pay and the effect it has on their business. What relationship do you have with the assessor?
- MH People generally realise that it is not the Council or the Assessors fault but the entire system. The current system re-assesses the business rates every ten to twenty years without any period of adjustment so any major change can floor a small business. There is an opportunity for appeal.
- IT Some flexibility is needed in the system.
- FH The problem with the current evaluation system is that it was based on the time of a boom when most local trades, for example hotels, were doing extremely well. Since the last revaluation there has been an economic crisis but that valuation still stands and fails to take account of this. The Small Business Bonuses Scheme has helped around eighty thousand businesses but more still needs to be done. Assessors should have recognised the recession and offered a discount accordingly.

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EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION THURSDAY 9th JUNE

14.00 HOURS, WOODHILL HOUSE- CONFERENCE ROOM F

**Meeting with Aberdeenshire Council Community Learning and Development
(CLD) Officers:**

**Kevin McDermott (KM), Strategy Development Officer, Community Capacity
Building; and
Douglas Findlay (DF), Dialogue Youth Development, CLD.**

**Present: Councillors Allan (AA), Bellarby (PB), Duncan (SD),
Fleming (TF), Gray (IG), Hood (FH), Sullivan (MS), Tait (IT)
and Thomas (RT).**

**Officers: Jan McRobbie, Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny
and Audit) and Lindsay Dougall, Scrutiny and Audit
Assistant.**

Apologies: Councillor Cullinane.

PB Welcome and thank you for taking part in our SAC Community Planning investigation. The function of SAC is to carry out investigations into the work of Aberdeenshire Council, specifically on topics suggested by senior Councillors. These concentrated investigations seek improvement and to find out how better services can be provided by the Council.

AA Question 1: Please tell us about your job and how this role relates to community planning and empowerment.

KM In Community Learning and Development (CLD) we have three strategy officers for Capacity Building, Youth Work and Adult Education. CLD as a service play a central role in engaging the community.

When I first started in this role one of my initial tasks was to produce and report recommendations on the role of local Community Planning groups for the board.

I also have a strategic role across Aberdeenshire and work with groups who put community plans into action. CLD also deliver training to help capacity building.

DF Dialogue Youth is part of CLD and we promote partnership working including supporting Aberdeen Youth Council who is a member of the Community Planning Board. Dialogue Youth and community planning have had a very strong relationship over the last three or four years.

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Last year the Community Planning Board felt it needed to strengthen its youth engagement strategy so we were given more resources to implement this. An example of our work is arranging job shadowing with some of the partners.

FH Do youth representatives have links with the community planning groups?

DF Yes there are seven members of the Youth Council and seven members of the Youth Parliament and they meet every six weeks. There are two on the board and two on the executive. It works well and everyone is kept informed of what everyone else is doing.

TF What age are these representatives?

DF They range from twelve to twenty six. The youngest on the Youth Council is fourteen and the oldest twenty two. We have no say over who is elected or what age they are, they are elected by fellow youths.

RT Question 2: In your opinion and experience, what is community planning and empowerment?

KM Community planning is a process which brings key partners and the community together to meet the needs of the area. When I did a review of community planning I found most Local Community Planning Groups had a shared understanding although there is some confusion with the term itself, especially since we have now changed from simply planning for the community to engaging and actually delivering. We are at the point now where there is lots of progress in how the agencies work together.

Sometimes we confuse engagement with empowerment; we need to decide if we are consulting on opinions and existing ideas or engaging on a blank page. I think we must be clear of this from the outset so that people don't end up disappointed by the process.

AA There can be confusion as to whether there is consultation or just information giving.

KM Consultation implies that there is an option to change things.

DF From the youth aspect it has given young people in the area a chance to consult and have the option to change things if they have the enthusiasm to do so.

They have also helped by bringing to our attention a lot of duplication, for example within the police and fire services. This shows how consultation has helped groups to work better together and improve community planning as a whole.

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TF Question 3: What are the drivers for your service in working in community planning and empowerment?

DF The Youth Engagement Strategy which all the partners signed up to is a driver although I have found the hard part is getting them to act on the agreement. Government Bills also help to get them heard; the Youth Council for example is part of the Pathfinder programme for the NHS which is especially good as it talks about long-term plans.

TF Do they work in the same regions as the Council?

DF It gets slightly confusing as we work with the Scottish Youth Parliament which have their own regions. There used to be six members of the Youth Parliament and six Youth Councillors but this has now gone up to seven.

RT Do they all participate well?

DF Yes, the fact that they put themselves up for election shows how willing they are to participate. To be elected they then have to outshine their competitors and this comes across at meetings.

KM To go back to the question asked I think there are two parts. Community planning is one way to deliver community engagement and community empowerment is the outcome of Community Capacity Building. I think the Community Empowerment Action Plan is overlooked and is the most important national policy document in relation to empowering communities. The Working and Learning Together document shows what we do and identified the three priority areas of youth work, adult learning and community capacity building. There is more focus on outcomes in CLD work and all our work ties back to the Single Outcome Agreement.

We have our own CLD plan with one document as a partnership and one as a service within the Council. These are our main policy drivers behind our involvement in community planning.

PB What about other partners such as Economic Development or rural partnerships?

KM They are absolutely essential to the whole process and we have many links with them. We recognise the role they play in capacity building and rural partnerships in particular have taken the lead on planning for real - often with the involvement of CLD staff.

We try to think of how we can make the most of the resources we have. Community outreach is part of community planning and a recent social audit of the Reaching Out Project showed the partnership work improved the use of resources and allowed partners to access more

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people.

We cannot however immediately replicate the successes in other areas as it takes a while to develop trust. This type of community development is a longer term process.

- PB Do you think there are too many agencies that duplicate their work?
- KM No, there is a lot which needs to be done still but people are getting smarter at sharing information. I certainly don't think there are too many capacity building agencies.
- DF There aren't too many volunteer organisations especially for young people as there are so many different groups of children and a number of different reward schemes. The three agencies of Youth Link, Youth Scotland and Young Scot have some duplication and arguments over where funding should be allocated but generally there is little overlap. They probably could work better together though.
- AA Westhill Youth Group has arranged some good projects like camping but not everyone wanted to do that. Some preferred to go to Jimmy Chung's for a meal. Young people often have varied opinions and interests.
- DF We must try to accommodate all young people but not everyone likes the same thing.
- KM We are having a HMle inspection and one of the issues raised is how many young people do not have any sort of accreditation. We do not know the precise figure at the moment because of the different recording systems used by different services but we're looking into it and are expected to monitor this in the future.
- TF How do you engage those hard to reach groups?
- DF We take direction from the local CLD workers and we also use the Young Scot website and Facebook to contact people. We are always available, for example we set up a meeting in Banchory after someone contacted us about improving the area. A usual first step is to walk around and talk to the young people in the community. We then consider the suitability of projects such as a youth club or drop-in centre. The number of clubs has increased dramatically in the last few years. Youth Scotland is a very good independent organisation which supports these ideas.
- KM Miranda Aitken, the Youth Work Strategy Development Officer, has just produced a Youth Scotland report on how to sustain local youth projects.

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FH Question 4: How does your work relate to local community planning partnerships? Are there any barriers to effective two way communication on the delivery of strategic themes and in responding to specific local needs?

KM I have a strategic role and link in with community planning officers. Within community planning we have a CLD partnership which is now part of the overall strategy. The Partnership was able to draw down national funding for staff training and it is a good example of funding being strategically used to continue the development of CLD in both the council and third sector partner organisations.

Our staff on the ground are the key link with community planning and a recent audit showed that CLD were very heavily involved in the delivery of the Local Community Plans. I don't understand however why some other services aren't involved in community planning such as schools or social work as these are key services which have a massive impact on people's lives.

FH That was mentioned earlier, especially the omission of schools.

MS Question 5: How aware are you of the diverse strands of other services, council or partner organisations, who also work in community empowerment in the areas? Do you need to be aware of these?

DF From a youth perspective we are very aware of what other partners do. The Youth Councillors in particular take information away and feed it back into the community. I think it is vital that everyone is aware of the other partners' work so that we can minimise duplication. There can be an issue with some partners using complicated names for people which makes it difficult to know who to contact, the Council has similar issues.

KM CLD staff have a good knowledge of who does what locally but in my role I'm still trying to join the dots of who does what within the Council.

We were involved in a National Standards for Community Engagement training day with a mixed audience – some who volunteered to come and others who were sent to represent a service. The lesson from this day was that some people who did not instinctively see community engagement as part of their role were able to make the connection and to see how it could help to deliver and develop better services. We still need to improve awareness across all services and get people involved.

MS There seems to be a lot of silo thinking used.

KM Yes, I think there are some organisations who are simply not aware of the benefits of using things like the National Standards. There is a free

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piece of software called VOiCE (Visioning Outcomes in Community Engagement) which has real potential and could be used a lot more.

MS What is your point of view on Community Development Groups (CDGs)?

KM I haven't been personally involved with them but I have never understood why they aren't linked in with local community planning groups.

MS I have recently been invited to their meetings for the first time.

AA Community development groups in my area have been good but the link to community planning has been an issue. Do you think there's some opposition or do they work well together?

KM People sometimes say that community planning takes credit for things which would have occurred anyway but if we look at community planning as a process I don't think there is an issue. Community planning officers have more of a partner facilitation role whereas CLD is more about implementation.

AA Due to budget cuts people want to show their purpose and continued use.

MS It's down to the people involved to work well together.

AA Question 6: How is agreement reached between Council services as to who should lead on community empowerment issues? How is the best way forward agreed, in terms of resource allocation for specific projects and initiatives?

KM At a strategic level it is done through the Single Outcome Agreement process so we look to outcomes and identify who the lead partners are. Other partners can then get involved as the process continues as and when they are needed.

Someone said to me recently that there is not enough work with the elderly which was a priority a decade ago whereas we carry out a lot of work on early intervention now. It is sometimes unclear to people about how these priorities change and where the drivers come from.

MS What do you think of relationships between partners such as the NHS, social care and mental health agencies?

DF I find partners speak to each other and communicate well. Those who fit best take the lead and everyone else slots in around them as and when they are required.

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FH Question 7: What do you think are the key issues for successful community engagement and empowerment?

DF It must begin with the community rather than getting them involved half way down the line. As well as timing the quality of the engagement is essential; it must not just be a token. People can see right through that and know when their time is being wasted, especially young people.

Proper engagement and empowerment must be open and honest about the direction it is taking and what is realistic.

KM The community is the essential part of community planning and we need to respect their right of self-determination. The process must be inclusive and look to the long-term future with enough resources allocated to sustain this. In turn the community must be instrumental in telling us what they want – which means that community groups and community representatives also need to reach out in their communities to ensure they are being as representative as possible.

Some engagement takes a long time such as the community planning project in Balmedie where the local people were asked to carry out an community audit. This process was well resourced but a good example of how to engage.

Even if it takes a while, it is still worth doing correctly.

FH Talking about engagement and empowerment, when approached by individuals within a community do you bring out the plan to show them what it contains?

KM No, we would first listen to what they want. We would maybe then refer to the plan during the process if we needed to but only if it were relevant.

FH I have come across the issue of time on some occasions with members of the community becoming impatient. Young people especially sometimes don't appreciate how long it takes to do things.

DF I think a review of community planning every six months rather than four years will help this.

TF Has the skate park bubble burst?

DF I wouldn't say it's burst, more just deflated and I am sure it will return.

TF What is the current trend which has replaced it?

DF I would say youth space. Young people want somewhere they can call their own and decorate how they want.

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- TF We have experienced that in Huntly when we visited a youth café as part of this investigation.
- FH How realistic is it to give young people their own space if they are only going to use it once a week?
- KM It does cost a lot to run a building and now that we are looking at asset transfers we are faced with issues of how to sustain building in the long term with little resources. There is also the issue of young people moving on so those people who use the building this year will be different to those who use it in a few years' time. This makes it difficult to encourage them to take ownership of the projects long-term; we are not looking for a short-term fix.
- Currently, I don't think we make the best use of the resources available to us and that is why I think we should get schools more involved.
- FH I have witnessed issues with staffing the buildings. For example some school buildings are no longer available after classroom hours as there is no funding for the janitors' overtime. If we want to maximise our use of our buildings we need to improve this.
- AA Lots of young people don't want to go back to school in the evenings after being there all day.
- DF Youth groups need somewhere to go. Recently the Guides have approached me asking for ideas on where they can hold their meetings.
- ?? With regards Councillor Hood's previous comment. I think those schools which cannot pay for a janitor are not fit for purpose.
- FH In my ward eight or nine groups were told that they could no longer hold their meetings in schools although the buildings themselves are perfectly suitable.
- AA Question 8: Are there areas where improvements could be considered - are you aware of good practice in other council areas which Aberdeenshire might consider?**
- KM I think we could make more corporate use of VOiCE to help get people to buy-in to the concept of community planning.
- Each community action plan is also a key document which we must make use of and the asset transfer process will bring some big issues. Moray has a simple but successful process with regards this that we can learn from.

Overall, we need to challenge ourselves and make use of critical

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external friends to advise us on how to improve – e.g in relation to the new Asset Transfer Policy. This would be a bold move and show how committed we are to making the best out of our resources. Bringing in different viewpoints will also have a power balancing effect.

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EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION THURSDAY 16TH JUNE

10.30 HOURS, WOODHILL HOUSE- COMMITTEE ROOM 2

**Meeting with the Community Planning Board and Executive Representatives of
Partner Organisations**

Present: Councillors Allan (AA), Bellarby (PB), Cullinane (NC), Duncan (SD), Fleming (TF), Gray (IG), Hood (FH), Sullivan (MS), Tait (IT) AND Thomas (RT).

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Officers: Jan McRobbie, Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny and Audit) and Lindsay Dougall, Scrutiny and Audit Assistant.

Part 1- Questions to Councillor Anne Robertson (AR), Leader of Aberdeenshire Council

On Thursday the 16th of June SAC met at Woodhill House to present a set of questions regarding Community Planning to various representatives from the partner organisations who sit on the Community Planning Board and Executive. Each witness was given a set of questions in advance of the meeting to allow them to prepare. Councillor Anne Robertson also provided a handout entitled "National Performance Framework" which will be considered along with this document.

SD Question 1: In your opinion and experience, what is community planning and what should it do?

AR Community planning is an opportunity for the public, private and voluntary sector to work together and with the community to identify needs from both a community and professional viewpoint. It is also about making the most of the resources available whether they are financial, personal or expertise. The aim is that by doing this and working closely together we can improve the outcomes for all.

SD In your experience do all bodies pull their weight and contribute equally?

AR In Aberdeenshire Council everyone is committed at an executive, board and community level although there have been some difficulties around some governance arrangements and the pooling of resources. All the statutory partners do contribute and there is a commitment and willingness to work together across all groups. I have chaired the Board since 2007 and I have seen a huge improvement in contributions, people now ask how they can get involved.

SD Can you elaborate on the involvement at a community level?

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- AR In the past there has been a gulf between the work of the Board and Executive and that at a community level, but restructuring has helped to address this. The Board makes the strategic decisions; the Executive takes more of a management role, while the community level focuses on implementation. In the past there have been issues with people being spread too thinly but we have taken out layers to focus work on delivery where it makes the most difference.
- MS Are there any members who have been conspicuously absent?
- AR No. At a board level there is a really wide representation with people there from the public, private and voluntary sector, ADP, Community Safety, Aberdeenshire's representatives on the Scottish Youth Parliament and Council and many others. These representatives fulfil the needs of the Board but if we need help from someone else we can ask others to attend, for example as has been done with Citizens Advice Bureau. We manage our agenda in a way which allows us to consult other bodies when required. Overall, I think in Aberdeenshire we have a good coverage of representatives and have a better spread than some of our counterparts.
- IG Do you think community councils have a good grasp of community planning?
- AR That is a grey area. Of the six areas I think there is a different level of appreciation and some areas interpret it better than others. The terminology can sometimes be misunderstood but I think at this point we have gone too far to change it. Some communities thought people were coming to build houses when they heard about community planning but we explained that it's just an enhancement of what they already do. There is still work to be done on the appreciation of community planning.
- PB We did get a legal opinion on whether the name could be changed and we can call it something different if we wish. Do you think we should do this?
- AR I think we should have changed the name two years ago but now we are past that point and people are starting to understand it.
- PB In terms of language do you think it is appropriate?
- AR In Aberdeen City they call it the Aberdeen Alliance and they are also going through a restructuring process.
- TF Do you think there is a lot of duplication in the partnerships?
- AR Yes we have mapped out the work of the partners and it is quite frightening how many groups there are out there. So it is no wonder

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that sometimes people are confused about whom to go to when they have an issue. In response, we have tried to pull some agencies in, such as Community Safety, to limit the duplication of effort. Maps showing the duplication are available on the Community Planning website. There was also duplication in that we were having different meetings with the same people present but we are trying to tackle this.

FH Do you think we could improve the understanding of community planning with a better use of the media with the help of Corporate Communications?

AR I think we do publicise things well, we just don't always do it under the name of community planning. We need to make better use of the area managers and area committees to improve this. Marr, for example, already produces regular committee updates, maybe because they cover such a wide geographical area they feel they have to.

With regards Corporate Communications, they only report what they are told about so we need better communication from an area manager level.

AA Question 2: How do the relationships between participants at board level and local community planning actions on the ground, work in Aberdeenshire Council?

AR If I start with the Executive, they give advice and deal with the decisions made by the Board, and the work which is delegated from the Board – or management. The local community plans go through area committees and are then presented to the Board. These board meetings are attended by local community planning officers on a rolling basis. The local groups are much closer to the Board than they were previously and we have reviewed the process of communication. We have now implemented a rolling process with plans endorsed by the Board reviewed every six months. Despite all these changes, I would say that there are still improvements which need to be made.

AA It's difficult to see how feedback can work both ways; do you think there are a lot of improvements still to be made?

AR The area managers are the link between the area committees and the local community planning groups. I see no reason why local community planning officers shouldn't come to area committee meetings to present on a more regular basis as opposed to the current annual system. We could maybe call for this in the future.

RT When we travelled around the different areas many people felt a disconnect between the community and the Board and some gave examples of good practice which had not been passed on.

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- AR It is definitely something which can be improved on, for example by building on the communications between community planning officers. The officers and the area managers also meet regularly so they can pass it on themselves without the need of the Board. The way the structure is set the Board sets the strategy, then the work is pushed out to others. I do however accept that we need to improve the work and communication of the Board.
- TF Question 3: How does the community planning board relate to local community planning partnerships? Are there any barriers to effective two way communication on the delivery of strategic themes and in responding to specific local needs?**
- AR There are perhaps some barriers interpreted by some. The Executive has community planning partners on it, as does the Board and they represent the active part of what is done - implementation. The Board sets the strategic themes and they tend to be very broad. The Woodhill House based community planning team also provides a link. We have a system in place to deal with these issues so maybe we need to look at how to make people aware of how to use it if barriers are being perceived.
- TF Do you feel much financial pressure?
- AR The community planning board has a pot of money and the fire and police services also contribute to the administration costs such as employee wages. Partners also contribute to one-off projects where they think appropriate. All the partners contribute pro-rata and we have agreed the same level of funding for this year despite the cutbacks. We may not be able to do the same next year.
- Looking at it from a board and executive level, there is no financial issue but at a community level funding is definitely limited.
- SD On the same theme, do you think both the Executive and Board are absolutely necessary?
- AR Due to the legislation which imposes statutory obligations Aberdeenshire Council must take the lead on community planning and that is done in the form of the strategic development plan which the Executive provides. The two are essential from a decision making and management point of view, especially since we need to be sure who has the authority to allocate resources. We also need an overarching structure to help bring in all the partners. I do think there is some truth in the view that we could push more work down to a community level.
- RT Question 4: As a participant at board level, how aware are you of the diverse strands of project work being undertaken in the areas? Do you need to be aware of these?**

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AR I would say it helps work overall if people know what is going on in the wider area and it also helps to bring people together. There are few examples of community planning officers attending other meetings to share practice and this could be done, for example, through ward forums. In Buchan, for example, community planning initiatives are well established and can be used as good examples, as can the Marr ward forums which have been very successful. Other notable examples include Reaching Out in Fraserburgh and the Hotspot in Peterhead. These are just some of the projects I know about as I have as wide a knowledge as I can but I still am not aware of them all.

FH Do you think community planning is having a positive effect on health and crime?

AR Yes, the Hotspot is an outstanding example of this and it has been far more successful than anyone thought it would be. I also think evidence of these positive outcomes should be presented to the Area Committees to show what a difference community planning can make. Community planning can sometimes be misleading as it includes so much it often doesn't get credit for what it does achieve. It certainly represents added value, but our challenge is to use social accounting to capture this and put it into outcomes.

AA You say anything can be community planning, do you think there is a tension about community planning taking credit for the projects of others?

AR The key to avoid this is to let people take ownership of their own projects and to use the challenge as a communication exercise.

IG **Question 5: How is agreement reached amongst partners on the best way forward in resource allocation for specific projects and initiatives? Is this process effective in delivering the objectives of the Single Outcome Agreement with the Scottish Government?**

AR As I mentioned previously partners agree pro-rata contributions. NHS Grampian requested a review as they don't think they are contributing enough. The police and fire services made the same representation as they work across three community planning partnerships so we negotiated and they have agreed to maintain the same amount this year with another review next year taking into consideration the cutbacks. So far there haven't been any problems in these negotiations with the board.

We have many specific projects and initiatives and when we identify something in the plan which we think should be a priority, we will allocate funding accordingly, for example as we recently did with the Grampian Fire and Rescue's vulnerability project. The Fairer Scotland fund is also allocated through community planning by reports which go

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to the Board. The Single Outcome Agreement is also linked to all of this and how to achieve the targets. The NHS Heat targets have been used in the Single Outcome Agreement, for example those relating to health inequalities. We have lifted things which work from our partners' success rather than trying to reinvent things.

- IG Money is the import factor when it comes to getting things done, especially at a community level.
- AR It's about local community planning officers identifying issues and then coming up with solutions which are discussed and negotiated with partners. We need to look at how we can capture outcomes locally and then feed them back up. I also think that attitudes can sometimes be just as important as money to get things done.

Questions 6 & 7 were not asked of Councillor Robertson, as it was felt that the points had already been covered. The questions were as follows:

Question 6: From your perspective, how has the Aberdeenshire Community Planning Partnership developed and refined its operating practices over time?

Question 7: How can greater awareness be raised on the role, remit and operation of Community Planning within partner organisations and within the communities of Aberdeenshire?

- PB Question 8: Are there areas where improvements could be considered - are you aware of good practice in other council areas which Aberdeenshire might consider?
- AR I am not as aware as I might be of some projects and we have not done enough to look at the benchmarks. It is difficult to make judgements unless you have been there to witness and examine the projects. I have not personally gone out to gather best practice but we can always improve things and look at how we can manage things differently.

I think the main area for improvement is at a local level and improving local communications to create good partnership working relationships. If I had to name four possible improvements they would be:

1. The link between the Executive and Board
2. The interpretation of community planning
3. Reduce duplication
4. Better knowledge of what is going on elsewhere

- IT You have highlighted communications as an area for improvement. Some areas have good connections between area committees and local community planning groups but do you think the Board can help this link? Should there be a direct link between the Board and area committees?

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- AR That could be a good idea and the Board and area managers could definitely improve things. Bringing the area managers into Board meetings occasionally would be a good link to ensure the area committees are doing what they should be doing. I do recognise that there is a disconnect in some areas.
- IT As a strategic body, is the Board suffering from a lack of accountability from the area committees? Should the Board become more involved in making sure that best practice is shared?
- AR That is another area which could be improved, possibly through better reporting from local community planning officers.

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EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION THURSDAY 16TH JUNE

11.30 HOURS, WOODHILL HOUSE- COMMITTEE ROOM 2

Meeting with the Community Planning Board and Executive Representatives of Partner Organisations

Present: Councillors Allan (AA), Bellarby (PB), Cullinane (NC), Duncan (SD), Fleming (TF), Gray (IG), Hood (FH), Sullivan (MS), Tait (IT) AND Thomas (RT).

Officers: Jan McRobbie, Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny and Audit) and Lindsay Dougall, Scrutiny and Audit Assistant.

Part 2- Questions to Superintendent John Cummings (JC) of Grampian Police

PB Welcome and thank you from coming along to speak to SAC today. Our current investigation is on seeking improvements to Aberdeenshire Council's role in Community Planning. We have asked you here today to find out the perspective of the police on this matter as an important member of the partnership and we are in no way reviewing the police's contribution to community planning.

SD Question 1: In your opinion and experience, what is community planning and what should it do?

JC I would say that there are two ways to answer that question. The first would be to give you the statutory viewpoint and the second would be to take the simple view that community planning is making sure that people are engaged in the decisions regarding their community and providing evidence that things are actually being delivered.

SD Do you think there is enough participation in community planning?

JC Yes I do, there is a considerable amount of partnership engagement through the community safety partnership especially. I am confident that we make as full a contribution as we can it appears to me that other groups do the same.

AA Question 2: How do the relationships between participation at executive level and local community planning actions on the ground, work in your organisation?

JC We have recently restructured to give local community policing and community engagement more prominence through our Community Focussed Policing Model. I think operationally we work well with community planning at the Local Policing Inspector Levels which are largely coterminous with Local Authority Area Managers' areas. If you

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look at outcomes you can see that local officers engage and contribute, the Local Policing Inspectors establish local issues which they are responsible for delivering on. They are also responsible for close working with Local Community Planning groups. I think the real work gets done locally and it is my job to influence how this is done.

AA Do you think there is good communication in both directions?

JC Yes there is and at the front end I am satisfied with the amount of engagement. There are perhaps more opportunities from a performance point of view at executive level.

IT So are you saying that the police contribute more at a local than board level?

JC No but that is where the delivery is carried out. How to improve the entire structure is what we need to look at, for example how the executive could improve focus on delivery and performance.

IT Should the executive, in your view, have a greater monitoring role?

JC There is some room for improvement there but I think that day to day performance is more the area manager's role. However a more structured overview at executive level might be useful.

TF Question 3: How does the community planning board and executive relate to local community planning partnerships? Are there any barriers to effective two way communication on the delivery of strategic theme and in responding to specific local needs?

JC I am not part of the board so cannot fully answer in relation to that. During my time on the executive I have seen a lot of change and review of what the executive does and some of this relates to performance. The executive seems to do less monitoring/managing and more general discussion of a broad range of agenda items? I think we could focus more on the performance such as a staggered representation of plans to the executive. The executive could also take more interest in helping to remove any performance blockers and the new chair may have an opportunity to develop this further with the partners.

RT Question 4: As a participant at executive level, how aware are you of the diverse strands of project work being undertaken in the areas? Do you need to be aware of these?

JC I have an overview of local areas so I can pick up local community plans and local quarterly policing reviews. I am well aware of the work of certain groups such as the Alcohol and Drugs Partnerships and the work of Community Safety. I am not as aware of other strands but I

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don't think I need to be. If it was something which needed improvement maybe it could be done through presentations to the board - people coming along and saying "this is what we have achieved, this is what is blocking further progress, this is why and can you assist?"

SD Do you think the entire police force understand what community planning is?

JC I do not have a definitive answer to that but we have done a lot of work with officers on how their role relates to the community's needs. It is possible however that some might not be aware of the term community planning even though they are involved in it.

FH The police presence at the community council meetings is a very positive thing, that close link is very important.

JC I agree, especially due to the number of community councils. We aspired to attend 100% of them but in reality it has been more like 80% although we do send an update to those meetings we cannot attend. I think this is an essential part of engagement and while community planning language doesn't always directly resonate; effectively the sort of work our staff are engaged on is directly connected.

IG Question 5: How is agreement reached amongst partners on the best way forward in resource allocation for specific projects and initiatives? Is this process effective in delivering the objectives of the single outcome agreement with the Scottish government?

JC Again I will answer the question from a community safety perspective. I am very comfortable with how we allocate resources. Getting the funding is the first challenge and the next is engaging with partners and the community on how to spend it, also taking into consideration the outcomes we are trying to manage. I am confident that we are making a considerable contribution and we are getting something back which benefits the community.

IG In the event of antisocial behaviour who will lead the community response to tackle this?

JC There is always a challenge is trying to decide who in the partnership should take the lead on a project. At the police we have daily, weekly and monthly strategy meetings looking forward as well as back. We have evidence from across the partnerships that projects which result from partners coming together are most successful; it's not just about certain people taking responsibility but about many partners buying into the same project. There is also a partnership tactical meeting which deals specifically with ASB (Antisocial Behaviour) and which appears to me to be a model of good practice.

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MS Question 6: From your perspective, how has the Aberdeenshire Community Planning Partnership developed and refined its operating practices over time?

JC From an executive perspective it is important that a difference is made on the ground. This is where the real energy is and where delivery actually takes place. The executive has been constantly maturing; I remember when I first joined it was difficult to understand its purpose. Now we are more focused on performance, especially in relation to the single outcome agreement, but there is room for improvement on this. I think it could also look more to helpful scrutiny such as identifying what is blocking achievements and if there are any agencies which are not engaging fully.

MS Stonehaven has suffered from vandalism in the evenings and weekends so residents have requested CCTV, is this something community planning would be concerned with?

JC For me that would be something which would be factored through the community safety work in which community planning has an influence. It might also be actioned by partner's tactical coordination. We need to remember that things can take time to get done through community planning so if there is a need for things to be done without delay partners must feel like they can work independently and address the issues here and now.

IT Speaking of operational practices, the police sometimes ask councillors for help. It has been said that local community planning groups an area committees are suffering a disconnect, do you think the links are sufficient?

JC I don't know, I can certainly take the point away to discuss with my senior management team and get back to you.

FH Question 7: How can greater awareness be raised of the role, remit and operation of Community Planning within partner organisations and within the communities of Aberdeenshire?

JC Firstly, I would say that engagement helps and within the police we have a great awareness at management level with a dedicated sergeant to partnership working. The police are very committed and any dialogue means that community planning is well embedded in Grampian Police.

In terms of the public, my view is that people tend to just want things to happen and improve and I am not really sure they are concerned with the other aspects of community planning. Maybe a better communication strategy using the media more could improve this.

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FH Do you think police involvement in community planning has helped to reduce crime?

JC I think it is the buy-ins which have helped; by building relationships there is a greater sense of people taking care of their community. There are of course regional variations but overall there have been significant improvements. We could again improve marketing but the structure and relationships are already in place.

PB Question 8: Are there areas where improvements could be considered- are you aware of good practice in other council areas which Aberdeenshire might consider?

JC We do not have a huge amount of engagement with other police counterparts specifically on community planning issues.

The Community Safety Partnerships produce an Annual Strategic Assessment of local, regional and national issues and risks. This approach is adapted from the Police Business Intelligence Model. I am not saying that everyone should copy how the police operate, we are just part of the partnership, but I think a strategic assessment annually for the Community Planning Partnership might help to set out the overarching issues and risks and enable strategic judgements to be made accordingly.

IT That is extremely interesting, you seem to say revision is a dynamic and not a static process. Do you feel it will be more useful if community planning had a rolling approach where successes and failures are reported to the executive and board? Anything that can improve performance is good but we have to have some sort of measurement to check this before it can improve. Are you suggesting a more dynamic monitoring regime?

JC Yes but we shouldn't create a monster which will complicate things further. We should look at how the executive and board can help with identifying and removing blockers to performance and delivery.

IT Would they suggest on how to improve things and isn't that what the single outcome agreement is about?

JC It is and we have made progress but I do feel there is more the Community Planning Executive and Community Planning Board can usefully contribute in this regard..

SD From your experience is there much duplication?

JC I couldn't give you specific examples but there may be some. I will get back to you on this point.

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- FH Some community councils allow police officers to bring an item early on the agenda since they are busy and often do not have time to attend the whole meeting.
- JC As I mentioned before we try to attend all of these meetings but sometimes it is just not possible and people would often rather see their police officers on the streets than in meetings.
- IT I have heard of written reports being refused at community council meetings.
- JC I've not heard about that but I will certainly look into it.
- AA In my experience police officers have always stayed if they can, its good for them to know what is happening in the community.
- JC I agree, it goes back to networking, establishing relationships and knowing what's happening in an area.
- IT It's also good to see a variety of different officers.
- PB We have visited many places in Aberdeenshire to see community planning on the ground and we have met a few different officers. We have been very impressed with your work.

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EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION THURSDAY 16TH JUNE

14.00 HOURS, WOODHILL HOUSE- COMMITTEE ROOM 2

**Meeting with the Community Planning Board and Executive Representatives of
Partner Organisations**

Present: Councillors Allan (AA), Bellarby (PB), Cullinane (NC), Duncan (SD), Fleming (TF), Gray (IG), Hood (FH), Sullivan (MS), Tait (IT) AND Thomas (RT).

Officers: Jan McRobbie, Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny and Audit) and Lindsay Dougall, Scrutiny and Audit Assistant.

Part 3- Questions to Dr Jennifer Hall (JH), Public Health Lead, NHS Grampian

PB Welcome and thank you from coming along to speak to SAC today. Our current investigation is on seeking improvements to Aberdeenshire Council's role in Community Planning. We have asked you here today to find out the perspective of the NHS on this matter as an important member of the partnership and we are in no way reviewing the NHS's contribution to community planning.

SD **Question 1: In your opinion and experience, what is community planning and what should it do?**

JH Before we begin I would like to point out that my job is part funded by the council and has a role in community planning. The Community Health Partnership (CHP) manages the NHS services in Aberdeenshire. I am part of that management structure and form a link between the Aberdeenshire CHP, Aberdeenshire community planning partnership and the Public Health Directorate of NHS Grampian. My role is mostly focused on improving health and reducing inequalities in health and meeting government targets.

I am a member of the CPP Executive and I link with the CHP chair who sits on the CPP Board. Members of my team sit on the local community planning groups so I also have links at a local level. We have other close links across the communities and Aberdeenshire-wide such as the links with multiagency groups which tackle issues such as poverty and employability.

Regarding question 1: community planning should be about the public sector services coming together, taking community needs into account, and working together with the private and third sectors. They must jointly agree priorities and come together to provide and improve

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services to meet local needs. Community planning is also about community engagement to identify needs using processes such as “planning for real”.

