ALIGNING CENTRAL AND LOCAL PRIORITIES IN NORTHERN IRELAND:
OVERVIEW OF COMMUNITY PLANS AND LINKS TO THE DRAFT PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT

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Introduction

All local councils have now published Community Plans, either in draft or final form[1]. These Plans, individually and collectively, provide a unique perspective. They provide an insight into what local communities see as their strengths, weaknesses and areas for growth and change. It also allows us to examine, at a high level, emerging priorities and the degree of alignment between central and local plans.

This paper provides an overview of the Community Plans, reflecting on the visions, outcomes, indicators, targets, actions and how these relate to the Executive's draft Programme for Government[2] (PfG). It considers issues such as citizen engagement, implementation and monitoring. Some of the main infrastructure priorities are also highlighted. The paper concludes with some high level observations and suggestions.

Background

Proposals to reform local government in Northern Ireland were first put forward over a decade before it came to pass. The process of reform commenced in 2002 under the Review of Public Administration. As well as wider changes in health and education, its purpose was to create more powerful councils with responsibilities for an increased range of services. Early plans were for a move from twenty six councils to seven and to give councils new powers for planning, local road functions, regeneration and fostering community relations. After some setbacks and delays a compromised position of 11 councils with more limited powers was agreed in 2011. The commitment to establish a new 11 council model for local government by 2015 was included in the Programme for Government 2011-2015[3] and enacted in legislation in Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.[4] The new councils were given the responsibility of leading the community planning process for their district.

The legislation provided the high level framework for the operation of Community Planning - a process led by councils, in conjunction with partners, to develop and implement a shared vision for their area and to plan and deliver better services. By connecting the various tiers of government and

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[1] This analysis was undertaken in summer 2017. At that time, eight plans were finalised, the remaining three were draft.
[2] Northern Ireland Executive, *Programme for Government Consultation Document*, 2016
[3] https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/nigov/pfg-2011-2015-report.pdf

[4] http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2014/8/contents/enacted

wider society, it is hoped that the ultimate aim of delivering better outcomes for citizens would be achieved.[5]

On April 1st 2015, Community Planning came into operation in Northern Ireland. The then Department of the Environment issued statutory guidance[6] to local councils for the operation of Community Planning with a recommendation that plans should be published within two years. The Guidance was reasonably prescriptive on a range of issues such as governance, the process, key issues to be addressed, publication of the plan and subsequent monitoring. Councils were encouraged to prepare Community Plans that were complementary to the Executive's draft PfG outcomes and associated delivery plans.

Guidance on Community Plans

- *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.*

Source: Department for the Environment, *Statutory Guidance for Operation of Community Planning,* 2015

Whilst each council had scope to decide on the membership of the Community Planning Partnership (CPP), the legislation suggests:

- The Education and Library Boards

- The Health and Social Care Trusts

- Public Health Agency

- Health and Social Care Board

- Police Service of Northern Ireland

- Northern Ireland Housing Executive

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[5] Community Planning has been operating in other jurisdictions for some time. It was given a statutory basis in the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 and strengthen more recently with the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 which focused on improving outcomes and tackling inequalities, including in localities whose communities experience the poorest outcomes.

[6] Department of the Environment, *Statutory Guidance for Operation of Community Planning*, October 2015

- Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service

- Invest Northern Ireland

- Northern Ireland Tourist Board

- Sports Council for Northern Ireland, (SportNI)

- Libraries NI

- Council for Catholic Maintained Schools

Community Planning means working differently. It is based on working in partnership and in forming deeper forms of collaboration not only with stakeholders and statutory partners, but also with other councils. This work has already begun through the process of engagement and will continue and strengthen through working groups.

Though Community Planning is relatively new to Northern Ireland, the concept of 'joined up services' and collaboration, across different tiers of government has been around for some time. The Northern Ireland Executive continues to grapple with this. The OECD concluded, in its 2016 report on Northern Ireland government, that the '*application of a whole-of-government approach is still aspirational with respect to the development of most policies and programmes'* (OECD, 2016: 25) and it set out a series of recommendations.[7] It was supportive of the new PfG outcomes based approach and recognised this as a positive step though many other changes were needed.

So as local government proceeds with community planning, in many ways, it is tackling issues central government has not yet overcome around public service delivery co-ordination. Community planning processes face challenges of many delivery bodies, political tensions and fragmented and constrained budgets to promote collective responsibility for local places. This requires local partners, in the first instance, to commit to and understand what collaborative working and service integration actually means in practice for their organisation. To get the real benefits for citizens it may be the transition up the 'integration ladder' from information sharing, sharing of resources to jointly planning activities. It is also about responsible departments and agencies ceding territory where others are performing similar activities. Rethinking the allocation of budgets to reflect new priorities is also important.

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[7] OECD (2016), *Northern Ireland (United Kingdom): Implementing Joined-up Governance for a Common Purpose*

Overview of Community Plans

This section gives an overview of the content of the Community Plans – in terms of the aspirations, desired outcomes, the indicators and the actions. It also shows where Plans overlap with the draft PfG as well as where thinking diverges. There may be value in doing a more comprehensive analysis when all the action plans have been published thus providing an opportunity to distil the key messages for central government and associated agencies.[8]

Titles and Timeframes

All Community Plans were published, either in draft or final form, within the specified two year timeframe. In some respects the Plans are similar with most adopting aspects of an outcomes based model[9] aligned to the Executive's draft PfG. In other ways they differ as each seeks to tell their own story and identify 'unique selling points'. The emphasis in the titles of the Plans is on inclusiveness, ownership, growth and agreed purpose.

