



Office of the  
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Creating sustainable communities

# *Process Evaluation of Plan Rationalisation*

Formulative Evaluation of Community Strategies

Consultation Findings and Evaluation Framework



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Deputy Prime Minister  

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# Process Evaluation of Plan Rationalisation

## Formulative Evaluation of Community Strategies

### Consultation Findings and Evaluation Framework

February 2005

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# Executive Summary

## Introduction

1. The Local Government Act 2000 provided the basis for significant changes to the operation of local government and its relationship with central government. The Act introduced a statutory requirement that all local authorities prepare a Community Strategy. This should set out local strategic priorities for an area, the basis by which progress towards these priorities can be assessed and how local stakeholders are engaged in planning and delivery. In addition to Community Strategies, and as part of the wider modernisation of central and local government, the Act also provided the basis for a review and subsequent rationalisation of 'Plans' between central and local government. The government intend that Community Strategies and Plan Rationalisation should not simply be seen as policies which culminate in the production of a strategy document or a one-off reduction in the number of plans: but rather as parts of a wider and continual process of central and local government modernisation.
2. This report outlines the findings from the scoping phase of the evaluations, examines the continued relevance of the original research objectives and issues set by the ODPM, and develops an evaluation framework to steer the evaluations over the next two years. Given the close links between Community Strategies and Plan Rationalisation the evaluations of each (a Process Evaluation of Plan Rationalisation and a Formative Evaluation of Community Strategies) are being undertaken together. The key objectives of the Community Strategies evaluation are to assess:
  - Whether the Community Strategies have added value?
  - What progress has been made against central and local policy objectives?
  - What systems of monitoring have been established and what indicators of performance exist?
  - What process outcomes there have been (e.g. increased legitimacy, reduced bureaucracy)?
  - What constraints and blockages exist to developing Community Strategies?
  - The impact of Community Strategies on other issues (e.g. mainstreaming, democratic accountability, sustainability, rural proofing and diversity)?

The key objectives of the evaluation of Plan Rationalisation are as follows:

- Evaluate the processes adopted by central government departments and agencies as part of the general move towards a rationalisation of plan requirements on local government.
- Evaluate processes local authorities have adopted in response to rationalisation of plans they have been required to produce
- Document and assess the extent to which Government Departments seek to achieve the purposes of removed plans through other means.
- Document and assess the burden of remaining plan, strategy and data requirements on local government.

- Develop an analytical framework to enable an evaluation of the impacts of Plan Rationalisation in the longer term.
3. The scoping and consultation of the research has involved: a series of 25 interviews across central government departments and central agencies (such as the Audit Commission), 14 interviews with regional Government Offices and 16 interviews from a sample of local authorities and LSPs; the collection and analysis of policy and academic literature on Community Strategies and Plan Rationalisation; and consultation events with central government departments and agencies and with regional Government Offices, local authorities and LSPs in two regions (Yorkshire and the Humber and London).

### Literature Search and Review

4. A literature search and review was undertaken of government documentation, policy studies and academic literature, primarily relating to Community Strategies. The key guidance on Community Strategies was published by DETR in 2000 (*Preparing Community Strategies: government guidance to local authorities*). This has since been supplemented by publications around supplementary guidance to local authorities (LGA 2000), communicating the Community Strategy (LGIU 2003) and the involvement of local people (CDF 2001).
5. Since the publication of the DETR guidance there has been a rapid growth in the publication of policy-specific guidance which addresses specific themes, for example around health (Health Development Agency 2002), rural issues (Countryside Agency 2002) and culture (DCMS 2004). More general guidance issued by government departments has also made increasing reference to Community Strategies, for example the Egan Review on planning for sustainable communities (ODPM 2004) and the Home Office guidance on community cohesion (Home Office 2003). Given the potential breadth of Community Strategies, local authorities and their partners may also need to be cognisant of policy developments at EU, national and regional levels in preparing their Community Strategy.
6. There was found to be a small but growing number of studies, policy commentaries and academic studies on Community Strategies. This work often focused on the implications of Community Strategies for specific areas of policy: for example, the delivery of health services, the future of Local Agenda 21 strategies and the spatial dimension of Community Strategies.
7. Against the specific issues set by ODPM for the evaluation of Community Strategies it was found that, as might be expected, that some issues and areas had been addressed in more detail than others. Issues of mainstreaming, community engagement, community cohesion, the voluntary and community sector and sustainability were all covered by guidance or through policy studies, although the purpose, format and emphasis of this documentation varied considerably: varying from specific guidance to general reviews with few specific recommendations. Areas where there appeared to be gaps in the guidance included the involvement of private sector partners, of multi-tiered working (especially links with regional tiers) and the role of elected members.

