

PREPARING COMMUNITY STRATEGIES

*Draft Guidance to Local Authorities from the
National Assembly for Wales*

Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1	2
AIMS AND OBJECTIVES.....	2
KEY CHARACTERISTICS	2
PRINCIPLES.....	3
PROCESS	3
CONTEXT.....	4
TIMING	4
CHAPTER 2	6
SCOPE OF COMMUNITY STRATEGIES.....	6
THE KEY ELEMENTS OF THE PROCESS.....	6
COUNCILLORS’ INVOLVEMENT	7
INVOLVING OTHER ORGANISATIONS	7
A COMMUNITY STRATEGY PARTNERSHIP	8
THE GEOGRAPHICAL EXTENT OF A COMMUNITY STRATEGY	9
CAPACITY BUILDING / SKILLS NEEDS	10
COMMUNITIES FIRST	10
LOCAL HEALTH ALLIANCES	11
ESTABLISHING A VISION	11
RESOURCE AND ACTIVITY ANALYSIS	12
ESTABLISHING PRIORITIES	12
ESTABLISHING AN ACTION PLAN.....	13
CHAPTER 3	14
COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY GROUPS	14
COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT	14
COMMUNITY COUNCILS.....	16
PUBLIC SECTOR ORGANISATIONS	16
ASSEMBLY SPONSORED PUBLIC BODIES	17
THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR WALES	17
<i>Policy agreements</i>	18
POLICE, FIRE AND NATIONAL PARKS AUTHORITIES	18
BUSINESS.....	19
CHAPTER 4	20
DELIVERING COMMUNITY PRIORITIES	20
OTHER PLANS AND STRATEGIES.....	21
BEST VALUE.....	21
UNITARY DEVELOPMENT PLANS	22
RATIONALISING THE PLANNING PROCESS.....	22
MONITORING AND REVIEW	23
<i>Monitoring systems</i>	23
<i>Measuring progress</i>	23
<i>Reviewing and modifying community strategies</i>	24
REPORTING PROGRESS	25
ANNEX 1: RATIONALISING THE PLANNING FRAMEWORK	26
TABLE 1	28

Introduction

Section 4(1) of the Local Government Act 2000 places on county and county borough councils in Wales a duty to prepare 'community strategies', for promoting or improving the economic, social and environmental well-being of their areas, and contributing to the achievement of sustainable development in the UK. Section 2(1) gives authorities broad new powers to improve and promote local well-being as a means of helping them implement those strategies. Section 7 gives the National Assembly the power by order to amend, repeal, revoke or disapply certain enactments relating to the plans local authorities are required to produce.

This document provides guidance to these authorities on the preparation of community strategies. Section 4(3)(b) of the Local Government Act 2000 requires authorities to have regard to it in discharging their duty.

The purpose of community strategies

Aims and objectives

1.1. A community strategy will fulfil a number of purposes, namely to:

- enhance the quality of life of local communities through action to improve their economic, social and environmental well-being;
- provide a mechanism to debate locally the needs, opportunities and aspirations of local communities and establish priorities;
- provide a focus for continuous improvement in joint working and resource planning between local authorities, the voluntary and business sectors and other agencies to ensure that they effectively meet community needs and aspirations;
- help councils develop their corporate priorities;
- identify how the Assembly's priorities relate to local priorities and how they can be implemented at local authority level;
- challenge and test the contribution of services, policies and practices to current and future well being;
- underpin applications to the National Assembly and other bodies for funding and support.

Key characteristics

1.2. A community strategy should focus on priorities for action arising from the specific needs of the different communities in the local authority area, bringing them together in a single strategy for that area . It should provide a means of co-ordinating the provision of services and initiatives and tackling cross-cutting issues in a coherent and integrated way. It should also provide the overarching strategic framework for all the other plans and strategies for the local authority area, so that people can see the relevance of those plans and the contribution that they will make to the community strategy. The community strategy should also be reflected in the plans and strategies of bodies operating on a regional or national basis.

1.3. A community strategy must have 4 key components:

- **A long-term vision for the area focussing on the outcomes that are to be achieved;**

- **An action plan identifying shorter term priorities and activities (the stepping stones) that will contribute to the achievement of the long-term vision;**
- **A shared commitment to implement the action plan and proposals for doing so;**
- **arrangements for monitoring the implementation of the action plan, and for periodically reviewing the community strategy.**

Principles

1.4 Every community strategy should be based on sustainability appraisal – that is, the analysis of needs and the proposed outcomes should integrate economic, social and environmental considerations. The strategy should promote development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

1.5 The principle of equality of opportunity should also be applied throughout the development of the community strategy. Authorities should ensure that they involve different sectors of the population from the earliest stage and that the process enables all communities to participate on an equal basis, by taking account of their different needs and interests.

1.6 Community strategies can also make an important contribution to tackling social disadvantage by ensuring that the needs of the most disadvantaged communities are taken into account in authority-wide strategies, thus supporting more localised or specific initiatives.

1.7 The policy agreements between the National Assembly and local authorities (see paragraph 3.19) underpin the commitment to demonstrate that these principles are reflected in each community strategy.

Process

1.8 The process by which community strategies are produced is vital. The preparation process will be the means by which local people and organisations can be drawn into determining the future of their areas, setting the direction of councils' and other agencies' policies and priorities and participating in the democratic decision-making associated with the strategy - making process. It will be essential to ensure wide local 'ownership' of the community strategy process. Local authorities will need to demonstrate the benefits for other organisations of co-ordinating action and helping to deliver key policy objectives more efficiently and cost effectively. At the same time, the Assembly will encourage its sponsored bodies and the NHS to play an active and constructive role.

Context

1.9 The duty to prepare community strategies should not be seen in isolation. It is linked to wider changes in public services which aim to ensure that the activities of the various bodies who provide services to the public are better co-ordinated; are responsive to the concerns of local communities; are delivered in ways that suit the people who depend on them; and take account of the needs of future generations.