By Council	Title
Antrim and Newtownabbey	*Love Living Here*
Ards and North Down	*The Big Plan for Ards & North Down*
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon	*Connected* *A Community Plan*
Belfast City	*Your future city: The Belfast Agenda*
Causeway Coast and Glens	*A Better Future Together*
Derry City and Strabane	*Inclusive Strategic Growth Plan*
Fermanagh and Omagh	*Fermanagh and Omagh 2030 Community Plan*
Lisburn and Castlereagh	*Nurture and reap the rewards*
Mid and East Antrim	*Putting People First*
Mid Ulster	*Our Community Plan 10 year plan for Mid Ulster*
Newry, Mourne and Down	*Living well together*

The timeframe of individual plans range from ten years in Mid Ulster to 18 years in Belfast City, with the majority covering a period of between 13 and 15 years. These are, therefore, medium term plans with a commitment to update them on a rolling basis, typically every two years.

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[8] A similar report was prepared in the Republic of Ireland when the City/County Development Boards first published their Plans. Fitzpatrick Associates and ERM Ireland (2003), *Review of County Development Board Strategies*, commissioned by the Department for the Environment and Local Government

[9] Aspects of the OBA framework were used more so than adopting the framework in its entirety.

Community Plan Timeframes

2027	2030	2032	2035
one council	**five** councils	**four** councils	**one** council

Engagement Process

A striking observation, in reviewing the Community Plans, is the breadth and depth of engagement with local people. The process of shaping and agreeing the Plan would appear to be as much an output as the Plan itself. Community Partnerships were asked to actively encourage local people and organisations to become involved in the process and to demonstrate the benefits of community planning and how it promotes the delivery of better outcomes for citizens and more efficient and effective service delivery. In the description of the engagement process, and in the language used, the Partnerships certainly appear proactive in seeking views of a broad range of citizens.

This was achieved in a variety of ways. There were extensive on-line surveys, social media activity, area wide workshops, focus groups with Section 75 Groups and engagement with children and young people through poster competitions and other means. Strong quantitative evidence was also gathered through surveys. Over 1,400 responses were received in some areas which provides a comprehensive evidence base and a valuable quantitative baseline for future monitoring.

There is some interesting discussion on the engagement process in some plans. Fermanagh and Omagh, for example, stated that engagements were used as an opportunity to manage expectations and develop the plan within the context of the PfG, resource levels and statutory limits. Some others adopted a more 'the world's your oyster' approach in terms of ambitions. The varying approaches are worth reflecting on as they are likely to shape the actions included.

Lessons from this extensive engagement process should be captured as it would be of great benefit to both central and local government in future policy and service design.

Extracts on the engagement process

"Over 5,000 people were engaged in the co-design of our outcomes, indicators and actions. This included….eight thematic groups, a citizen survey of 1,400 households, engagement with children and young people, focus group research with groups identified as experiencing inequalities in accordance with Section 75 of the NI Act."
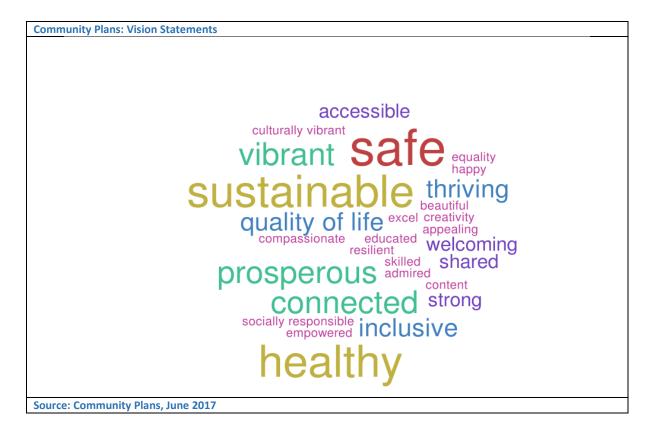**Derry City & Strabane**

"Launch of the Big Conversation asking the public for likes, dislikes and improvements; Community planning workshop with over 150 delegates; formation of five thematic delivery groups to review the feedback of the Big Conversation; extensive consultation with special interest groups."
Ards and North Down

Vision Statements

The vision statements set out the high level aspirations of each area. A key word search of the visions show the theme that appears most frequently is *safe*, included in seven visions. Other high frequency words include *sustainable, healthy, connected, vibrant* and *prosperous*. Whilst some words appear only once, there is, undoubtedly, a consistent message emanating across Plans. The emphasis firstly appears to be on the basic needs of *safety* and *health*, followed by *sustainable development*. The economic emphasis is reflected in aspirations to be *prosperous*, *connected*, *vibrant* and *thriving. Quality of life* and *inclusive* are also prominent goals. *Skills* and *educated* feature to a lesser extent - perhaps because these are seen as inputs to achieving the others – without (the right) education and skills the economic goals will be unobtainable and social inequalities will persist. In some ways education and skills are key to unlocking the rest.