SD You used the word jointly there; in your experience does everyone pull together well?

JH It varies depending on whether you look at strategic or local levels and depending on which of the six areas you look at. The police, council and health services are the key partners, mainly because they are the biggest.

TF What about the fire service?

JH They are definitely involved and an integral part of the partnership. I have just come from the tobacco alliance where they were present.

PB Originally there was very little third sector involvement in community planning, do you think there are any tensions? We have seen evidence of communities who do not feel that they are involved enough.

JH I see both community councils and voluntary agencies involved. Where there is a community council representative there may not always be good links back. It is important for people to understand their roles and to know who they are representing. Reporting to the right people is also essential so that there is a two way flow of information.

IT One representative from the community councils concerns some people that this is not enough of a link; do you think this one person is just token?

JH There has always been a debate about this and people are right to be concerned with just one person representing an entire population. Community Councils want to be better represented in community planning groups but I am not in a position to comment on whether this is right or wrong.

AA **Question 2: How do the relationships between participation at executive level and local community planning actions on the ground work in your organisation?**

JH I partly answered this question in my opening. Between myself and the local community planning groups, we have a good representation and there are various links with the NHS. We also link through the CHP at CPP Board level. We are currently redesigning the CHP so that the CHP areas will match the community planning areas which will mean the Area Managers will match and this will facilitate strong relationships.

TF You spoke of the various members of your team, could you talk us

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though a typical day's work?

JH There isn't really a typical day since the work is so varied but the roles my team play involves liaising with communities, identifying needs through gathering local data and evidence and developing multi-agency partnerships to progress projects/ work. We attend multiagency meetings such as those for the Children's Services or Community Planning. It involves linking in, developing and supporting projects, and reporting back on the progress made.

The role of the public health coordinator involves linking with local communities and a wide range of services providers, including GPs.

FH Can you tell us how often the CHP meets?

JH There is a CHP planning meeting every week; the CHP Committee meets quarterly and there are also monthly management meetings (both strategic and operational).

TF **Question 3: How does the community planning board relate to local community planning partnerships? Are there any barriers to effective two way communication on the delivery of strategic themes and in responding to specific local needs?**

JH There are links through the various partnerships with those who attend the different meetings. Community Planning Officers and Area Managers (who also tend to be the chair of the Community Planning Group) provide links between the board and the local community. For a while all the Area Managers were on the executive but it was thought that it was becoming too big to function efficiently so we reduced the size. I think we made the correct decision in reducing the size but I feel that the Executive lost links to the local areas.

TF Can you give us some examples of your work with partnerships on the ground?

JH In Aberdeenshire we have the community planning structure and a wide range of multiagency partnerships who work together although some are not formally recognised in the community planning structure, for example Children's services. All partners have been identified in the community plan as being partly responsible for the Single Outcome Agreement. If I were to give you an example it would be one of these – for example the Joint Management Group for Children's service,s together with the range of associated multi-agency strategy groups such as the early years' group..

PB This raises the question of should these parties be more involved, since the terms of the Single Outcome Agreement are between the Scottish Executive and Community Planning.

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- JH The executive provides a progress report on the progress of outcomes for the government. The data used comes from the work of the multi-agency partnerships even though some of those partnerships do not necessarily feel as though they are part of community planning.
- TF Can you give us some examples of these partnerships?
- JH An example would be the Joint management group for Children's Services which then has a range of subgroups (strategy groups) such as, Child Protection and Looked after Children. There are a whole range of different multiagency partnerships which are recognised at the back of the community plan.
- IT So would you say there is a difference between those agencies who consider themselves to be part of community planning and those who don't, even though they carry out similar work? For example, those who provide road services aren't themselves considered to be part of community planning as they provide a service anyway, whether it is done through community planning or not.
- JH The value of community planning is the partners working together to improve services for the joint benefit of everyone in the communities. If the work can be better carried out alone, however, then it should be done without community planning (without involvement of other agencies). Take the tobacco initiatives for example, the NHS can't do this alone so we involve other partners such as the Council, Grampian Fire and Rescue and the voluntary sector to get their buy-in and support to address the wider issues of tobacco. They (Aberdeenshire-wide multi-agency partnerships) are linked in to Community Planning as they are part of the Community plan but I don't think they share the same clarity of what community planning involves.
- PB If we could look further at this tobacco example, did they have an input into the Single Outcome Agreement and if so how?
- JH Yes, through me sitting on the CPP executive.
- PB So are there various multiagency groups who are not involved in community planning but are still linked informally?
- JH Yes, there are many links through other partners on the board.
- RT These groups don't consider what they do to be community planning even though they are contributing unintentionally.
- PB Do you think the current system is satisfactory?
- JH I would say it is almost satisfactory. Recently we have made a lot of progress and we can further improve by the partnerships being more

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aware of their involvement in community planning.

RT Question 4: As a participant at executive level, how aware are you of the diverse strands of project work being undertaken in the areas? Do you need to be aware of these?

JH I think I need to be aware of what is happening but not necessarily in full detail. There are different lines of communication such as through my team members on the Local Community Planning Groups, e-bulletins and reports to the CPP Executive so I think we are quite well aware.

RT I have often wondered, how genuine is the participation for the partners? Do you think it has improved?

JH I definitely think the contributions are genuine. There was a huge amount of work done (on the SOA) very quickly in the first year and then little change to the next year but overall the work done has been moving forward well. Since then we haven't developed the Single Outcome Agreement further, partly due to the *[Scottish Parliamentary]* election. If there is an agreement to do anything we should be clear as a partnership what the goals are for Aberdeenshire.

IG Question 5: How is agreement reached amongst the partners on the best way forward in resource allocation for specific projects and initiatives? Is this process effective in delivering the objectives of the Single Outcome Agreement with the Scottish government?

JH Resource allocation takes place in a number of ways according to which multiagency group you look at. For example, when the change fund arrived, a joint plan was developed to allocate the funding. Resource allocation is always done jointly in the case where funding is allocated to a multi-agency group.

IG Is this how finance is allocated?

JH Yes in the case of the Change Fund. The Local community planning groups have limited funding which the community groups can submit a request for. Other resource allocation takes place by the service with the funding.

PB The partners have to be responsible for the Single Outcome Agreement and must agree on how funding is allocated; in your experience does this work well?

JH I think so, everyone is in agreement and very committed to the work we do. The Single Outcome Agreement is very high level and doesn't give much detail which can make it difficult. As a partner organisation we

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must make sure outcomes are being delivered at a local level.

PB Are there good links with the community planning groups?

JH Yes, there are good links between Local planning groups and the priorities of the SOA as identified in the local community plans. However, we must look at local needs and balance this with the aims identified for Aberdeenshire. Some things only need to be included in local plans as they do not apply to the entire Aberdeenshire area. We also must ask how our goals and actions contribute to poverty and inequality and how we can continue to improve how we tackle this in the future. In recent reporting to the Government by NHS Grampian, the CHP was required to demonstrate how the NHS contributed to the work of the CPP – to reducing inequalities and socioeconomic deprivation. These are areas which the NHS has not previously considered as part of its role.

IT NHS Grampian is huge, the Scottish government is huge. Is community planning generating more bureaucracy, for example with management and working groups, when money is tight and funds could be better spent, for example on patient care? Do you think resources are wasted in calling in groups unnecessarily?

JH No, we are very aware of this and keep costs down, only involving groups when necessary.

IT When I was on the CHP, there was a tendency to set up groups unnecessarily to tackle problems because they didn't know how else to go about it, maybe because it is so big.

MS Question 6: From your perspective, how has the Aberdeenshire Community Planning Partnership developed and refined its operating practices over time?

JH I have already alluded to this a little. Community planning has made it clear what we have to achieve under the Single Outcome Agreement and partners are better functioning as they are developing. Over the last year the main project has been the development of the actual Community plan.

MS Does community planning help to improve people's diets?

JH Yes, there are many examples of this such as the Huntly community training kitchen and the associated allotment / garden project.

TF Is there any involvement with Mearns Healthy Living Network?

JH I have been involved with them in the past and a member of my team is still involved with them.

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- TF Does the NHS have much financial involvement?
- JH Yes we have supported Ed Garrett of Mearns Healthy Living Network but the aim is for it to become a self-sustaining enterprise.
- IT I think I read an article on an audit of the Community Health Partnership and it said that they were failing.
- JH I can't really comment on that but I have been told that some of the audit only used information from the central belt.
- IT Do you think it is cost-effective?
- JH The way the Community Health Partnership is structured with the involvement of partners it is very constructive in bringing a range of services together to help manage resources.
- IT I think we have agreed that the theory of working together is very effective.
- JH I certainly see it as being effective.
- SD At the outset community planning is a confusing term - do you think there has been a gradual improvement in understanding of the term and do you think it is too late to change the name?
- JH Yes, I think we are too far down the road to change the name without causing damage to the work already done. I think it would be more productive to focus our resources on helping people to further understand the existing name. Also, considering that the legislation uses the term Community Planning, I think changing the name would present a huge scope for confusion.
- PB Aberdeen City has used the term "Aberdeen Alliance" instead.
- FH Question 7: How can greater awareness be raised on the role, remit and operation of Community Planning within partner organisations and within the communities of Aberdeenshire?**
- PB I think this is linked to what we were just saying.
- JH I think we need to keep driving forward to increase awareness. It may help to be more explicit on who is involved and what their role is. The government talk about work done above and below the waterline, with the Single Outcome Agreement being the strategic work done above the waterline, and then below needing to be evidence based.
- PB Perhaps better awareness is not what is important. Superintendent Cummings spoke about how officers contribute to community planning

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even though some do not fully understand it.

JH As a minimum, if you are part of multiagency group delivering targets you should be aware of the overarching principles involved.

PB Question 8: Are there any areas where improvements could be considered - are you aware of good practice in other council areas which Aberdeenshire might consider?

JH The only thing I would say is that other partnerships have been rigorous in their strategic process so they have been clearer about what they want to achieve. If you asked the executive what the current number one priority is I'm not sure they would agree on the answer. If we had better priorities it would help facilitate cooperation.

Also, in other partnerships they have case studies which can highlight helpfully the problems which need to be addressed.

PB What do you think about Aberdeenshire Council's role in community planning?

JH I think they provide strong support both financially and otherwise.

SD From the evidence that we have heard so far, we have seen some indications that the board and executive are lacking a connection to the local levels of community planning. Do you think that the board and executive are necessary?

JH They are necessary but I am not one hundred percent sure they are working to the best of their ability. What I mean by this is that I am not sure they are achieving what the Single Outcome Agreement sets out.

SD Do you think it would work if there was just one of them?

JH No, I think we need to have both levels.

SD Can you help my understanding by explaining what exactly inequalities in health means?

JH The official definition would be non-random health outcomes across a population. There tends to be poorer outcomes in deprived areas such as death rates, smoking and disease generally. Since they are non-random, there are underlying reasons behind the outcomes, sometimes due to increased numbers of vulnerable groups such as the homeless or unemployed.

There has been a government drive to tackle these inequalities since we have seen more evidence on how to address it. The Marmot Review publication "Fair Society, Healthy Lives" showed the things

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which affect these inequalities are not the NHS services available but factors such as housing, the environment, early education, health and employment.

In Aberdeenshire it seems that people are generally healthy and affluent and in certain areas, for example Fraserburgh and Peterhead, it is well known that health standards are below average. However there are some other surprising pockets of health inequalities in Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City especially.

IG Do you think we need to tackle wealth inequalities in order to tackle health inequalities?

JH That is one aspect and it would certainly help things but not everyone in deprived areas has bad health. We need to look at the resilience and focus on giving people more control over their lives so they can make their own choices. We could do this through improved employment options and better access to services.

Colin Mair, Chief Executive of the Improvement Service, who worked on the development of the Single Outcome Agreement concept came recently to Aberdeen to talk about the work of the Christie Commission. There is now a greater understanding that although the NHS budget has been saved from cuts, the costs of providing existing services is increasing, for example due to increased cost of drugs and the aging population, so in real terms the resources are being reduced. The only way to make a difference and improve services with fewer resources is localism and involving communities to improve the outcomes. This is the real role of community planning.

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EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION THURSDAY 23RD JUNE

11.30 HOURS, WOODHILL HOUSE- COMMITTEE ROOM 2

Present: Councillors Allan (AA), Bellarby (PB), Duncan (SD), Fleming (TF), Gray (IG), Hood (FH), and Tait (IT).

Officers: Jan McRobbie, Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny and Audit), Lindsay Dougall, Scrutiny and Audit Assistant and Natalia Becka, Scrutiny and Audit Assistant.

Apologies: Councillors Cullinane, Thomas and Sullivan.

Evidence from Pauline Innes (PI), Head of National Supply Strategy Housing Supply Division, Directorate of Housing & Regeneration, Culture and Commonwealth Games.

On Thursday the 23rd of June SAC invited Pauline Innes to give evidence on the Scottish Government perspective on Community Planning. In addition to the questions covered at the meeting a written response was provided, all additional information from the written response is included at the end of this document.

PB Welcome and thank you for coming along to help us with our Community Planning investigation. The function of this Committee is to carry out special investigations into the work of Aberdeenshire Council; with the topics suggested by senior officers and Councillors on areas where they think there is a need for improvement. We then score these topics on relevant factors, including any Scottish Government incentives, before deciding which ones to pursue.

Our current investigation, as you know, is looking into community planning and empowerment. Aberdeenshire Council is taking a lead in community planning and there are a huge variety of organisations involved. For these reasons, we are focusing on Aberdeenshire Council's role within community planning and we aim to do so with a positive outlook, seeking improvements where possible.

PI I will start by giving you some background and explaining why I am here. My work mainly involves housing and I support the Scottish Government's local government director role in community planning.

The Scottish Government has recognised the complexity and importance of community planning and, in an effort to support improved dialogue, they have established officials to help facilitate the community planning partnerships. My role is to support these people who work at a

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local level. I also work with Aberdeenshire Council officials on a regular basis with regard to housing issues.

There is now a new administration in government and as a result the future direction of community planning may change. This is something that will be discussed by the Scottish Government and Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (CoSLA) in the coming months.

Where possible I will answer your questions in detail, including about the Single Outcomes process and if there are questions I cannot answer fully right now, I will return a written response in time.

PB Can you give us your opinion on Aberdeenshire Council's role in community planning?

PI That is an easy question to ask but not so easy a question to answer. It is not up to the Scottish Government to assess the Council's role, we are here to build capacity and drive improvements. Audit Scotland and the Improvement Service are the people who look at the performance of individual Councils. I can however comment on the delivery of the Single Outcome Agreement in relation to the factors it looks to assess. The last assessment was carried out one year ago and showed good progress and good performance against the targets set.

PB The community planning partnerships and the Scottish Government have the Single Outcome Agreement of which Aberdeenshire Council is a partner. There can be some difficulty in delivering outcomes as there are so many different partners involved, do you have any guidance on this?

PI COSLA and the Scottish Government gave guidance last year and there are multiple accountable officers involved. Are you aware of this guidance?

PB No we haven't seen it yet.

PI I will make sure it is passed on. It highlights the difficulties surrounding having so many different partners involved and will help answer your question in detail.

IG In terms of the Single Outcome Agreement is there an expected level of agreement?

PI This is a complex issue as the Single Outcome Agreement must reflect local areas and since each is different it is difficult to set specific targets. From a Scottish Government outlook we look at how it delivers in relation to national outcomes. There are no set yardsticks as we take each area for what it is and encourage them to continually improve.

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IG Aberdeenshire covers a huge area so it would be difficult to set one standard across the entire area.

PI I don't think we can have a single vision for the whole of Scotland and there is definitely a place for localism in the national agenda.

IT Your remarks look at issues across Scotland. Are Aberdeenshire Council and its partners performance measured at all if there are no goals or methods to assess delivery?

PI Yes, we can look at the Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) to measure performance but partners do a multitude of things and their work on this is only one aspect so may not show the true extent of their work. The SOA lets the Scottish Government look at the hard facts and figures but to get the full picture this needs to be looked at in context which needs a description of the softer measures that are harder to capture.

IT Looking at the past is it fair to say that there is a degree of artificiality? The Scottish Government now measures what was in place anyway before community planning, with partners working on a more informal basis. Do you think there is a degree of forcing outcomes unnaturally rather than letting them progress organically?

PI There is a detailed theoretical level of measuring performance which is about demonstrating the value of the efforts put in. Even before community planning we had performance measurements. Since 2007 the Scottish Government, through the Single Outcome Agreement and community planning, have tried to move to a new level though improved dialogue and joint agreement under the COSLA umbrella at a national and local level.

We need a framework which allows actions to be carried out locally and then put into a national arena so that the fruits of such projects can be recognised. Our role is in trying to move the partnerships forward and although any change of this sort takes time the measurements we use to track the progress are a useful tool.

IT The original community planning partnership only included Aberdeenshire Council, Grampian Police and NHS Grampian. The board is now much more diverse with many other partners who do not contribute any financial resources. Has this expansion been beneficial and do you think these additional opinions help or hinder matters?

PI I think that is a question you should answer rather than me. Some statutory partners bring resources but partnerships contain many important partners who provide important services and additional value to community planning as a whole. I have attended previous community planning meetings in Aberdeenshire and there was a question of whether the youth groups should be included in the strategic

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process even though they cannot contribute resources. The debate focussed on the value of their contribution as current and future service users, with the partnership ultimately deciding that they should become members. These sorts of decisions should be made locally according to the needs of the area.

IT When you say locally do you mean at a local council level, or at a more rural level?

PI In the context of community planning we look at local as being the council level because these authorities should know whose interests need to be included and what the priorities are in that area, but what you chose to do at different sub levels is a matter for you to decide.

PB We have seen during our investigation that locally there has been a move to include more partners, especially those from the third sector. There has been some tension here, can you comment?

PI This is an issue recognised by the Scottish Government. There was guidance issued before Christmas on how best to engage and work with the voluntary sector as well as how to coordinate to create an efficient system. The volunteer sector is very important and plays an important part in many communities.

I don't think this has been done well in all areas and it has caused some tension but this opens up an area for improvement. We need to remember however that this will be more complicated the larger the geographical area we are dealing with, as larger areas have multiple agencies. This should be looked at this as a positive challenge and consider how we can use these agencies to forward community planning.

IG If I could go back to the previous question - is it fair to have one representative from the voluntary sector or just one community council representative? How can we be sure these people are making an accurate representation?

Could we create a better system which limits the executive and board to those who contribute resources, then have a much broader consultation with outside bodies?

PI That is a two fold issue. I think firstly a good communications structure should be recognised as essential to community planning.

With regards the comment about those partners who bring resources, community planning is about service providers and users discussing needs together, not strictly in relation to resources. Ultimately however, I think such decisions should be carried out locally according to the needs of the community. For example, in terms of housing, it is very

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important to engage service users to know what the community want and need.

- SD Is there a specific design from the Scottish Government on how community planning should be delivered? The structure of executive, board and local groups seems cumbersome.
- PI There is not one single method but there have been various studies and recommendations made. Things change with time and there is a constant need for things to be evolved and refreshed. There are lots of examples of best practice which you might want to look at, and most councils have officials involved in a pan-Scotland community planning network where this kind of best practice is shared.

If you are interested in comparators I would refer you to the Audit Scotland Comparative Analysis.

- PB We would like to look at other council areas to compare the progress of Aberdeenshire Council and see if there are any improvements we can make. Community planning has been modelled on the shift towards decentralisation.
- TF We are living in an evolved time and community planning is an example of this. It has evolved from the work of area partnerships which started years ago and proved very successful. We should think about creating more rural partnerships.
- PB I agree, that was community planning before the concept was created.
- FH We are in difficult times and budgets are being reviewed and tightened. In light of this, do you think community planning represents value for money?
- PI The Scottish Government believes that devolved relationships must be accountable for the power given to them. Therefore, Aberdeenshire Council decides where to spend their resources and they must come up with their own criteria to determine whether these resources are being used efficiently. How you measure this can be difficult but the Scottish Government looks at the Single Outcome Agreements and how we can promote cultural change in the long term.
- IG Do you think there is some confusion between the current UK Government initiative of creating a Big Society and the Scottish Government's policy for Community Planning? There was a conference on that initiative in Edinburgh in October of last year.
- PI There is an element of the Big Society creating confusion since it is not a Scottish initiative. The confusion is difficult to comment on.

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In terms of the future, we must look at everyone's contribution whether that is financial or human.

FH Following on from Councillor Gray's comment, has the Scottish Government endorsed the Big Society initiative? The conference he mentioned was not run by the Scottish Government, nor were there any Scottish Government speakers.

PI I will have to get back to you on the answer to that since I cannot give you an accurate response on behalf of the Scottish Government without further research and consideration.

AA The name community planning an sometimes cause confusion, do you think it is too late to change it?

PI There are arguments for and against. The term community planning has been around for some time and the Scottish Government sees it as a description not a brand. Some councils have chosen to change the name and this is completely acceptable. Aberdeen City, for example, has named their community planning work "The Aberdeen City Alliance". I think each area should carefully consider confusion and familiarity when considering a change.

PB It would be difficult to change the name now we have come so far. A lot of good work and reputation could be undone.

IT Do you think there is a dichotomy since at a local level Aberdeenshire Council has a decentralised structure with six area committees but a disconnect with the local community planning groups? How concerned are the Scottish Government with the accountability questions this raises since local community planning groups are run by officers and not elected members? This is especially relevant since when something goes wrong, or is not delivered, it is often the Councillors who the community hold to account.

PI I would refer you to some guidance on the matter issued in February of this year. People need to understand the lines of accountability and communication in order to avoid duplication. The budgets do sit with individual accountable officers although I realise from personal experience how complex this issue is.

From a Scottish Government point of view, we look at whether Aberdeenshire Council is accountable and they in turn can then hold other groups to account.

IT Is this the case even though it is the Scottish Government who are making local councils implement community planning?

PI They are not forced to implement community planning, the two bodies

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have an agreement.

IT But the local council has a requirement to sign it on the back of community planning?

PI Yes that is correct. If the partnerships didn't want to sign the Single Outcome Agreement then there would have to be dialogue with the Scottish Government on the matter. There have never been any issues of this sort and it would raise questions on how we could measure progress without them signing the agreement.

There is, however, a legally binding duty on local councils to get behind community planning and they all seem to be happy to contribute.

SD Does community planning affect any of your responsibilities?

PI Yes community planning has an effect within housing since the framework for the strategic planning for housing must reflect the priorities of the community it serves. There is also a direct influence in terms of the housing strategy which sits along with community planning and the housing funding is influenced by top-down priorities which include community planning.

PB Do you have any final thoughts you wish to add?

PI I look forward to the final report; I hope it will identify challenges and where improvements are needed to drive services forward.

IT I think we need to look further into how objectives are measured with regards the Single Outcome Agreement and the performance indicators it contains.

SD Things are certainly starting to appear clearer as the investigation continues. Communication seems to be an issue which arises repeatedly.

IT The disconnect and lack of Council representation is another aspect which needs to be addressed.

Written response from Pauline Innes dated 22nd June

The responses below are based on the policy of the last administration, which may evolve under the new administration.

How does the Scottish Government feel local authorities should and are addressing the challenges of working with other agencies and the third sector

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in seeking to deliver national targets as voiced in Single Outcome Agreements?

This Government's focus is on outcomes, and effective partnerships at local level to deliver public services that are high quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive to local people's needs. Community Planning is at the heart of this approach with partners working together to agree their priority local outcomes. Single Outcome Agreements reflect these outcomes and show each area's contribution toward the National Outcomes.

Community Planning Partnerships across Scotland have responded well to this local outcomes approach, which offers better results for communities across Scotland making the best use of available resources.

The outcomes approach is fundamental to tackling Scotland's major social problems and includes many programmes to facilitate economic recovery, promote employability and tackle deep-rooted social challenges. There are already many examples of projects which show the commitment of local partners across Scotland, working together through CPPs, and making real change in support of distinctly local priorities.

Further details are given in 'Local Matters: Delivering the Local Outcomes Approach' which was published jointly by COSLA and the Scottish Government in March 2011. Available at:

<http://scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/03/10115335/0>

Section 3 of 'Local Matters' details a number of challenges to be addressed to take the local outcomes approach further. These cover organisational culture and partnership working, performance management and reporting, redesigning services and aligning budgets to pursue agreed outcomes, and focussing on early intervention and spending to save.

Comparisons with the national picture, insight into where we have identified good practice by other local authorities, and an assessment of how Aberdeenshire sits within national trends.

The Scottish Government has not undertaken its own comparative assessment of Community Planning. Our role in promoting and encouraging Community Planning is being carried out in a variety of ways, for example:

- through the involvement of Location Directors with CPPs. The Aberdeenshire Director has provided feedback to the CPP;
- by the facilitation of the Community Planning Network where CPPs can share good practice, and
- through our internal work to embed Community Planning principles throughout the organisation.

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An authoritative and up-to-date assessment of performance comes from Assurance and Improvement Plans (AIPs), produced by Local Area Networks (LANs) which comprise representatives from the main audit and inspection bodies (Audit Scotland, HMLe, Scottish Housing Regulator etc.). There is one LAN for each council area. The purpose of AIPs is to assess risks in the performance of each council, from which priority themes for external scrutiny are identified.

While the AIPs focus on the performance of councils rather than CPPs, their coverage includes how effectively each council undertakes partnership working, community leadership and community engagement. The AIP for Aberdeenshire, published in 2010 and updated in May 2011, identified no significant scrutiny risks on these themes.

The Improvement Service collated case studies of good practice in 2009 and 2010 which help demonstrate the credibility and benefits of the SOA approach. These aim to show the difference that the SOAs are making locally. These are available at:

<http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/library/577-single-outcome-agreements/692-case-studies/view-category/>

Audit Scotland is currently undertaking a performance audit of Community Planning, to assess the effectiveness of Community Planning by focusing on economic development. It is due to be published in November.

Who will the Scottish Government hold to account if delivery on the agreed SOA is not achieved- is there any risk for the Council in this?

The Concordat Oversight Group published guidance to CPPs about governance and accountability for SOAs in 2009:

<http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/library/download-document/2228-soa-governance-and-accountability-guidance-letter-feb-2009/>

Key messages from that include:

- accountability rest with the Council and public sector partners, rather than with the CPP;
- partners are signing up the whole SOA, not selected parts of it;
- signing up is equivalent to adopting the SOA as a formal corporate commitment of the Council or Board; and
- such a commitment is to support the delivery of the SOA in all possible ways compatible with that partner's duties and responsibilities.

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EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION THURSDAY 18th August 2011

10.15 HOURS, WOODHILL HOUSE- COMMITTEE ROOM 2

Evidence from Area Community Planning Officers:

Fiona Alderson (Banff & Buchan), Emma Kidd (Kincardine & Mearns) and Jill Sowden (Garioch)

Present: Councillors Allan (AA), Cullinane (NC), Duncan (SD), Gray (IG), Hood (FH), Sullivan (MS) and Tait (IT).

Officers: Jan McRobbie, Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny and Audit) and Natalia Becka, Scrutiny and Audit Assistant.

Apologies: Councillors Bellarby, Fleming and Thomas

AA Good morning. I do not know how much you know about the Scrutiny and Audit Committee and how it works. We choose to do investigations every year and we do evidence gathering sessions. Our current investigation is on community planning and empowerment. We have given you set questions but there will be supplementary questions as we go along if anything needs to be clarified. Officers Jan and Natalia are taking notes. Once this is over they will write them up and you will get a copy of that to make sure you are happy with what has been written and that it is clear what you meant. If you wish to make any changes to that you can as this will be a public record of the Committee.

SD **Question 1: In your opinion and experience, what is community planning and what should it do?**

FA I think we probably have similar views on what community planning is but I am sure my colleagues will probably have an input to add to it. For me community planning is communities, community groups, organisations and even individuals within the communities delivering community planning every single time they become involved in working for the benefit of their community. At the bottom end that could be a parent holding a coffee morning to raise funds for a local school and at the more extensive end it could be the physical regeneration of a run-down area. At the higher level it brings into play potential to target specific service delivery to ensure that communities receive the service they have themselves identified, always making sure that communities know that not everything is possible. The communities always have aspirations but we need to be realistic and say we will do our best to deliver, where possible, the

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actions that have been identified. In doing this it offers the potential to our community planning partners to avoid duplication and to strengthen services.

EK The main community planning element is that it is a way of working that any organisation can follow. It is about getting more bottom-up information and influence into the decision making, whether that is coming in through data, statistics, interviews or whether it is coming in through actually engaging community groups on the ground leading to decisions or actually delivering projects. And it is all about partnership working, sharing resources to identify where matters may be difficult to tackle and working across services and with partners coming together to deliver more efficiently.

JS Community planning is not an entity in its own right. I think this has caused confusion; I've worked the last five years with local groups and the message has still not got out fully yet. Community planning is not something in its own right; it is a way of working. I think that even within partner organisations, including the Council, it's not always understood. The message has not filtered through.

In Garioch, we lost our area manager, who was the chair of our local community planning group. The group took the opportunity to appoint one of the partners as chair of the group. I think that is quite healthy. It puts a completely different look on the way the group is working. I think we will be having a much bigger push on the partners working together because it is not done at the moment.

We had a look at the local community planning groups. They work well to a certain level with networking. It is very good at people updating each other on their own projects. What has not been happening is them coming together on projects. We just homed in on the first one (Fall prevention, being led by the Fire & Rescue Service) that brings four partners together. That is what we need to do more of. The partners are of a mind that as much as possible locally they want to pool resources. That could be financial, people or time. For example, the NHS will put money to a project that the Police are doing to reduce under-age drinking as at the end of the day it is going to prevent people using their services later on. That is where we want to get to at a local level. This is a new approach in Garioch.

To me, that is what it is all about. It is about all coming together.

SD I have been a Councillor for four years and am gradually picking up what community planning is. Did you find the same difficulty as Jill has mentioned in your area? That there is a misunderstanding of community planning and what it is?

FA Yes. When people ask me what I do I say I am a "Community

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Planning Officer - that is people not building". The perception is that the word 'planning' is houses or buildings. This needs to be made clear first and then meaning of 'people' needs to be explained. I tend to say that we are not there to take ownership of the projects and initiatives that the community groups are already doing. What they are doing is community planning. It is a term that has been imposed by the Scottish Government. What people are doing is community planning and a great amount of people do not understand that or do not think that what they are doing is very important when actually it is. It is important to make community groups and individuals aware that what they are doing has merit and it is a value to the community. But the word 'planning' is a big hurdle.

EK I have heard people comment on the term 'community planning', but it is not something that I personally have difficulty with. Somehow there is this feeling of a struggle between an official agenda that is moving towards Community Planning and a less explicit fear of the relinquishing of some power that is entailed by this agenda. To move forward we all need to be much more integrated with what other people are doing, widening our focus and recognising where we actually share common goals and agendas. I think this is happening but people are not always aware that all of this is community planning, so perhaps that is a problem with the term or perhaps it's just taking time to embed?.

IT Is it your opinion perhaps that too much has been made to try and extend what community planning was originally envisaged to do? Originally it was the NHS, the Police and the Council, the Council being the lead partner. The term community planning originated because it was meant to be just that: three agencies were meant to get together and plan services to optimise resources. In that context community planning is quite correct. The implementations of the projects were still going to be left to the individual organisations, but the planning was there to actually optimise or maximise resources.

Is that original concept been forced out into something that really is artificial in relation to the original concept? Should there now be two fields doing planning where you work at the high level in terms of community planning between major organisations, funding organisations and should there be a separate initiative called community engagement where these commonalities at a lower level can be effective? For example, Fiona, you mentioned that a coffee morning can be community planning. If you mean that there could be several agencies involved in that coffee morning that is not necessarily community planning. That is local groups in a local community combining as far as community engagement.

JS That ties into the way we've started to look at it in Garioch. We work locally and in fairly small areas. We have original partners and the

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community partners. I think that is quite healthy because it gets that relationship going between all of them. I do not think one detracts from the other. If we have the main partners there working together the delivery mechanism is through the other partners sitting on the group. Not always but they will work together. That is where we are hoping to get to. We have an item on our agenda for next week about the riots. We are going to be asking the partners – could they happen here? They haven't, why haven't they? What are the preventative measures? It is very much about the partners on the group doing things as a partnership. I think it is quite healthy to have that mix to local group.

IT Jill, you are actually speaking in a local dimension. Are you speaking about co-operation or local community engagement as opposed to community planning where the way forward in strategic terms is strategic plans and so on is envisaged by the major partners?

JS Later questions mention communication between the local level, the executive and the board. We operate at a local level and locally that is what we can do and that is the way we are working. There will be restrictions, higher up "the food chain" they have a shire-wide perspective.

EK I am not a 100% sure whether it is two separate initiatives or whether it should be two separate initiatives. There seems to be a bit of a gap between the local and strategic level. Regardless of what it is called, (e.g. local work called "community engagement" and strategic level something else for example), I still think there's a need to see more feeding up from the areas to inform the strategic levels. There are six areas and it would be possible to pick out similar issues across the areas which may need more strategic consideration.

FA This is quite an interesting and a challenging question. I will use an example. In Fraserburgh we have a project which runs both at an operational level and into the strategic level for the purpose of the same project. At the strategic level, the strategic group do not really know what their purpose is but they know what the purpose of the operational group is. The operational group know what their purpose is and they question the purpose of the strategic group. I have been pushing the strategic group to address that issue, because I do not see how they can inform on anything if they do not know what their function is. There is a need for both groups and I do not see how one can exist without the other as they need to inform each other.

In regard to the coffee morning mentioned earlier, the strategic level people could go along to the coffee morning to promote what it is they are trying to do, get feedback from the people in attendance, explore and consult on the changes and then work together to effect change.

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IT So your opinion is that those at the strategic level are too distant?

FA Yes. I think in some instances that is the case.

