

Preparing community strategies: government guidance to local authorities

On 5th May 2006 the responsibilities of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) transferred to the Department for Communities and Local Government.

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Introduction

1. Part I of the Local Government Act 2000 places on principal local authorities a duty to prepare 'community strategies', for promoting or improving the economic, social and environmental well-being of their areas, and contributing to the achievement of sustainable development in the UK. It also gives authorities broad new powers to improve and promote local well-being as a means of helping them to implement those strategies. Part I of the Act came into force on 18 October 2000.

2. By virtue of section 1(a) of the 2000 Act, the duty to prepare a community strategy applies to the following authorities:

- county councils;
- district councils (including shire district councils, metropolitan district councils and other unitary district councils);
- London borough councils;
- the Common Council of the City of London in respect of its functions as a local authority;
- the Council of the Isles of Scilly.

3. Section 4 of the Act requires local authorities in England to have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State in preparing their community strategies. This guidance may also be of interest and of use to other members of the local strategic partnerships (see paragraphs 24-31) which will work with local authorities to prepare and implement the community strategies for their areas.

4. Before issuing such guidance, the Secretary of State is required to consult "such representatives of local government, and such other persons, as he considers appropriate"¹. The draft version of this guidance, which has been circulated widely for comments, was a key element in that consultation exercise. This final version of the statutory guidance takes account of the key issues that were raised by the consultation process and has been prepared in consultation with local government representatives. An explanation of the Government's response to the consultation is available on the DETR web site².

5. Related documents have been published by the Local Government Association (LGA) and the Community Development Foundation (CDF) covering, respectively, local government examples of community planning³ and practical approaches by councils to community involvement and participation in relation to community strategies⁴.

Context

6. The Local Government Act 2000 is part of a local authority reform programme, linked to the Government's programme for the reform of public services. These programmes aim to ensure that the activities of the various bodies who provide services to the public:

- are better co-ordinated;
- are responsive to the needs and concerns of local communities;
- are delivered in ways that suit the people who depend on them; and
- take account of the needs of future generations.

7. The local government modernisation programme is designed to contribute to a process of democratic renewal by ensuring that councils are accountable, open and responsive to local needs. The Local Government Act 2000 and the Local Government Act 1999 will ensure that:

- councils' political decision-making processes are efficient, transparent and accountable;
- there is continuous improvement in the efficiency and quality of the services for which they are responsible;
- they actively involve and engage the community in local decisions; and
- they have the powers they need to work with other bodies to ensure that resources are deployed effectively to improve the well-being of their areas.

8. The duty to prepare community strategies is central to the modernisation of local government. This section of the guidance sets out the aims and objectives of effective community strategies and the principles that should be adopted by local authorities in their preparation.

Aims and objectives

9. A community strategy should aim to enhance the quality of life of local communities and contribute to the achievement of sustainable development⁵ in the UK through action to improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area and its inhabitants.

10. If this aim is to be realised, a community strategy will have to meet four objectives. It must:

- allow local communities (based upon geography and/or interest) to articulate their aspirations, needs and priorities;
- co-ordinate the actions of the council, and of the public, private, voluntary and community organisations that operate locally;
- focus and shape existing and future activity of those organisations so that they effectively meet community needs and aspirations; and
- contribute to the achievement of sustainable development both locally and more widely, with local goals and priorities relating, where appropriate, to regional, national and even global aims.

11. A community strategy must have four key components:

- a long-term vision for the area focusing on the outcomes that are to be achieved;
- an action plan identifying shorter-term priorities and activities that will contribute to the achievement of long-term outcomes;
- a shared commitment to implement the action plan and proposals for doing so;
- arrangements for monitoring the implementation of the action plan, for periodically reviewing the community strategy, and for reporting progress to local communities.

Underpinning principles

12. Community strategies will reflect local circumstances and needs. Every authority and every community will be different. The precise way in which these four components are constructed will therefore vary from one area to another. However, the following guiding principles should underpin all community strategies. They will:

- engage and involve local communities (see paragraphs 50-58);
- involve active participation of councillors within and outside the executive (see paragraphs 34-37);
- be prepared and implemented by a broad 'local strategic partnership'⁶ through which the local authority can work with other local bodies (see paragraphs 24-31);
- be based on a proper assessment of needs and the availability of resources (see paragraphs 70-79).

13. In preparing their community strategies, local authorities should comply with the new statutory duty on public authorities to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination and promote equality of opportunity and good relations between persons of different racial groups⁷. Information and advice about equality issues can be sought from the Equal Opportunities Commission, the Disability Rights Commission, and the Commission for Racial Equality.

14. Only by promoting and improving the economic, social *and* environmental well-being of their communities will community strategies contribute to the achievement of sustainable development in the UK. A community strategy that covers only one of those elements will not suffice; nor will the duty be met by producing three separate strands dealing with economic, social or environmental issues in isolation. A community strategy should cover all three in an integrated way. In developing their strategies, local authorities and their partners should have regard to the Government's sustainable development strategy - which provides a national framework for integrating economic, social and environmental concerns - and work on regional sustainable development frameworks (see paragraph 44). They should also take account of the ways in which national and global concerns - such as the mitigation of climate change and the protection of biodiversity - can be addressed through local action.

15. The need for sustainable, socially-inclusive communities is central to the aim of enhancing local quality of life and health. Community strategies should focus on priorities for action arising from the specific needs of the different communities that they serve. They should provide a means of joining up services and tackling cross-cutting issues in a coherent and integrated way.

Process

16. The process by which community strategies are produced is as important as the strategy itself. The preparation process will be the means by which local people and organisations can be drawn into democratic decision-making. It will be vital to ensure wide local ownership of the community planning process, which should therefore be predominantly 'bottom up' rather than 'top down'. Community strategies must give local people a powerful voice in planning local approaches to economic, social and environmental well-being and in holding core public services and local politicians to account. Local authorities will need to demonstrate the benefits for other organisations of co-ordinating action and helping to deliver key policy objectives more efficiently and cost-effectively. The key to an effective community strategy will, therefore, be successful partnership working and community involvement throughout the process. At every stage, all councillors will have important roles to play.

17. Local authorities can, and do, achieve a great deal on behalf of their communities. However, only by working together with other public, private, business and voluntary bodies will it be possible to deliver the broad range of outcomes encompassed by community strategies. All councils and their partners will have some experience of working together. In developing local strategic partnerships, councils and their partners should seek to build on those local arrangements that have worked well, rather than starting from scratch.

18. Many local partnerships have already been set up to fulfil specific objectives. In recent years, broader partnerships have been established, such as crime and disorder partnerships, health communities contributing to Health Improvement Programmes, New Commitment to Regeneration Pathfinder and partnerships for Local Biodiversity Action Plans. In particular, councils that have developed Local Agenda 21 (LA 21) strategies in line with the Government's guidance⁸ should have gone a long way towards developing effective partnership working, a long-term vision for the area and the necessary implementation mechanisms - as well as having staff with potentially relevant skills and experience.

Timing

19. The extent to which councils have already established some, or all, of the conditions necessary for successful community strategies will vary from authority to authority. Nevertheless, the trust that needs to underpin partnership working, the active engagement of local communities, and the arrangements needed to support fully-developed strategies take a considerable time to develop.