1.10 The local government modernisation programme is designed to contribute to a process of democratic renewal by ensuring that councils are accountable, open and responsive to local needs. The Local Government Acts 1999 and 2000 will ensure that councils' political decision making processes are efficient, transparent and accountable; that there is continuous improvement in the efficiency and quality of the services for which they are responsible; that they actively involve and engage the community in local decisions; and that they have the powers they need to work with other bodies to ensure that resources are deployed effectively to improve the well-being of their areas. The duty to prepare community strategies is central to the modernisation of local government and to the future development of local areas and the services provided there.

1.11 Community strategies can also show the connection between local and national priorities and objectives. In one sense, community strategies can help to show how those national policies are being brought into effect at local level, how effective they are, and how they sit with local priorities. At the same time, community strategies are meant to reflect what is most important to the communities in the local authority area and local agreement on how best to address key priorities. By articulating the needs of communities across Wales, they will have the potential to influence the national policies and priorities of the Assembly and how they are implemented.

Timing

1.12 The Assembly recognises that the extent to which councils have already established some, or all, of the conditions necessary for successful community strategies will vary from authority to authority. It also recognises that the trust needed to underpin partnership working, the active engagement of local communities, and the arrangements to support fully-developed strategies take a considerable time to develop.

1.13 Nevertheless, part of the potential of community strategies will be lost if every authority is working to a different timescale. The Assembly expects all councils which have not yet begun preparing community plans to have started that process by April 2001. Where that process has already begun, local councils and their partners should assess their approaches against the requirements set out in this guidance. The Assembly would expect the process to be well established, with the key components described in 1.3 all in place, before the next council elections.

1.14 In addition, there should be some link between the mandate of the council and the priorities and objectives set out in the community strategy. This guidance suggests that community strategies should have a 10 to 15 year time horizon. They should be reviewed on a 4 year cycle after each local council election, not in order to start again from scratch, but to enable new administrations to confirm or adjust the main priorities and the short, medium and long term goals set out in them. Interim reviews of the community strategies should also be undertaken annually to track the progress made over the year in implementing the goals and to adjust them to take into account changing local circumstances .

1.12. Councils and their partners should regard the production of the first statutory community strategy as a beginning rather than the conclusion of this exercise. The processes and relations through which strategies are produced and implemented should continue to evolve and be refined. In particular:

- **partnerships need to evaluate their effectiveness and adjust their membership and working arrangements accordingly.**
- **the development and implementation of community strategies needs to become embedded firmly into partners' managerial cultures, resource planning and budgetary decisions.**
- **there should be continuing efforts to secure greater degrees of community participation in the preparation and implementation of strategies.**

Developing a community strategy

Scope of community strategies

2.1. Community strategies should look at the needs of the area and its communities in the round. They need not attempt to separate out the economic, social and environmental aspects since in practice, people's needs and aspirations will be a combination of all three. In fact, integrating all these aspects will be crucial to the sustainability of the strategy and the quality of life of the population of the local authority's area.

The key elements of the process

2.2 Community strategies will reflect local issues and priorities. Every authority and every community will be different. There will however be common elements for all such strategies. An effective community strategy will:

- be prepared in partnership with other bodies and agreed by the partnership
- engage and involve the public and local communities; be "owned" by the community
- be based on proper research and an assessment of needs and the availability of resources
- include systems for monitoring and reviewing the strategies and for reporting progress to the public and local communities
- be communicated in ways that the public can easily understand and which are accessible to all.

2.3 To take the process forward, local authorities will need to act as facilitators to:

- bring together the partnership
- involve all relevant organisations as well as local communities in developing the vision and identifying and agreeing the specific outcomes to be achieved
- identify what the different public, private and voluntary bodies are doing in the area, the gaps in provision that exist and the opportunities to realign activity to better achieve the strategy's goals
- chart what needs to be done to realise the long-term vision
- establish the shorter term goals and priorities that will contribute to long-term outcomes
- develop an agreed action plan for meeting those shorter-term priorities and their links to other relevant strategies
- set-up systems for assessing and monitoring progress, for reassessing goals and priorities and for reporting back to the community.

Councillors' involvement

2.4 The success of any community strategy will depend on the sense of ownership it generates inside and outside the council. In exercising its responsibility to initiate and facilitate the community strategy, those taking decisions on behalf of the Council will wish to draw on the expertise and skills of all members of the Council. This involvement in building up a community strategy which draws on the views of communities and a wide range of organisations at all levels represents a very significant development in the roles and responsibilities of councillors. They will be involved:

- as representatives of their wards, leading and listening to formal and informal discussions and consultations, and representing these community views to those accountable for taking decisions on behalf of the authority;
- as members of overview and scrutiny committees. Overview and scrutiny committees have an invaluable role to play in identifying community needs and initiatives and making sure these are adequately taken into account in all plans produced by the council and its partners. This role can involve scrutinising the stated plans and priorities of the council(s) and other provider agencies; comparing these with the results of local consultation; and initiating audits of resources to meet expressed needs. They may also wish to play a role in evaluating the plan as it develops, for example against sustainability criteria;
- as members of area and neighbourhood forums and committees. All such structures should have a role in contributing to the community strategy process;
- as council representatives on outside bodies, ensuring that there is a real dialogue between the council and the other organisations in drawing up the community strategy.

2.5 Councillors and officers engaged in the development of the community strategy will need to be able to commit the council to take action to deliver the priorities agreed as part of the action plan. Since the full council must ultimately adopt the community strategy, those empowered to take decisions on behalf of the authority will need to ensure that all members are informed in good time of emerging developments and outcomes and have continuing opportunities to contribute to the process.

2.6 Councils will need to ensure that those working with the council in the community strategy partnership know which members to deal with on each aspect of the community strategy. Community councillors will also have a significant input to make. The role of community councils as partners is discussed in Chapter 3 below.

Involving other organisations

2.7 The Local Government Act 2000 requires local authorities, in preparing community strategies, to consult and seek the participation of such organisations and people, as they consider appropriate.

2.8 Given the potential breadth of issues that might be covered, a community strategy will only lead to effective action to improve the well-being of an area if it involves all the statutory, non-statutory and voluntary organisations that provide services, or whose actions affect local quality of life, as well as those that represent community interests which need to be taken into account in developing policies and priorities. The degree to which organisations need to be involved in preparing the community strategy will vary, depending on the nature of their work, their potential contribution to establishing the long-term vision (for example, as representatives of 'hard to reach' groups), or their contribution to delivering the action plan (for example, by providing key services).

