

# **ASSESSMENT OF OPTIONS FOR THE ABERDEEN CITY ALLIANCE (TACA)**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## PURPOSE OF REVIEW

This study has been commissioned by The Aberdeen City Alliance. The purpose is to explore the way forward for TACA and foster open debate on key issues. More specifically, the report examines options for the constitutional organisation of TACA, 'delivery vehicles' for TACA's business and governance arrangements.

The report notes that TACA has made real progress towards establishing itself as a vital, viable strategic partnership. The Council and other partners have made major contributions to this achievement. However there are concerns among partners about TACA which need to be addressed so the partnership can progress. Addressing such concerns in a frank manner indicates that TACA is a 'learning organisation', which is important to its future success. The report argues that to reinvigorate TACA, rather than concentrate on any single issue, it is important to take an holistic view across the range of issues which need to be considered. Key observations and recommendations of the report are given below.

## ADDRESSING CHALLENGES OF PARTNERSHIP WORKING

**Clarity of Purpose** A concern expressed by partners is lack of clarity about the appropriate role of TACA in fostering the development of Aberdeen and its people, and in leading the community planning network throughout the city. TACA is said to be not making best use of the human resources committed to it. The report recommends that TACA develop a new clarity of purpose and priority to enable it to use wisely the knowledge and skills of partners. It recommends that TACA re-launch its role in a strategic mode - as identifying key priorities where joint working between partners will give value-added in the achievement of a clearly articulated development strategy. This should be expressed in a new, sharp and succinct Community Plan.

**More Opportunities For Dialogue And Debate** The main resource available to TACA is the people who attend its meetings, and their links as leaders to networks around the city. Therefore the quality of face-to-face meetings is a key to the success of community planning. It notes concerns about the style and content of TACA meetings. In addition to recommendations for refocusing TACA meetings, the report recommends opportunities for 'away days' and open seminars and/or conferences on key issues.

## **ENHANCED ORGANISATIONAL ROLES WITHIN THE COMMUNITY PLANNING NETWORK**

**Proposed Executive** TACA requires strong leadership and regular management to achieve maximum benefit. The establishment of a Partnership Executive is recommended. This would ruthlessly shape TACA's agenda to maximise the benefits of deliberation in the larger partnership meeting. The Executive would have a watching brief over the work of the Challenge Forums, taking reports on their progress on strategy and bringing to TACA's attention important messages from them.

**Support Organisations to TACA** The Challenge Forums represent a valuable, extended resource for strategic planning and partnership working. Close liaison between Challenge Forums, TACA and its Executive is recommended. The Civic Forum, through its linkage to both TACA, community councils and communities of interest, is a valuable partner to TACA with its work at the leading edge of community participation in Scotland. The City's Citizens Panel and the Virtual Panel could also make an increasingly important contribution to strategic planning and decision-making by TACA.

## **GIVING TACA ARMS-LENGTH STATUS FROM THE COUNCIL**

**Time for Change** While there is widespread appreciation by partners for the effort the Council has put into getting TACA up and running, many participants in the community planning network, both in and outwith the Council, feel that it is an appropriate time to strengthen TACA by giving it a more independent position. Arms-length status would create the opportunity for non-Council partners to play a more active role, including sharing TACA's leadership role as well as contributing financially or in-kind to its operation.

**Chairing of TACA** The report also notes appreciation at the commitment of successive Leaders of the Council to chairing TACA. At the same time, there is a feeling that if a clear message is to be sent that TACA belongs to all its partners, then rotating chairing arrangements would broaden the leadership base of the partnership, and make more individuals and organisations 'champions' of community planning in Aberdeen. The report recommends that TACA consider a rotating arrangement for chairing the Alliance, on a two year basis, and the appointment of a Vice-Chair.

**Staffing of TACA** The study finds a perception across most key informants that TACA needs its own staff, if it is to be more independent of the Council. The appointment of a senior Partnership Manager, with a personal assistant, is recommended with the posts to be funded jointly by a number of partners.

**Constitutional and Legal Status for TACA** The analysis finds no evidence at the current time that TACA would benefit from, or be able to meet Ministerial requirements for, its formal incorporation as a company limited by guarantee. Rather there is evidence from both England and Scotland, including from a review of more than three hundred Local Strategic Partnerships, that the quality of partnership, and commitment to it, is far more important than any legal arrangements.

## **DEMOCRATIC ACCOUNTABILITY**

**Relation of TACA to Council** There are concerns about a blurring of the distinction between Council and TACA, and about the politicisation of TACA debate. This should be countered by clarity in the respective role of TACA and Council and by recognition of a clear two-way flow of benefits from one organisation to the other. The benefits are enumerated.

**Area Council Committees** The quality of the total governance framework in Aberdeen affects the quality of community planning. Area Committees are a logical addition to Aberdeen's governance structure and a compliment to community planning, bridging between city-wide partnership and neighbourhood action planning. They provide a level of democratic accountability grounded in practical, local concerns. The report suggests why Area Committees should not be partnerships.

**Community Planning at the Local Level** The achievements of neighbourhood action planning are stressed but the report says that unless Aberdeen's neighbourhoods feel they are genuinely able *to influence decisions* on service provision *and* strategic policy and planning as it affects the neighbourhood, local community planning will not succeed.

## **DELIVERY VEHICLES AND PARTNER SUPPORT STRUCTURES**

**Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV): Cart before the Horse?** Many partners and participants argue that revitalisation of TACA needs to take place before a consensual view on the value of either a city-wide, or more spatially focused, SPV is appropriate. An SPV set up as company limited by guarantee may be an appropriate option for delivering the physical regeneration components of the Aberdeen's Community Regeneration Strategy, but the business case needs further examination by TACA, its Executive and Council, particularly as the Scottish Executive will not commit, at the present, to funding any further URCs.

**Urban Regeneration Company (URC) Proposal** The Tribal HCH/Burness review provides a starting point for a consideration of options. However there are limitations. First, the suggestion that the proposed URC is not only a delivery

vehicle but a strategic, decision-making body confuses the URC's role with that of TACA and Council. Also of concern is the intention that a city-wide URC would tackle physical with economic and social regeneration. There is little evidence anywhere in Britain of URCs so doing, in that what makes URC a successful model is a consistent focus on physical regeneration. Finally, the assumption that once a city-wide URC is put in place, there is no need for area-specific SPVs is unsubstantiated. An example from Liverpool shows that city-wide and locality SPVs can coexist effectively.

**National Corporate Governance** A main constraint on local commitment to community planning for Aberdeen organisations working in a national structure is the lack of reinforcing commitment from 'national headquarters' which recognizes that community planning and local partnership working takes time but pays benefits. This issue will be particularly challenging if this report's recommendations on broadening the base of leadership in TACA are agreed.

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## **PREFACE**

I am grateful to the following persons in Aberdeen who gave of their time to meet with me to discuss community planning: Cllr. Yvonne Allan, Kath Beveridge, Jeanette Copland, Cllr. Irene Cormack, Bill Cormie, Jennifer Craw, Cllr. Kate Dean, Ailsa Duncan, Paula Duncan, Andy Finlayson, Isobelle Fenwick, Cllr. Neil Fletcher, Alan Fulton, Sarah Gear, Cllr. Gordon Graham, Eileen Grassick, David Henderson, Rab Hepburn, Helen Holland, Isobel Hunter, Cllr. Len Ironside, Willie Jaffray, Rhonda Kelly, Heather Kelman, Cllr. Jim Kiddie, Anne Knight, Lavina Massie, Cllr. Sandra MacDonald, Donald Murdoch, Will Napier, Alex Park, Douglas Paterson, Chief Superintendent Ian Paterson, Mike Scott, Sandy Scott, Dave Simmers, Gordon Smith, Hazel Spalding, Cllr. John Stewart, Craig Stirrat, John Stodter, Bridget Stone, Pamela Tosh, Dave Valentine and Jackie Wilkins. Needless to say, the views expressed here are my own.

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November, 2005

# 1. INTRODUCTION: A SOUND FOUNDATION FOR COMMUNITY PLANNING

## 1.0 BUILDING ON A SOUND FOUNDATION FOR COMMUNITY PLANNING

Partners in Aberdeen's community planning network, including The Aberdeen City Alliance (TACA), have over some years developed a sound foundation for taking forward the city's community planning agenda.<sup>1</sup> Independent assessment suggests that, although not perfect, the community planning framework in Aberdeen remains at the leading edge of implementation across Scotland.<sup>2</sup>

Among the achievements in Aberdeen are:

- The **Strengthening Local Democracy Strategy** that provided an framework for rethinking citizen participation and local democratic processes. This commitment by Aberdeen City Council then extended to early, positive support for developing community planning.
- An independent review of Council organisation and local democracy leading to reorganisation of the Council into three Area Offices as a sound basis for service decentralisation.
- Designation of 37 'natural' neighbourhoods across the city for the preparation of Neighbourhood Action Plans, with boundaries that make sense to local residents.
- At the city level, a Community Planning Partnership, TACA, with a good range of active, committed partners (as a 'network of networks'), taking forward the Community Plan, **aberdeen futures**, in association with 15 Challenge Forums.

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<sup>1</sup> This report uses the term 'community planning network' to encompass TACA, the Challenge Forums, the Civic Forum, neighbourhood organisations, communities of interest, community councils and other interested organisations or individuals committed to playing a positive role in community planning.

<sup>2</sup> Carley, M. **Implementing Community Planning: building for the future of local governance**, Communities Scotland, report 44, 2004.

- For community organisations and communities of interest representatives, a city-wide grouping of about 120 representatives, The Aberdeen Civic Forum, which provides a systematic mechanism for both neighbourhood and thematic group participation in TACA and for helping to organise community participation across the city.
- For 2005, a new strategy for community engagement - focusing on coordinated consultation by the partnership, support for community representatives, early participation in the policy cycle and staff development to value working with the community.

## 1.1 CHALLENGE: TACA AS A LEARNING ORGANISATION

However sound this foundation, there is no cause for complacency. Community Planning in Aberdeen faces serious challenges which, if not met, could mean the quality of partnership deteriorates rather than strengthens.

Most important is the health of TACA - as the lead partnership in the community planning network. By the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003, TACA is tasked with being the guiding hand for community planning throughout the city, with rationalising partnerships and strategies, and with being the focal point where diverse elements of partner's strategies and practices 'join up' into a coherent whole. The health of TACA is also important because commitment of organisations and individuals to community planning and partnership working throughout the city is reinforced at this senior level.

There are concerns about the health of TACA, but this is not surprising. Partnerships are fragile organisations, depending on voluntary partners and the quality of the human resources devoted to the partnership. At best, partnership is an 'action network', driven by a clear mission, which draws a tremendous variety of expertise and human resources into challenging tasks such as sustainable urban development.<sup>3</sup>

Because action networks involve a wide range of participants from different backgrounds, they require strong but subtle leadership if they are to achieve their potential. Otherwise it is common knowledge that partnerships deteriorate into disregarded 'talking shops'. When that happens, commitments wane, and partners pay lip service to partnership while shifting their allegiance and energy elsewhere.