The vision of safe, healthy communities reinforces the need for all Partners, central and local, to work together as the responsibilities and budgets for these functions primarily rest with central government and its agencies.

Community Plans: Vision Statements

Source: Community Plans, June 2017

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The vision statement examples give a flavour of the aspirations. Again the language is positive, engaging and inclusive.

Examples of Vision Statements

Belfast will be a city re-imagined. A great place to live for everyone. It will energise and drive a successful economy where everyone can reach their potential. Beautiful, well connected and culturally vibrant, it will be a city shared and loved by its people and admired around the world. It will be a producer of and magnet for talent, investment, innovation and creativity - a compassionate place where people create value and are valued.

Belfast City

We have a happy, healthy and connected community, a vibrant and sustainable economy and appealing places for living, working and learning.
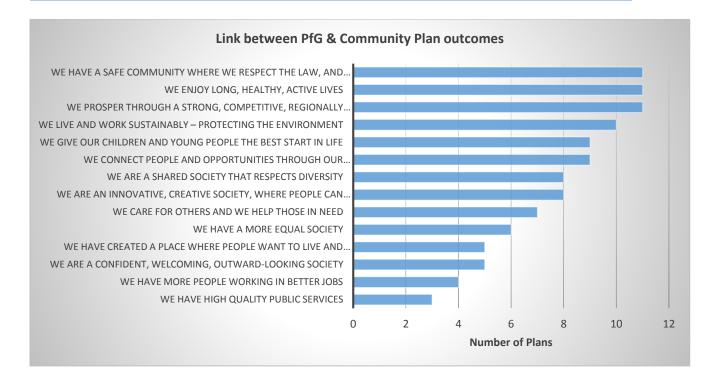
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon

Outcomes

A collection of outcomes is included in all Community Plans. Most are high level statements and are not quantified. The quantum of outcomes range from four in Antrim and Newtownabbey to nineteen in Mid and East Antrim. Most have less than ten outcomes; three have more.

Community Planning Partners were advised to align plans with the Executive's draft PfG, and a review of the high level outcomes shows this is the case. A simple mapping of outcomes using key words shows a close correlation between both. The outcomes also reassuringly filter down from aspirations in the visions – with *safety*, *health*, *prosperous* economy and *environment* featuring in almost all. High quality public services, better jobs and outward looking economy outcomes do not feature as highly but this may be because these overlap with others or these could be considered inputs[10].

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[10]The current working draft (and subject to political agreement) of the PfG has dropped the outcome related to high quality public services. Instead a statement has been included that '*these Outcomes will be delivered through collaborative working across the Executive and beyond government and through the provision of high quality public services*'.

Link between PfG & Community Plan outcomes

Outcome	Number of Plans
WE HAVE A SAFE COMMUNITY WHERE WE RESPECT THE LAW, AND…	11
WE ENJOY LONG, HEALTHY, ACTIVE LIVES	11
WE PROSPER THROUGH A STRONG, COMPETITIVE, REGIONALLY…	11
WE LIVE AND WORK SUSTAINABLY – PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT	10
WE GIVE OUR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE THE BEST START IN LIFE	9
WE CONNECT PEOPLE AND OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH OUR…	9
WE ARE A SHARED SOCIETY THAT RESPECTS DIVERSITY	8
WE ARE AN INNOVATIVE, CREATIVE SOCIETY, WHERE PEOPLE CAN…	8
WE CARE FOR OTHERS AND WE HELP THOSE IN NEED	7
WE HAVE A MORE EQUAL SOCIETY	6
WE HAVE CREATED A PLACE WHERE PEOPLE WANT TO LIVE AND…	5
WE ARE A CONFIDENT, WELCOMING, OUTWARD-LOOKING SOCIETY	5
WE HAVE MORE PEOPLE WORKING IN BETTER JOBS	4
WE HAVE HIGH QUALITY PUBLIC SERVICES	3

Number of Plans

Analysis and Indicators

An evidence based approach has been adopted in all Plans. There is a strong focus on '*telling the story*' and the socio-economic analysis in the majority is comprehensive. They include statistics on demographics, urban/rural structure, geography, skills levels, deprivation, health, vacancy, business base, unemployment, and the natural environment. Most compare their areas performance against the Northern Ireland average on a range of statistics. Nearly all Plans include population indicators aimed at tracking progress on outcomes over the long-term. The draft PfG has set a similar framework for indicators. There is less evidence of public service mapping to identify gaps/overlaps in provision though some propose to do so.

Most Plans contain a large number of indicators, over 40 in many cases. This is similar in number to the draft PfG. [11] Partnerships are, of course, free to choose whatever indicators best meet their individual needs and there are plenty of examples specific to individual Plans. That said there is overlap between some PfG indicators and those in the Plans.

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[11] There were 14 outcomes and 42 indicators in the Programme for Government Consultation Document. The current working draft has 12 outcomes and 49 indicators.