EK I have recently been doing some data gathering/evidence gathering for the Kincardine & Mearns area. It is quite easy to look at statistics and build a picture, but at the same time we need to be speaking to people to get a real feel of what is actually happening. Statistics are abstracted and quite often inform the strategy but it loses a lot of information. It loses a lot of what is happening. There needs to be that greater link between engagement with front-line staff, partners and communities and the strategic decision making level or that level can remain distant and misses out on quality input either in terms of information or action.

NC **Question 2: What are the main challenges in delivering successful community planning?**

EK There are quite a few. Firstly, there are different partners so there will be different agendas. We have the NHS coming in with a health agenda and everyone else coming in with slightly different agendas. We need to be doing more about finding where these agendas overlap. A recent example is an initiative that was started by the Scottish Government with high up NHS boards and their partners, including the Council, looking at improving access and transport to health appointments and clinics. The project has been sticking, having reached a point where the NHS started saying that transport is not their priority. But it is about looking at the bigger picture and identifying the shared agenda. It is about broadening the outlook. It is about identifying where different agendas overlap in the provision of shared services – transport and building social networks can have a big impact on health. When there are partnership groups coming together sometimes there are conflicts, difficulties or hurdles, as people are still coming with slightly different agendas.

Another challenge is about gathering or having quality local information that can feed up to strategies and policies. There seems to be a tendency to distrust consultations/ engagement events as people seem to think that a decision has already been made. There is also distrust amongst strategists whether the information available is reliable and of good quality. It is difficult to get information at a local level. For example, the Alcohol and Drugs Team (a multi-agency partnership) are an excellent source of shire wide information on the topic, but it's not so easy to get that quality information on a more local basis.

FA One of the biggest problems is communication. Communication within the community partners (top down) and bottom up within individual partner organisations and also within the community

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planning structure as it currently exists (bottom up). There is no mechanism for local community planning groups to feed up information (to the Community Planning Executive and Board) and information fed down may not always be relevant or appropriate to all 6 areas. Actions agreed by the Community Planning Board and/or Executive and tasked to the Local Community Planning groups may not be items or issues that individual groups have identified as something that they feel there is a need to become involved in, at the time, within their particular area. There seems to be a big gap in those lines of communication.

Also, within the community planning partner organisations there is a lack of awareness of community planning and what it is about. Partners feel that this is something else that is being attached to a piece of work that they are doing. In fact, the piece of work that they are doing should be part of that, as what they are doing is already community planning. There still appears to be a lack of communication and a lack of awareness of what community planning is. This is obvious within the Council and its services as well.

JS I am talking at a local level here and these are issues that we have identified operating locally. The first one for our area is that we have no rural partnership. That puts us on a back foot compared to the other areas. By not having rural partnerships we are missing out on their assistance to create community action plans. This affects us in Garioch as they are a major player in community planning groups in the other areas. They also carry out other work for the other local community planning groups.

Also, the personalities of those sitting on community planning groups can make a big difference, depending on who you have. It makes a big difference as to who is the driver and who is the follower.

The way that the six groups work is different in each area. This has been very much driven locally by the people within that area. It responds to local need and that need may be different in each area. I have been dealing with people that cover the whole shire, who see a couple of areas agreeing on something they think great and then wonder why everybody isn't doing it? Often they are not. Why aren't they? They are responding to local need. For people with a wider remit this causes confusion. This happens quite often.

Another challenge is where there is a need coming through from a community of interest, perhaps looking for a community of locality or place to address that need. For example in Westhill there is a need around mental health issues and the community has struggled to take that on board. It has taken quite a long time to get people on board as people didn't know how to get a way into addressing the issue and so couldn't have done it themselves in isolation.

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Also, we are starting to lose funding streams and projects have stopped due to that. For example, sport groups – sport funding is stopping at the end of this year and where could we find alternative funding? We have to be aware that the voluntary sector that traditionally would have worked with us is in a very vulnerable position.

Another issue is annuality of budgeting – again this year we were told that if we did not spend the money from our budget at the end of March we were going to lose it. I had two projects that were running over the end of March and we could not commit ourselves to them if we were going to lose the money. After sleepless nights, I managed to find a voluntary sector group that we had to pay a management fee to, to hold the money for us for one project. The second project had some of its elements paid upfront which again was a nightmare to sort out. Both processes delayed the projects' implementation. We also had to shuffle round all the budgets to pay people. This caused problems. Previously we'd been advised that we might be able to ring-fence the project money to the following financial year, but the Committee decision to do that was taken after the projects would have finished; we can't take that risk so need to look for alternative methods of carrying forward allocated funds.

- IG You are a 100% correct with what you are saying that community planning can only ever be successful if community serves as a driver; has a serious attitude to a project. But there are still communities out there that will never go down that road. I do not know how to get them to understand what community planning is all about. There was an issue several months ago in Aberchirder where there was a lot of vandalism and theft and the police got heavily involved. One of the questions that came up was that there is nothing for the youth in the community to do. All agreed a drop in centre may help – but it was always “someone else's” job to provide it. The issue is that the support is there but the people have to be the drivers.
- JS We'd a similar experience in Westhill where it took 18 months to get a local steering group established for a particular project. People do not want the commitment. They do not want the responsibility of these projects. It generally then falls on the usual people in the community to take things forward. It is the often the same people doing many different things.
- FA Also people got used to somebody else doing it for them.
- MS I am looking for a one word answer to question two. You have come up with several answers: communication, money and lack of it, flexibility and lack of it. I was going to put in something that you have just touched on and ask for your comments, whether it is irrelevant or

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correct: is the main problem defeating inertia?

FA Difficult, yes

JS Yes.

EK I cannot easily give a one word answer, but perhaps, sometimes.

MS Two yeses and a maybe.

FH **Question 3: How aware are you of the diverse strands of other services, council or partner organisations, who also work in community empowerment in the areas? Do you need to be aware of these?**

JS We do know of others working in community engagement, within the Council services and partners. But we can't be aware of those we don't know about if we don't know about them! By and large with regards to the partners we rely on the representatives who serve on the community planning groups. They have a good relationship with people who deal with community planning in the NHS and the Police. If we do not know then we know someone that does. I am happy with that, that I can go to the group and they will have that information.

EK In terms of whether we need to be aware of them, yes absolutely, in terms of leading the Community Planning groups – these are the people who should be talking together. It has taken time to build these relationships. We might be missed out as some of the strands work on a shire wide basis and there are still difficulties in these relationships and in building such relationships. In Kincardine & Mearns the relationship with one of the partner services, Community Learning and Development (CLD), could be developed.

AA Is it a case of "it's my job"?

EK Yes – and partially barriers in being directed through a single contact person for the group and not having been able to do so. There is misunderstanding: community planning is still very often seen as an extra add on over and above core work rather than a core way of working. It's taken me a while to work out exactly what my role is – and it is to complement, not duplicate, the CLD role.

FA As has been already said, I do not feel that I need to be fully aware of this as long as I know someone who is and that I know where to go for this information should I need to. In terms of sharing information with other partners at a local level, it takes time. One of the ways we found round this was to add to our agenda a partner project/partner update. Each of the partners tells us what has been happening. Over time the Partners have shared this information more readily -

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they find that by sharing the information they complement each others' work and can pool resources. "Community Planning" is a relatively new concept and could be seen as taking over. When I started, I made it very clear that this was not the case and that it was rather a complementary role and would give assistance where possible.

JS CLD structure is also not very helpful re community capacity building – in the time I've been in post, the structure has been altered twice (i.e. in the last five years.) Also each CSN now does all three strands, whereas previously we had one senior worker contact for each of those strands covering all areas. Now there are four. Input into their work and specialities is very much driven by the personalities of those four. It does not help from our point of view when we used to have one point of contact. They also must find the restructuring difficult.

MS Surely you have to be aware of the diverse scales of other services otherwise there is a danger of duplication?

FA You have to be aware but it is about the level of awareness.

EK Our role, I believe, is to be aware and to make links to avoid duplication.

AA **Question 4: How is agreement reached between council services as to who should lead on community empowerment issues? How is the best way forward agreed in terms of resource allocation for specific projects and initiatives?**

FA If the question relates solely to the Council services we would not know. I do not know how the Council will reach a decision as to who should lead. We operate at a lower level. If it relates to community planning groups then our local group works effectively on a common sense principle. We circulate the agenda in advance, giving the opportunity to respond by all partners. If there's no response, this is taken as agreement that the proposal proceed as detailed. Recently the local group in Banff & Buchan considered a two year prioritisation scheme which was agreed by consensus as the way forward.

JS I'm in the same boat re the overall decisions. We do not know. We would expect it to be through the area management team but we are not on the area management team. There are service representatives and the area manager chairs it but Area Community Planning Officers are not on it. We do not know what happens on the area management team.

If the question is referring to the local community planning group, then it depends on what the issue is and who has the experience, the

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knowledge, the contact and is best placed at the time to lead.

- EK I sit on the area management team and am aware of some discussions.
- AA That is the gap in communication. I've heard often that sometimes there may be no consultation with the people who have been working in the area already.
- EK Yes – this has definitely been the case.
- JS We recently had a meeting with the representatives from each of the services who draw up the service plans. The agreement reached at that meeting was that the area management team would be the place for the issues to go to and service representatives on the management team would be the ones that would take those issues back to the services and have that discussion with their service management. This was to ensure that issues go into the service plan as we were concerned that they were coming from us but not getting into the service plans.
- EK I feel that communication relies on a haphazard form of connections. I think there are a lot of really good technologies about which could help; for example, digital forums. There's also different understanding of community empowerment. We work already directly in the communities and we're a good source of expertise in these areas. Although everyone appears to be signed up to community planning and community empowerment, there's an equally strong pull against it – perhaps a fear of losing power to front-line staff, 3rd party organisations or the communities. There may be a lack of belief that such groups could have a positive impact on delivering strategies at a local level and allocating resources. I feel we're losing out on a lot of possible resources by resisting this.
- IT We are speaking about community empowerment here. How do you decide which service leads on community empowerment? I am not quite sure what that actually means. You have given brilliant answers to a question that I find difficult to understand. What I often find is that people that shout the loudest may be the ones who actually get their way. Officers of the Council do not want political or public disturbance. Community Planning Groups are in a difficult situation having to deal with this. Surely which service should lead on community empowerment all depends on a particular project? What worries me the most is the relationship, or the lack of a relationship, with CLD. It is the one that I expected you would have the most difficulty with, because it is community learning and community development and part of your job is to facilitate community development. They see a clear contradiction and they could be acting to protect it.

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- EK That has not been the case in every area.
- IT But other officers who appeared before us have also mentioned how difficult it is to communicate with people inside this Council, the Police and so on. There is a communication issue.
- FH I liked Emma's answer about community empowerment and certain services or people within the Council that are reluctant to give up or hand over power simply because they feel they will lose control. But at the end of the day delivering services is what the Council is about. It should not matter how it is done as long as the service is delivered efficiently.
- EK Massive cultural change is needed.
- FH Yes, a huge cultural change is needed within the Council. I've been a councillor since 2007 and been aware of the way the Council is set up. It is divided into different departments and people have their own bit of work to do. This may lead, over and over again, to "silo" thinking. What you are trying to do is to build bridges. This can be difficult as you can only build bridges if you have people with the personalities that are willing to work with you to do this.
- IG **Question 5: How do you match projects to funding sources? Do you need to know about potential funding options or are you able to refer groups on to someone who does? Do you ever specifically shape projects to fit funding criteria?**
- JS I am going to look specifically at shaping projects to fit funding criteria. All sources are different but I found generally that it is not helpful to be too prescriptive in the development of a project because it restricts the imaginative ways organisations come together. The more the groups work together the more inclusive that community becomes and more aspects the project has. The greater the inclusion, the more funding opportunities may be come available.
- To answer the question, no we do not shape projects to fit funding criteria. We may start off with the seeds of an idea but through our networks we approach different organisations that may have an input. Working together for the benefit of a third party, the organisations can each bring their own funding with them.
- For example, in Garioch there's a social inclusion project, Opening Up. It looked to use art and creative work as a means of identifying barriers people face in their everyday lives. By linking up arts development officers with the project, arts funding was added to external mental health resources.
- Finance is in short supply and people are struggling for funding. We

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have to be much more imaginative with the way that we use funding that we have and involve as many people as possible from the outset.

IG Again that is a big problem amongst communities. The aspirations are there for a specific project but people have to believe that funding comes automatically with the idea.

JS If groups are approaching us for funding and their projects meet the criteria which, in our case, are that it goes towards the actions of the local community plan, we will look towards funding it. We have direct control over only a very small pot of funds but we are aware of other funding streams and we can point people in those directions as well. I would not like to think that projects were changing to fit the funding criteria. We try to find the right funding for the project.

FA This year the community planning groups received just over £11,000 each. In Banff & Buchan we elected not to give small grants to projects this year but from now on to prioritise the development and implementation of actions coming from community action plans – such as ‘Making it Real’ events facilitated by the Banffshire Partnership at the request of Community Councils in the area..

The area covered by the Banffshire Partnership is that of just under half of Banff & Buchan, however they have frequently stated their willingness to provide opportunities for facilitating ‘Making it Real’ events on the “far side” of the area – that being from Pennan down to Rathen. Recently they facilitated a ‘Making it Real’ event on behalf of New Aberdour, Pennan and Tyrie Community Council and from this an application for funding (to the LCPG) was successful for a project at New Aberdour.

We are aware that the CVS, CLD and the Banffshire Partnership do an excellent job in helping people identify funding sources and would direct people to them for advice and support regarding this.

I think that it would be good if there was a Rural Partnership which covered the eastern parts of Banff & Buchan – otherwise these parts are as bereft of a rural partnership as Garioch.

EK I think that this is a really important part of community planning – for example Aberdeenshire Alcohol and Drug Partnership (ADP, previously mentioned) have taken funded projects and initiatives and are looking at other community projects which they may be able to deliver. We need to look at community and joint boards more as they may be aware of different funding streams.

By working to reduce public sector costs, there’s even more of a need to have 3rd sector or the community to pick up the pieces and

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we need to become more effective in this. For example, community groups and community transport – need income streams. The Council, police and NHS need to look at how to procure services – for example, should we ever be purchasing private taxis to support service delivery if there could be a community owned solution?

MS Question 6: How do local community planning partnerships relate to the executive and board? Are there any barriers to effective two way communication on the delivery of strategic themes and in responding to specific local needs?

JS I'd refer to our earlier comments. I think we have a very weak link between us to the executive/the board. I feel it was a very retrograde step when the Chairs of the local groups were removed from the executive. I am aware that the executive may have been unwieldy and Council heavy, as at that point all 6 local community planning groups were chaired by the relevant area manager. However, their attendance was not as area managers but as chairs of the local groups. It should be noted now that the Garioch Chair is now a NHS representative and not a council officer.

As a local group we do not have anyone sitting on the executive or the board and therefore we do not have that link.

FA We have asked the Corporate Policy Officer (Community Planning) to suggest to the executive a way round this which would be that a representative from each local group would sit on the executive wearing their sectoral hats. This would ensure representation from local groups geographically whilst not being over reliant on any single organisation. Some of the 6 LCPG's already have a member of the LCPG who also, on behalf of their organisation, sits on the Executive. In this case they could act both for their organisation and for the LCPG. This would mean adding only a few more people round the Executive table and would give each LCPG a voice.

MS If I were to say that the answer to this question is that there is a poor structure, which inhibits effective communication, would that be too harsh?

JS I am taking the second part of the question to refer to the Single Outcome Agreement (SOA). We will do good work at a local level but there is no mechanism in place to feed that into the outcomes of the SOA. Local Indicators currently included in the SOA are not relevant to what we are doing, whilst the national level indicators are. Some of the local indicators are very specific. That mechanism should be there. What are we really measuring?

IT That is begging the question again; Has it all mushroomed past its original conception? The criteria included in the SOA are intended to

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measure what was envisaged initially but this has now grown outside that. It is not necessarily the SOA that is at fault but the fact that development has not been taken account of subsequent to the SOA development.

JS The SOA is supposed to be an annual document. We were told that it has changed very little from day one so those indicators may not be that relevant or there might be more relevant indicators that could be in there. It is not picking up on what we are doing locally.

IT **Question 7: How should the relationship between local members and the local Community Planning Group work?**

The question is about the relationship between the local councillors, local elective members and the local community planning people.

FA Our LCPG has a Partnership Agreement, which was revisited by the local Partners last December. Each partner has agreed to represent their organisation on the LCPG. Therefore it would be the role of the local elected member on the LCPG to feed back information (as appropriate) to and from the local councillors, just as police representatives would be expected to feed back to police organisations, CLD to the groups and organisations they are involved with. Extract from Partnership Agreement shown below: -

Sharing relevant information - We will share relevant information subject to any confidentiality agreement or legal restriction that may apply to the information.

When Community Planning Group members attend meetings of, or are members of, other community groups (for example Community Councils, Community Development Group's, tenants associations, health groups, young people's groups etc.) they will act as a conduit to/ from the CPG and these groups and will feedback information to/from the groups in question as and when appropriate.

IT Do you think it is a good idea that it should not be the Council official who chairs the local community planning group? Perhaps it should be a rotating chair?

EK We tried a rotating chair and it did not work. It did not meet the consistency and continuity required. The most important thing about sitting on the role of chair is the personality of the person. It is a very skilled position to take on.

IT What happens in your three areas? Do you all have a Council Official as Chair of the local groups?

FA We currently have no area manager as the post is currently vacant

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and being looked after by one of the other area managers. We have been rotating the chair at every second meeting. Previously it was the area manager who was the chair and it might go back to that when the post is filled. The local community planning groups were quite happy for the position of the chair to remain with the area manager and proposed him for that post each year.

IT Do you think the area manager is the best position to actually initiate and carry through development? Don't they have enough to do without this role?

FA I would agree with Emma. I think it would depend on the personality of the person.

IT Do you not think that position has enough to do as area manager, without being the leader for community development?

EK Most people on the local groups also have enough to do? If the area manager is the right person for the job, and in the position to do, it then that is fine.

IT Who is your chair?

EK The area manager.

JS We lost our area manager. The local community planning group took the decision to appoint a partner representative to be Chair for the next 12 months. The first meeting under his lead is to be held next week and it looks as if "radical" changes are being considered.

IT Do you hold closed meetings not open to the public?

JS Closed. They have always been closed that was the decision right from the beginning. The board is open to the public but the local meetings are not. * **see note at end**

EK/FA Meetings are always closed.

JS The relationship between the local members and the local community planning group is not ideal. The local area chair comes to the meetings and we have good representation. There is not, however, an easy mechanism or an opportunity to feed back to the area committee.

IT I am not quite sure what that means. Can an item not be included in the agenda for the area committee or in the information bulletin?

JS In order to get round this I have a monthly update that is sent out to everyone. All elected members and Community Councils receive it.

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There must be about 100 people on the list that get it. But this is not ideal. It keeps people informed about what is happening but this in itself does not allow feedback. That has to be done as and when issues arise. It is not a formalised procedure.

IT Getting back to the question about the elected members. The elected members on the area committee are not given an opportunity to comment on the work of the local community planning groups, would that be correct?

JS In our case we do not have an item on our {area committee} agenda but what we do have are joint meetings. There will be one coming up in December between the local community planning group, area councillors and the area management team. This is to go through the Community Plan. We did it last year and it went very well.

FA We did it two years ago at Macduff Town Hall. I'd expect that this be repeated under a new area manager. Each of the 6 LCPG's will be holding joint meetings with the Area Committees and Area Management Teams at least once if not twice a year.

EK We have not done it yet. There was a set of actions to strengthen the relationship between the area management and the local community planning groups and this is critical. We're planning a joint meeting as a really important step forward.

IT Do the local elected members support your work?

EK I'd refer to the task description of the local community planning groups and the role of representatives. You could ask the same about any of the partners – they have a role to be representatives for us on the groups they are representing and then take back information to their organisation. This very rarely happens as communication is not ideal through a single person. Our Area Chair attends the local community planning group regularly – but I'm not sure what comments he shares with the other elected members.

IT The local community planning group is not elected and so not accountable. The local councillor is accountable. Do you think it would be a good idea to have a regular item in an agenda of the area committee, or in the information bulletin, to give the local elected councillors the opportunity to comment on the work that you are doing?

EK Yes. This would be one way of doing more.

JS We do what we can at the moment. We are open for more input and more involvement. I feel that in Garioch there's a good relationship between the community planning group and the area committee.

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- IT The area committee is not a single member entity – it's a decision making collective.
- EK I'd have concerns about the partnership group – the Councillor's role is to represent the Council but there are issues relating to external partners. Having said that, we're open to considering new ways of effective 2 way communication.
- IT Do you think that the work of the local community planning group should be exposed to the scrutiny of the area committee, bearing in mind that the local councillors get a sense of information on all accounts put to them?
- EK Not for scrutiny.
- JS No, not for scrutiny – for discussion.
- EK For discussion yes.
- FA I am a bit confused by the question. The local councillor is a member of the group, equal to all the other partners and it is a partnership group. If the area committees wished to look at the work of the local community planning group, that same right should be extended to all the other community planning partners. I do not think that is something that has been set up not to happen.
- The issue is that the question may not ever have been asked.
- My concern with the question is that it is almost as if it has been set up not to happen and that is not the case. We publish our minutes and we are happy to answer any questions and take forward, through the representatives on the group, any issues that arise from any of the other groups. We have always been like that. I would not be comfortable working any other way.
- IT The area committee will not try to necessarily interfere with your work but simply apply scrutiny in the sense that public money is going in there and it is part of the Council's way to examine how Council money is being spent. Scrutinising that is the same for any service the Council does. If we put the money into development partnerships then we can ask how that money is being best used.
- FA We have a budget of £11,600 this year. When I take minutes at the local community planning group meetings I look at it from the perspective of a member of the public reading the minutes. If I was a member of the public and wished to know what is happening I would want to have more than one line in there. My minutes can at times be quite detailed. If I were seeing funding being allocated to a project, I would want to know something of the discussion behind it.

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- IT If you have extended that to the public, then you would have no difficulty with the elective councillors having the same opportunity?
- FA I speak for myself as an officer. On the community planning group, I do not have a vote and so therefore that would have to be a decision taken by the group. I cannot see why the group would not make such a decision as that is what community planning is all about.
- AA **Question 8: How can greater awareness be raised on the role, remit and operation of Community Planning within partner organisations, including with councillors and officers of Aberdeenshire? Are there areas where improvements should be considered?**
- JS The biggest issue is the lack of awareness within the Council and within the partners. We did think about drawing up some form of presentation to take around the council services, management teams and front line staff to show what community planning is all about. A recent meeting of Community Planning officers agreed that the message isn't getting out there.
- I would also like to throw in a good model, albeit operating on a smaller scale. I am trying to think how we can replicate it on a shire wide scale. The Council's Housing Service has established a tenant officer sub group for each strand of housing policy. The groups are small but the model itself is good and it works. There are always more tenants taking part than officers and the Chair is always a tenant representative. This is a very good model, especially if we can do it on a larger scale.
- FA There should be improved communication with information passing top down as well as bottom up. For example, I'm aware of recent discussions about the European Fisheries Fund, linked to Economic Development. All the Area Community Planning officers were advised to that it was "advisable to have CPOs there to provide support". However what was the expected role to be? Passing information to local community groups/ councillors? I asked for clarification and was advised 8 days later that "nothing" was expected of me. It makes me concerned that having us there was a tick box for inclusion rather than any real need. Having said that, I intend to be there to be aware of what the EFF is about. There clearly needs to be improved communication and improved awareness within the Council services and partner service organisations. We were told two years ago that community planning should be at the core of council business – but this does not seem to have happened.
- FH In regards to raising awareness, could there be something put on the news page of arcadia about community planning?

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- EK It is doable. We could look into this idea.
- FA I know that our colleague, Mark Mitchell, has been looking in detail at this issue – he may have some suggestions to offer.
- FH That would be one way of reaching every employee. It is not to say that every employee would click on it and open it but it is a way of reaching people.
- EK There's a caveat here, I think. Community planning is a way of working. If news stories go on arcadia if does not necessarily fall to us to "badge it". There needs to be a culture change within the Council, so that services put up their own stories which illustrate good community planning. In order to get cultural change, I think the fear of letting go and centralisation need to be tackled. I think this is insidious in all levels of the Council. It needs something physical and tangible to generate confidence in each other and the skills to work together.

Looking at other authorities, Perth & Kinross Council piloted a piece of software, "VOICE" (Visioning Outcomes in Community Engagement) and trained a number of staff from each service to train others in their service so that they felt confident to work in ways that made use of effective community engagement to inform their service delivery. This helps culture change by giving staff a practical tool and empowering them. This is even more effective than simply sending out a message about new ways of working.

Returning to the original question, one small bit of a change and improvement is about the chair person. Recommendations on making the best use of the skills available within a group could have a big impact on how groups deliver. We also need to move away from a feeling of Council control.

- AA Is this not something about which the local group itself would be already aware?
- FA It is not all negative. At a local level information is being shared and awareness is being raised. People seem to be more willing to share information, for example, in Fraserburgh the Reaching Out Project put together a list of all of the projects each partner group or organisation (involved in the Project) was working on. This is quite a large document and includes about 13 pages from CLD. Five years' ago members of the group would not have been as willing to share this information with each other. Each partner from the opportunities it has provided for them to work together on elements of several of the projects.

I think the problem with awareness regarding community planning at

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a local level is that the CP Board and Executive don't seem to be aware of what is taking place across the 6 areas of Aberdeenshire, this lack of awareness also shows up in the Council services and within some of the community planning partners. Several years ago one of the Board partners acknowledged the difficulties with internal communication.

IG Conveying information within the Council should not be a big problem. It is conveying information to the general public that is a big problem. Is a newsletter a way forward?

FA We have this and it comes out three times a year. Stories are about what communities are doing. This happens in each of the six areas and is issued electronically. It's coordinated across the shire and posted on the community planning website. That website can be accessed via the Council's website. We've now been looking at a limited production of paper copies, to provide information on what's going on in the area, not just electronically, as not everyone has access to the internet. These might be placed in local gathering points such as cafes and shops.

EK I think there is more that could be done in terms of using modern communications technology. The use of social media and other internet based tools might engage with a wider community.

EK One of the English local authorities did a 24 hour experiment. They tweeted over 24 hours and reached out to a 160,000 people.

IT Someone might look at the initial tweet from the Council but after hundred tweets will they still tune in? I do not think there is any substitute for face to face communication.

EK No definitely not a substitute for face to face communication.

FA Facebook might also be considered – but this would only be worthwhile if there was something to put on and one person was tasked with updating Facebook on a regular (if not daily) basis. Additionally we would have to consider what to post on Facebook and whether this would be done as a LCPG or linked (via the LCPG) to local Partner pages.

SD **Question 9: Are you aware of good practice in other council areas which Aberdeenshire might consider?**

JS For me it is the Housing one that I have already mentioned.

EK The VOICE pilot – as used by Perth & Kinross.

AA Thank you very much for coming today.

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Jill Sowden:

*** Since the SAC meeting, the Garioch Community Planning Group has decided to “take to the road” and hold its meetings around Garioch (each ward in rotation) and make them open to the public. We held our first one at Inch recently. Not only does this give the community the opportunity to meet the Group and raise any concerns they have in their community, Garioch or the Shire and the Group chance to see and hear about local projects, it also allows Ward Members to attend to help facilitate the communication between Area Committee and the Group.**

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EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION THURSDAY 18th August 2011

11.30 HOURS, WOODHILL HOUSE- COMMITTEE ROOM 2

Present: Councillors Allan (AA) (Vice-Chair), Cullinane (NC), Duncan (SD), Gray (IG), Hood (FH), Sullivan (MS) and Tait (IT).

Officers: Jan McRobbie, Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny and Audit) and Natalia Becka, Scrutiny and Audit Assistant.

Apologies: Councillors Bellarby (Chair), Fleming and Thomas

Evidence from the Community Safety Representatives: Councillor Ron McKail (RM) (Chair, Garioch and North Marr Community Safety Group), Sandy Allan (SA) (Vice-Chair, Buchan Community Safety Group) and Kate Rigby (KR) (Strategy Development Officer, Community Safety).

AA Good morning. We choose to do investigations every year and we do evidence gathering sessions. Our current investigation is on community planning and empowerment. We have given you set questions but there will be supplementary questions as we go along if anything needs to be clarified. Officers Jan and Natalia are taking notes. You will receive a written copy of this. Please make sure that you are happy with what has been written and that it is clear what you meant. If you wish to make any changes to that you can as this will be a public record of the Committee.

SD **Question 1: Tell us about your role and involvement in Community Safety.**

SA I have been aware of the local Community Safety Group (CSG) since its inception in 1998, mainly through local tenant group (who had a representative on Buchan CSG committee) and later through my involvement with Cruden Community Council. When they needed additional community representation in 2006 I began attending on behalf of both Cruden Community Council and HARA (Hatton Area Residents Association). When there was a need for new office bearers in 2010, I was voted in as Vice Chair and I was re-elected in 2011.

Apart from attending meetings of Buchan Community Safety Group I have been involved in public awareness raising activities for example a stall at local Harbour Open Day and I have attended the Community Safety Network in lieu of other representatives.

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I regularly attend the annual Community Safety Seminar and Awards Ceremony. Our local tenant group has been quite involved over the years in submitting projects for the awards and occasionally winning something.

RM A lot of us that have been involved in community safety have started off with neighbourhood watch. I set up a neighbourhood watch where I lived in Westhill and it started from there. Around 1998 I was just a volunteer and part of the Community Safety Group in Garioch and North Marr. I then became the Chair and I have been the Chair ever since. Although we have a constitution which states that the Chair is subject to change it is only when someone else expresses an interest. I am also the Chair of the Network Group which is where the Community Safety Groups of Aberdeenshire come together and share information on their activities and best practice. I also sit on the Community Safety Executive, not as a Councillor but as a volunteer representing the Community Safety Network Group. I am also the Vice-Chair of the Grampian Neighbourhood Watch Association. This previously included representatives from Moray and the City – but there was no real cohesion in the group.

Spin offs for me have been projects such as the first responders' scheme which we funded in part.

My role and what we try to do is to promote community safety. We go out on road shows and fairs. The Police organised an activity day for the children, "Challenge 4", to combat bullying at school. We provided some of the funding for that and we went there as part of the Community Safety Group.

Community Planning Groups organise events which are aimed at organisations responsible for looking after senior citizens. We go along to such events to promote community safety. We promote several community safety items such as the 'Message in a Bottle'. The scenario could be an elderly person living on their own collapses, emergency services are called and nobody knows who that person is. The idea of the 'Message in a Bottle' is that a plastic bottle is kept in the fridge (a fridge is least likely to be destroyed in e.g. a fire compared to other white goods) containing a leaflet with personal details about that person for example health conditions (but not details of medication as these may be constantly changing), whether they have a pet or not and their GP. By the front door there will be a sign, a cross, so that the emergency services will know to look for that. 200,000 of these were distributed throughout Scotland. This is a very fast way of getting helpful information to those responding to an emergency. This was introduced with support from local rotary clubs from a suggestion made via the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) pre-2000 and has rolled out ever since.

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There is also a Police initiative, a leaflet that opens out into a poster and it states 'Help Call the Police'. The idea of this is that if a person is in a car and that car breaks down this can be displayed on the car window, without the need to leave the car to seek assistance. It is a very simple idea but proves effective.

These are just some of the examples of the community safety initiatives.

KR My title is Strategy Development Officer (Community Safety). I have been involved in the community safety partnership since its inception in 1998. Initially it was for a two year secondment and thereafter I took up my current post within the Housing and Social Work Service. I work alongside several other officers. We are not a team as such, not a community safety team where we all work together but we work on different aspects of community safety and development. The Community Safety 'Team' of officers consists of Kathleen Power, Corporate Policy Officer (Antisocial Behaviour), Andrew Jamieson (a Sergeant with Grampian Police) seconded to Aberdeenshire Council as Partnership Development Officer, myself and Willie Munro, Kincardine and Mearns Area Manager who is the current chair of the Partnership.

The Community Safety Partnership also forms links to other posts within the Council. There are two housing officer posts that deal with antisocial behaviour in non council tenancies. These posts are currently funded by the Community Safety Partnership. We also fund the post of Community Safety Analyst. There are also four Community Wardens working within Aberdeenshire. These were traditionally based in Peterhead and Fraserburgh but they can now be directed to work across the six areas on issues of concern.

Together we deliver community safety in Aberdeenshire.

NC **Question 2: Several previous witnesses have spoken highly of the processes and structures of Community Safety in Aberdeenshire. In your opinion, how does Community Safety relate to Community Planning in Aberdeenshire?**

SA Community safety is very much about the delivery of one aspect of Community Planning, mainly related to the wellbeing theme. Community safety predates the formal community planning structures. Local Community Safety Groups still operate within the identified themes of the Community Safety Partnership but now work in tandem with Local Community Planning Groups. In Buchan, where I sit on the Community Planning Group, we now have a Community Safety Group representative. This has been quite useful and has led to us being involved in other aspects of community safety like the Buchan Alcohol project, working with young people on their issues relating to alcohol.

KR Just as Sandy said, the Community Safety Partnership is delivering

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Community Planning under the wellbeing theme. It has always done that. Although the Community Safety Partnership was established before the Community Planning Partnership that was just because the legislation came later. Recently we have strengthened that relationship in that all Community Safety Groups sit on the Community Planning Groups and vice versa.

The Community Safety Action Plan is an annual document which follows a strategic assessment process and sets out a detailed plan, with relates to both the Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) and the Council's Strategic Priorities. This Plan allows us all to look at community safety and identify how we can deliver on the stated objectives.

RM For us in Garioch and North Marr, we cover two areas. In practical terms I, or my substitute, attend the Garioch area community planning meetings on regular basis and two members of our group are nominated in the Marr community planning group. This provides opportunities for the Community Safety Group to participate in community planning matters and raise community safety issues within that forum. We see ourselves as partners in the process; we are part of both community safety and community planning.

There's a very positive side to this - some of the funding that we require for community safety projects is not available; for example, home safety and water safety is not covered under the Community Safety funding because they have not been identified as priorities through the strategic assessment process. We've been able to get funding through community planning for water safety. One of the projects that we are involved in is providing RoSPA home safety booklets to secondary pupils, and this has been funded by top up budgets from Area Committees. One recipient of this booklet has subsequently gone on to a career in Health & Safety, having had his interest stimulated from the booklet. We hope that by presenting the information to schools, this might stimulate discussion both amongst their peers and also when at home, with family and parents.

