

COMMUNITY PLANNING

Community Planning should allow effective engagement to improve the planning and delivery of services which reflect local needs.

Effective Community Planning can provide efficiency, transparency and engagement to help streamline the decision-making process.

Reformed local governance and structures should fully incorporate Community Planning as an integral part of the framework.

Community Planning is a vital component of building sustainable communities to create a more cohesive society, empowered communities, a sense of ownership and meaningful participation.

Community Planning will allow more creative and innovative solutions to local issues by creating partnerships and involving those who are best-placed to understand and identify specific challenges.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

-  Statutory guidance should be provided to ensure consistency within a delivery framework and long term commitment to effective partnership within the Community Planning process.
-  NI legislation for Community Planning should include a duty to initiate and participate in the process for councils and relevant bodies – similar to that in Scotland.
-  Detailed guidance should be provided on the Power of Well-Being to ensure consistency and clarity of responsibility.
-  Widespread consultation and engagement need to become part of the on-going process of developing a Community Planning framework as part of changing governance and council arrangements.
-  A programme of capacity building needs to be devised to empower communities and fully equip local authorities to facilitate the process and encourage participation.
-  The process must provide information to communities in an accessible, timely manner that will enable communities to debate options and contribute in an informed way.
-  Pilot projects should be extended across Northern Ireland with the involvement of councils, NGOs, the private sector and all relevant stakeholders.

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- ❖ Effective Community Planning requires a clear and robust statutory framework with related structures in place to implement policy appropriately at the local level.
- ❖ Community involvement should be 'front-loaded' to allow full participation in the process and early involvement in decision-making that can shape the outcome of local policy delivery as people recognise the significance of their contribution.
- ❖ Community Planning can help provide a more integrated approach to area-based problems, working across sectors and government departments to identify locally relevant ways to address the issues.
- ❖ The process must focus on the planning and delivery of public services, whilst providing meaningful local strategies and action plans to develop sustainable communities and provide benefits to all.
- ❖ Active participation can help change public attitudes and promote a more positive view of planning as part of its reform to provide a more proactive plan-led system. It has been widely accepted that publicly initiated community based projects are more likely to be accepted than top-down, large scale schemes. There are also additional benefits to emerge as results of participation; for example, with community renewable energy projects, people are more likely to engage further with wider energy and sustainability issues.
- ❖ Effective Community Planning will move beyond consultation to allow negotiation and coordinated decision-making and demonstrate genuinely integrated partnership working, which in turn will produce more effective solutions as knowledge is exchanged and learning shared amongst all participants. Transparency, accessibility and inclusivity must be demonstrated within the process to build trust and commitment for successful partnerships.
- ❖ The process of working together and achieving goals creates a sense of community and promotes good relations within the area. People feel more attached to an environment if they are involved with the process of design and development. They will subsequently manage it better with less likelihood of vandalism or neglect as there is a strong community focus.
- ❖ An independent reporting system should be developed with Community Planning partners to agree key indicators of performance and measurable outcomes that will facilitate effective monitoring and evaluation of the process.
- ❖ Community Planning and participation are core to successful implementation of the sustainable development agenda and can drive sustainable, long-term investment in local infrastructure necessary for balanced economic and social development.
- ❖ Research has widely demonstrated that projects with a high level of participatory planning are more likely to be publicly accepted and implemented successfully. Furthermore, these projects are also more likely to develop supporting networks that have continued to work in the area and maintain existing community development.