

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council

Internal Audit Report Community Planning

2020
Final



INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT

Community Planning

Executive Summary

This internal audit was completed in accordance with the approved annual Internal Audit Plan for 2019/20. This report summarises the findings arising from a review of

Through our audit we found the following examples of good practice:

- Audit has found that there is good engagement with the community planning activities from other areas in the council such as numerous Directors, Heads of Service and other officers (those not responsible for or in the Community Planning team).
- The Community Planning team have documented a good, clear Community Plan, which provides details on outcomes, actions, indicators, measurements and more and the community plan is easily accessible through the Council's website

During our audit we also noted that there are 44 Actions to be completed to support Council in delivering the 12 high level outcomes outlined in the Community Plan.

Causeway Coast and Glens have the lead on 61.4% (27) of these actions, they are also joint lead on 6.8% (3) of the actions.

The table below summarises the key risks reviewed:

Risk	Number of recommendations & Priority rating		
	1	2	3
There may be inadequate partnership working arrangements and a lack of clarity of roles and responsibilities on the Strategic Community Planning Partnership and Thematic Delivery Groups leading to delays in delivery, a lack of transparency and accountability and poor decision-making	-	2	-
Progress of the delivery of the Community Plan may not be reviewed on a regular basis, leading to outstanding actions not being identified, followed up and progressed on a timely basis, and Council statutory duties not being fulfilled	-	-	1
Consultation with the public within the borough may not be adequate leading to reputational damage	-	-	-
Total recommendations made	0	2	1

Based on our audit testing we are able to provide the following overall level of assurance:

Satisfactory

Overall there is a satisfactory system of governance, risk management and control. While there may be some residual risk identified this should not significantly impact on the achievement of system objectives.

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Distribution:	Audit Committee
	Chief Executive
	Director of Corporate Services
	Head of Policy and Community Planning

All matters contained in this report came to our attention while conducting normal internal audit work. Whilst we are able to provide an overall level of assurance based on our audit work, unlike a special investigation, this work will not necessarily reveal every issue that may exist in the Council's internal control system.

Objective

The areas for inclusion in the scope of the audit were determined through discussion with management and considered the main risks facing Community Planning and a review of the key systems and controls in place to address these. The objective was to ensure that:

- There is an adequate Community Planning framework in place
- Processes are operating as expected to effectively plan, procure, and manage the implementation of projects

Background

The Local Government (Northern Ireland) Act 2014 requires Councils to initiate, maintain, facilitate, and participate in community planning for their district. As lead partner, the Council is responsible for making arrangements for community planning in its area. As a new power, which came into being when new councils were formed in April 2015, Community Planning is about the public, voluntary and community sector working together to design and deliver services which make a real difference to the lives of local people.

The Community Plan for Causeway Coast and Glens has identified 3 overarching long-term outcomes, 'A Thriving Economy, A Healthy Safe Community and A Sustainable Accessible Environment' leading to 12 intermediate outcomes encompassed in 4 thematic groups

- Health and Social Wellbeing
- Community Safety
- Environment and Infrastructure
- Education and Tourism

Risks

The risks identified by Internal Audit relating to Community Planning and agreed with management are as follows

1. There may be inadequate partnership working arrangements and a lack of clarity of roles and responsibilities on the Strategic Community Planning Partnership and Thematic Delivery Groups leading to delays in delivery, a lack of transparency and accountability and poor decision-making
2. Progress of the delivery of the Community Plan may not be reviewed on a regular basis, leading to outstanding actions not being identified, followed up and progressed on a timely basis, and Council statutory duties not being fulfilled
3. Consultation with the public within the borough may not be adequate leading to a lack of public acceptance of the Community Plan and/or reputational damage

Audit Approach

Our audit fieldwork comprised:

- Documenting the systems via discussions with key staff
- Consideration of the key risks within each audit area
- Examining relevant documentation
- Carrying out a preliminary evaluation of the arrangements and controls in operation generally within the Council
- Testing the key arrangements and controls
- Testing the completeness and accuracy of records.

Findings and Recommendations

This section of the report sets out our findings in relation to control issues identified and recommendations. A summary of all the key controls that we considered is included in Appendix II to this report.