Water safety is a very important issue in this area – we worked previously with coastguards in highlighting awareness of the dangers around water. Now we tend to work through community planning in delivering a course in each of the shire's primary schools.

There's a concern that Community Safety might lose its impetus – we depend so much on volunteers and so we must be mindful to provide the right incentives and support or we may lose them.

There have been other spin offs for us in being involved in Community Planning – such as the Men's shed project in Westhill. This intends to get men together to repair/ share experiences and be given some self

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validation. There's a potential role here in supporting community safety initiatives.

As a result of funding from Community Planning we were able to provide such projects.

IG Community Safety Groups receive annual funding from the Council. How is that funding dispersed? Is it dispersed through a discussion with your own group or in discussion with Community Planning?

KR Yes, the Community Safety Partnership is allocated funding from Aberdeenshire Council. It also can attract funding from other sources. For the past two years, determining how that money is spent has been progressed through the Strategic Assessment Approach. This approach involves the Community Safety Analyst pulling together all statistics and facts held by partner agencies such as the Police, Fire and Rescue and NHS. Using this approach we are able to have a complete picture of Community Safety issues in Aberdeenshire and we can identify what our priorities will be, where efforts and funding must be applied over the next year. These are then considered on a local level by the local Community Safety Groups identifying issues within their own areas.

For the past two years the priorities have been: reducing antisocial behaviour, preventing accidents and reducing violence. These are used by local Community Safety Groups to direct their funding. We also identify initiatives and projects that require human resources rather than actual funding. Sometimes we will use the resources from another organisation, but we will adhere to these three themes.

The Action Plan of the Community Safety Partnership can be found on the Council's Arcadia, detailing all the projects, in addition to being on our own website.

IG As far as Community Planning is concerned, where is the link?

KR The Community Safety Partnership is funded by Aberdeenshire Council. Community Planning have their own budgets to deal with. Each Community Safety Group in Aberdeenshire gets an allocation from that funding. The links between the Community Safety Partnership and the Community Planning Partnership start with the Community Planning Board and the Community Planning Executive having representation from the Community Safety Partnership and then at a local level representation from the individual Community Safety Groups on the Local Community Planning Groups and vice versa. That is where the link is.

RM Each now gets £1,750 per annum – this was previously £2,500. Local groups are only allowed to spend on the priorities identified by the

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strategic assessment process, and are also expected to show the outcome of their spend. Community Planning, in contrast, has greater flexibility on spending, can make a stand alone bid for additional project funding and have been able to get this in the past. They also had a previous restriction to stated priorities.

KR The Council allocation to community safety has reduced by 30% this year.

FH I am quite interested in the items that you have brought along today. I am just wondering about the concept of paying for such items. Is it possible for firms to sponsor these? Would you look for sponsorships from the business community?

RM Yes. The Fire Services, for example, provide funding for free fire alarms in homes. Message in a bottle was sponsored by the local Lions club – and rotary clubs have also been supportive of specific community safety projects.

SA Also for smoke alarms for the deaf.

KR Overall the Community Safety Partnership looks for external sponsorship money. We've achieved this in the past for projects such as the "Safe Drive, Stay Alive". The "Best Bar None" Scheme which is an accreditation scheme for licensed premises also attracts sponsorship.

RM We need to do a lot more – for example, Area Top Up Grants, through Aberdeenshire too, could also be accessed for specific local community safety projects.

AA **Question 3: In your experience, how do relationships between participation at strategic level and local level community safety actions work?**

SA The local Community Safety Groups are not really involved at the strategic level. Representatives of the various local groups meet quarterly as the Community Safety Network to feedback from local group activity, discuss common issues and receive updates from the Community Safety Executive, with further input from Grampian Police, Grampian Fire and Rescue Service and others.

The local Community Safety Groups work at a more practical level, rather than strategic, delivering on the ground within guidance set by the Community Safety Executive.

If projects are found, we look to see how this fits with services.

RM The way that it works in practice is that at the Community Safety

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Network meetings, each of the Community Safety Groups provides its own update, takes account of what is happening to other groups and that then goes into our minutes which are forwarded to the Community Safety Executive. This ensures that they know what's happening and can have strategic overview.

The role of Craig Watson, the Community Safety Analyst, in providing the data which allows the identification of strategic priorities should also be stressed.

AA We have covered questions 4 & 5 in the answers already given:

Question 4: How does the community planning 'executive' relate to local Community Safety Groups?

Question 5: How is agreement reached amongst partners on the best way forward or resource allocation for specific projects and initiatives?

MS Question 6: How can we ensure future sustainability, in terms of people as well as fiscal resources, in community safety?

KR As a partnership we continue to pool resources, so that we can progress identified projects. Sustainability can be ensured if the partners continue to work together and pool resources, both in terms of funding and human resources. The fear is that the current extreme times with regard to budgets will result in agencies pulling back from their partnership working. We need to work hard to ensure that this doesn't happen.

RM Representatives of the various community councils face the same challenge in terms of sustainability and continuity in terms of people. We can work with Community Councils to support issues in their area and they will work to support us – it's a two way process. It's not an easy task to get volunteers to attend.

Financially we have a small budget but we have to spend it as wisely as possible for the benefit of the community. There is sometimes a need to look elsewhere for both funding and people resources.

FH The work of the Community Safety Groups and organisations is very important within communities as a lot of the initiatives are about preventions rather than things happening. I think this is recognised by the partners, especially by the Police and the Fire Services. If you can prevent somebody's house going on fire by providing them with a free smoke alarm then that saves the Police, the NHS, the Fire Service and the Ambulance Service. Operation Zenith was similarly successful as prevention. It saves a huge amount of money in terms of people having to go out and deal with the outcome of accidents. Community safety

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work is a partnership and I feel it is vitally important that it continues. I am sure the partners, certainly the Grampian Police and the NHS have bought into this and see the benefits to themselves. I would be very surprised if they draw back from this, even with budget constraints as they have to realise the bigger picture. If they do not spend the money on this prevention work, the consequences could be hundreds of thousands of pounds. Are you as confident as I am that the partners will remain on board for this?

SA Yes.

RM Yes.

KR Early intervention is important and this is how community safety looks at the issues. We use the PIER model - Prevention, Intervention, Education, Rehabilitation. Early intervention is a way to save money and it's very much part of the Community Safety Action Plan.

RM An example of that would be the Driving Ambition scheme, undertaken in schools. We provide funding for that. Safe Drive Stay Alive takes place annually and reaches thousands of young people. One of the big projects of Community Safety is Pass Plus and last year over 200 young people undertook this training. It was previously available almost fully funded, (at £160 for a 6 hour day course) with Community Safety Group gives £100, the Council £45). This year we can only provide £80 because of budget cuts which unfortunately seems to have led to a drop in young people expressing an interest in the scheme. Leaflets about the funding are distributed to schools and to driving instructors. The drivers can benefit from reduced motor insurance having done the Pass Plus course and the community gets safer drivers.

We also did a calendar about travel to school with the aim to raise awareness about transport safety. We also distribute anti-vandalism leaflets and encourage school calendar projects. Both these projects were initiated when we asked young people to identify the issues which concerned them.

There's another community issue where we've distributed leaflets to individual households to assist the police with "Lights out – You're out" campaign. There's a warning this may be seen as an invitation to break in and the scheme advocates leaving lights on or having them set to timers. As it starts to get darker, this is increasingly relevant.

SA Representation on the Community Safety Groups and involvement with Community Councils varies from year to year depending on who is involved or interested. At a local level, unless the Community Safety Groups raise a high profile, people will not know that there is something to get involved in. We need to keep local visibility up. We try to hold local activities and attend Open Days, selling items such as attack

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alarms. This is both providing a service and increasing our visibility.

Most of the community representation has been from Community Councils, Neighbourhood Watch Associations or local tenant groups. There's perhaps a need to be more open to people attending as individuals, not just representing other bodies.

Partners often struggle to be represented at each local meeting – for example, police availability depends on duty rosters. If attendance is not consistent, that can generate a lack of continuity. In Buchan, the group meets in the local fire station, so it's less of an issue to ensure Fire & Rescue participation. It also should be noted that Aberdeenshire is a large geographic area and there are a range of different issues not all of which are relevant in each locality. With limited resources the question for partners must be whether to try to cover all, spreading resources thinly, or concentrating on one or two prime issues to benefit all.

- MS In Denmark it is the standard practice to have head lights on, all day and every day. Is it within your remit to suggest that in the future?
- RM Yes. I have suggested this some time ago to the Police but it has not been taken forward. I agree with you that is something that should be done, but there's not been the same interest as in Denmark – and a response received that this may disadvantage motorcyclists. However, even if cars may be more visible than bikes, I think that we should continue to pursue this.
- MS Is there a requirement for some sort of political input?
- RM Well I have approached the local Police, but yes there might be others to approach. It's something that could be progressed through RoSPA.
- FH I have noticed that the Police are very good in attending Community Councils. I wonder if, as part of that visit, a Police Officer can give the Community Council an update on Community Safety initiatives while they are there giving their crime report? At least the message would then get into the Community Councils who could then publish that in their minutes. That then reaches the community.
- KR That is a very good suggestion. We would like to see the links strengthened.
- RM We invariably have a police officer in attendance and they either give an oral report, or on occasion, a written report. We don't have the same difficulties in getting attendance as they have in Buchan. We also get email reports on the rare occasion that a police representative can not attend. We have very good police support in Garioch and North Marr.

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IG Sustainability is based on success and success is all about sharing and getting new ideas. Do you share the initiatives and ideas with other areas?

KR Any initiative that has been worked on by the Community Safety Group is reported at the Network Group meeting where all the Community Groups meet together. The network meets four times per year. It is an opportunity to share ideas, initiatives, best practice and also problems. Minutes are taken at the meetings and this can be presented to the Community Safety Executive so that all the partners are aware of what all the Community Safety Groups are doing.

RM We also have a website – the Aberdeenshire Community Safety website. The total number of “hits” from June 2010 to May, 2011 was over 6,000; that equates to 216 per day. One of the members runs the website for us and it is excellent and it is used by a lot of the partners including the Police. It can cover a whole range of issues – the police contact telephone number is the third most visited page. There are also welcome pages and community safety guidelines, including those for people coming to work in the UK.

KR Community Safety website is a great success story. It was established and has been kept up to date by a volunteer.

For your information, the web guides for migrants are available via both the community safety and community planning websites and have been recently updated.

AA **Question 7: Do you think that the residents of Aberdeenshire are aware of the Community Safety message and activities?**

SA There are specific activities and projects that the public are aware of, although I do not think many would relate them directly to “community safety”. The messages do get through but out with those actively involved only those who have sought out information on something may be aware of “community safety”.

The PASS PLUS project has provided a high profile for Community Safety and locally a CYCLE COMPETITION we ran in conjunction with local weekly newspaper raised awareness not just of cycling safety issues but also of the group and the website. We had a large number of “hits” to the website during the competition.

The website certainly helps get community safety messages across. I am told that new migrant workers, in particular, use it on a regular basis, downloading information that is available in some 8 languages.

AA **Question 8: How has the role of, and public awareness of, the community safety groups evolved over time?**

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- SA The financial aspects of the local groups has changed over time, with little initial resources, then more reliable funding, and now the funding situation is critical again.

Having the various Community Safety Groups across Aberdeenshire working on the same topics does have a bigger impact and does help in sharing resources but has to be large projects as local areas have very different issues.

Public awareness has evolved as the groups have become involved in activities locally. Work in schools, with Pass Plus and Cycling Safety, has led to growing awareness among young people and through them to their parents and other relatives.

- IT **Question 9: How does the work of the Community Safety Group align with the Single Outcome Agreement and national outcomes?**

I can imagine that has been monitored by the Community Safety Partnership, at that level, rather than the Community Safety Group level.

- KR The Community Safety Action Plan highlights the relationship with it and the Community Wellbeing theme (national outcome 9 – We live our lives safe from crime, disorder and danger) and also to the Council Strategic Priorities CW 1,2,3, CW 1.3.1 – 5, CW 1.4.1 and CW 1.4.2. Corporate priorities are also included at the top of the community safety action plan. Underneath this, we then say “how” these are to be delivered in Aberdeenshire.

- IT Do you monitor bottom up results?

- KR Yes –it is very important to collate the local outcomes of any initiative.

- FH Are you looking at the statistics that you are getting back to see that the work that you are doing from a community safety point of view is actually reducing antisocial behaviour, road accidents etc?

- KR We do a quarterly assessment, using our analyst and that is reported to the Executive. It details what the SOA and national outcomes are and also what the results have been in each area. If there’s a blip in expected outcomes, the project or initiative is reassessed and we may look for new actions.

- FH Does this analysis allow efforts to be focused on a particular area of need – such as Peterhead or Fraserburgh and facilitate the concentration of resources to meet that need – as in more police visibility, or reducing road accidents? If so, I think these would be very interesting reports, having had a quick look at some of them I can see

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these identify local hot spots (such as alcohol and youth). The benefits in employing an analyst over the last couple of years have surely directed focus?

KR The post ensures that the attention stay at the right level and in doing the right thing in each locality. It means that we do not have to rely on impressions or perceptions, but can have specific data to justify intervention priorities. It makes it all real.

AA I can relate to this – an “incident” happened in Westhill that gave a particular perception – but the annual crime figures were able to refute this feeling.

RM When the analyst produces his document, the report can target certain areas and this can be broken down into streets. You can look through the report very quickly and see what the hot spots are. The data about different areas is very useful.

However, the community safety overview remains a focus on the big issues – road accidents, drugs, which have a shire wide remit. We aim to make Aberdeenshire a safer place to live. Despite a recent reduction in police numbers from 1600 to 1515, the police must be congratulated at how well they are doing in assuring community safety.

FH Coming back to ‘Safe Drive Stay Alive’ campaign, is that going to continue?

KR Yes we have the funding for this for November 2011. There will need to be future discussion with partners about this campaign, including the need to have staff available to participate in the scheme. It’s very personnel intensive – a whole week of the event and the need for practice time before hand. We need to be sure these resources are in place before planning any future events.

MS Isn’t the cost of a road fatality, with all the knock-on services and processes, something like £1.5M?

RM At a meeting I attended yesterday, this cost was given as £1.8M.

SD **Question 10: Are there areas where you think improvements could be suggested – are you aware of good practice in other Council areas which Aberdeenshire might consider?**

KR At a strategic level, there are always improvements that could be made. The structure of community safety in Aberdeenshire is such that we’re always looking to improve.

Through membership of the Scottish Community Safety Network (SCSN) we are able to keep abreast with practice in other Council

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areas. All 32 local authorities lead Community Safety Partnerships and they are all members of the SCSN. This SCSN is also supported by the Scottish Government who can advise and assist when required.

Whilst SCSN participants may not actually meet physically very often, it's a great network for email contact. We can learn a lot about other community safety areas. SCSN also evaluate projects on their website - this is very useful.

RM We are constantly picking up ideas externally or ideas that come from the Community Safety within Aberdeenshire. Kate and Kathleen Power attend conferences as officers and feed back a great deal of information to the community safety groups in Aberdeenshire. The Police also contribute good ideas for consideration, based on what they have heard about happening elsewhere. For example, there's a new initiative to have neighbourhood watch posters on wheelie bins – this idea came through crime stoppers. The “first responders” scheme was similarly developed elsewhere and then borrowed for Aberdeenshire.

In terms of whether we could do better, I personally feel we could spend more in regards to Home Safety as that is currently not our priority. Our focus is more on Road Safety. Some other councils have a home safety officer.

KR We don't have a home safety officer in Aberdeenshire. There is no real recording of home safety incidents – for example, the NHS do not record accidents as home safety issues, or otherwise and therefore we cannot identify it as our priority. If the data were collected, this would provide evidence of need in this area of work.

SA High level ideas often come from elsewhere and are fed down. The Community Safety Network is the main vehicle where the groups share ideas internally. For example, we in Buchan have borrowed ideas from Garioch and Marr. It's the same for the police and fire & rescue – they will adapt ideas from elsewhere to address local needs. But there are also ideas coming from, for example, the Police or the NHS.

RM A recent example of an idea coming from somewhere else is as follows: A person was caught for speeding, outwith Aberdeenshire. He was offered either three points on his licence or to go on a Speed Awareness course (at a cost of £60/70). We do not have this option in Scotland, but it seems to me that re-education is more useful than the point system for a lot of drivers. It is an idea that has come from somewhere else. I have a meeting next Monday with Mel Edwards, our Roads Safety Officer and a Police Officer and we will discuss this.

IG What happens after you have done the course and you are caught speeding again?

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- RM The data suggests that it is working. People that do the course do not necessarily continue to break the speed limits again. There is no education with just getting the points on your licence. Those given three points tend to re-offend – i.e. they do not learn from their experience.
- FH Are you able to tell us whether there is a smoke alarm in every Council house?
- SA Yes - all properties will have mains wired smoke detectors and mains wired carbon monoxide detectors.
- IT What did you mean, Sandy, when you spoke about smoke alarms for the deaf?
- SA Smoke alarms for the deaf have flashing lights.
- KR There is also a vibrating pad that the person can carry in their pocket.
IT Are they more expensive?
- KR They are but everyone can get them fitted.
- IT For nothing?
- KR Yes. Initially the Community Safety Group supplied them to raise awareness that such a thing existed. Fire and Rescue Service and the Society of Deaf now provide them. It may be that there's a need to raise awareness of their availability again.
- AA Thank you for your help with our investigation on community planning and empowerment. You will receive the written report so please read it carefully and make any changes if required as this will become a public record. Thank you for your time.

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EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION THURSDAY 18th August 2011

14.00 HOURS, WOODHILL HOUSE- COMMITTEE ROOM 2

Present: Councillors Allan (AA) (Vice-Chair), Cullinane (NC), Duncan (SD), Fleming (TF), Gray (IG), Hood (FH) and Sullivan (MS).

Officers: Jan McRobbie, Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny and Audit) and Natalia Becka, Scrutiny and Audit Assistant.

Apologies: Councillors Bellarby (Chair) and Tait.

Evidence from the Estates and Legal & Governance: John Gahagan, Estates Manger, Infrastructure Services and David Currie, Principal Solicitor, Legal & Governance.

On Thursday the 18th of August SAC invited John Gahagan and David Currie to give evidence on Community Planning and Empowerment.

AA Welcome and thank you for coming along to helps us with our Community Planning and Empowerment investigation. We have given you set questions but there will be supplementary questions as we go along if anything needs to be clarified. Officers Jan and Natalia are taking notes. You will receive a written copy of this. Please make sure that you are happy with what has been written and that it is clear what you meant. If you wish to make any changes to that you can as this will be a public record of the Committee.

NC **Question 1: Tell us about your job and how it relates to responding to requests from Community Groups looking to take over land, or facilities, in Council ownership.**

JG I am the Estates Manager. Most community asset transfer requests involve land or buildings therefore that involves the Estates department. Estates in the past have been the main co-ordinator for community asset transfer requests. We deal with all such enquiries. We also involve other services and other parts of the Council as necessary. Initially the first contact is with Legal & Governance to see if there are any issues, such as restrictions, on the title of the land or property. Thereafter other services may be contacted if they are the current users/ operators of the asset. This is to check if the property is surplus and can be disposed of. Further on in the process other sections are involved, such as those required to undertake conditions surveys on the state of the property. Overall my section would previously have had a coordination role to see the process of transfer or disposal, if approved,

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through.

More recently I was involved in drafting the community asset transfer policy. That policy envisaged the setting up of a Steering Group to manage and oversee the asset transfer. I am part of that Steering Group. There is a core group made up of the Corporate Services Director, the Area Manager, myself for Estates, and the representatives from legal and finance. That group is developing guidance for Officers and for Community Groups to take them through an asset transfer process.

DC From the legal perspective we are generally not involved until we are given notice. Thereafter there are two stages: the preliminary stage is in looking at any title issues, to be sure we do own what we think we own; after that we look at other legal issues. On been given instructions, we would then issue an offer of lease or sale. The process should be straight forward at that stage.

Like John, I'm on the corporate steering group, although the Legal & Governance representative will change. It's hoped that the new process will get issues resolved earlier in the process than has previously been the case.

FH The question mentions Community Groups; do either, or both, of you look into the background of the group that is requesting the asset transfer to make sure it's properly run or on the subject of the intended use?

JG There are two elements to the group's background. One is the constitution of the group. The new Community Asset Transfer sets out fully the criteria we are looking for. We look into that to ensure that the group is constituted in the way that we would be prepared to recommend the transfer. There are quite a few criteria that we look at. We want groups that come to us wishing to achieve an asset transfer to be fully aware of what is required of them in terms of their constitution. However the fact that they are properly constituted up does not mean that they are able to take on an asset and manage it for a long period of time. Therefore the second element that we look at is the group's ability to manage an asset in the future. There may be issues with taking on what may be a liability in the future, and a business case will need to demonstrate that the group contain the people and experience to be stable and able to manage over time.

TF In these asset transfers, will the real ownership always remain with the Council or will the ownership transfer to another party who then can sell on?

JG It depends on the nature of the transfer. Some groups will not be set up in the way that we will feel confident about transferring permanent

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ownership over the asset to them, or it may be the nature of the asset itself. Some assets may be transferred as leases.

For example, we are currently looking at the process of Caravan Parks and the intention is to have long leases of 25-30 years. That gives the Council a greater element of control should it be required. If someone goes out of the bounds of what was envisaged, then with a lease the Council, as landlord, can do something about that.

In terms of empowering Community Groups, in many cases it will be appropriate to transfer direct ownership to the group.

In terms of future disposal that is a difficult question. The intention with most of these transfers is that the services operated from the asset will continue in the future. It essentially will have been transferred for the benefit of the community. We need to be conscious of a potential disposal in the future. But we also need to make some allowance for the possibility of it being transferred in the future. For example, take the typical Village Hall; whilst it might be fit for purpose today, in 50/100 years' time it may make sense to have that property disposed of, and a different site bought to build a new Village Hall or a new structure built on the existing site. There should be that the ability to do that. We need to have a balance between having some control and giving Community Groups the ability to run the service.

FH From a legal point of view, would you have anything in the title deed, for instance in the transfer of an asset to the Community Group, that might say that if that particular activity will occur, the asset would revert back to the Council?

DC There would be a possibility of putting in a pre-emption. I am not sure how this will sit in with the funders as they may view it as a lease. It will be important to discuss this with potential funders at as early a stage as possible. For example, at present the Big Lottery require outright ownership before they will fund. However we are aware of the risk of handing over valuable assets which then might be transferred to another party and used for a different purpose. We will try to prevent that from happening and one of the best safeguards is to examine the constitution of the group. Any company articles will declare its operations or it may be that the group have a restricted charitable purpose.

In the future, the asset transfer group will have additional remits which it can use so it may be a very different process.

It is a complicated situation. We do not have a feudal system anymore, while we may look to establish a normal title condition, this would be very hard to enforce, unless it's deemed appropriate for a community burden. We need to explore this. Each of these transfers will be unique

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and we need to approach them individually, with fresh eyes.

- MS Whose ultimate decision is it to approve an asset transfer?
- JG It would depend on the nature of the transfer. They will follow the same process as all other disposables, being considered by the appropriate Committee in terms of the Council's scheme of delegation. It could therefore be either an area or a policy committee – or even both. I've been in post seven months and have seen occasions where an area committee's disagreement with a disposal report's recommendations has gone to Policy & Resources for determination.
- DC Before reaching committee consideration, the matter would also have been discussed with the relevant service, which would be required to "give up" the property to other ownership.
- JG The community asset disposals will follow the same process of all other disposals, for example, if it is recommended that the facility be transferred at less than the market value, this would need to go to Policy & Resources to approve.
- IG I fail to see the connection between the constitution of a group and the ability of that group to take over a community asset. My biggest concern in the selling of community assets is the group itself, the personnel within that group. They might be adequate today but in five years' time that could completely change. Where does the Council fit in then?
- JG It would depend on whether it is a lease or a sale. For a sale we tend to satisfy ourselves with the constitution of the group. It would not just be the individuals that are in the group at the moment but how that group deals with changes in its personnel. We would need to be convinced that it has a proper process of doing that in such a way that it will continue to be focused on delivering benefits for the local community. It is almost impossible to say exactly how we would deal with that in each case as all of these groups will have different constitutions and it is a case of looking at each constitution individually. The constitution will have to show that it is robust and satisfies the long term aims of the transfer.
- IG Surely the difficulty will lie with the fact that these groups are made up of volunteers? There is no guarantee that these would be the right personnel to run that facility in five years time. We can't always short leet volunteers!
- JG Ultimately if the group is not robust enough, then the transfer would not take place. It's not just a case of fit for today, but fit for the future. The groups would be required to operate within their constitutions, regardless of individuals. I think more information about this will come

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out in the wash in the next year or so. Previously we had perhaps one or two transfer requests per annum; we have about 30 applications at the moment. It's suddenly taken off. We'll be looking, in any ultimate transactions, to make sure these can't depart from being community resources.

DC In respect of the need for a robust constitution, this should be up-to-date anyway. If it's too old, it may not be suitable for funding applications too. Again, it's an issue which is better explored at the start of any potential transfer application, not three quarters through. Therefore it's important to get the right paperwork as soon as possible to the appropriate people, to ensure that what's proposed is suitable for their purposes as well as our own. There's always a risk in going forward – and that risk is people. All we can do is try to ensure that appropriate safeguards are in place.

IG Does the Council become a fail safe if something goes wrong?

DC Not in the sense of providing any guarantees. It is not intended to operate as a guarantor or the ultimate fall back. It depends on the Councillors to decide to intervene or take the facility back. Again, this process will evolve over time and I cannot predict that and what the attitude will be. At the moment it is not the current policy to require the Council to step in and take over.

JG Leased properties are different, of course, they will come back to us in the event of a failure. All groups set up with best intentions and the best personnel. The purpose of the group could be relevant at the time it was set up but it may not be relevant later. Leases are therefore better and we would probably prefer all of them to be leases but that may not be good for all Community Groups, particularly in regards to funding. In some cases outright asset transfers are more appropriate but then we need to incorporate safeguards allowing us to step in, if required, in the future. This might take the form of a Minute of Agreement based in standard security. This could be a device used in the future.

We need to learn to let go and transfer assets over to Community Groups – this is community empowerment.

FH In regards to the Standard Security idea, when the Council is transferring assets to the Community Group, if a standard security were in place on the Council, is there a possibility that the group could then go and mortgage the asset and raise money against it?

Also, will Audit Scotland have a monitoring role on assets that the Council is transferring and to whom?

JG I'm not sure how Audit Scotland will see its role. These are property

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disposals but the route and issues are different from the more usual. We have a statutory obligation on the amount that we give in terms of a disposal. For example, when we dispose a property for less than its market value, (i.e. "best consideration") we need to justify that. Most groups will want to take a property at less than its value but they need to make the case to be anything other than the market value conforming to statutory requirements. Again, such a case would have to go to Policy & Resources for support.

The element between standard security and mortgages is not what the purpose of the standard security is in this case. It is a device to allow us to have a future ability to get involved.

DC I've used the device in reverse – when the Council has gifted land at low cost or free. In those cases we've set up a Minute of Agreement combined with standard security so that if it's sold on, the Council would get a share of the price/ profit.

I'm not sure how Lottery funders would feel about this – the issue has not been fully explored yet.

JG We'd also have comments on any proposals and related issues – we're thinking around them now.

AA **Question 2: We have visited all six areas and heard from several community witnesses of their concern about the time and processes followed in responding to their requests – would you tell us what the previous operating practice was and what improvements were needed to speed up this process?**

JG There was no specific process before as community asset disposals were treated as normal disposals. As numbers increase and we need more to be proactive, it became clear that a policy was needed. This has now been developed.

Policies need to be easily understood by Officers and by Community Groups. There needs to be a consistent approach where both sides know what to expect. Some of the problems in the past involved people feeling that things were taking too long as there was a misunderstanding of the processes involved. The purpose of the policy and the guidance is to clarify that, to offer guidance and to make both sides aware that things can go wrong and delay the process.

The corporate steering group will monitor the applications and if it sees things that are not working as envisaged, it will make changes. It might find that some of the elements thought to be correct aren't and need to be adapted. I would like to think that as officers we've thought of everything in advance, but we won't have – so the capability to change and evolve the process is built in.

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SD Question 3: What are the triggers to delays in successfully concluding leases?

JG I think there may be a distinction between “delays” and “perceived delays”. There is a potential for delays at every stage. We seek to determine what these delays might be and we try to address them before they happen. We’ll also work to a determined timetable which can identify what time each part will take and whether there might be delays at any stage. There are processes to deal with this in advance and help us monitor this and pick up and address any delays sooner than in the past.

Sometimes delays do occur but usually for good reasons which may not be understood. When we are dealing with Community Groups we could be involved in necessary processes, taking place in the background but because the groups are not always aware of them, they consider this as a delay. The aim is to make them more aware of the process.

Also, sometimes delays occur when there’s a mismatch between what the group want and what the Council wants. The delay may be needed to negotiate a mutually acceptable outcome.

DC From a legal perspective, delays may occur towards the end of the process due to issues, such as business plan or constitution, not being identified at the start. But I’d stress that this is historical and not what we are working towards now. What we aim to do now is getting all the appropriate advice, legal or survey, early on, combined with an identified timetable and an agreed list of “hurdles” to be cleared.

Historically this was done on an ad-hoc basis; the group might have a basic understanding of what it wants, but no business plan. At the same time the “instruction” could land with the lawyers – we’d issue an offer- but then find that the group may not have taken legal advice or engaged a solicitor to act on their behalf. This led to delays.

The new guidance now states what has to be done from the start, what should be in place and who should be contacted. This will help speed things up when everyone, officers and groups, know exactly what they have to do from the beginning.

SD I’m aware of a situation in Turriff where there was a significant delay in the process when, late in the day, an anomaly with the title deeds was discovered.

DC This is exactly the type of issue which should have been flagged at the start.

JG The Council, like other local authorities, often deals with inherited properties, not all of which were looked at in terms of title, in any great

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detail. We'd like to try to identify any issues as soon as possible in order that these can be resolved while proceeding with the other necessary work.

One of the prime determinations should be the decision as to whether the property is suitable for transfer at all – there's no point in putting a paper before a committee, for example, if the asset were a school building needed for the provision of the education service!

The next stage after this would be the examination of title.

IG If I were buying a business, the first thing I'd want to see would be the books. I'm told that, in the current exploration of caravan park operations, it's been almost impossible to give figures for individual sites - was no calculations made of the profits and losses for each site for a year before deciding to off-load them?

JD Re the particular instance of the caravan parks, the figures were provided by the service and covered 5 years. They were also given figures for the part-year spend of the year to day for 2011/12. This would include elements of the council's net spend (including central costs) that would not be relevant to the groups. Having said that, I think these are quite identifiable. Groups have been given the accounts we have for each park and have been afforded the opportunity to go produce their own figures which will then be compared to those we hold. For example, grass cutting is relatively cheap for us to provide, as we do it on a huge scale across Aberdeenshire, so we can allocate a cost for that which might be different from the market value. We could, of course, offer to provide that service to them at a cost....

However, there's a limit to what we can do to assist groups in their assessments, as it is a business application at the end of the day. If they were to come back with a sound case to argue, we may be able to offer a better price.

TF **Question 4: Are there issues in co-ordinating workloads between Council services?**

JG No, I do not think that co-ordinating workloads has been a significant issue. Co-ordinating workloads between services within any organisation, private sector or Council, will throw up issues over time. I come from the private sector and it is not one that has occurred to me to be a significant issue within the Council. At times there will be specific pressures on resources within the various sections of the service, but it is not a particular issue here. In fact, I would almost say the opposite; It seems a very well run Council and a very well run service.

DC Due to the anticipated increase in the number of transfers we will have to look at resource allocation and manage them. If there is a significant

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increase in this particular workload, we need to make sure that does not cause a problem.

- TF Are these asset transfers hinging on the Big Lottery, allowing these groups to access money that the Council cannot access or give? What if the Big Lottery changes their constitution over night? Will the applications fall away?
- JG The Big Lottery is not really relevant to many of the community asset transfers. The Big Lottery is for the 'big ones', for big amounts of money. An example of this would be Newmachar Hall, a community project of £2M, where this would have been relevant. I would not expect it apply for smaller projects such as the caravan parks. If the Big Lottery changes their view of how they will give funding, it will have an impact on these groups. But that is only a certain percentage of them and not the majority, depending on the type of transfer. If the Lottery fund itself were to cease, would it be replaced? And of course, there are other potential funding streams.
- FH Coming back to the Community Group side of this, when a Community Group comes forward seeking information about an asset transfer would you meet face-to-face with the members of that group quite early in the process? When would you actually have a face-to-face meeting with them?
- JG The face-to-face meeting with the Council officers would take place immediately. The lead in asset transfers for each area will be the area manager. The area manager will usually be familiar with the group, and perhaps even the individuals on the group, and there will be early face to face engagement. The guidance has not been finalised yet as to what exactly the process is, but it's very well developed and revolves around very early engagement. It aims to assist them to provide us with the relevant information which we require and help engage with other people as necessary.
- FH Would your service be prepared to put a time limit on services in regards to their use or potential use of the surplus asset? There have been delays in the past with property trying to get confirmation from services that a facility is really surplus to operational requirements.
- JG It is difficult to envisage every situation. The policy and the guidance will have indicative time scales within them. It would be too easy to say "response from service" may be "we're not transferring" when they may not have made their minds up. This is part of a separate issue outwith community asset transfer and relates to all disposals. The Council's stated intention is not to have property or other assets sitting around idle – if there's a better use by another service or one of the Council's partners or community, this should be considered before any sale.

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The Council's office accommodation strategy challenges services to look at what their occupation needs are now, and in the future. The services will now be challenged – "why? Do you really need this? Justify your position." Initially the focus is on council offices, but this approach will be rolled out across all council owned/ occupied/ leased property in due course.