Draft PfG Indicators included in <u>most</u> Community Plans*
Preventable mortality
Prevalence rate (% of the population who were victims of any NI Crime Survey crime)
Proportion of the workforce in employment qualified to level 1 and above, level 2 and above, level 3 and above, and level 4 and above
% all journeys which are made by walking/cycling/public transport
Gap between highest and lowest deprivation quintile in healthy life expectancy at birth
% of babies born at low birth weight
% of school leavers achieving at Level 2 or above including English and Maths
Seasonally adjusted employment rate (16-64)
Total spend by external visitors
Note:* included in seven or more plans

Examples of PfG indicators used in most Plans relate to basic needs of health and safety. They also include education attainment levels and employment rates. Tourism is an economic priority in all Plans and most include the indicator '*Total spend by external visitors*'. Alternative indicators such as '*number of visitors*' or '*visitor experience*' were also used. Just because a PfG indicator is not used it does not mean that this issue is not significant. Some Partnerships chose a different indicator to measure change in a particular sector. For example, the housing indicators selected relate to housing quality and tenure as well as the stock. Mental health is another notable example. It is a major issue in most Plans. But only a few used the PfG indicator of '*% of population with GHQ12 scores ≥4 (signifying possible mental health problem)*' with most selecting '*number of anti-depressant drug items dispensed per head of registered population*' as the indictor on this issue.

Other indicators that appear in many of the Plans but are not in the draft PfG focus on aspects of crime, preventative healthcare, education, civic engagement, housing, regeneration and business growth measures[12]. Specifically they include:

- Number of hate motivated crimes;
- Vacancy rates in local towns and villages;
- Business survival and birth rates;
- Wages;
- Attendance levels at primary and secondary school;

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[12] Although not included in the PfG consultation document as indicators they may feature as performance measures against specific actions. The emphasis thus far has been on indicators (population accountability) more so than performance measures (performance accountability).

- % of who people who feel they have an influence when it comes to local decisions;
- % of active volunteers;
- % of children at Year 1 and Year 8 who are obese;
- % who normally participate in sport at least one day per week; and
- House condition survey.

Whilst Community Planning Partners could certainly influence these indicators, collaboration across all stakeholders will be needed to turn the curve on these. Central government may wish to consider these indicators and the related actions that would actually drive change in the context of the draft PfG and associated delivery plans.[13]

Coupled with the vast array of indicators is a significant data development agenda. Some relate to the draft PfG, for example, a *respect* indicator and *better jobs* index. Others are Plan specific, for example, a *measure of social enterprise*, *level of social contact the older population have*, *a measure of city innovation*, a *liveability index*, *access to and quality of open space*, and *trust and confidence in public service*. There is considerable scope for central and local government to work together to develop indicators and performance measures. This will ensure consistency in future monitoring and measurement.

Whilst the indicators chosen are, without doubt, comprehensive, there are a number of challenges. First is the practical issue of how to monitor all these indicators without it turning into a business in itself. There is a risk of people getting lost in a sea of indicators and performance measures. Enhanced co-ordination may be achieved by having a jointly funded or managed monitoring unit or an oversight group. The second is about seeing change and applies as much to the draft PfG as it does to the Plans. Movement on some is likely to be slow without a real shift in policies and programmes.

Targets

The majority of councils chose, at this stage, not to include targets or assess the impact of their plans. This is similar to the draft PfG approach where the focus is more on the direction of travel rather than definitive targets i.e. reducing crime, improving mental health and improving internet connectivity. There are exceptions, however. Belfast City and Derry City & Strabane include specifics around population and employment. Belfast's ambitions are to have '...*an additional*

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[13] See OBA framework. Whilst these indicators are not listed as population indicators in the draft PfG, they may be included as performance indicators as the process is rolled out.

70,000 new residents' and that *'…our urban economy supports 50,000 more jobs'* in the coming two decades*.* Derry City & Strabane presents its numbers as the impact of the capital plans if delivered in full and to schedule, *'…an increase of approximately 10,000 additional people in the city and District'* and the *'…creation of almost 15,000 new jobs'*.

In these two council areas alone this would mean 80,000 new residents and an additional 65,000 new jobs. NISRA's principal population projection, which is policy neutral and does not consider economic climate, estimates a population increase of 127,000 for Northern Ireland over the same period.[14] Achieving the 80,000 new residents in the two largest cities would require a considerable shift from settlement patterns over recent decades towards much more concentrated city centre living.

The two councils are also ambitious around jobs targets. Ulster University Economic Policy Centre Outlook (Summer 2017)[15] estimates that a poorly managed Brexit combined with a squeeze in real incomes could see employment levels fall by 8,200 over the next ten years. The optimistic scenario estimates that, with a very fair wind and convergence with UK average economic performance, employment levels could increase by 87,500 by 2026. But the most likely outcome, according to the UUEPC, is the central estimate of 28,800 jobs. Achieving half the combined jobs target, in the region of 32,500, would mean the two areas alone surpassing the central estimate.[16] Councils are tending towards the optimistic scenario in planning. It is not to say these targets are not achievable but more so to recognise the scale of the aspirations and the imperative of doing things differently.

Actions

For many, the emphasis in the Plans is on the vision, the socio-economic analysis, the outcomes and the indicators much more than the actions. In cases where actions are not included, the Partnerships have indicated their intention to publish separate action/delivery plans in the coming months. Where actions have been included they are broad ranging – some specific and others fairly generic.

