

## The Highland Community Planning Partnership

### COG 13.8.15

Agenda Item	7.
Report No	COG 18/15

## Renewing local democracy and local community planning

### Discussion paper by the Head of Policy and Reform

#### Summary

This report sets out proposals for discussion with the COG, noting further discussions are needed with the Council's leadership before recommendations are made to Council and the CPP Board.

#### 1. Background

1.1 The Council and the CPP have agreed to review of Area Committees and local community planning arrangements and committed to several experiments between now and May 2017. The new Community Empowerment Act strengthens the requirement for localised governance arrangements. There is further political impetus in the Council for greater local decision-making including in local spending decisions. In addition a new self-evaluation [checklist](#) for implementing health and social care integration sees localities as the engine room of integration. Having spent time deliberating with Members in each Ward on what they seek to achieve by strengthening local democracy it is now time to set out proposals for Members and partners to consider.

#### 2. Proposals

2.1 Having agreed why the proposals are needed, this report sets out:

1. Where the local democratic experiments will be
2. What they aim to achieve and will test – for the Council and partners
3. What they will involve
4. How we will resource them
5. When they will start
6. How we will know if they are working
7. Whether the results are transferable

#### 2.2 Where the local democratic experiments will be

The Council's Leader has indicated her preference for Caithness and Sutherland to be selected and for Nairn to be included. This affects two current Area Committees and draws in potential change for Badenoch and Strathspey.

2.3 Selecting all four Areas fits well with the discussions with all Members so far as those in the Skye, Ross and Cromarty (SRC) Area are not yet settled on geographic boundaries for localism, Lochaber has chosen to proceed with evolutionary change as planned and Inverness Members need more time to consider options.

2.4 **It is recommended we seek approval from Council and partners to develop the early experiments in Caithness, Sutherland, Nairn and Badenoch and Strathspey.**

2.6 What they aim to achieve and will test – for the Council and partners  
Members have deliberated on their vision for local democracy. For the four areas proposed, these have been presented to Council and the CPP Board. The vision for each area is attached at Appendix 1. They were developed with the local context in mind and are aligned to recommendations of the Strengthening Local Democracy Commission and the principles approved in the CPP Board.

2.7 If we use the principle of form following function, we need to create local governance around the vision for each of the four areas. This means different partners may be involved in different places and topics for consideration by them will vary. A one size approach will not be suitable.

2.8 While the vision for each area clearly sets out what Members seek to achieve, progressing with this requires partner buy-in. **It is recommended that agreement is sought for local conversations between local Members and the partners they need to involve.** These would be around the vision statement, how partners can participate and how in practice they can take this forward locally. The result should be:

- agreement of which organisations will be involved locally and who will represent them;
- any amendments to the vision;
- local proposals on how to organise the deliberation and governance around the vision.

**A CPP view and local Member view are needed to progress this proposal.**

2.9 It should be noted that to improve community engagement and empowerment, local Members in the four proposed areas have agreed to use some for their Ward Discretionary Fund for Participatory Budgeting (PB) in 2015/16 and 2016/17. Planning for PB is underway.

2.10 What they will involve  
Creating local governance around the vision for each of the four areas means being clear about what is being decided and by whom.

2.11 Members have already identified that:

- they want more local decision-making, to make local budget decisions, be involved earlier in policy development with the local context in mind and with local officers supporting them.
- Area Committee business needs to be brought together with partnership discussions to consider the area's needs more comprehensively and to focus on improving local outcomes and specific issues.
- They have variety of roles that means their governing is about: decision-making on certain business and accountability for those decisions, scrutiny of Council performance and Police and Fire service

performance, local problem-solving, agreeing local priorities, community leadership, representing constituents and communities, influencing and persuading other bodies, listening, and empowering. How to enact these points are considered below.