On the plus side, research finds that high quality partnerships regularly assess their strengths and weaknesses, and work to strengthen quality of partnership

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<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of action networks around the world, see Carley, M. and I. Christie, **Managing Sustainable Development**, London: Earthscan, 2000 (second edition).

and strategy.<sup>4</sup> These partnerships become ‘learning organisations’ which recognise that there are no easy or right answers to the challenges of sustainable city development, social inclusion and political engagement. In these circumstances, the experience of the recent past is a learning environment for considering the future. In commissioning this report and other reviews, TACA demonstrates that it is such a learning organisation.<sup>5</sup>

## 1.2 TACA AT A CROSSROADS

Although its foundations are strong, TACA is at a crossroads. Some senior representatives of partner agencies say that TACA lacks focus and a sense of priority. They suggest that, unless there is a clearer role for TACA and more efficient methods of operation, they will withdraw their commitment and cooperation. Some feel this is happening already, describing TACA as a “frustrating, slow, bureaucratic process” with another suggesting “it might be time to by-pass TACA and find other ways to get things done”.

As commitment withdraws, senior people are replaced by junior staff at TACA meetings – without the ability to take decisions on the spot. In the words of a long-serving councillor, “if TACA hasn’t got the movers and shakers it goes nowhere”. Others are concerned about the interjection of party politics in TACA discussions, suggesting that “TACA ought to be about collective working, not politicians slagging each other off”.

There is also concern that attention is being given to formally-constituted organisational arrangements for and by TACA, such as for ‘special purpose regeneration vehicles’, before TACA has proved itself as a vital and viable partnership mechanism on current arrangements. The issue is said to be “more about TACA’s purpose and commitment...not about legal arrangements”.

## 1.3 TIME FOR RENEWED CLARITY OF PURPOSE

In a nutshell, TACA needs a renewed clarity of purpose. When it has that clarity of purpose then it needs to ensure that it is organisationally fit for purpose. Its activities must generate added value for participants and for city development. Among the main challenges are:

- Reinvigorating partnership processes within TACA and strengthening both its leadership role and its operating procedures to make best use of the combined ‘brainpower’ of everyone around the partnership table.

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<sup>4</sup> Carley, M., M. Chapman, A. Hastings, K. Kirk and R. Young, **Urban regeneration through partnership: a study in nine urban regions in England, Scotland and Wales**, Bristol: The Policy Press, 2000.

<sup>5</sup> see also, Tosh, P. ‘Interim Findings and Proposed Action from First Phase of Review’, 2005.

- Addressing concern that TACA is becoming a political debating forum, thus blurring how it differs from Council, by developing clarity about the complementary relationship between TACA and Council.
- Using TACA's leadership role to coordinate and thus strengthen its strategy process, led by the Challenge Forums.
- Finding a way that TACA can continue to work closely with the Council, while being more independent from it by broadening the base of its leadership.
- Ensuring that Neighbourhood Action Planning, which has begun so well, brings tangible and systematic improvements to local quality of life, thus vindicating the process for local community groups.

These challenges can be overcome. The solid foundation of TACA means that it is in a position to go from strength to strength - but only if issues are debated in an open, forthright manner and broad consensus is achieved on the way forward.

#### **1.4 PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY**

A basic purpose of this analysis is to foster such open debate on key issues and consensus on the way forward. More specifically, in recognition of the need to be a learning organisation, this study has been commissioned by TACA to assess and review:

- Options for the constitutional and legal organisation of TACA
- Options for joint 'delivery vehicles' for various aspects of TACA's business, e.g. regeneration
- Implications of local and national organisational governance arrangements
- Implications of organisational options for community engagement, and for individual partners' governance arrangements

#### **1.5 APPROACH OF THIS STUDY**

If TACA is to be strengthened then a variety of issues need to be addressed *simultaneously*, and a series of actions implemented within a fairly short time. The interests of community planning in Aberdeen will not be served by a slow or incremental approach to revitalisation of TACA.

**This report therefore takes an holistic view across the range of issues which need to be considered to reinvigorate TACA, and makes a series of recommendations for action. Its premise is that innovation across this range of issues will be more effective than single areas of innovation on**

**their own, such as establishing an urban regeneration company in the absence of a root and branch review.**

This approach represents a significant challenge to TACA in that it must continue to carry out its typical business, while it is also considering how it needs to reform to make itself fit for purpose. However, this is the stuff of good partnership, which is about both *strategy*, that is 'what to do' and organisational innovation, that is, 'how to do it better'.

## **1.6 METHODS OF THIS STUDY**

First, this study consisted of desk research that examined all the relevant documentation. Second, the consultant carried out thirty key informant interviews with a sample of key players in community planning in Aberdeen. Third, a discussion group was held with fourteen community representatives active in the local community planning process and/or the Civic Forum.

## 2. THE ORGANISATION OF COMMUNITY PLANNING IN ABERDEEN

### 2.0 ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES OF PARTNERSHIP

#### Clarity of purpose

A concern expressed by partners is lack of clarity about the appropriate role of TACA in fostering the development of Aberdeen and its people, and in leading the community planning network throughout the city. There is a feeling that TACA tries to do too much without considering how to make good use of its limited time. In the words of a partner, “its like everything before TACA is of equal importance...there is no sense of priority”.

TACA’s business agenda is said to devote too much time to responding to, or ‘noting’, initiatives and reports from partners rather than discussing strategic priorities for the city. TACA’s meetings are said to be driven by reporting on paperwork, rather than by a “simple clarity of purpose” of what TACA is and why it’s important.

There is concern that lack of focused discussion is contributing to partnership fatigue, rather than resolving it intended by the Local Government in Scotland (LGiS) Act. Part of the problem is that it is easy for community planning to attempt to ‘be all things to all people’ and encompass every relevant initiative, since the intention of the Act is that the community planning partnership (CPP) is the overarching framework which joins-up diverse initiatives in a coherent whole.

#### Using TACA’s Resource Base Wisely

TACA also needs to jealously guard and get maximum benefit from its available resources by using them wisely. The foundation of this resource base is simple. It consists of:

- the **‘brainpower’** of the representatives contributing to TACA meetings,
- their **interaction** in considering key issues facing the city, and
- their **leadership** in their organisations and networks to foster implementation of the city’s development strategy, embodied in the Community Plan.

Under current arrangements, TACA is said to be “failing to unlock the benefits of partnership”. Partners’ commitment to TACA is still there but there is a feeling it will go quickly unless TACA takes time to reflect on what it can do best and reorganises itself around this assessment. A commitment to using the time of its members effectively is critical when representatives feel stressed by “too many things at once, community planning, health partnership, community learning, regeneration strategy, special purpose vehicles, and the pressures of day-to-day work”.

**TACA needs to develop a new clarity of purpose and priority to enable it to use wisely the knowledge and skills partners bring to the Alliance.**

### **Relationship of TACA to Council**

A second concern is about the relationship of TACA to City Council. On the one hand, there is genuine appreciation of the effort City officers and councillors have put in to bringing TACA to the status of a functioning partnership, and the commitment of the Council to changing its organisational culture to embrace partnership working and neighbourhood action.

On the other hand, there is feeling that it is now time to re-examine the relationship and resolve some concerns. One is about the role of TACA vis-à-vis the decision-making powers of Aberdeen City Council. One informant said “TACA appears like a step in what is basically a Council decision-making process - so they can tick the ‘consulted partners’ box...”. There is concern about politicisation of TACA by what is described as “political point scoring” by councillors of opposing political parties in TACA meetings.

Another key informant feels “the Council is over-controlling of TACA, which is not good because its decision-making processes are slow, slow and slower.” Over-control of TACA by the Council is said to preclude financial commitment to the partnership by non-Council partners. Of course, there is another side to the coin, which is a perceived “lack of buy-in” to the partnership by non-Council partners who “find it easier to let the Council do everything”.

### **A Challenging Role for Council**

The fact that these issues have arisen is part of the logical progression of partnership. Research suggests that councils across Scotland have a difficult and challenging role in community planning – to lead a process that is, by definition, tending toward egalitarian partnership among equals.<sup>6</sup> In other words, councils

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<sup>6</sup> The Guidance pursuant to the Act uses the term ‘facilitate’ rather than lead.

need to work themselves 'out of a job' in leading partnership to the point where the council becomes an equal rather than a leading partner.

In terms of the relationship of partnership to politics, the Demos project showed that this is a challenge across Europe – balancing the influence of participatory and representative democracy. Given this, the relationship between councils and active CPPs was always going to be an issue – although there is nothing in the Guidance that clarifies how this challenging relationship is to evolve. It is therefore down to TACA and Aberdeen City Council to evolve a working relationship that is mutually beneficial. To do so will require that TACA evolve more clarity on its role, but also that council officers and especially councillors are drawn into discussion about the evolution of TACA.

**There needs to be informed and open discussion about the most effective future role for TACA.**

**Tensions between TACA and Council should resolve themselves over time as TACA develops a clearer role, complementary to that of Council, and a degree of independent stature. Practical recommendations in this report will assist this challenging process.**

The remainder of this chapter and the next consider five areas in which TACA can sharpen its focus and improve its operation and organisation to strengthen the partnership:

1. Rethinking TACA's basic role, or mission, in community planning
2. Sharpening the focus of dialogue and debate on TACA's agenda in meetings
3. Creating new opportunities for dialogue and debate
4. Rethinking the role of TACA vis-à-vis the Lead Officers Group and the Challenge Forums
5. Giving TACA more independence from the Council

## **2.1 RETHINKING THE ROLE OF TACA**

**TACA requires a clear mission and strong leadership if the benefits of its diverse human resources are to be realised. It is logical and in the nature of partnership that TACA periodically examine its purpose and whether its operating arrangements are fit for purpose.**

A partner suggests this process be taken forward "with transparency and honesty" in discussing the need for change. Subsequent discussion in this report will assist TACA in reformulating its role in a manner that takes better advantage of the resources at its disposal.

In TACA's capacity as the lead organisation for community planning in Aberdeen, it should consider committing itself to the following roles:

- TACA, in discussion and reflected in its Community Plan, should identify a modest number (say, five to seven) of clearly articulated economic, social and physical **priorities** for development of the city over the next three years;
- TACA, through a close relationship with the Challenge Forums, should bring together relevant information and develop sophisticated **strategy** for achieving these priorities;
- TACA should identify where **joint-working** among agencies will help achieve the objectives of the city's development strategy (the Community Plan); and
- TACA as a whole, and by commitment of its individual members, should demonstrate **leadership** in managing the city's diverse human and organisational resources the city to achieve the key priorities for development.

**It is recommended that TACA re-launch its role as identifying key priorities where joint working between partners will give value-added in the achievement of a clearly articulated development strategy.**

## **2.2 REFOCUSING TACA'S AGENDA**

The term 'agenda' is used here in two ways – in the sense of the business conducted during TACA's formal meetings but also, more generally, how it goes about carrying out the four-fold mission identified above. What TACA does in its meetings, that is how it uses its human resources, and how it views its role or 'mission', are intertwined.

