

Community outcomes: what are they?

Community Outcomes are part of the Local Government Act 2002.

The Act sets out two key planning processes:

- Community outcomes - what local communities think are important for their social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being
- LTCCP – a ten year plan that shows what the Council will do to help achieve the community outcomes.

Community outcomes are a picture of the type of City people want to live in over the next 10 – 15 years.

The legislation is very clear that the outcomes belong to the community, not the Council. The Council's role is to facilitate the process to identify them. This process will involve other key stakeholders and the general public.

The legislation is equally clear that community outcomes are for the whole community to achieve, not just the Council. They are about organisations and communities working in a more co-ordinated way to solve problems or achieve aspirations.

The LTCCP is where the Council sets out its role - it shows what the Council will do to help achieve the community outcomes. It also shows what this will cost and how the Council's success can be judged.

Community outcomes have to be identified at least once every six years and be monitored at least once every three years. The LTCCP is a ten year plan that has to be prepared every three years.

The sections of the Act on community outcomes are sections 91 and 92:

91. Process for identifying community outcomes -

1. A local authority must, not less than once every 6 years, carry out a process to identify community outcomes for the intermediate and long-term future of its district or region.
2. The purposes of the identification of community outcomes are -
 - (a) to provide opportunities for communities to discuss their desired outcomes in terms of the present and future social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of the community; and
 - (b) to allow communities to discuss the relative importance and priorities of identified outcomes to the present and future social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of the community; and
 - (c) to provide scope to measure progress towards the achievement of community outcomes; and
 - (d) to promote the better co-ordination and application of community resources; and
 - (e) to inform and guide the setting of priorities in relation to the activities of the local authority and other organisations.

3. A local authority may decide for itself the process that it is to use to facilitate the identification of community outcomes under subsection (1), but the local authority -
 - (a) must, before finally deciding on that process, take steps -
 - (i) to identify, so far as practicable, other organisations and groups capable of influencing either the identification or the promotion of community outcomes; and
 - (ii) to secure, if practicable, the agreement of those organisations and groups to the process and to the relationship of the process to any existing and related plans; and
 - (b) must ensure that the process encourages the public to contribute to the identification of community outcomes.

92. Obligation to report against community outcomes—

1. A local authority must monitor and, not less than once every 3 years, report on the progress made by the community of its district or region in achieving the community outcomes for the district or region.
2. A local authority may decide for itself how it is to monitor and report under subsection (1), but the local authority must seek to secure the agreement of organisations and groups identified under section 91(3)(a) to the monitoring and reporting procedures, including the incorporation of any research, monitoring, or reporting undertaken by those organisations and groups.

The following information on community outcomes is part of a speech by Rosalind Plimmer (Manager, Local Government Policy, Department of Internal Affairs).

The Local Government Act 2002 and how it will affect you

Successfully Implementing Local Government Reform Conference 2003

Community outcomes

One of the key provisions in the Act is the requirement in section 91 for local authorities to carry out a process to identify community outcomes. Although the first such process is not required until 2006, this process is central to the operation of the Act in the longer term.

Community outcomes are defined as the outcomes for the district or region that are identified as priorities. They are not the local authority's priorities but the community's. And it is not the local authorities responsibility to buy uncritically into the results of the process in terms of its own planning and decision-making.

In the first instance the local authority's role is to carry out the process. In effect, local authorities are given the lead role in an exercise that is broader than just the activities of the local authority itself – it is a community planning exercise intended to involve a wide cross section of the community.

The Act does not attempt to prescribe a specific process for this, and indeed directly states that a local authority is to decide for itself the process it will use. It does, however, specify two things that a local authority must do before settling upon the process.

The first is to identify the other organisations and groups capable of playing a role in either identifying or achieving community outcomes. The council must seek to secure the agreement of those other organisations and groups to the process. And it must also seek to secure agreement about the relationship of the process to existing and related plans.

This reflects the extent to which the community outcomes process is seen as playing a key role in the identification of partnership opportunities, not just between the local authority and other organisations, but also between different other organisations identifying their shared goals, interest or focus through participation in the process. One result of the process, for instance, might be an improved working relationship between a central government agency and a voluntary organisation, or a local business and a community organisation.

The second requirement in considering the process to be used for identifying community outcomes is to ensure that the process encourages the public to contribute.

The local authority's Long Term Council Community Plan (LTCCP) must include a range of information about the community outcomes. This includes statements about:

- the community outcomes that were agreed;
- what the community outcomes process was;
- how the local authority will contribute to furthering the community outcomes;
- how it will work with other agencies to promote those priorities; and
- how progress is to be measured and monitored.

Decisions about what a local authority will do to advance community priorities remains, however, a set of decisions for the local authority to make. Indeed each other organisation that has been party to the process makes its own decisions. It is to be expected that the community outcomes process will influence both the local authority and other organisations in their decision-making. They do not, however, directly bind individual organisations or automatically flow through to their own plans.

Nor is there any expectation that every activity undertaken by a local authority will be able to be sheeted back directly to a corresponding identified community outcome. One reason for this is simply the fact that local authorities still have a range of mandatory responsibilities that have to be undertaken regardless whether that is identified by the community outcomes process as a priority.

For each outcome (or groups of outcomes) the councils will need to think about questions such as:

- What is the outcome?
- Can it be measured? - if so how?
(and here I must note that the Select Committee considered that measurability should not be a precondition of outcomes)
- How can the council make a difference?
- How do council activities contribute to it?
- How do the activities of others contribute to it?
- How can the council work with others to make change more effective, or happen more quickly?
- What have other communities done to achieve similar outcomes?
- How can we learn from and share with each other our work with respect to this outcome?

Ideally, these questions will become the focus of on-going attention and debate across local government. If approached correctly, the work done to assist implementation can form the basis of ongoing policy and best practice discussion about each outcome, rather than simply a one-off implementation process.

Local authorities have one other important role in relation to the community outcome process. This is the obligation, contained in section 92 of the Act to monitor and report on progress towards the achievement of community outcomes at least every 3 years.

The local authority may decide for itself how it will do this but before deciding must consult with other interested organisations. I am conscious that some authorities, have already been doing considerable work on the development of indicators of community wellbeing – most notably those that participated in the development of the 6 Cities report – indeed two more cities have now joined that group.

The expectation is that over time the community outcomes process will bring about a clearer picture of what it is that communities' value, and a higher level of co-ordination among government and other organisations that are active in communities than we have had in the past.

At the same time it needs to be acknowledged that this is something likely to be achieved over the longer term rather than the short term. One round of the community outcomes process is not expected to operate as a magic wand. In addition it needs to be borne in mind that the first such process is not required until 2006. It is a mechanism about the long haul rather than the quick fix.

The expectation is, however, that if all ships are navigating according to the same charts, then there is a greater likelihood of the fleet all arriving at the same destination.