Quite a few economic actions focus on topical issues such as Brexit, broadband and being prepared for local economic shocks (such as, for example, large scale redundancies). Others are around positioning and future planning such as developing strategies for key growth sectors and maximising

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[14] NISRA, *2014-based Population Projections for Northern Ireland Statistical Bulletin*, 2015
[15] Ulster University Economic Policy Centre, *Outlook*, Summer 2017
[16] The combined jobs target for Derry city & Strabane and Belfast city is 65,000 over a 15-18 year timeframe. This target has been halved to 32,500 to provide a proxy alignment with the ten year timeframe of UUEPC outlook.

international connections. There are also actions focused on better planning to support growth, for example, reimaging and improving the competitiveness of town centres and better transport links for new developments. Even now at this early stage and before all actions plans are produced, common work streams around the economy are evident. Some co-ordination or oversight will be helpful to ensure councils know the Plans of others and can collaborate. There are also valuable messages for departments and agencies on how individual places see their economies growing. In some instances it is difficult to see how the proposed actions will shift the curve on the associated indicators.

Examples of actions related to the economy	
BREXIT/ECONOMIC SHOCKS	- *'…establish a Development Zone Pilot to mitigate the challenges and explore the opportunities arising from Brexit'* - *'…establish a new rapid redundancy response … to deal with future shocks'* - *'…along with the NI Executive, explore new financial mechanisms and models to enable better use of budgets by NI departments, public bodies and councils to facilitate economic growth and the implementation of agreed priority schemes'*
INFRASTRUCTURE	- *'…develop a pilot Rural Community Broadband Scheme and roll out in multiple locations'* - *'accessibility by modes of transport other than private car …. in the location and design of development'* - *'…review of existing work space capacity'*
STRATEGIES	- *'…commission local strategies for advanced manufacturing, agri-food, financial, business services and digital sectors'*
GLOBAL	- *'…work with city partners to create and deliver a new International Relations Framework to maximise the city's new and international connections to drive trade, investment and tourism…'*
REGENERATION	- *'…reimagine the use of town centres'* *'…develop the competitiveness/attractiveness of our town centres…'*

The strong focus in the social actions is on supporting the most vulnerable in our society through early intervention, targeting and better cross-agency support. This includes helping:

- older people - supporting them to live independently and remain healthy for longer;
- children in care - supporting them as they seek work;
- children generally - supporting them so they have the best start in life; and
- those with mental health issues - supporting them through multi-agency interventions.

This focus on inclusive growth resonates with the draft PfG and thinking internationally.[17]

Some Plans contain actions around the co-location of public services which puts the citizen at the centre of service planning. Whilst there are good examples of co-location very often the practicalities present challenges so it will be useful to share learning from this work as it progresses. Some have committed to map existing services to identify duplication and overlap. Delivering better public services is the bedrock of Community Plans so this is an action one would like to see in all plans.

Examples of actions related to social issues	
SUPPORTING VULNERABLE PEOPLE	*'…develop a multi-agency support system for 18-23 year olds who have left care'* *'…develop good quality parenting programmes and further develop the local family support hubs infrastructure'* *'…develop volunteering programmes with accredited qualifications as a bridge to employment and to support social and vocational engagement of Vulnerable people'* *'…a dedicated cross-agency group to focus on emerging issues of vulnerability and identification of those individuals most at risk'*
HEALTH	*'..use of social media and social marketing for targeted health improvement'* *'…co-design initiatives which identify and address barriers to independent living'*
COMMUNITY RELATIONS	*'…establish a tension monitoring framework to help predict and prevent community tension as opposed to reacting to it'*
PUBLIC SERVICE	*'…map existing services and take account of existing structures and partnerships to identify service duplication and gaps'* *'…investigate the potential of the co-location of public services in town centres'*

The environmental actions focus on making the best use of resources by developing greenways, using open spaces and also carefully managing these assets through appropriate plans. Actions and initiatives around waste management, circular economy, flood alleviation and related issues are included.

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[17] OECD, *Time to Act: Making Inclusive Growth Happen*, Policy Brief, 2017

Sample of actions related to environmental issues
'…develop and implement management plans for the Sperrins AONB and for the Global Geopark in partnership with neighbouring areas'
'…deliver an open spaces strategy'
'…develop and enhance the waste infrastructure across the district'
'…create new greenways'

The very essence of Community Planning is to encourage collaborative action and interventions. Going on the actions included thus far, efforts to collaborate are evident. But it remains to be seen how collaboration and integration will actually play out in practice. It certainly will need a move towards a culture of trust and collaboration. This requires all to recognise '*collaboration as the new competition*'[18]. There are examples of intra-council collaboration in functional areas such as waste management and in strategic work through the North West Gateway and the Belfast-led Economic Opportunities Group. These must become the norm between and across the layers of government to deliver the visions in the Plans, and indeed in the draft PfG.

Delivery of the Plans is a shared task between all Partners. As the process moves into delivery, Partners at local and regional level need to understand their role and the expectations in the respective organisations. In the longer term, discussions between local and central partners about what is best delivered at what scale may be worthwhile. Either way actions will need to be resourced. Learning from each other, plan alignment and collaboration will be important to get the most out of the process.

Funding

There was no specific requirement on Partnerships to state how the actions in the Community Plans would be funded. Most do not raise the issue. A number do, however, commit to looking at alternative financial models to enable better use of budgets to support priorities. Probably reflecting the heavy capital and resource aspect to its Plan, Derry City & Strabane took a different approach and costed the capital element. The development cost is thought to be in the region of £3.8bn, which includes significant private sector development supported by flagship public sector

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[18] Mollenkopf, quoted by Harrison J., Chapter 8: Competition between Places in *Changing Gear: Is Localism the New Regionalism?* The Smith Institute, London, UK, 2012

projects. Belfast City has included numerous references to funding, including looking at the opportunities that a City Deal may present for the city region[19].