In terms of the agendas of its meetings, a review of the minutes of TACA supports the contention of key informants that meetings are more about receiving information from a variety of sources than discussing key strategic issues facing the city and city-region. Following on from the four roles identified for TACA, the following emphasis in fashioning the organisation's agenda is suggested:

**Establish priorities** – TACA should establish a rolling focus on a limited number of strategic issues requiring joint working at city-wide and regional levels, and on the quality of partnership, participation and democratic governance which could bring about progress on these issues. These can be expressed in, say, bi-annual Community Plans, which need be no more than 10 to 20 pages long. The Plan should provide a context for consideration of sub-strategies and budgets such as the Regeneration Strategy and City Growth Fund.

At the same time, when a city-regional perspective is growing in importance, TACA should lead in moving toward a 'joint Northeast strategic development (community) plan, which should be visionary and aspirational rather than based on a 'predict and provide' planning mode.

**Develop strategy** - having identified a modest number of key priorities for the coming two years, TACA needs to ensure that the Challenge Forums are fully aware of the overall city-wide and regional perspective and of the importance of their particular contribution of intelligence and action to address key priorities. The Challenge Forums should report regularly and efficiently to TACA on a rolling basis.

**Foster Joint Working** – the overwhelming value of TACA has to be in drawing out the most beneficial linkage between and among organisations to address key priorities. This means joint working between Challenge Forums and key partner organisations represented on TACA. The potential for joint working needs to be a key component of the TACA agenda.

**Promote Leadership in Human Resource Management** – TACA represents a potentially powerful network of networks which can be committed to achieving the benefits of coordinated, joint working – but only if partners agree on key priorities, the elements of strategy and the optimum areas for efficient joint working. Every individual and organisational member of TACA should be a leader in their network and a champion of community planning and the objectives of the Community Plan.

**The agenda of TACA meetings should be reorganised around its primary roles in leading Aberdeen's community planning network.**

### **Refocusing the Community Plan**

Planning, at its best, is a rolling process of reflection on key issues, leading to consensus on what those issues are and identification of essential priorities and policies leading to action. This triggers another round of reflection, all undertaken as part of the partnership process of debate and dialogue. This means that, rather than seeing a Community Plan as a fixed, shiny document, full of vague, worthy aspirations, it ought to be a working document - a commitment to progress on key issues, updated, say, every two years.

Aberdeen's Community Plan therefore ought to express clearly and succinctly the priority issues being addressed in the city by TACA, and identify strategy and joint working to resolve the issues. The Community Plan should include a small number of realistic targets and priority actions leading to quick wins, which can reinforce commitment to partnership working and citizen participation. Anyone from outside Aberdeen picking up the Community Plan should understand, in a

nutshell, the strengths of the city, its key challenges and how partners will work together to meet those challenges over a limited period.

Currently, there are some limitations to **aberdeen futures**, which can be rectified in subsequent rounds of community planning. First, the Visions and Key Aims are vague. Second, many Targets are unrealistic with no chance of achievement within the period specified. Finally, it should not try to encompass every aspect of life in the city, nor does every Challenge Forum need space in every plan – in many cases it must be the joining up of efforts between Challenge Forums which indicates the benefits of joint working.

**The Community Plan should be clear, succinct expression of key issues facing the city and how these are being addressed by the community planning network.**

### **2.3 CREATING NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR DIALOGUE AND DEBATE**

If the main resource available to TACA is the people who attend its meetings, and their links to networks around the city, then the quality of face-to-face meetings is a key to the success of community planning. It is in this interaction that joined-up working, based on trust and the value-added of partnership, is achieved.

There are concerns about the style and content of TACA meetings. The four or five meetings per year are said to be “too formal” and “too much like a council committee...with little chance for reflection and dialogue over serious issues”. With the agenda insufficiently focused, there is said to be an “absolute lack of time” to consider “complex issues like long-term strategy, special purpose vehicles or the pros and cons of stock transfer”. “Time for dialogue” is said to be essential “for building trust between partners” to the point that a consensual view emerges.

There are other concerns. Some feel that TACA meetings are just too big; one partner described TACA meetings as “intimidating”. A number of informants felt that TACA has become “dominated by regeneration funding issues” which, “at the end of the day, bring only modest additional resources” compared to inward investment by the private sector and by the mainstream budgets of the public and voluntary sectors.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps of greatest concern, many people are worried by what is described as “a lack of consistent attendance by key players at a senior level” - an indicator of the health of partnership.

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<sup>7</sup> The predominance of discussion in TACA on regeneration over the past year is borne out by a review of the minutes. For a background discussion of the relationship of mainstream public expenditure compared with regeneration expenditure see ODPM, **Mainstream Public Services and their Impact on Neighbourhood Deprivation**, 2005.

## **Providing Time for Discussion and Building Trust**

Well-run formal meetings will always be important for TACA but it is also necessary to create sufficient opportunities for relaxed, 'off the record' dialogue among partners, and between partners and community organisations. This can be done in two ways: 'away days' for partners; and regular public 'conferences' or seminars focused on key issues identified in the Community Plan. The latter could be open to all on a first-come basis.

**It is recommended that TACA augment its regular meetings with off-the-record 'away days' for core partners to discuss key issues and the means of joint working.**

**It is also recommended that TACA consider one or two day-long, well-organised public conferences per year, each focused on a critical issue facing the city.**

Both type of events will not only provide the opportunity to 'unpack' and explore issues and aspects of strategy but will also help build trust and good will around partnership working. In parallel with the launch of public conferences, there could be a review of the more general Assembly events, to determine if they continue to constitute a valuable participation mechanism.

There is ample precedent for these types of meetings. For example, the Community Health Partnership is organising a "Development Day" to reflect on key questions about the purposes, priorities and organisation of the partnership. This is seen as essential for building commitment to partnership in the health sector. This Challenge Forum also alternates business meetings and topical seminars throughout the year.

## **Rotating Venues for TACA activities**

Subject to appropriate venues being available, key informants feel it would send a valuable message about 'co-ownership' of TACA if some its meetings could be held elsewhere than in the Council building. Altering the venues of TACA meetings might also introduce new styles of conducting meetings.

**Regular and special TACA meetings should rotate venues to broaden the 'ownership' of such events.**

## **2.4 ORGANISATIONAL ROLES WITHIN THE COMMUNITY PLANNING NETWORK**

### **An Executive for TACA**

Like any complex partnership or network, TACA requires strong leadership and regular management to achieve maximum benefit. A smaller Executive, representing the Chair, vice-Chair and six or so key players, could help the larger partnership group operate effectively.<sup>8</sup> The Executive would be selected for their commitment to partnership and a willingness to devote time to it. A senior Council officer would also need to be a member of (or co-opted to) the Executive to ensure continued efficient communication between Executive and Council.

Working with a Partnership Manager, as proposed below, the Executive would consider what is appropriate for the TACA agenda and what items and reports should be steered elsewhere, or only briefly summarised. The Executive would ruthlessly shape the agenda to maximise the benefits of deliberation in the larger partnership meeting.

The Executive would also have a watching brief over the work of the Challenge Forums, taking reports on their progress on strategy and bringing to the attention of TACA important messages from the Challenge Forums. The Executive, working with a Partnership Manager as recommended below, can synthesize information from the Challenge Forums and elsewhere, such as the Scottish Executive, and translate these into recommendations for decision-making and action by the full TACA partnership. This would serve to focus discussion in TACA on key points of strategy and implementation where dialogue and decision-making is required. As necessary, the Chairs of the Challenge Forums could also report to TACA on the invitation of the Executive.

**An Executive should be established to lead and manage TACA. It could meet monthly. Consideration should be given to merging the role of the Lead Officers Group with that of the Executive.**

### **Activities of the Challenge Forums**

Some of the Challenge Forums were in existence before TACA, and thus value a measure of independence. Many are multi-functional and, in addition to working

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<sup>8</sup> In England, of 306 Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) surveyed, 83% had an Executive, up from 74% in 2002. The establishment of an Executive was considered to be the most effective organisational innovation of 13 innovations reported in the study, with 75% of LSPs reporting it as effective or very effective. See ODPM, **National Evaluation of Local Strategic Partnerships: 2004 Survey of All English LSPs**, 2005.

with TACA, report to other statutory or voluntary agencies and networks. Nevertheless, the relationship of TACA working with the Challenge Forums is at the heart of community planning for Aberdeen. There is great benefit from TACA and the Challenge Forums working closely together to achieve 'integrated' development for the city and region.

The Challenge Forums 'unpack' key issues and develop practical elements of strategy and commitment to implementation to resolve those issues. They also suggest where areas of joint working can implement strategy. In the words of one partner, "the Challenge Forums should challenge TACA".

There is not the opportunity in this analysis to review the work of every Forum, which is an on-going task of partnership working. Most are recognised to be doing good work. For example, NESEF has a city-regional vision and has identified strategic themes, such as in energy, life sciences and food production. It is said to be good at prioritising projects, promoting joint working and avoiding wasteful duplication of functions across its partner agencies. It appears well-organised with a Forum, Management Team, a rotating Chair, a paid Communications Coordinator and work on 'next generation' network. NESEF is also one of Scotland's 22 Local Economic Forums, indicating that it serves multi-functional purposes and reduces numbers of organisations undertaking overlapping functions, thus providing effective and efficient policy development.

**Overall, the Challenge Forums represent a valuable resource for strategic planning and partnership working within Aberdeen's community planning network. Close liaison between Challenge Forums, TACA and its Executive is recommended.**

Some informants question whether Aberdeen needs as many forums as it has. With regard to the ten substantive issue forums there is little apparent rationale for either combining or disbanding individual forums. However with regard to what might be called the 'process forums'<sup>9</sup>, there is scope for a reduction in number. There are already joint meetings and agendas, and further consolidation would be efficient.

### **Role of the Civic Forum**

The quality of community planning depends, by definition, on the quality of community participation. Here Aberdeen has all the organisational elements in place for genuine empowerment at different spatial levels and for different types of groups: neighbourhood action planning, widespread coverage of community councils, communities of interest and the Civic Forum.

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<sup>9</sup> Leading the City, Being Informed, Getting Involved and Neighbourhood Action/Locality Planning

The potential contribution of the Civic Forum to democratic governance in Aberdeen is substantial. In particular, having a citizen's organisation operating at the spatial level of the city and TACA indicates genuine commitment to establishing an organisational basis for empowering citizens across the local authority. Such organisational innovation is rare in Scotland.<sup>10</sup> Where it is lacking, community organisations are easily and frequently shut out of dialogue and debate at the city or strategic level.

Aberdeen City Council has made a substantial contribution to building local capacity for community participation. With this range of organisational elements in place, TACA working with the Council, is in a position to further strengthen local capacity. For example, strengthening community councils should strengthen both neighbourhood action planning and the Civic Forum. Strengthening the Civic Forum strengthens its community council members and so on.