MS Question 5: In your opinion is there a communication issue with managing community expectations on a timetable for the outcome?

DC I do not know about 'managing community expectations' but historically, there has been a problem in communication in the sense that each party at the start do not fully understand what the process is and what the timescale is. This is something that we are trying to sort now by having an immediate face-to-face meeting to have everything out in the open at the beginning of the process. We can then realistically manage expectations.

This was difficult to have in the past; a group might expect to have an outcome in 3/6 months – when a year has gone by it might be hard for them to see the process going on behind the scenes. It's not so much about managing expectations as much as having a known and shared timetable up front.

MS Has the idea of an initial get together with the group and all concerned, yourself and Estates, to resolve the issues, been developed?

DC As I understand it, this is not proposed for the very first meeting which will be the group and the area manager. It may come out that is what is required after this, especially if there are legal issues. I am happy to meet with groups and clarify issues – I have done so in the past and can't see that this will not be continued.

JG The guidance has not been completed yet. It would be potentially appropriate to replicate the Corporate Steering Group which includes Legal & Governance, Estates, Area Management and others at a local level. I'd stress that the draft guidance makes it clear that the area manager will have the power to pull together representatives from all necessary services/ functions, if required, to progress an application. This contrasts with the corporate group which is of a broader based composition.

MS There is a requirement to expedite asset transfers as far as possible. Every possible way of speeding things up should be investigated. If there are 30 possible applications on the go at the moment, I'd expect that would increase as time goes by. It's a matter of urgency; the Council owns lots of property and some need to be disposed of.

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JG There are two elements to community asset transfers. Until now, this has been a reactive process where Community Groups will come forward looking for assets to be transferred to them, an exception is the Caravan Parks where the council has instigated the process.

The Council is now more likely to identify things which may be surplus to operational requirements and then have to decide their disposal method; should they be put to sale on the open market? Do we survey community groups to see if they might have an interest? As long as we are up front and identify that these are properties we want to get rid of, either because they are a liability or detraction from the Council's core purpose. So the other element is the identification of other assets that could be suitable for transfer.

IG **Question 6: How can the Council better assist Community Groups who may have to provide proof of lease/ownership to meet funding deadlines, especially where a project may be subject to complicated funding agreements?**

DC If I may give you a recent example, where drafts of the paperwork were shared with a community group, rather than wait till the formal offer or formal lease was produced. I think this was a great improvement. Legal & Governance officers tend to be involved once we get the set of instructions as to what has been agreed, maybe there should be an intermediate stage where, once we are clear what should be in a lease, we might send the draft lease to the applicant group. This would allow them to get the ball rolling. Once funders see a genuine draft they are usually happy with that, they are happy that it got to that stage and are also in a position to comment on, and perhaps input to, the proposed content.

I feel this would improve the process.

JG Previously in asset transfers, while the Council examined the requested transfer, the Community Groups would be work on their side of things, for example, trying to get funding. These parallel processes sometimes took place in isolation and we've had calls – "we need the lease sorted out by a week next Tuesday". (On a side note, I have to report that we usually managed to get it out on time!) Or at a late stage the Community Groups may find that they have no funding and can not proceed.

We are now better educated with community asset transfers and the process. We now know better what the Community Groups are going through on their side of things. Community Groups need to work in tandem on any funding application, while we work on the transfer process. The new process will identify all of this up front and allow us to work in tandem.

The process will be quite demanding on Community Groups. It's a big

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deal to hand over a significant asset to a community group. We will demand from them the details of their funding arrangements and the process that they are going through so that we can match that to what we are going to do.

IG Is the Council quite happy to put out 99 year leases?

JG We are. We go up to 175 year leases, but only when that is appropriate. Only a few are towards the longer scale of the spectrum. There will be cases where it is only three years initially, to see how it goes. It means that they don't take over the long-term liability initially. A group may be set up well but it is not mature enough so we will not pass on outright ownership but instead offer a lease which may be of a short duration, three to five years – a 'try before you buy' approach.

TF So is it a case of looking forward to asset transfer whilst being aware of asset stripping?

JG I can assure you we are very much aware of asset stripping.

FH Speaking about leases and the safety net, are you going to propose not allowing assignation of these leases?

JG We try hard not to be too prescriptive and we are open to persuasion from the Community Groups of the best way forward. We need to be persuaded as we will not easily give away the right to prevent assignation. The preference in most cases would be that it is not allowed, but the fallback would be that it is allowed but only to a group that has a similar constitution; that is involved in similar activities. We do not want a completely different group running something else. We would prefer not to be overly restrictive on empowerment, perhaps suggesting that a use be permitted "in x ways" to "a group similar to your own."

FH **Question 7: The Committee is aware of the June 2011 adoption of a new community asset transfer strategy and establishment of a working group, under Corporate Services, to bring forward new processes and procedures. How do you anticipate that this will work?**

JG I'd refer you, in part, to some of the answers given above. The Corporate Asset Transfer Group has been set up for some time now and has, I feel, achieved a lot. One of the main things was to determine what the remit was. The remit is:

- to monitor all the requests
- to ensure they are progressing
- to monitor the application policy
- to carry out reviews of the application policy (and make

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- recommendations for change if necessary)
- to provide advice to the area teams, which are to be set up separately
- to monitor resources
- to monitor not only numbers of officers, but the capacity and skill available in the Council to progress applications
- to promote capital asset transfers, rather than just accept what is asked of us
- to monitor the success of individual transfers

This is the remit at the moment, but it is subject to reconsideration.

TF How does that relate to recognising the partnership groups we already have in the areas, such as the Kincardine & Mearns Area Partnership, Formartine Partnership? Are these Partnerships going to be involved in these community asset transfers?

JG It's not just about individual community group transfers, it's also about the Council transferring on assets which may be used to better deliver services to its communities.

There is no rule about how we will address transfers. It is really for the group to come forward with a convincing case. The partnerships to which you refer are all mature groups, well used to working in tandem with the Council and contain many other groups under their umbrella – they may have a role in providing expert advice to the smaller groups on potential transfers to them.

SD Returning to caravan parks, if no community group comes forward will you be opening them up to individuals to run?

JG In the current instance the process still has stages to complete, with dialogue on going as to what the Council might choose to do if no agreement is reached, or if potentially interested partners walk away before the transfer can be accomplished. I should stress that this work doesn't fall within my team's remit, although we are the lead service. The parks have previously been advertised on the open market with no response; on this occasion, interest was sought only from outside bodies. The Council have taken the view that from 2012 it will not be providing caravan parks. Officers are still considering how to protect the local community interests if the parks were to be in private ownership – some sites have a very high alternative use value, compared to their current land use – but these alternatives would be less of a benefit to the community. I feel that private transfers would only be agreed if it was felt that there was a way of doing so and simultaneously preventing inappropriate use in the future.

IG There's a concern in my area about the buying and selling of assets not taken over by community groups. I have two caravan parks in my area

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and there were strong objections at community level about any proposal that these be sold.

- AA Thank you for your help with our investigation on Community Planning and Empowerment. You will receive the written report so please read it carefully and make any changes if required as this will become a public record. Thank you very much for coming today.

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EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION THURSDAY 25th August 2011

10.15 HOURS, WOODHILL HOUSE- COMMITTEE ROOM 2

Present: Councillors Bellarby (Chair), Allan (AA) (Vice–Chair), Cullinane (NC), Duncan (SD), Fleming (TF), Gray (IG), Hood (FH), Sullivan (MS) and Tait (IT).

Officers: Jan McRobbie, Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny and Audit) and Natalia Becka, Scrutiny and Audit Assistant.

Apologies: Councillor Thomas.

Meeting with Area Community Planning Officers: Hazel McLaren (HM) (Marr) and Mark Mitchell (MM) (Formartine).

On Thursday the 25th of August SAC invited Hazel McLaren and Mark Mitchell to give evidence on Community Planning and Empowerment.

PB Welcome and thank you for coming along today to help us with our Community Planning and Empowerment investigation. We will ask you set questions but there will also be supplementary questions through the course of our proceedings. All the questions and answers will be recorded and you will receive a record of this. Please make sure that you are happy with that as it will become a public record. This will not actually happen until we have completed the whole investigation. Perhaps we can start by each of you introducing yourself.

HM I am the Community Planning Officer of the Marr area which covers a large part of Aberdeenshire. I work with the local Community Planning Groups and with communities to enable them to realise some of their ambitions.

MM I cover the Formartine area which covers Turriff, Oldmeldrum and Ellon. I have been in post nearly two years now. I work with the Community Planning Partners in the local area to address any issues or concerns that are raised by the community or by the partners. My key role is working in partnership with the partners and the community to try and realise some of their ambitions.

TF **Question 1: In your opinion and experience, what is Community Planning and what should it do?**

HM Community Planning is a process. The term “community planning” has caused some confusion, but it is about what we all do in our

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communities. The Community Planning Groups support the communication between communities, the partners and generally support things happening in the communities. It is everybody working together to improve the quality of life in their areas and we attempt to support that process.

- MM I'd echo what Hazel has said; Community Planning is a process. It is not a department within the Council. It is not something that you have but something that you do. It is a process of working together. Different partners work together to achieve better services or facilities or other needs of the communities. The term 'Community Planning' can be confusing for communities. It is important that we work with communities to break down that barrier of what actually Community Planning is and what it means to people. That can be a difficult task. When people hear 'Planning' they immediately think about planning applications. Community Planning can be as basic as working with a local group to set up a fete or it could be something as extreme as a regeneration of a town centre. Community Planning has various aspects to it and there is no 'one size fits all'.
- HM The partnership element is a very important part of Community Planning. We achieve more by working together than we would if we were working in separate organisations. Also the representatives on the Community Planning Groups are very important as they have a direct voice on the group and it ensures there is much closer working. It should be stressed that the communities themselves are also our partners in community planning.
- TF Do you administrate the different groups to make that happen?
- HM We work with them. I would not use the term 'administrate'.
- MM I like the words 'sign post'. We are there to sign post people and to give the support and the guidance that particular groups are looking for. In terms of the Community Planning Groups, without the partners working together, a lot less would be achieved. They bring experience from different organisations and all this can come together, different models or experiences of working can be proposed or different funding. The partnership approach benefits the community.
- PB Do you think there is any merit in changing the name 'Community Planning' to something else?
- MM There would be but we have come on a long journey with the term. To change it now would confuse people even further. If it had been thought out in more detail at the beginning of the process, then that might have been an ideal opportunity, but to change it now would be a backward step.

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- HM We also need to consider the public perception of changing the brand and the impression they may get of the costs involved with that. This can be problematic. When I started three years ago, I would have been supportive of the change in the name but we have come a long way with the term. It would be difficult to do and we would have to start from the beginning with some of the work that we have already done.
- SD Hazel you cover a vast rural area. Does the same criteria apply to all areas or different criteria?
- HM As far as Community Planning itself, it is the same criteria but different areas have their own identities and politics. We have different issues to other areas, such as transport and rural isolation, but the Community Planning process itself is the same.
- MM We all have the same six principles that we adhere to and the five Community Planning themes. These criteria do not change from area to area. Every area is different and every community within that area is different. It is important to reflect such differences.
- HM We find different ways of working within that. In Marr we have Community Ward Forums which happen quarterly. We and the various partners from the group go out and meet with the Community Representatives, Community Council Representatives and the Councillors at these events. We use this process within Community Planning in Marr to deal with the rurality of the area.
- MM We have recently taken on that model in Formartine. We previously used the Formartine Forum as our main method of community engagement. The discussion at this Formartine wide forum was not localised enough for people. People were commenting that everything was about somewhere else and not about where they live. We adopted some of the work that Hazel has done and we now hold three different ward forums in the Formartine area. The response to that has been good, the numbers participating have increased and different people attend as it is held in a place where they live. We have found this to be a successful tool in engaging communities.
- AA Do you think that would be good in any of the areas?
- MM Yes. I found it to be a good exercise in finding out particular issues, the nitty gritty, of a community's issues rather than Formartine wide issues which, to some people, may not be important. It would be good to replicate that across the areas but it depends on the Community Planning Group in an area whether they wish to take that process forward.
- HM I understand that Kincardine & Mearns Community Planning Group are looking at a similar scheme. I know that when my predecessor in Marr

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Jill Sowden, tried a single contact group it didn't work as it was hard to get attendance.

IT In each area there is one local Community Planning Group. Is that a redundant model or should that be replaced by several more immediate relevant planning groups?

HM That would make things more difficult. We go out as a group to meet people as we find that the best way of doing it, but if we were to have three groups, the Community Planning officer role would be down to managing and coordinating these different groups. Getting the commitment of people to come to those groups would place more demand on both the various major partners and the communities in trying to find enough people to sit in their group and be committed to three different groups. It would also have an impact on the Area Manager's time.

IT Why the Area Manager?

HM Most commonly, Area Managers Chair the local community planning group and are very involved with Community Planning.

IT Do you think it should be mandatory that the Area Manager should be the Chair?

HM No. It is only in our situation that the Area Manager is the Chair at the moment. The Chair should be the right person at the right time.

SD **Question 2: What are the main challenges in delivering successful Community Planning?**

MM The actual title 'Community Planning' is a challenge for people. It is ambiguous and it is important to stress that it is about planning in community and not about planning applications. It is a hard task to get that across to people and also that it is not a department within the Council but a process of working with people.

HM Another challenge is the remote rural aspect of the work, the distances that are covered and the challenge of dealing with different communities. I have become aware since I have started that Aboyne, for example, is very different to Ballater and Ballater is a different community to Alford. There are different types of population, different attitudes and different views of the neighbouring populations. This makes it complicated and dealing with the distances in the time that you have is challenging. But this is what also makes it interesting.

Also, Community Planning should be seen as more than just the Council. All the partners are involved and also the community as a partner. It is wider than just the group and it is everything that we are

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doing. A challenge is getting through to people that Community Planning is a process and that we are all involved in it.

MM Another challenge that I have found is to do with natural linkages to other towns. For example, Turriff has a natural linkage to Banff, Oldmeldrum to Inverurie and Ellon towards the city. They therefore can often rely on the services from other Council areas. That in itself is difficult. There is no one focal point within Formartine where people naturally align to for access to public services, they either access them in the larger Formartine towns, if they have them or gravitate to the nearest larger settlement in other Council areas.

HM Communication can be an issue between different levels within Community Planning and within different departments and partners. If we are trying to get responses to information that we have from the community, and trying to affect a change, that can be challenging.

We recently met up with the officers responsible for the service plans for their functions to explore how better working links can be established. This process is still relatively new and will take time to become more effective.

TF You were speaking about working in partnership, we have the Mearns Area Partnership, the Kincardine & Mearns Area Partnership and Marr Area Partnership, do you closely work with them? Do you use these area partnerships in your approach on what you are doing? Also, how much influence do you have on the transport issue?

HM We work very closely with the Marr Area Partnership. We are in constant conversation with them. We employ them to run the ward forums as we find that comes better from an independent body and not seen as the Council running it directly but rather as a whole group. The Marr Area Partnership is a key part of the Community Planning Group itself and they are great.

The transport issue is a difficult one.

SD In each community in Formartine, (such as Turriff, Fyvie and Rothienorman,) there are individuals who tend to be involved with a particular organisation within that community, and so they all have different ideas of what they want for their community. Does that make things more difficult for you?

MM It is important to gather their views but also to get evidence from the rest of the community to confirm whether that is actually what they need. If any issues or suggestions come forward, we try to work with the community to prioritise them. The community as a whole should agree on the priorities for a community. If you start listening to the loudest voice, things would become difficult in that community.

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- HM We have a good example of that. In the Torphins Community Action Plan which is 18 months old, one of the key items was to move recycling bins from outside the village hall as they were deemed to have a negative impact on the visual impact of the entrance to the village. The Council asked the Community Group to carry out a survey in the community to check what the overall view was after the bins had been moved temporarily to other locations. i.e this will be reassessed as the community's choice after the trial to ensure that the voice of the majority is heard and is happy with the change.
- IT You were speaking about different priorities of different communities and how you deal with that. On the local Community Planning Groups we have one Community Council Representative for the whole area. Do you think it would be a better idea if you invited the Chairman of the local Community Council in an area where a project was going to take place, rather than have one Community Council Representative who, to my mind, does not seem to be able to represent the interests of the communities geographically spread miles away? Would it be better when dealing with a certain Community Council issue on the agenda to invite that Community Council Representative?
- MM Our Community Council Representative is now very good. Initially, while in our group, it was all about his Community Council that he was reporting back on. We encouraged him to use the Community Council Forum as a mechanism to pull information from the rest of the Community Councils. He now does a monthly phone round of his colleagues in order to be able to present a more complete picture.
- I would have no objection to have the relevant Community Council Representative present. The difficult would be that Community Councils are voluntary and people may have other commitments and cannot come to the meetings which are usually held during the day. If there were a particular project that a specific Community Council was heavily involved in, I think they should come along.
- HM We try to have a wider representation. In Marr, we now have three spaces for Community Council representatives; one from each of the three ward forums. So we already have more than a single representative.
- We would also welcome the attendance of specific Community Council representatives to speak on projects in their areas.
- SD Do you find the Community Ward Forums a good way getting past the "loud voices" of individuals?
- HM Yes - they also seem to be a good social activity between Community Councils, which is very positive as there are a lot of discussions between them at the meetings. We also ask them for feedback after

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every meeting and we respond to the feedback they give us and organise training or workshops for them if required. The feedback to date shows that people are getting a lot out of it and would like to meet more often.

- MM Some of our Community Council Representatives have said that they benefit greatly from the Community Ward Forums as they manage to get in touch with different individuals within a community who they may not have been able to connect with at all. It is a good networking opportunity. People within the community also get to know who their Community Council representative is.
- FH I attend a number of Community Councils but I never see Community Planning as an item on the agenda. What do you think could be done to help the Community Councils be more involved in Community Planning?
- MM When I send out information, like our newsletters or information on events, I assume these are going on the Community Council agenda for discussion. But perhaps that is not happening in all Community Councils.
- FH It is not happening in the ones that I go to.
- HM I would presume that after the Community Ward Forums they are talking about what is happening within their communities. They may be talking about subjects which are actually community planning in their areas but they just do not see the link to "Community Planning" as these are not badged as such. We do not go to the Community Council meetings since the Community Ward Forums have taken off but most of the Community Councils are engaging with us at the Community Ward Forums so I would presume that is going through to their meetings.
- MM I attend the Community Council Forum in Formartine. Numbers attending were quite low. We're in the process of adapting the forum to better meet the needs of Community Councils. Changes have been made to the actual forum style whereby more presentations from the Council services and Community Planning Partners are given to the Community Council members. This has helped to improve the link between Community Planning and the Community Councils. We also work with Community Councils outside the meetings. For example, there's ongoing work with Ellon Community Council on a Town Centre Planning For Real. Local Community Planning Partners are also working with Belhelvie Community Council on tying up after a Planning For Real event, including generation of an action plan. It's not feasible for Community Planning Officers to attend every individual community council meeting, and I feel the new ward forums and Formartine Community Council Forum are operating well in two way communication – attendees bring information to the table and also take

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information back to their communities.

- HM In Marr, the ward forums function as our Community Council Forums too – there may be an issue about representation. However, Community Councils own their own agendas – it may be hard to influence them to add a formal reference to community planning.
- FH Can this be brought up in the Community Council Forum meetings as a suggestion that the Community Councils consider having Community Planning as an item on their agenda for discussion?
- HM If they are working on Community Action Plans, a process in which community council input is central, then they will be discussing Community Planning.
- MM I think there would be an expectation if Community Planning were on the agenda, that we were there to present something to them.
- FH No, I do not think so. They would just be discussing local Community Planning issues. If Community Planning type of work is happening in their Community Council area, it should have an update on what stage it is at, or it should be feeding some input into their discussions.
- HM Again that might already be on the agenda as a specific project rather than badged as Community Planning itself.
- FH They should also be aware of the Community Plan, if there is one, which I do not think they generally are.
- MS I agree. Discussion of “Community Planning matters” could be a useful addition to the Community Council agendas.
- TF I would like to correct the imbalance that seems to be appearing here. I attend the Mearns Community Council and the Mearns Community Council is very aware of the Community Action Plan and they have the documents for the Community Councillors to look at. It is for discussion, not at every meeting, but it is certainly there on their agenda. The Mearns Community Council is also very aware that the forum is the place to push that type of issues through and they actively do that.
- FH We have 74 Community Councils in Aberdeenshire. We do not have representatives from all the wards at this meeting so the question needs to be asked in a wider context. We need to find out what is happening in the 74 Community Councils.
- PB Possibly this is an area where good practice could be shared?
- AA **Question 3: How aware are you of the diverse strands of other**

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services, council or partner organisations, who also work in community empowerment in the areas? Do you need to be aware of these?

HM We work very closely with some of them, for example Community Learning & Development (CLD) and Public Health, to reduce the amount of work and effort that needs to go into things. We've also got very strong links to the Marr Area Partnership. Within certain services of the Council, there will be things happening that we do not know about but as we know how services are set up, we can direct people and find out.

MM It is vital that we work with services like Community Learning & Development and Public Health as they too are working on community engagement. It is important not to duplicate work.

PB One of the unique features of Marr is that part of the area is the Cairngorms National Park. Does that have any impact on how you do things?

HM We have a Cairngorms National Park Representative on the local community planning group. Its inclusion means that we can access different funding pots, such as Leader funding. We treat East Cairngorms as another part of the area and we will do things slightly differently to suit its particular needs as we do for all the different communities within Marr. Some of its issues are not dissimilar to other parts of Marr, such as Strathdon.

We get additional resources via the national park area, but equally we need more resources – it's a far flung area and it needs more to make an impact.

TF To clarify, are you are saying that you treat East Cairngorms as a different area? Do you treat that as a different area from Aberdeenshire or do you treat it as a different area from the Cairngorms part?

HM We treat it as a different area within Marr.

FH **Question 4: How is agreement reached between council services as to who should lead on community empowerment issues? How is the best way forward agreed in terms of resource allocation for specific projects and initiatives?**

MM At a strategic level, that is something that we would not be involved in. At a local level, there would be focus on the Community Planning Group to take on Community Empowerment, working alongside departments such as the NHS, Grampian or local partnerships.

HM At a local level, we agree amongst ourselves who would take projects

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forward and usually there is an obvious person within the group. The local community planning group would agree unanimously on the budgeting of funding allocations.

PB We're aware of many different council services with a remit for community empowerment – the question is, would this be better done not by the Council, but someone else?

MM It's difficult for us to gauge who may be involved in what services are doing. It's obvious that CLD are doing it, but for example what about roads? I'm not always sure who within Council services is involved in community empowerment work, as most services will be working with their service users to improve their community and or service but to what extent are they empowering the community to do it for themselves?

Local Community Planning Groups could enable council services to access local groups through the networks we have. I feel that the partnership route means we can get more for the money and less of a single organisation leading with their own agenda.

AA Do you think Council services are doing enough of consulting with communities to get it right, rather than just going ahead and doing something, then finding out that is something that nobody wanted? Is there a gap there, do you think?

HM It depends on the individual services and individual situations. There was talk about a Park & Ride from Banchory which stirred up unhappiness in the community, with plans to have a consultation on that, but I do not think that is going to happen. We are a good route to come through to access communities and their views, either through the forums that we organise, or through the Community Action Planning processes.

At last night's forum, we had representatives from the Council's Community Care team, promoting their new dementia website.

AA Is Community Planning embedded enough in all the Council services?

HM No, but we are working on it.

IT Would I be correct to say that, in terms of services, the officers in the services identify needs in the communities as far as their service and they bring them forward to the local Community Planning Group which are then endorsed and included in the local Community Plan? I would like to use an example of failure in communication between local Community Planning Group and a local Community Group in Fraserburgh. The local Community Planning Group decided on a particular course of action about traffic management. This is what the

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service wanted but when it was implemented, about 90% of the people in the estate objected, and had petitions but their views were ignored. Is that not an example of how a service objective overrides, in practice, what a local community wants?

- HM In regards to Community Plans, in their initial formations, we had submissions from the services of actions that they wanted to go into the plan. We accepted actions from the services, the community, and the partners, and we pulled them all together into a single community plan. We are going to be changing this process. In Marr we are looking at guidelines of what is to come into the plan. For instance, one of our actions in the current plan is for forestry and it was about implementing things they have to implement by law anyway, so that should not have gone into the plan.
- IT Are you advocating that before something goes into the plan, there should be a community consultation i.e. that there should be bottom up consultation?
- MM Any actions that come from services would come to the Community Planning Group for discussion before they were even accepted into the plan. If the group then felt that the action should be in the plan, the draft plan would go out for consultation to the community. We would then address any issues that would come up from the consultation. We would not take something from the service and put it straight in, without consulting with the community.
- HM We were putting in actions that were submitted from the services on the basis that we had expected the services to have done their ground work. But we are changing this at the moment. Also we will not be allowing partner strategic actions to come in as we want actions that are happening directly in communities. We want council services to be influenced by bottom up comments.
- IT You made a very interesting point about not allowing strategic issues to come in. This is what happened in this case. The service sneaked it through by saying that it wanted a particular form of traffic management but did not explicitly say what. If it had made it plain, the community would have been aware of it before it even got into the plan.
- FH Picking up on the second part of the question about resource allocation and how specific projects are identified. We have less money. Do you have a scoring matrix system that you use to score each of the ideas that come in from the communities as surely we will not be able to do them all? How do you score them so that when the community finds out that their idea is not taken forward into the plan they can see some reasoning behind it?
- HM We tend to refer to the Community Action Plan to identify which should

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be pursued – it should be noted that this may group wider actions together.

MM When we carry out Community Engagement we tend to there and then get people to prioritise what is coming forward. We've used electronic voting which gives a clear picture of what the priorities are. Also within our Community Plan we put in a line that emphasises to communities that some things in that plan are aspirations and due to funding, resources or staffing not all actions can be achieved. But it is vital that when actions are not achieved we feed that back to the communities.

FH So what you are saying is that you actually prioritise issues when you are attending community events?

MM That is one way of doing it. We have to look at all actions as some actions may be priorities for others. We can sometime combine priorities together.

HM I agree – the community action plan process leads to very clear priorities. It makes it clear it's up to them to help support activities which need to be funded. We could group a number of actions in the plan under one if they refer to the same issue in different communities, but some will remain location specific.

I'd also stress that the process is taken seriously – we didn't have a big list last time.

MS **Question 5: How do you match projects to funding sources? Do you need to know about potential funding options or are you able to refer groups on to someone who does? Do you every specifically shape projects to fit funding criteria?**

HM We need to have a general idea of what is out there but we forward people to other organisations, such as IUS (?) to get funding advice if the project refers to communities of interest, and to the Marr Area Partnership if it is a locality issue. We give out the information that we have and if a funding stream comes in that we see would fit something in particular, then we try and match things up as long as the project itself fits the funding criteria. I would not want to be looking at funding on an opportunistic basis.

MM It is important to stress that projects should be developing on need and not only on the basis that there is a funding stream available. It's not a case of saying, there's a pot of money available – go make a project to fit it. A project needs to be identified as a need to communities. As Community Planning Officers we do not sit down with others to try to identify funding streams – there are other community engagement partners who could support that process. But we need to be aware of funding streams out there.

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MS Would it be correct to say that having identified a project, you then look around for funding?

MM Yes, if that project has been identified as a need you then need to find resources to meet that need.

HM Yes.

TF **Question 6: How do local Community Planning Partnerships relate to the Executive and the Board? Are there any barriers to effective two way communication on the delivery of strategic themes and in responding to specific local needs?**

MM At one point, there was a natural linkage with the local community planning group Chairs sitting on the Executive. That produced a natural linkage between the Executive and the Community Planning Groups. But group Chairs have been removed from the Executive – only one (the Marr Area Manager, Les Allan) now attends and has responsibility to report back to all 6 area community planning groups – this makes it more difficult.

More recently we have been giving the Community Planning Executive agenda some weeks before the Executive is to meet. This allows the local Community Planning Groups and Community Planning Officers to comments or request additions to it. This has helped communication but it is still not very good between local groups and the Executive and the Board.

HM Also, there are now more meetings of area and central community planning officers. It's recently been agreed that the area community planning officers be invited to attend the Board on a rota basis. This had never happened before.

MM Improvements are being made to help address the communication gap but there is still important reliance on the partners who sit at the Executive and Board level to be speaking with the other parts within their organisation down the chain. For example, the Police could be speaking with the Executive level representatives and the Board and should cascade that information in the police. It is not just the reliance on us being the communicator between the different levels but it also needs to be on the partners. They need to take responsibility for communicating community planning issues through out their organisation.

IT How do you view the Executive? It is strategic, setting the general policy or more involved in directing implementation?

MM I see the Executive as the overarching structure for Community

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Planning Groups but also the decision body for the Aberdeenshire-wide community planning activity. For example, the Westhill Service Point (a joint venture between Grampian Police and the Council) was pursued by the local group with endorsement from the Executive.

They also allocate our funding.

HM The Executive is the overarching point where Community Planning Partners come together and agree things like funding streams.

MS Is the communication between local Community Planning Groups and the Executive satisfactory?

MM I would not say it is satisfactory but it is improving.

SD **Question 7: How should the relationships between local members and the local Community Planning Group work?**

HM As a partnership, we have joint meetings on a six monthly basis of the Marr Area Committee, the Marr Area Management Team and Marr Community Planning Group. Cllr Moira Ingleby, the Marr Area Chair, is on the local Community Planning Group. We look at things like monitoring the plan and ensuring clear communication with all interested parties being in the same room at the same time. Councillors are also involved in the Partnership by being represented by the area chair, who shares information with the rest of the Committee. Members are very much part of the whole thing.

MM We do the same. We have meetings on a six monthly basis with the Area Committee, Area Management Team and the Community Planning Group looking at the Community Plan and any emerging issues or needs that are coming forward.

I personally feel that when I am corresponding with Councillors on community planning issues, I get a good response from them.

We also have a Community Partnership Working Guide which each area has. Each area has slightly different rules and remits within the guide which stipulates how each member of the Community Planning Group should operate – there's a clearly defined role for elected members in this guide.

IT Does communication with the other area committee members therefore rest solely with the single councillor representative on the group, in most instances, the area chair?

HM There are other points of contact – for example; in Marr we have ward forums. One last night involved not only Councillor Ingleby, but also other ward members, including Councillor Joanna Strathdee. We see

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all members regularly and have good contact with them.

IT Question 8: How can greater awareness be raised on the role, remit and operation of Community Planning within partner organisations, including with Councillors and Officers of Aberdeenshire?

MM It is important that within the services of the Council the Heads of Service, or Directors or that type of level, inform their teams about Community Planning. It needs to come from top down through the teams within the Council, detailing what Community Planning is and how it works. It is hard for us to try to work with services if our role is not recognised.

HM Yes, it is difficult for us if it is not recognised at the top.

AA Question 9: Are there areas where improvements should be considered – are you aware of good practice in other Council areas which Aberdeenshire might consider?

MM I mentioned some possible improvements when looking at challenges covered in question two. Communication is a huge issue and needs to be improved not just between the local groups and the Executive and the Board, but also between different strands of the Council and Partner organisations.

HM There is a challenge in regards to disparate or remote rural communities. But we need to deal with that as there is not much that we can change. A key improvement would be to get through the idea of Community Planning as a process, one in which we're all involved. Once that is more fully understood, it will make things a lot easier.

I should say, however, that despite the challenges, the work and success of the Marr Community Planning partnerships was commended in the recent Christie Commission report as continuously improving and establishing better communication to its groups for sharing in their own organisations.

It's not perfect, but we're trying to do our best.

PB Thank you to you both for coming this morning and sharing your thoughts with us. It is very helpful to our investigation. You will receive a record of this, please make sure that you are happy with it.

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EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION THURSDAY 25th August 2011

11.30 HOURS, WOODHILL HOUSE- COMMITTEE ROOM 2

Present: Councillors Bellarby (Chair), Allan (AA) (Vice-Chair), Cullinane (NC), Duncan (SD), Fleming (TF), Hood (FH), Sullivan (MS) and Tait (IT).

Officers: Jan McRobbie, Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny and Audit) and Natalia Becka, Scrutiny and Audit Assistant.

Apologies: Councillors Gray (IG) and Thomas (RT)

Evidence from Karen McWilliam (KM), Area Committee Officer, Kincardine & Mearns

PB Welcome and thank you for coming along today to help us with our Community Planning and Empowerment investigation. We will ask you the set questions but there will also be supplementary questions through the course of our proceedings. All the questions and answers will be recorded and you will receive a record of this. Please make sure that you are happy with this as it will become a public record of the Committee. This will not actually happen until we have completed the whole investigation.

MS Question 1: Please tell us about your background in working in community planning in different council services and functions.

KM I used to be a community learning worker prior to this post and I was involved in community planning in regards to education learning and leisure. I was also a development worker with rural partnership, carrying out research for Communities Scotland on community engagement and community planning. This brought me into the field of community planning. I am currently a member of the local Community Planning Group and the Area Management Team. I support local members and rural partnerships. I attend their meetings and feedback information. My degree is in community regeneration. Most recently in this post I have been involved in the Council's community engagement strategy and regeneration project in the coastal zones.

PB At this point I ought to declare an interest since I am the Chair of the Stonehaven Town Partnership, one of the local partnership groups.

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FH Question 2: In your opinion and experience, what is community planning and what should it do?

KM I think community planning is a means of getting services, partners and the community to look realistically at service delivery. Looking at what is required, what is aspirational and what the possible solutions might be. I think it is a way of working with local people to allow them to influence service delivery, working with partners and services. It is all about influencing delivery of services to communities. Personally I feel that it is a pity that we had to re-badge this as I do not think this is necessarily new. I think that community planning has happened for years. We have some examples in Kincardine & Mearns of community planning through the Mearns Area Partnership, established in 1992 by the Social Strategy Unit of the then Grampian Regional Council. Their remit was community planning. Sometimes I think there is a myth that we have created this new theme of something that actually already existed. I personally think this might have caused confusion.

Community planning is about co-ordinating partnership working on cross-cutting issues and themes. I think it is about the best use of money available to achieve the best value for communities.