20. In recognition of the different stages that councils have reached, and the challenging goal that fully-developed community strategies represents, the Government does not intend to use this guidance to prescribe a date for their completion. The Government does, however, expect councils and their partners to assess their progress against the requirements set out in this guidance, and to set realistic and publicly-agreed targets for putting in place their first community strategies.

21. Councils and their partners should regard the production of the first statutory community strategy as a beginning rather than the conclusion of this exercise. The processes and

relationships through which strategies are produced and implemented should continue to evolve and be refined. In particular:

- Partnerships need to evaluate their effectiveness and adjust their membership and working arrangements accordingly.
- The development and implementation of community strategies needs to become embedded firmly into partners' managerial cultures, resource planning and budgetary decisions.
- There should be continuing efforts to secure greater degrees of community participation in the preparation and implementation of strategies.

¹ Similar requirements apply to any guidance that may be issued by the National Assembly for Wales in relation to the preparation of community strategies by principal local authorities in Wales.

² www.communities.gov.uk/local-regions

³ *Preparing Community Strategies: issues for local authorities*; LGA, June 2000; and *Preparing Community Strategies: issues and advice*; LGA, December 2000. Both publications are available on the LGA web site at www.lga.gov.uk/index.htm

⁴ *The New Community Strategies: how to involve local people*; Community Development Foundation, December 2000. Also available on the CDF web site at www.cdf.org.uk/

⁵ *A Better Quality of Life: a strategy for sustainable development for the UK* states that sustainable development means ensuring a better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come. It explains that achieving sustainable development means meeting four objectives at the same time, in the UK and the world as a whole:

- social progress which recognises the needs of everyone
- effective protection of the environment
- prudent use of natural resources
- maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment.

The sustainable development strategy (Cm 4345) was published by DETR in May 1999. It is available from The Stationery Office (ISBN 0-10-143452-9) at £11.80, and can also be accessed at www.defra.gov.uk

⁶ Draft non-statutory guidance on local strategic partnerships emphasises that they are cross-sectoral, umbrella partnerships bringing together the public, private, voluntary and community sectors to provide a single overarching local co-ordination framework within which other, more specific partnerships can work.

⁷ www.hmso.gov.uk/acts/acts2000.htm.

⁸ *Sustainable local communities for the 21st century: why and how to prepare an effective Local Agenda 21 strategy*. DETR, January 1998. Also available via www.defra.gov.uk

Partnership and Participation

22. The Local Government Act 2000 requires local authorities, in preparing community strategies, to consult and seek the participation of such organisations and people as they consider appropriate.

23. Given the potential breadth of issues that might be covered, a community strategy will only lead to effective action to improve the well-being of an area if it involves all the statutory, non-statutory and voluntary organisations that provide services, or whose actions affect local quality of life. The degree to which organisations need to be involved in preparing the community strategy will vary, depending on the nature of their work, their potential contribution to establishing the long-term vision (for example, as representatives of 'hard to reach' groups), or their contribution to delivering the action plan (for example, by providing key services). Community strategies should provide opportunities for all partner agencies to make better progress locally towards their own goals and targets; in many cases, there will be shared common aims and objectives, such as regeneration, reducing inequalities and addressing social exclusion.

A local strategic partnership⁹

24. Following the publication of the Policy Action Team report on *Joining It Up Locally*¹⁰ and the review into Government intervention in deprived areas (GIDA), the Government believes that the most effective way of ensuring the commitment of other organisations will be for local authorities to work with other bodies through a local strategic partnership. This should comprise the key partners operating in the area that the strategy is to cover (see paragraph 59).

25. There is no definitive approach to the way in which such local strategic partnerships should be structured, the bodies that should be represented, or the way in which the partnership should operate. That is a matter for the partnership itself to determine. It is important, however, that the representatives of the member organisations have the necessary authority to speak for their organisation, to sign it up to the long-term vision and to commit resources - where they have them - to implementing the action plan. Partnerships should recognise that individual partners will each bring different resources (including skills, experience, connections and so on as well as finance) to the partnership. In particular, the voluntary and community sector can contribute knowledge of specific communities and expertise in a range of fields which other partners may lack (see paragraphs 48 and 49). In addition to representation of voluntary and community sector organisations on the partnership itself, a local strategic partnership should actively seek the involvement of local people in the design and implementation of the community strategy (as set out in paragraphs 50-58).

26. A local strategic partnership should provide a voluntary framework for local co-operation. While it is local authorities which are legally required to prepare community strategies and which may thus have the greatest incentive to initiate the process and involve other appropriate bodies, they should recognise the operational autonomy of their partners. Only in this way will the partnership develop the trust and responsiveness that is essential to gain real commitment from the participants. The organisation that leads a local strategic partnership

needs to command the confidence of the other partners. While in many cases the local authority will be in the lead, where the local strategic partnership is based on an existing partnership chaired by another partner, or where another partner can command a greater level of confidence and support than a local authority, then the chairing arrangements for the partnership should reflect this. The Government is also keen to encourage alternative models, and where partnerships are already working towards a stronger community role, their further evolution should be encouraged.

27. The establishment of a local strategic partnership should provide an opportunity to rationalise existing strategic planning processes (see paragraph 95). Authorities and their partners should give careful consideration to the advantages of developing a single strategic umbrella to bring together other existing partnerships. As a first step, it will be necessary to establish clear linkages between the various partnerships to avoid duplication and overlap. Local strategic partnerships should provide an overarching framework within which other, more specific partnerships can operate.

28. It is not possible to include in this guidance an exhaustive list of all the potential partners in local strategic partnerships, all the existing requirements for plans which would be covered by the community strategy framework or all the ways in which local authorities and local strategic partnerships might choose to combine and rationalise these approaches. Certain key examples of existing plans and partnerships, and the way in which work is already undertaken in relation to these initiatives, are included in this guidance for illustrative purposes; but this should not be taken as marginalising or excluding any other plans or partnerships which should be included under the umbrella framework of either the community strategy itself or the local strategic partnership which prepares it (see paragraphs 71 and 72).

29. The membership and size of a local strategic partnership should reflect both its aims and the breadth of issues that might fall within its scope. Organisations that may need to be involved will range from those representing only one geographical part of the community or one particular community of interest through to regional-level bodies (see paragraphs 32-49).

30. Where deprivation, social exclusion, a poor quality environment and health inequalities are significant factors for any community, the community strategy will need to address how these are to be tackled and how the quality of life of those in deprived communities is to be improved. The success of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal¹¹ - which aims to bridge the gap between the most deprived neighbourhoods and the national average - will depend upon local partnership working. Local strategic partnerships would be well placed to take on this role, producing local neighbourhood renewal strategies as part of their wider community strategies; in the 88 most deprived neighbourhoods the establishment of local strategic partnerships will be fast-tracked with a view to distributing the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund¹². By taking responsibility for the development and implementation of both community strategies and the deprivation-focused neighbourhood renewal strategies, local strategic partnerships should be able to make vital links between neighbourhood-level action to tackle social exclusion and initiatives taken at a broader strategic level.

31. The Urban White Paper¹³ places great emphasis on the importance of local strategic partnerships developing community strategies in order to achieve the Government's vision of an 'urban renaissance'; effective partnerships including local government, all service providers, local businesses, the voluntary sector and the full range of community groups are key to the

Government's strategy to deliver better towns and cities. Community strategies present an opportunity to build on success as well as to tackle failing urban areas; local people in all towns and cities need to act positively to take control of their future in a changing world.