1.1 Risk 1 – Inadequate Partnership Working Arrangements

ISSUE 1 – Terms of Reference

- a) **Observation-** Internal Audit viewed unsigned terms of references for the different Community Planning Groups, which include Community Planning Partnership, and Delivery Design Groups. However, Internal Audit was not able to view a signed copy (signed by all partners) of the Terms of Reference as these were stored in the Riada House office (Ballymoney) and due to the Covid-19 pandemic access to the office was limited. The ToR for the DDG related to the design phase of creating the actions for the various themes within the Community Plan. Audit was advised that the DDG operate on a task and finish basis.
- Audit has been advised that the Action Steering Group is responsible for monitoring, reviewing, and reporting the progress of actions. The Action Steering Group reviews report cards received from each Action Lead on a quarterly basis and then reports on progress on each action to the Community Planning Strategic Partnership at its quarterly meeting. However, there is no Terms of Reference for the Action Steering Group.
- b) **Implication-** As there is currently no TOR for Action Steering Group (ASG) there is a risk of the ASG not having adequate governance, guidance to follow and the group may not successfully meet its monitoring responsibilities.
- c) **Priority Rating-** 2

d) Recommendation- The Community Planning team should create and implement a terms of reference for the Action Steering Group with the group members signing in agreement. The terms of reference should at a minimum, describe the purpose, scope and authority of the committee, frequency of meetings and the group's role and responsibilities for monitoring and reporting.

Documented guidance to support the work the ASG should be developed including the procedure and frequency for monitoring and review of Actions.

A new Terms of Reference for the Delivery Design Groups being put in place for the task of monitoring should be developed for the DDGs It should include details of how the purpose, scope and authority of the groups, frequency of meetings and the role and responsibilities for monitoring and reporting. and that notes/minutes along with who attended should be made.

e) Management Response-

As it has not been possible at this time to trace any Terms of Reference for the Action Steering Group, a Terms of Reference for the Group will be created and implemented as outlined in the recommendation.

Documented guidance to support the work of the Action Steering Group will likewise be developed and implemented.

Terms of Reference for Delivery Design Groups will also be created and implemented as and when such Groups are established to undertake an activity on a Task and Finish basis.

f) Responsible Officer & Implementation Date-

Head of Policy and Community Planning
October 2020

ISSUE 2 – Corporate Plan / Council Strategy

a) Observation- Audit has found that Causeway Coast and Glens do not currently have an up to date Corporate Strategy, the strategy in place has been outdated since 2019. Audit has been advised and acknowledges that work has started on a new strategy and that the Covid-19 pandemic has had an impact on finalising a new strategy. However, the current strategy remains outdated and therefore has no clear linkage to the Community Plan

b) Implication- In the absence of an up to date strategy there is a risk that there will be a lack of agreed direction, style and standards for the Council moving forward. There is a risk that there is no clear and updated framework to allow those representing the Council to work towards a shared and agreed direction and to continue to establish strategic priorities which are linked to the Community Plan

c) Priority Rating- 2

d) Recommendation- Causeway Coast and Glens should create and implement an updated Council Strategy as soon as possible with approval from the council. The new council strategy should reflect the Community Plan and ensure that there is an alignment between both Council Strategy and Community Plan. If Covid-19 causes further delays in agreeing the next Corporate Strategy, discussions on an interim position should take place and an agreement by elected members documented e.g. continue to work towards the (2015/19) strategic objectives until the new strategy is developed and agree how to ensure the Community Plan objectives are reflected in these strategic objectives.

e) Management Response-

Work is currently on-going in relation to the development of a new Council Strategy with a report on draft findings to be presented to the Council's Corporate Policy and Resources Committee in August 2020.

The initial workshop for Councillors on the development of the new Council Strategy included a presentation by the Head of Policy and Community Planning on the Community Plan and the strategic direction established by this Plan. The need for the Council Strategy to reflect the strategic direction established by the Community Plan was highlighted at this workshop and the draft Strategic outcomes being presented to Council at CP&R in August reflect to a great extent the overarching strategic outcomes of the Community Plan, ie:

Community Plan Strategic Outcomes

A Thriving Economy
A Healthy, Safe Community
A Sustainable, Accessible Environment

Draft Council Strategic Priorities

Local Economy
Healthy and Engaged Communities
Climate Change and Our Environment
Cohesive Leadership
Improvement and Innovation

f) Responsible Officer & Implementation Date-

Director of Corporate Services
December 2020

1.2 Risk 2 – Inadequate Review and Monitoring of the Community Plan

ISSUE 3 – Monitoring and Review

a) Observation- Audit was advised that Delivery Design Groups (DDGs) were created in 2020 to undertake the process of reviewing and monitoring the Delivery Plan. Audit acknowledges that the Covid-19 pandemic has had an adverse effect on these DDGs with only 3 meetings being able to be held so far in 2020.

b) Implication- There is a potential risk that there may not be timely review, monitoring and reporting of progress, leading to some actions not being completed or not completed within the desired timeframe, or a lack of timely corrective action in reaction to changing priorities.

c) Priority Rating- 3

d) Recommendation- Community Planning team should now agree and document a schedule of meetings to ensure that monitoring and review meetings occur and that they report in a timely fashion to ensure that if needed proactive steps can be taken to achieve the completion of Actions

e) Management Response-

Work is currently being taken forward by the Community Planning Team to facilitate the review of the Delivery Plan. The original schedule of meetings for Design Delivery Groups to progress this work has been adversely impacted by the Covid-19 situation and the Community Planning Team has had to devise a new approach to the review process. This is on-going at present and takes the form primarily of informal meetings with individual Statutory Partners or Action Leads or small group meetings in relation to specific actions or proposed actions via telephone calls, conference calls or virtual meetings.

