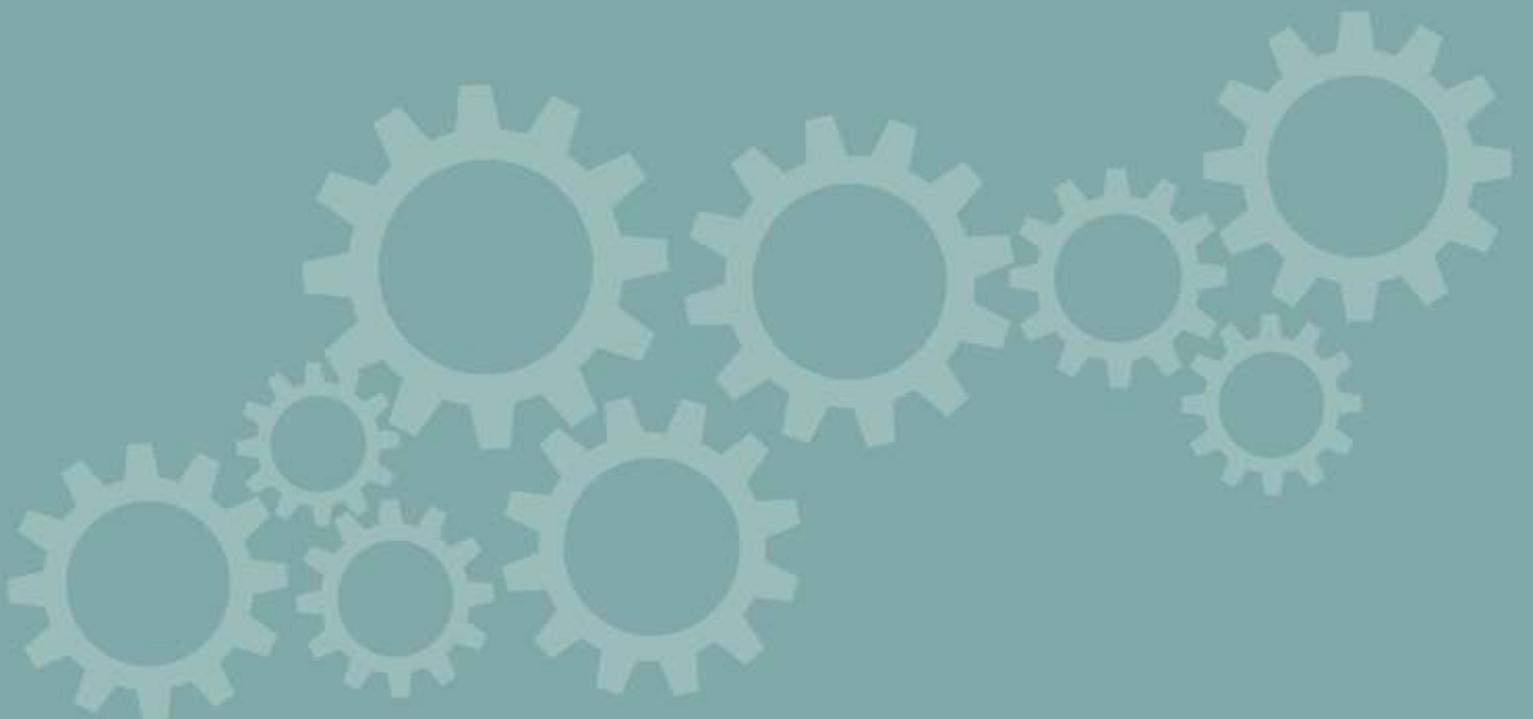# Insights from 'Your Community' - a place-based approach to public service reform

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What Works Scotland (WWS) aims to improve the way local areas in Scotland use evidence to make decisions about public service development and reform.

We are working with Community Planning Partnerships involved in the design and delivery of public services (Aberdeenshire, Fife, Glasgow and West Dunbartonshire) to:

- learn what is and what isn't working in their local area
- encourage collaborative learning with a range of local authority, business, public sector and community partners
- better understand what effective policy interventions and effective services look like
- promote the use of evidence in planning and service delivery
- help organisations get the skills and knowledge they need to use and interpret evidence
- create case studies for wider sharing and sustainability

A further nine areas are working with us to enhance learning, comparison and sharing. We will also link with international partners to effectively compare how public services are delivered here in Scotland and elsewhere. During the programme, we will scale up and share more widely with all local authority areas across Scotland.

WWS brings together the Universities of Glasgow and Edinburgh, other academics across Scotland, with partners from a range of local authorities and:

- Glasgow Centre for Population Health
- Improvement Service
- Inspiring Scotland
- IRISS (Institution for Research and Innovation in Social Services)
- NHS Education for Scotland
- NHS Health Scotland
- NHS Health Improvement for Scotland
- Scottish Community Development Centre
- SCVO (Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations)

For the purpose of this evaluation project, What Works Scotland (WWS) worked with five members of the Communities Team (West Dunbartonshire Council) to establish a Communities Partnership Innovation Team (PIT). Christina McMellon, an independent researcher with expertise in Contribution Analysis, facilitated the work with the Communities Team. Suzanne Greer, who also co-authored this report, provided coordination and leadership from West Dunbartonshire Council. Claire Bynner, What Works Scotland Research Associate, managed the project.

This is one of a series of papers published by What Works Scotland to share evidence, learning and ideas about public service reform. This paper relates to the What Works Scotland **Collaborative Action Research** work stream.

Contents

Executive summary

This report presents the findings from an interim evaluation of *Your Community*, a neighbourhood-level, place-based approach to public service reform in West Dunbartonshire. The community planning partnership piloted *Your Community* in 2014-2015 across 17 community council areas. The new approach was aimed at supporting communities to become more sustainable, thriving, and aspirational, and to improve service delivery. The evaluation was conducted as a Collaborative Action Research project with the Communities Team of West Dunbartonshire Council, facilitated by What Works Scotland. What Works Scotland researchers worked with local practitioners to co-design the research methods, analyse results and write the evaluation report.

The aim of the evaluation was to identify those aspects of *Your Community* that were showing progress and potential, and aspects that were proving challenging, using an approach called contribution analysis (CA). Contribution analysis is a form of theory-based evaluation that is used to examine the inputs, processes and outcomes of a complex initiative. The process includes creating a logic model that describes how 'in theory' inputs and activities within a programme or project lead to outcomes. The resulting 'theory of change' is a tool that can be used for ongoing learning, reflection as the programme evolves.

This report provides insights into experiences and process of implementing the *Your Community* programme. The findings discussed in this report are likely to be of interest to practitioners and policy makers with an interest in place-based approaches, public service reform, collaborative governance and community empowerment. The original evaluation report was written for local community planning partners in the case-site area. This report has been summarised and adapted for publication by What Works Scotland.