Local authority involvement

Local government and partnership working

32. In many parts of the country, the same geographical area is the responsibility of several tiers of local government. The implications of this for community strategies are dealt with in more detail in paragraphs 61 and 62. All tiers of local government have an important role to play in developing community strategies and it is important that the various tiers work out a joint approach to the preparation of community strategies before they involve other partners in the process. It may be that both councillors and council officers will require training in this respect, especially in relation to engaging communities and encouraging participation.

33. Principal authorities responsible for preparing a community strategy will need to ensure that the tiers above and below are appropriately involved and consider the involvement of neighbouring authorities. Parish and town councils should be able to play a significant role in reflecting the priorities of their local community. (Further information on the role of parish and town councils is set out in paragraph 67.)

Councillors' involvement in community strategies

34. The success of any community strategy will depend on the sense of ownership it generates within and outside the council. In exercising its responsibility to initiate and facilitate the community strategy, the executive will wish to draw on the expertise and skills of all members of the council. Other councillors will be involved:

- as representatives of their wards, leading and listening to formal and informal discussions and consultations, and representing these community views to the executive (in councils operating executive arrangements) and the council;
- as members of overview and scrutiny committees. Overview and scrutiny committees have an invaluable role to play in working with the executive (in councils operating executive arrangements) and the council to identify community needs and initiatives. This role could involve scrutinising the stated plans and priorities of the council(s) and other provider agencies, commenting on the results of local consultation, and initiating audits of resources to meet expressed needs. They may also wish to play a role in evaluating the strategy as it develops, for example against sustainable development criteria;
- as members of area and neighbourhood forums and committees. Many councils have or are considering establishing area committees; one of their roles could usefully be to contribute to the community planning process;
- as council representatives on outside bodies, ensuring that their views receive full expression in drawing up the community strategy.

35. Councillors and officers engaged in the development of a community strategy will need the

authority to commit the council to take action to deliver the priorities agreed as part of the action plan. Since the full council must ultimately adopt the community strategy, the executive (in councils operating executive arrangements) or the relevant policy committee (in councils operating alternative arrangements) will need to ensure that all councillors are informed of emerging developments and outcomes and have continuing opportunities to contribute to the process. Following the adoption of the community strategy, non-executive members of scrutiny committees will be able to examine the performance of the local strategic partnership to monitor the achievements of the local authority, and other accountable partners such as health authorities, in the activities that they have promised to deliver as part of the action plan, as well as monitoring progress against long-term outcomes.

36. The statutory guidance that has been issued under Part II of the Local Government Act 2000¹⁴ makes it clear that the Government expects that all councils to which Part II of the Act applies should have introduced a new constitution by June 2002 at the latest. With the exception of small shire districts¹⁵, this new constitution must include a separate executive. In small shire district councils the new constitution could involve a separate executive, but could instead be based on a streamlined committee system with overview and scrutiny (known as alternative arrangements). The Government believes that a separate, identifiable and accountable executive, possibly including an elected mayor, will ensure that those working with the council in the local strategic partnership will know which members to deal with on any particular aspect of the community strategy.

37. In the transitional phase before councils have introduced executive or alternative arrangements and in the case of small shire districts which adopt alternative arrangements, councils should ensure that it is clear which members or officers are responsible for the community planning process and for delivering the aspects of the community strategy for which the authority is responsible.

Involving other organisations

Public sector organisations

38. The public bodies that should be involved in preparing community strategies may vary from one authority area to another. At the least, however, an effective community strategy would need to involve the key public sector organisations that operate at the local level and control the majority of the resources going into the local area: health authorities (particularly when there are shared aims/objectives around reducing inequalities), primary care groups and trusts, police authorities, education (at all levels including higher/further education), the Employment Service and Benefits Agency - and, from 2001, the Working Age Agency - New Deal delivery partnerships and so forth. Organisations that provide services to a particular part of the community, such as the Small Business Service and independent providers of social housing such as Registered Social Landlords, will also need to be involved.

Central government

39. National government is a significant player at the local level, both because of the resources that it provides and because local government and other public bodies are often involved in delivering national priorities. The aim of community strategies is to allow local communities to

articulate their needs and priorities. However, action at the local level will inevitably take place against a backdrop of priorities established at national and regional level (see paragraph 41).

40. Central government also has a key role to play in providing the optimum conditions for effective local partnership working, including taking a co-ordinated approach to rationalising requirements for local plans and partnerships (see paragraph 95). The NHS Plan¹⁶, for example, already includes a commitment to helping the development of local strategic partnerships in the interests of strengthening links between health, education, employment and other causes of social exclusion. The Health Act 1999 enables local authorities and health authorities to work more closely together, and the Local Government Act 2000 extends this power to enable local authorities to improve their partnership working arrangements with other bodies.

Regional bodies

41. Councils should also involve the Government Offices for the Regions in the development of their community strategies. The role of Government Offices is being strengthened and extended in the light of the report of the Government's Performance and Innovation Unit¹⁷ and guidance on local strategic partnerships. Government Offices have a good knowledge of existing local partnerships, and will be in a position to offer advice to local partners still in the early stages of setting up their partnership, or those requiring information on networks and partnership working arrangements already in place. This will facilitate the sharing of good practice, enabling new partnerships to take on board lessons learnt from those already established. The Government Offices could also help to facilitate effective dialogue between local strategic partnerships, central government and other regional bodies, and to identify and moderate potential gaps and tensions between local, regional and central programmes.

42. A number of other public bodies operate at regional or sub-regional level. For example, the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), Regional Chambers, Learning and Skills Councils (and the new Connexions Service), NHS Executive regional offices and the social care regions of the Department of Health, the Legal Services Commission, Regional Cultural Consortia, English Nature, the Countryside Agency and the Environment Agency all have specific responsibilities that may be relevant to the preparation of a particular strategy. Authorities and their partners should, therefore, consider how best to involve these and other such regional bodies in the preparation of their community strategies; they in turn will also need to take account of relevant community strategies when they are in place. Specifically in London, borough councils will also need to ensure appropriate involvement of the Mayor and Greater London Assembly.

43. The RDAs' statutory purposes cover a broad spectrum of activity that requires them to take an integrated and sustainable approach to regional economic issues. The RDAs are thus responsible for producing regional strategies whose fundamental purpose is to improve economic performance by enhancing the regions' competitiveness, addressing market failures which prevent sustainable economic development, and tackling the underlying problems of unemployment, skills shortages, inequalities, social exclusion and physical decay. The RDAs work with partners to ensure delivery of their strategy. Whilst the strategy does focus primarily on those areas that justify action at the regional level, delivery will be at the sub-regional and local level. The vision for the region set out in the relevant regional strategy will therefore be part of the framework of local activity which local strategic partnerships will want to take into

account when they prepare community strategies.

44. Regional sustainable development frameworks should be in place in all English regions by the end of 2000, bringing together a wide range of partners to agree high-level visions for achieving sustainable development. These documents and the processes that drive them will be a point of reference for regional and sub-regional decisions, such as regional planning guidance and the RDAs' regional strategies, as well as community strategies. The Government expects the frameworks and other strategies to develop in an iterative and compatible way in the future.