FH I take on board what you have said; that community planning type work probably already existed. But do you think that community planning has formalised what was going on in the past, because we now have the stated community planning themes and things like that?

KM Yes perhaps. But I think that in some instances and in some areas rural partnerships, and again I can only talk about my area, the Mearns Area Partnership is a multiagency partnership, so Police, Fire Services, health representatives, the Council, Social Work and Education are all working together responding to local issues. So I do think that certainly some of that did exist. But yes of course we are formalising it and we are also offering more support because there are Area Community Planning Officers who are working in the field and with the partners.

PB Do you find any difficulty with the term 'Community Planning' itself?

KM I do not have any personal issue with it. I think that there was a view that the word 'planning' caused confusion but the process is bedding in now and people are becoming more aware of community planning. There have been some community representatives that have suggested a change of name might assist the process. There may be merit in referring to building of physical structures, "development planning" as opposed to community planning. Communities are starting to get a handle on what the Council and its partners are

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trying to achieve. I think community planning as a name is fine.

MS Is there duplication between area partnerships and the local community planning groups?

KM I do not think there is duplication. I think there have been, and there are, tensions. I have certainly witnessed tensions. We are at the stages now where there are jobs being lost and there are cuts in funding so people are more reluctant to hand over information on projects in case it is "hi-jacked" and badged as someone else's work. I think that exists although we are working hard to work as a partnership and will develop through self evaluation.

TF Would you say that community planning is really trying to change emphasis from the Council telling people what to do, to the people asking the Council what they would like to do?

KM I think that is certainly an aspiration and I think that is something we are aiming for. The local community plans that are produced by the six areas are probably heading more into that direction. Although I think there might be an issue there, where services and partners put items in the local community plan that are part of their core work. I think that needs to be looked at more closely. I am not suggesting that services' and partners' core work should not be in a local community plan, but I think there needs to be some rationale there that new projects, new initiatives, coming from communities are captured. Whilst we might not be able to deliver, they should still be in the plan, with an opportunity for funding packages or methods of realising them to be considered.

IT First of all I would like to say that I appreciate your down to earth, common sense approach. You said some of the most wonderful things that I have heard in this investigation so far. It is really good to hear crystal clear logic and common sense being spoken. So many fancy phrases float about with all this and you hear things about the Council telling communities what to do, or communities asking the Council what to do. If it is meant to be the latter, communities have always asked the Council for support as to what they would like to do. You are an enthusiast for this process; would you not agree? You will find every means possible to get assistance of your particular project. So if everything else is going to be formalised, does this dialogue between the Council and other partners, and the communities have to be formalised as well?

KM No, probably not. I think what we also must be aware that sometimes in our engagement exercises we get, as you are well aware, the "usual suspects", so the projects that come forward can be projects of a small sample of the community and maybe not the views of the majority. I do not think that we need to formalise everything that

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happens in a community; sometimes we ought to let the community do what it wants to do itself. If there are any issues that they cannot overcome, then they can come to us as a Local Community Planning Group to either resolve through partnership or lobby for future consideration by partners.

SD You have highlighted something in your answer just now that ties in with what the previous people that come to us have said; that dominant individuals have effect on projects and try to push them through. How do you think that can be avoided?

KM We cannot dismiss local knowledge. The area managers, the community learning workers, the social workers, teachers, police, fire and rescue etc - they all have a part to play in that. The professionals will have, by and large, a very good overview of what is required/sustainable in a community. Sometimes the silent majority are very happy with what they have; and the people that come forward are not necessarily representative. I think through the National Standards for Community Engagement, which I know the Council has adopted, are meant to enable and support robust community engagement. I know that for some this can be a bit of a box ticking exercise but if you do use the Standards properly you can identify if you have given due consideration to disadvantaged and hard to reach groups in communities. This may be people who have mental or physical disabilities and there are people from late teens to mid twenties that we hardly every capture. The reason that I know that is that one of the pieces of work that I did for Communities Scotland was about community engagement. I actually went into the pubs to speak to people from that age group to try and capture their views. I think there are people who do not want to be involved and we should respect that also.

NC Question 3: What are the main challenges in delivering successful community planning?

KM Partner buy-in and service buy-in are issues. I think the community engagement strategy that we prepared has a systematic approach to engagement but it can be hard to fully take cognisance of what comes out of engagement. If actions do not sit comfortably in Service Plans and or there is not a suitable funding programme, it can be difficult to achieve outcomes. So that is about resources.

Communication is also something that we need to strengthen in terms of delivering successful projects.

AA Question 4: In your experience, how do diverse strands of Council services, or partner organisations, work together in community empowerment?

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KM I think cross-service/ partner working is improving, although with fewer staff there will be a knock-on effect. In the current climate services may be resistant to sharing some project information with the community planning officers because it might be seen as a project steered by the community planning officers rather than, for example, the community learning and development (CLD) staff. I think there are tensions there. Equally, community planning officers seem to work in the different areas in different ways. Some of the work in which I have seen community planning officers involved appears like the work that you would expect a social worker or a CLD worker to be involved in. Therefore I think the role and remit of the area community planning officers should be more consistent, even taking account the different area dimensions. In my opinion, CPOs facilitate the needs of cross-service/ partner groups

I also think communities sometimes manipulate the diverseness of what we have created as a community planning group. By that I mean that they can appear not to understand what community planning is if it suits them.

PB You have mentioned community learning and development. How does that actually fit in with community planning?

KM A lot of the engagement work that we would be using for community planning might be carried out by community learning and development staff or social work. I think sometimes the role of the area community planning officer and the role of the community learning and development staff is a little muddled and sometimes they may be trying to achieve the same goals.

PB What about the relationship with the rural partnerships?

KM It is a similar situation. I think it is not all negative, but there are roles and responsibilities that could be clearer and more defined - then people may not be so protective of the work they are involved in. It is not all negative; there is some excellent partnership working but I am trying to highlight what I think the issues are, for improvements, in what is proving to be a success story.

TF Community engagement, Community Councils and Community Council forums seem to build together. Do you think the Community Council Forum, where all the Community Councils in an area come together, is a good way to highlight or sieve out issues in community planning?

KM Yes. I think it is a reasonable method. I know that in some areas there are community planning forums rather than community council forums therefore you could elect a wider member representation. The K&M CC Forum have also elected to hold two of their meetings

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as wider CP Forums as a pilot. CC Forums are a reasonable method of capturing the views of communities. But we also have to be careful that we do not over-prescribe meetings for people to attend and to hear about the same community issues. In our area, the Community Council Forum is effective and we get very good representation from the Community Councils. There is also the argument about how representative Community Councils are. I think with a forum, where you might have more than a Community Council present, you might end up with a more balanced view of community

- TF I am coming back to the Councillor Duncan's theme on the strong group or the loud mouth shouting the loudest and things like that. Has that enhanced this position or downed it a bit?
- KM I think if we had a forum where there were more than community council representatives present that would down it a bit. But equally, the community council forum does because you get the spokespeople of, let's say, Stonehaven up against the spokespeople of Laurencekirk, so in many ways that can be a fairly good overview of Kincardine and Mearns. I think there is probably a place for both but again there is an issue of defining what we would expect from the different groups.
- IT Speaking about the communication with the Council services and what we perceive sometimes as a service reluctant to share with the community planning people. Do you feel there is any element of protectiveness coming from the fact that the service perceive itself as being able to efficiently carry out the work directly, whereas if it was defused into community planning, the service might not be able to deliver the works as efficiently as it could?
- KM That could be the case, although I think there is evidence that would indicate that through shared partnership working we can achieve more, particularly in the current financial times. For example, let's say, community learning and development officers want to be involved in street football. This could be shared with social work and the police and can actually achieve a whole lot more. In some instances yes, services may find it easier just to deliver projects themselves for easy of process. I think in other instances they may choose not to share work for the purpose of portraying what any one partner can do without a collection of others hence promoting their value.
- IT The question that is begged from that, is why should they come to the local community planning group when they can contact other relevant services directly? So if it is, for example, something involving the Police, why should they come to you rather than just go to the service directly?

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- KM I think it is good practise, in many cases, for others to be particularly if the other partners can enhance what is being offered and also often for the purposes of communicating to others. I think it creates a network where it is possible for somebody from one agency to hear about something of which they had no previous background knowledge, and may think, "Actually, we might be involved in that" and see a possible role. There is a place for it.
- SD Can you please clarify a point? You were speaking about services being protective over projects and things. Does that apply within the Council services or are you speaking about the Police and so on?
- KM The whole lot – it can apply across all partners.
- SD Question 5: How is agreement reached between council services as to who should lead on community empowerment issues? How should the best way forward be agreed in terms of resource allocation for specific projects and initiatives?**
- KM I think the local community planning groups and the area management team locally try to resolve community engagement findings and influence service provision. I am not sure that I would use the word 'empowerment' as I wonder if that is a kind of "Scottish Government speak". I would say community 'engagement' findings. For us, it would be about local community planning groups and area management team trying to resolve community issues. The best way forward in terms of resource allocation would probably be by formalising a wider forum group and also probably 'beefing up' the area management team.
- SD Do you hold these forums?
- KM We have a community council forum and we are going to pilot community planning forum.
- PB Can you tell us more about the community planning forum?
- KM We have several means by which communities can feed into community planning. All the rural partnerships are involved in the Local Community Planning Group.

There is only one community council representative at that group and you have to question whether that one community council representative is a representative of all the Kincardine & Mearns. At present, the current representative is from the Mearns so he probably has very little contact with Portlethen. However the community planning officers have set up a means of supporting that individual to disseminate information to all Community Councils. But I am not convinced that he gets a whole lot back. I wonder, if I were a

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Community Council person myself in Portlethen, if I would give my local information to somebody from Mearns to then feed to the community planning group, when I can just go straight to either my area manager or my area community planning officer. At the moment we only have one Elected Member on the Local Community Planning Group, so it is there job to keep information flowing to the other eleven members.

That said we have in Kincardine & Mearns a successful new system of presenting community planning information to the area committee. It is a traffic light system, reporting on actions in the local community plan. It shows if there has been improvement or if there has been no improvement: a down arrow for no improvement, a static arrow if nothing has happened and an up arrow if things are progressing. It is an easy way for Members to see what the issues are.

IT Do you have that going just now?

KM Yes, we do. We have done this twice now and I think it has been adopted by other areas.

IT Chair, I thought it was very interesting when Karen was speaking about the funding issues. Karen, you took your time to think of your response to 'best way forward to be agreed in terms of resource allocation' and I noticed you referring to your notes. One of the assumptions that you came up with was 'beefing up the area management team'. Is there a dichotomy between the local community planning group suggesting projects, which can only go forward if the local area management team agree to share resource allocation?

KM In terms of projects that are Council specific, of course the area management team has no representation from the Police, the Fire Service etc but I think that if the area management team had possibly a stronger representation of services in each area then perhaps that might be a way forward.

IT Can you maybe just elaborate – "stronger representation"?

KM Maybe we are in a state of flux because of the changes to the staff, but I do not think we have we have all the services fully represented in the area management team, certainly not at all meetings which can make things difficult to progress I think that sometimes getting the right people round the table might be difficult.

IT And the view would be that since the area manager chairs the area management team and the area manager sits on the local community planning group we would have established the communication channel?

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- KM Yes.
- IT So is that then a requirement that the area manager should always be the chairman of any local community planning group?
- KM My personal opinion is that yes, almost definitely for the sake of continuity.
- TF Question 6: How do local community planning partnerships relate to the Executive and Board? Are there any barriers to effective two way communication on the delivery of strategic themes and in responding to specific local needs?**
- KM There has been a lack of effective two way communication between the Board and Local Community Planning Groups. Sometimes the Local Community Planning Group has felt a little disassociated with the Executive and the Board. I think I am right in saying that only one area manager sits on the Board whereas in the past I think there was more than one. I suspect that having one area manager at Board level is possibly not enough and I think that it would be an automatic improvement if the six area managers were part of the Board.
- PB What kind of things do come down from the Executive or the Board? For example, do you get things saying the Executive and the Board have agreed that community safety is a big thing and they want to press this so then they tell all the local groups that this is something they should do something about?
- KM Yes there is communication and I think it is improving. In fact Ally Macleod has been attending Local Community Planning Groups but that is fairly new. One example was that we in Kincardine & Mearns had an issue with the delivery of child care, either at nursery level or play group level, and there was quite an issue with the potential reduction of that service, this was fed to the Board.
- PB Did it work?
- KM It is too early to say as I am not yet aware of a collective Shire view/action.
- TF Continuing on that, would it be right to say that the Executive and the Board set the strategic agenda which flies over the top of all local community planning groups and if there is any communication at all it really should be from the local community planning groups back to the Board?
- KM Yes, I think that is the way it is meant to work. There should be issues captured as grass roots level feed to the local group and if there is a strategic action required this should be fed to the Executive

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Board for consideration in inform strategic plans.

SD In this investigation I keep getting the feeling that there is the Board and the Executive, and then there is the lack of communication down to the local community level. Do you think we need both of them or is there duplication of effort there?

KM I honestly could not comment as I do not know enough about the governance structures and how they operate.

IT Question 7: How should the relationships between local members and the local Community Planning Group work?

KM There should be easy access for local members to work with the local Community Planning Group and at present there is one Local Member on the group but a good range and various methods of involving other Local Members in the process.

We introduced reports that are designed to show instantly if issues in the local community plan are not progressing and the reasons for them not progressing. The partners, when they are submitting information to the Area Community Planning Officers about targets in the plan, are not just allowed to say it is ongoing but there has to be a reason for it not progressing, or some kind of dialogue, so that the local members are made aware of why things are not progressing (for example through lack of available funding. I think this reporting is a step forward.

IT Is this the Traffic Lights System report that comes to the area committee?

KM Yes, we had that now twice at our committee. My understanding is that this is being rolled out in all the areas. It is a monitoring report of the local community plan and all the issues are encompassed in this monitoring report and show clearly if things are progressing, if they are not progressing and why are they not progressing. There may be valid reasons for example lack of funding. In my opinion this has been one method and one solution to keeping members more aware.

IT Would it be an improvement to actually include in that report to the area committee projects which are imminent, rather than those just at implementation phase?

KM Yes, that would be an improvement. We're also looking at action setting meetings with the local members to inform the next local community planning plan, including actions flowing from the community. Local members are going to be far more involved in the action setting which I think will help.

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- IT Is that process to be applied across all areas of Aberdeenshire?
- KM Yes, that is my understanding.
- AA Question 8: How can greater awareness be raised on the role, remit and operation of Community Planning within partner organisations, including with councillors and officers of Aberdeenshire?**
- KM I think as I have probably previously said, we need to define the role and responsibility of the Area Community Planning Officers, both to partners and Council services. I think if that were better defined then we would possibly be more comfortable in sharing and working closer together. I think we have made a lot of progress with our e-bulletin and that is a good way of sharing what partners are doing and offering up easy information for all members of the public to access.
- IT How does the e-bulletin go out? Does that go out on the Council's website or how do you get that out?
- KM We post it on the community planning website for Kincardine and Mearns. We have been closely looking at communications which I think has been seen as a bit of an issue. There is a communication strategy being formalised and agreed and within that we have a mailing list for the e-bulletin which will include all community councils and elected members.
- IT Do you think there would be any remit in generalising that across Aberdeenshire so that people in another area could pick up on an idea that another area has hit upon, so they could share?
- KM Yes, that is a really good point. I suspect that if I were a member of the public in Kincardine and Mearns and I was looking at this e-bulletin or the community planning website, I would not be looking at the Buchan information, for example.
- IT No, you would just look at your own.
- KM Having said that, as far as community engagement, one of the strategy items was sharing good practice. Each area was to put forward something they felt showed good partnership practice and that others might want to copy. We, area offices, certainly do that. We try to highlight something that we have created and we feel that it works and share that with other area offices. I guess there is no reason why that could not be shared with the partners.
- PB How does this sharing work? How do you actually do the sharing?

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- KM Well, with the area offices it is quite simple because we have a network in order to be able to do that. In regards to the community engagement strategy, the agreement was that it was handled by the rural partnerships. The rural partnerships may put forward a project that they have been involved with and they thought worked well and in a short piece of work (paragraph) state what they did, why it worked and if there were any pitfalls, and if so what they were.
- PB Question 9: Are there any areas where improvements could be considered – are you aware of good practice in other council areas which Aberdeenshire might consider?**
- KM In regards to the Community Planning Groups and the Area Management Teams, thinking specifically about the Council - I cannot speak about the partners - I think there needs to be a better way of responding to community led consultations. We are still not good enough at that. If there has been a robust engagement exercise such as Planning for Real producing information that has been meaningful across different sectors and I think that we need to be much slicker at progressing that with the services and with partners. If we are not able to act on the proposals, we need to feed that back to the community giving reasons.
- PB How do you deal with unrealistic expectations coming out of community engagement? Say they are saying "right, we want a bus service between Stonehaven and Montrose every ten minutes"?
- KM Dialogue. If you have a dialogue with the community, you can be open with them and say "it is not realistic, we cannot do that". We have gone out to different Shaping Aberdeenshire events relating to the need to make budget cuts. By and large, at the ones that I have attended, people have been understanding. It is possibly just about being open, honest and realistic.
- PB Have you had the opportunity of looking at what happens in other council areas?
- KM I have seen some of the leaflets produced by Angus Council. They are very good at producing documents, with lots of cross partner working apparent. I have always thought they were a step ahead of us in terms of community planning, but I do not know if they actually are.
- PB What was good about these leaflets?
- KM Lots of cross-partner working was apparent in the documents, good interaction with community groups also.
- FH But is this really happening?

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KM I do not know. When I was a development worker and we were doing work for Communities Scotland and we were looking at engagement I contacted the Angus Council and Aberdeen City Council. This was a number of years ago, they were no further than Aberdeenshire was, at that stage, in terms of community planning.

MS We have local community planning groups, we have area partnerships, we have Community Learning and Development and Community Development Groups, we have area committees and various community councils, have we gone a group too far?

KM I have to be honest, yes. Yes I think we have, but it is very difficult to rationalise.

SD Which one of these groups?

KM Exactly, that is the difficulty. I went round the community councils when I started in this post so that they would get to know me and I would get to know them. Also most recently the community councils on the coastal strip of Kincardine & Mearns as we have done a fairly intensive bit of engagement there and drawing up an action plan as we have been designated as a regeneration priority area. Now, I have to say that this piece of work has been largely done by the area manager, community planning partners are involved but it has been largely done by the Area Office. Not all community councils are robust – they can to be full of “the usual suspects” and I am not sure how representative they always are. I should stress, I am not saying that they are not representative.

Equally with the local development plan, we went out to all our local community councils and we encouraged the community councils to go to their communities on the proposals. Piers Blaxter did the presentation and we provided support and scribing. We do offer a lot of support to community councils.

PB Some Community Councils are very good at engaging with their communities; others seem less good.

KM Deciding which of the groups would not be required is very difficult. We have three rural partnerships in Kincardine & Mearns. They do cover different areas/ interests but there can be tensions because you then have three different groups that come together and they all have their own idea.

IT Do they all have their separate funding as well?

KM Yes they do.

IT From the Council?

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- KM Yes.
- IT Is that £25,000?
- KM It is £23,000 from economic development and is spilt across the three in sums of £9.5K, £9K and £8.5K. There is also £4K via the Area Manager.
- TF In your travels around the community councils, how many community councillors who were elected did you meet?
- PB All community councillors are elected – not all elections are contested.
- KM Maybe one.
- FH I have only seen one election being done for a community council and I think the total votes cast was only something like 41 votes out of a community of 3,000. So I take your point about community councils perhaps not being representative of their communities.
- KM I think we do try to support them. Three of the area officers, Maureen Stephen, Alison Cumming and myself are trying to put together a tool box for community councils, things that they can use if they want to carry out community engagement exercise etc But we cannot force them to use it
- FH And of course they are all volunteers.
- KM And that is often a difficulty when working in a group if things get too onerous, volunteers may go.
- AA There is difficulty in engaging with their own communities. I attended Cluny and Midmar meeting, and there was discussion of a P&J advert to try to get news out. I think it might be harder in the more rural communities
- SD I have a wonderful community council in my area that made magnificent effort to mail drop a questionnaire to find out what the community wanted. They distributed 550 leaflets, delivered by hand and received back only 27. Very disappointing.
- KM I would just like to add to the point about areas that we could improve. I am sure that you are all aware that the Town Centre Regeneration Funding, for example, has tight deadlines to deliver the right projects. We were very lucky in Kincardine & Mearns because we had a project that we were aware of in Laurencekirk that was good to go. This scheme was progressed via the area office. If community planning could be a step ahead of the game and have projects right and ready to go, and if we were to say to the members

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of the community that we might not be able to deliver them but if we have it ready to go, we would be aware of them and more able to respond to the opportunity to attract funding when it came on the stream. Brechin (in Angus) most recently lost their Town Centre Regeneration Funding allocation because they tried to put it all together at the last minute and it did not work. The project did not happen. There is a case there for encouraging and making communities aware that often funding becomes available with tight deadlines and community action plans – ripe ready projects are a good way forward.

- MS Is there not an interesting example of this with this European Fisheries Funding Axis 4.
- KM Yes and this is causing a bit of an anxiety at the moment. Communities are aware of the fund but not sure of criteria and how quickly they will need to assemble information for a funding proposal.
- PB Yes this is a European fund which will support coastal fishing communities but the timescale is quite short.
- KM We do not yet have the criteria but we have one or two projects that might fit. It's being progressed through Economic Development and disseminated to other partners. So that is an example of something that should actually be in a local community plan – community action plans.
- PB Thank you for coming and joining us today. It is very helpful to our enquiries. You will receive a record of this meeting, please make sure that you are happy with it before it becomes part of the public record.

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EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION Monday 3rd October 2011

14.00 HOURS, WOODHILL HOUSE- COMMITTEE ROOM 2

Present: Councillors Bellarby (Chair), Allan (AA) (Vice-Chair), Cullinane (NC), Duncan (SD), Fleming (TF), Gray (IG), Hood (FH), Sullivan (MS), Tait (IT) and Thomas (RT).

Officers: Jan McRobbie, Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny and Audit) and Natalia Becka, Scrutiny and Audit Assistant.

Meeting with Perth & Kinross Council, Fiona Mackay (FM)

PB Welcome and thank you for coming along today to help us with our Community Planning and Empowerment investigation. The Scrutiny and Audit Committee carries out its scrutiny work through certain investigations. We invite Senior Council Officers to put forward suggestions as to topics that are worthy of consideration. We seek information from the Senior Management Team and we hold a topic scoring session and select topics for investigation. There may be reasons why we do not select something, for example if something is already under investigation. There are also positive reasons that we will investigate something, for example if concerns have been raised. The emphasis on these investigations is very much about seeking improvement. We hold a number of evidence gathering sessions with a range of witnesses, including Community Representatives and officers from other Councils and other organisations. We are evidence based and we will record what is said in such sessions. Officers Jan and Natalia are taking notes and there will be a record of this which will be sent to you. Please make sure that you are happy it as it will become a public record of the Committee. We have a number of questions for you which you have seen prior to this meeting, but there will also be supplementary questions through the course of our proceedings.

PB **Question 1: Tell us about your role and involvement in Community Planning in Perth & Kinross.**

FM My current role is Partnership Improvement Manager for Perth & Kinross Council, based within the Education and Communities – previously the post was in the Chief Executive's service. I lead a virtual team of lead officers for thematic partners. My primary function in regards to the Partnership work within that is to support the Community Planning Partnership itself and the overarching structure of Community Planning. The function is to support the Chair of the Community Planning Partnership who is also the leader of our Council and the Chair Executive. I also link closely with Partner Chief Officers as well,

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whether that is the local Police or the area representative of the Fire and Rescue Service, Health or the local college. To a large extent, my role and function is to be a conduit for Community Planning conversations on areas of interest to be addressed across the Community Planning Partnerships as a whole. We also have a management function, relating to the Single Outcome Agreement and annual performance reporting that feeds into our Community Planning Partnership meetings.

In team we support the Self-Valuation Model that we have for our Community Planning Partnership and also any improvement action flows from my team to provide structures to support partners in their organisations.

- IT This Self-Valuation Model sounds very interesting. How does it work?
- FM We developed the model from a model provisionally used by HMle for Schools. The model was on “how good is their school” and a number of years ago we developed it into “how good is our Council”. Over the years we have developed “how good is our partnership” Self-Valuation Model. There is a collection of key areas that are checked to see how we are doing each year and it is very much discussion based. We address it as a workshop and look at particular indicators to see how we are doing in respect of impact on service users, or impact on staff. A key one is “how good is our leadership”, e.g. at strategic level.
- IT Are there set criteria or is it just a general approach?
- FM It is a general workshop. There are set questions but they are there to prompt the conversation, not the sole focus.
- IT Does the self evaluation apply individually to each of the partners or globally?
- FM We do it as a partnership as opposed to each individual organisation doing it separately.
- IT Do you think there would be value in breaking it down to see how any one individual partner is performing?
- FM Yes, certainly having just completed our Joint-Self Valuation which is very much done in that way, I would say there would be some value to each of the organisations developing a self-valuation. But there are pros and cons of both. I think it maybe just depends on the area of investigation a single organisation takes.
- SD When they come together to discuss self evaluation, do the partners always agree?

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FM Well, they will not always agree, but our partnership is very much based on consensus model and through negotiations try to reach something that all can sign up to. Like your own committee, if there is evidence to justify a particular decision, it would be hard for a single partner to persuade the others of a contrary view.

RT Are self evaluations quantitative or qualitative?

FM Largely qualitative. There will be an element of quantitative in it if we can look at some of the detail behind indicators. So, for example, one of our questions may be "how good are our outcomes?" They will have to base that on the evidence that comes out in terms of our indicators and the Single Outcome agreement. Some of it will be based on surveys or other results to provide quantitative basis but other parts will more generally be qualitative.

SD **Question 2: How has Community Planning evolved in Perth & Kinross over recent years?**

FM We established the structure in 2003, as a Community Planning Partnership with five themed groups – Community Safety, Life long Learning and Leisure, Economic, Environment, and Health and Wellbeing Partnerships. Those all still exist. The structure has been relatively stable over the years with the exception that we added an additional partnership which is a strategic partnership. It is a Chief Executive/Senior Officer led partnership which makes it different from other themed partnerships as it involves elected members but it is still seen as part of the Community Planning. This will be looked at again in the current context of public sector reform.

Other areas of actual partnership working have changed quite considerably. Previously it was a case of sitting and listening to presentations from different groups. We've become more sophisticated in making decisions in partnership. Now reports show that things have happened as a result of the decision making in partnership. Therefore there's been a marked change in what partners expect to get out of joint working. Also, in 2003 it was very Council led whereas now other partners have much greater engagement particularly from Single Outcome Agreement. Partners recognise that they need to be round the table whereas previously much pushing had to be done by the Council. When we looked at the Governance arrangements in February 2011, we recognised that we had to enhance the groups. The Community Planning Partnerships were moved from being a partnership that had three elected members and a number of Executive Officers to being elected members or Board members from all partners, with the exception of the Scottish Executive as there is only a single representative for the whole of Scotland! The Community Planning Partnership is now made up of three elected members from the Council, joint board members for the Police, Fire and Rescue, Tayside Health

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Board, Perth College and the senior area representative for Scottish Enterprise. We felt that unless we are actually influencing Boards and having a direct relationship with the Boards of the different partner organisations, the Community Planning Partnership really did not have the strength to deliver on the Single Outcome Agreement.

- FH I am interested in evolving of Community Planning. You have mentioned a lot about Partnerships which is what Community Planning is about. How embedded do you think Community Planning is within the Perth & Kinross Council structure? How have you managed to integrate Community Planning aspirations of communities into Council decision making?
- FM In terms of the integration of Community Planning into Perth & Kinross Council, when we revised our Committee structure, we developed a Council Committee structure that was parallel to the Community Planning ones – i.e. it echoes the five themed partnerships. The crossover with that is that the Leader of the Committee will be the Chair of the Partnership as well. It is not a pre-requisite that the Chair of each council committee will automatically be the Chair of the related partnership, but in effect that is what has happened. We have a link at that level. In terms of Community Planning decision making Community Planning is influenced by Council Services and other Partner Services, but I'd struggle to provide evidence of this flowing through at ground level. The difficulty is that lots happens which is influenced by what the Council and other partners and services are experiencing on the groups and the experience of partners – this will influence what's suggested to elected members and the Council.
- IT I would like to clarify a point. When you were saying the five thematic partnerships, do you have an overarching Community Planning Board and are these sub-groups of a Board? Who actually sits on the Board? Is it Officers or Elected Members from the Boards?
- FM Yes we have an overarching partnership, made up of members and representatives of the five themed groups, as well as the themed groups themselves. The elected members and other representatives from the partner groups are Board members. The themed partnerships are made up of elected members and officers at executive level. The majority of the other Partners from Themed Partnerships will be at the officer level. I can provide you with a structure diagram.
- TF Aberdeenshire has six Area Committees. Does Perth & Kinross have the same type of structure?
- FM No, we do not have Area Committees at Council or Community Planning level. All the work is managed through the themed Partnerships as we don't have the same localised infrastructure as you. There are some obvious benefits to operating at a local level and it's

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something that we are to look at in the near future.

FH How many Councillors do you have in Perth & Kinross?

FM 41.

FH That is the difference, we have about 68. That is why we have six area Committees, you can do something different since you have fewer Councillors.

RT Question 3: In your experience, how do relationships between participation at strategic level and local Community Planning actions work?

FM We do not have local Committees. But each of the Themed Partnerships has a range of work and dedicated projects taking place in specific locations. Themed Partnerships have a direct link to delivery within Perth & Kinross but they are not specific to only one geographical area. They may have something delivering in a "hot spot", e.g. Kinross which is a link to a locality but also something delivering other things in a different area. They have the breadth of the whole local authority to deliver a particular aspect such as health and well being or community safety.

The Community Safety structure is probably the more area based group, akin to Aberdeenshire's localised structure, as we do have local tasking groups. It is relatively new. We had two tasking groups running for some time which have been successful so we are now extending that to the whole of Perth & Kinross. A group will come together consisting of the local Police, Fire and Rescue or Youth workers, a wide range of people will deliver in a particular geography. Their function will be to identify issues that are happening across the area but also cases where progress has stalled, or there are specific difficulties which are perhaps wider than the organisation that require to be looked at, and addressed, by the Partners collectively. So these groups meet with each of the areas. The key information from them will go to a co-ordinating sub group that reports directly to the Community Safety Partnership. The Themed Partnerships probably have the closest link to an area based approach.

RT Do these local Community Safety Groups have elected member representatives?

FM No, they do not. There's been no attempt to develop that to date – the groups have been seen as more operational.

PB Do you have Rural Partnerships, and if so, how do they link in?

FM Rural Area Partnerships will link into the economic development

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partnerships. That is not an area that I have the most information on.

PB How many of these Partnerships are there? In Aberdeenshire we have different arrangements for the six areas, but five out of six have involvement with a form of Rural Partnership.

FM I am not sure. I can send Jan an answer.

RT In our Community Planning Partnerships there are representatives of the third sector, voluntary organisations. I do not remember you mentioning that, but are they part of yours as well?

FM Yes. The single interface with Voluntary Organisations is the Perth & Kinross Association of Voluntary Services. They sit on the Community Planning Partnership but may also have representatives that sit in each Themed Partnerships as well.

PB Question 4: How does the Community Planning 'Executive' relate to Local Community Planning Groups?

But you have already told us that you do not have Local Community Planning Groups, so there is no point in asking this question.

FH Question 5: How are elected members involved in Local Community Planning Groups – and relate to Local Community Action Plans? Have there been challenges in reconciling democratically elected Councillors' views with those of un-elected representatives?

PB I think we can extend that to talk about Community Planning Groups.

FM They are very involved in Community Planning, but from the outside, apart from the three elected member representatives on Community Planning Partnership and the five Themed Partnerships. For each of the partnerships elected members are recognised as having a key leadership role, approaching it from the stance of representing Perth & Kinross Council as opposed to their local geographical areas. It has created a challenge in terms of consensus with other Partners at an organisational level. It keeps away from any fighting on local issues. Our Partnership also has agreement in terms of community rules – from 2004 there has only ever been one vote – and that was about the role of the Chair of the partnership – i.e. the formal decision process is very rarely used. There is very rarely any ongoing difficulty in reaching consensus.

IT I think there is a fundamentally important point that is emerging here. You have a completely different structure from us. We have Local Community Planning Groups and I presume the thinking behind that was the need for Community Planning to engage at local levels. I

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believe there is a dichotomy in our system between people in that Local Community Planning Group and the Local Elected Members on Area Committees. You do not have that contention because your themed groups are making decisions on a Council-wide basis rather than an area basis. How do you push Community Planning down to a local level?

FM I think that is an area on which we still have quite a lot of work to do.

IT Can I put it another way, you have a lot of projects going on at a local level in various communities. Does your perception of Community Planning say that you should be involved at that level?

FM Yes. I think we should have increased mechanisms to be able to engage with communities directly.

IT So that answer says that you do not have that at present.

FM We do not have that in place at present. It is an area for development.

IT Would you regard that at present time as a deficiency in your system?

FM Yes.

IT That was not meant to be a criticism.

FM We have Community Learning Development Partnerships that are active in communities and individuals from organisations will feed into that. But again that does not capture as much as we would need for planning in the future. We have also looked at an approach to locality planning which incorporates the function of the elected members. We put in place an allocated Head of Service of the council wards. That Head of Service has responsibility to speak to the ward members on a routine basis. The idea of that is to recognise the elected member's role as being a representative of the community. Elected members receive a lot of information about the local communities and there needs to be enhanced mechanisms to capture that to pass it to the Council. It is about developing a structure approach to locality on the basis of a ward. In time we hope to develop that more so that we can bring Community Planning to it as well.

IT You emphasised the importance of feeding local information directly back to local members through a responsible officer. You have said that two Heads of Service meet regularly with elected members, is that on a ward basis?

FM Yes.