Overview of key findings

- In general, the public service partners and communities who engaged in *Your Community* recognised the value and potential of working more collaboratively on solutions to local problems.
- Staff and partners felt that greater consideration needs to be given to the level of inputs required including **sustained resources** - **budgets, staff time and capacity** to deliver meaningful and impactful change.
- Issues of capacity to undertake a major programme of reform are particularly pertinent at a time of **institutional flux and high staff turnover** as local authorities restructure departments, services and job roles. This instability impedes the ability of staff and partners to develop and sustain new place-based approaches that rely on long-term relationships.
- Place-based approaches need **flexibility in delivery and geographical targeting** in recognition of both the considerable time it takes to build **trusting relationships**

between local services and with communities, and **highly localised nature of disadvantage.**

- The evaluation found evidence that the activities undertaken as part of the *Your Community* programme facilitated small improvements in partnership working through **increased awareness of local needs and new contacts.**

- Understanding and responding to complex needs and priorities at a neighbourhood level requires ongoing **professional development and support for members of staff who have a key role as public participation professionals.**

- **Greater clarity is needed around the roles of community planning partners** especially in relation to facilitating public engagement and responding to the issues raised through public engagement processes.

- Learning from the past and evaluation of the present is key to developing new and innovative place-based approaches such as *Your Community*. A ***theory of change*** approach can provide a useful tool and basis for **ongoing self-evaluation**.

In order to make further progress, respondents stressed that there is a need for:

  o **a shared vision** to be promoted at **all service levels and across partners** with emphasis on the potential human impact of this reform process
  o greater understanding of the new opportunities represented by the **Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015**.

Introduction

Your Community is an example of a place-based approach to public service reform that aligns to the Christie Commission's (2011) asmbition for public services to be more responsive to local needs and aspirations. The argument for a place-based approach is that place is 'a magnet for partnership and the basis for stronger community participation' (Scottish Government, 2011:10). Yet there is little evidence of place-based interventions that have achieved improvements to public services, while at the same time reducing public spending (Bynner, 2016). Both Audit Scotland (2016) and the Improvement Service (2016) have highlighted the need for evaluation to be built into the design of place-based working to assess when and how these approaches are likely to have the greatest impact on communities.

In this report, we aim to capture insights from a collaborative evaluation of an innovative place-based model developed in a single community planning partnership. The findings provide an opportunity to consider the design and resourcing options and implications of place-based working. Arguably, the need for more evidence of what works in place-based approaches has increased urgency given the external political and financial challenge of reduced public budgets alongside the unknown future of Brexit**.**

This report is structured into four main sections: the background and development of the *Your Community* approach; the Evaluation method; the Evaluation Findings section, which includes the theory of change and the results from each of the seven stages; and a final section with Further Reflections and implications for place-based working.

The *Your Community* approach

Your Community was developed in West Dunbartonshire as a new localised approach to public service reform. The aim of this approach was to support communities to become "more sustainable, thriving and aspirational". There were two key elements to the approach:

- To improve the coordination and responsiveness of local services with an emphasis on efficiency.
- To support the development of empowered and engaged communities active in the design and delivery of services to the area.

Since the issues that *Your Community* is concerned with were not restricted to a particular topic or theme, this approach could be described as a holistic. The aim was to address issues that are complex and interconnected across a range of issues and service areas.

Your Community emerged from a comprehensive review of Community Planning Partnership (CPP) arrangements in 2013 and a corporate desire within West Dunbartonshire Council to improve local public engagement. Following the CPP review a series of Listening Events were organised as an initial attempt to improve public engagement at a local level. The Communities Team invited local residents to come to Listening Events and raise their issues and concerns with council officers. The events were very poorly attended and it was quickly recognised that a new and different approach to public engagement was needed.

A steering group including senior managers and CPP partners undertook the design of Your Community. The programme was originally named 'neighbourhood management' which was the name originally given to a form of housing estate management developed in England in the early 2000s that targeted cleansing, environment and safety issues (Power, 2004). Rather than targeting interventions within a few streets or blocks of housing, *Your Community* was designed to cover a wider administrative area and to address a wider range of issues.

The design of *Your Community* also drew on place-based approaches developed in other local authority areas, in particular the Vibrant Communities programme in East Ayrshire. This model involved a structured process to develop five-year plan community-led action plans. In each area, the process began by inviting expressions of interest from local residents in setting up a Steering Group. As part of the information gathering process, a community survey was carried out, also stakeholder interviews, using evidence from community profiles, holding a community event to agree local priorities working towards developing a community action plan for each area. The structured and coherent nature of this approach was intuitively very appealing to policy makers and Vibrant Communities and received considerable attention from other local authority areas.

The Communities Team in West Dunbartonshire Council were tasked with implementing and developing a new model for the West Dunbartonshire Community Planning Partnership (CPP). Staff received support from Richard Whetton at the Improvement Service and professionals who have led reform programmes in other authority areas. CPP discussions on the best way to deliver a model at both local and strategic level led to the agreement to work with all services across the community planning partnership and with a local focus at the level of community council areas. It was felt that these sub-authority administrative areas would be more identifiable for local communities. The Strategic Board approved the *Your Community* model in June 2013.

Your Community aimed to engage the following services and organisations in a new form of place-based working:

Public Reassurance*	Communities Team	Customer Services	Education	Housing	Libraries	Planning	Police	Roads	Waste	Housing Associations	Community Development Trusts	Community and voluntary sector support organisations

*Public reassurance teams work with Police Scotland. They engage with communities and formulate appropriate problem-solving approaches in areas that are affected by high levels of anti-social behaviour and crime.

The following community and voluntary groups were recognised as having a key role in the success of the programme:

Community councils	Community development trusts	Parent and child groups	Sports clubs	Tenants' and residents' associations	Youth groups	Other groups

The programme created a new geography of locality working at the level of community council areas (of which there are 17 in West Dunbartonshire). Initially there were three Operational Groups each covering five or six neighbourhoods. Later, this was reduced to two groups to reduce the burden of meetings on front line officers. The Operational Groups brought a range of community planning partners together including police, housing, community safety, waste management, neighbourhood services, culture and libraries. Communities Team staff organised and chaired the six-weekly meetings. The aim was to develop a partnership approach to leading and developing the *Your Community* model as a new way of working.

Meetings with local community groups

Walkabouts with staff from local services, local residents and councillors to highlight visible issues in the local area

Community profiles - statistical data

A residents' survey to identify local priorities, issues, concerns

Open day events and conversation cafes to develop ideas and actions for community action plans

The initial pilot for the approach ran in Alexandria/ Renton between September 2014 and March 2015. The pilot developed a loose framework of activities to develop a community action plan (see diagram above). An internal review of the pilot highlighted a number of milestones that were achieved including: set up of an Operational Group; invitations to local groups to get involved; local partners helping to conduct a community survey; and a walkabout in the local area to highlight local issues and concerns to councillors and local services.

The review identified some aspects of the pilot model that were challenging and required further attention. This included analysing and producing local statistical data to inform local priorities and designing a meaningful and effective process of dialogue and participation in community-led action planning. What Works Scotland agreed to provide support with both these aspects of the programme[1][2].