Business

45. Business must be fully involved in the community planning process. The private sector is a significant user and supplier of local services as well as a key provider of local employment. Business activity contributes both directly and indirectly to the quality of life of local communities.

46. Councils should consider how best to bring business into the community planning process as part of local strategic partnerships. Regional Development Agencies can help facilitate this interaction, and local forums such as chambers of commerce and Business in the Community will often be well placed to represent local business interests. Business will have views on a wide range of issues related to the well-being of local communities, and the skills and ideas to enhance the work of partnerships through innovation or new ways of working. Private sector participation will be encouraged by approaches to community strategies that are based on clear, relevant goals and practical means to achieve them. Business will be turned off by approaches that appear to be bureaucratic or directionless.

47. Councils and their partners should build on approaches to business involvement that have already been shown to work - there are many examples of good practice - and should ensure that local businesses, economic development agencies, local chambers of commerce and other representative organisations and the Small Business Service are properly involved in preparing community strategies. Many businesses are already involved in local and sub-regional economic partnerships and regeneration bodies, and will potentially welcome the coherent and overarching approach offered by the community strategy and local strategic partnership.

Community and voluntary groups

48. The voluntary and community sectors also have an important role to play in improving the quality of life for local communities. For example, they are often best placed to reach and involve those sections of the community that the mainstream public sector may find hard to reach, and to access funding that is not available to public bodies. As with other partners, voluntary and community sector bodies remain responsible for decisions on how best to deploy their resources. Specific efforts should be made to involve representatives from under-represented groups such as ethnic minorities, women, faith communities, older people, young people and children, and disabled people. Such groups need to be taken seriously as contributors to both the preparation and delivery of a community strategy. Partnerships should, therefore, ensure that community and voluntary organisations are in a position to play a full and equal part in multi-agency partnerships on the same basis as statutory authorities and

better resourced partners.

49. Local authorities, the voluntary sector and their partners should recognise the value of community support organisations - such as the Councils for Voluntary Service, Rural Community Councils, Volunteer Bureaux, community development agencies, development trusts and so forth - and should explore ways of funding and assisting both them and individual voluntary and community groups to participate in the community planning process. Such organisations can set up and support forums and networks which are vital for drawing both geographical communities and communities of interest into particular projects. For example, Community Legal Service Partnerships have developed an inclusive approach so that the voluntary sector is fully involved in decision-making. Local authorities will want to ensure that the diversity of the voluntary and community sectors is reflected in local strategic partnerships and that any organisation speaking on behalf of others has a fully representative and accountable structure which mandates them to do so. The Compact between central government and the voluntary sector, and its associated Codes of Good Practice¹⁸ and Guidelines for Local Compacts¹⁹, provide a framework within which the relationship between the voluntary and community sectors and other partners can be defined and developed.

Community involvement

50. The involvement of local people is central to the effective development and implementation of community strategies, and key to change in the longer term. There is an often untapped pool of ideas, knowledge, skills, experience, energy and enthusiasm among individuals, groups and communities as a whole which, if realised, can be a real driver for change. Community strategies offer a fresh opportunity to put local people at the heart of partnership working and should be grounded in the views and expectations of those people.

51. If community strategies are to respond to public concerns, there needs to be genuine community engagement with the beginning of the process. It is important that community planning allows communities to be fully involved in establishing both the long-term vision and the shorter-term priorities for action. It would not be sufficient simply to consult communities on a range of options determined by the authority and its partner organisations. Attention should be given at an early stage to ensuring that all sections of the community have the opportunity to participate - not just the 'usual suspects'.

52. Authorities will need to consider the various methods by which they can involve communities in the preparation of community strategies. These will need to recognise that individuals belong simultaneously to a number of communities, of both place and interest, and will identify with different communities according to their circumstances and the issues under discussion. Community strategies should reflect this complexity, and the partnership should accommodate it by putting in place a variety of routes into participation, employing different mechanisms. In this way the full range of perspectives and contributions can be accessed and included. Individual councils will need to consider how best to involve the different communities that make up their area, and devise techniques that are most appropriate to local circumstances.

53. Particular measures may be needed to encourage the involvement of communities of interest which can be marginalised in these processes. local strategic partnerships will of

course take the requirements of existing equality legislation in respect of gender, race, and disability into account in developing such measures. The new duty to promote equal opportunities between people of different racial groups, which the Government is placing on all public sector bodies - and the commitment to introduce similar duties in respect of gender and disabled people, when parliamentary time permits - means that councils must ensure that the techniques they employ do not discriminate against particular groups. Disabled people and those in ethnic communities can, inadvertently, be under-represented or excluded by the methods commonly chosen to engage communities, since they can find that some consultation techniques and methods of communication are difficult to access. Using a variety of different methods is more likely to avoid this problem, and much good practice already exists. Partnerships will need to be imaginative and flexible in their approach and take advantage of the range of available methods that have been successfully used for achieving the widest participation.

54. As a starting point, local authorities should, wherever possible, use existing mechanisms that have already been proved to be effective, rather than setting up duplicatory processes. For example, where local authorities have established mechanisms around LA 21 strategies, the New Deal for Communities or the LGA's New Commitment to Regeneration these should prove useful starting points. This should then form the basis for considering how to equip local groups with the knowledge and support to make a meaningful and continuing contribution to the community planning process. Individual local authorities should consider the role that councillors, staff and local community groups can play in helping to ensure that all communities have access to independent sources of information and advice to support their involvement.

55. The nature and degree of community involvement will inevitably vary at different stages of the process and according to the issue. Moreover, community views are likely to reveal differences of view - particularly about priorities for action - not all of which will be reconcilable (see paragraphs 76 and 77). Councils and local strategic partnerships will need to consider:

- how community views are going to influence and inform the decision-making process;
- how differences of view are to be aired and resolved within the local strategic partnership; and
- how decisions are to be explained to communities (see paragraph 108).

56. It is important that in seeking the views of communities, councils and their partners do not inadvertently raise expectations that they cannot meet. Clear parameters need to be established and communities must be given to understand the context and constraints within which public service providers operate (such as central government expectations and targets, resource levels and statutory limitations).

57. Local strategic partnerships will also need to consider the part that residents and community groups can play in implementing community strategies. In some areas, notably the management of social housing, there are well-established ways of involving communities in both the planning and delivery of services. Partnerships should be responsive to the wishes of local communities in this regard, and help to create the conditions for a greater degree of community involvement where this is being sought.

58. Parish councils provide a recognised route for involvement specific to people in rural communities, not only for local authorities in predominantly rural areas but also for those in areas which include some rural elements (see paragraph 67).

⁹ Local authorities and their partners should read this section alongside the guidance on local strategic partnerships. See footnote 6.