## Scoping and consultation: findings

8. Current guidance for **Plan Rationalisation** sets out that a substantial number of plans will be abolished by 2005/06. With a significant rationalisation of other plans there will be just six major service plans required from non-excellent authorities in addition to the Best Value Performance Plan and Community Strategy. Non-excellent authorities will be required to produce: a Housing Strategy; Local Development Documents; Single Education Plan; Strategy for Children and Young People; Local Transport Plan; and a Civil Contingencies Plan.
9. Interviews with civil servants central government departments considered the progress made to date on Plan Rationalisation. These highlighted the importance of establishing strong mechanisms for cross-departmental working (through the Local Government White Paper (Implementation) Group and for identifying common principles for plan reduction (the Portico/NPI study) as being essential to Plan Rationalisation centrally. Interviewees and consultation also stressed that Plan Rationalisation should be seen as a wider package of policies. These include work on the CPA methodology, BVPIs, and plans to remove the ring-fencing or grants. However, there were also perceptions that Plan Rationalisation was resisted more by departments which faced losing all planning instruments (e.g. Cultural Strategies), than those which would see plans merged (e.g. Health, Housing and Education).
10. More recent developments have included the development of local government gateways by government Departments and the establishment of a local gateway team in ODPM. This increase in capacity was seen to be essential in maintaining the impetus of Plan Rationalisation, and helping to identify other mechanisms through which central departments could achieve their policy objectives (for example, the use of CPA, surveys and Community Strategies). However, it was clear from interviews that different approaches were emerging - reflecting the roles and purposes of different plans.
11. Interviews with regional Government Offices and local authorities/LSPs provided more mixed evidence on the progress of Plan Rationalisation. A typical response was that Plan Rationalisation meant the merging of existing strategies and for some that Plan Rationalisation was not yet seen as a priority. It was also stressed by interviewees that plans would still be required for service delivery.
12. Nearly all local authorities and LSPs have now produced a **Community Strategy**. Moreover, many areas are now working on second, third or in some cases fourth versions of Community Strategies. Local authorities are also developing monitoring frameworks and action plans. However, there is considerable variation in the detail of the documents, with some as short as 12 pages and others over 200 pages long. There was a general consensus amongst interviewees that Community Strategies reflected the development of the LSP. Where this had worked well, Community Strategies had started by developing a shared and common vision for an area and a series of headline priorities or themes for an area. From this a more detailed strategy and action plan could be developed. The themes or priorities typically reflected key service areas, for example, crime and community safety, physical environment including housing, education and young people, health and older people, and employment and training.



13. Differences between Community Strategies were seen to be along the following fault lines and reflected the resources available locally to prepare and implement Community Strategies: rural district authorities typically had fewer resources than metropolitan districts; and NRF areas had benefited from the process of developing Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategies. There was also some evidence to suggest that two-tier authorities complicated the development and implementation of Community Strategies.
14. Constraints and blockages in the preparation of Community Strategies were seen to include the involvement of partners, particularly around the sharing of data and pooling budgets and the alignment of strategic priorities. This was compounded by the variation in discretion agencies had in setting targets (e.g. Jobcentre Plus offices, PCTs, Police and LSCs). Constraints and blockages were in some cases due to problems in partnership working in the LSP, until these were resolved progress in implementing the Community Strategy, or at least parts of it may be slowed. The scoping research revealed divergent responses on the significance of other issues, such as multi-tiered working, rural proofing, equalities and mainstreaming.
15. The findings from the scoping phase of the research highlighted that the links being made locally between Plan Rationalisation and Community Strategies varied. In some cases Community Strategies were being used as a *tool* through which to subsume or rationalise plans. Three common issues emerged from the scoping phase of the research which should inform the evaluations over the next two years: the achievement of central objectives through Community Strategies; the development and effectiveness of new ways of working, both centrally and locally; and the mechanisms and methods developed for performance management. The links between these elements will develop at different rates and in different ways across localities. However, it is expected that the key fault lines will be around capacity issues, urban-rural differences, and the relative priority given locally to Community Strategies.

