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Our reference:
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Dear Chief Executive

STATUTORY GUIDANCE FOR OPERATION OF COMMUNITY PLANNING

The Department has prepared the attached guidance to assist with the practical operation of the provisions of part 10 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 (the Act), in relation to arrangements for community planning.

This guidance is issued under section 111 of the Act.

Yours sincerely

Nichola Creagh

Enc



Department of the
Environment

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

October 2015

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Foreword



Local government in Northern Ireland is undergoing the biggest changes seen in over 40 years. The eleven new councils are now in place and they will be at the forefront of delivering a modernised local government. This will mean bringing decision making closer to communities and citizens, creating a stronger and more effective local democracy, and improving service delivery. Councils now have some powerful tools with which to shape their areas and communities. Integrating functions such as planning, urban regeneration, local economic development and local tourism with councils' existing functions, will allow for a more productive, joined-up approach which makes the best use of opportunities and

available assets.

The economic challenges, both locally and globally, highlight the need for central and local government to reorganise and adapt how they take decisions and, most importantly, how they can bring decision-making closer to communities and citizens; create a stronger and more effective local democracy; and improve service delivery by influencing place shaping and facilitating greater integration. The effective use by councils of community planning is of central importance, since reform is not just about doing things differently – it's about doing things better. Reformed local government presents new challenges and opportunities. The new councils cover larger geographical areas, serving a bigger population base. They will also deliver significant new functions, including spatial planning, regeneration and community planning, and they will operate within a new governance framework. In moving forward, there will be major challenges and opportunities in relation to implementing both transition and transformation simultaneously and creating new fit-for-purpose organisations which can deliver against the following vision for local government as agreed by the NI Executive: “... **a strong, dynamic local government creating communities that are vibrant, healthy, prosperous, safe, sustainable and have the needs of all citizens at their core...**”

Local government reorganisation provides a real opportunity to redefine the role of councils and the services they provide, further enhancing the ability of councils to shape local places and meet local needs and priorities. Community planning aims to improve the connection between regional, local and neighbourhood level through partnership working and better use of all available resources, with a focus on collaboration between organisations for the benefit of all citizens accessing services. To do that successfully, councils will first need to establish community partnerships for their districts. I expect that through consideration of the guidance contained in this document, Northern Ireland's new councils will be able to take on their new challenges and become stronger, more efficient, delivering more effective services. They will be citizen focused, responding to the needs, aspirations and concerns of their communities. In partnership with central government and others, they will guide the future development of their areas.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Durkan". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Mark H Durkan MLA
Minister of the Environment

1. Introduction

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

2. Background

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

- 2.5. The new councils will bring together a number of key functions such as planning, urban regeneration and community development, local economic development and local tourism, along with their existing responsibilities of providing services and facilities in relation to leisure, recreation, waste management, cemeteries, business and community projects and facilities, the regulation and licensing of activities relating to environmental health, consumer protection, building regulations and public safety, supporting the Policing and Community Safety Partnership, and promotion of culture, the arts, sports and tourism.
- 2.6. Linking service delivery, long term objectives of an area, and physical planning and regeneration will change the way areas are planned and will bring sustainable development into sharper focus. Social, economic and environmental issues, and the well-being of citizens, can all be considered together within the framework provided by the collaborative approach of community planning.

An Evolving Process

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

Fig. 1



A Long Term Process

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

3. Roles and Responsibilities

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

Duty on Councils

- 3.3 The Local Government Act (NI) 2014 requires the council to **initiate, maintain, facilitate and participate** in community planning for its district. The council is the lead partner and is required to put in place a process where it works with bodies to develop and implement a shared vision for promoting the well-being of its area, community cohesion and improving the quality of life of its citizens. As lead partner the council is responsible for making arrangements for community planning in its area.
- 3.4. The council as lead partner is responsible for:
 - Facilitating and managing the process including putting in place appropriate governance and management structures;
 - Ensuring that the commitments set out in the council equality scheme are applied in the development, implementation, monitoring and reviewing of the community plan.
 - Working collaboratively with its community planning partners and identified support partners to reach consensus on the content of the community plan, and publishing the plan;
 - Working with community planning partners and identified support partners to monitor and review the plan; and,
 - Ensuring that community involvement is an integral part of the full community planning process.
- 3.5. Management of the community planning process is the responsibility of the council. The council manages the production of the community plan,

sets up a strategic community planning partnership in collaboration with their partners which will provide leadership to the process, and may set up other supporting structures such as thematic or local area partnerships that focus on addressing more specific detailed issues.