¹⁰ The report of Policy Action Team 17 was published in April 2000 (ISBN 1-85112-376-8); priced at £10, it is available from DETR. Copies may also be downloaded from the Local Regions area of the ODPM site

¹¹ *National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal: a framework for consultation*. Cabinet Office, April 2000. Copies are available from the Social Exclusion Unit or may be downloaded from www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/seu/index/publish.htm

¹² As part of the Local Government settlement announced at the end of the 2000 Spending Review, the new Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) will channel an extra £100m in 2001/2, £300m in 2002/3 and £400m in 2003/4 to the most deprived areas. In order to benefit from NRF funding in 2001/2, the Government is asking the relevant local authorities to commit to participate in establishing a local strategic partnership, and to agreeing a local neighbourhood renewal strategy with the partnership setting out how NRF resources will be used to help achieve the new deprivation targets on jobs, crime, education and health. Details of this new fund are set out in a consultation paper issued in October 2000, which can be accessed via www.communities.gov.uk/groups/odpm_localgov/documents/page/odpm_locgov_605154.hcsp

¹³ *Our Towns and Cities: the Future. Delivering an urban renaissance*; Cm 4911; DETR, November 2000. Available from The Stationery Office (ISBN 0-10-149112-3) for £28; also available via www.communities.gov.uk/groups/odpm_urbanpolicy/documents/page/odpm_urbpol_608356.hcsp

¹⁴ Two volumes of a guidance pack on *New Council Constitutions* was issued by DETR in October 2000; each volume is priced at £90 and can be obtained from The Stationery Office (ISBN 0-11-753566-4 for the combined pack). More information, including copies of the guidance and regulations contained in the pack, can be found www.communities.gov.uk/groups/odpm_localgov/documents/page/odpm_locgov_605625.hcsp

¹⁵ District councils in the area of a county council with a population below 85,000 as estimated by the Registrar General on 30 June 1999.

¹⁶ *The NHS Plan: a plan for investment, a plan for reform*; Cm 4818; Department of Health, July 2000. The NHS Plan addresses reform with far-reaching changes across the NHS, and investment in the NHS with sustained increases in funding. The stated purpose and vision of the Plan is to give the people of Britain a health service fit for the 21st century: a health service designed around the patient. Chapter 7 of the NHS Plan sets out specific information on partnership working. This document is available from The Stationery Office (ISBN 0-10-148182-9), priced at £15, but can also be accessed via www.doh.gov.uk/nhsplan/default.htm

¹⁷ *Reaching Out: the role of central Government at regional and local level* was published by the Cabinet Office in February 2000; it is available at £18 from The Stationery Office (ISBN 0-

11-430163-8) or via www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/innovation/2000/regions/index.htm

¹⁸ *Compact on Relations between the Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector in England*; Cm 4100; The Stationery Office, November 1998. This document is also available via www.homeoffice.gov.uk/new_indexes/index_volunteering.htm. The Codes of Good Practice are available at www.homeoffice.gov.uk/acu/codes.htm or from the Active Community Unit (telephone 020 7217 8400).

¹⁹ *Local Compact Guidelines: getting local relationships right together* was published by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations in July 2000; it is also available via www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/main/gateway/compact.html#5

The Geographical Extent of a Community Strategy

59. While section 4 of the 2000 Act requires every principal local authority to prepare a community strategy to improve the well-being of its area, it specifies neither the level at which the strategy should be produced nor the specific geographical area it should cover. This recognises the fact that community planning can take place at various levels and across various boundaries. Consequently, there is no single blueprint for the approach to be adopted by principal authorities in developing community strategies. To be most effective, community strategies and the process of implementing them will need to operate at different geographical levels, from county-wide to individual neighbourhoods or localities. The important point is that strategies should be developed in ways which best suit the needs of the communities they are designed to serve, rather than the administrative convenience of service providers.

60. The duty to prepare a strategy does *not* necessarily mean that every council must prepare a separate community strategy. Section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972 permits an authority to discharge any of its functions jointly with another. If community strategies are to meet the aims and objectives set out in this guidance, there needs to be effective interaction between the different tiers of local government operating in each area, and between neighbouring authorities. This includes reaching early agreement about the processes for preparing community strategies that will best meet the needs of the local communities that they jointly serve.

Community planning in multi-tier areas

61. The development of a community strategy will present particular challenges in areas with both county and district councils. It is especially important for these different tiers of authority to work together to establish a joint approach to the preparation of community strategies. The services delivered at county and district level each make an important contribution to local quality of life. It is not conceivable that a community strategy tackling important quality of life issues would not involve educational and social services. Similarly, no overall strategy to promote well-being is likely to be complete without references to housing, local transport, air quality, culture and leisure. Unless the county and districts work together, the process of preparing community strategies is likely to lead to considerable duplication, conflicting priorities and 'consultation/partnership fatigue'. Such an approach will quickly lose credibility in the eyes of local partners and the public.

62. Authorities will, therefore, want to give careful consideration at an early stage to the most effective approach and the most appropriate level for dealing with particular issues and priorities. That might mean, for example, 'nesting' district level strategies within a broader vision and framework established at county level, or a series of joint strategies for parts of counties based on agreed geographic communities. Separate community strategies will only be effective if the strategies themselves, and the processes by which they are prepared, are complementary. In particular, it is vital to avoid multiple consultation exercises with partners and the public - who will rightly expect local authorities in multi-tier areas to develop suitable arrangements for joint working. Whatever approach is to be adopted, counties and districts will thus need to consider how best they ensure that there is the necessary degree of integration. The related papers available from by the LGA on preparing community strategies provide

further suggestions as to how this might be achieved.

Action outside an authority's boundaries

63. While the duty to prepare community strategies refers specifically to each authority's area, this does not preclude strategies from covering issues or actions outside the authority's own administrative boundaries. For example, in areas where health and local authorities are not coterminous, local authorities will be working with neighbouring authorities in order to contribute to the Health Improvement Programme, and health authorities will need to work together in relation to community strategies which cross their boundaries. Some of the issues that concern local communities will be best tackled by action at a regional, cross-regional, or sub-regional level. This might mean that such action will depend on the involvement of a particular regional or sub-regional body, and/or a number of authorities working together to take action in one area that benefits each of their communities. In some cases, there may be communities that, while outside an authority's boundary, are particularly dependent on that authority for access to services. Section 2(5) of the Local Government Act 2000 enables local authorities to use their new power to promote community well-being in a way which affects areas outside their own boundaries, if that action contributes to well-being in their own area.

64. When such issues are first identified, authorities will need to consider whether effective action demands joint working with neighbouring authorities. Where it is decided that community concerns and aspirations are best addressed by joint action, authorities and their partners will need to explore the scope for linking elements of their community strategy with those being prepared for other areas.

65. In such cases, authorities will also need to consider whether they need to involve regional and sub-regional bodies (see paragraphs 41-44). Depending on the nature of the activity, this might also include the relevant Government Office, or the Mayor and Assembly in London.

Neighbourhood and locality planning

66. Other sections of this guidance (paragraphs 50-58) deal with community engagement and consultation. Local authority areas will comprise many different communities, both of place and of interest. It is likely that community needs and aspirations will vary geographically. The needs of a deprived neighbourhood will not be the same as those of a suburb, or an isolated rural community. If the community planning process is to reflect these differences adequately, authorities will need to develop mechanisms to ensure they have input to the process. This will help to ensure that the community planning process is not remote from people's daily concerns and will counter any risk that the process might become too top-down. The related document published by the CDF on encouraging community involvement and participation in community strategies provides further suggestions as to how this might be achieved.

67. Parish and town councils are the democratic bodies with the closest direct links to their communities. As such, they can make a vital contribution to establishing the long-term vision and the priorities contained in the community strategy. Such local councils can also play an important role in helping to implement elements of the strategy, although their capacity to do so will vary from council to council; the Quality Town and Parish councils proposed in the Rural

White Paper[20]²⁰, for instance, could be expected to make a significant contribution. The role that parish and town councils play should therefore be a matter for local discussion between those councils and the relevant local strategic partnership.