An area of concern suggested by key informants is the need to address the extent to which Civic Forum representatives feel welcome on Challenge Forums. Their role should be clarified and enhanced, an issue already being addressed by the Council in terms of 'supported induction'.<sup>11</sup> While they should not be expected to have professional competence, some capacity building may be appropriate. Support from TACA itself could help encourage Challenge Forum Chairs and professional attendees to take advantage of the expertise of Civic Forum representatives in discussion. It could also be helpful to make more use of the skills of the Aberdeen voluntary sector to support community participation activities.

**The Civic Forum, through its linkage to both TACA and community councils and communities of interest, is a valuable partner to TACA. Its work should continue to be supported.**

### **Other Participation Arrangements at City Level**

Organised community participation within group settings will always represent the valuable contribution of no more than a minority of Aberdeen citizens. Although the Demos Project found that worrying overmuch about the 'representativeness' of community representatives a 'red herring' compared with welcoming their contribution, it also stressed that parallel mechanisms of participation were important to enable input by individuals outwith a group setting.<sup>12</sup> Here the

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<sup>10</sup> Another exception is the active, long-standing Stirling Assembly. An East Renfrewshire Assembly is proposed.

<sup>11</sup> The Demos Project website ([www.demosproject.org](http://www.demosproject.org)) gives examples of "Citizen Academies" in the USA which formally train citizens and bring them together with professionals in areas such as town planning and public safety.

<sup>12</sup> Demos Project, **Citizens, Innovation, Local Governance**, final report, 2004.

Council has done valuable work in establishing the Citizens Panel (Aberdeen City Voice) and the Virtual Panel (Virtual Voice).

Continuing to develop the efficacy of the Citizen Panel and the Virtual Panel, and to report the findings to TACA, offers a valuable opportunity to input systematic citizen views into community planning. Information from these panels would be very useful to check priorities, to get a snapshot of service quality, and for TACA to act with confidence in decision-making, sometimes despite opposing media coverage, over difficult issues.

**The Citizens Panel and the Virtual Panel could make an increasingly important contribution to strategic planning and decision-making by TACA.**

## **3. GIVING TACA ARMS-LENGTH STATUS FROM THE COUNCIL**

### **3.0 TIME FOR CHANGE**

As noted, there is widespread appreciation by partners for the effort the Council has put into getting TACA up and running. There is clear recognition that no other organisation in Aberdeen could have fulfilled this essential leadership and support role. At the same time, many partners in TACA and participants in the community planning network, both in and outwith the Council, feel that it is an appropriate time to strengthen TACA by giving it a position more independent of the Council.

Proponents of this approach suggest that arms-length independence could reduce the influence of formal Council ways of conducting business on the partnership, so that TACA became “less like a Council Committee and more like a partnership”. But more important, arms-length status would create the opportunity or ‘space’ for non-Council partners to play a more active role in the partnership, including sharing the leadership role of TACA as well as contributing financially or in-kind to its operation. For example, there is ample precedent elsewhere in Scotland for non-Council partners to support partnership financially.

A number of TACA partners have indicated they could only legitimately fund a partnership that was independent of the Council. For in-kind contributions, other partners could be drawn in. For example, ACVO could use its network of resources to draw voluntary groups into support roles, thereby building the network of organisations committed to community planning.

**Arms-length status for TACA would create the opportunity for non-Council partners to play a more active role in the partnership, including sharing the leadership role and contributing to its operation financially or in-kind.**

### **3.1 CHAIRING OF TACA**

There is heartfelt appreciation at the commitment of successive Leaders of the Council to chairing TACA. At the same time there is a feeling that if a clear message is to be sent that TACA belongs to all its partners, then rotating chairing

arrangements would broaden the leadership of the partnership, and make more individuals and organisations ‘champions’ of community planning in Aberdeen.<sup>13</sup>

Chairs could be rotated every two or three years on a voluntary basis. It would also be appropriate to appoint a Vice-Chair from a different partner organisation, thus providing an alternate chair as necessary and also broadening the base of leadership. Chairs also need the necessary skills and firmness of manner to ensure that the objectives of the agenda are achieved, and that inappropriate or ‘political’ comments do not detract from the quality of deliberation.

**TACA should consider a rotating arrangement for chairing the Alliance, on a two year basis, and the appointment of a Vice-Chair.**

### **3.2 STAFFING OF TACA**

As with chairing, there is widespread appreciation of the efforts of Council officers in supporting TACA and recognition that a positive relationship needs to continue. But there is also a feeling across all types of key informants that, if TACA is to be more independent of the Council, it needs its own staff.

This needn’t be a large staff complement; rather a senior Partnership Manager with a personal assistant would be sufficient for the next few years. Whatever the formal funding arrangements, TACA staff would answer only to TACA and the Executive and would work closely with them. They would also work closely with staff from the Council and other partners, seconded or assigned to partnership activities and support for the wider community planning network.

#### **Partnership Manager’s Tasks**

This independent Partnership Manager’s main task would be the advancement of community planning in all aspects. The Partnership Manager would:

- Serve as a secretariat to both TACA and its Executive;
- Help TACA identify a limited number of clear priorities;
- Organise meetings, agendas and paperwork around those priorities;
- Foster joint working and budgeting addressed at priorities;
- Oversee the work of the Challenge Forums;

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<sup>13</sup> In England, there is a trend away from the chairing of the 306 Local Strategic Partnerships by local authorities, from 82% chaired by local authorities in 2002 (most by the Leader) to around half chaired by other agencies in 2004. Chairs now come from other public sector agencies (16%), the private sector (11%), the voluntary sector (11%) and other organisations, such as universities (9%). ODPM, **National Evaluation of Local Strategic Partnerships: 2004 Survey of All English LSPs**, 2005.

- Oversee the continuing improvement of the Community Plan;
- Organise and oversee other TACA events; and
- Be an independent champion of community planning, committed to strengthening partnership in organisations across Aberdeen in formal and informal ways.

In terms of the Partnership Manager's skills, the following are relevant:

- Ability to liaise at all levels within the community planning network
- Secretariat skills for the Alliance and Executive
- Strategy development
- Bid planning and management
- Data collection
- Analysis and summary of reports
- Performance assessment

### **Funding of Staff**

There is preliminary agreement among some key partners in Aberdeen that joint funding of a small staff complement is possible through an accountable body.<sup>14</sup> There is local precedent in that the Joint Drugs and Alcohol Action Team has independent staff working in an office independent of key partners. Other staff can be seconded into TACA under the guidance of the Partnership Manager.

In terms of level of remuneration, and thus status, the review of English LSPs finds that LSP Chief Executives/Managers benefit from a level of seniority which would assist them in negotiating easily with senior personnel in partner organisations.<sup>15</sup>

### **3.3 CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL STATUS FOR TACA?**

Section 19 of the LGiS Act sets out the conditions whereby a Community Planning Partnership can trigger a Ministerial order-making power to establish the partnership as a legally distinct corporate body. The purpose is to allow Community Planning partnerships to have the option of establishing themselves as a distinct legal entity, independent from any one partner. However, the Guidance states that:

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<sup>14</sup> Similar arrangements exist in Stirling, Fife and Angus. In Fife, for example the Council, the police, the enterprise agency, the NHS and Communities Scotland all fund the independent post of Community Planning Coordinator.

<sup>15</sup> In England, the average dedicated staff complement of LSPs is 1.5 persons. The status of the appointments is indicated by salary levels, with 29% of partnership Chief Executives or Managers receiving an annual salary above £40,000 pounds, and further 39% between £30,001 and £40,000.

the aim of this provision is to allow corporate bodies to be formed to co-ordinate or further community planning in its area, not as a corporate body that substantially delivers services in itself (para. 13).

The provision in the Act is permissive and enabling - the decision to form a corporate body of the Community Planning partnership rests entirely at the local level. However, the requirements to trigger the Ministerial order-making power are onerous and not to be embarked on lightly.

Incorporation can only be accomplished by an application of members of the partnership itself, which must include the local authority and one or more bodies participating in community planning in the area. The application must specify the functions to be undertaken by the corporate body, details of the consultation undertaken and the outcome of the consultation. In terms of what constitutes a consultation, the Guidance makes clear that:

Broad agreement from the wider participants in the Community Planning partnership would be required before a Minister would proceed with an order. This stops short of requiring unanimity among every participant in a Community Planning partnership, but it is likely that all of the key agencies involved would need to be in agreement. The order will be subject to scrutiny and approval by the Scottish Parliament.

In terms of legal options available to TACA that also have some track record which enables them to be evaluated, both options and evidence are skimpy in the extreme. No CPP in Scotland has attempted to avail themselves of this option, and most CPPs appear to reject that movement beyond the status of a voluntary partnership is required.<sup>16</sup>

There is slightly more evidence from England, with a very few LSPs constituted as a company limited by guarantee (CLbG) but with no other formal organisational option attempted. Of 306 LSPs, only 0.9% of LSPs have established themselves in this manner and these are almost entirely within the 88 local authorities in receipt of Neighbourhood Regeneration Funding (NRF) status. For these very few, their main advantages are that grant funding can be received and administered directly by the partnership, and staff directly employed and paid by the organisation.

The status suggests an organisation independent of the Council and other partners, although obviously that would depend entirely on the make-up of the company board. However these partnerships appear to have more limited

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<sup>16</sup> The Fife Partnership has seriously considered incorporation but there is considerable hesitation among staff and partners due to the expense and the amount of officers's time involved, compared to rather limited perceived benefits.

strategic aspirations than most LSPs. The recent interim review of LSPs sets the context of the issue:

LSPs are, of course, not direct delivery organisations. Their role, except perhaps at the margins, is to work with partners who do have delivery responsibilities, both in facilitating delivery... of renewal strategies, and in stimulating action on a range of other issues, some of which may be nationally driven but which may also be locally driven and require particular local responses. Additionally, LSPs have (and will have greater) indirect responsibilities...to promote the effectiveness of local delivery mechanisms by seeking to rationalise structures, plans and activities.<sup>17</sup>

Overall there appears to be little case at the present time for going through the upheaval required to shift TACA to the status of a company limited by guarantee, especial since the few advantages in terms of grant and salary administration can easily be accommodated by any sympathetic accountable body. Caution is also indicated by the powerful fact that a significant number of key informants in Aberdeen indicated strongly that TACA should prove itself as a valuable, viable partnership before even considering whether formal status conferred sufficient benefits.

**There is no evidence at the current time that TACA would benefit from, or be able to meet Ministerial requirements for, its formal incorporation as a company limited by guarantee. The option could be reviewed in three years time.**

**There is evidence from both England and Scotland that the quality of partnership, and commitment to it, is far more important than any legal arrangements.**

### **3.4 COMMUNICATION IN THE COMMUNITY PLANNING NETWORK**

In a telling comment, the review of English LSPs cited above notes that the “quality of communication in a partnership” is far more important than its legal status or organisational arrangements. TACA needs to put in additional effort to get its message across. This can serve two purposes. First, it promotes community planning generally in Aberdeen. Second, it improves communications within TACA and the wider community planning network, and strengthens linkage between levels and commitment to community planning in all sectors.

