



# Self-assessment in Community Planning Partnerships

## Project Evaluation Report



“Community Planning Partnerships should have a strong commitment to performance improvement and quality standards, including national requirements where appropriate, with robust self-assessment as a starting point”.

Single Outcome Agreements Guidance to Community Planning Partnerships,  
December 2012

## 1. Background on project

With co-funding from the Scottish Government, the Improvement Service has supported self-assessment in 16 Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) over the last 18 months. These have taken the form of nine Board level assessments, five thematic assessments and two neighbourhood assessments within the same community planning area. Table 1 provides a breakdown of those CPPs who participated in the project.

**Table 1**

CPP Board self-assessments	CPP thematic self-assessments	CPP neighbourhood self-assessments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• North Ayrshire</li> <li>• South Lanarkshire</li> <li>• Falkirk</li> <li>• Fife</li> <li>• Outer Hebrides</li> <li>• North Lanarkshire</li> <li>• Inverclyde</li> <li>• East Ayrshire</li> <li>• Angus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clackmannanshire Community Learning and Development Partnership</li> <li>• West Lothian Community Safety Partnership</li> <li>• Highland Employability Partnership</li> <li>• Moray Drugs and Alcohol Partnership</li> <li>• West Dunbartonshire Community Health and Care Partnership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Western Neighbourhood Partnership (Edinburgh)</li> <li>• Inverleith Neighbourhood Partnership (Edinburgh)</li> </ul>

One of the CPPs who participated in the project – North Ayrshire – agreed to participate in one of the three early CPP audits, which was carried out in September 2012 by a team from Audit Scotland with support from the Care Inspectorate, Education Scotland and HMICS. The Audit Report found that:

*“North Ayrshire CPP is self-aware, having subjected itself to both internal and external review. Partners are committed to improvement and the CPP has set itself a demanding improvement agenda.”*

The Chair of the North Ayrshire Community Planning Partnership – Councillor Willie Gibson, Leader of North Ayrshire Council – noted that:

*“Undertaking a self-assessment, with support from the IS, helped prepare the North Ayrshire Community Planning Partnership for its recent audit.*

*The self-assessment was a challenging but effective and supportive process for helping the partnership to identify what it was doing well and where it needed to improve”.*

The project required participants to use self-assessment tools to consider and evidence whether their governance, planning, performance management and resource management are fit for purpose to deliver improved outcomes for their communities.

The following self-assessment tools were available to CPPs:

- **The Outcomes Focused Partnership Checklist**, which encourages partnerships to critically review their ‘fitness for purpose’ in achieving shared outcomes. The checklist consists of around 50 statements and respondents rate the extent to which they agree with each statement in relation to their partnership. The survey is issued to individuals within the partnership electronically and can be used at Board, thematic or neighbourhood level. It acts as a ‘can opener’ for identifying potential areas for improvement in the partnership, which are identified through a follow-up workshop.
- **The Public Service Improvement Framework (PSIF) CPP Board Framework**, which is a high level self-assessment framework consisting of 14 statements.
- **The PSIF CPP Thematic Framework**, which is a more operationally focused self-assessment framework, with around 40 statements.

The PSIF frameworks are based on the principles of the full PSIF framework, which is the leading performance management/self-assessment framework in Scottish local government and has been widely adopted across the public and third sector. PSIF is based on the EFQM Excellence Model and integrates the principles of Best Value with elements of the Investors in People Standard and the Customer Service Excellence Standard. The PSIF CPP frameworks require partnerships to adopt a similar process to that which is undertaken by PSIF organisations, in terms of identifying evidence in relation to their strengths and areas for improvement in relation to each statement within the framework.

CPPs could choose to utilise either the Outcomes Focused Partnership Checklist or the PSIF Framework (either the Board or Thematic Framework as appropriate) or use a combination of these tools. Six CPPs used the Outcomes Focused Partnership Checklist, four CPPs used the PSIF Thematic Framework, three CPPs used the PSIF Board Framework and three CPPs used a combination of the Checklist and PSIF Frameworks.