68. A number of well-tried methods are now available to enable communities (whether neighbourhood-based or communities of interest) to articulate their needs - such as village appraisals, community profiling and listening surveys. Such processes serve a dual purpose: developing plans that are owned by the community, and empowering groups within that community to start their own projects and activities. Both will make important contributions to the development and implementation of the community strategy. However, it is crucial to recognise that this kind of locality or sectoral planning is dependent on long-term community development support.

69. The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal has put forward the idea of neighbourhood management as a way to ensure that services are responsive to people in deprived communities (see paragraph 30). A local strategic partnership would be a key ally in this task, as it would provide a single meeting point for all the service providers and other groups with whom the neighbourhood manager would need to work. The Government will be funding a pathfinder neighbourhood management programme, funded from the New Deal for Communities. More information on this can be found in the forthcoming Neighbourhood Renewal Action Plan and in separate guidance on neighbourhood management.

²⁰ *Our Countryside: The Future. A fair deal for rural England*; Cm 4909; DETR, November 2000. Priced at £28, it is available from The Stationery Office (ISBN 0-10-149092-5) and can also be accessed via www.wildlife-countryside.dtlr.gov.uk/ruralengland/index.htm

Development and Implementation of Community Strategies

First steps

Establishing a vision

70. Having set up a broad local strategic partnership, the first stage in developing a community strategy will be to establish a long-term vision for the area, taking into account wider regional and national visions for better quality of life (see paragraphs 15 and 16). Where there are effective LA 21 strategies in place, they should provide a good basis on which to inform the public of the sorts of things to be considered in a long-term sustainable vision for the area. If this is to command support, it is important to involve the widest possible number of local people and organisations at this stage. The aim should be to arrive at a broad consensus about what the area should look like in 10 or 15 years time, and the sorts of communities in which people want to live. The timeframe is something that can only be decided in the light of local circumstances and following the articulation of communities' aspirations. In the key areas of education, jobs, health, crime, and the environment, it is likely that aspirations will only be realised in the long term. However, to ensure that the long-term vision is more than a set of aspirational statements, the local strategic partnership will need to ensure that it includes some explicit outcome targets.

71. A community strategy cannot realistically attempt to cover every issue that may be relevant to a local community. Rather, authorities and their partners should seek to draw together the views of their communities to identify a number of broad priorities or themes. In doing so, they will also need to take account of what their community strategy might contribute to regional and national priorities and consider how best to balance these priorities with local concerns. Here, too, local authorities should be able to build on existing work and experience, whether it is through Health Improvement Programmes, best value consultation or LA 21 planning.

72. The long-term vision should provide the context in which all other corporate strategies and plans are grounded. Outcome targets will allow the overall impact of shorter-term activities to be measured and will provide a basis for local strategic partnerships to review progress and adjust their actions (see paragraphs 98-110).

Resource and activity analysis

73. The intention of community strategies should be not only to generate new activity, but also to evaluate the ways in which current activities do (or do not) contribute to the achievement of the strategy's goals. Councils and their partners should carry out an analysis of their own expenditure, staffing, and skills in relation to the priorities and objectives identified by the strategy. The deployment of both revenue and capital resources should be examined to determine whether, considered jointly, they are being used in the most effective and sustainable way. The aim should be to establish where there are gaps, overlaps or contradictions in resource use. The Cabinet Office's 'Access Checklist'²¹ will help public sector bodies to evaluate how accessible public services are to users.

74. Decisions about the use of resources will still remain the preserve of the individual

partners, but opportunities for better ways of working should be identified, utilising if necessary the powers contained in recent legislation to facilitate closer joint working between local authorities, health authorities and other bodies²². For instance, local authorities will need to work with health authorities and primary care groups and trusts to analyse the resources available to support community strategies, and to consider where resources can be shared to implement the Health Improvement Programme.

75. Such evaluation should be part of a continuing process, alongside the development of the long-term vision and the establishment of shorter-term goals and priorities. While the analysis may start with the resources of public agencies, it could be extended to cover the private and voluntary sectors and the community generally. The initial analysis might best concentrate on achieving a more efficient, effective and economical deployment of *existing* resources. However, partnerships should also aim to ensure that *future* investment and expenditure decisions are informed by a similar analysis.

Establishing priorities

76. In order to meet long-term outcomes, community strategy partners will have to establish shorter-term priorities for action. Inevitably, different local communities will have different priorities. The community planning process should provide a forum in which differences of view can be properly articulated. As the democratically elected bodies in the local strategic partnership, councils will play a strong role in mediating between different interests, resolving conflict where possible and helping the partnership to make decisions about priorities.

77. To assist this process, it is important that partnerships fully involve communities in those decisions (see paragraphs 50-58). As well as the views of local communities, councils will want to take decisions based on a proper analysis of needs and as a result of independent research. Such research will, on occasion, suggest courses of action different from those supported by the community. In such situations, councils and their partners will need to balance community views with the research findings before they determine how to proceed. Opposition from sections of the community should not preclude action if the council and the local strategic partnership believe that it is in the best interests of the area, but they should be prepared to provide a full explanation of the approach taken.

Establishing an action plan

78. Community strategies need to produce tangible results. They should, therefore, include the major actions that will be taken to contribute to the objectives and outcomes, and identify the body or bodies responsible for those actions. Again, the community strategy should concentrate on key actions. More specific activities of each of the partners may be covered by means of references to their own corporate strategies or to other theme- or service-specific plans.

79. The action plan should also include clear details of the arrangements for reviewing progress, including the timescales by which the strategy will be periodically reviewed (see paragraphs 105-107).

Delivering community priorities

80. A community strategy should be a practical tool for councils and their partners to pursue the economic, social and environmental well-being of their area and contribute to the achievement of sustainable development locally and nationally. This section deals specifically with some of the practical implications for principal authorities, but the principles apply equally to those other bodies who have committed themselves to delivering elements of the community strategy and who will often be working in partnership with local authorities.

81. As set out in the preceding section, the preparation of a community strategy should result in:

- a long-term vision for the area, focusing on achievable outcomes;
- specific goals and priorities that will contribute to those outcomes;
- an agreed action plan for meeting those goals and priorities.

82. The community strategy will therefore identify desired outcomes, some broad priorities and some key actions. This should set the context for everything that is going on at the local level. The achievement of the identified outcomes will depend on the individual and joint actions taken by authorities and their partners as part of their day-to-day activities. Responsibility for delivering particular services and actions will remain with individual service providers, including the local authority. It is therefore essential that the priorities and actions identified in a community strategy feed directly into the content of other, more detailed plans produced by authorities and their partners (see paragraphs 85-94). In turn, these plans must be translated into action on the ground.

83. It follows that the community strategy must be linked to the day-to-day activity of the council and its partners. It should be central to an authority's planning and resource decisions, ensuring that local priorities and concerns are genuinely reflected in the allocation of resources. At the highest level, executive members will need to translate priorities arising from the community strategy into a clear set of activities for the council, and ensure that resources are allocated to deliver the specific actions to which the authority has committed itself.