## Evaluation Framework

16. The findings from the scoping phase of the research suggest that the following four elements lie at the heart of Community Strategies and Plan Rationalisation:
  - the reshaping of centre-local relations
  - shift from plan-based methods of centre-local relations to the use of multiple methods
  - the extent to which local authorities take up freedoms and flexibilities through Community Strategies and Plan Rationalisation
  - the extent to which local partners have greater flexibility to respond to local needs.
17. The original research specification set out 18 issues which the Community Strategies evaluation should respond to. It is recommended that these be grouped around the following seven themes:
  - Have Community Strategies added value?
  - What progress has been made against central government objectives?
  - What systems of performance management have been developed?
  - How to local processes constrain or release delivery?

- What roles do different partners play?
  - How is work at different geographic levels (including neighbourhoods and regions) managed?
  - How are different policies mainstreamed into Community Strategies?
18. Mirroring the structure of the evaluation themes for Community Strategies, it is recommended that the evaluation of Plan Rationalisation focus on the following:
- How aware are central government departments and local authorities and their partners of Plan Rationalisation?
  - Have different models of Plan rationalisation emerged, both centrally and locally?
  - How are local issues covered following Plan Rationalisation?
  - What processes have emerged centrally and locally to manage Plan Rationalisation?
  - What systems of performance management have emerged?
  - What implications does Plan Rationalisation have for capacity?
19. It is recommended that these themes will be addressed through four main streams of work. These include:
- Study of Central Government processes (focusing primarily on Plan Rationalisation) and undertaken through interviews and workshops
  - Study of Local Government processes and progress on Community Strategies and Plan Rationalisation, undertaken through an annual survey of all local authorities, longitudinal case studies, assessment of 50 Community Strategies and a review of all Community Strategies.
  - Study of emerging issues through light touch case studies and call-off research
  - Provision of support to partners through the development of the Community Strategy Guidance Portal and Action Learning Sets.

## **Research Elements**

20. The evaluations will be undertaken through the following individual elements of research:
- Interviews with Central Government departments, Central Agencies and regional Government Offices to be undertaken in Autumn 2004 and Autumn 2005. These will focus on specific policy areas (e.g. health, culture and environment) and critically examine models or plan rationalisation, drivers and blockages
  - Action Learning Sets organised on a regional basis
  - Assessment and Review of Community Strategies, Action Plans and Monitoring Frameworks. A detailed assessment of 50 will take place in Autumn 2004 and wider review of all in Summer 2005.
  - Surveys of all local authorities to be undertaken in Autumn 2004, Spring 2005 and Spring 2006.
  - Primary case studies undertaken in eight areas
  - 'Light touch' case studies to be undertaken around emerging issues.
  - Possibility for call-off provision, for example to explore issues around the mainstreaming of specific policies into Community Strategies

- Development of a Community Strategies guidance portal in conjunction with ODPM to provide an on-line resource for local authorities and LSPs involved in Community Strategies.

### **Links with the Wider LGMA Evaluation**

21. The LGMA is underpinned by seven policy levers. These are: service improvement, community leadership, democratic renewal, public confidence, freedoms and flexibilities, partnership working and improved financial framework. These levers form the main themes of the meta-evaluation of the LGMA. Of these, the Plan Rationalisation and Community Strategies evaluations will make the greatest contributions to the themes of improving community leadership and partnership involvement.
22. The evaluations will provide various inputs into the Meta-Evaluation of the LGMA, including providing an indication of the wider partnership of Community Strategies, the involvement of stakeholders and the use of Community Strategies to drive processes of leadership and engagement.

### **Outputs from the Evaluation**

23. A range of outputs will be produced by the evaluations and these will have quite distinct purposes and target audiences. The outputs will include:
  - Case Study reports
  - Light Touch Case study reports
  - Issues papers
  - Good Practice guides
  - Miscellaneous reports (e.g. questions for the 06/07 BVPI survey)
  - Annual report



## 1. Introduction

The Local Government Act 2000 provided the basis for significant changes to the operation of local government and its relationship with central government. As part of a wider package of reforms, in particular around new freedoms and flexibilities and powers to promote social, economic and environmental wellbeing, the Local Government Act 2000 introduced a statutory requirement that all local authorities prepare a Community Strategy. This should set out local strategic priorities for an area, the basis by which progress towards those priorities can be assessed and engage key local stakeholders in planning and delivery. The Act intends that Local Strategic Partnerships provide the basis for such planning and delivery. In addition to Community Strategies, and as part of the wider modernisation of central and local government, the Act also provided the basis for a review and subsequent rationalisation of 'Plans' between central and local government. Such plans, whether produced annually, triennially or some other period, or with the purpose to manage central funding or collect information, are seen to provide undue burdens on local government. Moreover, the cumulative impact of such plans, is seen to constrain local freedom whilst providing an overly mechanistic and formulaic basis for central-local relations. Following the Act, a process of Plan Rationalisation is being undertaken through a combination of review and also legislation to remove the statutory requirement for certain plans.