Following the pilot, the model was rolled out to other areas of West Dunbartonshire. A key learning from the early phase of the rollout was the importance of responsiveness to local context. The 'one size fits all' model used in Vibrant Communities in East Ayrshire to develop community-led action plans did not transfer easily to West Dunbartonshire for reasons that will be examined later in this report. In response, the Communities team attempted to adapt the model to support and enhance to community activities already underway and to devote more resources to areas with fewer resources and community initiatives.

At the start of the initiative, the intention was to adopt a phased approach to implementation across all 17 areas within set timescales. In February 2016, the *Your Community* programme was in Phase 1 and the implementation plan was proving difficult to achieve within the anticipated timescales. Senior officers reflected that the programme and its aims were not widely understood across the community planning partnership and further work was needed to develop a clear narrative. The Communities Team needed more time to build trust with partners and communities and the original timescales for rolling out in the programme were reviewed.

It was during phase one that community planning management asked WWS to undertake a 'fast track- light touch' evaluation of *Your Community*. It was agreed that WWS would facilitate a Collaborative Action Research project using Contribution Analysis. The next section describes the evaluation methodology applied.

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[1] What Works Scotland established the *Your Community in Profile* partnership project with West Dunbartonshire CPP and Glasgow Centre for Population Health (GCPH), drawing on the expertise of the National Services Scotland (NSS) Information Services Division (ISD). The neighbourhood profiles that were produced for the 17 community council areas and the local authority areas are available online through interactive mapping at
http://www.west-dunbarton.gov.uk/council/community-planning-west-dunbartonshire/your-community/interactive-map/

[2] The initial phase of work with What Works Scotland from June to October 2015 focussed on community-led action planning. See the Community-Led Action Planning Report available from
http://whatworksscotland.ac.uk/publications/community-led-action-planning-day-event-report/

whatworksscotland.ac.uk

Evaluation methodology

The evaluation methodology combined collaborative action research with contribution analysis. Collaborative action research (CAR) is the model for improvement used by What Works Scotland. CAR involves What Works Scotland researchers working with local practitioners to critically examine current arrangements, make changes based on evidence, monitor the impact of these changes, refine, and adapt them as appropriate. Contribution Analysis is a qualitative approach to evaluation, which acknowledges that there are many factors in the wider social and professional context that will affect the outcomes from new programmes and initiatives.

The analysis involved two stages: first, a 'theory of change' is developed to illustrate the different stages of the initiative; and second, evidence is collected to support or test this theory.

A theory of change breaks down the different stages of a programme in order to reach its desired end outcomes. A Contribution Analysis approach acknowledges that a complex programme takes place within a specific social context. Many factors contribute to whether or not end outcomes are achieved. Staff working on the programme can control some of these factors and although others cannot be directly controlled. However, outcomes occur at each stage of the process and achieving outcomes at the early stages of the theory of change will make the end outcomes at the latter stages more likely. The use of a theory of change model strengthens programme planning and design by clearly setting out the internal and external assumptions and risks that could impact upon successful implementation of the programme.

The image below describes the types of questions raised by a *theory of change.*
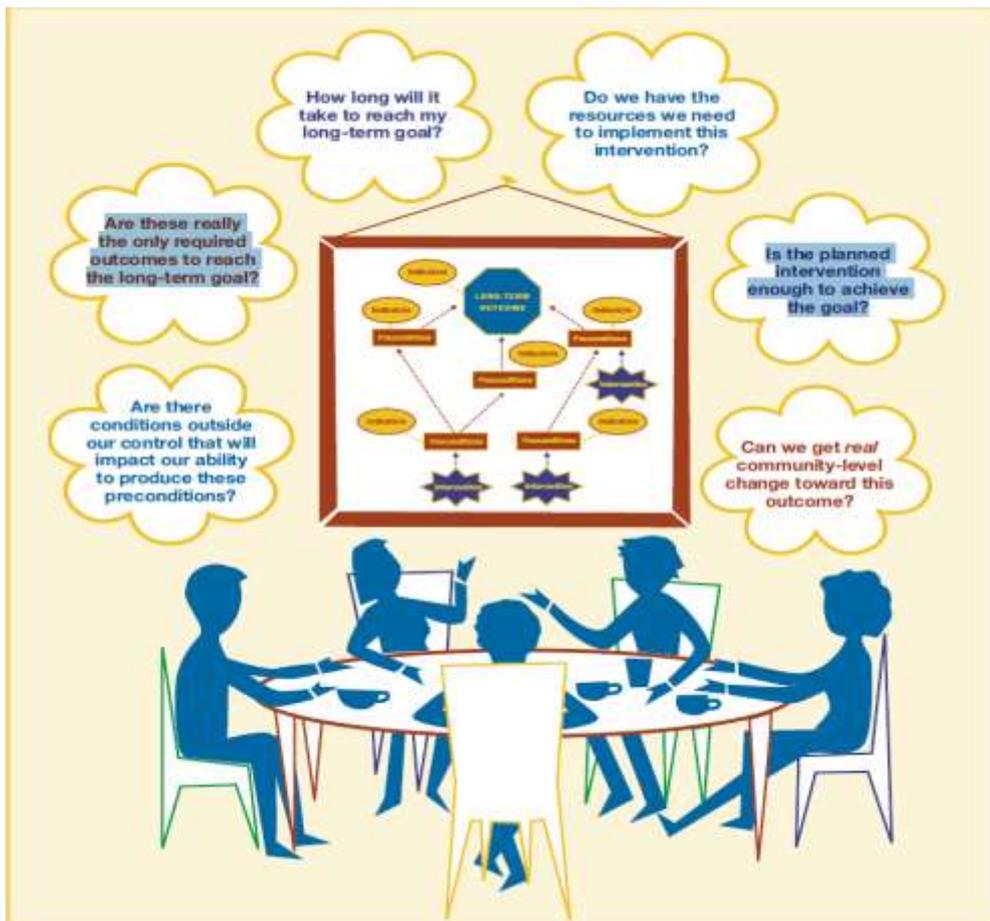
Figure 1 Source: The Community Builder's Approach to Theory of Change: A Practical Guide to Theory Development

Figure 2 below describes the different stages and key questions for building a theory of change in contribution analysis. In practice, we found that it was quite difficult to separate neatly the stages of a programme in this way. Nevertheless, the method provided a useful and practical tool for breaking down a complex theory of change into component parts that could be more easily examined through facilitated dialogue[3]

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[3] For guidance on conducting Contribution Analysis see Scottish Government Social Science Methods Series Guide 6: Contribution Analysis, available at http://www.gov.scot/resource/doc/175356/0116687.pdf
 accessed 20th June 2016. Better Evaluation (2012) Contribution Analysis
http://betterevaluation.org/plan/approach/contribution_analysis accessed 20th June 2016

Figure 2: Theory of Change (Source: Stocks-Rankin, 2014)