- 3.6. The production of a community plan depends on the council and its partners reaching consensus on the objectives and actions, and the responsibility of the council as lead partner is to work to build consensus among the partners, and produce the plan when the consensus has been reached. The council will have to make a judgement as to when this point has been reached. As lead partner the council must also put in place systems to monitor progress on the community plan and report to the public on progress.
- 3.7. It is the responsibility of the council to ensure that the needs of citizens are understood and are considered during the formulation and review of the community plan. The council should actively encourage local people and organisations to become involved in the community planning process, demonstrate the benefits of community planning, how it assists with delivering better outcomes for citizens and more efficient and effective service delivery, and report to them on progress. The council and its community planning partners should work to ensure that collective public consultations are carried out where possible to reduce confusion and consultation overload.
- 3.8. As the lead partner, the council should champion the process within their own organisation and work to integrate as fully as possible the functions and systems within their remit. They should work to build knowledge and capacity with all groups involved in their community planning process.

Duty on Community Planning Partners

- 3.9. The Local Government Act (NI) 2014 requires community planning partners to participate in community planning, to the extent that it is connected to their functions, and the partners must assist the council in carrying out its community planning duties.
- 3.10. The Local Government (Community Planning Partners) Order 2015 will name the organisations that are required to participate in community planning.
- 3.11. Bringing together the key public sector organisations is a necessary part of an effective community planning process. Community planning partners will be involved at all stages of the process. They will work with councils to reach consensus on the long term objectives of the community plan and key objectives to be delivered upon, assist with monitoring and review of the plan, and seek participation of the community in carrying out their community planning duties.

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

Duty on Departments

- 3.17. The Local Government Act (NI) 2014 requires that in exercising any function which might affect community planning, every Northern Ireland

department must promote and encourage community planning, and have regard to any implications of a community plan for the exercise of a department's functions.

- 3.18. To provide clarity to these requirements and to strengthen the links between central and local government the Partnership Panel for Northern Ireland has agreed to develop a generic engagement protocol that clearly establishes the nature of the relationship between central and local government. The precise terms of the protocol will be drafted collaboratively by central and local government and will aim to underpin the existing commitment from both sides to work together constructively to deliver improved outcomes for local people. The protocol is currently under development and is subject to Executive approval.
- 3.19. With councils now having a wider remit and greater role in delivering on commitments in the Programme for Government, departments will be working more closely with councils on the delivery of central government strategies and programmes.
- 3.20. The community planning process provides a platform for the integration and planning of public sector services and investment, with the focus being on tackling cross-cutting issues that require a collaborative approach for the benefit of citizens. Therefore, departments should engage with councils when developing their strategies and delivery structures on the relationship with community plans and community planning structures at the local level.
- 3.21. Departments should seek to integrate community planning outcomes into their corporate and business planning. They should learn from the local service providers for which they are responsible about how community planning assists with delivering better outcomes for citizens and more efficient and effective service delivery. Gaining a better understanding of local issues will positively influence their forward planning processes. It will enable them to consider the needs identified by various councils when developing policy and planning services at the regional level.
- 3.22. Within the context of the changing working environment between local and central government, more integrated working will be taking place on a number of fronts including the creation of the Partnership Panel. It is possible that departments which directly deliver services locally may be invited to participate in community planning at the local level, and it is for each department to consider the implications of this in consultation with local government. It is anticipated that departments will make every effort to respond positively to such requests. At the same time, councils should recognise that departments have responsibilities to their Ministers and that that is their first priority. However, taking into account Ministerial responsibilities, departments should ensure that community planning is included in corporate and business planning documents and reflected in their strategic planning structures.