Government policies for Community Strategies and Plan Rationalisation are closely connected with the cumulative effect of both policies intended to bring changes to central-local relations and to the freedoms of flexibilities of local authorities and their partners. Moreover, Community Strategies and Plan Rationalisation policies should not be seen as static: but rather parts of a wider process of central and local government modernisation. For example, proposals to introduce Local Area Agreements and proposed changes to Comprehensive Performance Assessment from 2005/06 are both contingent on the changes brought by Community Strategies and Plan Rationalisation. For these reasons, the evaluations of these two policies are being undertaken together. Moreover, both evaluations are designed to examine process and formative issues, rather than impact and summative issues, and in particular to feed into the development of policies in this area.

This report outlines the findings from the scoping phase of the evaluation, examines the continued relevance of the original research objectives and issues, and develops an evaluation framework to steer the evaluations over the next two years. Although the evaluation framework covers the evaluation of both policy areas, greater attention in this report is given to Community Strategies. This is for the following reasons. Firstly, Plan Rationalisation policy is largely determined and the requirement of the process evaluation is to examine processes already defined and established by central government. Secondly, and in contrast, Community Strategies are being led locally, although following central government guidance, and evolving rapidly. A scoping phase of the research was therefore required to identify key issues, processes and outcomes in Community Strategies and to develop a framework through which these could be evaluated.

## 1.2 Structure of the Report

This report is structured around seven sections. This section outlines the background to the evaluations and their key objectives, the policy areas and outlines the research undertaken as part of the scoping phase which is reported here. The next section outlines the findings from a literature search and review. Section three reports on the main findings from the scoping interviews and consultation events. The subsequent section develops the evaluation framework, identifying key questions and the fourth section outlines how the different research instruments will be deployed. This updates the framework outlined in the original research specification. The fifth section outlines the links with the wider LGMA Framework Evaluation and the final section outlines the outputs from the evaluation.

## 1.3 Background

The Policy Research Institute (Leeds Metropolitan University), together with the Centre for Economic and Social Research (Sheffield Hallam University), has been commissioned by the Office for the Deputy Prime Minister (Local and Regional Government Research Unit) to undertake the evaluations of Plan Rationalisation and Community Strategies. Both evaluations will be undertaken between 2004 and 2006 and will focus on assessing the effectiveness of the processes which underpin each policy area and linkages between them.

The research to be undertaken as part of the Community Strategies and Plan Rationalisation evaluations will include:

- A programme of interviews with **Central Government Departments**.
- A **Review** of all Community Strategies and their action plans, together with in-depth assessment of 50 Community Strategies and their action plans. This will consider how Community Strategies balance national government policy priorities with local needs, the engagement of stakeholders, and the monitoring frameworks which have been established.
- **Case Studies** in eight local authority areas, enhanced by additional fieldwork around specific policy issues. These will be undertaken in each year of the evaluation.
- An **Annual Survey** of Plan Rationalisation and Community Strategies lead officers in all Local Authorities.
- The establishment of a **Guidance Portal** to provide information on Community Strategies to local authorities, LSPs and regional Government Offices.
- The establishment of **Action Learning Sets** with lead officers for Community Strategies in local authorities and regional Government Offices, which will help identify emerging issues and provide the opportunity to test findings.

Outputs from the evaluation will include:

- A series of **Issues Papers** around issues including, **stakeholder engagement** and consultation, the use of **targets, indicators and baselines**, and the **processes** underpinning Plan Rationalisation.
- **Good practice** guidance on Community Strategies.
- An **Annual Report** pulling together key findings and research undertaken.

- Reports on the individual elements of the evaluation, including **case studies, survey and review of Community Strategies**.

This document outlines the work undertaken in the scoping and consultation phase of the Community Strategies and Plan Rationalisation evaluations. This work was undertaken between January and July 2004.

