

**IMPROVEMENT SERVICE**  
**COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT ACT AND STATUTORY GUIDANCE:**  
**SUMMARY OF KEY SHORT- AND MEDIUM-TERM EXPECTATIONS OF CPPs**

**Purpose**

This briefing note summarises the Improvement Service’s understanding of the key expectations and requirements of community planning partnerships (CPPs) arising from the Community Empowerment Act (2015) and associated statutory guidance. Rather than simply copy across the main elements of the Act<sup>1</sup>, this summary seeks to highlight key issues for consideration by CPPs in order to achieve the full potential of the intent that underpins the Act.

**Introduction**

The Act aims to further raise the level of ambition for community planning, setting out a legislative requirement to improve outcomes and ensure that:

- Communities are central to the process;
- Effective collaboration and joint resourcing takes place amongst partners;
- A robust evidence base is utilised to ensure efforts are targeted on areas of greatest need; and
- A real and sustainable reduction in inequalities is achieved.

The focus of the Act is not a new approach but a natural progression in the ongoing development of public service reform that gained added impetus through the publication of the Christie report in 2011. In particular, CPPs are being handed a new set of powers, and increased expectations, designed to raise ambition around reducing inequality and enhancing community participation.

**Community Planning**

Given the expectations of the Act, CPPs now need to consider how they will develop the following:

- A more targeted approach towards communities (both geographic and interest group based), specifically focusing on those experiencing poorer outcomes;
- An overarching and cross-cutting approach, focused on community participation and reducing inequality;
- CPP governance arrangements that are ‘fit for purpose’, encourage constructive challenge, review and improvement; and
- A culture for partnership working that genuinely adds value and is likely to include joint resourcing, capacity sharing and community development.

The Act is also clear in that community consultation is no longer enough. CPPs must be able to demonstrate active participation and engagement across all key areas. CPPs could consider the following to enable this change to happen.

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<sup>1</sup> In referring to the ‘Act’, this implies the actual legislation and associated guidance

- Undertake a partnership approach to community participation to enable an understanding of distinct needs and complexities within localities and across communities of interest.
- Ensure partners work together to build capacity within the community. Any activity should be led, planned and managed at partnership level so that there is no duplication across agencies and the totality of resource dedicated to this strand is enhanced.
- Ensure that communities have access to the information and evidence they might need - including advice and support on interpreting the information, comparison between communities and other council areas - to enable them to form views about where improvement is necessary or desirable.
- Actively develop capacity across disadvantaged communities to enable them to participate effectively.

### **Local Outcomes Improvement Plan & Locality Plans**

Specifically, the LOIP should:

- Be clearly based on evidence and analysis of the area and its communities, variations in outcomes between communities, and the communities and outcomes where improvement is a priority.
- Be specific about the preventative work required by the plan and how resources will be used in new ways to support prevention. The evidence and analysis identifying where prevention is necessary and the particular preventative approaches adopted should be set out within the plan or its supporting documentation.
- Be a driver for CPPs to develop integrated approaches to improving outcomes, based upon governance arrangements that focus on the new shared accountabilities.
- Be a focus for the CPP to identify where partnership working adds value and can genuinely improve outcomes.
- Be clearly based on active participation by communities and community organisations. The nature of that participation and the resources allocated by statutory partners to enabling participation should be documented.
- Be clear about the resources necessary to deliver the planned improvements and how they will be provided by statutory partners. Links to evidence that agreed commitments have been built into partners' own individual corporate and resource plans would be expected.
- Be precise about the level of improvement and the timescales for each improvement commitment in the plan. There should also be clarity about how progress towards and achievement of agreed outcomes will be measured.
- Be clear about scrutiny, performance and accountability arrangements for the plan, including the role of the CPP Board, the role of partners' own corporate governance arrangements, and the role of communities and community organisations in scrutiny and performance monitoring. The duty to resource community participation applies as much to scrutiny and performance as it does to other aspects of Community Planning.

In addition to the LOIP, the partnership must also identify smaller areas within the local authority area which experience the poorest outcomes, and prepare and publish locality plans to improve outcomes on agreed priorities for these communities. Active community participation is again a core element of the locality planning process.

The introduction of **Participation Requests**, whilst potentially challenging for traditional ways of working, can also be viewed as a positive opportunity to encourage active participation as a matter of course. A number of CPPs are already actively engaging with communities to work towards jointly improving a wide range of local outcomes. This approach seeks to improve understanding of the issues under consideration, utilise the full range of talents within communities and develop sustainable and cost effective improvements. A framework and approach that routinely encourages active participation, is likely to reduce the incidence of one-off, reactive participation requests.

Whichever approach is taken, CPPs should consider how they will ensure that:

- Communities are aware of their ability to engage and make a participation request in the outcome improvement process and clearly understand the process for doing so;
- Communities have appropriate administrative, communication and logistical support to arrange meetings, disseminate views, consult on issues, etc., including access to digital or social media support;
- Participation events and opportunities are fully publicised, inclusively organised, and meet high standards of participatory practice; and
- Communities have the opportunity to participate in setting out how public funds can be used to address local need. Support where required, should be given to those with additional barriers to participation.

The guidance on **Asset Transfers** has the potential to further enhance community participation. Engaging with communities through this process provides a mechanism through which to fully utilise public assets to improve local outcomes and seek to reduce inequality in areas of disadvantage. Relevant public bodies should now consider the following:

- There is now an incentive for public bodies to be innovative and radical in their approach to community ownership;
- Asset planning should now consider community ownership and adjust estimations for capital receipts accordingly;
- How asset planning activity will be coordinated to ensure the community are fully involved and have an opportunity to participate; and
- Coordinate asset planning across the CPP (where the relevant public bodies are part of the CPP).

The introduction of the Act now provides a framework through which there is an opportunity to achieve significant step-change across the community planning landscape. It provides a focus on community development and capacity building to enable effective community participation, with a specific focus on those areas experiencing poorer outcomes. LOIPs and Locality Plans should be developed on that basis and identify how CPPs will seek to enhance outcomes and reduce inequality.