84. Section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000 provides principal authorities with a broad new power to promote or improve the social, economic or environmental well-being of their area. This power provides an important new tool for local authorities to improve local quality of life. In particular, the well-being power can provide the means to deliver some of the priorities identified in the community strategy, and councils must have regard to the community strategy when using the power. The Secretary of State will issue separate statutory guidance on the use of the well-being power²³.

Other plans and strategies

85. A community strategy should identify the key priorities for action in a council's area. It follows that it should act as an overarching framework for other service- or theme-specific plans and, together with other key strategic plans (such as Health Improvement Programmes

and the strategies prepared by crime and disorder partnerships, for instance), should influence a wide range of activities. A community strategy will not specifically cover every local issue, but it should affect the delivery of a wide range of services, including housing, education, transport, crime prevention, economic development, environmental health, culture and leisure. It should thus be prepared in the context of other planning processes relevant to the area, such as how the NHS will implement the NHS Plan. A community strategy should provide a practical context for informing and linking other service- or theme-specific plans, including those already prepared with local partners. In reviewing or drawing up such plans, authorities should consider with their partners the extent to which the plans can and do contribute to the priorities in the community strategy. However, work on other plans should not be delayed until a community strategy has been finalised; they should instead be revised later. Guidance on particular key local authority plans is set out below.

Best Value Performance Plans

86. The development of a comprehensive community strategy is inextricably linked to the delivery of a local authority's duty of best value²⁴. A community strategy provides the basis from which an authority can best determine its own contribution to the long-term economic, social and environmental well-being of its community. The key local priorities identified should in turn be reflected in the setting of the authority's corporate objectives, and in the establishment of authority-wide objectives and performance measures. These objectives should then help to provide the overall context and framework for an authority's approach to best value, and enable Best Value Performance Plans to give practical expression to them. One example might be that locally-driven targets from the local neighbourhood renewal strategy (see paragraph 30) could be incorporated within the performance plan.

87. Best value will be a key tool in ensuring that the aspirations identified in a community strategy are turned into effective action on the ground. Without a clear understanding of local needs and of the potential contribution that can be made by other local agencies and the private and voluntary sectors, an authority will be unlikely to achieve best value in the provision of its own services. Best value service reviews will need to examine the extent to which existing services are meeting community priorities, and identify ways in which services can be improved to do so. In some cases, community priorities will cut across traditional service boundaries; a cross-cutting approach to best value reviews that reflects this will also have an important and enduring role to play.

88. An authority's annual Best Value Performance Plan will draw together the key information that emerges from these different approaches. As a result, it should provide an important means of monitoring and informing the public of the effectiveness of the authority's contribution to tackling the priorities identified in the community strategy.

Local Public Service Agreements (PSAs)

89. Local PSAs offer local authorities the opportunity to commit themselves to delivering key national and local priorities, in return for agreed operational flexibilities and pump-priming grants of up to £1 million per authority. Authorities that meet the more stretching performance targets agreed in local PSAs will also gain access to a new Performance Reward Fund. A pilot with 20 authorities will run in 2001/2, ahead of a planned wider roll-out to other county councils, metropolitan districts, London boroughs and unitary authorities for 2002/3 and, it is hoped, to

shire districts thereafter.

90. A local authority's proposal for a local PSA should explain how the enhanced outcomes that are proposed would reflect and contribute to the achievement of a broader vision and strategy for the local community, with suitable cross-references to any community strategy that has been prepared. Each local PSA will focus on about twelve key outcomes which reflect a mix of national and local priorities, including, where appropriate, targets to improve outcomes for areas or groups most at risk of social exclusion. Local authorities will need to demonstrate that the local priorities they are proposing are important to, and supported by, local people and partners. For most, if not all, aspects of the local PSA, local authorities will need to work closely with partners to deliver the agreed enhanced outcomes. The community planning process provides both a forum (the local strategic partnership) in which to agree priorities with local communities and key partners and an opportunity to agree the actions necessary to deliver them.

Development plans

91. Development plans (prepared by local authorities under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990²⁵) and community strategies need to be complementary. In preparing community strategies, local authorities will need to take into account the policies and proposals in any existing adopted development plan. Once a community strategy has been established, the development plan will provide the means of taking forward those elements of its vision and priorities that concern the physical development and use of land in the authority's area.

92. Where development plans are themselves in need of updating, there may be scope for taking forward, in an integrated way, the alteration or replacement of the development plan alongside work on the community strategy. The consultation process and involvement of the local community required by the development plan preparation procedures can, for example, form part of the wider process of participation involved in developing a community strategy.

93. The development plan remains the primary basis for the consideration of applications for permission to develop or change the use of land. Under section 54A of the 1990 Act, an application for planning permission shall be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. It is therefore important that authorities ensure that their development plan is up-to-date and reflects the aims of the community strategy. Other policy statements of the authority, such as might appear in a community strategy, are capable of being material considerations in the determination of a planning application, if they relate to the development and use of land. Advice on the status of 'material considerations' is contained in Planning Policy Guidance Note 1²⁶. It may be that elements in the community strategy supplement and support the policies set out in the development plan. These could be adopted by the authority as supplementary planning guidance if the requirements set out in Planning Policy Guidance Note 12²⁷ about content, consultation and adoption are fulfilled.

94. The Department proposes to undertake, in conjunction with the LGA, further studies of the scope for change in the form and content of development plans; these will include consideration of their relationship with the other plans and strategies of local authorities. Further guidance may be appropriate once these studies are completed.

Co-ordinating and rationalising local activity

95. The establishment of a local strategic partnership should provide the means to co-ordinate more effectively the raft of activities undertaken by local authorities and their partners. Once established, such partnerships should provide the means to pull together the activities of all local stakeholders at different strategic levels. At the highest level, the community strategy should set out the partnership's central aims and a broad outline of how these are to be achieved. Below this level, different coalitions of agencies would operate together to tackle specific problems, such as those relating to the delivery of children's services. The local strategic partnership should aim to bring coherence to plans relating to specific issues, and establish effective links between these plans and the rest of local activity. In particular, they should consider the scope for rationalising the proliferation of existing partnerships and planning processes, so as to avoid duplication and 'partnership fatigue'.

96. A community strategy, based on a thorough analysis of local needs and resources, should also provide much of the background information and material that informs many other plans. Where appropriate, authorities may choose to cross-refer to their community strategy in those other plans - such as their capital strategy - to avoid unnecessary duplication of information.

97. Section 6 of the Local Government Act 2000 provides a power for the Secretary of State to remove or disapply redundant planning requirements, and to amend existing statutory planning processes so that they operate more effectively. The Act itself removes the requirement to prepare Economic Development Plans under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989²⁸. Within the context of community strategies, this power could provide a means to simplify the statutory planning requirements relating to particular services. It could also allow different approaches to streamlining planning to be piloted in particular authorities where effective local strategic partnerships are established. Through the Central-Local Partnership and other relevant mechanisms, the Government and the LGA will seek to identify opportunities to do so.

Monitoring and review

98. Local strategic partnerships will need to establish systems for monitoring progress on their community strategies, ensuring that the activities identified in the action plan are carried out and assessing their success in addressing the priorities identified in the strategy.