IT This appears to be much more superior to a Aberdeenshire's area basis

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which takes in three wards. You are actually saying that Perth & Kinross Councillors are briefed, three or four at a time, perhaps by a Head of Service on all local community issues?

- FM Yes and equally elected members are feeding information in. It is very much a two way process. It is not purely about Officers giving information.
- PB Do these Heads of Service have an interaction with the Community Groups?
- FM Not at the moment although that was seen as the next step in the process, particularly around the Community Councils and the other representative groups. We didn't want to get bogged down into single person issues or become a target for "torch bearers".
- IT We have 19 wards in Aberdeenshire. How many wards do you have?
- FM We have 12 wards.
- FH Coming back to the question there, it mentions Community Action Plans. Do you have any Community Action Plans for your communities in Perth & Kinross?
- FM We don't. We had regeneration work ongoing, detailed in Action Plans for the specific areas, but these were very small areas and this is not ongoing and it's not been applied in all areas.
- FH What you have just spoken about the Heads of Service and Elected Members and that two way flow of information, is that in some way trying to cover the subject of a Community Action Plan?
- FM I do not think it is that ambitious. It's not looking at the same need and delivery wholesale on a locality basis.
- FH I like the idea of Councillors being able to meet with Officials and exchange ideas. We do that in similar ways, we have ward meetings so that the elected members in our ward meet with the local Area Manager. So we have a similar structure but different.
- FM The scheme was developed by Maria Walker who is now with yourselves – you have the architect!
- SD Do you have specific Community Planning Officers in the Council?
- FM Yes we have a Legal responsibility for Partnership. In effect the Head of Service and I will be the leads for the Community Planning Partnerships and my team in particular will undertake the Partnership.

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- SD In Aberdeenshire, we have local community planning officers who work with the area managers in each of the six areas. Do you have local community planning posts?
- FM No.
- FH Am I getting an impression that you have a simpler structure than we have?
- FM I am not sure. I do not know your structure well enough to comment. The thematic approach aims to give standardised level of engagement and strategic themes, not deliver on an area basis. For example, there is work ongoing on Community Safety. It's done at the Community Safety Partnership level and then is filtered out for local application. This gives consistency, although there will be specific communities where a different approach is required depending on their individual needs. How do your local community planning groups share good practice?
- AA There are a lot of common issues across the area, as a rural council. Do you think it works better to spread through themed groups, rather than one little area doing something really good and not spreading out the whole theme across the Council?
- FM I think sharing information as to what works definitely helps.
- SD Have you any comments on the structure of a single Board deciding strategic direction?
- FM Yes. The Themed Partnerships have responsibility for their specific agenda in an area, but anything significant in terms of the strategic direction would then be forwarded up to Community Planning Partnership. This would include things like the change fund for health and social care that was introduced earlier this year. We received notification that there was a requirement to develop a plan and that was delegated to the Strategic Health Partnership to do. But the Strategic Health Partnership brought that plan to Community Planning Partnership for agreement and final sign off. So there is a two way working there.
- AA Question 6: How is agreement reached amongst partners on the best way forward or resource allocation for specific projects and initiatives?**
- FM The Officers will generally be tasked with gathering evidence for agreement on a particular issue, strategic direction or resource allocation. It will depend on the scale. For example, in the case of the Change Fund, there was an initial report to the Community Planning Partnership – “this is a table – are you happy that (x) group(s) develop

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this/these idea(s)" – i.e. there was a delegation of matters to other groups. In the same way, the themed groups may work up the rationale for a proposal and present it to the overarching partnership group for approval. Lots of the preparatory work would be undertaken by dedicated officers from the partner organisations, working in partnership, outwith the formal partnership meeting.

- AA In different areas of operation it is often clear which agency should lead on specific projects.
- PB It seems to me that there is a difficulty inherent in partnership working. All might agree "we'd love to do this..." until the time comes to allocate money and resources. The partnership may think it is costing too much money but then it has to go back to the individual organisations who in turn may say it is not really that bad... is that sort of thing happening?
- FM We certainly have the potential of that sort of thing happening. It was one of the things we recognised. Almost a year and a half ago we developed proposals and we agreed the flow of decision-making, recognising that Community Planning Partnerships cannot sign off money, that is for the individual Partners. There have always been tensions around when decisions should go to a Partnership and when they should go to the Council Committees and what should come first as the Council Committees are the final sign off. Decisions to allocate resources or service provisions had to initially go to the Council or to a Partner Board and they would agree there and in effect it went to Community Planning Partnership for implementation. But the Community Planning Partnership will still have to be involved at the beginning to actually work out what the plan was. There are some flow charts in terms of decision making and what the responsibilities of different groups are. I will send these on as they make it easier to understand the flow of decision-making and governance.
- FH At the Board level, do your partners all contribute equally to the budget for running community planning? In Aberdeenshire, we get some contributions towards administration and the Executive and Board committee structure from Fire and Rescue, the NHS and the Police.
- FM We do not have a shared budget for running Community Planning. Perth & Kinross Council pay those costs themselves. One of the other Community Planning Partnerships has asked about that earlier this year. It is one of the areas that we have asked for additional resources from the partners.
- FH So Perth & Kinross Council is paying for running Community Planning Partnership?
- FM Yes.

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TF Question 7: How is future sustainability, in terms of people as well as fiscal resources, in Community Safety, ensured?

FM In terms of fiscal resources, when funding was reduced as part of the Concordat with the national government, the Community Safety fund disappeared. In reflection of that the Council has continued to allocate Community Safety Partnership funding on a regular basis. But with the cuts that any service is facing it is likely that will not be protected. It is likely to see some reduction. The Community Planning Partnership itself is funded at £80,000 per annum and will similarly be exposed to funding cuts as are all other services.

In reality, the majority of resources come in kind from the partner organisations – the police, fire and rescue, NHS etc – in terms of officer time.

A lot will depend on the future direction of community planning as a concept in the current public sector reform.

TF We did an investigation into the closure of public toilets, and learnt from Perth & Kinross the concept of Comfort partnerships. Does this come into Community Safety or is that a completely separate thing?

FM I think that would be a separate. I am not aware of that coming through the agenda for Community Safety.

NC Question 8: How has the role of, and public awareness of, the Community Planning in Perth & Kinross evolved over time?

FM Over the years we have addressed public awareness through branding of initiatives, but we're moving away, now, from this single brand. Community Planning is now reported in the context of the Single Outcome Agreement report, so I'm not sure how much clear influence it can be seen to be having. I am not sure how much that influences people. The majority of the community do not worry about which organisation provides them with the services, they just want the services provided. That is reflected in some of the enquiries or complaints that we get about Health, the Police, things that the Council has no influence on but is seemed to have influence on. The actual identity of organisations is not that important to people. They just want to see public services being delivered.

NC How do the public in Perth & Kinross respond to the term "Community Planning"? Do they think it is like planning buildings or do they realise its proper meaning?

FM I would struggle to give a clear answer. I am listed in the Council phonebook under Community Planning and I do get phone calls from people asking about development control applications. These have to

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be re-directed. Therefore I'd guess there may still be an issue of being seen as building plans/ planning.

- FH Does Perth & Kinross Council involve its Community Councils in Community Planning? Are Community Councils updated on what the Council is doing on the Community Planning agenda?
- FM Only through elected members. They are involved in the consultation stage on the Single Outcome Agreement but not routinely throughout the year.
- PB I would like to go back to Councillor Cullinane's point about public perception on what Community Planning is about. We have previously asked whether it would be a good idea, or a bad idea, to try and implement a different term. For example, we now have the "Scottish Government" whereas previously it was the "Scottish Executive". Some Councils that have done that for Community Planning, applying a different operating title for the statutory term. Have you considered doing this?
- FM I'm aware of this – for example, the "Dundee Partnership". We have not in Perth & Kinross, but it may be something that we will consider, depending on the route of public sector reform where it's possible that local authorities may have a new role, through partnership, in working with fire and rescue, the police etc. This might change the dynamics and function of the partnership.
- PB We have heard conflicting views on this. The term Community Planning does seem to cause confusion in the general population but on the other hand, if we were to change the name now such a long way down the road, that may cause even more confusion.
- SD I think the public are only getting used to it now – to change might cause even further confusion.
- MS Question 9: Are there areas where you think improvements could be suggested – are you aware of good practice elsewhere which Aberdeenshire might consider?**
- FM As I've mentioned above, Perth and Kinross needs to consider an improvement to enhance engagement with local communities and continue to focus on that. We also need to look at community leadership – how do we empower our local community to bring things forward in a constructive manner to feed things in a constructive way in terms of what the community wants. We have lots of local leaders who are able to take in this role, but we need to identify what the most helpful and useful mechanisms might be, and not just repeat what we already have in place.

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In terms of 'good practice elsewhere' there is a range of things such as allocation of resources through a "Total Place" approach – where various agencies may be involved in addressing a particular issue in a defined locality, sharing resources to make the best use of services and provide the best outcomes.

There is so much change going on across the country at present – it's difficult to know what would work and should continue or not.

- AA Can you please explain the Total Place thinking?
- FM It is a project in England. It has now been placed under Community budgeting. It was an initiative that brought together the main organisations and looked at funding. I.e. a number of key outcomes were identified and several agencies allocated funds to a central pot to deliver these outcomes.
- PB We've seem some evidence of joint working across a couple of partners on specific projects like this.
- FM It's similar to what happened under Integrated Resource Thresholds between HNS Tayside and ourselves – this operates across three local authority areas. There have been interesting factors included in determining how the resources were spent – for example, it appears that people who lived closer to a hospital were more likely to be referred in by their local GPs – the more remote you were , the more likely it was that different or more innovative ways would be found to address the issue.
- MS On the issue of transportation; At the beginning when you talked about Perth & Kinross Council and other organisations such as Police being part of the Community Planning Partnership, you made no mention of Transport. I understand that their function is to benefit their shareholders and not necessarily to work to the public good – but should they be included?
- FM We have a Regional Transport Partnership which sits under our Economic Development themed group.
- MS We have a similar partnership – NESTRANS – but it has no authority to bring the providers together at a community planning level.
- FM One of the challenges that we have is that we want to continue strengthen links between us and Edinburgh. We'd hope to achieve more in terms of regularity and speed of service both. The partnership will try to broker agreements but have no ultimate authority or direct control.
- MS So if you were to say "start buses at the Hospital at 6 o'clock in the

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morning”, the bus people could turn around and say “get lost”?

- FM My understanding is that the Council’s Public Transport Section would negotiate with the lead bus companies and create a service level agreement which is an opportunity for such discussions to be held.
- MS So basically what you have to say to the bus people is you do it and we will pay for it.
- FM Yes. But there have been successful discussions about better transport links between Perth Royal Infirmary and Ninewells in Dundee, although this took a number of years in negotiations. We started by providing all the funding – it’s now self financing as it’s so very well used.
- PB Aberdeenshire Council subsidises bus services where these are seen to be socially necessary –therefore we can dictate some of the terms, some of the time. But there’s no real means to influence commercial decisions on a regular basis.
- IT We have area bus forums where Council Officials, Transport Officials regularly meet with the members of the public to suggest improvements; does it seem to you that if such a system exists and is working well, it is important not to change it just for the sake of branding it as Community Planning?
- FM Yes. However any information gathered at these forums should be incorporated into the flow of information to the Community Planning Partnership. Local communities would generally like to see their transport services enhanced and some of our settlements are very remote but in the current climate there’s not much of an opportunity to promote new linkages, unless it’s possible to support some social enterprise transport venture.
- PB Our bus forums are attended by representatives of the operators, the public, council officers and the local councillors. Suggestions for improvement are often put forward but as you say, are not always accepted.
- RT How big is the city of Perth in relation to Perth & Kinross Council area?
- FM The total population of Perth & Kinross is around 148,000. Population of Perth was around 65,000.
- RT Is there any difficulty in terms of making sure that the city of Perth does not gobble up most of the resources?
- FM You have to be creative as to what the projects are in rural areas as demand (in terms of population of users) will be much less. We have one Children and Families Centre in Perth & Kinross and that is based

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in Perth. It would not make sense financially to replicate that in each of the different areas so we had to be more creative, for example, by paying for privately provided nursery places in rural areas instead of direct council provision

In terms of deprivation, most is centred on Perth City itself – so it is the focus for activity. Rural areas may have individuals who have needs, but the perception is that Perth & Kinross is generally a well off area. This is not true of everyone living there and this divide makes it hard sometimes.

TF Coming back to the transport issue, is Perth the hub of all the areas? Do all the buses go from Perth and back again to Perth or do you have individual services running?

FM We do have some services that run from different areas, such as Blairgowrie to Pitlochry not via Perth. It's a cobweb of provision, depending on the geography of the area. The bus to Kinloch Rannoch goes out of Perth.

PB I once travelled from across Perthshire – two changes, lengthy waits and a slow journey – the trip took 5 hours in total!

How does the relationship with Perth College work? Aberdeen College is not in Aberdeenshire, although we have a local Banff & Buchan College.

FM I think that Perth College has always been round the table of Community Planning – it was very involved in the previous area economic partnership and links into the employment agenda which the Council has. The arrangements for the college is very different to other public sector participants, there's a strong drive for them to be money and income generating and this makes it more difficult for them to be on a social partner in Community Planning. They have strong overseas links, with the previous Principal looking at developing collaborations overseas, most recently with the United States of America. The college is part of the University of the Highlands and Islands, with impending amalgamations coming. It's hard to foresee how this will impact on community planning.

PB It remains for me to thank you very much for joining us this morning and helping us with our investigation. You will receive the written record of meeting, so please read it carefully and make any changes if required as this will become a public record of the Committee.

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EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION THURSDAY 6th OCTOBER 2011

11.30 HOURS, WOODHILL HOUSE- COMMITTEE ROOM 2

Present: Councillors Bellarby (Chair), Allan (AA) (Vice-Chair), Cullinane (NC), Duncan (SD), Fleming (TF), Gray (IG), Hood (FH), Sullivan (MS), Tait (IT) and Thomas (RT)

Officers: Jan McRobbie, Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny and Audit) and Natalia Becka, Scrutiny and Audit Assistant.

Meeting with Scottish Borders Council, evidence from Sarah Glendinning (SG), New Ways Co-ordinator (Video Conference).

PB I am Peter Bellarby, the Chair of Aberdeenshire Council's Scrutiny and Audit Committee. We are very pleased to be speaking to you this morning.

I would like to start by saying something about the way this Scrutiny and Audit Committee works. In terms of its scrutiny function one of the major things that it engages in is carrying out a number of special investigations on topics. The topics come about from suggestions that we invite from the Senior Officers of the Council and Councillors as to what they think might be investigated in the coming year. We then hold a topic scoring session in which we select topics that we are going to investigate. There may be good reasons why we do not accept some of the topics for example if something is already going on within the Council or somewhere else. There may also be good reasons why we do want to investigate something for example concerns may have been expressed or issues which have been raised by the Councillors involved. We invite witnesses to talk and these are Internal Officers or members of Community Groups or other Officers.

We do have a number of questions which I think you have already seen but we will have supplementary questions which will arise during the course of our proceedings. We do have two Officers who are taking notes of the proceedings. We will send you a record of this so please check this carefully as it will become a public record of the Committee.

Question 1: Tell us about your role and involvement in Community Planning in the Borders.

I would like to supplement that. It would be interesting to know about the structure of community planning that you have in the Borders and the structure of the Council that you have and how these two things fit together?

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SG I would also like to roll questions 1 and 2 together in my reply, if that is ok, to explain my job along side the evolution of community planning.

I am a Community Planning Co-ordinator. That is what it is known as down here. I was employed seven years ago by the Partnership, i.e. though joint funding from the Statutory Partners in the Community Planning Partnership (CPP). At the time that included contributions from the Health Board, the Council, Scottish Enterprise and Communities Scotland, with a small sum from VisitScotland. I was an employee of the Council only on paper as I worked across the Partnership. I am using past tense as this has changed over the past couple of years as there have been changes in various organisations. My role at that time was to facilitate joint working. The Partnership needed a resource, having grown from being an economic development partnership. In 2003 the community planning legislation came into place and our previous Chief Executive, David Hume, was in post. We had a number of different partnerships and created a Community Planning Partnership. We already had a strong Economic Development focussed Partnership and to that we added the Health and Wellbeing aspect to create a single Partnership. We called that the New Ways Partnership. The original came from the Scottish Border's Council's economic focus as the crisis there has galvanised partnership working like no other driver.

PB Can I ask about the structure of the Council? We know that you have Area Committees in the Borders. Can you tell us a little bit about how they work?

SG I cannot tell you a great deal about how they work. We are going through a change at the moment. We now only have three Area Committees. They used to deal with certain very limited devolved matters, including community grants and local police reporting. They did not work brilliantly to be perfectly honest. We had aspirations to change them into more local Community Planning Partnerships but the current political administration does not want to change that structure. We are left with a bit of a patchy landscape at the moment in terms of Area Committee Structure. But we still do very much talk about the possibility of extending the Area Committee boundaries of operation, if there were to be a political shift.

PB Do you have any area structure within Community Planning, or local community planning groups?

SG No and I realise that a number of your questions relate to that. A number of years ago we did set up a local Community Action Plan pilot in Hawick which included a community hub. We've just passed a stage one Big Lottery application phase. Members' intention is that this not be rolled out widely at present. Other Community Action

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Plans have been put in place by the community, for example by the CVS, but not specifically under Community Planning itself as the Council and other statutory partners had not been involved.

At the moment, Scottish Borders Council is working on winter resilience plans with 4 pilot communities. It is hoped that these plans could be extended to deal with other issues within communities but we're dealing with the most immediate issue – what happened if there's snow like last year?

There have been some very successful joint strategies carried out under a partnership banner e.g. New Ways Economic Development Strategy, Tourism Action Plan etc, as well as lobbying the government to reopen the Waverley Railway Line, opposing the relocation of Heriot-Watt's School of Textiles and Design to Edinburgh and the subsequent successful securing of European funding to create a collocated campus (HWU and Borders College) in Galashiels.

However, these are all strategic issues and at a local level I feel that we've failed to meet the aspiration of local planning.

We are working at the moment with all Community Councils.

IT Did I hear you correctly did you say that the Police reported to the Area Committees?

SG Yes. Police Officers go along to every Area Committee and give an update of the activities of a particular area. They also go to Community Council meetings.

FH Do you have a community planning board?

SG Yes. I am going to rewind back to focus on questions one and two. I said initially that I was employed by the Partnership. When the Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) and Concordat with the Scottish Government came into being, we took the decision to restructure our community planning arrangements. At that time we had a very wide forum who just noted papers that might not have meant much to them, then a project management team which included the chief executives of all key partner organisation.. We took the view that what we needed at the top of the Community Planning hierarchy, at the strategic level, was a more strategic Board, which might not include everyone. We needed a more strategic group, independently chaired. The post was advertised and Dave McDougall was appointed.

The board now consists of the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council, the Chief Executive and Chair of the Health Board and a

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range of other Chief Executives. For example, there are 4 main Registered Social Landlords in the Scottish Borders and one of their chief executives represents housing. We have a representative from the voluntary sector, Scottish Enterprise, Fire and Police in the new structure. There are three main groups: Competitive Borders, Healthy Borders and Strong and Safe Borders. This latter relates greatly to capacity building and strengthening community safety confidence.

FH You mentioned working on winter resilience. How does the work you do on winter resilience link in with the Council's Road Department for instance?

SG There are very strong links. Initially the work is being developed and driven by the Chief Emergency Planning Officer with Douglas Scott, who previously worked on community engagement and related issues. There have been a lot of changes over the past year in the Scottish Borders Council, with departments being restructured. We have a new Environment & Infrastructure Department. There are currently pilots in four areas, where community funds are available for bids for basic equipment such as high visibility jackets. These pilots were reported to our Corporate Management Team who instructed that the project be shared with wider areas.

IT Can I just clarify about the actual structure? You said that you have replaced the wide ranging forum with the Community Planning Board? Can I ask you to say again who is actually on that Board?

SG The leader and the Chief Executive of the Council, the Chair and the Chief Executive of the Health Board, the Chief Inspector of the G-division, Lothian and Borders Police, the Chief Officer of the Fire Board, a chief officer from the voluntary sector and a representative Chief Executive from one of our four main Registered Social Landlords. We also have Scottish Government input in the form of the Director who works on our Single Outcome Agreement, Ken Thomson.

IT And below that do you still have the Chief Executives?

SG No just the Strategic Board, then onto the working Partnerships.

IT So you got rid of the theme groups then?

SG We grouped them into Economic, the Health and Wellbeing and Community. In the early days of Community Planning, people wanted to go round slapping Community Planning labels on different things and actually what we found was that groups such as the Children and Young People Partnership, the Learning and Disability Board, were happening anyway and already grouped together. We

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do not have a Community Plan anymore – it's all related to and arising from the delivery of the Single Outcome Agreement. We just saw too much public, and officer, confusion in having separate themes.

IT So how do the theme groups relate to locality?

SG It's all about strategic partnerships – we don't have locally based operational structures in each case. The work is done through the likes of the Children and Young People Partnership. It is a strategic Partnership but it does have locality based structures. But we do not have a local Partnership that meets on a quarterly basis and pulls everybody together to talk about everything. There will be a Partnership that meets to talk about Children and Young people for example but that is part of their operational setup.

IT And then would they feed back up to the theme groups and apply for resources?

SG Yes, and from the theme groups it goes up to the Strategic Board. If it's working ideally, it is appreciated that partnerships have different priorities, for example social enterprise or health related. As far as is practically possible, the Board may say, "what's stopping us achieve SOA" and identify how to get past blockages in delivering on SOA>

RT Apart from you, how many other workers work purely in Community Planning?

SG I am the only full time Community Planning Worker. For the past six to seven years that has been the case.

RT Just to get an idea of the scale, how many Councillors do you have in the Scottish Borders?

SG We have 34 Councillors.

TF And population?

SG 110,000

FH I would be interested to know if the groups that sit below the Board produce an annual report or if the Board produces an annual report?

SG The Board report to the Scottish Government on delivery of the Single Outcome Agreement. We have just completed the last report and within that we take the opportunity to mention the outcomes and give a bit of a narrative; for example, if the performance is not good, we would provide the reasons as to why. This year road maintenance did not meet its targets as there were too many roads

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requiring too much maintenance. So there is an explanation for that mainly relating to the extremely hard winter and backlog of work. We also say what we are doing to address the issues.

PB Question 2: How has community planning evolved in the Borders over recent years?

I know that you have probably already covered this, but is there anything else that you would like to add?

SG I think in the last few months there has been a realisation within our Council Management Team that community planning is not an optional extra, or “nice to have”, that it is our business. I was speaking to the Council Management Team yesterday and we have invited the partners to attend the next meeting to discuss public sector reform and other partnership working. We are very neat and tidy here at the Borders, sharing the same geographic boundaries, so if it is going to work it is going to work here. There is a realisation that we have to do this now and certainly finances mean that we have to do this. It’s no longer an excuse to say our governance or our budgets are different so we can’t share. We are actually starting a review of our governance structures within the Council. There has been a disconnect – members have not been as involved as we would have liked in community planning and this will have to be addressed.

FH Speaking about that in closer Partnership working, have you approached the subject of possibly sharing budgets or handing over budgets or suggesting that you actually take a budget from a Partner? Have you got to that issue yet as I think this is the thing that is holding genuine Partnership working back?

SG I completely agree with you and the simple answer is No, we have not got to that stage yet. I think the Change Fund helped with the consideration of integrated resources, i.e. how much resource we and the Health Board put into schemes, but no-one is prepared yet to say “here is our budget – you’re the expert”. I think these conversations have to happen in the next few months.

PB Question 3: In your experience, how do relationships between participation at Strategic Level and Local Community Planning Actions work?

So really what we are interested in is that you have the Executive at the top level and something is happening or the Executive wants something to happen in a particular area, how does that work?

SG I have already intimated that we do not really have a local Community Planning structure in terms of groups that sit at a local level. So I am

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not sure how to answer that. Obviously the people that you have round the table on the Board are constantly updating on what is happening and engaged operationally. So we have that flow of information, but we do not have that structure that I think you want me to talk about.

- PB Yes, sorry our questions have been rather orientated to the structure that we have in Aberdeenshire which is that you have a Council area structure with six administrative areas, associated Area Committees and associated Area Managers. The way in which we have organised Community Planning also has this kind of area dimension to it. We have local Community Planning Groups, one in each six areas and one aspect of this is Rural Area Partnerships. Do you have Rural Area Partnerships in the Borders and if so how do they fit in?
- SG No we do not. In what remit? I mean we may have something that does the things that you are talking about, but I am not sure what you mean by Rural Area Partnerships.
- PB Rural Area Partnerships in Aberdeenshire exist in five of the six areas but there is one area where we do not have it. These are essentially organisations which have members that are also organisations. A lot of the work that Rural Partnerships do is in terms of trying to empower communities to build capacity and things of that nature.
- SG We have a third sector partnership in the Borders and it operates strategically. We have a very strong Community Council network, a very strong CVS (Councils for Voluntary Service) network, Sport Councils etc. But these do not operate on area by area basis. Each will have spokes into local communities and are very strong sectors.
- FH You mentioned there likes of Community Councils, how does the feedback come from Community Councils back to your Council and to the Community Planning Partnerships, to what you are doing?
- SG Within the team that I work in, the Community Engagement Officer has the responsibility for all the engagement and communication with Community Councils. She and the Community Council Network Chair feed into the voluntary sector Partnership and that then is fed to the Strategic Board.
- IT How does Community Planning relate to local Councillors in the Borders?
- SG That is a very good question. We have struggled with elected member engagement in Community Planning. There is a current review of governance structures to speak to those actively involved (for example via the Community Safety Partnership, and explore why

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they are not so engaged with other areas of community planning. For example, we have created a Council Sub-Committee to deal with Community health and care issues arising jointly from the common interest of the health board and social care/ social work.

This is a very important point; members need to be sure they are there with the interest of the Council and representing the Council, so the Sub-Committee structure is of real benefit with the Community Health and Care Partnership, where interest was previously very limited and sporadic. The new administration in May 2012 will need to be better prepared. We recognise this as a current weakness.

IT How do you weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of having a system like Aberdeenshire where we have a local Community Planning Group as opposed to a sub-committee system that you are working towards in the Borders?

SG The Sub-Committee proposal will be subject to review as we go forward, based on the experience of the last year. Our Area Committees, and I do not know how your local Partnerships function, are very formal. Only Councillors have voting rights and Community Councils could not speak. It is far too formal. It was too formal to be a local Community Planning Partnership. We had proposed to make the system more inclusive but there is no appetite for this at present with elected members.

IT Our local Community Planning Groups have representatives, the Police, Health and so on and Community Councils but only one elected member. Some elected members feel that there is a disconnect between local Area Committees and local Community Planning Groups so the point of the question is whether you actually overcome that difficulty?

SG No. We've left them to wither on the vine, the three area committees that are left. The review will be a root and branch examination. We can't have three left and two areas without.

PB **Question 4: How does the Community Planning 'Executive' relate to local Community Planning Groups?**

The question is based on the idea that there are local Community Planning Groups, but you said that you do not have them so we will skip this question.

Question 5: How are elected members involved in local Community Planning Groups – and relate to local Community Action Plans? Have there been challenges in reconciling democratically elected Councillor's views with those of un-elected representatives?

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Councillor Tait has already approached the first part of the question about elected members, especially local elected members. But is there anything that you would like to add to the second part of the question about challenges?

SG Yes there have been challenges and will continue to be, based on the make up of the Board. On our Community Planning Board we only have the leader of the Council and the Chair of the Health Board. We do not have Chairs of other organisations. A question might be asked as to if that is fair. We do not have the Chair of the Police Board, for example, only officers.

PB We do not have the Chairs of the other organisations on our Board, although senior officers sit on the Executive, which is the more operationally connected group.

PB **Question 6: How is agreement reached amongst partners on the best way forward or resource allocation for specific projects and initiatives?**

Councillor Hood has already said something about this but is there anything that you would like to add?

SG It is not really done at the strategic level. It is done more at the type of partnership level that we have been talking about, the Community Safety Partnership, or the Children and Young People Partnership for example. The strategic board examine the problems, what needs to be put in place to make sure projects run smoothly but they would not actually be sitting saying £10,000 for example needs to go to this and £10,000 to that. They do not direct the specific allocation of funds. The Integrated Resource Framework (IRF) pilot between Community Health and Care was a Scottish Government initiative which had clear funding allocated. It's always easier when given a separate pot of money.

IT Does the strategic Board have a budget?

SG No it does not. It used to have. When I first came into post we had about £100,000 a year of operating money; that paid for my post, various types of projects and community action planning. We had awards ceremony for projects relating to economic health and community projects. But Partners changed and the delivery of services has changed. There is no longer any dedicated money. I think, however, that partnership has to happen in actual operations, not through discrete money.

IT It there funding at an officer level to contribute?

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SG It was much more fundamental than “here is £20,000 from me”, but rather joint budgets to deliver services.

IT Is there a difficulty in that perhaps some Officers from different agencies might perceive partnership sharing like that as a threat?

SG Yes most definitely. There are good working precedents where it has been successful. One of the recent examples - proceeds of crime money came to Borders for work to be done for young people. Schemes involving our Sports and Leisure Trust were established, including funding for leisure activities. Intensive work was done and it was a huge success. Petty crime and vandalism plummeted by 60% over the period of the project. At the end of the scheme, the question will be how to fund it in the future – It’s not only the police who benefited but other services and the wider community from the Council working via access to leisure to work differently.

That is a very small basic example of the benefits of joint working. A partner’s input may help to solve your problem and you will have to use their resources to do that.

FH Yes that is what I was trying to get at earlier when we were speaking about sharing or swapping budgets.

PB **Question 7: How is future sustainability, in terms of people as well as fiscal resources, in Community Safety, ensured?**

SG Community Safety is one of the areas that we have had a lot of success in the Scottish Borders, looking at future sustainability and effective use of resources. We have a co-located community safety unit at the Scottish Border’s Headquarters, for example. This allows the Council’s Anti-social behaviour team to be working directly with community safety colleagues. Some of our elected members have spoken of feeling the Borders to be a very safe place. The Chair, Cllr Nicol, is seeking to be more proactive in issues relating to roads, lighting and youth work, i.e. to get services other than the police bringing influence on these safety issues.

PB We have similar issues to these, but having someone being proactive is a good start.

PB **Question 8: How has the role of, and public awareness of, the Community Planning in the Borders evolved over time? We note that your job title is New Ways Co-ordinator so can you please tell us about that?**

SG I would say that public awareness rocketed, plateaued and is now on a descent. There was a time that all the partners felt that everybody in the community needed to know about Community Planning. They

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had to get the name out there in the press articles, radio features and websites. The situation has changed; we changed ourselves through the Single Outcome Agreement. This now means that we focus on outcomes and not the way these have been achieved. It's not about telling people about all the whistles and bells, the man on the street would be appalled to think things were being done any other way (other than in a co-ordinated, partnership way that is). I think now we need to make fundamental changes to get it to work as opposed to just telling people 'this is community planning'.

The Council has a quarterly publication which shares initiatives.

The name, "New Way" is a hang over from the early days.

- IT I think that is a very interesting answer. I think this is a difficult question and slightly cheeky question. It seems to me that there is a slight feeling of political "faddishness" about Community Planning. It is the label given to the latest sub-political plan that is coming out from the Scottish Government, initiated by the previous Labour administration. In order to be politically correct in this latest possible plan, is there not a danger of spending resources inefficiently through "Community Planning" as opposed to the Council and other agencies just getting on and delivering the services just as efficiently, and perhaps more efficiently?
- SG The "fad" came with legislation several years ago. A Council who thinks they can deliver all services alone won't be able to deliver this in the future. The stark reality is that we need to pool budgets and work differently, otherwise we can't meet the needs of the population, of the Scottish Borders – I can't speak for Aberdeenshire. We have passed the stage of just talking about joint-working; we now have to do it. We do not need to call it anything, just doing things better and more efficiently for people. It's all public money to the people on the streets.
- IT Do we need to call all this Community Planning? If Council policy that Officers should try and work in Partnership with other relevant agencies, would it not be more efficient just to do it under their existing systems? That way you would not have the two parallel systems, the Council system and the Community Planning system, working on specific projects and initiatives, as at present time. Work will be done much more quickly and efficiently.
- SG Yes, absolutely. But the joint system means that you still have members who are responsible for the allocation of council money and also the Health Board representatives who are responsible for the allocation of money from the Scottish Government. They are both accountable to different Ministers. We are stuck in a system and what we are talking about would be an Officer's dream, if allowing

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Officers freedom to work, including passing resources to another agency to deliver services. But would that be acceptable to members?

IT It's the issue of ultimate accountability – and members being accountable to their electorate that's the key issue.

FH Returning to the question on public awareness. I was wondering how aware the public are in your area of Community Planning or are the public simply just concerned with having their services delivered, by whichever mechanism?

SG Yes, that is my view: delivery of services is the main concern. I think there would be an element of "I can't believe you're not working together anyway". That's what it initially was all about – I'm not sure how well we worked in partnership previously and what we have done seems to have created a plethora of different organisations.

PB **Question 9: Are there areas where you think improvements could be suggested – are you aware of good practice elsewhere which Aberdeenshire might consider?**

SG There's pressure on us all to consider advances or initiatives from elsewhere. We're linked to the national Community Planning Network and can access what's going on, and what's working, elsewhere through them. I can't offer any specific examples of what could be tried, as I do not think you can find a perfect structure anywhere; something might work in one Community Planning Area Partnership but not another.

I don't think you can over value co-terminosity. In our case this has been instrumental in joint working with, for example, health colleagues. I'm extremely concerned that the proposals for a national unified police and fire and rescue service might impact on the shared geographical boundaries which make working together easier. A central force may change things, especially for a rural area such as the Scottish Borders.

I'd say that this is a clear message to get across to the decision-makers. Let us have an area focus so we can work together with all other agencies for the residents of the Borders.

IT I have a question on the health point, you mentioned working with the Health NHS in the Borders. Do you have Community Health Partnerships?