## 2. Summary of key evaluation findings

Feedback on the self-assessment process was received from key stakeholders from all CPPs who participated in the project. The key findings are summarised below:

- The self-assessment tools helped CPPs to understand their strengths and areas for improvement, to define their challenges and to drive change forward.
- The Outcomes Focused Partnership Checklist and PSIF were both deemed to be valid approaches to self-assessment within a CPP. The Checklist approach was found to be the simplest and less time consuming self-assessment tool. This is likely to be a reflection of the stage that many CPPs are at with their own development and also the fact that for many, this was their first experience of self-assessment.
- Both self-assessment tools enabled the CPPs to have open and challenging discussions within a supportive environment about issues facing them following on from the Community Planning reform agenda. CPPs confronted the tough and demanding issues and operating context they are facing by developing comprehensive improvement plans. These focused on the actions required to be undertaken by the CPP to help it achieve its priority outcomes, and the support required by individual CP partners to enable these actions to happen.
- Most of the self-assessment workshops were facilitated externally, either by colleagues from the Improvement Service, Quality Scotland or accredited PSIF facilitators from other public service organisations. This was deemed to be a valuable approach as it provided the partnerships with challenge, gave them an oversight of what was happening in other CPPs and it helped them to raise their ambition.

### 3. Summary of key improvement themes

There has been a great deal of consistency amongst CPPs, both at board and thematic level, in terms of the improvement actions being identified. The improvement actions generally focus on the themes outlined below:

#### Reviewing governance and accountability

Improvement actions have generally focused on clarifying the role and remit of both CPP Boards and thematic partnerships and the roles and remits of the community planning partners who are involved, to address issues such as:

- CPP Boards being unclear as to what it means in practice to be a 'board', and whether the CPP Board has a legitimate oversight of the decisions of the community planning partners and, if it does, how that oversight should be exercised in practice.
- Individual partners within the CPP not embedding CPP decision-making within their own governance arrangements.
- CPPs being unclear how performance failures by individual community planning partners can be resolved.
- CPPs being unclear whether and how they can be held democratically accountable by local communities.
- CPPs not knowing whether the elected members who sit on CPP boards should have greater influence on the Board's decisions than other members, given that they are democratically accountable.

- CPPs not knowing whether representatives of statutory community planning partners should have a greater influence on the Board's decisions than non-statutory members.
- Representatives of statutory community planning partners who sit on CPP Boards being concerned about how a CPP board majority decision would sit against the decisions of their own boards or Ministers.
- Statutory community planning partners being absent from CPP Board meetings or sending representatives who have no delegated authority from their organisation.
- CPPs being unclear as to whether their partnership is comprised of the right membership.
- Individual partners within the CPP not regularly challenging each other and the CPP as a whole to 'do more' in achieving priority outcomes.
- CPPs often not ensuring the co-ordination of activity by thematic groups and partnerships, and in many CPPs these rarely report to the CPP Board.
- Community Health Partnerships, Alcohol and Drugs Partnerships, and Community Safety Partnerships often being seen as outwith the scope of Community Planning.

### Using evidence and resources

Improvement actions have generally focused on improving CPPs' evidence base and how evidence is used effectively in decision making, improving collective resource deployment against outcomes, to address issues such as:

- CPPs facing difficulty in identifying what evidence is available, and what is good enough, to provide a basis for hard decisions about prioritisation.
- CPPs being unable to share evidence/data locally due to data protection issues.
- Shifting resources between partners or to task significant resources for use by other partners towards prevention and early intervention.
- CPPs lacking reliable evidence of what works and indicators which will support delivery.
- CPPs not prioritising outcomes in ways which help drive the shift to prevention.
- CPP Boards being unable to significantly influence the resource allocation decisions (e.g. budgets and workforce) of many community planning partners.
- CPPs' priority outcomes and activities not reflecting the need for targeting on specific equalities/inequalities issues.

### Improving community engagement

Improvement actions have generally related to focusing on the 'community' part of community planning by considering how approaches to community engagement and co-production can be developed and improved, to address issues such as:

- CPPs not having effective engagement mechanisms in place for understanding the needs of individuals/communities.