Monitoring

All Plans include a commitment to monitor the potential impact of actions on indictors. Most intend to have comprehensive often multi-layered governance arrangements to oversee implementation and engagement. There is also a recognition that Plans must remain relatively fluid to reflect the changing environment. In due course, a review of approaches to monitoring (and associated indicators) may be useful.

Local Infrastructure Priorities and Asset Management

Infrastructure is an important element of local plans. This section summarises the infrastructure priorities identified in Community Plans which includes physical and digital activity, energy, tourism and regeneration, social housing and environmental issues. It also looks at actions related to Asset Management and Buy Social.

The Northern Ireland Executive sets out its infrastructure priorities in the Investment Strategy. It is a rolling programme of its priorities, updated every three to four years in line with the Budget. The Investment Strategy is underpinned by a significant development process which includes analytical research and active engagement with central government departments and other stakeholders, including local government. The Community Plans give another valuable perspective on future infrastructure priorities. In many ways, they mirror central priorities but there are local variants. Some projects mentioned are familiar and are either in planning or the early stages of development. A few are new suggestions.

The degree to which infrastructure features differs across Plans. In some infrastructure plays a central role whilst in others the references are much more subtle.

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[19] The Chancellor announced in his 2017 Autumn Budget Statement yesterday that he would open negotiations for a Belfast (Region) City Deal.

Connectivity – transport and digital

Access is a major issue in many areas – access to services, access to work and education, access to and from markets for people and goods, and access to leisure and recreation. There is a clear recognition in the Plans that better transport improves peoples' lives in many ways. All aspects of transport are covered from better sub-regional planning, major and minor road upgrades, public transport improvements and enhanced walking and cycling.

An enhanced road network is seen as essential to the future development of many areas. Whilst some road schemes identified are strategic, others are local and about improving the network within the District Council area.

The push towards public transport in the draft PfG is also reflected in the Plans. The emphasis is on the planning and delivery of public transport. A number of Plans include proposals to prepare an integrated transport strategy to improve connectivity and access. Improving intra-town transport systems is another important issue, cited in Newry, Mourne and Down, Mid Ulster and other Plans. Rural transport also features in some.

Budget 2016-2017 flagship projects[20] - the A5 and A6 roads, Belfast Rapid Transport and Belfast Transport Hub are mentioned, as well as other significant schemes such as the York Street Interchange. The other main initiatives around transport relate to park and ride facilities, better planning, rail link restoration and a transport hub in the North West.

EXAMPLES OF ROAD PROJECTS	EXAMPLES OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT/CYCLING PROJECTS
•A5 •A6 •York Street •M1 at junction 8 to Knockmore Rd, Lisburn •A2 Buncrana Road •A29 – A31 and A4, including bypasses for the main towns and villages •Various bypass schemes	•Belfast Transport Hub •Rapid Transit System •Progress park and ride at strategic sites •Feasibility of restoring rail links to and from Mid Ulster •Comprehensive solution to city centre parking •North West Transport Hub •Cycling – new greenways, dedicated lanes and cycle infrastructure •Intra-town Transport Planning

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[20] https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/nigov/2016-17-budget-document.pdf

Improving the cycling infrastructure, through greenways and dedicated lanes, features in nearly all the Plans. Cycling is seen as a core part of the future tourism offering as well as an important alternative mode of transport. Efforts to promote active travel and build tourism products around cycling need infrastructure investment. Given the common interest in this issue, local government would benefit from working together, alongside central government, to maximise the potential health and economic gains.

Tourism, regeneration and housing

Tourism is seen as central to the economic development story of many places. There is a strong focus on it in most Plans with local areas keen to build on their unique selling points. Co-ordination will ensure tourism products developed locally complement rather than compete with each other. Quite a few focus on developing greenways. Other examples include new world class visitor attractions (indoor and outdoor), a regional gallery, canal reinstatement and more accommodation.

EXAMPLES OF TOURISM PROJECTS	EXAMPLES OF REGENERATION PROJECTS	HOUSING REFERENCES
• Greenways • Tourism Masterplans • Further world class visitor attraction in Belfast city • Scope the potential of a regional gallery being located in the city • Fermanagh and Omagh as a world class outdoor activities destination • Opening of Hillsborough Castle • Progress reinstatement of Ulster canal and its greenways • Redevelopment of Dundonald Ice Bowl • City centre hotel for Lisburn	• Addressing vacancy and dereliction • Re-imagining the use of town centres - attracting evening footfall and developing the night time economy • Strategic sites including redevelopment of St Patrick's Barracks site, the MLK site and further development at Ebrington and Fort George	• Majority of references are generic not specific • Focus - right tenure mix and quality of provision • Belfast City's Plan - to deliver 1,800 social housing units by 2021 • Important aspect of future housing developments - design for supported living and home based support services, adapting housing for extended families

There are numerous references to making better use of strategic sites, regeneration and better planning. Addressing vacancy, dereliction and bringing life back into town centres is an issue for many and there are numerous actions to tackle this. Development of strategic sites is also seen as key to unlocking potential – specific sites mentioned include the redevelopment of St Patrick's Barracks site, the Maze Long Kesh site and further development at Ebrington and Fort George.