## 2.12 Local decision-making and local budgets

The new Leadership is keen to enable more devolved control over Community Services budgets, including roads, waste and housing. **In discussion with the Council's Director of Finance and Director of Community Services proposals for devolving Community Services budgets are made below.**

1. We approach this with a can do attitude (in accountancy terms the Community Services budget is already apportioned across the former 8 Districts);
2. The timescale for localising decisions would be 1.4.16 as by then the budget savings decisions should have been made so the budgets devolved reflect that;
3. We use the principle of subsidiarity (as recommended by the Commission) and assume that of the current Area budget<sup>1</sup> for Community Services all can be decided locally unless there is a strong case for not doing that;
4. We do not instigate a review of the apportionment of Community Services budgets across the areas;
5. We use the budget reporting for community services which identifies the budgets for different types of services to begin work with officers and local Members in the four areas to consider what should be in and out of scope for local decisions (identifying the implications of the options). Involving the Strategic Committee Chair and the Chair of Resources needs to be considered;
6. We ensure appropriate accounting practice for local decisions; (controls, management and monitoring)
7. We amend the Scheme of Delegation for the business affected at Area and Strategic Committee level;
8. We seek new ways of engaging communities in deciding on local spending priorities – to trial in at least one area by 2017 (PB or Citizens' Juries).

2.13 It is proposed that this approach is used in the four areas, but it is acknowledged that Members seek this to happen across all Areas for Area Committee decisions. Similarly, **better management of current Area Committee agendas** is required, not just for the four areas proposed but for all Area Committees. This means finding different ways to provide information to Members for noting (e.g. Ward Business Meetings or Member bulletins) and giving Members earlier opportunity to be involved with potential future items, e.g. using the Ward Business Meetings.

## 2.13 **Proposals for bringing Area and Partnership business together, acknowledging the different roles for Members, are set out below.**

1. Disband the two current Area Committees covering the 4 Areas;

---

<sup>1</sup> As amended by the budget savings decisions for 2016 onwards

2. Create a local forum for local governance in each of the 4 Areas. The title can be decided and if preferred consulted on locally. Nairn Members proposed a 'Nairn Community Partnership' for example. Using 'Area Committee' may deter partners and communities from participating.
3. Enable Council and partnership business to be considered in the local forum on the same day;
4. Arrange the agenda so that:
  - a. items requiring Council decision-making to be grouped together, conducted in a formal governance setting as currently provided for Area Committees, involves a local Member as Chair, are held in public and are web cast;
  - b. Items for scrutiny of Council services and Police and Fire Services are conducted in the same style as above and clearly marked on the agenda that the purpose is scrutiny. We would seek continuation of current performance reports and local staff to attend (internally and externally). We should identify what further Council performance reports and local performance data can be provided;
  - c. Partnership business is treated in a less formal setting to enable honest discussion and problem solving. This could be organised thematically for each meeting (e.g. some topics considered annually) and held in another venue. It would be chaired by a relevant partner. It is recommended this is not taken in public but attendance and involvement of relevant groups is considered (e.g. community councils, local community groups), or some sessions could be designed as listening to evidence from people/groups on specific topics. The output from the partnership discussion should be made public, e.g. through news releases, presentation at next public part of the 'Forum' and through partner Boards and Council committees for information.
  - d. If business is managed well there should also be time on the day for public engagement, possibly using a Ward Forum format and based on the theme of the Partnership meeting.

2.14 In developing the proposals above we need to consider:

1. The fit with District Partnership business in item 4c above. It may be that that is a standing partnership item in each of the four localities. It would also mean splitting the District Partnership covering Nairn and Badenoch & Strathspey (but that may help given the continuation of locality planning there and the opportunity to bring that together better). The Sutherland District Partnership would also be affected in NW Sutherland. The new guidance on integration partnerships hyperlinked in paragraph 1.1 needs to be considered.
2. The role of the Area Leader. One option is retain the role but have 4 instead of the current 2 and to share the allowance accordingly.
3. If there is an appetite or requirement for the business at 4c to be held in public, it is suggested that partner briefing or thematic workshops are held in advance.

4. If CPP Partners feel these proposals are adequate for local community planning, the permissions they need for engaging in Local Forums and how their governance arrangements may need to be changed.
5. The impact on the Highland CPP arrangements (e.g. local partnership leads attending Board, developing the LOIP)

2.15 How we will resource them

In terms of organising and supporting the new 'Local Forums' we would continue to need the Council's Democratic Services support, but with shorter agendas for decision-making and scrutiny the additional burden should be minimised.

- 2.16 Re-focusing the activities of the Ward Management Team has already begun. They will be a key resource in the four experiments. However given the new shared responsibilities in the Community Empowerment Act, **we need to agree in the CPP how to resource the partnership element of the 'Local Forum' across the Council, Police Scotland, Fire and Rescue Services, HIE and NHH.**

2.17 When they will start

**We should seek to start the new 'Local Forums' as soon as local Members and partners agree and during 2015.** It may require the Council to begin the formal part of the 'Local Forums' in advance of the partnership agenda if partners engagement takes longer to arrange, but District Partnerships should be aligned as soon as possible. New devolved Council budgets would take effect from 1.4.16.