- CPPs not having effective mechanisms in place that enable individuals/communities to influence the partnership's priority outcomes, activities undertaken and the way those activities are delivered.

### Improving performance management

Improvement actions have generally focused on improving CPPs' approach to performance management, to address issues such as:

- CPPs not having an agreed set of targets which reflect priority outcomes, and which are ambitious and stretching, whilst still being realistic.
- CPPs not having an efficient and robust system in place for recording progress made towards the achievement of outcome targets and the inputs, activities and outputs that contribute towards them.
- Performance information not being timely, relevant or providing a good measure of progress towards the desired outcomes.
- CPPs not using performance information to facilitate constructive strategic discussion and, where required, to instigate corrective action in order to address under-performance against key targets.
- CPPs not making clear linkages between performance reporting by the CPP Board, thematic groups and each individual partner organisation.
- CPPs not having mechanisms in place to effectively manage collective risks.

### Improving communication

Improvement actions have generally focused on improving communication between individual partners within a CPP, ensuring the decisions and priorities of the CPP are communicated within individual partner organisations and improving communication between the CPP and local communities.

## 4. Key evaluation findings

In terms of the evaluation of the self-assessment in CPPs project, feedback was received from key stakeholders from all CPPs who participated in the project. This took the form of:

- Survey and written feedback collected from members of the 17 CPPs who participated in the self-assessments and those who arranged the self-assessments (including Community Planning Managers and PSIF Lead Officers).
- Feedback from those who facilitated the self-assessment workshops (facilitators included employees experienced in undertaking self-assessment from Quality Scotland, CPP organisations and the Improvement Service).
- Informal verbal feedback from participants was noted by facilitators during the self-assessments.

### Outcomes Focused Partnership Checklist – Feedback

Overall, the majority of stakeholders agreed that the self-assessment Outcomes Focused Partnership Checklist was straightforward to complete, an appropriate length and a useful tool to begin to assess the effectiveness of the partnership.

The majority of stakeholders also agreed that the follow-up workshop was a useful vehicle for members of the partnership to explore and prioritise the issues raised by the checklist findings and identify potential solutions and improvement actions.

#### KEY FINDINGS

“The external facilitation of the workshop provided our partnership with challenge and helped us to raise our ambition”.

“The Checklist workshop enabled the partnership to identify relevant improvement actions”.

“We ran our workshop over half a day and it just wasn’t enough time. Clearly major change is coming and a lot of thought and planning on CPPs is needed”.

### PSIF CPP Frameworks – Feedback

Overall, the majority of participants agreed that the PSIF self-assessment was straightforward to undertake, there had been sufficient time to undertake the self-assessment, PSIF covered issues that were relevant to the partnership and PSIF was a useful tool to assess the effectiveness of the partnership.

Whilst all CPPs were offered the opportunity to adapt the PSIF statements to reflect the context and operating arrangements of their partnership, most used the standard PSIF template. Those CPPs who adapted the PSIF frameworks generally found the self-assessment easier to complete and more relevant than those who used the standard framework.

Those CPPs who completed the Outcomes Focused Partnership Checklist and PSIF generally found the Checklist more straightforward and slightly less time consuming than PSIF. This is likely to be a reflection of the stage that CPPs are at with their own development and also the fact that for many, this was their first experience of self-assessment.

#### KEY FINDINGS

“Using the Checklist with PSIF worked very well. It focused the minds of the people involved and got them thinking about issues prior to the PSIF consensus day which meant they were ready to discuss their own opinions”.

### Improvement Planning – Feedback

Following their self-assessment, the CPPs developed an improvement plan and the majority of stakeholders agreed that their CPP’s improvement plan addressed the key issues facing the

partnership, it identified challenging actions and it will help the partnership achieve its priority outcomes.

Whilst the majority of stakeholders were confident that the improvement actions identified will be achieved, some identified potential barriers that may prevent their CPP from implementing the improvement actions including lack of buy-in from individual partners, workload pressures, lack of resources and lack of shared understanding of the improvement actions.