The Community

- 3.23. The Local Government Act (NI) 2014 requires the council and its community planning partners to seek the views of the community, encourage them to express their views, and take their views into account in the community planning process including those matters relevant to the statutory equality and good relations duties (i.e. presenting the equality and good relations screening/assessment with the proposals). The Community Planning Partnership should ensure they make full use, where possible and appropriate, of the statement of community involvement prepared for the local development plan process. The community planning process includes the production and review of the community plan.
- 3.24. The legislation reflects the Department's understanding of "community" in its widest sense. It states that the council must seek participation and views from:
- Residents in the district;
 - Persons who are not resident but receive services in the district from the council or its community planning partners;
 - Representatives of voluntary bodies whose activities benefit any part of the district;
 - Representatives of businesses in the district;
 - Other persons interested in the social, economic or environmental well-being of the area.
- 3.25. The wider community: The community has the opportunity to provide input on their views of the area and their needs, which will assist the council and its community planning partners with formulating the evidence base upon which decisions on the content of the community plan and its review can be based.
- 3.26. Through the community planning process the community can expect to be consulted and engaged on the social, environmental and economic issues of the planning and development of their area, and on the planning and delivery of services.
- 3.27. Community and voluntary sector: Community and voluntary organisations have a crucial role to play in improving the quality of life for local communities through their expertise in effectively engaging citizens, services users and potential users; through service design, commissioning, procurement and evaluation; through joint delivery partnerships; through contributing to a mixed economy of service provision and through engagement in scrutiny and review of services.

- 3.28. The sector is often best placed to reach and involve those sections of the community that the mainstream public sector may find hard to reach, and to access funding that is not available to public bodies. Specific efforts should be made to involve representatives from under-represented groups in the wider community planning structures, so that all section 75 groups have a voice in the process.
- 3.29. Community and voluntary organisations speaking on behalf of others in the community planning process should ensure that they have a fully representative and accountable structure that mandates them to do so.
- 3.30. Business: The private sector should be fully involved in the community planning process, as it is a significant user and supplier of local services, as well as a key provider of local employment. Business activity contributes both directly and indirectly to community prosperity and quality of life.
- 3.31. Councils and their partners should build on approaches to business involvement that have already been shown to work and should ensure that local businesses, economic development agencies, local chambers of commerce, trade union councils and other representative organisations are properly engaged in community planning.

Support Partners

- 3.32. It is recognised that there are a wide range of businesses including representatives of people carrying on businesses in the district, voluntary organisations, community and other groups which make vital contributions to promoting the social, economic and environmental well-being of an area and which may be involved in the process. These partners may have an interest and level of influence that is more locally or theme based, or have a particular skill that can assist with certain aspects of the community planning process.
- 3.33. Partnerships can invite other support partners to join their community planning process according to the priorities and needs of their particular area. These support partners may be organisations that can assist with the development and/or delivery of the community plan.
- 3.34. Partnerships should ensure that private sector interests are properly represented and should aim to include local business organisations as support partners.
- 3.35. Their role is on a voluntary basis, and the support partners should agree their role and extent to which they participate in the community planning process with the partnership. Their role will be similar to the statutory community planning partner's role, and they may be invited to join the strategic community planning partnership or a sub-group in relation to a particular theme or area, or to input at certain stages of the process due to their particular expertise, for example facilitation or community

engagement. A representative will be expected to attend the relevant meetings, speak authoritatively for their organisation and commit the organisation to agreed courses of action.

- 3.36. In determining support partners to participate in the community planning process partnerships should ensure they use a clear criterion that is reflective of the organisations role in the delivery of community planning outcomes. Partnerships may wish to consider drawing up an assessment tool to assist in such an assessment.