2.9 Local authorities can, and do, achieve a great deal on behalf of their communities. However, only by working together with other public, private, business and voluntary bodies will it be possible to deliver the broad range of outcomes encompassed by community strategies. All councils and their partners will have some experience of working together. Many local partnerships have already been set up to fulfil specific objectives. In recent years, broader partnerships have been established, such as community safety partnerships, Local Health Alliances, Employment Service led New Deal partnerships, partnerships for European programmes and partnerships for Local Biodiversity Action Plans. Community Consortia for Education and Training are being set up to co-ordinate the planning of local service delivery in the field of post 16 education and training.

2.10 In particular, councils that have developed Local Agenda 21 strategies in an inclusive and comprehensive way should have gone a long way towards developing effective partnership working, a long-term vision for the area and the necessary implementation mechanisms. In developing community strategy partnerships (see below), councils and their partners should seek to build on those local arrangements that have worked well, rather than starting from scratch. Where Agenda 21 strategies have been prepared local authorities and their partners should consider whether in the light of this guidance that partnership provides the right starting point for taking forward the community strategy.

A community strategy partnership

2.11 The most effective way of ensuring the commitment of other organisations will be for the local authority to establish a community strategy partnership. This should comprise the key partners operating in the area that the strategy is to cover. The range of partners to be considered is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3 below.

2.12 There is no definitive approach to the way in which such community strategy partnerships should be structured, the bodies that should be represented, or the way in which the partnership should operate. That is a matter for local authorities and their partners to determine. They should, however, bear in mind the value of partnerships being balanced and not dominated by one sector. They should also seek to achieve diversity among

the people on the partnership, so that different local communities and sectors of the population will be able to see that is broadly representative. It is also important that the representatives of the member organisations have the necessary authority to speak for their organisation, to sign up to the long-term vision and to commit resources to implementing the action plan.

2.13 A community strategy partnership should provide a voluntary framework for local co-operation. While the onus will be on local authorities, in the first instance, to initiate the process and involve other appropriate bodies, they should recognise the operational autonomy of their partners. Only in this way will the partnership develop the trust and responsiveness that is essential to gain real commitment from the participants. This will create the potential for a partnership which will be able to act more collectively in due course.

2.14 The establishment of a community strategy partnership at the local authority level should provide an opportunity to establish links with existing strategic planning arrangements and with other partnerships established to address subject specific or area specific plans. Where possible, authorities and their partners should consider how these arrangements can be rationalised. They should give careful consideration to the advantages of bringing together all existing and proposed local partnerships under a single strategic umbrella. The community strategy partnership should provide a framework and point of reference to which all other partnerships should relate. As a first step, it will be necessary to establish linkages between the various partnerships. This will ensure that :

- The potential for duplication is minimised;
- The partnerships in which the local authority and others are involved operate to a common vision and set of objectives; and
- The scope and performance of partnerships can be assessed against the contribution they make to achieving the community strategy's objectives. The reviews of partnership arrangements should be tied in with the community strategy review process.

2.15 The membership and size of a community strategy partnership should reflect both its aims and the breadth of issues that might fall within the scope of a community strategy. Organisations that need to be involved will range from those representing only one geographical part of the community or one particular community of interest through to regional and national bodies.

The geographical extent of a community strategy

2.16 While Section 4 of the Local Government Act will require every principal local authority to prepare a community strategy, it specifies neither the level at which the strategy should be produced nor the specific

geographical area it should cover. Local authority areas will comprise many different communities – both of place and of interest. The needs of a deprived estate will not be the same as those of a suburb, or an isolated rural community. To be most effective, community strategies, and the process of implementing them, will need to operate at different geographical levels, from county-wide to individual neighbourhoods or localities. An element of locality planning will help ensure that the community strategy process is not remote from people’s daily concerns and will balance the risk that the process becomes too top-down.

2.17 This does not preclude strategies from covering issues or actions outside the authority’s own administrative boundaries. For example, some of the issues that concern local communities – such as transport - will be best tackled by action at a regional level. This might mean that such action will depend on the involvement of a number of authorities working together to take action in one area that benefits each of their communities, or a particular regional or all Wales body. In some cases, there may be communities that, while outside the boundary of a particular authority, are dependent to a significant extent on that authority for access to services. When such issues are first identified, authorities will need to consider whether effective action demands joint working with neighbouring authorities. Local authorities should ensure, in any case, that neighbouring community strategy partnerships are consulted as part of the process.

Capacity building / skills needs

2.18 At the outset each community strategy partnership should consider what skills development and capacity building is needed in order to support the development of the partnership, including a common understanding of its role and what is expected of its members.

2.19 A number of well-tried methods are now available to enable communities (whether neighbourhood based or communities of interest) to articulate their needs — such as ‘planning for real’, village appraisals, community profiling and listening surveys. Such processes serve a dual purpose: developing plans that are owned by the community, and empowering groups within that community to start their own projects and activities. Both will make important contributions to the development and implementation of the community strategy. However, it is crucial to recognise that this kind of locality planning is dependent on long-term community development support.

Communities First

2.20 Where significant problems of deprivation and social exclusion exist in a local authority’s area, the community strategy will need to address how these problems are to be tackled and how the quality of life of those in the deprived communities is to be improved. The Assembly’s Communities First programme (currently the subject of consultation¹) recommends that local

¹ Communities First - ref

partnership working is needed to tackle the problems of the most deprived neighbourhoods. It proposes that in each Community First area a local partnership should be set up with representation informed by the 'three thirds' principle- one third from the statutory sector (Assembly, local authorities, health, policing, education etc), one third from the social (business, commerce, voluntary sector) and one third from the community (local residents and representatives of community groups) – though this should not be prescriptively applied. Each Community First partnership would be expected to prepare a local vision setting out where they want to be in 5 – 10 years time and a local delivery plan setting out how the vision could be realised.