The inadequacy of social housing and necessity to provide quality, affordable accommodation quickly is to the fore in most Plans. Many recognise the important aspect of future housing developments, particularly in the context of an ageing population and the requirement for supported and adapted living arrangements. Belfast City's Plan is specific around housing, with plans to deliver 1,800 social housing units by 2021. Others chose not to be definitive at this stage.

Telecoms, Energy and other priorities

Digital connectivity includes mobile and broadband services. It is viewed by all as a priority, as a means of accessing services and doing business, particularly in rural areas. There is reference to it in all Plans. In the case of these services it is about improving access first and foremost – addressing the '*not spots*' and providing everyone with a reasonable service. Secondly it is about improving the overall level of provision. Whilst there are no specifics about how this service gap will be addressed, there is a recognition of its importance and a willingness to work with Partners to seek solutions. Causeway Coast and Glens, for example, intends to '*develop a strategy to address the identified telecommunications gaps*'. Councils can potentially learn from each other and also from other jurisdictions on the best way to address telecommunications gaps and provision more generally.

The energy references relate to two specific aspects. The first is around sustainable energy. Newry, Mourne and Down, for example, emphasise the importance of '*clean energy and a commitment to focus on wind, ocean waves and the sun as potential energy sources'*. The second issue which Mid Ulster recognises is the strategic significance of energy security and supply and its Plan specifically references two strategic projects underway - *Gas to the West* and the *Interconnector*.

There are various actions related to the environment, waste management, the circular economy, flood alleviation and coastal zone management. There is universal agreement across the Plans on using the extensive resources in local areas but doing so in a way that is responsible and protects the environmental asset.

Some other infrastructure priorities include the expansion of Magee campus, further education colleges, and Altnagelvin hospital. These are just some of the major schemes; others have been mentioned. This should be revisited again when completing a more comprehensive review of the actions.

TELECOMS/ENERGY PROJECTS	OTHERS
•Real problem area - addressing 'not spot' •Broadband access for all •Mobile coverage •Gas to the West •Interconnector •Renewables and clean energy	•Expansion of Magee campus •FE colleges region wide •Altnagelvin hospital •Well being centres •Cleantech hub •Public realm

Asset Management Plans

In recent years there has been a strong focus by central government on asset management. This is manifested in the publication of an Asset Management Strategy and an Asset Management Unit (AMU) established to work with Departments and respective agencies to help make best use of our asset base and develop effective asset management plans. In recent years the Unit has also been supporting local government in this area.

Councils have embraced asset management with a commitment evident in many of Plans. It is mentioned in a variety of contexts – community assets, environmental assets, and private and public sector assets.

Examples of actions include:

- *developing a community asset management strategy;*

- *working towards a compelling & collaborative investment proposition for public sector assets;*

- *develop a collaborative and partnership model of working across the education sector with businesses to ensure smarter use of existing assets and funding;*

- *design an integrated, inter-agency approach to neighbourhood regeneration and maximise the impact of local assets and investment;*

- *seeking to improve community assets as a driver for regeneration –* [including] *a strategic overview of these;*

- *develop a city energy programme - better manage energy usage across the city's public estate;*

- *develop and implement an Asset Management Plan for the entire public sector estate across the Council area; and*

- *consider how the use of assets can be achieved by setting up asset management agreements, shared use of facilities or the transfer of assets.*

Central government is continuing to support local partners on various aspects of asset management.

Buy social

Buy social, or social clauses, is a way to attempt to maximise the benefits from public procurements through targeted recruitment and training. Actions around Buy Social have been included in some Plans. Examples of these include:

- *harness the collective procurement power of the public sector to deliver on wider social outcomes;*

- *support for social enterprise and the introduction of 'buy social' clauses. Ensure that corporate social responsibility is written into procurement practices; and*

- *explore the use of social clauses and local sourcing in contracts issued by community planning partners to support the Community Plan's outcomes'*

Central government has been working actively on Buy Social, continuing to refine the understanding and actions to maximise impact. There is also a monitoring system to quantify the overall impact of such interventions. It will be important to draw out the impact and lessons learnt as the processes are refined over time.

Infrastructure – summary

Infrastructure is seen as key to unlocking the potential of some places. A significant volume of projects have been identified across the plans. Many of these projects are already on the radar as they are in planning or due to commence in the near future. Others are new. The totality of the projects identified will be costly to deliver. Particularly so as most seek to draw from the same central government pot. There are other projects and actions related to sub-regional infrastructure planning, better asset management and funding options which are not resource heavy. Central government must continue to support the Community Planning Partners on achieving these.

Key Observations and Suggestions

Key observations

- The last few years have been a time of change for local and central government. Both have undertaken separate but comparable strategic planning exercises. Central government for the first time adopted an outcomes led approach in the draft PfG whilst Councils led an extensive Community Planning initiative within their Districts. With the publication of the draft PfG in December 2016 and the Community Plans in recent months, now is a good time to take stock and consider at a high level the key messages in the Plans and the degree to which they align with and diverge from the draft PfG. It is also important, as the process moves forward, to focus on the robustness and feasibility of the actions.