4. Partnership Structure and Governance

The Community Planning Partnership

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

- **Utilise existing partnerships to deliver on the community plan:** Existing partnerships that are already delivering successfully can be incorporated within the delivery structures and asked to deliver/lead on actions contained in the community plan. For example, there may be a health partnership that is already established and successfully delivering on health outcomes for the district. Actions contained within the community plan could be taken forward by the same partnership and added to their existing commitments.
- **Maintain an agreed and effective Partnership:** To ensure the Partnership achieves optimum impact it is necessary to keep the strategic Partnership and any supporting structure under review, and to allow the structure to evolve and be refined. Review of the structure could be undertaken at key stages of the process reflecting the Partnership's priorities, whether it is formulating the plan, delivering on actions, monitoring and evaluating performance, or conducting a review of the plan. Any changes should be agreed between the statutory partners. Over the longer term the Partnership can review the roles and responsibilities of existing partnerships that sit within the overall structure, and consider how rationalisation of existing partnerships can be achieved where they are not operating effectively.
- **Nominated personnel from participating organisations:** Those attending the meetings will be expected to speak authoritatively for their organisations and commit them to agreed courses of action. It is the responsibility of the statutory body or other organisation participating in the process to ensure it has appropriate representation at meetings. Representation can also change during the course of the process, depending on whether the focus of activity is to formulate the plan and agree to actions, or to deliver on actions where managerial responsibility for service delivery is important. The important issue is that the person attending meetings should have an influential senior role, be able to agree to targets and actions and ensure they are implemented.
- The Partnership should also **take into consideration other cross-cutting regional policies.** Partner organisations that are developing and delivering strategies that tackle particular themes will likely benefit from the platform that community planning provides. It can provide an opportunity to share information to inform the evidence base and policy development, gain a shared understanding of local issues, reduce duplication of effort, and identify opportunities to join up service delivery and planning. The Partnership Panel will also provide a forum for Ministers to highlight and discuss any new strategies likely to be of interest to community planning partnerships.

4.5. Managing and co-ordinating the process: The strategic Partnership should ensure that the development and implementation of community plans becomes firmly embedded into partners' managerial cultures, corporate, resource and business planning, and budgetary decisions. It should ensure that engagement is co-ordinated across the partnership

and, where appropriate, between organisations involved. A co-ordinated process for evidence collection should be established to underpin the development of plans and that analysis of this evidence is shared across and between organisations. Also, the experience of citizens accessing services should be sought with a view to solving problems and removing barriers to integrating delivery across sectors. Effective performance management arrangements should be put in place, including arrangements for scrutiny