## **1.4 Community Strategies**

The Local Government Act 2000 places a duty on councils to prepare Community Strategies for promoting or improving the well being of their areas. According to the guidance (DETR 2000), such documents have four key components: a long-term vision, an action plan, shared commitment to improvement, and arrangements for monitoring and implementation. There is no prescribed date by which an authority is required to have completed its Community Strategy. However, the most recent survey of LSPs suggests that all areas have a Community Strategy in place, although the consultation for this research revealed that in some cases this was very much at an early stage.

Statutory responsibility for preparing a community strategy rests with the local authority, and the guidance states that the authority should, where appropriate, take the lead with the LSPs and its partners in the development of the Community Strategy. This implies that the capacity of local authorities to work with partners in developing flexible solutions to local needs, and to ensure their effective implementation by the most appropriate organisations, is of critical importance.

The purpose of the Formative Evaluation of Community Strategies is to assess the feasibility of evaluating a range of research issues and questions within a formative evaluation and then to develop an implement an evaluation framework. This framework should also provide the basis for, and be consistent with, a subsequent summative evaluation. Key issues to be evaluated include, whether Community Strategies add value, the effectiveness of performance management systems and the identification of key blockages and constraints, as well exploring other issues such as community engagement, sustainability and the involvement of the voluntary and community sector.

## **1.5 Plan Rationalisation**

A review of local authority statutory and non-statutory service and planning requirements published by the ODPM (then DTLR) in early 2002 set out the plan or strategy requirements imposed on local authorities. This research considered 66 different plans but recognised that there are more that are discretionary, and that many plans have underlying requirements, for example statistical returns. The various plans rest on a spectrum between statutory and non-statutory. They can vary considerably in their length, frequency of reporting and function.

The 2002 review categorises the use which central government makes of plans as follows:

- To inspect compliance with national standards/policy objectives (to use plans to ensure that authorities comply with national requirements and conditions of funding awards) - 34 requirements

- To monitor levels of activity (to use the plans to assess the processes employed and outcomes achieved for specific service areas) - 21 instances
- As a basis for allocating funding (to use the plan as evidence for distributing funding grants and aiding competitive bidding processes) - 9 instances
- For information only (to use the plans as a reference source on an ad hoc basis) - 5 instances
- Other uses (using the plans as a source of information, for example to inform assessment of the authority's performance) - 15 instances

More generally, plan requirements are considered by ODPM to offer transparent and accountable frameworks for implementing policies and achieving desired outcomes. Many requirements are thought to drive performance (73% of plans involve the reporting of some performance data). Plans can be considered a support to policy development, specifically in kick starting action on a national priority that is not yet being effectively addressed at local level. There are also considered to be benefits from some plan requirements in terms of co-ordination and providing a platform for joined-up working.

More critically, plans can be important instruments through which to implement, and ensure the delivery of, national (and European Union in the case of environmental directives) policies. The use of targets is the mechanism through which delivery can be assessed.

Despite the actual or perceived benefit in operating a plan requirement, there is the potential that a requirement will not be focused in the clear delivery of outputs and outcomes, and can introduce rigidity into the effort of local authorities and their partners in tackling local issues and inhibiting capacity building. This could potentially be contrary to one of the main thrusts of the local government modernisation agenda, which seeks to provide local authorities with the freedom to develop local solutions and to put in place the appropriate capacity. As a result of the numbers of requirements, there are dangers of fragmentation and duplication and resulting bureaucracy and inefficiency. It is recognised by government that it needs to employ such requirements in a more measured and considered way. Plans have often been seen as a first resort, rather than as one of a range of policy responses. Once introduced, central government departments have on occasion been slow to remove requirements, even when they have served their main purpose.

Achieving the rationalisation of plans has been through a number of means. Firstly, in November 2002 an announcement was made to reduce and rationalise plan requirements by 75 per cent. This was primarily through the implementation of the recommendations of study undertaken for ODPM by Portico and NPU. This objective has been taken further with a Parliamentary Order in April 2004. This is likely to bring a reduction in plan requirements for CPA Excellent Authorities to two plans (the Community Strategy and Best Value Performance Plan) and for other to these plans and an additional six plans. Other plans (for example Supporting People) will not be continued after their current funding allocation.