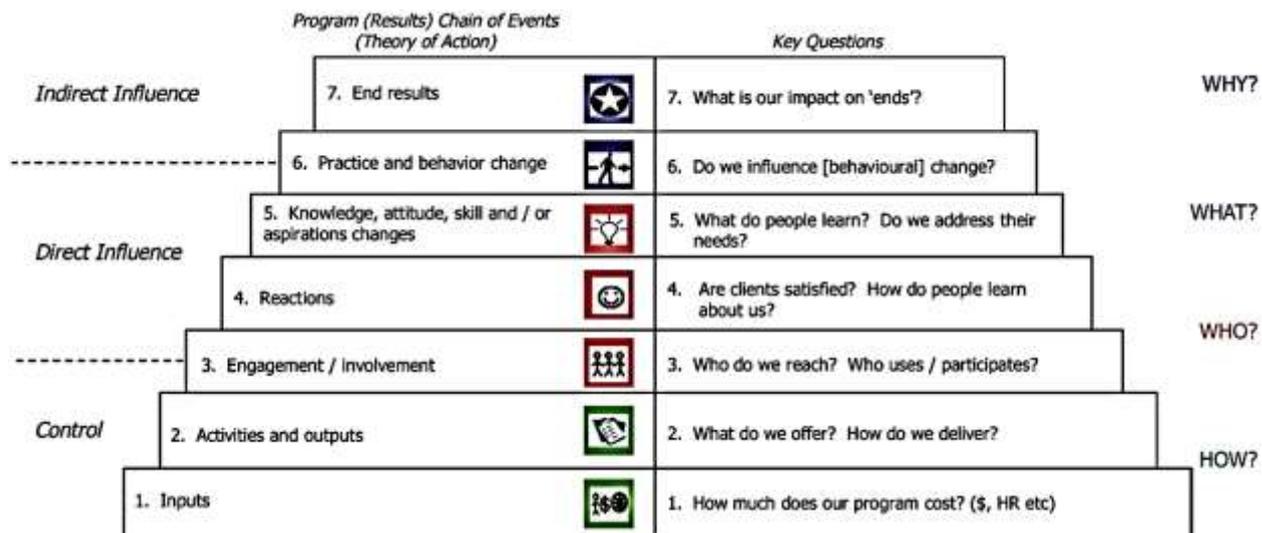Common to both collaborative action research (CAR) and contribution analysis is the emphasis on learning, reflection and discussion throughout the process. By combining these approaches we emphasised the importance of dialogue between smembers of the Communities Team to construct the *theory of change* and reach agreement on the research process. Our intention was not to produce a research report with a set of simplistic recommendations, but instead to work collaboratively with the Team and to gain deeper insight and understanding to support the future development of *Your Community*.

It was helpful to acknowledge from the outset that while professionals and practitioners may feel the burden of responsibility for delivering successful outcomes from a place-based approach, in practice practitioners and policy makers have different degrees of influence over the stages that are likely to lead ultimately to outcomes. Contribution Analysis posits that the overall programme contributes to final outcomes along with other factors in the social context. Each stage is *necessary* in order to get to the next stage and there are important outcomes at each stage.

Research participants

Three groups of research participants were identified for this evaluation:

Communities – this term is used to refer to local people who have participated in local surveys and community events.

Partners - refers to staff from a range of Council departments and community planning partner organisations across the public sector and third sector. These are staff delivering services at a neighbourhood level and attending *Your Community* Operational Groups.

Staff - refers to members of the Communities Team who have a direct role in organising and facilitating programmed *Your Community* activities such as operational group meetings, community surveys, walkabouts, and community events.

Data for the evaluation was collected through the following methods:

- Two workshops with Communities Team staff developing the *Your Community* Theory of Change
- One workshop with staff from the Communities Team to develop evaluation methods.
- Data gathered from local people at three community events using 'graffiti walls'.
- Reflective questionnaires completed by 10 members of the Communities Team working directly with *Your Community.*
- An online survey completed by 39 community planning partners across a range of services (see Figure 3 below).
- A collaborative data analysis workshop with staff from the Communities Team

The data gathered from communities for this evaluation was limited due to the low levels of attendance at community events during the time period for the evaluation and the very early stage of the programme. Therefore, the views and perspectives represented in this report are skewed towards community planning partners and staff. A diverse range of services engaged in the evaluation process, as described below (Figure 3).

Service area	Number of respondents
Housing Association or co-op	3
Local Authority Housing	9
Policing	2
Community Safety	7
Social Work	3
Social Care	4
Health Services	1
Welfare Rights	1
Employability	4
Youth Services	6
Services for Older People	3
Education	3
Waste Services	3
Economic Development	2
Other	9

Figure 3: Breakdown of responses to the online survey of community planning

Evaluation findings

Your Community – A Theory of Change

The theory of change for *Your Community* was developed from analysis of documents describing the Your Community model, the data collected at a facilitated session with stakeholders in the partnership and two workshops with Communities Team staff. The resulting model (next page) was used as a basis for the design of the evaluation questions.

Following the theory of change the report discusses the findings from the evaluation working through the seven stages of inputs/activities, engagement, reactions/awareness, knowledge/skills, behaviours/practices, and outcomes.
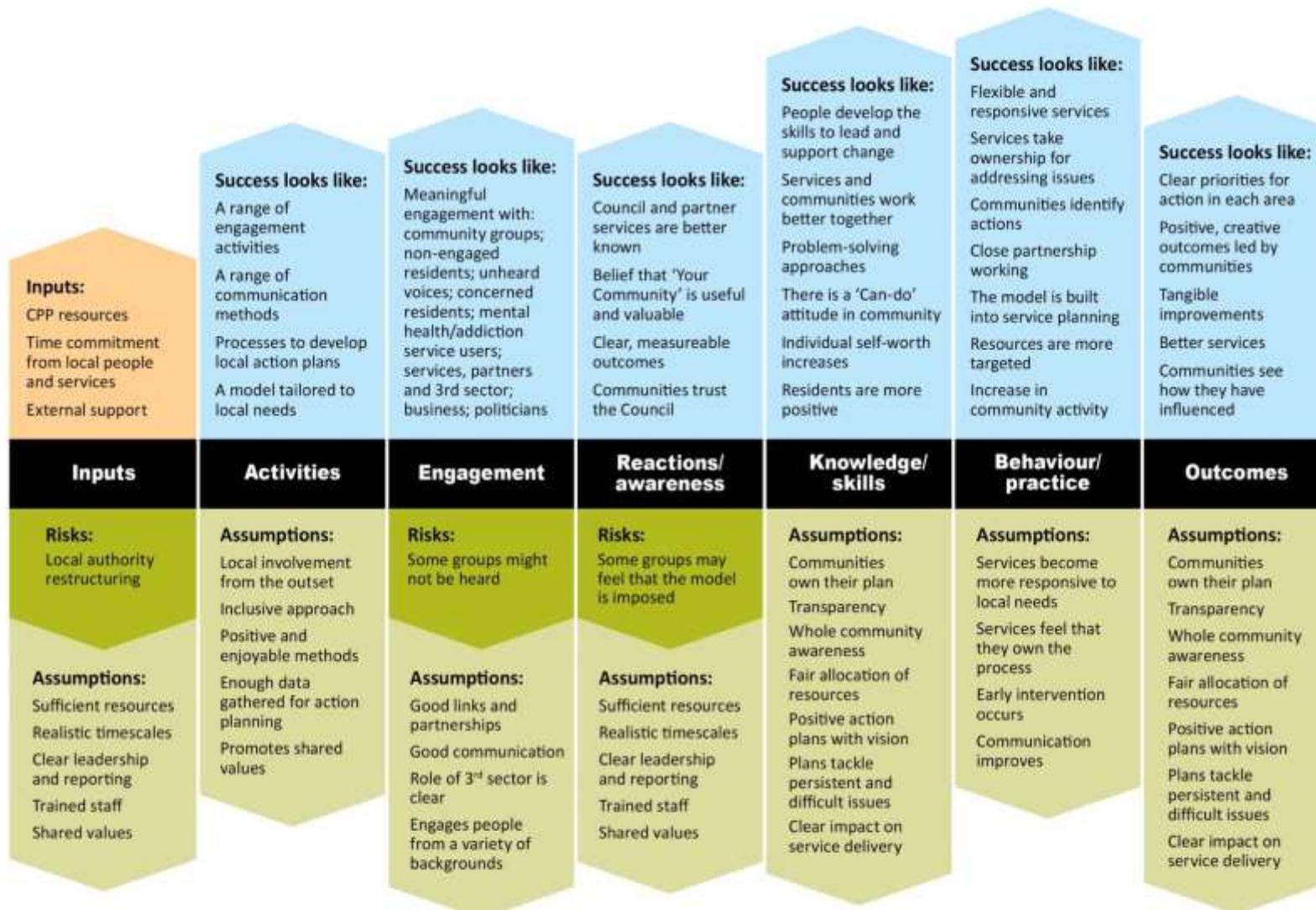
Inputs:

CPP resources

Time commitment from local people and services

External support

Success looks like:

A range of engagement activities

A range of communication methods

Processes to develop local action plans

A model tailored to local needs

Success looks like:

Meaningful engagement with: community groups; non-engaged residents; unheard voices; concerned residents; mental health/addiction service users; services, partners and 3rd sector; business; politicians

Success looks like:

Council and partner services are better known

Belief that 'Your Community' is useful and valuable

Clear, measureable outcomes

Communities trust the Council

Success looks like:

People develop the skills to lead and support change

Services and communities work better together

Problem-solving approaches

There is a 'Can-do' attitude in community

Individual self-worth increases

Residents are more positive

Success looks like:

Flexible and responsive services

Services take ownership for addressing issues

Communities identify actions

Close partnership working

The model is built into service planning

Resources are more targeted

Increase in community activity

Success looks like:

Clear priorities for action in each area

Positive, creative outcomes led by communities

Tangible improvements

Better services

Communities see how they have influenced

Inputs	Activities	Engagement	Reactions/ awareness	Knowledge/ skills	Behaviour/ practice	Outcomes

Risks:

Local authority restructuring

Assumptions:

Local involvement from the outset

Inclusive approach

Positive and enjoyable methods

Enough data gathered for action planning

Promotes shared values

Risks:

Some groups might not be heard

Risks:

Some groups may feel that the model is imposed

Assumptions:

Communities own their plan

Transparency

Whole community awareness

Fair allocation of resources

Positive action plans with vision

Plans tackle persistent and difficult issues

Clear impact on service delivery

Assumptions:

Services become more responsive to local needs

Services feel that they own the process

Early intervention occurs

Communication improves

Assumptions:

Communities own their plan

Transparency

Whole community awareness

Fair allocation of resources

Positive action plans with vision

Plans tackle persistent and difficult issues

Clear impact on service delivery

Assumptions:

Sufficient resources

Realistic timescales

Clear leadership and reporting

Trained staff

Shared values

Assumptions:

Good links and partnerships

Good communication

Role of 3rd sector is clear

Engages people from a variety of backgrounds

Assumptions:

Sufficient resources

Realistic timescales

Clear leadership and reporting

Trained staff

Shared values

Figure 4: Your Community Theory of Change

Inputs

CPP Resources and timescales

While there were positive comments about the overall model from staff and partners there were also some reservations about the level inputs required and the resources provided. *Sufficient resources* and *realistic timescales* and *training for staff* were not in place during the early phase of the programme although during the evaluation period steps were taken by community planning management to address these issues[4].

Staff and partners emphasised that it is essential to allow sufficient resources to deliver *Your Community* and initially many felt that this was not the case:

> *"There needs to be a budget for booking rooms, set up funds for new steering groups, support to the Team" (Staff)*

Your Community aims to reduce public spending over the longer-term and increasing community-level activity may contradict with the aims of cost-cutting and efficiency savings. There was also ambiguity over the role of community planning partners – whether they were participants in the programme or co-organisers of public engagement.

Local authority restructuring and staff capacity

Local authority restructuring was found to be a significant risk to the successful implementation of the new approach. The *Your Community* programme was undertaken against a backdrop of organisational change and staff turnover with ongoing reviews of staffing as part of a process to achieve efficiency savings within the Council. At the time of this evaluation, the Communities Team consisted of consisted of one co-coordinator and 12 staff including community officers, workers and assistants with professional backgrounds and skills in community development and community safety. Whilst *Your Community* was

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[4] Initially there was no specific budget allocated for Your Community. It was to be delivered within existing service budgets. However, in 2016/17 the local Council agreed a budget allocation of £1 million over 2 years, of this £425,000 was allocated to community budgeting to support the Your Community model. The remainder of this budget was to make improvements in local areas that were identified through the process of community-led action planning and were outside existing service budgets.

the main focus, the Team also delivered community safety, community empowerment and capacity building, support to community councils and social enterprises and supporting refugee resettlement. The Team were also involved in developing and delivering a programme of community budgeting - a form of participatory budgeting[5]. *Reduced staff due to restructuring* and the increased the workload of key professionals who were also tasked with implementing other national initatives alongside this programme limited the staff capacity for the level of work needed to deliver the model successfully.

> *"I think there is insufficient community development staff to build the community groups and networks which would ideally underpin the Your Community process. There are insufficient other staff to co-ordinate the large number of asreas and meetings and activities which need to be done. Whilst this can be done with existing staff, I think this risks the process being done in insufficient depth and risks community disillusionment which would have implications for future attempts at engagement." (Staff)*

Activities

Your Community was designed to include a range of activities to engage people in the process, support good communication and to develop local action plans. The activities in each area varied according the local context and motivations to get involved.

A range of engagement activities

The evidence suggests that the approach was successful in the range of engagement activities that were provided and new methods of public engagement such as *walkabouts*.

> *"I think the walkabouts have worked well, and demonstrate a different way of engaging communities and partners" (Staff)*

Feedback from community members and partners about *community events* involving *open days* (stalls and activities run by local organisations) and *conversation cafes* included many positive comments:

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[5] Participatory Budgeting is a process that

"It was very interesting and I'm glad things are happening in the neighbourhood."
(Community member)

"Lots of information packs and great entertainment for kids" (Community member)

"We had a lovely community event in February that had a warm community feel to it.
It got people talking." (Partner)

A number of community respondents asked for hot food to be available, a greater emphasis on fun activities to develop community spirit and an increase in the number of organisations.