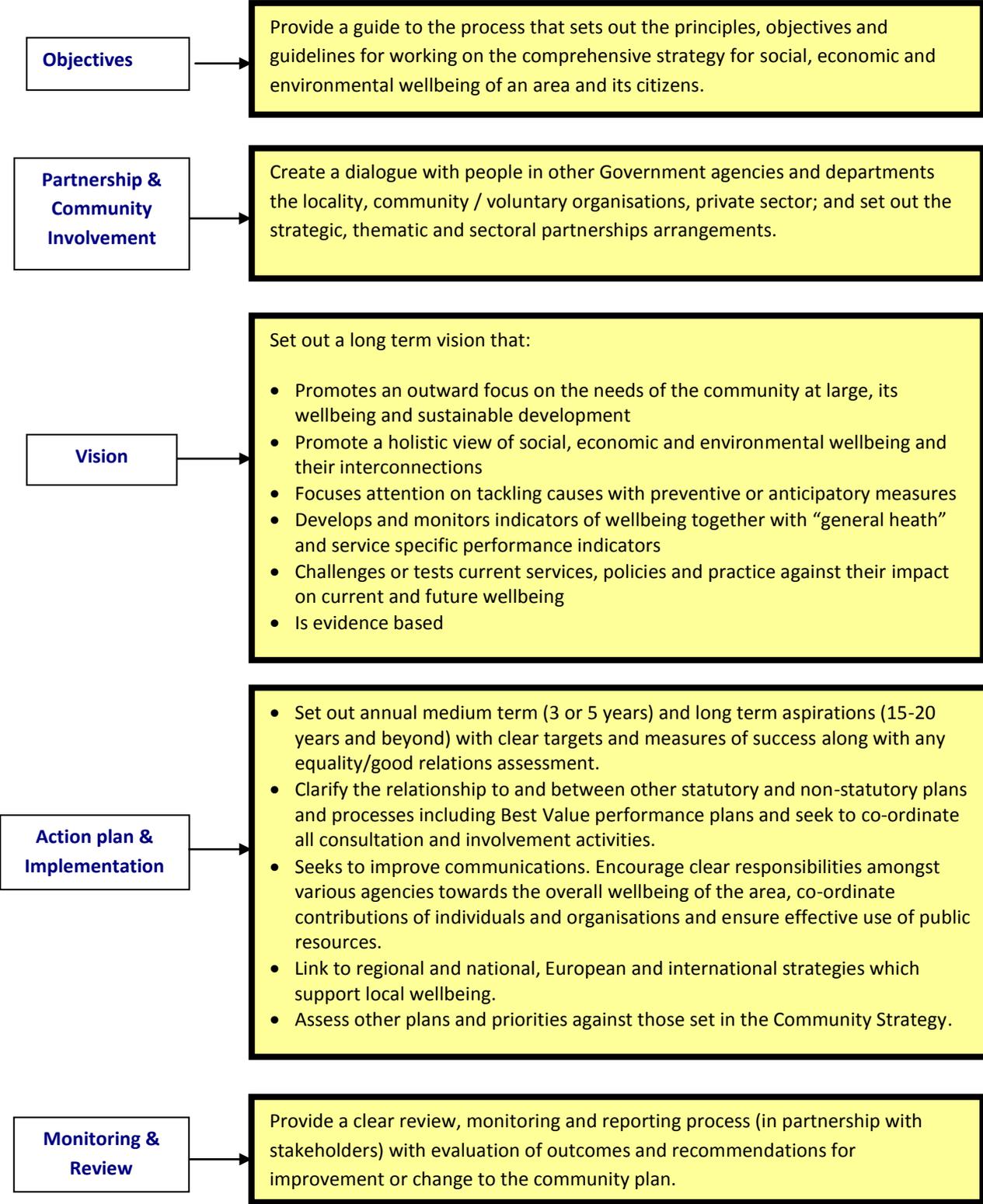
5. The Partnership Panel

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

6. The Community Planning Process

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

Figure 2: The Process of Community Planning



Community Involvement

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

citizens, views should be sought from all Section 75 groups. Practicalities such as venue accessibility, timing, transportation, methods of communication including the obligation to take account of the needs of speakers of other languages will be important considerations as will ensuring the obligation to make reasonable adjustments for people with disabilities is met. The voluntary and community sector will have information on the nature of the local community and, in particular, information on and routes to reaching seldom heard groups.

- 6.8. Although it is vital that the partnership engage fully with all groups in society and that they meet their commitments in relation to consultation and engagement set out in the council Equality Schemes as regards all section 75 groups they have, in light of specific government commitments, a particular responsibility to encourage and promote the role that can be played by children and young people in community planning. The Community Planning Partnership should seek to do this through reference to the structure set out in the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People's (NICCY) proposal for a Northern Ireland regional model of engagement.¹ The Partnership should also consider an appropriate method of engagement to involve children and young people and should use a mechanism such as youth forums or other similar arrangements. [NICCY can provide partnerships with valuable advice and guidance in this area]
- 6.9. Partnerships should also have due regard to the need to promote the participation of people with disabilities in public life as part of their statutory disability duties.
- 6.10. Range of views: The Partnership should consider preparing an engagement strategy to ensure that they engage with a wide range of interests across all sectors of society from development to evaluation of the community plan. There is an often untapped pool of ideas, knowledge, skills, experience, energy and enthusiasm among individuals, groups and communities as a whole which, if realised, can be a real driver for change. A variety of methods should be employed to garner views from communities of place and interest to ensure the full range of perspectives and contributions can be accessed and included. Existing mechanisms, developed by the council and its community planning partners that have already been proved to be effective can be a starting point. A range of methods should be employed such as public meetings, workshops and focus groups, discussion forums and citizen's panels, web-based engagement, future search 'visioning' process, interactive displays and community questionnaires. The Partnership should consider the appropriateness of the method to the stage of the community planning process, the strengths and weaknesses of the method, and which sectors of society to which it will appeal. The Community Planning Toolkit provides information on a wide range of methods that can be employed

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

and how to ensure the range of views are captured.
<http://www.communityplanningtoolkit.org/>

Identifying the Vision, Outcomes and Actions

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

Creating a Baseline

- 6.15. The evidence base will provide a baseline upon which decisions can be made and against which progress can be monitored. Qualitative and quantitative information gathered should include:

² ECNI Advice Note: Setting outcome measures, March 2011

- Census information and statistics from NISRA on population patterns, housing, economy, health and well-being, crime etc and existing survey information.
- Scoping relevant central government and service provider strategies and priorities for the area, progress reports on these existing strategies and service delivery improvements.
- An assessment of the key characteristics and assets unique to the area eg. environment and natural resources, heritage and tourism destinations, retail and leisure, industry and IT, transportation, health and sport, education campuses etc.