As the processes of Plan Rationalisation started in central government as early as 2000, following the Local Government Act 2000, this evaluation will in part be retrospective. There are two key foci for the research. Firstly, the evaluation will



examine the process of Plan Rationalisation within central government (including the roles of the Audit Commission and the regional Government Offices). This part of the evaluation is vital to understanding the process of Plan Rationalisation, identifying key policy drivers and in identifying key blockages. Secondly the evaluation will also examine the local processes involved in Plan Rationalisation. These two foci are inter-linked and are crosscut by the range of links between central and local government and by different policy areas.

## ***1.6 Linkages between Community Strategies and Plan Rationalisation***

There appears considerable potential for Plan Rationalisation and Community Strategies policies to be closely intertwined. Together they should assist in giving local authorities new freedoms and flexibilities, recognising the role of the local authority as community leader, identifying new ways to deliver services through partnership and, fundamentally, changing the relationship between central and local government: for example through allowing central government to develop a more differentiated relationship with local government, based on local needs and difference and the most appropriate means to achieve central government policy objectives. The rationale for this is reflected in proposals for Local Area Agreements. It is therefore appropriate for both evaluations to be undertaken together. Not only does Plan Rationalisation entail subsuming some plans into Community Strategies, but the overarching objectives of the Local Government Modernisation Agenda, in terms of efficient and effective service provision and performance management, cut across both initiatives. Both should encourage added value and performance improvements through strategic planning, prioritisation of local needs and increased joint working in service delivery.

Local authorities' and LSPs' use of Plan Rationalisation and Community Strategies may act as tremendous releasing factors for strategic planning, partnership working and service delivery. Key tasks of the evaluation will be to identify whether such releasing factors are entirely attributable to the processes of Plan Rationalisation and the development Community Strategies, what observable variations in processes exist between types of local authorities, and differences between policy areas. For example, Plan Rationalisation may trigger changes both within and across policy fields. An example might be the linking together of different service areas to work on key goals, such as Neighbourhood Renewal.

However, multi-tiered governance relationships may also be instrumental in explaining process outcomes and whether the conditions for 'releasing factors' are created. The evaluation will therefore examine the processes involved within and between central government departments (including the role of regional Government Offices) and changes to processes between central and local government brought about by Plan Rationalisation. Particular issues to examine here will be variations between policy areas, issues of performance and how government policies can be implemented following Plan Rationalisation and Community Strategies.

## ***1.7 Evaluation Objectives***

This section outlines the objectives for both evaluations which as they were set out by the ODPM in the original invitations to tender. As noted in the introduction a key aspect of this report, based on a scoping phase of research, is to develop an evaluation framework, and in particular to identify how a series of research and policy

issues can be most effectively evaluated. In contrast, the issues to be examined in the Process Evaluation of Plan Rationalisation were largely determined in the original invitation to tender.

### **Community Strategies**

The Invitation to Tender for this evaluation set the following objectives for the first phase of research:

- Research Objective 1a: To assess the feasibility of evaluating the range of research issues and questions within the formative (or summative) evaluations. Also to determine the relative priorities and degree of attention to be given by the project around the key 18 research issues and questions listed below.
- Research Objective 1b: To develop an evaluatory framework for both processes and impacts of the development and implementation of Community Strategies.

The key research issues and questions for this evaluation are around the following sets of issues, some seen as core and specifically related to Community Strategies, with others being cross-cutting and/or stemming from another area of policy:

- Core to the evaluation:
  1. Have the Community Strategies added value
  2. Evaluating progress against central (and local) policy objectives
  3. Indicators of performance
  4. Process outcomes
  5. Monitoring
  6. Constraints and blockages
- Other key issues
  7. Mainstreaming and links to other plans, strategies and partnerships
  8. Community engagement
  9. Local democratic accountability
  10. Public and private sector partners
  11. Community leadership and community cohesion
  12. Crosscutting review of the voluntary and community sector
  13. Sustainability
  14. Sustainable communities and urban renaissance
  15. Multi-tiered governance
  16. Role of elected members
  17. Rural proofing
  18. Equality and diversity

One of the objectives of the scoping phase of the evaluation has been to prioritise these issues and identify how they may most effectively be evaluated. The subsequent phases of the research were to implement the evaluation framework, to

undertake call-off research around Community Strategies as required by ODPM or other government departments and to develop a Guidance Portal.