"I would like the same location but expand on the organisations and have some hot
food available." (Community member)

However, the community survey was less successful as a method of engagement. Unlike the Vibrant Communities approach in East Ayrshire, local residents were not involved as volunteers in conducting the survey. Instead, there was a reliance on local partners to encourage completion of the surveys. However over time levels of support from partners with the completion of surveys reduced and there was unwillingness to respond to the issues raised by residents by some services. Later, the community survey was replaced by the Place Standard tool (https://placestandard.scot) a dialogue tool that seeks views on the physical and social aspects of an area. Several respondents mentioned the need to *involve local people earlier in the process* in order for them to feel a meaningful sense of engagement with the process. One of the lessons from this experience might be the *importance of involving local people from the outset*, an assumption from the theory of change that was not fully met in practice.

Processes to develop local action plans

The Communities Team organised open day events and conversation cafés to engage partners and local residents in developing community action plans. The aim of the Open Days was to prioritise the community issues emerging from the community survey. The prioritised issues were then explored in the conversation cafes in order to develop a community-led action plan. The following key themes issues and concerns emerged across the areas and events:
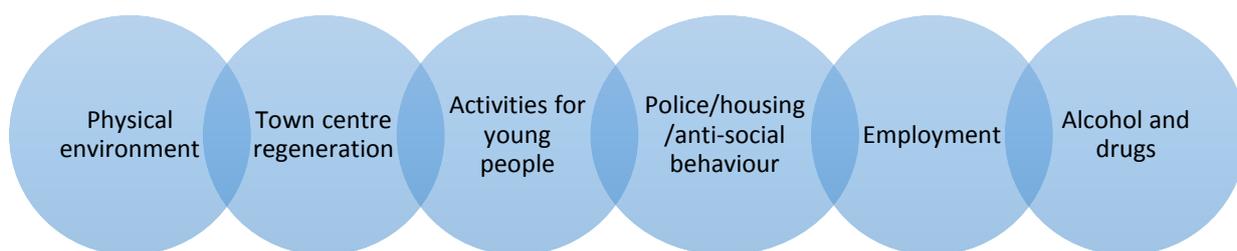
Figure 5: Local priorities identified through Your Community events

Attendance levels varied and staff suggested that deprivation and relationships with local community groups influenced attendance:

> *"I think the events have gone well. Whilst the numbers attending might be small in proportion to the whole area population, they are actually good for attendance at public events run by the Council. It is notoriously difficult to get people to come out to events, so we should be proud of this achievement. In some areas good links exist with community groups, community councils and other partner agencies –which essential for the process to work." (Staff)*

Engagement

This section focuses on the engagement and relationships with communities and partners that took place as a result of the inputs and activities undertaken under *Your Community*. In order to be successful, *Your Community* sought to engage with a full range of community groups and residents including groups already known and those whose voices are seldom heard (e.g. young people, older people, equalities groups and those who are not in groups). *Your Community* also sought to engage with local community planning partners including third sector organisations, local businesses and politicians.

Community groups and residents

Staff cited the following community groups as having a key role in the success of the programme:

- Community councils
- Community development trusts
- Parent and child groups
- Sports clubs
- Tenants' and residents' associations
- Youth groups
- Other groups

In the responses from community members, staff and partners a key theme emerged regarding the *diversity and inclusion* of people involved in *Your Community.* Respondents suggested that more effort is required to engage young people, older people, people with disabilities, people with mental health issues and other seldom-heard groups. The model needs to flexible and responsive to the ways individuals prefer to participate for example giving people options for participating in different ways at different times depending on their interests and capacity.

> *"Think about ways of making things more accessible for people with communication difficulties." (Community member)*

> *"We need to get disengaged young people involved. Ask them what they think." (Community member)*

One participant suggested that people who work in an area but may not live there were also stakeholders in the process and could be encouraged to participate.

> *"Part of the original thinking was to involve not just residents and community groups but people working in the area – from supermarkets to doctor's surgeries. (Staff)*

Some respondents felt that there had been some positive engagements but that it was too early to measure overall success. More time is needed build up levels of trust especially in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Several respondents mentioned the need to ensure that *Your Community* uses social media more effectively to promote public engagement activities.

Local community planning partners

The *Your Community* model aimed to engage the following services and organisations:

- Public Reassurance[6]
- Communities Team
- Customer Services
- Education
- Housing
- Libraries
- Planning
- Police
- Roads
- Waste
- Housing associations
- Community development trusts
- Community and voluntary sector support organisations

The engagement of other services in the partnership in *Your Community* was limited by a lack of understanding of what in practice delivering this new approach would entail. Some research participants suggested that existing organisations and community groups could do more to assist with embedding *Your Community* dialogue and conversations into everyday practice.

> *"The trick is to make use of the skills specific agencies and partners have and embed the Your Community dialogue and conversations into normal practice and engagement methods - as well as being receptive to new ones. Basically build on what's strong! Rather than what's wrong!" (Staff)*

There were different challenges to engaging community members in different areas that need to be recognised and frontline staff may require greater autonomy to make decisions about the best ways to engage with communities.

> *"I feel a more direct approach is needed when trying to engage some of the people within the area I have been involved in. The area is too 'diverse' in its issues. What is needed within [one area] is totally different to what is needed in [another]." (Partner)*

Areas suggested for further development of engagement are to tailor the model to different contexts and locations and to support frontline staff in partner organisations to get more

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[6] In West Dunbartonshire, there is a 'public reassurance' service. These teams work with Police Scotland to engage with communities and formulate appropriate problem-solving approaches in areas that are affected by high levels of anti-social behaviour and crime.

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involved. A few respondents mentioned a need for more strategic guidance and partnership agreements to build this approach into daily activities.

Reactions and awareness
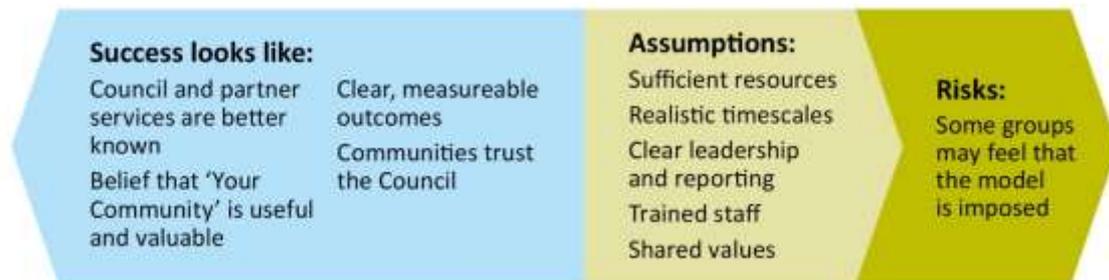
This section focuses on the ways in which people that have engaged with *Your Community* have reacted to the initiative and become aware of its aims. The themes below cover the shared ways in which staff and partners expressed their understanding of *Your Community* and the reaction of community members to the initiative.