### **Benefits of undertaking self-assessment within a CPP**

The majority of stakeholders highlighted that using the self-assessment tools helped the CPP to:

- identify improvements that will result in the delivery of improved outcomes for customers;
- drive change forward;
- define its challenges; and
- understand its strengths and areas for improvement.

Some stakeholders also noted that the self-assessment enabled the CPP to identify improvement actions that it was unaware of and assisted the CPP in embedding an outcome focused approach to service planning and delivery.

Overall, the majority of stakeholders rated their experience of the Outcome Focused Partnership Checklist and/or PSIF as either good or excellent and noted that they would recommend the self-assessment tools to other CPPs.

## **5. Key findings - development areas**

A key part of the project evaluation was to assess areas that require to be strengthened going forward to maximise the successful implementation of self-assessment in CPPs. The following points will need to be considered in any future self-assessments by CPPs:

- Ensure sufficient time is allocated to self-assessment workshop sessions to enable CPPs to fully consider, agree and prioritise their areas for improvement and develop an improvement plan.
- Benefits realisation should be built in to the improvement planning process. The wider PSIF Partnership is currently developing an approach to benefits realisation which should also be applied to future improvement plans which are developed as part of CPP self-assessments.
- An officer with an understanding of the role of the partnership should review the statements within the self-assessment tool being used to ensure they are relevant for the context of that partnership.
- Partnerships new to self-assessment should be recommended to undertake the Outcomes Focused Partnership Checklist in the first instance, as this is a more accessible and less resource intensive process than the full PSIF option, while still resulting in the production of an improvement plan.

Some community planning partners and stakeholders who facilitated the CPP self-assessments noted that it would be helpful if good practice could be identified and shared across CPPs of what is working. The new national Improving Evidence and Data Group (IEDG) will undertake work, with an immediate emphasis on the key policy priorities identified in the SOA Guidance December 2012 (economic recovery and growth; employment; early years; safer and stronger communities and reducing offending; health inequalities and physical activity; and outcomes for older people) to help CPPs understand 'what works' so that better informed decisions on prioritisation and resource management can be made on the basis of the best available evidence.

CPPs also noted that targeted follow-up support would be important to assist them with the implementation of their improvement actions. This will be addressed by the national Community Planning Capacity Building Programme.

## 6. Conclusions

Overall, feedback on the use of self-assessment tools in a CPP context has been very positive, with CPPs going on to develop improvement plans that identify challenging improvement actions that will support CPPs with the delivery of their outcomes.

There has been a great deal of consistency amongst CPPs, both at board and thematic level, in terms of the improvement actions being identified. Improvement actions have generally focused on the themes identified below, and support in these areas will be provided to CPPs as part of the capacity building programme being developed by the Improvement Service in conjunction with Scottish Government and other organisations which provide improvement support within or across sectors:

- Reviewing governance and accountability;
- Using evidence and resources;
- Improving community engagement;
- Improving performance management; and
- Improving communication.

Self-assessment will continue to be a vital tool to CPPs to provide them with a high level of self-awareness of their strengths, where they need to make changes and to focus their improvement activity on areas where it will make the greatest difference. Self-assessment will also be a key element of the Account's Commission's CPP audits. Whilst the Accounts Commission will not promote any particular model of self-evaluation as part of the CPP audit, leaving it as a matter of local choice for the CPP itself to determine how it wishes to take forward its approach to self-evaluation, the self-assessment tools used in this project will assist a CPP to strengthen its approach to self-evaluation.

## 7. Offer of support

One of the key priorities of the national Community Planning Capacity Building Programme is to provide support to CPPs on the facilitation of self-assessment and improvement planning. Whilst the details of the programme are being finalised, the IS will continue to support CPPs at Board, thematic and neighbourhood level with self-assessment and improvement planning. For further information contact Kathleen McLoughlin, Senior Project Manager – Change and Improvement, on 01506 775567 or at [psif@improvementservice.org.uk](mailto:psif@improvementservice.org.uk)

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