- Great efforts have been put into the Community Plans. Most use something akin to outcomes based approach and are similar in structure and, for the most part, content. Most include a strong socio-economic analysis and refer to a huge level of engagement. Public service mapping is not as evident at this stage though some have indicated their intentions to do so.

- Community Planning Partners were advised to align plans with the Executive's draft PfG, and a review of the high level outcomes shows this is the case. A simple mapping of outcomes shows a close correlation between both. There are strong ties to the draft PfG in terms of the vision, outcomes but to a lesser extent the indicators.

- Similar to draft PfG, there are a large number of indicators in most Plans. Some overlap with PfG indicators but there are numerous others used in the Plans but not in the draft PfG though they may appear as part of the performance accountability framework. These relate to aspects of hate crime, preventative healthcare, education, civic engagement, regeneration and business. With the sheer number of indicators the risk is that monitoring these becomes the focus rather than the specific actions themselves. Co-ordination around monitoring will be important to ensure consistency when determining the impact.

- Most Plans do not include targets. The exceptions are Belfast City and Derry City & Strabane Plans, both of whom include targets around population and employment. The targets are ambitious. That is not to say it is not possible but more to recognise the scale of the aspirations and that new thinking and initiatives will be needed to achieve these. The Local Development Plans are an important vehicle in the practical aspects of achieving these goals.

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- In terms of the actions, there are strong messages about supporting the most vulnerable in society and inclusive growth. Mental health also stands out as a big issue. On the economy side there is a clear consistent voice on anticipating the implications of Brexit, dealing with large scale redundancies, the role of tourism and potential for growth in key sectors of advanced manufacturing, cyber security and others. Infrastructure is also viewed as an important lever. In some cases the relationship between actions and the associated indicators looks somewhat tenuous.

- As with the draft PfG, many Plans seek to address all problems affecting citizens. This will be challenging to deliver particularly with limited resources. But Plans and budgets may be streamlined over time. Achieving these ambitions means adopting innovative and clever solutions. Over time a critical assessment of the policies and programmes that work and do not work will be needed as well as an assessment of the extent to which budgets are realigned.

- Community Planning requires working in partnership and forming deeper forms of collaboration not only with stakeholders and statutory partners but also with other councils. This has begun through the process of engagement and should continue and strengthen through working groups and other fora.

- It is also imperative central government supports local government in delivering the Community Plans as most of the functional control and budget rests with them. There is an onus on all involved to collaborate rather than compete, to remove blockages and support implementation.

Suggestions

Both central and local government are at crucial periods as they move from strategic planning to delivery of the draft PfG and Community Plans. It is important now to work together to align plans to achieve the desired outcomes. The suggestions below seek to use the learning from the community planning process thus far, as well as availing of opportunities to align and maximise the impact of central and local delivery plans in the future.

- Capture and disseminate the learning and good practice from the Community Planning process so far in terms of the engagement process, strategy development, buy in of partners, challenges etc. The output should be shared with central and local government.

- Where Partnerships have not already done so, encourage all to map public service provision to identify overlap/gaps in provision. This information can be collated to give a regional and sub-regional overview.

- Discuss the implications of having or not having targets in Community Plans.

- Consider the best way central and local partners could collaborate on indicators, performance measures, monitoring and data development agenda.

- Review the action plans and distil the key messages for central government and agencies. Undertake an exercise to show the relationship between actions, resources and budgets to indicators.

- Co-ordinate regional and sub-regional strategies, policies and plans around transport, tourism, regeneration, social housing and others.

- Support collaborative working across central and local government on these issues, including the potential implications of incentivising co-operation across stakeholders.

- Continue to support local partners in the delivery of actions in community plans. Areas for support may include asset management, social clauses, capital projects, monitoring and evaluation amongst others.

- Facilitate discussions to consider the powers, functions and budgets local government needs to strengthen its position in delivering change – regeneration, for example

Appendix 1: Draft PfG Indicators included in relatively few/no Community Plans

Draft PfG Indicators included in <u>relatively few*/no</u> Community Plans
% of population with GHQ12 scores ≥4 (signifying possible mental health problem)
% population living in absolute and relative poverty (before housing costs)
Number of households in housing stress
% the population who believe their cultural identity is respected by society
Biodiversity
A Respect Index
Healthy life expectancy at birth
Average journey time on key economic corridors
A Better Jobs Index
Employment rate of 16-64 year olds by deprivation quintile
% who think leisure centres, parks, libraries and shopping centres in their areas are "shared and open" to both Protestants and Catholics
% change in energy security of supply margin
% water bodies at 'good' status
Number of adults receiving personal care at home or self-directed support for personal care, as a % of the total number of adults needing care
% of schools found to be good or better
Overall Performance Assessment (NI Water)
Usage of online channels to access public services
External sales
Rate of innovation activity (% of companies engaging in innovation activity)
Annual mean nitrogen dioxide concentration at monitored urban roadside locations
Average time taken to complete criminal cases
Reoffending rate
% people who are satisfied with health and social care
% people working part time who would like to work more hours
Employment rate by council area
Proportion of local graduates from local institutions in professional or management occupations or in further study six months after graduation
Self-efficacy
Nation Brands Index
Private Sector NICEI
Average life satisfaction score of people with disabilities
Note: *included in less than three Community Plans