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

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

7. Key Issues to be Addressed

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

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

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

Equality, Good Relations and Social Inclusion

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

8. Sustainable Development

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

9. Rural Proofing

- 9.1. The Partnership is encouraged to consider and take account of the needs of rural dwellers within the district in the development of its community plan. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) has published guidance on rural proofing, which sets out the process. Partnerships should also be aware that DARD is progressing proposals for primary legislation within the 2011 -2016 Assembly mandate, subject to Executive agreement, which would place a statutory duty on councils to consider the needs of people living in rural areas when developing, revising or implementing strategies, policies or plans.

10. Spatial Planning

- 10.1. The Executive's spatial strategy is prepared under the Strategic Planning (NI) Order 1999 which states that the Department for Regional Development (DRD) is responsible for formulating a Regional Development Strategy 2035 for the long term development of Northern Ireland. Departments must have regard to the Regional Development Strategy in exercising any functions in relation to development.

Statutory Link between the Community Plan & the Local Development Plan

- 10.2. The local development plan system aims to move away from a narrow land use focus towards a 'place shaping' approach which incorporates a spatial analysis and visioning process. It provides a unique opportunity for the council to shape places for local communities which can be used by all and enable them to adopt a joined up approach, incorporating linkages to other functions such as regeneration, local economic development and local tourism, within the framework of community planning. Therefore, it provides the spatial strategy for the community plan, flowing from the vision for the council area and its communities, and linking public and private sector investment through the land use planning system. In preparing their local development plans councils are required to take account of both the Regional Development Strategy 2035 policy and advice contained in the guidance issued by the department (which will

include the Strategic Planning Policy Statement when published in final form) and their own current community plan. However there is no requirement to prepare a community plan in advance of the local development plan. If a community plan is prepared after a local development plan has been adopted, then councils should review and amend the local development plan as appropriate, to take account of the community plan.

10.3. The local development plan should fulfil the following functions:

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

10.4. Common to both the local development plan and community planning processes is that they aim to provide a long term vision/framework to support the social, economic and environmental needs of the area, require an evidence-based approach to decision-making, and seek the engagement of the community throughout the process. Councils are reminded that they have duties in relation to consultees as a result of equality scheme commitments. The following aspects of the local development plan process could assist/be co-ordinated with the preparation of the community plan:

- Community involvement and statutory consultees - the council must prepare a statement of community involvement³ containing the strategy for how and when the community are to be involved in the local development plan process.
- The Statement of Community Involvement is a statement of the council's policies for actively involving the community from the outset in the making of the local development plan and in carrying out its development management functions. The Statement is a key tool in increasing awareness of the scope for community participation and involvement.

³ SR 2015 No. 63 - The Planning (Statement of Community Involvement) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015

Effectively it is the how, where, when and by what means the council will engage / involve the community.

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

11. Collaborative Working Across Boundaries

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

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

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

12. Production and Publication

- 12.1. The Local Government Act (NI) 2014 requires the council to produce a community plan, once a degree of consensus has been reached between it and the community planning partners on the objectives of the district and the actions to be taken to achieve the objectives. The community plan must contain a description of the objectives and actions, and be produced and published as soon as reasonably practicable after a degree of consensus has been reached.
- 12.2. Reaching consensus: It is at this stage that the council will be required to make a judgement as to when a degree of consensus has been reached between the partners. The objective should be to develop a shared understanding of local needs, based firmly on the available evidence and the views and aspirations of the community. The objective is not to

accommodate the separate operational outlooks of individual partner organisations which should be captured in their own strategies, and it is not to reach agreement by negotiation. It is understood that consensus may take time to be reached, and that it not be possible or expected that complete consensus between all partners will be possible on every aspect. However, there should at least be consensus on the vision, outcomes and key actions as the document is the key strategic, long term plan for the local area.