2.21 While the community strategy will cover the whole local authority area, the Community First partnership will focus on the specific needs of the smaller area which it covers. There will need to be links between the two, since the overarching community strategy will be a way for Communities First partnerships to make vital links to other strategic themes, including the delivery of mainline services, and to other neighbourhoods. It may also be that the community strategy partnership will be able to deliver the commitment of participating agencies at the highest level to Communities First. Further guidance on the role of community strategies in the implementation of Communities First may be issued following the conclusion of both consultation processes.

Local Health Alliances

2.22 Local Health Alliances, which are rapidly being developed across Wales, provide the means by which local action to improve health at both strategic and operational levels can be planned and implemented. Local Health Alliances will be a natural vehicle for taking forward those parts of the community strategy which relate to health, as a cross cutting aspect of the strategy, ensuring that health is taken into account in fields which are relevant but have not normally been considered.

Establishing a vision

2.23. Having set up a broad community strategy partnership, the first stage in developing a community strategy will be to establish a long-term vision for the area, which will sit within the context of wider regional and national visions for better quality of life. If this is to command support, it is important that the widest possible number of local people and organisations are involved at this stage. The aim should be to arrive at a broad consensus about what the area should look like in 10 or 15 years time, and the sorts of communities in which people want to live. The timescale is something that can only be decided in the light of local circumstances and following the articulation of communities' aspirations. In the key areas of education and training, jobs, health and social care and crime reduction, it is likely that aspirations will only be realised in the

long term. However, to avoid the long-term vision being no more than a set of “motherhood and apple pie” statements, the community strategy partnership will need to ensure that it expresses some hard-edged outcome targets. These should include some early wins as well as longer term results.

2.24. A community strategy cannot realistically attempt to cover every issue that may be relevant to a local community. Rather, authorities and their partners should seek to draw together the views of their communities to identify a number of broad priorities or themes. In doing so, they will also need to take account of what their community strategy might contribute to regional and national priorities.

Resource and activity analysis

2.25 The intention of community strategies should be not only to generate new activity, but also to evaluate the ways in which current activities do (or do not) contribute to the achievement of the strategy’s goals. Councils and their partners should carry out an analysis of their own use of resources - expenditure, staffing, and skills - in relation to the priorities and objectives identified by the strategy. The deployment of both revenue and capital resources should be examined to determine whether, considered jointly, they are being used in the most effective way. The aim should be to establish where there are gaps, overlaps or contradictions in resource use. At least in the shorter term, until partnership working is developed to a point where truly joint decisions can be taken, most decisions about the use of resources will remain the preserve of the individual partners. Nevertheless opportunities for better ways of working should be identified, using if necessary the powers contained in recent legislation to facilitate closer joint working between local authorities, health authorities and other bodies².

2.26 Such evaluation should be part of a continuing process, alongside the development of the long-term vision and the establishment of shorter-term goals and priorities. While the analysis may start with the resources of public agencies, it could be extended to cover the private and voluntary sectors and the community generally. The initial analysis might best concentrate on achieving a more efficient, effective and economical deployment of existing resources. However, partnerships should also aim to ensure that future investment and expenditure decisions are informed by a similar analysis.

Establishing priorities

2.27 In order to meet long-term outcomes, community strategy partners will have to establish shorter-term priorities for action. Inevitably, different local communities will have different priorities. The community strategy process should provide a forum in which differences of view can be properly articulated. As the democratically elected body in the community strategy partnership, councils will play a strong role in mediating between different

² Notably section 31 of the Health Act 1999 and clause 2 of the current Local Government Bill.

interests, helping to ensure that different perspectives are shared, resolving conflict where possible and helping the partnership to make decisions about priorities.

2.28 To assist this process, it is important that partnerships fully involve communities in those decisions. As well as the views of local communities, councils will ideally want to take decisions based on a proper analysis of needs and as a result of independent research. Such research will, on occasion, suggest courses of action different from those supported by the community. In such situations, councils and their community strategy partners will need to balance community views with the research findings before they determine how to proceed. Opposition from sections of the community should not preclude action if the council and the community strategy partnership believe that it is in the best interests of the area and can explain to the community at large the reason for following a particular course of action.

Establishing an action plan

2.29 Community strategies need to produce tangible results. They should, therefore, include the major actions that will be taken to contribute to the objectives and outcomes, and identify the body or bodies responsible for those actions. Again, the community strategy should concentrate on key actions. More specific activities of each of the partners may be covered by references to their own corporate strategies or to other theme- or service-specific plans.

2.30 The action plan should also include details of the arrangements for reviewing progress, including the timescales by which the strategy will be periodically reviewed.

Chapter 3

Partners in community strategies

3.1 The partners in developing and implementing community strategies will range from individuals playing a community leadership role to national and multi-national organisations. The role of councillors was outlined in the previous chapter. This chapter addresses some of the other partners who will need to be involved.

Community and voluntary groups

3.2. The voluntary and community sectors have a vital role to play in improving the quality of life for local communities. They are often best placed to reach and involve those sections of the community that the mainstream public sector may find hard to reach. They may also be able to access funding that is not available to public bodies. Such groups need to be treated as true partners in the preparation and delivery of a community strategy. The National Assembly wrote to all local authorities last year encouraging them to develop compacts with the voluntary sector. Most local authorities in Wales now have a voluntary sector compact in place. The Assembly is now asking local authorities, through policy agreements, to help the voluntary sector develop its capacity to play its full part in the development and implementation of community strategies and ensure that voluntary organisations are involved at the earliest stage of policy as well as service development.

3.3 Local authorities should ensure that umbrella bodies, in particular the County Voluntary Councils, are involved in addressing how best to build up a wider dialogue with voluntary and community groups locally.

Community involvement

3.4 If strategies are to respond to public concerns, there needs to be genuine community engagement at an early stage of the process. It is important that the process allows communities to be fully involved in establishing both the long-term vision and the shorter term priorities for action. It is not sufficient simply to consult communities on the options preferred by the authority and its partner organisations.

3.5 Authorities will need to consider the various methods by which they can involve communities in the preparation of community strategies. These will need to recognise that individuals belong simultaneously to a number of communities, of both place and interest, and will identify with different communities according to their circumstances and the issues under discussion. Individual councils will need to consider how best to involve the different communities that make up their area, and devise techniques that are most appropriate to local circumstances.