SG We have one Community Health and Care Partnership (CHCP) which covers the whole Borders. Linking into that there are a range of different operational arrangements like awareness and stability which

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remain with the Health Board.

IT Can that direct budgets?

SG Yes. The Community Health and Care Partnership worked on integrated resource framework (IRF) and Change Fund allocations.

IT I do not think ours does.

SG Well it has a discrete budget through the Scottish Government funding. It does not have a separate budget to what the Health Board and Council have for Social Care, but it has facilitated sharing of funds to joint purpose.

IT Can it facilitate budget sharing between agencies?

SG Yes.

IT Is there is evidence that it has actually accomplished projects by joint budget sharing basis?

SG Yes. However I'd reiterate that the outcomes will still be reported in two different directions, and have shared budgeting approved. It will report to the Council and to the Health Board.

PB It remains for me to thank you very much for joining us this morning and sharing your experience in the Borders. It is very helpful to us. As I said at the beginning there will be a record of this and you will get it for your approval. Please make sure you are happy with it. This will become a public record of this Committee, but that will only happen when we present our final report to the Council. Thank you very much.

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EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION THURSDAY 17 NOVEMBER, 2011

14.00 HOURS, WOODHILL HOUSE- COMMITTEE ROOM

Meeting with Lead Service Representatives - Ritchie Johnson, Director of Housing & Social Work and Alexander (Ally) Macleod, Corporate Policy Officer (Community Planning).

Present: Cllrs Bellarby (Chair), Allan (AA), Cullinane (NC), Duncan (SD), Hood (FH), Fleming (TF), Tait (IT) and Thomas (RT).
Apologies: Cllrs Gray and Sullivan.
In attendance: Jan McRobbie, Corporate Improvement Officer (Scrutiny and Audit).

Update – on changes to Community Planning arrangements/ support reporting.

Mr Johnson explained that since the lead service briefing, responsibility for leading on Community Planning had move from the Assistant Chief Executive role to his remit; he was now responsible for Ally Macleod, (Corporate Policy Officer (Community Planning)), Erika Skinner (Community Planning Support Officer) and the administrative support post in Community Planning. He welcomed this opportunity, as a corporate director, to become more involved in Community Planning.

1. Rigorous target focused on outcomes (a la Community Safety) – issues raised by area community planning officers re data/ analysis – not always available at a local geographic level. Could/ should this be pursued in terms of Community Planning/ the Council's pursuit and demonstration of SOA improvements?

RJ The simple answer is "yes". It's all about outcomes and we're aware that there can be challenges in providing information to a local level of relevance. There are already lots of indicators associated with the Single Outcome Agreement (SOA), Strategic Priorities, Service Plans and other partnerships – but I'm not sure we have the right actions to a local level. Some outcomes are not easily brought down to a local level, although everyone agrees that the more local the information, the better.

I think we're getting better at outcome focusing, but we need to be sure that these are not just the ones we count, but also other measures – which may be more subjective. There needs to be a great rigour about how these are set up.

Targets set need to be real and relevant to people, so in local areas should reflect the local issues. If these local issues contribute to a wider priority, we need a better way of signposting what we can and can't achieve and getting this message across.

At present, I think we have more than 100 separate indicators – and even I

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struggle to keep them all clear in my mind.

- AM I think there's also a need to be mindful of the capacity of partners to get information at a very local level, area by area – some things are only measured at a shire level and it's hard to get a meaningful breakdown. This is challenging. I think ultimately it would be preferable for each local community planning officer to have access to have area-level data as this would help to inform local action planning.
- RJ I should also stress here, just because something can't be measured doesn't mean that an issue may not be important and still used to inform the council and its partners as to what should be done/ is being done.
- PB Is there a dichotomy here? I assume there's pressure from the Scottish Government to track and monitor the SOA outcomes – how is this done at a local level? And how are local issues fitted into the categories to be achieved in the SOA?
- RJ Dichotomy's a good word; the SOA covers a vast scope and it's very important that this can connect at a local level. It's maybe about how you tell the story and see the flow through of process. I feel we're getting better as a council at linking what we do to the outcomes.

In that way, it's also about our own staff and partners – we all have a part to play. For example, the floor sweeper at Cape Cod was tagged “helping to put a man on the moon” – we need to do this as an organisation, to credit all input to the processes of delivering on Community Planning and other outcomes. For us, that's still quite a journey to be taken. In some areas the SOA outcomes are perceived as being high level, and divorced from the day to day service provision and delivery. The SOA review will allow a chance to simplify the linkages and make the connections more real.

2. Rationalisation of “cluttered landscape” – Do we need separate Board and Executive- or could these be merged to single group? A la Council committee – elected members present and make decisions on strategy – officer carry forward implementation?

- RJ I've been Community Planning Lead for six months and from outside, had posed the question if the two groups were both required – but from the inside, I've developed a very different view. I think the executive role is very important. I think it's all about assessing what value can be added by each group. The Board is comprised of elected members and senior level representatives from other agencies. As Chair of the Executive, I try to make the agenda more relevant to what we can cover and add value. For example, we challenge ourselves – we have power to go on and do things without reference to the board, and the meetings aren't held as regularly as to be a bind. Without an Executive, matters would go to the Board level and it may be more complicated to reflect up what happens locally – the Executive has a

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clearly defined role to do this, especially where there are challenges, shire wide issues or good practice to be shared/ commended.

In recent meetings, Ally has been tighter about what is accepted as agenda items of business and what may be presented to the Executive – it's not just a talking shop. For example, at this week's meeting, there was discussion of early intervention. This is an important concept for the Council and its partners and the matter was presented as an open challenge for all. This type of approach can lead to cross-agency benefits. Again for example, the youth council representative raised the issue of the careers advice given to pupils. The oil and gas sector hasn't collapsed, there were premature reports of its demise – but this perception still has an impact on advice being given at schools. There's a role for public and private sector to work together in terms of economical impact.

I've also taken the route of getting other partners to play more of a lead on specific matters. At the moment, therefore, I think the role of the Executive, as a distinct body to the Board, adds value – and I intend to do more work with partners to be more sure that they are feeling the added value of its role too.

IT If, then, there's a place for both – do the Minutes of the Executive go to the Board? This is especially important if the Executive have powers to do stuff without referring matters to the Board.

RJ I could draw the comparison between the Council's Senior Management Team and Full Council – the minutes don't go. However, I can see no reason why the Executive Minutes can not go to the Board. I'm happy to take this suggestion back for consideration.

Comment [a1]: Not sure if the comparison with the Council's SMT was in here or used in response to question above

IT I feel it would keep the Board more and better informed.

RJ Maybe it's about raising the Executive's profile with the Board, to clarify and demonstrate that the Executive is implementing the Board approved strategy and perhaps making a better link in referring matters up for consideration?

IT This would clarify the Executive's role as a conduit of information from local groups to the Board.

RJ The Local Community Plans come to the Executive for consideration prior to being submitted to the Board for endorsement.

AM There's a clear relationship between the Board and Executive as set out in the Scheme of Delegation approved by the Partnership. I think the idea of sharing minutes is a very good suggestion. There's a need to improve the relationship(s) top to bottom and bottom to top in the structure. Opportunities to share good practice, (such as you've already seen on your site visits to the six areas) to show the Board what the Executive and the local Community Planning Groups are doing.

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- IT Would you please clarify the Board's composition?
- RJ The same organisations are represented on both the Board and the Executive – the Executive includes representatives at a more operational level, the Board is comprised of the equivalent of elected member types.
- IT What's the advantage of having this type of structure as opposed to a themed group approach? For example, I know that the Youth Council were recently agreed a place on the Board – is this better than having a separate youth group focus? Does the current system not lead to a piecemeal response to each application for a place? As I understand it, the original concept in Aberdeenshire was for a themed group focus.
- AM In 2006 there were five themed forums created. This was reviewed last year as it was felt that the groups were not fit for purpose and were not adding value to what was being done collectively.
- RJ In managing business at the Executive, it's still possible to take a themed approach. There are different opportunities for areas to be addressed coming through the Executive. There are also areas which other council and strategy partnerships could pick up. The original themed groups had a very patchy membership and rarely met which led to weakness in their consideration of matters. We can still have themes as part of the agenda.
- IT We've heard from one other council about their themed group approach which was felt to give a "more focused approach" compared to that of a potential Executive/ Board structure. People approached issues from a stance of being better informed of the matter, bringing their previous knowledge and awareness to the table, as opposed to matters being considered in their generality due to lack of detailed awareness.
- RJ It is certainly an option. I'm confident that matters are being dealt with as effectively through the Board/ Executive system – and we're always open to be challenged if people feel their interests are not being covered/ dealt with appropriately. I don't think there's a need for an extra layer of complication.
- PB Do action groups assure implementation?
- RJ Not in any formal way – but agencies around the Executive table take the lead on certain issues most relevant to them. For example, there's a Health and Transport Action Plan on the current agenda. It's lead by the Council's Infrastructure Services function – but obviously relates to Health, Social Work and the voluntary sector, so it's almost a theme being pursued round table at the executive.
- There's always a concern that the creation of action groups can then lead to the manufacture of actions to fill their void. I'd stress again, my approach would be to look at the added value, or not.

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There's a fail safe position which would challenge us on non-delivery or gaps. The issue could come back to the local Community Planning Group, Board or Executive – i.e. I don't think that there's any need for an additional structure to do this.

- FH How do the links connect the local community planning groups to the Executive and Board? We've heard from witnesses that there may be a feeling of being remote.
- RJ I think there has been a feeling of not being as well connected with the Executive and the Board. Recently processes have changed. Ally meets the area community planning officers on a regular basis and they've attended the Board to make presentations and see what goes on. There's a need to be careful here though, not to over load the groups with too much council attendance leading to council dominated meetings. I believe this process will allow them to feel more able to influence meetings and decisions. We're looking to ensure that stronger local community planning groups are linked to the Executive and Board's work.
- An Area Manager sits on the Executive – currently Les Allan, the Marr Area Manager. His role is not just to be there as an individual area manager but to make the connection to, and from, the Executive for all the Area Managers/ Area Community Planning Officers. So there are three threads for bringing local issues or sharing good practice to the Executive/ Board – me, Ally and Les. We need to make sure that groups have the confidence to approach us – not just sit muttering behind closed doors.
- AM A recent development has been the sharing of the draft agenda and papers for the Executive with the area community planning officers. This means they are fully briefed on what is going on and are able to input into what is discussed at Executive level. There needs to be a variety of methods employed to ensure that local community planning groups can feed in where appropriate.
- RJ I'd stress again – it needs to be a two-way process – not just us feeding down, but also local groups feeding up.
- IT Does the Executive have a budget?
- AM The partnership as a whole has £100,000, with £10,000 delegated to the Executive.
- RJ There's not a lot of direct spend – most is allocated through the Board.
- SD A number of witnesses spoke about a lack of communication and connection – that is where this question came from.
- RJ I can fully understand that, it's a real challenge which we would wish to address – but I'd throw the challenge back to them also – “tell us”, “raise with

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us”.

3. What is the future of the Executive given increased use of partnership working with community groups envisaged – only 1 voluntary body representative on each – and not the same one- possible issue of communication with the Board/ Executive?

PB	Are the third sector represented on both Board and Executive?
AM	The Rural Partnerships, Community Councils, Aberdeenshire Volunteer Partnership and the Youth Council are all third sector representatives. The last is a very recent addition. The organisations have places on both the Executive and the Board, but it’s not the same representative who attends both.
RJ	<p>Individuals who represent any sector or groups are there on a very clear basis; that they provide a sectoral view and not just their personal contribution. We all need to take a broad perspective in discussions. In my time of working with the Executive, perhaps the most telling contributions have come from the youth representatives when we’re looking at what effect actions will have – they’re keeping it real for us.</p> <p>I’m not sure if there’s an issue about having different people on the two groups – there’s a thread of continuity and connection there as Ally and I attend both groups. Each representative is meant to go back and share information with their partner representative – so there’s an onus on them too to do so.</p> <p>There’s also a connection between the groups with recurring themes. Over the last six months there’s been a really close fit between the agendas of the Board and the Executive. However, we can’t be too prescriptive and local groups need to have confidence to carry forward work in their areas and be given options, if needed, for more support or other matters.</p>

4. Where is the evidence that Aberdeenshire is “one of the best” in Community Planning? Do we benchmark? External assessment?

RJ	<p>I could turn this question on its head – is there evidence that we’re not one of the best? I know assumptions are not acceptable – but the only real assessment we’ve had is the original Best Value Audit, which covers Community Planning. The last one may be considered a degree of benchmarking as all Scottish local authorities were assessed on the same basis. We got a very good audit.</p> <p>However, it’s questionable to make such claims which are hard to justify categorically. The Council does have a good reputation for how it goes about its partnership business and Community Planning is all about joint working. I</p>
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	<p>personally think we're one of the best – although we could do better. It's always good to retain the aspiration to be one of the best.</p> <p>But it's a circular argument. We say "we are" and that may make us become so. The challenge is to be confident that this can be tested – and perhaps this is where we could do more to tell people about what we're doing.</p> <p>Aberdeenshire is waiting to hear when our BV2 will come - this could be as early as next year. This will include an updates assessment of community planning.</p>
FH	<p>One measure may be to chart the out comes of what has been achieved through community planning – community planning doesn't really seem to make much of an issue of it; perhaps there could be wider circulation of community planning successes through the communities of Aberdeenshire. Could there be better communication with Community Councils, saying this is what Community planning is and what it has delivered in your communities. This would also require evidence to be noted and shared.</p>
RJ	<p>This is an excellent point – I've said as much myself that we don't tell people enough about the good pieces of work being done at Board, Executive or local community planning groups. There are some fantastic projects, as you have seen on site, and it wouldn't just be blowing our own trumpets, there's an element of sharing good practice as well as showing solutions to problems.</p> <p>I think the next stage is how to communicate more widely – I agree this is something which can be done better.</p>

5. Are there any implications for community planning arising from the recent Christie Commission?

RJ	<p>There are some "helpful" themes coming from Christie, for example, early intervention, integration/ efficiency – these are all areas where I feel community planning could add value. It's still a work in progress to identify what exactly will come out – Christie seems to advocate a more holistic community planning model, wider than the public sector agencies. I think we've seen some of the possible issues in recent Board/ Executive agendas, and there's more to come. However, again there's a need to be careful and not duplicate what's already being done elsewhere – if it's more appropriate to be done there. I'd argue the Board and Executive can add value, and should not complicate matters.</p>
PB	<p>Are the Scottish Government to make recommendations on the back of the Christie Commission?</p>
RJ	<p>They have "welcomed" the report and although I've not seen any specific Community planning issue highlighted, we may see inclusions in policy</p>

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	intimations coming forward which chime with the Commission's findings. The findings were fairly open and have a return to a "making it real" approach.
PB	Is it a case then of "wait and see"?
RJ	Yes, we'll have to wait to see government policy and no – in one way not need to wait – for the direction of travel is well laid out. For example, current work will progress with integration of council care services with health, even if we're not sure of any timetable or prescribed form, we can think locally about what it might mean locally.
FH	How can we promote community planning in our services – getting council officers at all levels to see the link to community planning in their week to week tasks? I think there's an element of departmentalisation working in the Council still – where can we see community planning integrated into general operations?
RJ	<p>Again I agree with you – I've always had a genuine interest in community planning but my previous activities in Social Work and Housing mitigated against my over involvement in it. I feel there is more work to do, relating to awareness of what can be achieved and delivered. It's about a way of thinking, how can we do it differently/ better/getting the most out of funding.</p> <p>We do try to share good practice – and maybe there's a role for the Executive and /or Board to challenge council services – and other partners – tell us how you engage with community planning and add value. This would also apply to the police, fire, and health board.</p> <p>The reality is that community planning officers are a very small team – 6 FTE area community planning officers, Ally, Erika and a clerical post. They can't do it all – we need everyone to do it.</p> <p>And, of course, there's also the issue of those who do do community planning – but don't realise that this is what they are doing!</p>

6. How do we consult more effectively with local members on what goes into the community plans, bearing in mind that if you ask two sections of the community the same question, you will get different answers?

AM	<p>I think the recent initiative of having joint meetings of the local community planning groups with the area committees and area management team is very helpful as it allows elected members' voices to be heard better than previously, given that only one councillor attends the local community planning groups to attend the local area committee.</p> <p>This is the first step in a means to address the local of local member involvement in local community planning issues.</p>
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RJ	I'd also stress again the role of the area manager, which I see as very important. They can pull together the various perspectives, including that of the local members which is extremely important. There's a real problem here in that the Local Community Plans are different from the previous Area Plans, having a wider ownership and therefore reflect the perspective of different organisations. However there's a need for local debate, especially if there's no consensus on what the local priorities are – debate is very good and helpful.
IT	The Banff and Buchan Area Committee had one of these meetings on Tuesday – there was no dialogue – members sat and listened to 6 presentations. Two were from Development Trusts (Fraserburgh and Banff) who seemed to think the plan was not members' decision – they were talking about stuff they were doing themselves. There was little input from area management team members and <u>none at all from councillors</u> . Each member was limited to a single question and the forum was so big there was no discussion. Therefore I didn't think it was a very successful meeting of the three groups. Who decided that this would be the format of the meeting?
AM	The joint meetings of the three groups came from the previous SAC investigation into decentralisation, and were part of an effort to get elected members more involved in the community planning process. Other areas use what seems to be a more interactive format allowing for more debate and challenge. The format you mention is not common, in my experience.
IT	The meeting seemed only to be an arena to be told what was already being done, not an opportunity for inputting into consideration of what was going to be done.
RJ	Each area operates differently but my understanding is that local community planning is about dialogue – not a one way conversation. I'll take this back to the officers, ascertain who agreed the Macduff format, and will come back to the Committee on this.
IT	The meeting was chaired by the Area Chair, not the Chair of the local community planning group. The Chair's approach was unhelpful, seeming to close down discussion, not foster it.
RJ	<u>It may have been seen as an initial meeting as part of a longer-term approach</u> , but I will take this matter back via the area managers – we need reassurance that the approach being taken is such that we get a better level of engagement in the future.
FH	I feel there needs to be some wider local consultation by those driving the community planning process, including the fire and rescue service, the police and the health board as well as the voluntary sector and the Council. Local member input might concentrate on the deliverability of some of the suggestions which come forward. The Committee has also previously

Comment [a2]: Not sure as Cllrs were asking plenty of questions, maybe delete.

Comment [a3]: Jan, think Ritchie made a comment to this effect.

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	questioned who has the ultimate sanction on what goes into a local plan – is it the partners, the area community planning officer, the area manager – who?
RJ	Ultimately, these local Community Plans are approved by the Board. There's an aspiration that the plans are broadly representative when they go up. In terms of disputes, I'd expect the Area Manager to work these out locally and if this can't be done, that this would be relayed back to the Board.
SD	I wonder if we're being premature here –it's clear that not all operate on the same format – I'd hope our ultimate recommendations might be able to suggest working along similar lines?
RJ	There's also a degree of caution here. All the different areas are populated by different groups – and we need to be very careful not to tie their hands. However I think that there are principles of operation which should be pursued, as well as reflecting diversity. There should be guidelines as to how things ought to work which can't always be ad hoc arrangements.
TF	How is it possible to reflect the diversity of an area if there are different groups interplaying?
RJ	I'd see this as very much the role of the Area Manager, the Area Management Team and the elected members.
IT	Is there an issue about the scope of the local community planning groups' membership? If it's too wide is there a dichotomy in the diversity inside and area – can one Local Community Planning Group support this or should there be more than one?
RJ	My immediate answer would be cautious. The main agencies provide resources to support community planning and I'm not sure that these are enough to support local community planning to a greater extent than they do already. Also, other forums may already be in place to pursue the issue. Again I think it's a case of assessing whether what's being done is adding value or not.
IT	But would you rule out exploration of the potential?
RJ	I would be cautious about it. I'm very aware of the consequences of the resource implications which may mean it's better to have only one group per area.
FH	When the local community plan, and Aberdeenshire Community Plan are approved, can you see their influence in partners' own plans? I.e. can we see community planning in the Police's "Platform for Success", or the Fire & Rescue and Health Boards? Do our community planning plans genuinely feed into these?

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AM	Previously the local community plans were four-year documents updated every two years. Recently we have moved to a rolling plan which is updated every six months and will better feed in to the partners' plans and the service plans of the Council.
RJ	<p>Timing is very crucial to this process – not least for budget consideration. It's critical that plans have the ability to influence this.</p> <p>I am confident that you could read the Police plan, for example, and find clear references to the Aberdeenshire Community Plan.</p>

7. Are there lessons to be learnt/ have been learnt from the transition from previous Area Plans to the local Community Plans?

AM	<p>Yes. The previous Best Value Audit was critical of linkages between service plans and the area plans – discussions have recently taken place to look at how best to match service and local priorities.. In the past the local community plans might have been considered “wish lists” as not all actions contained were deliverable and there's a need to focus on where it's possible to add value to the work of the partners round the table.</p> <p>There's also a wider debate to be had in terms of where the service plans and policies integrate with the community plans. So the answer is yes, and these are still being tracked through the system.</p>
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8. Are we getting it right in giving weight to different channels of Community voice arising from “consultation” - representatives, letters, petitions, loud voices?

AM	These are all different streams of evidence which could be used to inform the considerations of the local community planning groups, however it all needs to be accurately assessed, with statistics and other hard data used to complement these “voices”. In pursuit of this, the local community planning officers are being given training in carrying out strategic assessments and in facilitation. This should make it easier to get round hearing only the loudest voice as opposed to all the voices in a room.
RJ	<p>This is an interesting question – but I'd say it's also about local confidence; if there's a feeling locally that something should be a higher priority, they can challenge this. There's a clear role for the area manager/ area community planning officers in this.</p> <p>I'd suggest that there may be gaps i.e. unheard voices, which may, in fact, be the silent majority. Again I'd agree we need to be careful that not one size fits all. We need to have confidence that the local members represent the plan of their communities which gives a sound setting for the local community plans.</p>

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FH	<p>Planning for Real and Making it Real are, I feel, some of the best ways to gauge and engage communities. There's a concern here when you look at our recent Performance Indicator feedback from the public of Aberdeenshire on consultations – only 32% felt that consultation was “genuine”. This was a positive increase from the previous year's 28%, but still is too low.</p> <p>I attended a meeting at Potterton, lead by the local community planning officer and survey software was used to get the community voting – with a clear and immediate public display of outcome – on the topics under discussion.</p> <p>Questions were taken from the floor of a very well attended meeting and I feel this was very successful. It allowed ideas to be presented in a priority order which I think was a good way of doing it.</p>
AM	This would have been the “who wants to be a millionaire” style equipment.
PB	It's all very well having consultation exercises about what goes into the local community plan, but it's also important that we let people know the things that come out of the plan.
RJ	It's also very important to have a follow-up to consultation, to go back and tell the people what's been decided.

9. Do you think the Ward Forums should be rolled out across all six geographic areas? Could these replace the local Community Planning Groups, so that we're not adding an additional layer of meetings/ bureaucracy?

PB	The Committee have seen this process working in Marr.
RJ	In this case, there are implications wider than the Council's to be considered.
AM	The Marr model has certainly been observed to operate well and has been shared as good practice. Formartine recently trialled ward forums. However, it must be stressed that each area is different and it would be hard to impose a single operating structure. It's better to encourage community participation by allowing them to develop themselves, rather than impose a structure.
RJ	I think it's horses for courses – the geography of Marr is a critical factor. The focus should ask, “do you have a way to engage?” – and this should be debated locally. Like Ally, I'd be cautious about what could be imposed. However, I can confirm that the lessons learnt from the success of the Marr Ward Forums are valued.
IT	But surely a uniform and rigorous system for local community planning groups is being imposed at the present?

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PB	If more ward forums were established as a method of community planning engagement, there's a danger that the responses will become more fragmented and also require more local participation.
RJ	Timing would also have to be considered; Marr's working pattern is well established but has evolved over time – it's not the kind of thing that you could impose easily as a "big bang".
PB	It's all very well having consultation exercises about what goes into the local community plan, but it's also important that we let people know the things that come out of the plan.
RJ	It's also very important to have a follow-up to consultation, to go back and tell the people what's been decided.

10. Do you see a role for the Ward Forums in giving the communities real ownership and direction in community planning?

IT	This relates in part to the previous question. It's not really about where members are getting on or working well together, it's a different concept intending to give people the chance to air their views locally – as opposed to the limited number currently sitting on the local community planning group. The intention of the question was to explore whether there is a better and more representative way for people to have a voice in determining what local communities want.
RJ	I understand the intent of the questions, but would reiterate my concern that we don't seek to impose a structure where things are already working – we need to be sure that, whatever structure, community planning is fair and represents the views of the community. Ward forums will work in some areas – but it's not for every area.
IT	I agree that not every model will suit every area, but is something is seen to be working well in first Marr, then Formartine, is there a need to know why it works in these areas and consider what isn't working/ might not work in Banff & Buchan, for example? The existing model of one local community planning group for each area was a given – surely there's merit in reviewing this to see if it's the right option for each area?
RJ	I don't know enough about the models- the current groups may be representative, but there are clear principles about local engagement and involvement – but we also need to ensure local flexibility.
IT	I'm aware that there may be resource implications for the agencies who may not be able to support a plethora of meetings. In that case, could the ward forums be the local community planning groups but with wider representation?

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RJ	There are lots of views and opinions. It's really up to what works best locally. I think the issues would be best addressed if there were a more clear definition of what the important operating principles were. This would allow flexibility for local differences.
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11. Could we look to have a layer less in the current cluttered landscape – and if so, where might this come?

RJ	<p>I'd refer to my earlier response in regard to the Board and Executive – I feel both have clearly distinct roles and are required. There's also a clear role for a local community planning "group", what ever form this may take. There are lots of interests to be incorporated into the local community planning process and I think the current structure and approach offers a means by which these can be de-cluttered. As groups are successful and are seen to be so, they will attract more interest. It's also an interesting consideration – "highly cluttered" or "well represented"? Again, I think there's a need to be careful.</p> <p>I've heard today pointers as to where added value could be achieved, or things could be done better – for example in regard to the Executive and Board. I'd be hesitant to say "you should" but numbers could be reduced by greater collaboration and more working together. This needs to be determined locally, rather than us imposing.</p>
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12. Should "Community Planning" be seen as two separate entities – (a) the strategic joint working as envisaged in the original legislation of large public bodies working together with shared resources on shared projects for the good of the communities in their areas and (b) the working with communities at a local level which has always taken place?

If the above were to be accepted, would there be merit in badging the separate elements differently – with the upper strategic level remaining "Community Planning" and the grass roots activity perhaps known as "Community Working"? Would such a name change assist public in understanding that it's not new and something that's always been done?

AA	These issues were raised as local people still seem confused on occasion by the term "Community Planning" – should it be renamed "community working"?
RJ	<p>This is the old chestnut – the issue's been around for some time and the confusion still chimes, in my experience. I think this also relates to Cllr Hood's earlier question about general awareness of community planning.</p> <p>I can see all the issues – but I think the term is here to stay. We'd only cause more confusion if we started calling it something else and you'd have to question the benefit of change if things are already happening at the local level. In Scotland, I think people do what they do, working well locally –</p>

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	regardless of what it's called or how it's badged. It really doesn't matter what it's called. Perhaps we need to be less precious about calling things "Community Planning" all the time?
AA	There's already an area of friction between community planning and Community Learning & Development in some areas; rather than rebadged but call it the softer "community working"?
SD	Many of the witnesses we've heard so far have suggested it's too far down the road to see any benefit of changing the name.
RJ	If I'm talking to a local group, I don't talk about "Community Planning", but rather focus on the local issues; I may only say as an aside, "oh and by the way...this is community planning." The community planning process leading to the development of a local community plan is clear and direct. I'm not sure if we need to badge it day in day out. It should be made clear it's not a separate box. Perhaps the solution is to do it informally rather than as a campaign?
FH	I've attended lots of Community Council meetings – I can't recall ever seeing anything on the agendas about the local community plans.
AA	Westhill Community Council do have it as an agenda item.
RJ	We've had community planning workshops on each of the themes.
AM	The recently revised Aberdeenshire Community Plan was sent to all 73 Community Councils for consideration and comment. I know we certainly had feedback from Westhill Community Council and a couple of others. Not all community councils may have decided to put it on their formal agenda.
AA	It's also a standing item on the agenda of the Cluny, Midmar and Monymusk Community Council.
PB	I'm aware there's been some discussion at Kincardine & Mearns Area community councils.
RJ	This may be a question to be pursued with the area managers. There's an issue here though; if it is suggested as a standing agenda item but there is no relevant business to discuss. Also, it could be considered that all items on the community council agendas are, in fact, community planning – their work is community planning without branding.

Cllr Allan left the meeting at this point.

13. Do you think that future sustainability in people would be better supported if the communities believe that they have been listened to

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and more feedback given to them on progress/ barriers to progress and what can/ can not be done?

PB	This question relates to Cllr Hood's earlier comment about public feedback of only 32% as being convinced of genuine consultation.
RJ	<p>The clear answer is "yes". There have been recent sessions across Aberdeenshire with the Leader, the Chief Executive and Management Team representatives. This involved local groups and resulted in real and honest conversations. These started about 18 months ago in the specific context of budget cuts – but these things change.</p> <p>The meetings have been pretty positive, and some expectations have been more realistic than others, but there's been open and honest discussions of the issues, leading to the beginning of conversations at a very local level on specific issues which were able to be followed up.</p> <p>Any consultation is important, but it needs to be set in as much context as possible, accepting that people will sometimes believe that there's been a predetermination of what the answer will be.</p> <p>There's also a need, when we can carry out what was originally intended, to say so – and say why.</p>

14. Would there be any merit in altering the current local community planning plans to be generated at a ward level, (incorporating, if available, specific settlement plans if these are available), given that the sporadic nature of resources means not all communities have had the benefit of Planning for Real/Making it Real?).

This would allow local members to input as part of the formulation of the plan utilising local knowledge that may not be available to the area cttie sole representative on the local community planning group. Ideally not to be an additional tier – but a better way of working, empowering both local communities and observing the role of democratically elected members?

RJ	This is a difficult one.
AM	I'd refer to the earlier answer on the resource implications of ward forums, and the support from partners for the six local community planning groups. The same issues also apply to the potential for plans at an even more local level – the question would be – is this a step too far?
RJ	There's room for a compromise here. If an issue is sufficiently important at a settlement level, there's no reason why it shouldn't feature in the local community plan.

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	Too many plans may see issues going in different directions, and there'd be the added challenge of governance – where would matters go to get approval if there were resource implications? At present, these issues go to the Board which provides a degree of consistency.
PB	Planning for Real in Kincardine & Mearns seems to be more a matter of community response and not matters of resources.
RJ	<p>Also, if an issue is not one of resource, it does not need to go in the plan. If here's a local commitment for change, communities should just go ahead and get it done. There's no need for formal reporting/ recording – but benefit might be attained in the sharing of good practice across the networks.</p> <p>There are also sensitivities – local councillors are also elected to represent the community – the same way as local groups on local community planning groups are there to represent their area of interest. There will always be a potential tension between different interests. Again, the roles of the area manager and area chair are very important.</p> <p>Again it would be more a matter of being as inclusive as possible that would be the defining principle – the issue is how.</p>

15. Is there a catch where some officers may use Community Planning to endorse their own projects, which can then be done under delegated powers (financial regulations) without recourse to the democratically elected councillors to approve budgets? £60k is the current officer delegated limit – should this delegation be waived when it comes to Community Planning promoted projects – in order that the audit trail of project “approval” may be clear?

RJ	The question would be – how has this happened? Is there concern about a specific project? Regardless of how an issue has been raised via a local community planning group, for the council – and all other public sector agencies, the appropriate scheme of delegation would apply as well as the relevant financial regulations. Therefore the situation would not arise where a single officer was able to authorise spend with carte blanche. This situation may be where we need to get to in terms of working in partnership, where officers can commit contributions to a shared budget /project – but we're not there yet.
FH	Have there been many projects that could have been pursued on this basis?
RJ	There have not been any as stand-alone projects. In most cases, the decision-making has been through the normal arrangements and powers of the organisations.
RT	Therefore there needs to be an approved budget line which relates to the

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	project/ matter?
PB	Within the Council, this Committee has a role to oversee where financial regulations and due process has not been followed, as per the regular reports of the Chief Internal Auditor. Indeed, it has made representations to the Chief Executive where these have not been followed correctly.

16. Who should make the decision on any selection of items to be included in the local community plan – is it an officer (Area Manager/ Area Community Planning Officer) who decides what is to be included, what omitted, in any choices/ priorities where there is no clear audit to community choice and voice? Is there a role for using the multi-member ward basis for determining this for each local area (e.g. process similar to planning application approval/ referral to committee).

RJ	<p>I'd refer to my answer to a previous question. The ideal is for local engagement, such as Planning for Real, or an event by the local community planning group, or what ever means suits the issue. There needs to be a degree of consensus and this should include the relevant local members. It would all go to the Board in due course for approval. Where there's potential disagreement, the first port of call in attempting a resolution would be the area manager who has a role to mediate. The views of the local elected members would be a strong voice in any argument.</p> <p>If the issue is significant enough not to be resolved locally, an area plan might, for example, go to the Board not fully, but only 90% agreed. In this instance the Board would resolve the local impasse, being asked to take the decision. This has never happened, so what I've give is the theoretical answer. Local community planning should be about reaching consensus – this is something that could be clarified in any statement of operating principles.</p>
FH	I can't recall seeing the draft Community Plan coming round the local community councils for consideration before it was finalised/ signed off.
RJ	It happens for the draft Aberdeenshire Community Plan, as Ally said before. I don't see any reason why this couldn't also happen for local community plans – they should already be familiar with the issues having been part of the process of its formulation. It relates perhaps to the earlier question about effective consultation. I feel that all those who've been involved in the consultation on the local community plan should see the plan in draft – it should be shared with those who have contributed.
FT	At the Mearns Community Council the documents are there for comment or consultation – but it tends to be only the "eager beavers" who look at them in any detail.

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PB	Community Council office bearers often do this type of thing as part of their given remit.
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