- 12.3. The primary emphasis should be on building relationships and developing understanding between partners over the long term, and where agreement cannot be reached initially, then there is an opportunity to revisit an issue later when the community plan is reviewed.
- 12.4. Prior to publication, the council should ensure that the community planning partners agree to the content and format of the plan, and the council should publish the community plan as soon as possible after the plan has been agreed.
- 12.5. Content and publication: It is recommended that the first community plan for an area should be published within a maximum of two years of commencement of the community planning duty. The first community plan should be considered as an interim plan, as it is understood that it will take some time for councils' new powers and functions under local government reform to fully 'bed in' to their operational and governance structures and organisational culture. However, it is also important that the community planning process gains some traction within a reasonably short timeframe to ensure its strategic significance influences decisions on the operational and governance structures of the council. The council can use the monitoring and review procedures to amend the plan within a recommended two year timeframe after first publication (more information on monitoring and review in section 13 below).
- 12.6. The title page of the plan should clearly state what it contains, and that it is the duty of the council to publish a community plan for the area under Section 68 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014. It should contain clear information on the evidence base and how the vision, outcomes and actions are derived from it, who is responsible for delivering on actions and when actions will be delivered to achieve the outcomes. The council may wish to consider publishing separate documents for different parts of their area/communities, but the strategy for the overall area should still remain clear.
- 12.7. The plan should be published in both paper and electronic forms, and made available in other formats when requested. The council should consider at the time of publication if the plan could usefully be publicised in other formats (such as Braille, large print, audio or summary form) or in other languages.

- 12.8. The plan should be widely accessible and the council should use a variety of means to publicise the plan. The council and its community planning partners should consider how to promote broad awareness of the plan to encourage community ownership and interest in its delivery and progress.

13. Monitoring, Review and Reporting

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

- district councils should develop appropriate improvement objectives accordingly. These will clearly contribute to the “strategic effectiveness” improvement aspect, but other aspects, in particular fairness and sustainability, may be particularly relevant.
- other public bodies should also integrate community planning actions into their business planning processes, by formulating appropriate objectives, in line with their existing (and continuing) different roles and accountabilities.
- delivery of those objectives should inform the continuing development of community planning. All partners should, individually and collectively, consider the delivery and relevance of community planning actions, as part of the process of monitoring implementation. If it becomes clear that one or more partners are unable to carry out community planning actions, or that those actions or the objectives to which they relate have become irrelevant or less important, partners should consider amending them.

Performance Improvement

- 13.6. Part 12 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014 requires the council to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in carrying out its functions. The council must have regard to the need to improve its performance in relation to strategic effectiveness, service quality, service availability, fairness, sustainability, efficiency and innovation.
- 13.7. There is a clear link between the community planning process and the council’s performance improvement regime. Community planning focuses on achieving better outcomes for citizens accessing services, through the collaborative working of organisations to improve service delivery for the benefit of citizens. A successful community plan will consist of a long term vision for the area, underpinned by a set of outcomes identified for key themes, with clear accountability and interim performance measures. The community planning process should achieve better integration of public sector services and investment resulting in performance improvements for organisations involved.
- 13.8. The council is required to prepare an improvement plan containing improvement objectives, which includes the strategic objectives for 10 to 15 years ahead set out in the community plan. The community plan identifies long term outcomes using a solid, reliable evidence base as a baseline upon which decisions can be made and against which progress can be monitored. The council must annually monitor its performance and publicise the information. In order to measure performance against its strategic objectives, the council can consider setting short to medium term objectives through action plans or their existing corporate and business plans.
- 13.9. Community planning partners should also build into their corporate and business planning regimes their commitments contained in community plans.

13.10. Performance improvement and community planning should inform, and be informed by, each other. It is expected that that:

- improvement should take full and proper account of the strategic vision as set out in the community plan. This provides the frame within which many short-term improvement priorities should sit. Although there will be other such priorities which do not, either because they are too short-term or too confined to one organisation, they should at least not conflict with the community plan;
- community planning should be based both on an understanding of what appears reasonably deliverable by a district council and/or its partners, and on continual monitoring of how effective that delivery is. If and when it becomes clear, from shorter-term information, that community planning objectives are not deliverable or no longer relevant, those objectives should change; and
- the use of the new flexibilities and freedoms offered by the general power of competence should be influenced significantly by issues identified through the community planning process. Similarly, performance improvement considerations should influence a council's choices in using the general power of competence and how it engages with its community planning partners.

GLOSSARY

In this Guidance:

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

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

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

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

“**council**” means the council of a local government district established in accordance with the Local Government (Boundaries) Act (Northern Ireland) 2008⁴;

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

“**meeting**” means any meeting—

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