3.6 Councils must ensure that the techniques they employ do not discriminate against particular groups. Specific efforts should be made to involve different ethnic communities, women, faith communities, older people and disabled people. This includes making sure that venues used for consultation are accessible for people with physical or visual impairments; that audio loops are provided at meetings and that sign language interpreters or interpreters for minority languages are available when necessary. Written information should be in plain language. It should be available in large print, audio, Braille or minority languages on request or where the need arises. Hard-to-reach groups can, inadvertently, be under-represented by the methods chosen to engage communities. Voluntary and community groups can provide practical local advice and contacts.

3.7 In the same way, community strategy partnerships should make specific and appropriate efforts to ensure that young people are able to influence decisions— bearing in mind the principles set out by the Assembly in “Children and Young People: A Framework for Partnership” and the advisory report ‘Extending Entitlement : Supporting Young People in Wales’, endorsed by the Assembly on 2 November 2000 which underlined the importance of supporting the participation of young people including those disadvantaged in different ways, both to promote their own development as individuals and citizens and to promote creative solutions to problems.

3.8 As a starting point, local authorities should, wherever possible, use existing mechanisms that have already been proved to be effective, rather than setting up duplicatory processes. This should then form the basis for considering how to equip local groups with the knowledge and support to make a meaningful and continuing contribution to the community strategy process. Individual local authorities should consider the role that councillors, staff and local community groups can play in helping to ensure that the views of communities are fully communicated.

3.9 Where other partners in the community strategy process also have plans to engage in dialogue with communities, the partnership should seek where possible to combine efforts, both to increase the dividends for the partnership and to avoid duplication, avoidable costs and “consultation fatigue” on the part of communities and voluntary organisations.

3.10 The degree of community involvement will inevitably vary at different stages of the process. Moreover, community views are likely to reveal differences of view – particularly about priorities for action — not all of which will be reconcilable. There may be differences between generations, for example. Councils will need to consider how community views are going to influence and inform the decision-making process; how differences of view are to be aired and resolved within the community strategy partnership; and how decisions are to be explained to communities.

3.11 It is important that in seeking the views of communities, councils and their community strategy partners do not inadvertently raise expectations that they cannot meet. Clear parameters need to be established and communities must be given full information about the context and constraints within which

public service providers operate (e.g. UK government and Assembly expectations and targets, resource levels and statutory limitations). The process is about dialogue, including communication about limitations as well as possibilities. Where there are genuine constraints, these need to be explained so that the partners – including local communities – can understand them and work around them.

3.12 Community strategy partnerships will also need to consider the part that residents and community groups can play in implementing community strategies. In some areas, notably the management of social housing, there are well-established ways of involving communities in both the planning and delivery of services. Partnerships should be responsive to the wishes of local communities in this regard, and help to create the conditions for a greater degree of community involvement where this is being sought. The Assembly may wish to issue good practice guidance on community participation and involvement drawn from across the public sector in Wales.

Community Councils

3.13 Community councils also have a key role to play in developing community strategies. Although they will not be the exclusive means of securing community involvement, they will be an important means of contributing to, and securing, that involvement and should be fully engaged in the community strategy process. Where the local authority has established area committees or forums and has given them a role in developing a community strategy, they should always liaise with community councils - as should the local authority itself when considering setting up area committees or forums.

3.14 Community councils might wish to facilitate the preparation of visions for their local areas which outline how they would like their areas to develop and identify the contribution that they and others could make to implementing them. The visions could form the basis of town and village plans that some community councils produce. These visions should be realistic, based on solid research and full engagement with the public.

Public sector organisations

3.15 The public bodies that should be involved in preparing community strategies may vary from one authority area to another. At the least however, an effective community strategy would need to involve the key public sector organisations that operate at the local level and control the majority of the resources going into the local area – Health Authorities and Local Health Groups, Hospital Trusts, Police Authorities, local schools, the Employment Service, , Legal Services Commission, the Environment Agency and the Benefits Agency for example. Organisations that provide services to a particular part of the community, such as Business Connect, Careers companies and independent providers of social housing, such as Registered Social Landlords, will also need to be involved.

Assembly sponsored public bodies

3.16 The National Assembly's Sponsored Public Bodies have a key role to play in working alongside local authorities and their partners in preparing the community strategies. Under the Local Government Partnership Scheme adopted by the Assembly, all Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies are required to co-operate with local government in preparing community strategies, focus on the problems and opportunities identified in them and have regard to them in implementing the Assembly's priorities. The Welsh Development Agency, Countryside Council for Wales, Wales Tourist Board, Sports Council for Wales, Arts Council for Wales, Welsh Language Board and Council for Education and Training for Wales all have a part to play and have indicated their willingness to work at the local authority level and contribute to the relevant strategic and local partnerships.

The National Assembly for Wales

3.17 There are many levels at which the Assembly is relevant to individual community strategies:

- the Assembly's strategic plan, Better Wales, is in one sense a community plan for the whole of Wales. It sets out a vision for 2010 together with medium term objectives and targets. It is supported by an annual operational plan with specific milestones measuring progress towards the objectives and it depends on the contribution of partners in all sectors and at all levels to deliver the targets identified. While this guidance does not require authorities to adopt the same structure, priorities and objectives as Better Wales, it does ask all authorities to address the topics covered by the national strategy under the headings of :
 - better opportunities for learning
 - a better, stronger economy
 - better health and well-being
 - better quality of life
 - better, simpler government

3.18 Councils and community strategy partnerships should consider how the priorities, objectives and targets set out in Better Wales relate to the priorities for their own communities. The key supporting strategies at national level, such as the National Economic Development Strategy, should assist in identifying more detailed priorities and targets. [Would a list of extant strategies, as included in Annex 1 of Better Wales, be useful?]