On the latter, a number of key informants want better communication between TACA and the Challenge Forums and between the Challenge Forums and

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<sup>17</sup> ODPM, **Evaluation of Local Strategic Partnerships: Interim Report**, 2005, p.78.

community organisations.<sup>18</sup> There is still a lack of detailed knowledge about what community planning is all about, even among some city councillors who still view the process with unease. TACA is said “not to do enough to explain itself...councillors just don’t know what’s happening”.

**As part of refocusing its role, TACA should consider the quality of communication about partnership and strategy. It should consider publishing a brief, half-yearly newsletter reporting succinctly on TACA’s deliberations and activities.**

The newsletter should be informative rather than promotional; a tight summary of deliberations over two or three meetings; and e-mailed, printed and put on the TACA website. This would bring non-attenders of TACA ‘into the loop’ of its deliberations including local councillors who don’t attend.

In terms of other media, TACA has a good website, although perhaps not too exciting for the ordinary citizen or web surfer. Finally, one councillor suggest TACA needed ‘branding and logo’ to capture attention and establish itself as an activity independent of the Council. These issues are being addressed by the Being Informed forum.

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<sup>18</sup> As also noted in “The Civic Forum Said It”, August 2005.

## **4. DEMOCRATIC ACCOUNTABILITY AND COMMUNITY PLANNING**

### **4.0 LINKING REPRESENTATIVE AND PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY**

Among some key informants, there is concern about whether community planning in Aberdeen is democratically accountable, that is, supported and subject to scrutiny or review by elected councillors. Some elected members report “suspicions” about community planning, which is seen to be “cutting councillors and Council Committees out of decisions”.

This is a broad issue for discussion in terms of implementation of community planning – across Scotland and beyond. The intention of community planning must be to enhance *the governance structure*, which is local government working in partnership with other sectors of society for the good of Aberdeen, rather than trying to go it alone.

This issue reflects the Demos view that the biggest challenge facing not only community planning, but similar initiatives across Britain and Europe, is how to link representative and participatory democracy in an harmonious relationship – at a time when both are recognised to have a legitimate role in governance processes.

### **4.1 RELATIONSHIP OF FULL COUNCIL TO TACA**

For both councillors and others there is concern about a lack of clarity of the respective roles of TACA and councillors sitting as full Council. While the Council is a political forum, TACA should be a forum that drives towards consensus among partners.

In part this issue should be resolved as TACA, working with the Challenge Forums, develops more clarity about its own role as complementary to the role of Council, rather in conflict with it. At the bottom line, Council’s decisions are about Council policy and expenditure; TACA’s decisions are about issues affecting all organisations in greater Aberdeen and how organisations working together, including Aberdeen City Council, can tackle those issues by joint working. TACA can use its broad organisational base, and strategic perspective, to recommend to Council policies and expenditures but only full Council can decide whether to implement those recommendations.

## **Council and TACA – two-way flow of benefits**

Council's benefits to TACA have already been spelt out, but the relationship is very much two-way. Overall, TACA should be a valuable source of information to enable full Council to do its essential task better. For example, the first question asked in the recent Audit Scotland **Audit of Best Value And Community Planning in Dundee** is "Does the council have clear strategic direction?".<sup>19</sup> Later the review questions the Council's record on joint working, raising the concern that, although joint working occurs in the CPP, this does not extend sufficiently across the Council as a whole. Strategic direction and joint working are clearly areas where TACA can assist the Council to achieve higher levels of performance.

Council, including councillors, already have substantial influence on the deliberation of TACA. Similarly, Council should also welcome the influence of TACA on Council business and political deliberation. The heart of the issue is less about who has power - Council alone controls Council policy and expenditure - than about a process of mutual influence and communication.<sup>20</sup>

This trade-off between power and influence extends to financial considerations in that in the city, local authority expenditure is unlikely to be more than a third of total public expenditure, some of which can be influenced through TACA to promote strategic objectives of integrated development. When total flows of money in the city or any one neighbourhood are considered, council expenditure will be around only 10% compared with other public, private and voluntary sector expenditures. Even without this impetus, it should be clear that cooperation between TACA and Council will give rise to better decision-making and political accountability on both sides.

**Because Council is Aberdeen's only city-wide elected body, the links between TACA and Council are important to both organisations. The current arrangements by which party leaders and/or senior members sit on, or attend, TACA should ensure a measure of democratic accountability and communication back from TACA to Council, Committee and party.**

Also care must be taken to ensure that the roles of councillors sitting on Council and on TACA do not become blurred. In the view of a long-standing councillor, councillors sitting on TACA should be "fully committed" to consensual, partnership working.

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<sup>19</sup> Audit Scotland, **Dundee City Council: Audit of Best Value and Community Planning**, 2005.

<sup>20</sup> In the words of Liverpool councillor, "It is in the interest of councils to trade power for influence".

## 4.2 THE AREA COMMITTEE PROPOSAL

In parallel to TACA reviewing its own remit, the role of local councillors in the overall governance structure needs to be considered. There is substantial support among interviewed councillors for the concept of Area Council Committees to give “local councillors a real stake in area-level decisions...especially important after the introduction of multi-member wards”.

By strengthening the governance structure, area committees also strengthen the community planning network. There is a feeling that such Area Committees would be less party-political than full Council - being concerned with tangible local issues, knitting together councillors from different wards and different parties in a common forum.

**Area Committees are a logical addition to Aberdeen’s governance structure and a compliment to community planning, bridging between city-wide partnership and neighbourhood action planning. They provide a level of democratic accountability grounded in practical, local concerns.**

In the words of councillors, Area Committees are said to need “real powers”, “a clear remit” and “money to spend” or they will “just be talking shops”. Assessment of appropriate competences would be on the principle of subsidiarity. Deliberation over this role vis-à-vis full Council could be taken forward in an all-party manner. Previous experience of all-party working in “Organisational Development Task Forces” over committee structure and then services and functions was cited.

The next chapter will argue that Area Committees could play a valuable role in community planning, drawing together and summarising cross-cutting neighbourhood issues in their Area for reporting to TACA and full Council – thus strengthening the all-important linkage between top-down and bottom-up in Aberdeen’s community planning network.

### **Area Committees and Democratic Accountability**

This report has suggested that TACA, through the Alliance and a new Executive, enhance its relationship to Challenge Forums. A similar, positive relationship between TACA and the Area Committees could increase TACA’s democratic accountability to the local electorate. This would require that TACA keep the Area Committees fully informed of its deliberations and decisions, and that in turn, the Alliance or its Executive receive and consolidate information from the Area Committees, which will serve to keep it alerted of local issues and concerns, both of neighbourhood organisations and service providers. The next chapter discusses further linkage between neighbourhoods, areas and TACA.

## **Should Area Committees be Partnerships?**

An initial reaction might suggest that Area Committees ought to replicate TACA at the area level, drawing together councillors and service providers. However a note of caution is indicated.

First, Aberdeen has many active partnerships at the city and neighbourhood levels, so additional partnership is not required. Service providers already committed to TACA and the Challenge Forums are unlikely to want to sit on any other partnerships. This is not to say that service coordination at the Area level is not important, only that it does not require formal partnership to achieve efficient joined-up working to satisfy the requirements of neighbourhood action planning.

There is also an issue of numbers related to the functioning of any partnership. If there are, say, 14 councillors in an Area there is little scope for additional membership of a partnership, given that partnerships of over about 18 people are seldom workable.

How then do the 12 or so neighbourhoods in each area make their views known to the Area Committee? If Area Committees were to meet monthly, an option would be a portion of the agenda of every Area Committee meeting to devoted to receiving a delegation from a single neighbourhood, rotating systematically through the neighbourhoods in the Area. This would give local residents a real opportunity to summarise their Neighbourhood Action Plan and their priorities for Council and partner action. It would also give councillors from a variety of wards and neighbourhoods the opportunity to get to know all the neighbourhoods in their Area.

## 5. COMMUNITY PLANNING AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

### 5.1 GOAL OF INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT

A community planning network needs to be strong in two dimensions. Horizontal integration describes the linkage across organisations and across professional disciplines and areas of expertise - the essence of partnership. Vertical integration, on the other hand, links action at various spatial levels: neighbourhood, area, city and region in a coherent whole.

Without both types of integration, the network doesn't realise the goal of *integrated development* where elements in the system are reinforcing in a positive manner, rather than working against each other. Integrated development is the basic objective of community planning. In this conception, what happens locally, in the neighbourhood and the area, is just as important to the health of the overall system as what happens at the level of the city or region.

As noted, Aberdeen has a significant achievement in supporting neighbourhood action planning in its 37 neighbourhoods, and in decentralising policy and service coordination within its Council to an Area level. This recognition that, in any good sized city, there are functional requirements at both neighbourhood and area levels, and that the two are different, is a factor which puts Aberdeen amongst 'leading edge' councils in implementation of community planning.<sup>21</sup>

Therefore, although area and neighbourhood boundaries may need to be adjusted to accommodate multi-member ward boundaries, the foundations for neighbourhood action planning and area service coordination are sound. Both are key parts of an equation that has potential to deliver local community planning, as required by the Act, and to support city-wide community planning in a bottom-up fashion.

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<sup>21</sup> Some large Scottish urban local authorities are defining 'local' community planning as for area groupings of 50,000 to 70,000 persons, much to the concern of neighbourhood organisations who understand that large groupings of unrelated neighbourhoods are not at all local and invariably fail as a basic level for bottom-up community participation.

## 5.2 IMPORTANCE OF NEIGHBOURHOOD ACTION PLANNING

Neighbourhood Action Planning is a key component of vertical integration. It is important because, because for most citizens, quality of life in the neighbourhood is a key aspect of their overall quality of life. Improvement of life in the neighbourhood ought to be another basic objective of community planning.

The biggest challenge from a local community point-of-view is to ensure that the process of neighbourhood action planning leads steadily, over some years, to genuine improvements in:

- local service delivery, and
- community participation in strategic planning issues which affect the neighbourhood.

In terms of these strategic issues in Aberdeen, a focus group with community representatives conducted during this study found key areas of concern included: city-wide and local transport, the ring road, releasing land for house building, the quality of neighbourhood centres and the run-down of local shopping, capital investment in schools, community centres and youth centres, stock transfer, council housing allocation, anti-social behaviour, and so on. Many of these issues are about policy and planning, rather than service provision *per se*.

A real key to quality community participation is influence over decisions. In the words of the Guidance, a main aim of community planning is:

making sure people and communities are genuinely engaged in the decisions made on public services which affect them.

If people feel they being listened to, preferably early in policy and planning cycles, they genuinely feel involved and positive about governance. Lack of influence, on the other hand, breeds apathy and cynicism about local democracy. Neighbourhood organisations and community councils need to feel that they are at the heart of decision-making.

