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News release

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Community planning is improving but not yet realising its potential

An overview report published today for the Accounts Commission and the Auditor General for Scotland says ambitions for community planning have yet to be translated into action on the ground.

Community planning partnerships (CPPs) were set up over a decade ago in all 32 council areas to bring together councils, health boards, and a range of other bodies to jointly plan and deliver better services for their communities.

There is a strong sense of renewed energy nationally and locally to improving community planning since the publication in 2012 of the Statement of Ambition. Partners are now taking a more active part in sharing ownership of priorities, understanding what resources are available, and recognising the importance of prevention.

However, leadership, scrutiny and challenge remain inconsistent. Many CPPs are still not clear about what they are expected to achieve and there is confusion over whether the focus on community planning should be more on local needs or delivering national priorities.

The lack of a coherent national framework for assessing the performance and pace of improvement of CPPs means there is no overall picture of how individual CPPs are performing. The Scottish Government needs to more consistently hold central government bodies and the NHS to account for their contributions to community planning.

The National Community Planning Group has recently set out its plans for an ambitious but realistic improvement agenda for community planning. It now needs to work with the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on what this new approach means in practice for CPPs and how successful delivery will be measured.

Douglas Sinclair, chair of the Accounts Commission, said: "There has been encouraging progress over the last year but community planning is still a long way from achieving its full potential. The key to a successful partnership is building mutual trust. That's not easy when each partner organisation has its own priorities and structures.

"With strong leadership, partnerships can then agree clear priorities provide effective challenge, and deliver change on the ground."

Caroline Gardner, Auditor General for Scotland said: "CPPs now face a double squeeze - much more is expected of them at a time of much tighter public finances. That means difficult choices for them, particularly over moving resources to longer term prevention when still meeting current demands.

"This makes it all the more important that they make effective use of information to identify local needs and target resources appropriately."

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Notes to editors

1. Community Planning Partnerships were established in 2003 to bring together councils, health boards and other public and voluntary agencies to agree and implement plans for tackling key problems in their areas such as reducing inequalities and crime and providing jobs.
2. This report has been prepared by the Controller of Audit (for the Accounts Commission) and the Auditor General. It is based on five CPP reports this year (Glasgow, Falkirk, Moray, Orkney and West Lothian), follow-ups on previous reports and wider monitoring.
3. The Statement of Ambition was published jointly by the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities in March 2012 on their expectations of community planning.
4. The Accounts Commission is the public spending watchdog for local government. It holds councils and various joint boards and committees in Scotland to account and help them improve. It operates impartially and independently of councils and of the Scottish Government, and meets and reports in public.
5. Audit Scotland is a statutory body set up in April 2000, under the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act, 2000. It provides services to the Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission for Scotland.