Policy agreements

3.19 The National Assembly recently consulted on proposals for a framework of policy agreements between the National Assembly and individual local authorities. They are intended to strengthen the synergy between local and national priorities and objectives. They affirm a shared overall vision for the future development of Wales and the importance of the five key action areas defined by Better Wales and listed above. They also affirm the commitment of the individual councils to develop the themes of sustainable development, tackling social disadvantage and equal opportunities. The framework agreement proposed following that consultation includes a commitment for each authority to ensure that the community strategy is underpinned by sustainability appraisal and to evaluate its community strategy against sustainable development criteria by or before December 2003; to specifically address the needs of different ethnic communities in its community strategy; and to help the voluntary sector to develop its capacity to play a full part in the development and implementation of the community strategy.

3.20. The targets on education, social services, transport and waste management proposed by local authorities for inclusion in the policy agreement and agreed with the Assembly should be adopted for the medium term objectives and targets of community strategies or the more detailed plans which support them. The Assembly believes that while many other topics may emerge as being of importance to local communities, the measures singled out for the policy agreements represent key areas where all communities will benefit in economic, social and environmental terms from a high quality of service.

3.21 In addition:

- Individual Assembly Members, whether elected on a constituency or regional basis, have an interest in community strategies because of their understanding of the concerns of local people and their wider knowledge of the policy issues facing Wales.
- Assembly Ministers have a dual interest – as individual members and as service portfolio holders. In the latter capacity, they will always be ready to listen to the views emerging from individual community strategies to test and inform their views of national priorities.

Police, fire and national parks authorities

3.22 Police, fire and national parks authorities would not be required to prepare their own community strategies. They have an important input to make into local authorities' community strategies and to participate in relevant thematic or area partnerships. These will cover directly relevant topics such as community safety and local environment action plans but may also lead to

links with wider topics such as children and young people / education and training.

Business

3.23 Business in the widest sense, including agriculture, trades unions and the social economy including community enterprises, must be fully involved in the community strategy process. The private sector is a significant user and supplier of local services as well as a key provider of local employment. Business activity of all kinds contributes both directly and indirectly to the quality of life of local communities. Business will have views on a wide range of issues related to the well being of local communities, and the skills and ideas to enhance the work of partnerships through innovation or new ways of working.

3.24 Private sector participation will be encouraged by approaches to community strategies that are based on clear goals and the means to achieve them. Business will be discouraged by approaches that appear to be bureaucratic or lacking direction. Councils and their partners should build on approaches to business involvement that have already been shown to work. There are many examples of good practice and local authorities and the community strategy partnerships should ensure that local businesses, economic development forums, local chambers of commerce and other representative organisations such as local trades councils, trades unions, and the county committees of the NFU and FUW , the Country Landowners Association, Business Connect, Menter a Busnes and the Leader Groups, where they exist, are fully involved in preparing community strategies. Where the existing organisations are not fully representative of key business interests, or where the mechanisms are not in place to engage with business, local authorities should consider how to stimulate participation from a wider range of enterprises.

Implementation

Delivering community priorities

4.1. A community strategy should be a practical tool for councils and their partners to pursue the economic, social and environmental well-being of their area. This section deals specifically with some of the practical implications for principal authorities but the principles apply equally to those other bodies who have committed themselves to delivering elements of the community strategy, and who will often be working in partnership with local authorities.

4.2. The community strategy will identify desired outcomes, some broad priorities and some key actions. This should set the context for everything that is going on at the local level. The achievement of the identified outcomes will depend on the individual and joint actions taken by authorities and their partners as part of their day-to-day activities. Responsibility for delivering particular services and actions will in many instances remain with individual service providers, including the local authority, or will be overseen by another partnership (eg a Strategic Partnership Board, for joint health and social services working). It is, therefore, essential that the priorities and actions identified in a community strategy feed directly into the content of other, more detailed plans produced by authorities and their partners. In turn, these plans must be translated into action on the ground.

4.3. It follows that the community strategy must be linked to the day-to-day activity of the council and its partners. It should be central to an authority's planning and resource decisions, ensuring that local priorities and concerns are reflected in the allocation of resources. Members who are responsible for developing policies and strategies, proposing the allocation of resources and taking decisions on behalf of the council will need to translate priorities arising from the community strategy into a clear set of activities for the council, and ensure that resources are allocated to deliver the specific actions to which the authority has committed itself.

4.4. The Local Government Act 2000 also provides principal authorities with a broad new power to promote or improve the social, economic or environmental well-being of their area. This power provides an important new tool for local authorities to improve local quality of life and contribute to sustainable development. In particular, the well-being power can provide the means to deliver some of the priorities identified in the community strategy, and councils must have regard to the community strategy when using it. The National Assembly will be issuing separate guidance on the use of the well-being power.

Other plans and strategies

4.5 A community strategy should identify the key priorities for action in a council's area. It follows that it should act as an overarching framework for other service or theme-specific plans and together with other key strategic plans, such as Education Strategic Plans, Social Services Plans, Local Biodiversity Action Plans and (in a broader context) Health Improvement Programmes and local Health Action Plans, will influence a wide range of activities. A community strategy will not specifically cover every local issue, but it should affect the delivery of a wide range of services, including social care, housing, education and training, transport, crime prevention, economic development, environmental health, countryside management, culture and leisure and so on. A community strategy should provide a practical context for informing and linking other service-specific or theme-specific plans, including those already prepared with local partners. In reviewing or drawing up such plans, authorities should consider with their partners the extent to which the plans can and do contribute to the priorities in the community strategy. However, work on other plans should not be delayed until after a community strategy has been finalised. Instead, other plans should be revised later.

Best Value

4.6 The development of a comprehensive community strategy is inextricably linked to the delivery of a local authority's duty of best value. A community strategy provides the basis from which an authority can best determine its own contribution to the long-term economic, social and environmental well-being of its community. The key local priorities identified should in turn be reflected in the setting of the authority's corporate objectives, and in the establishment of authority-wide objectives and performance measures. These objectives should then help to provide the overall context and framework for an authority's approach to best value, and enable Best Value Performance Plans to give practical expression to them.