**Unless Aberdeen's neighbourhoods feel they are genuinely able to influence decisions on service provision and strategic policy and planning as it affects the neighbourhood, local community planning will fail.**

From community representatives, there is much positive feedback on local community planning activities, such as Community Planning Days or Planning for Real, and on working with Neighbourhood Planning Officers. However, will all neighbourhoods intending to have neighbourhood action plans by 2006, a key issue is for these plans to trigger a steady process of improved quality of life through more efficient service provision and through community representatives

feeling they are genuinely influencing strategic decisions and policies which affect the neighbourhood.

**An annual review of progress on each Neighbourhood Action Plan could help foster steady improvements to quality of life in the neighbourhood. Such improvements substantiate the value of community planning.**

### **Reciprocal Social Responsibility**

The results of the annual review would be presented to the Area Committee and the Area Corporate Director, who will liaise with service providers. However it is not only service providers and policy organisations that have responsibilities to improve local quality of life. One benefit of neighbourhood action planning ought to be to build a sense of neighbourhood stewardship by which local people (including school children) and local organisations take increasing responsibility for the area. For example, in neighbourhoods where litter is an issue, community groups and schools should make anti-litter programmes and environmental education a priority, in parallel with improvements to cleaning services.

### **5.3 JOINING NEIGHBOURHOOD TO CITY AT THE AREA LEVEL**

Given that neighbourhood concerns are about both local service provision and strategic decision-making by various partner agencies, it is important that neighbourhoods have a means to connect to TACA and full council in the governance network. A big challenge therefore in vertical integration is how TACA relates in some systematic and efficient manner to all 37 neighbourhoods – not an easy task.

Area Committees, reporting periodically to TACA and/or its Executive, could play a valuable role in assisting this communication in two ways. First, by coordinating and distilling cross-cutting information on the neighbourhoods in their Area and second, by taking a scrutiny role on the response of service providers to neighbourhood concerns as expressed in Neighbourhood Action Plans. Community representatives will certainly want to discuss both local issues and organisational responses.

**Area Committees could be an important link between neighbourhoods and TACA.**

## 6. DELIVERY VEHICLES AND SUPPORT STRUCTURES FOR COMMUNITY PLANNING

### 6.1 SPECIAL PURPOSE REGENERATION VEHICLES

#### Tribal HCH-Burness Report

A substantive report has been prepared on options for an Aberdeen Community Regeneration Strategy delivery mechanism, often called a special purpose vehicle (SPV).<sup>22</sup> It is not the intention here to reiterate the findings of that report but only to comment on them in light of this review. Key points are:

- The Tribal HCH/Burness review is succinct but comprehensive and provides a good starting point for a consideration of options for a special purpose vehicle.
- The report's main recommendation is for an SPV called an Urban Regeneration Company (URC) for Aberdeen, constituted as a company limited by guarantee. Other options are considered for their advantages and disadvantages and reasonably discounted. There is no cause to review these rejected options.
- A number of key informants have expressed reservations about implementation of the report's main recommendation. These are reasonable concerns which may stem from some confusion in the report about the focus and purpose of the URC model, and its position with Aberdeen's governance and community planning framework.
- There are three problems with the manner the URC option is put forward. First, the report suggests at the outset that the URC is not only a masterplanning and delivery vehicle but a "strategic...multi-agency decision-making body". It augments this perception by arguing that "the strategic decision-making body should adopt a citywide approach to regeneration", and states in the **Community Regeneration Strategy** that the implementation of the entire strategy "should be the responsibility of the URC...". This confuses the URC's role with that of TACA, its partners and Council.

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<sup>22</sup> Tribal HCH and Burness, **Aberdeen Community Regeneration Strategy: Delivery Mechanism**, 2004.

- A second concern is the **Community Regeneration Strategy** (para. 5.13) states specifically that a city-wide URC would tackle simultaneously physical regeneration and economic and social regeneration. There is very little evidence anywhere in Britain of URCs so doing, in that the very factor which makes URCs a successful model is a clear, consistent focus on physical regeneration and linkage to the private sector. The report is correct, however, in identifying the URC model as the best option for a physical regeneration programme that includes commercial development, land disposal and redevelopment and private housing.
- The report and the **Community Regeneration Strategy** assumes that once a city-wide URC is put in place, there is no further role for formal organisations such as a constituted Old Torry Partnership, or a locality development trust, but no case is made to substantiate this assertion. An example below from Liverpool shows that city-wide and locality SPVs can coexist effectively.
- The report, taken together with the **Community Regeneration Strategy** (possibly noting lack of Scottish Executive commitment to funding further URCs) implies that the URC would be the appropriate vehicle for overseeing Aberdeen's access to the £175 million Early Action Fund element of the Community Ownership Programme.<sup>23</sup> It is premature to make this assumption, which is also debatable. Once again there is no evidence for the benefits of rolling all SPV-type functions into a single organisation.

## **What is a URC?**

The most common SPV in terms of delivering regeneration objectives is a company limited by guarantee and called a URC. However, what invariably defines a URC is designation by government which carries with it a substantial injection of public funds, combined with a land holding available for disposal or development within the local public sector, with which to lever in private investment.

The Scottish Executive and the ODPM provide guidance on the structure of a Scottish URC. They are independent companies with the liability of the contributing parties limited by guarantee and not by shares. The contributing parties contribute resources to the URC, but the company is independent from them. The URC can, for example, hire new staff or develop and implement its own investment strategy for an area without seeking agreement from all the contributing partners to those actions.

**URCs are mainly a business organization focused on land acquisition and**

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<sup>23</sup> See para. 69, **Aberdeen Community Regeneration Strategy: Executive Summary**, pg. xviii.

**disposal, physical regeneration, local master planning, construction management and provision of local, physical infrastructure.**<sup>24</sup>

URCs have a board and a small, executive team. In Scotland a board, usually about 12 persons, could include representatives of the Local Authority, the Enterprise Network, the private sector and, possibly, Communities Scotland.<sup>25</sup> There is no reason, however, why other partners such as community organisations, the voluntary sector, police, fire, or NHS interests could not be involved.

Although a company limited by guarantee is the usual model for URCs, because it is the model most readily understood by the private sector. As the Tribal HCH report notes, there are other ways in which they could be constituted including as a joint venture company, an industrial and provident society (IPS) or as a development trust. However, there is currently no apparent advantage to IPS or development trust status for these functions, although development trusts can play an important role in community-controlled local development.<sup>26</sup>

### **Are There Strategic SPVs?**

Aside from UDCs, the great majority of SPVs are URCs which focus on one specific locality within the local authority area. There are exceptions. For example, Liverpool has had a UDC for its city centre called Liverpool Vision since 1999. However Liverpool also has an SPV, Liverpool Land Development Corporation (LDDC), which has prioritized physical regeneration in five strategic investment areas (SIAs) of the city. In four of these five areas, the company is the lead agency responsible for the delivery of major physical regeneration projects. In the city centre it assists Liverpool Vision. The SIAs were identified as Liverpool's key areas for potential business growth with the help of European Objective 1 funding.

The LDDC has four staff and a Board of 11 persons: three councilors including the Leader, the City's Chief Executive, three representatives of the private sector,

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<sup>24</sup> URCs are not be confused with a small number of Urban Development Corporations (UDCs) in England, which take over some statutory planning functions from local authorities, for example, development control in Milton Keynes. UDCs are limited-life, non-departmental *public* bodies established under the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980. They were tasked with regeneration of designated areas and the first round were wound up by the mid-1990s. In the 2003 **Sustainable Communities Plan**, the Government stated that it would establish new mechanisms to drive forward development, specifically UDCs. Since then UDCs have been established in East London (covering the Olympic site) and Northamptonshire. An Urban Development Area, similar to a UDC, has been established in Milton Keynes.

<sup>25</sup> Currently there is confusion over whether Communities Scotland representatives can join a company board. The Guidance suggests the answer is yes, but in practice staff are unsure. The Clydebank Re-built URC has a Communities Scotland Area Manager on its Board.

<sup>26</sup> For further information see the website of the Development Trusts Association.

two from English Partnerships and two from the Northwest Development Agency. LLDC is a company limited by guarantee and is wholly owned by its three partners: Liverpool City Council, English Partnerships and the Northwest Development Agency.

Once again it is important to note that LDDC is concerned almost solely with physical regeneration based on control of land assets. At a strategic level above this, Liverpool's City Council, working with the LSP, has a strong strategic vision and plan for the city which is the overarching framework within which the SPV operates. The LDDC, like the URC, is a mechanism for delivery of physical regeneration. Finally, in terms of LLDC, it is important to flag up the pivotal role of English Partnerships as a well-resourced partner with a large, expert staff complement across the country, and with a relatively independent status arms-length from Government. Scotland has no comparable national regeneration organisation, particularly as there is confusion about whether Communities Scotland can sit on company boards.

### **Current Scottish Policy on URCs**

Although 21 new URCs were recently announced for England by English Partnerships<sup>27</sup>, there are currently only three pilot URC Pathfinder in Scotland (Craigmillar, Raploch and Clydebank). Each has received either £6m. or £7m. in special funding from the Scottish Executive. Two, Craigmillar and Raploch, are deprived, former Council estates, while Clydebank includes mainly extensive reclaimed industrial land with other mixed uses.

PARC Craigmillar Ltd. gives an example of URC activity. Following a Masterplan Framework Document which was formally adopted by the Council in 2001, the Company has now set out to create around 3200 mixed tenure new homes, a new secondary school, and three new primary schools, a new town centre with 300,000 sq ft of retail, leisure and office space, a new library, and community and life long learning facilities. The Company is also responsible for ensuring delivery of an appropriate infrastructure for the area, integration of existing public and local authority provision and the creation of new landscaping, public parks and civic spaces. It is important to note the Craigmillar URC does not replace or duplicate the SIP (now CRF) funded Craigmillar Partnership, which continues to be the main method of community development and participation.

In terms of control of URCs and political accountability, the board make-up gives a good idea of local intentions. For Clydebank Re-built Ltd. the Board consists of 3 councillors, including the Leader of the Council, four representatives of Scottish Enterprise Dunbartonshire, three representatives of the private sector, and a representative of Communities Scotland, all chaired by the local M.P. According

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<sup>27</sup> by Margaret Ford, Chairman of the national regeneration agency, English Partnerships, in July, 2005.

to Scottish Executive guidance, almost any organisation that sits on a CPP would also be eligible to join a URC board.

In terms of future URCs, the Scottish Executive states (as of October, 2005) that no further Pathfinders are planned at present, pending review of the existing three. At present there is no commitment whatever to further funding for URCs. This is not to imply, however, that Aberdeen could not set up a URC as a company limited by guarantee, or as an Industrial and Provident Society or Development Trusts. However there would be no additional Scottish Executive funding.