2.18 How we will know if they are working

In creating an evaluation framework we should:

1. Make this a collaborative process for the CPP.
2. Begin with the vision statements and working with local members and partners on refining these to see what is measurable and how best to do that. This may well lead to new activities for the Local Forums. We should not overly focus on quantitative methods.
3. Accept that some things will evolve as we go, for example Members may be interested in other budgets out with Community Services being devolved. This suggests more of an action research approach to be used.
4. Use qualitative methods to capture how those involved feel the experiments are working and what difference they are making;
5. Consider how to understand the partnership impact and impact on partners' governance arrangements and CPP business;
6. Consider how to understand the impact on the Council – governance and operations.

2.19 Whether the results are transferable

This has still to be developed, but:

- We need to consider the different approach being taken forward in Lochaber and how we will capture learning from that;
- It may be that before 2017 members will approve further experiments in

the Skye, Ross and Cromarty (SRC) and/or Inverness areas.

2.20 While this report focuses on the four areas proposed, Members may be keen for some aspects to be incorporated into the business of the SRC, Lochaber and Inverness City Committee e.g. devolving the Community Services budget. This will be considered further in the Council and for the report for September.

### **3. Timeline**

3.1 The timeline is set out below, designed around reports for the Council and CPP Board in September:

- 13<sup>th</sup> August – COG report/discussion
- 17<sup>th</sup> August – consideration by the Council's Executive Leadership Team
- 18<sup>th</sup> August – Council's Leadership considers proposals
- 25<sup>th</sup> August – Council agenda printed
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Sept – report at Council
- 11<sup>th</sup> Sept – report to CPP Board

### **4. Recommendation**

4.1 The COG is asked to discuss the proposals in the report.

Carron McDiarmid 10.8.15

### Local Members' Vision for their Areas

#### Caithness

Members felt that for Caithness to be a shining example of local democracy, they needed to make sure that:

- Partners agree and work towards growing the population and confidence in the local economy, benefitting from Caithness' natural assets, new opportunities and maximising benefit from public spending.
- More of the wealth generated in Caithness stays here, creating a sustainable employment base, skills development for young people and targets support to help people into employment.
- They build on the success of the Caithness and North Sutherland Regeneration Partnership by engaging more partners to all work together on, and be accountable for, improving outcomes in Caithness. This includes Council business and decision-making.
- More Council decisions are made locally especially on planning, licensing and community services.
- Community Councils are more sustainable and more people want to be involved.

Our voluntary groups and sector are more appreciated and respected.

#### Sutherland

Members felt that for Sutherland to be a shining example of local democracy, they needed to make sure that:

- Sutherland is strong and self-sufficient, with services and assets that people need in place.
- The focus is on Sutherland, with the right partnership arrangements in place for strategy and for delivery, enabling different people and organisations to lead on, and to be accountable to the public for, their duties and actions.
- Key partnership activity will focus on economic regeneration, population growth and reducing inequalities. It will involve the public, private and third sectors.
- We learn from other European countries with sparse populations.
- We recognise and grow Sutherland's assets so that community groups are freed and supported to be feisty, able and dedicated.
- Community Councils are really empowered and with funding to do more for their communities.

## **Nairn**

Members felt that for Nairn to be a shining example of local democracy, they needed to make sure that:

- They get positive relationships with the community;
- Public agencies work together with the community;
- They lead on projects and push on ideas and strategies – linked to priorities;
- They scrutinise the process for all public services;
- They make decisions for things they are elected for;
- They facilitate the community to deliver for the town;
- They address inequalities and include the harder to reach communities; and
- They build trust with community groups.

## **Badenoch and Strathspey**

Members felt that for Badenoch and Strathspey to be a shining example of local democracy, they needed to make sure that:

- All the public bodies in the Badenoch and Strathspey area come together to focus on solutions and share resources for Badenoch and Strathspey communities. This includes national and regional public bodies. The decisions they make locally are adhered to.
- We have full engagement of the third sector and communities building on the community work done through Voluntary Action Badenoch and Strathspey (VABS) and we engage fully with commercial organisations.
- Many more people want to stand for election, e.g. for Community Councils and local government.
- People have a voice and can influence decisions affecting them.
- Resources target inequalities – including rural inequalities and improving transport.