4.7 Best Value will be a key tool in ensuring that the aspirations identified in a community strategy are turned into effective action on the ground. Without a clear understanding of local needs and of the potential contribution that can be made by other local agencies and the private and voluntary sectors, an authority will be unlikely to achieve best value in the provision of its own services. Best value service reviews will need to examine the extent to which existing services are meeting community priorities, and identify ways in which services can be improved to do so. In some cases, community priorities will cut across traditional service boundaries, and a cross-cutting approach to Reviews that reflects this will also have an important and enduring role to play.

4.8 An authority's annual Best Value Performance Plan will draw together the key information that emerges from these different approaches. As a result, it could provide an important means of monitoring and informing the public of the effectiveness of the authority's contribution to tackling the priorities identified in the community strategy.

Unitary Development Plans

4.9 Unitary development plans, prepared by local authorities under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, and community strategies need to be complementary. In preparing community strategies, local authorities will need to take into account the policies and proposals in any existing adopted unitary development plan. Once a community strategy has been established, the unitary development plan will provide the means of taking forward those elements of its vision and priorities that concern the physical development and use of land in the authority's area. Where unitary development plans are themselves in need of updating, there may be scope for taking forward, in an integrated way, the alteration or replacement of the unitary development plan alongside work on the community strategy. The consultation process and involvement of the local community required by the unitary development plan preparation procedures can, for example, form part of the wider process of participation involved in developing a community strategy. The Assembly is considering whether it would be useful to issue further guidance on the links between community strategies and unitary development plans.

Rationalising the Planning Process

4.10 A community strategy — based on a thorough analysis of local needs and resources — should provide much of the background information and material that informs many other plans. Where appropriate, authorities should cross-refer to their community strategy in those other plans to avoid unnecessary duplication of information.

4.11 Section 7 of the Local Government Act 2000 provides a limited power for the National Assembly for Wales to remove or disapply redundant planning requirements, and to amend certain existing statutory planning processes so that they operate more effectively. Under the provisions of the Act the Assembly's power under this Section is currently limited to Air Quality Action Plans, Energy Conservation Plans and Waste Recycling Plans. This power can be extended by Parliamentary Order to include further plans. The Act itself repeals the requirement to prepare Economic Development Plans under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. Within the context of community strategies, this power could provide a means to simplify the statutory planning requirements relating to particular services. It could also allow different approaches to streamlining planning to be piloted in particular authorities where effective community strategy partnerships are established. Through the Local Government Partnership Council, the Assembly and the Welsh Local Government Association will seek to identify opportunities to rationalise and reduce the number of plans local authorities are required to produce.

4.12 Alongside statutory plans, several non-statutory plans are also required of local government and local authorities are asked to contribute to a number of other plans produced by public bodies. Annex 1 gives a simplified

illustration of these requirements. Although it is clear that most plans will contribute to all three aspects of well-being, this broad categorisation is intended to be a starting point for considering the scope for simplifying or merging planning requirements into a smaller number of more strategic planning frameworks. These would sit immediately underneath the community strategy and provide the pointers to more detailed action plans where necessary.

Monitoring and review

4.13 Community strategy partnerships will need to establish systems for monitoring progress, ensuring that the activities identified in the action plan are carried out and assessing their success in addressing the priorities identified in the community strategy.

Monitoring systems

4.14 It is important that any monitoring systems should involve the local authority, other partners and the wider community. The nature of the arrangements will be a matter for community strategy partnerships to decide. They may want to establish a series of multi-agency groups to monitor or manage the delivery of specific activities identified in the action plan, or to monitor progress against the goals and priorities identified in the community strategy. Where there is scope to do so, existing groups could be used. Alternatively, particularly where neighbourhood or locality planning is a strong feature of the process, they may wish to monitor progress on a geographical basis.

4.15 Whatever the arrangements, however, it is important that they enable the partnership to readily identify the progress made, and the areas where action looks like being ineffective and where objectives are in danger of not being met.

Measuring progress

4.16 In order to establish effective monitoring arrangements, community strategy partnerships will need to consider how they will measure progress. Community strategies are about achieving specified outcomes. It follows that progress should be monitored against those outcomes, rather than focussing just on inputs or actions taken. Progress should be measured and reported in a way which local communities will readily understand. This may be done in a variety of ways, from specific data (eg jobs created, reduction in accidents) to surveys which measure changes in local perceptions of where their community stands in relation to “benchmark” statements describing the sort of community in which they want to live. It will be important for the partnership to agree at the outset how progress will be measured and who will measure it.

4.17 Local authorities and their partners already have in place a range of indicators for measuring their own performance and efficiency, notably

through the best value regime. Best Value authorities are already required to measure their performance against a basket of national and locally set indicators in their annual Best Value Performance Plans. These plans, and those of other partners, will provide the means of demonstrating the effectiveness of the contribution of individual bodies to tackling the priorities identified in the community strategy. As such, there will be little value in simply replicating this performance data (although some BVPP outcome measures may be directly relevant to particular community strategies).

4.18 Given that community strategies will be addressing a range of areas relevant to quality of life, authorities may also find it useful to consider whether indicators developed for sustainable development purposes³ or the quality of life indicators developed by the Audit Commission⁴ will help to measure progress against local priorities. Local partnerships are encouraged to select and use these indicators according to their local experiences and needs, and the objectives they set themselves, and to consider which will best monitor progress through the community strategy process. However, it is important that indicators should be relevant to the needs of community strategies. So community strategy partnerships may need to supplement those developed at national level with additional locally chosen or developed indicators.

Reviewing and modifying community strategies

4.19 Authorities and their partners should establish a timetable for periodic reviews of community strategies. Community strategies should be reviewed on a 4 year cycle, starting immediately after the local government elections. Because of the long time interval between full-scale reviews, partnerships should undertake interim reviews annually. This will enable alterations to be made to the activities being pursued, where monitoring reveals this to be appropriate to help realise communities' aspirations, or respond to unforeseen changes in the area's economic, social or environmental circumstances.

4.20 It would be useful in the run up to local government elections if outgoing councils' administrations were to publish assessments of the extent to which they had contributed to the attainment of the goals of the community strategies. This would emphasise the community leadership role of local authorities, encourage the public to focus on the future development of their areas and the different aspirations of the political parties, and foster public debate on councils' performance in attaining the vision.