Communities are more aware of local services

Involvement in *Your Community* had increased awareness of local services for partners (through operational groups) and the community (through events). For partners, *Your Community* provided links into other services and into the community.

> I know people's names and faces and would be able to contact them. We are now linked in with a few services and it has widened out community contacts" (Partner)

A significant number of respondents mentioned increased partnership working and networking with other services that emerged from increased awareness of other local services. This included community intelligence passed between partners to tackle sensitive issues. However, at least one partner felt that the process was at an early stage and that further breaking down of 'silos' between services was needed

Clear, measurable outcomes

When describing the aims of *Your Community*, many staff and partners focused upon the importance of communities identifying their own needs and taking a more active role:

> "Your Community is a partnership approach to identifying and responding to the needs of the community, encouraging community volunteers to be engaged in delivery of services." (Partner)

Your Community also aimed to provide a mechanism for communities to be more involved in decision-making processes

"I believe the aim of Your Community is to give the local residents in each community council area a voice, to ensure they are part of the decision-making process." (Partner)

Some respondents linked *Your Community* to realising the benefits of the Community Empowerment Act:

"Your Community aims to bring the community together and understand local needs [of] tenants and residents , understand the benefits of the Community Empowerment Act , and how this can improve / develop areas" (Staff)

For others the focus of *Your Community* was to develop community-led action plans for each area:

"The aim of Your Community is to promote an empowerment agenda, develop [the] capacity of [the]community to get involved in delivery of services and in particular a Community- led Action Plan." (Staff)

There were however, differing opinions on aims and outcomes. While, community-led action plans were seen by some as the ultimate aim of *Your Community* for others the action plans were a step towards achieving *"positive, creative outcomes led by communities".*

Knowledge and skills
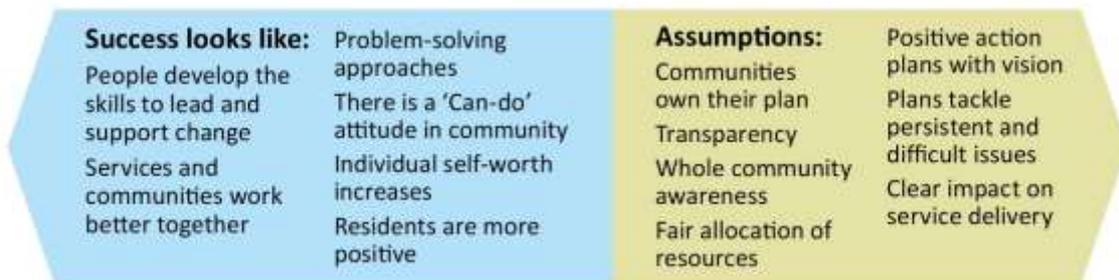
This section covers the knowledge, skills and attitudes that participants say they gain through their engagement in *Your Community*. This includes developing the confidence and skills of community members to lead and support change and service providers improving their skills and knowledge in order to work better with communities to influence services. The lack of detail in the evaluation responses suggests that in future greater attention needs to be given to the knowledge and skills required to deliver successful place-based approaches.

A shared vision of change

There was some concern about whether there was a wider shared understanding of the aims and values of *Your Community*, beyond those who were directly involved. Partners and community members were positive about their involvement so far in the process, although

recognised that they had not yet achieved a shared vision of the change they wanted to achieve in communities.

> *"I don't think we are at the stage yet of local community members having a clear vision about the aims of Your Community – we are still trying to get the message out and about." (Staff)*

> *"I feel that not all internal partners, local people know enough about "Your Community" and the empowerment act, to deliver this service" (Staff)*

On the community side there was a need to build trust in the model as a genuine opportunity for community empowerment. There was a feeling from staff and partners that they are still early in the implementation of the model and that there is a need to address lack of community ownership of the new approach. Anecdotally staff reported that local Community Councils felt that *Your Community* was a threat to their role.

> *"Already Your Community is seen (by local people) as 'owned' by the council. That's the perception I am hearing." (Staff)*

People developing the skills to lead and support change

There was little evidence in the evaluation responses that *Your Community* had included direct efforts to increase community capacity to lead change in neighbourhoods. The role of the Communities Team and partners in this area of work was uncertain.

Several respondents felt that there was a need to *deliver training* on *Your Community* and develop staff, partners' and community members' understanding of the model but there was *little mention of the skills to lead and support change.*

Services and communities working better together

A number of respondents, particularly partners, reported that *Your Community* has increased their knowledge of community issues, concerns and priorities.
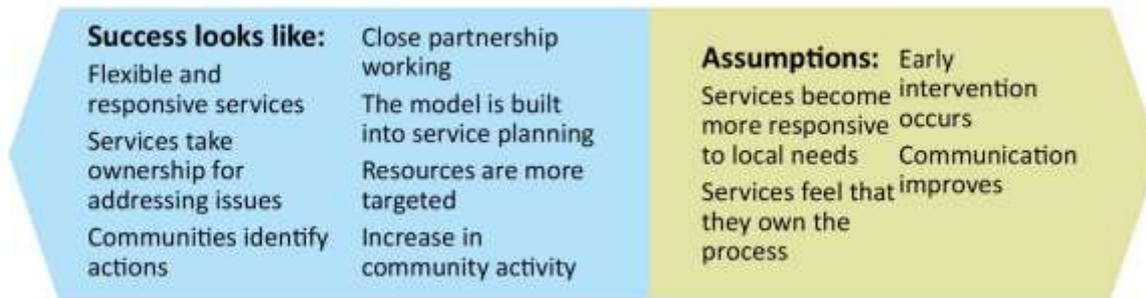
> *"…it's a good opportunity to go into other areas and find out what the issues and concerns are within the area that are affecting our tenants and residents, [and relating that] to the work that you do. Then you are more influenced in picking up those issues "(Partner)*

There was however, some indication that community members wanted information to turn more quickly into action.

> *"It's great getting lots of information but its action that matters" (Community member)*

> *"It is not just about listening, you have to follow thorough – it's about the actions" (Community member)*

Behaviour and practice change

Success looks like:
Flexible and responsive services

Services take ownership for addressing issues

Communities identify actions

Close partnership working

The model is built into service planning

Resources are more targeted

Increase in community activity

Assumptions: Early intervention occurs

Services become more responsive to local needs

Communication improves

Services feel that they own the process

This section focuses on the things that respondents say that they do differently as a result of *Your Community*. These behaviour changes include improving **partnership working** and **embedding the *Your Community* model into service delivery**, **making services more responsive to local needs.**

The following two themes examine the common threads in the ways that behaviour and practice have changed because of *Your Community*.

Flexible and responsive services

Several respondents saw the *Your Community* model as a positive approach to partnership working and said that they had seen signs of closer joint working between the partners. There were some examples of positive steps, such as the walkabouts in neighbourhoods and a sense that things were moving in the right direction, with some further work to be done in developing and embedding partnership approaches.