## Plan Rationalisation

The Invitation to Tender for the Evaluation set out the following Objectives:

- Research Objective 1: Evaluate the processes adopted by central government departments and agencies as part of the general move towards a rationalisation of plan requirements on local government.
- Research Objective 2: Evaluate processes local authorities have adopted in response to rationalisation of plans they have been required to produce
- Research Objective 3a: Document and assess the extent to which Government Departments seek to achieve the purposes of removed plans through other means.
- Research Objective 3b: Document and assess the burden of remaining plan, strategy and data requirements on local government.
- Research Objective 4: Develop an analytical framework to enable an evaluation of the impacts of Plan Rationalisation in the longer term.

Objectives 1, 3a and 4 relate specifically to the Central Government interviews. Under Objective 1 (and 2 which looks at Local Authorities), the outcomes of the research should allow the ODPM to understand:

- The relevant processes which have taken place over the course of the study period.
- How 'well' the processes operate.
- The reasons behind successful and unsuccessful operation.
- The outcomes of successful and unsuccessful operation for the organisations concerned.

Under Objective 4, the research should help ODPM understand:

- How different internal outcomes might be linked to wider impacts.

Under Objective 1, the research should show:

- How Plan Rationalisation is driven within authorities and central Government.
- How the behaviour and approaches of central government departments are adjusting and specifically what are the resulting frameworks for performance management and how central government seeks to ensure objectives are achieved locally without a plan requirement
- What is innovative in terms of performance management and what are the trade offs with other approaches such as PIs, grants or funding mechanisms

Objective 3b will concern providing an assessment of how effective Plan Rationalisation has been. This could potentially be done by updating some of the analysis contained in the Portico and NPI study for ODPM on Plan Rationalisation.

## 1.8 Research Undertaken

The scoping and consultation phase of the research has involved: a series of approximately 25 interviews across central government departments, agencies such as the Audit Commission and organisations such as the LGA, LGIU and IDeA; 14 interviews with regional Government Offices; 16 interviews with officers from a sample of local authorities and LSPs; the collection of Community Strategies (and Action Plans and Monitoring Frameworks where available) from the same sample of local authorities; and the collection of central government and national agency guidance and documentation on Plan Rationalisation and Community Strategies. Consultation events have been held with local authorities and LSPs in London and Yorkshire & Humber as well as with central government departments and agencies. These are outlined in more detail below.

**Central Government interviews** form part of the process evaluation of Plan Rationalisation as well as the scoping and feasibility element of the formative evaluation of Community Strategies. It was envisaged that there would be a significant degree of overlap in these two policy areas. A common discussion guide for both evaluations was therefore used; although this recognised that interviewees will tend to have involvement in only one of the policy areas (but need to be aware of, and be affected by the developments in the other). In addition to the round of Central Government interviews conducted up until March 2004, there will be an additional round of interviews conducted in Spring 2005. The first round of interviews related to both evaluations with the second round solely to Plan Rationalisation. The second round of Plan Rationalisation interviews will also have a much stronger focus on specific policy areas and groups of plans (e.g. health, education, crime and disorder reduction, planning, housing). A **central government and central agency consultation event** has also been held which explored, key policy objectives for Plan Rationalisation and Community Strategies, how central objectives may be achieved through community strategies alone, and what other mechanisms may be developed to coordinate central-local relations.

**Regional interviews** and **regional consultation events** formed a key part of the scoping activities undertaken for the evaluation of Community Strategies. They were also used to explore some specific aspects of Plan Rationalisation. **Local interviews** were undertaken primarily with LSP officers. However, it should be noted that interviewees tended to have a much clearer understanding of their local Community Strategy, rather than the process of Plan Rationalisation which the local authority may be undertaking.

A **literature search and review** was also undertaken which drew together material publicly available from the Government Departments most closely involved in Community Strategies and Plan Rationalisation, from central agencies and organisations (LGA, Audit Commission) as well as grey literature (interview briefing material, draft bills etc) and some academic and wider literature. This material is reviewed in the next section of this report.

A key aim of the first phase of the research was to develop a 'theory of change' for both evaluations. Although intended to cut across both evaluations, it is primarily intended to form the basis for the evaluation framework for Community Strategies. This theory of change will be tested through the course of the evaluation. However, it is also likely, in particular in the case study work, that local, and therefore additional, mini-theories of change will be explored. The basis of a theory of change approach is to identify the explicit and implicit assumptions which are held by policy makers and policy officers and for a common theory to be identified. This is then used to guide the evaluation and to structure the research methods accordingly. Theory of change approaches are premised on the assumption that evaluation should be led by those

designing and implementing a policy, rather than using the methodologies (and theories) imposed by evaluators. This can pose a series of methodological problems for conducting the evaluation. These issues are discussed in the later section on the evaluation design.