4.21 The Local Government Act 2000 includes a power for local authorities to modify community strategies. As with the initial preparation of a community strategy, local authorities must consult or seek the participation of such bodies and individuals as they consider appropriate when modifications to a strategy are proposed. The level of partner and public involvement will depend on the extent of the proposed modification, and authorities should have regard to the guidance. The arrangements for any full-scale review should be

³ "A Sustainable Wales/Measuring the difference: consultation indicators"

⁴ "

commensurate with those for the preparation of the original community strategy.

Reporting progress

4.22 If the preparation of a community strategy and its continuing development and implementation are to maintain credibility with local people, it is vital that communities are kept informed of progress. They should also be made aware of the reasons why particular decisions or actions were taken (or not). An important part of the implementation and further development of a community strategy will, therefore, be reporting back to the wider community on the outcome of the community strategy process – and later on, the progress that is being made.

4.23 The style and manner in which this is done will depend on local circumstances, the manner in which partnerships have involved their communities in the decision making process, and the preferences of communities themselves. However, it is important that reporting should be clear and understandable and that all sections of the community should have ready access to it.

4.24 Again, it will be important to avoid unnecessary duplication of the existing reporting requirements for local authorities and other bodies. Reports need only include the main indicators of progress. However, they could also usefully act as 'signposts' to the detailed activity being taken by each partner body by indicating sources of more detailed information on their performance.

ANNEX 1: Rationalising the Planning Framework

The requirement in the Local Government Act 2000 for local authorities to prepare community strategies creates an opportunity to review the requirements placed on councils to prepare plans and strategies.

Table 1 shows that local authorities in Wales currently prepare a total of [38] formal and informal plans and strategies. The large number of plans that local authorities produce are:

- Expensive in terms of staff time and other resources to produce and update ;
- Confusing to elected members and the public who find it difficult to differentiate between plans, many of which cover aspects of a single service ;
- Difficult to relate to authorities' wider priorities and funding strategies as the plans differ in their time horizons and when they were last updated

The community strategies discussed in this paper will set the priorities and provide a co-ordinating framework for the wide range of plans that local authorities and other agencies produce.

The emphasis on working towards an agreed vision, operating to a 4 year cycle that coincides with the electoral cycle and with annual interim reviews, places an emphasis on outcomes, performance and expediting the plan review process. Individual service plans can then reflect immediately the changing priorities identified by the local authority and the community strategy partnership.

It would be over-ambitious and unmanageable to try to synchronise and cross-refer all the relevant plans produced by all the partners. Establishing a medium and long term strategy for the area should go a long way to promoting greater coherence between plans produced by different organisations, even if their timescales do not coincide exactly. There may however be greater scope to introduce much more specific coherence into the framework of plans for which local authorities have lead responsibility.

As many local authority plans operate to different time horizons and take a long time to update it will be difficult to ensure that those who are responsible for implementing policy or delivering services at the local level will be able to respond speedily to changes in priorities identified in the community strategies. Any review of the planning system would have to:

- Establish what is a reasonable number of plans;

- Establish a close link between the community strategies , their priorities and the service plans; and
- Standardise the plans' review and resourcing cycles and speed up the process.

This would entail:

1. Reducing the total number of plans that local authorities produce by merging or revoking the requirement to produce those plans which no longer serve a purpose or merging them with other plans or strategies;
2. Simplifying the content of plans, thereby expediting the plan preparation, review and modification processes; and
3. A mixture of the two approaches – reducing the number of plans and simplifying the preparation process.

An option which would encompass all of the above would involve grouping the plans and strategies which local authorities currently produce into 4 main themes- economic; education and training; environment; social; and corporate. Consideration could then be given to merging or simplifying individual plans into a smaller number of broader strategic frameworks under each theme.

A list of the plans local authorities currently produce under each theme is outlined in Table 1.

Views are requested on:

- The general approach outlined above;
- Whether the list of plans in Table 1 is complete and whether there are any other plans/strategies which should be included in this list;
- The scope for merging or restructuring the plans along the lines indicated in the table.

TABLE 1
PLANS PRODUCED AT LOCAL AUTHORITY LEVEL

PLAN TITLE	CORPORATE	ENVIRONMENT	YOUNG PEOPLE	SOCIAL
Best Value Performance Plan	*			
Asset Management Plan	Subset of Best Value Plan?			
Procurement Strategy	Ditto			
ICT Development Plan	Ditto			
Local Agenda 21	Absorbed into Community strategy?			
Education Strategic Plan			*	
Class Sizes Plan			Subset of Education Strategic plan	
School Organisation Plan			Ditto	
Behaviour Support Plan			Ditto	
Lifelong Learning Plan				*
Library Plan				Link to lifelong learning?
Cultural Strategy				*
Sport and Leisure Plan				*
Early Years Development Plan			Link with other children and young people's plans	
Children's Services Plan			Ditto	
Surestart			Ditto	
Children First Action Plan			Ditto	
Child and Youth Partnership Plan			Ditto	
Youth Justice Plan			Ditto	
Crime and Disorder Strategy			*	
Community Safety Plan				Subset of Crime and disorder strategy?
<i>Local Drug and Alcohol Action Team Plan</i>				Ditto?
<i>Local Health Action Plan</i>				Link to Social Care Plan
Social Care Plan				*
Carers strategy				Combine into social care plan
Housing Strategic Operational Plan				Scope to merge into community plan
Home Energy Conservation Plan				Subset of housing plan
Local Transport Plan		*		
Economic Development Plan	Scope to merge into community plan			
Unitary Development Plan	*			
Local Biodiversity Action Plan		*		
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan		Subset of Biodiversity plan?		

Nature Conservation Strategy		Ditto		
Countryside Plan		Ditto		
Integrated Waste Management Strategy		*		
Contaminated Land Plan		Subset of Waste Management Strategy?		
Waste Recycling Plan		Merge into Waste Management Strategy?		
Air Quality Management Plan		Subset of Waste Management Strategy?		
<i>Local Environment Action Plan</i>		Link to Biodiversity Plan		

Key:

Bold = retain

Italics = not direct local authority responsibility

Normal text = possible scope for rationalisation