### **Summary of URC Advantages**

Given a clear organisational framework, and 'chain of command' of TACA partners and Council to an SPV Board, such special purpose vehicles have following advantages:

- They develop a common physical regeneration agenda and promote this with a single voice and strong leadership;
- They understand the private sector, and can lever in new investment by coordinating public and private action;
- They can move from plan to action quickly;
- They are independent of politics; and
- They can encourage pooling of resources to realise strategic objectives.

Of course, the SPV's very advantage - of being independent of politics - can also appear to be a cause for concern in terms of democratic accountability. However, experience in England, such as in Liverpool and Hull, suggests that, where the role of the URC is clearly set out, initial apprehension of council and councillors is not borne out in the implementation of the SPV.<sup>28</sup>

### **URC Engagement With Local Communities And Communities Of Interest**

The main benefits of the URC/SPV is in linking the private to the public sector in an environment conducive to inward investment and physical regeneration. Given this, they are not on the whole organisations that engage directly with community organisations on a sustained basis. Other organisational structures, such as SIP Boards, local forums and, at the city level, communities of interest and the Civic Forum representation on TACA are more appropriate to this objective.

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<sup>28</sup> This is based on key informant interviews in the English round one of URCs in Hull and Liverpool.

## SPV for Aberdeen?

If Aberdeen requires a formal special purpose vehicle (SPV) to deliver the physical aspects of its Community Regeneration Strategy, the company limited by guarantee is the most appropriate option compared with others.<sup>29</sup> However, while there is nothing to fear from the establishment of a SPV for Aberdeen, the business case needs to be made. The following questions need to be answered:

- Is there a sufficient physical regeneration agenda in the six priority areas, including land acquisition and disposal activity, need for masterplanning and implementation and opportunity to lever in private sector investment matched with public sector funding to warrant setting up a SPV?
- In the absence of special funding for a URC from the Scottish Executive, are there sufficient financial and land resources within the public and quasi-public sector in Aberdeen to fund a stand-alone SPV?
- Is a SPV the most appropriate vehicle to take a citywide view of development requirements and the options for securing inward investment, or would some non-constituted relationship, say TACA working closely with NESEF, be the appropriate option?
- Given the optimum focus of the URC on physical regeneration, are there additional organisational arrangements necessary to give a voice to neighbourhood organisations and communities of interest?
- Is it appropriate to establish one formal SPV to work across the city as proposed,<sup>30</sup> or oversee the master planning process for each of the six priority areas (and possibly the city centre), or would it be better in terms of the overall benefit stream to have a range of formal and informal options, such as the Old Torry Partnership in one area, and a development trust in another, tailored to local requirements?

On the latter point, it is worth noting that existing designated URCs, unlike UDCs, are generally established to work in a specified area of a city rather than as a city-wide organisation. In Hull for example, its URC's area of activity is confined to the city centre and its adjacent, underutilised waterfront. In Edinburgh, its URC works on a single peripheral estate, in association with the SIP, while in its Granton/Pilton waterfront area there is a different joint venture company, a SIP and an informal strategic coordinating group. In Aberdeen it appears that while the Old Torry Partnership may extend to being a Torry Partnership, there is little interest in broadening its scope beyond this, partly because it would become detached from local interests.

**The key to successful community planning is to link sophisticated strategy to commitment to practical implementation. Various formal and informal**

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<sup>29</sup> There are more options, such as Limited Liability Partnerships, Community Interest Companies and Charitable Incorporated Organisations but they are untested and not, as yet, relevant. See **Scotregen**, issue 29, 2005.

<sup>30</sup> Or city-region, if Aberdeen City Council owns land outwith its boundaries.

**options for implementation (or delivery) are relevant, including special purpose vehicles. TACA and its new Executive is the appropriate venue to consider this issue.**

**A special purpose vehicle set up as company limited by guarantee may be an appropriate option for delivering the physical regeneration components of the Aberdeen's Community Regeneration Strategy, but the business and organisational case has yet to be made.**

## **6.2 CORPORATE GOVERNANCE AND COMMUNITY PLANNING**

### **Corporate Governance for TACA.**

A primary step in improving corporate governance is the preparation of a consensual protocol, code of conduct (or rules of engagement) that sets out guiding principles for partnership operation.<sup>31</sup> These would include such factors as:

- The appropriate membership of the Alliance, and other mechanisms for participation
- Guiding principles for conducting Alliance meetings in a fair, effective and efficient manner
- The responsibilities of the Executive and its relationship to the Alliance and Challenge Forums
- The responsibilities of partner members
- The membership and conduct of Challenge Forums
- The responsibilities of the Chair and Vice Chair
- The relationship between TACA and other organisations within the community planning network

The Code of Conduct should be straightforward and succinct. Here the lessons from English Local Strategic Partnerships is relevant:

...the most important aspects of partnership – building understanding and trust between very different organisations and individuals, and building consensus around shared action – could be seriously jeopardised by a huge rule-book and a bureaucratic preoccupation with paperwork, terms of reference, constitutions, legal rules and protocols. It would be wrong to embark on highly complex corporate governance structures and rule-systems without being clear about the needs for these rules, and the right balance of rules and flexibility given the actual LSP model in use.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> The Civic Forum has a Code of Conduct for representatives serving on other bodies.

<sup>32</sup> ODPM, **Evaluation of Local Strategic Partnerships: Interim Report**, 2005, p.46.

## **Corporate Governance in TACA Partner Organisations**

The LGiS Act is clear about the responsibilities of organisations required to participate in community planning. For those bodies mentioned in section 16(1) of the Act, the emphasis is on ensuring that they engage with the Community Planning partnership covering their area on an on-going basis. Specifically, they are required to assist the local authority in its facilitation role. They are also required to:

be prepared to make their own distinctive contribution to realising the objectives and outcomes agreed collectively by the partnership. This may entail taking a leadership role on certain facilitation tasks and/or policy issues on behalf of the partnership.

There is likely to be increasing attention to auditing this commitment of local authorities and statutory partners. It is the Auditor General for Scotland (AGS) who has audit responsibility. Audit Scotland will work with the AGS to ensure that auditors working to both AGS and the Accounts Commission jointly seek to resolve issues. In the event that an audit were to find that community planning was not working well in a particular area, and that the performance of non-council public sector bodies was implicated, these conclusions would be included in the audit report to the Commission.

The importance of adjusting corporate governance, policy and planning in partners organisations to the requirements of community planning is stressed within the Guidance pursuant to the Act:

Community Planning should also be embedded within the business processes of individual partner organisations. For example, in a Council context, the Council Corporate Plan should reflect the content of the Community Plan and relate the Council's contribution to it (any 'Council-only' issues should also be reflected in the Council Corporate Plan). Service plans will have their direction set by the Council corporate plan and will therefore also reflect priorities set within the Community Plan. In line with the ethos of Community Planning, individual organisations' business plans should be made available to partners to engender shared understanding.

Similarly any 'area' or decentralised service plans should be consistent with, and aim to develop, the key themes of the Community Plan.

Although, as noted, there are concerns for the future of community planning in Aberdeen, there is also strong commitment amongst most partner organizations to its successful, on-going achievement. There is also evidence from many TACA

partner organisations that their commitment extends to adjusting corporate governance and policy to contribute to community planning. As the operation of partnership and the development of sophisticated strategy improves in TACA, this should reinforce such commitment.

However a main constraint on this local commitment for Aberdeen organisations working in a national structure is the lack of reinforcing commitment from 'headquarters' which recognizes that community planning and local partnership working takes time. Very often little or no time is available to be allocated to community planning compared with achievement of national objectives, tasks and targets. The problem is particularly severe for those organisations which participate in more than one community planning partnership.

**A main constraint on local commitment to community planning for Aberdeen organisations working in a national structure is the lack of reinforcing commitment from 'headquarters' which recognizes that community planning and local partnership working takes time but pays benefits. This issue will be particularly challenging if this report's recommendations on broadening the base of leadership in TACA are agreed.**

## 7. AN ACTION PLAN FOR TACA

### First Round of Innovation

- Organise an away-day for TACA partners and other key players, including a good range of councillors and community representatives, to consider this report, the focus and mission of TACA and its organisational arrangements.
- An Executive should be established to lead and manage TACA. It should meet monthly. Consideration should be given to merging the role of the Lead Officers Group with that of the Executive, or making the Lead Officer Group a resource which works to the Executive's requirements.
- TACA should consider a rotating arrangement for chairing the Alliance, on a two year basis, and the appointment of a Vice-Chair.
- TACA should consider hiring two dedicated staff, a Partnership Manager and personal assistant, for an initial period of two years. Funding commitments from partners need to be secured.
- Regular and special TACA meetings should rotate venues to broaden the 'ownership' of such events.
- Close liaison between Challenge Forums, TACA and its Executive should be fostered.
- A sub-committee of TACA (which could be the Reference Group or NESEF) should consider whether one or more formally-constituted special purpose vehicles could generate real benefits in implementing the physical regeneration aspects of the Community Regeneration Strategy. Discussions with the Scottish Executive could be appropriate.
- Council should continue its initiative for 'supported induction' of community representatives to Challenge Forums, exploring some formal programmes such the 'citizens academies' mentioned in Demos. With its Civic Forum, Aberdeen could become 'leading edge' in this aspect of citizen empowerment.
- As part of refocusing its role, TACA should consider the quality of communication about partnership and strategy. It should consider publishing a brief, half-yearly newsletter reporting succinctly on TACA's deliberations and activities.

- The Citizens Panel and the Virtual Panel could make an increasingly important contribution to strategic planning and decision-making by TACA.
- The report notes that a constraint on community planning for Aberdeen organisations working in a national structure is the lack of reinforcing commitment from national headquarters which recognizes that community planning takes time but pays benefits. Joint lobbying should be considered.

### **Second Round of Innovation**

- TACA should consider a new approach to preparing ***Aberdeen futures*** to make a succinct, hard-headed analysis of key issues and the way forward for joint working.
- TACA should plan a series of public seminars or conferences on key issues facing Aberdeen
- The relationship between the proposed Area Council Committees and the overall community planning and governance structure should be explored.
- TACA and the Council should explore whether the power to advance well-being under the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 offers opportunities for substantial innovation in community planning processes.

### **Subsequent Innovation**

- In 2008 or thereafter, review again the benefits and costs of formal incorporation of TACA.



