

Local Government Research Programme

Capacity Building for Community Planning

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The Community Planning Task Force (CPTF) commissioned this study in 2002, with the support of the Social Research at the Scottish Executive, to research the capacity building requirements of Community Planning, with reference to the training and development needs of staff directly concerned with developing and progressing Community Planning. The study was expected to indicate what sort of training and other development work needs to be done to progress Community Planning, and then to advise on an appropriate way forward.

Main findings

- There is little evidence yet of real progress being made at a strategic level in addressing learning and capacity building for Community Planning (CP) in the Community Planning partnerships (CPPs). In fact, the lack of a learning infrastructure or processes in the CPPs suggests that such progress may be some way off.
- Progress has been held back by, among other things: confusion and uncertainty about what CP means; the virtual absence of a learning and development culture surrounding CP; a lack of incentives for collaborative working; restructuring within partner organisations and fragmentation, and poor co-ordination in the supply of, and demand for, capacity building services. There is limited evidence of the extent to which CP has impacted on the mainstream business of partner organisations, and an acknowledgement amongst stakeholders that more people need to be involved in the process.
- The study points to two parallel solutions: firstly, addressing the cultural and institutional barriers to collaborative working; secondly, developing an integrated approach to capacity building across a range of areas – both specific to CP and more generic in nature. Since CPPs are at different stages of development, a “one size fits all” approach to development is inappropriate. The required competencies are wide ranging, and these are captured in a Learning Development Framework derived from the study.
- The limited amount of progress to date strongly suggests that a sensible first step would be for CPPs to prepare their own Community Planning Capacity Building Plans to promote a strategic approach to development and commit CPPs to certain actions within a self-determined time-scale. Plans could be underpinned by general guidelines, saying what elements could figure in the plans, and be further supported by pilot studies.
- The proposed statutory underpinning of CP will create an environment in which building up capacity will become part of the normal business of CPPs. Some sort of incentive may nonetheless be needed to kick-start the process. The study therefore suggests provision of some pump priming funding, albeit with an expectation that CP partners would fund much of the local capacity building work from their own budgets.

Background

The study focused on the skills and development needs of officers concerned with the implementation of CP, including engaging with communities. Initial research carried out on behalf of the CPTF indicated that little training and development work was taking place at this level. This study sought to explore the factors behind this and advise on a way forward.

The study involved two interrelated threads of research - primary research with a range of CPP representatives and secondary research into existing training and development provision.

Lack of Progress in Capacity Building

There was little evidence of real progress being made in co-ordinated learning activity in the CPPs. There were some examples of commitment to learning, but these tended to be isolated examples, mainly in particular organisations rather than CPP-wide.

This lack of progress was due partly to CP still being at an early stage of development and to the confusion about just what CP means. Many CPPs still had to agree the values, attitudes and behaviours required to work collaboratively, so had not progressed to identifying the required skills and competencies. In practice it seems there had been little work even on the mechanisms to identify what these skills and competencies might entail. It was evident that partnership-wide learning had been rare.

The lack of progress was also due to weaknesses in addressing some of the cultural, and other constraints both at national and local partner levels. These constraints had to be addressed before real progress could be made on developing capacity building for CP at officer level. The constraints included:

- A virtual absence of a learning and development culture in CP
- Difficulties in bridging the “knowing-doing gap” – moving from an awareness and understanding of community planning to effective delivery and implementation
- A lack of career and organisational incentives for collaborative working
- ‘thematic-based’ national policy initiatives or guidance not being joined up with work at a local level

- CP having to develop against a background of institutional change in key organisations
- The perceived need to achieve consensus, sometimes creating blockages to getting things done
- A fragmented and under-developed supply of capacity building services against a backdrop of poorly co-ordinated demand between agencies that stand to benefit from such services.

Capacity Building Requirements

One of the main conclusions of the study is that there is no “one size fits all” training programme applicable to all CPPs. Addressing the cultural barriers to effective implementation of CP is the first priority, rather than a national programme of capacity building for officers. CPPs are at different stages of development, and it is unlikely that a single training programme will capture the varied range of different capacity building needs among different CPPs. The capacity building activity must be flexible and learner centred.