The intention of the Community Planning Team is to have a draft review document on the Delivery Plan available in September for consideration by the Community Planning Strategic Partnership.

f) Responsible Officer & Implementation Date-

Head of Policy and Community Planning
September 2020

1.3 Risk 3 – Inadequate Public Consultation

There are no issues to report here.

Appendix I: Definition of Assurance Ratings and Hierarchy of Findings

Satisfactory Assurance

Evaluation opinion: Overall there is a satisfactory system of governance, risk management and control. While there may be some residual risk identified this should not significantly impact on the achievement of system objectives.

Limited Assurance

Evaluation opinion: There are significant weaknesses within the governance, risk management and control framework which, if not addressed, could lead to the system objectives not being achieved.

Unacceptable Assurance

Evaluation opinion: The system of governance, risk management and control has failed or there is a real and substantial risk that the system will fail to meet its objectives.

Hierarchy of Findings

This audit report records only the main findings. As a guide to management and to reflect current thinking on risk management we have categorised our recommendations according to the perceived level of risk. The categories are as follows:

Priority 1: Failure to implement the recommendation is likely to result in a major failure of a key organisational objective, significant damage to the reputation of the organisation or the misuse of public funds.

Priority 2: Failure to implement the recommendation could result in the failure of an important organisational objective or could have some impact on a key organisational objective.

Priority 3: Failure to implement the recommendation could lead to an increased risk exposure.

Appendix II: Summary of Key Controls Reviewed

Risk	Key Controls
There may be inadequate partnership working arrangements and a lack of clarity of roles and responsibilities on the Strategic Community Planning Partnership and Thematic Delivery Groups leading to delays in delivery, a lack of transparency and accountability and poor decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A terms of reference has been developed for the Partnership • Roles and responsibilities have been clearly set out (eg in a partnership agreement or MoU) and partners have signed up to this and operate within this • The role of the Council in the Partnership and Thematic Delivery Groups is well defined and understood by all partners • Terms of reference have been developed for Thematic Delivery Groups (both delivery plan stage and review stage) and delivery vehicles set up under the Community Planning framework • A programme of meetings has been set for the Partnership and Thematic Delivery Groups • Officers and elected members nominated to the Partnership and Thematic Delivery Groups attend Partnership or Group meetings (both delivery plan stage and review stage) • Minutes are kept of Partnership and Thematic Delivery Group meetings and action points followed-up (both delivery plan stage and review stage) • A programme of work has been developed for the Partnership and Thematic Delivery Groups (both delivery plan stage and review stage) • Partners are engaged and supportive of the programme of work • The work of the Thematic Delivery Groups is monitored by the Partnership (both delivery plan stage and review stage) • There is alignment between the Council's Corporate Plan and the community plan
Progress of the delivery of the Community Plan may not be reviewed on a regular basis, leading to outstanding actions not being identified, followed up and progressed on a timely basis, and Council statutory duties not being fulfilled	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery plans are developed to deliver on each of the outcomes set out in the Community Plan • Timescales and lead partners have been identified for actions within the delivery plans • Resource have been identified / budgets have been developed for delivery plans • Resources required from the Council (including financial) to deliver actions within the delivery plans are clearly identified by Council and included within Council's budgets and service plans • Heads of Service and Service Unit Managers are engaged in the development and implementation of delivery plans • A clear process has been identified for the monitoring and review of actions identified to deliver the Community Plan • A baseline has been created from which to measure progress against each of the outcomes • Data requirements for measuring the impact of the outcomes in the Community Plan and associated actions in the delivery plans have been clearly identified and data collection mechanisms established • Responsibilities for data collection have been identified • Data collection methods will support the Outcomes-Based Accountability approach • Progress reports are produced and presented to Council (as the lead partner) and the Partnership

Risk	Key Controls
Consultation with the public within the borough may not be adequate leading to a lack of public acceptance of the Community Plan and/or reputational damage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The requirements for two-yearly reporting and four-yearly reviews are understood within Council and have been factored into the programme of work • Statutory publishing of performance statements occur in a timely manner • The Council together with Partnership members consults with community groups to identify the areas that the partnership can address within the Borough • Community consultation is open to support as much input as possible • Consultations are widely advertised and communicated to the public • Sign in sheets and/or head counts are taken at every consultation meeting. • Information from consultations are documented and retained • A communication strategy has been developed that considers communications with all stakeholders (including the public, community planning partners and internally within Council)