# The Aberdeen City Alliance

**Development Plan 06**

## The Aberdeen City Alliance Development Plan

issue	action	tasks	timescale	responsible
<p><b>Clarity of Purpose</b> A concern expressed by partners is lack of clarity about the appropriate role of TACA in fostering the development of Aberdeen and its people, and in leading the community planning network throughout the city. TACA is said to be not making best use of the human resources committed to it. The report recommends that TACA develop a new clarity of purpose and priority to enable it to use wisely the knowledge and skills of partners. It recommends that TACA re-launch its role in a strategic mode - as identifying key priorities where joint working between partners will give value-added in the achievement of a clearly articulated development strategy. This should be expressed in a new, sharp and succinct Community Plan.</p>	<p>Develop a 'clarity of purpose' statement which clearly support the move to TACA becoming more strategically focused.</p>	<p>Develop a 'clarity of purpose' statement for consideration by TACA.</p>	<p>TACA meeting - May 06</p>	<p>Kath Beveridge/Hazel Spalding</p>
	<p>Agree 4 or 5 strategic priorities for the City taking into account the Strategic priorities for the North East which have been developed by the North East Scotland Joint Public Sector Group.</p>	<p>Develop a process paper which details the set of actions TACA will take to develop it's strategic priorities including opportunities for facilitated discussion and consultation to gain agreement within the City for the priorities.</p>	<p>TACA meeting - March 06 <b>COMPLETED</b></p>	<p>Ailsa Duncan Ally Spence Jackie Wilkins Rhonda Kelly Alison Spearman</p>
	<p>This will be led by the Exec group</p>	<p>Refreshed Community Plan will detail how TACA will deliver the strategic priorities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organise seminars etc to launch refreshed Community Plan.</li> </ul>	<p>Autumn 06</p>	<p>Exec Group</p>
	<p>Once strategic priorities have been agreed, publish a refreshed Community Plan.</p> <p>Map Forums across the City and North East to determine which of these have a strategic outlook which impacts on the region as a whole.</p>	<p>Update previous work</p>	<p>TACA May meeting</p>	<p>Rhonda Kelly</p>

<p><b>More Opportunities For Dialogue And Debate</b> The main resource available to TACA is the people who attend its meetings, and their links as leaders to networks around the city. Therefore the quality of face-to-face meetings is a key to the success of community planning. It notes concerns about the style and content of TACA meetings. In addition to recommendations for refocusing TACA meetings, the report recommends opportunities for 'away days' and open seminars and/or conferences on key issues.</p>	<p>Meetings will be held in community settings.</p> <p>An annual away day for TACA will be established to review progress and set strategic priorities for the coming year.</p> <p>Establish a quarterly newsletter.</p> <p>To review the challenge forums in terms of their purpose, level of activity/achievement, methods, interaction with one another, and that this be underpinned by the principles of best value and performance management.</p> <p>Opportunities for seminars and conferences will be fostered.</p>	<p>Find suitable venues for TACA meetings around the City.</p> <p>This will be provide an opportunity to review the current priorities and set priorities for the coming year.Schedule away day for 2007.</p> <p>Set up editorial/news gathering Board.</p> <p>The adoption of strategic priorities will prompt a refocusing of Forums to deliver the priorities. This in turn will prompt a process of self assessment to respond to the new challenge.</p> <p>Challenge Forums and Networks to consider a programme of open seminar/debates.</p>	<p>Completed for o6</p> <p>Plan in autumn o6</p>	<p>Ailsa Duncan Vikki Cuthbert</p> <p>Exec Group</p> <p>Partnership Manager (when appointed)</p> <p>Partnership Manager (when appointed)</p> <p>Partnership Manager (when appointed)</p>
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<p><b>Proposed Executive</b> TACA requires strong leadership and regular management to achieve maximum benefit. The establishment of a Partnership Executive is recommended. This would ruthlessly shape TACA's agenda to maximise the benefits of deliberation in the larger partnership meeting. The Executive would have a watching brief over the work of the Challenge Forums, taking reports on their progress on strategy and bringing to TACA's attention important messages from them.</p>	<p>Establish an Executive Committee who will develop TACA's agendas and plan meetings.</p>	<p>A paper detailing options for the make up of the Executive, role and remit to be developed for consideration by TACA.</p>	<p>TACA meeting - March 06 <b>COMPLETED</b></p> <p><b>Exec Group to be established – April 06</b></p>	<p>Kath Beveridge</p>
<p><b>Support Organisations to TACA</b> The Challenge Forums represent a valuable, extended resource for strategic planning and partnership working. Close liaison between Challenge Forums, TACA and its Executive is recommended. The Civic Forum, through its linkage to TACA, community councils and communities of interest, is a valuable partner to TACA with its work at the leading edge of community participation in Scotland. The City's Citizens Panel and the Virtual Panel could also make an increasingly important contribution to strategic planning and decision-making by TACA.</p>	<p>Continued support for the 'supported induction' of community representatives to Challenge Forums.</p> <p>Support for the Citizen's Panel and Virtual Panel.</p> <p>Closer liaison between Challenge Forums, TACA and its Executive to be fostered.</p>	<p>Explore formal programme such as 'citizens'academies'.</p> <p>Financial support is secured for the Panels.</p> <p>To be discussed and progressed at Executive.</p>		<p>Lifelong Learning and Getting Involved Forums</p> <p>Partnership Manager (when appointed)</p>

<p><b>Time for Change</b> While there is widespread appreciation by partners for the effort the Council has put into getting TACA up and running, many participants in the community planning network, both in and outwit the Council, feel that it is an appropriate time to strengthen TACA by giving it a more independent position. Arms-length status would create the opportunity for non-Council partners to play a more active role, including sharing TACA's leadership role as well as contributing financially or in-kind to its operation.</p>	<p>TACA meetings (regular and special) will be held in venues across the City.</p> <p>TACA and the Council to explore testing The Power to Advance Wellbeing.</p>	<p>TACA meetings for the remainder of 2006 to be held in non Council venues.</p> <p>Identify a suitable issue to progress. Shortlist to be developed</p>	<p>completed</p>	<p>Ailsa Duncan Vikki Cuthbert</p> <p>Legal Network when established</p>
<p><b>Chairing of TACA</b> The report also notes appreciation at the commitment of successive Leaders of the Council to chairing TACA. At the same time, there is a feeling that if a clear message is to be sent that TACA belongs to all its partners, then rotating chairing arrangements would broaden the leadership base of the partnership, and make more individuals and organisations 'champions' of community planning in Aberdeen. The report recommends that TACA consider a rotating arrangement for chairing the Alliance, on a two year basis, and the appointment of a Vice-Chair.</p>	<p>The Chair will rotate. The appointment of the Chair will reflect the strategic priorities agreed for the year.</p> <p>A Vice Chair will be established. It is anticipated that the Vice Chair will succeed the Chair.</p>	<p>A paper detailing the role and remit of the Chair and Vice Chair to be developed in conjunction with the paper proposing the make up of the Executive.</p>	<p>TACA meeting - March 06 <b>COMPLETED</b></p>	<p>Kath Beveridge</p>

<p><b>Staffing of TACA</b> The study finds a perception across most key informants that TACA needs its own staff, if it is to be more independent of the Council. The appointment of a senior Partnership Manager, with a personal assistant, is recommended with the posts to be funded jointly by a number of partners.</p>	<p>The post of Partnership Manager will be established, along with a post for a personal assistant.</p>	<p>Job descriptions with detailed costs will be prepared.</p> <p>Further work on the job descriptions and secure finance from partners.</p>	<p>TACA meeting - March 06 <b>COMPLETED</b></p>	<p>Kath Beveridge Jackie Wilkins</p> <p>Exec Group</p>
<p><b>Constitutional and Legal Status for TACA</b> The analysis finds no evidence at the current time that TACA would benefit from, or be able to meet Ministerial requirements for, its formal incorporation as a company limited by guarantee. Rather there is evidence from both England and Scotland, including from a review of more than three hundred Local Strategic Partnerships, that the quality of partnership, and commitment to it, is far more important than any legal arrangements.</p>	<p>No constitutional or legal status will be sought for TACA at present.</p>			
<p><b>Relation of TACA to Council.</b> There are concerns about a blurring of the distinction between Council and TACA, and about the politicisation of TACA debate. This should be countered by clarity in the respective role of TACA and Council and by recognition of a clear two-way flow of benefits from one organisation to the other. The benefits are enumerated.</p>	<p>Clarity of purpose (see above) will be communicated to elected members. The concern regarding the politicisation of TACA debate will be communicated to elected members on TACA.</p>	<p>Elected members to be informed.</p>	<p>March 06</p>	<p>Kath Beveridge Cllr Kate Dean</p>

<p><b>Area Council Committees</b> The quality of the total governance framework in Aberdeen affects the quality of community planning. Area Committees are a logical addition to Aberdeen's governance structure and a compliment to community planning, bridging between city-wide partnership and neighbourhood action planning. They provide a level of democratic accountability grounded in practical, local concerns. The report suggests why Area Committees should not be partnerships.</p>	<p>TACA partners acknowledged that this is a decision for the Council, but agreed to support the Council decision.</p>	<p>The level of partner participation in local decision making structures to be explored.</p>		
<p><b>Community Planning at the Local Level</b> The achievements of neighbourhood action planning are stressed but the report says that unless Aberdeen's neighbourhoods feel they are genuinely able <i>to influence decisions</i> on service provision <i>and</i> strategic policy and planning as it affects the neighbourhood, local community planning will not succeed.</p>	<p>Achievements will be communicated.</p>	<p>Aberdeen City Council will take this forward when developing plans for Area Committees.</p> <p>To be taken into consideration when jointly reporting/communicating on the delivery of the Neighbourhood Community Action Plans.</p>		<p>Lead Officers Group and NCPOs</p>

<p><b>Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV): Cart before the Horse?</b> Many partners and participants argue that revitalisation of TACA needs to take place before a consensual view on the value of either a city-wide, or more spatially focused, SPV is appropriate. An SPV set up as company limited by guarantee may be an appropriate option for delivering the physical regeneration components of the Aberdeen's Community Regeneration Strategy, but the business case needs further examination by TACA, its Executive and Council, particularly as the Scottish Executive will not commit, at the present, to funding any further URCs.</p>	<p>To be considered by TACA once DTZ have delivered the masterplans.</p>	<p>Referred to the Project Board for Regeneration to consider all the options.</p>		<p>Project Board</p>
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<p><b>Urban Regeneration Company (URC) Proposal</b> The Tribal HCH/Burness review provides a starting point for a consideration of options. However there are limitations. First, the suggestion that the proposed URC is not only a delivery vehicle but a strategic, decision-making body confuses the URC's role with that of TACA and Council. Also of concern is the intention that a city-wide URC would tackle physical with economic and social regeneration. There is little evidence anywhere in Britain of URCs so doing, in that what makes URC a successful model is a consistent focus on physical regeneration. Finally, the assumption that once a city-wide URC is put in place, there is no need for area-specific SPVs is unsubstantiated. An example from Liverpool shows that city-wide and locality SPVs can coexist effectively.</p>	<p>See above Special delivery Vehicle.</p>	<p>See above Special delivery Vehicle.</p>		
<p><b>National Corporate Governance</b> A main constraint on local commitment to community planning for Aberdeen organisations working in a national structure is the lack of reinforcing commitment from 'national headquarters' which recognizes that community planning and local partnership working takes time but pays benefits. This issue will be particularly challenging if this report's recommendations on broadening the base of leadership in TACA are agreed.</p>	<p>The position of the Grampian wide partners is acknowledged. and opportunities for joint lobbying to be developed</p>	<p>Opportunities for joint lobbying to be developed. This could be built on a previous lobby campaign.</p>		<p>Rhonda Kelly to investigate the current status of the campaign.</p>