> *"I believe it's a work in progress – my thoughts are however at this stage it's going in the correct direction to achieve this." (Partner)*

However, others felt that partners were already been responding effectively to community needs. This suggests that there is some latent resistance to the idea that a change in working practices is necessary.

Services take ownership for addressing issues and communities identifying actions

Desired behaviour changes included community members taking greater ownership of community issues and services acting on these issues. Although many respondents felt that it was too early to measure behaviour change there were signs of progress.

> *"Partnership working with local Registered Social Landlords has increased, and they have been a major supporter of the Your Community initiative. A number of people expressed the desire to see more gala days in areas where they don't exist – this would encourage development of community groups and community links, would*

underpin Your Community etc. But would also require more staff and other
resources." (Staff)

There was also a sense that there needs to be a shift in mind set from communities being recipients of services to being equal partners, which required support from local politicians and less pressure for quick wins.

"I really do hope it works, but it will need time, better resources, improved
communication, promotion, less political pressure." (Staff)

Final outcomes

When this evaluation was conducted, *Your Community* was at an early stage and therefore it was too early to expect significant outcomes. The *theory of change* used for this evaluation provides a clear illustration of the initiative and allowed an examination of the initial stages of the implementation process in order to identify potential successes and challenges. While it was too early to provide evidence that the approach had achieved its final outcomes, evidence of results in the early stages of the *theory of change,* indicate signs of progress.

Further reflections

This evaluation found that *Your Community* offers a place-based approach that is both promising and challenging. Overall participants in this evaluation saw value in what Your *Community* was trying to achieve. Staff, partners and communities believed in the potential to co-produce solutions to neighbourhood issues at a local level and they were beginning to see evidence of small improvements in partnership working. In order to make further progress, respondents stressed that there is a need for a shared vision to be strongly promoted at all service levels; with increased awareness of value of the approach as well as the implications of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015.

The following reflections drawn on the learning from *Your Community* and provide broader insights for the design and delivery of place-based approaches in Scotland.

Skilled professionals, sustainable resources and time to build relationships

Building trusting relationships across services and with communities takes time, effort and financial resources, as well as professionals skilled in public engagement. Central to public service reform is the role of professionals such as the staff in the Communities Team who were charged with implementing *Your Community* and making 'real' the shift to new ways of working. *Your Community* is a complex intervention that is dependent upon relationships and partnerships. Escobar (2017) describes this as the work of Public Participation Professionals. This role involves bridging the policy implementation gap, working between policy mandated by government, and written in policy guidance and the actual practices of multiple agencies and services working across different policy domains. Reform work involves not only introducing new institutional practices but also "the equally important but rarely recognised task of de-institutionalising old ways of working" (Sullivan and Lowndes 2004, p.67). This is highly demanding and skilled work and that requires greater recognition, support and opportunities for professional development. Given the scale of budget cuts and the pace of other national reform agendas and new initiatives, the scale of ambition, timing and capacity of staff and systems requires careful consideration.

Sensitivity to context

The shift to a localised approach to public service reform in Scotland raises issues of inequalities, targeting and the scale of intervention. The What Works Scotland Scaling Up Innovations Evidence Briefing (Bland et al 2015) explains why scaling up or scaling across can be a complex process that requires careful planning. In attempting to apply the best practice from other areas of Scotland, *Your Community* faced a number of challenges. First, some Community Councils felt they had no ownership over the new approach. They had not been involved in designing and planning *Your Community*. Second, the levels of inequality

and variance within and between neighbourhoods suggested that a 'one size fits all' approach was unsuitable for this local authority area. Third, there was a need to work more intensively at the micro-level. Staff feared that without the ability to build more relationships with residents in the most deprived localities the process would only engage "*those who are already engaged and able to respond*".

A key learning from this evaluation is that place-based approaches in areas of high inequality need greater sensitivity to the specific context, history, social relationships and needs of residents. The most appropriate scale of intervention may be smaller than the wider neighbourhood administrative area. Skilled professionals need greater autonomy to work flexibly with local communities at the frontline. Community planning partners would like greater clarity on the practical and everyday implications of this way of working for their services. A significant strategic challenge for community planning partnerships is that targeted, bespoke place-based approaches are resource intensive and require significant staff resources as well as long-term commitment.

Local engagement and effective action

Feedback from the local residents who attended *Your Community* events indicated that there was desire for more community activity. Community members suggested that staff could improve local events by providing hot food and fun activities, which would boost a sense of community spirit. The value of a 'fun, food and folk' approach has been demonstrated by another What Work Scotland research project on the work of Centrestage - an organisation that works in some of the most deprived neighbourhoods in Scotland (see Nugent and Escobar 2017).

Community members who attended *Your Community* events said that they were keen on receiving information about local projects; however, they also wanted local services to take more immediate action to address their concerns. One of the challenges for the *Your Community* model was that for staff to respond effectively to the issues raised by residents required preparation and willingness on the part of other sections of the Council and other public services. Yet these services had little incentive to respond to the seemingly ad-hoc issues that the Communities Team referred to them. The absence of a systematic approach that could directly respond and deal with the issues raised impeded progress with building confidence and commitment to the new approach with local residents. In addition, this raises a question over roles and the extent to which public participation professionals find themselves undertaking a customer- complaints role, which they are not adequately trained or resourced to sustain.

The competing logics of efficiency and participation

The difficulty of building a shared vision and sense of purpose across the *Your Community* programme might be explained by two competing logics that underpin public service

reform. On the one hand there is the drive for efficiency, and the need to provide a quality service for the individual customer or consumer, and on the other hand there is the aspiration for a more democratic, deliberative and participatory approach to engaging the public in collective decisions. These different goals and logics can easily become muddled and confused within place-based approaches. It is clear from this evaluation that participatory processes require time and resources, and do not necessarily improve efficiency and reduce costs, at least not in the short-term. There is no clear evidence that a satisfied customer will become a more engaged and proactive citizen. This suggests that when developing the vision and final outcomes for a place-based approach it is important to separate these two competing logics so that the theory of change leading to final outcomes can be more easily understood and defined.

The politics of place

Participants in this evaluation highlighted the risk that a superficial approach to local engagement could undermine the potential for future public engagement in local decision-making. If place-based approaches become consultative exercises with little impact on actual decisions and resource allocation, they may lead to increased public disillusionment and disengagement. It is therefore important that communities have a sense of ownership over the process and that the outcomes from high quality and inclusive deliberative processes have an impact. Public engagement activity is more likely to have an impact if it links directly to the work of councillors and to decisions taken through formal mechanisms of decision making such as in council chambers and committee meetings. This connection provides the potential for 'a deeper understanding of place' that can inform the political deliberations of local and national governments. System-wide reform of this nature requires facilitative leadership, as well as institutions and systems that are primed and ready to support and enable place-based working.

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Useful websites

Evaluation Support Scotland http://www.evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk/

Better Evaluation http://betterevaluation.org