Monitoring systems

99. It is important that any monitoring systems should involve the local authority, other partners and the wider community. The nature of the arrangements will be a matter for local strategic partnerships to decide. They may want to establish a series of multi-agency groups to monitor or manage the delivery of specific activities identified in the action plan, or to monitor progress against the goals and priorities identified in the community strategy. Alternatively, particularly where neighbourhood or locality planning is a strong feature of the process, they may wish to monitor progress on a geographical basis.

100. Whatever the arrangements, however, it is important that they enable the partnership to readily identify the progress made and the areas where action looks like being ineffective and

where objectives are in danger of not being met.

Measuring progress

101. In order to establish effective monitoring arrangements, local strategic partnerships will need to consider how they will measure progress. Community strategies are about achieving specified outcomes. It follows that progress should be monitored against those outcomes, rather than focusing on inputs or efficiency measures. The monitoring process should provide a means to bring together data collected by a range of bodies into a single, accessible summary.

102. Local authorities and their partners already have in place a range of indicators for measuring their own performance and efficiency, notably through the best value regime. Best value authorities are already required to measure their performance against a basket of national and locally set indicators in their annual Best Value Performance Plans. These plans, and those of other partners - such as the NHS Performance Assessment Framework and high level performance indicators - will provide the means of demonstrating the effectiveness of the contribution of individual bodies to tackling the priorities identified in the community strategy. As such, there will be little value in simply duplicating this performance data (although some best value outcome measures may be directly relevant to particular community strategies).

103. Monitoring progress on community strategies should focus primarily on key outcomes as the basis for providing clear and accessible progress reports back to the community. In particular, there are two complementary strands of work which could provide relevant measures of progress on community strategies. First, authorities may wish to consider using all or a selection of indicators from the menu of 29 indicators of sustainable development/quality of life, which were developed for local use by the Central and Local Information Partnership (CLIP) task force on sustainable development²⁹. They were designed for use in monitoring and reporting as part of the LA 21 process. In addition, they might want to make use of the quality of life and cross-cutting indicators currently being developed by the Audit Commission³⁰. Local strategic partnerships are encouraged to select and use these indicators according to their local experiences and needs and the objectives they set themselves. The key point is that indicators should be relevant to the objectives of community strategies. So local strategic partnerships may need to supplement those from these two menus with additional locally chosen or developed indicators, including indicators devised to measure the impact of activities on different groups (such as ethnic minorities, disabled people, older people or women).

104. Whatever approach is adopted, it will be important to establish the key indicators of progress at an early stage and identify the most appropriate body to collect the data on each one. In this way, it will be possible to avoid duplication and minimise the data collection burden within the local strategic partnership.

Reviewing and modifying community strategies

105. Authorities should establish a timetable for periodic reviews of community strategies. The extent and timing of such reviews will depend on the timeframe of the community strategy and on local circumstances (see paragraph 70). If strategies are designed for three or five years and there are long time intervals between full-scale reviews, partnerships should consider the desirability of establishing arrangements for interim reviews. This will enable alterations to be

made to the activities being pursued, where monitoring activity reveals this to be appropriate to help to realise the communities' aspirations.

106. The review process should entail not only updating the content of the strategy, but also a critical review of the effectiveness of the local strategic partnership in preparing and implementing the strategy, an analysis of the opportunities to enhance community participation, and an assessment of the extent to which the strategy informs and influences the work of partner organisations.

107. The 2000 Act includes a power for local authorities to modify their community strategies. As with the initial preparation of a community strategy, local authorities must consult or seek the participation of such bodies and individuals as they consider appropriate when modifications to a strategy are proposed. The level of partner and public involvement will depend on the extent of the proposed modification, and authorities should have regard to the guidance in paragraphs 24-58. The arrangements for any full-scale review should be commensurate with those for the preparation of the original community strategy.

Reporting progress

108. If the preparation of a community strategy and its continuing development and implementation are to maintain credibility with local people, it is vital that communities are kept informed of progress. They should also be made aware of the reasons why particular decisions or actions were taken (or not taken). An important part of the implementation and further development of a community strategy will, therefore, be reporting back to the wider community on the outcome of the community planning process - and, later, on the progress that is being made.

109. The style and manner in which this is done will depend on local circumstances, the manner in which partnerships have involved their communities in the decision-making process, and the preferences of communities themselves. However, it is important that reporting should be clear and understandable and that all sections of the community should have ready access to it.

110. Again, it will be important to avoid unnecessary duplication of the existing reporting requirements for local authorities and other bodies. Reports need only include the main indicators of progress (see paragraphs 101-104). However, they could also usefully act as 'signposts' to the detailed activity being taken by each partner body by indicating sources of more detailed information on their performance (such as Best Value Performance Plans, annual reports, health authorities' Performance Assessment Frameworks and so on).

²¹ Available from the Cabinet Office web site (www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/servicefirst/2000/joinedup/accesschecklist.htm)

²² Notably section 31 of the Health Act 1999 and section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000.

²³ Details available on Local Regions section of the ODPM site

²⁴ The duty of best value is set out in section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999. More information, including Circular 10/99 (*Local Government Act 1999: Part I - Best Value*), can be

obtained on the ODPM web site at www.local-regions.communities.gov.uk/bestvalue/bvindex.htm

²⁵ More information about the Town & Country Planning Act 1990 and the planning system in England can be found on the ODPM web site at www.communities.gov.uk/planning

²⁶ *Planning Policy Guidance Note 1: General Policy and Principles* was last updated by DETR in February 1997 and is published by The Stationery Office at £8.50 (ISBN 0-11-753368-8).

²⁷ *Planning Policy Guidance Note 12: Development Plans* was last updated by DETR in December 1999 and is published by The Stationery Office at £10 (ISBN 1-851123-49-0).

²⁸ The repeal of section 35 of the 1989 Act came into effect on 18 October 2000.

²⁹ These indicators were produced through a collaborative consultation process with the LGA, IDeA, Audit Commission, local authorities and LA 21 groups, and were tested in about 30 local authorities. They are based on local versions of some of the national 'headline' and core set of indicators of sustainable development and also on a number of other indicators developed by local authorities and LA 21 groups. The menu is contained in *Local Quality of Life Counts: a handbook for a menu of local indicators of sustainable development*, published in July 2000; for further information see www.la21-uk.org.uk/.

³⁰ The Audit Commission's *Quality of Life and Cross-cutting Indicators: consultation on a voluntary set of indicators for local authorities*. More information is available via www.audit-commission.gov.uk/ac2/Plfirst.htm

Selected Bibliography

A number of key documents are referenced fully in the notes to this guidance. This bibliography provides details of other recent policy and guidance documents produced by Government Departments, and a small selection of other relevant publications from the Local Government Association. Given the broad-ranging nature of community strategies, there will be many other documents which may be of interest to local strategic partnerships, and addresses are therefore provided at the end for Government and other web sites where these and many other documents may be found.

Cabinet Office

All Our Futures: the report of the Better Government for Older People Steering Committee
The Stationery Office, June 2000.

Citizens First: modernising government annual report 2000
The Stationery Office, September 2000.

Neighbourhood Management
Policy Action Team 4; April 2000; £14; ISBN 0-11-430170-0.

Winning the Generation Game: improving opportunities for people aged 50-65 in work and community activity report
The Stationery Office, April 2000; £19.50; ISBN 0-11-430166-2.

Department for Culture, Media and Sport

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