The study pointed to two parallel solutions. Firstly, to address the cultural and institutional issues constraining collaborative working and, secondly, to ensure that an *integrated* programme of capacity building is developed to enhance the relevant skills and competencies, attitudes and behaviours of all key officers.

For CP to become truly embedded, it will be important to encourage partners to learn and develop together across the partnership and for the impetus for such change to begin at the top.

Learning Development Framework

The study suggests that a broad Learning Development Framework could form the basis of an integrated programme for capacity building, comprising four interrelated learning areas:

- Values and visioning
- Partnership working
- Practitioner skills

Each learning area would capture a range of competencies identified in the study. The programme should be flexible

enough to accommodate a wide range of different learning activities, including:

- Networking
- Secondments and shadowing
- Learning forums
- Internally devised and delivered workshops and training events
- Externally devised and delivered workshops and training events
- e-learning, web-based forums and good practice databases.

There should also be opportunities for self-directed learning and other informal ways of capturing knowledge and experience. Approaches to working with or through a range of different agencies – in further and higher education and in the voluntary, community and private sectors – also deserve to be fully explored.

Existing provision (materials, coursework, expertise) is fairly patchy and under-developed, against a backdrop of fragmented, ad hoc demand and lack of co-ordinated effort among agencies that stand to benefit from such provision – representing a lost opportunity for partners to development costs. Among the more promising developments has been the Working Together, Learning Together programme for Social Inclusion Partnerships and Working for Communities Pathfinders, and the forthcoming evaluation of this is therefore awaited with much interest.

Capacity Building Plans

This study has shown that very little training and development work for CP is taking place on the ground. This strongly suggests that as an essential first step, CPPs should develop their own Community Planning Capacity Building Plans. Such Plans would be expected to promote a strategic approach to capacity building for CP and commit partners to carrying out various supporting actions, costed in broad terms, within a self-determined agreed timescale.

Plans would be jointly owned by CP partners to ensure that capacity building is firmly and sustainably embedded in each partner's own business plans.

The Capacity Building Plans would incorporate the elements set out in the Learning Development Framework and be underpinned by quality standards. Emphasis would be given to some elements more than others, depending on the stage of development. The focus would be on the training and development needs of officers working at a range of levels, although it is likely that Plans would also need to address those of elected members, board members, and community representatives as well.

Capacity Building Plans could also be underpinned by general guidelines setting out the main elements that should figure in the plans. These could include the various elements in the Learning Development Framework. They could also include provision for carrying out baseline or scoping studies, audits of capacity building needs, option appraisals, and the various learning activities suggested above.

Consideration should also be given to the piloting of different approaches in a range of settings, to support development work and inform good practice. This work could draw on the experiences of CPPs that are furthest forward in their development.

The proposed statutory underpinning will be expected to create an environment in which building up the capacity of partners will become part of the "core business" of CPPs. Some incentive may nevertheless be needed to kick-start the process, and the study suggests that provision of some pump priming funding to supplement the partners' own funding of training and development work would be appropriate.

As the study suggests a bottom-up approach, it is not possible to give more than a notional estimate of the cost of initial development work. It is roughly estimated that it would cost up to £1 million across all CPPs in the first year, depending on what elements were built into this (e.g. baseline studies, awareness raising workshops, modular training sessions, networking, etc). There is already a commitment by the Scottish Executive, under the Local Government in Scotland Bill, to assist with the development costs of Community Planning.

Next steps

On the basis of this study, the next steps for the CPTF to consider are:

- The promotion of Community Planning Capacity Building Plans – possibly with a view to all 32 CPPs having well-developed Plans in place by around spring 2003
- Pump priming funding for CPPs submitting Capacity Building Plans
- The commissioning of pilot projects to support development work and inform good practice
- The development of general guidelines to promote quality standards in capacity building for CP
- The potential role of the proposed Improvement Agency in providing longer-term support

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