## 2. Literature Search and Review

### 2.1 Introduction

As part of the scoping phase of the Community Strategies evaluation a literature search and review has been undertaken. This has primarily focused on the inclusion of Community Strategies into central government policies. It has therefore considered policy documentation (e.g. White Papers, legislation, responses to Select Committee Reports), guidance and good practice guides, policy studies, research and evaluation. It has also considered documentation produced by local government agencies (LGA, LGIU and IDeA), local authorities themselves, and independently commissioned policy studies and research. A number of search methods were used to collect documentation. These included document searches on central government and local government agency (LGA, IDeA and LGIU) websites, documentation provided by ODPM-Local Government and searches on IDOX. The search focused on documentation produced between 2000 and 2004. It should be noted that the literature search focused on documentation which specifically refers to Community Strategies. However, there will also be documentation which may have implications for Community Strategies, for example guidance on community planning. In many cases this material has been included.

This report contains a summary of the literature search and review. It is recommended that a full literature review be produced as an early Issues Paper of the evaluation. The literature search also provides the basis for material to be included on the Community Strategies guidance portal. This is discussed in more detail in a later section. A detailed bibliography (including referenced and unreferenced material) is included in Annex 1.

### 2.2 Review

Documentation can be grouped under the following headings: Guidance on Community Strategy Policy; Guidance on Community Strategy processes; Specific Policy Guidance; Guidance with Reference to Community Strategies; Wider Guidance and Policy Development; and independent studies and academic literature.

#### **Guidance on Community Strategy Policy**

The document on Community Strategy is DETR (2000), *Preparing Community Strategies: government guidance to local authorities*. This sets out the statutory requirement under the Local Government Act (2000) for all local authorities to prepare a Community Strategy and that this should contain a vision for the area, a strategy, an action plan and a monitoring framework.

## Community Strategy Processes

Three documents have been produced which specifically consider processes in developing Community Strategies. These include the Community Development Foundation (2001) report *The New Community Strategies: how to involve local people*, the LGA (2000) report *Preparing Community Strategies: issues for local authorities* as well as a report by the LGIU (2003) *Communication of Community Strategies*. Other aspects of Community Strategies, for example performance management, are not considered any specific guidance, but have been developed in a wider context, for example performance management and CPA. This aspect is considered below.

## Specific Policy Guidance

A wide cross section of government departments have issued guidance which is primarily intended for the Community Strategy. Examples of this include work by the Countryside Agency (2002), *Local Strategic Partnership and Community Strategy checklist*, DCMS (2004), *Guidance on Integrating Cultural and Community Strategies* (prepared by Creative Cultures), on nature conservation, biodiversity and sustainable development, English Nature, RSPB and Wildlife Trusts (2004), *State of Nature - Lowlands - future landscapes for wildlife*, and the London Sustainability Exchange (2004), *Community Strategies and Sustainable Development*.

Guidance has also been produced on health improvement, NHS Health Development Agency (2002a), *Planning across the local strategic partnership: case studies of integrating community strategies and health improvement*, and (2002b), *Community Strategies and health improvement: a review of policy and practice*. Finally guidance has been produced by the LGIU (2004), *Promoting equalities through the Community Strategy* and by the Home Office on different aspects of community cohesion. This includes, Home Office (2003), *Building a picture of community cohesion: a guide for local authorities and their partners* and Home Office (2003), *Community Cohesion Advice for those designing, developing and delivering Area Based Initiatives*. Although the latter do not specifically mention Community Strategies in their titles, much of their contents are applicable to preparing and implementing Community Strategies.

However, there do appear to be some significant gaps in existing guidance material, specifically around key public service areas. This is not necessarily because of lack of guidance on these areas, just that there is no material or only limited material available. For example, crime and disorder reduction policy at a local level is led by the statutory Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships and through Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategies. The Home Office have produced extensive guidance on this policy area and this is already disseminated through a web-based toolkit, [www.crimereduction.gov.uk/toolkits/index.htm](http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/toolkits/index.htm). However, the toolkit makes no mention of how Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategies should relate to Community Strategies: the reference in the toolkit to Community Strategies only includes a direct reference to the DETR (2000) guidance.

Similarly, only limited guidance which specifically relates to Community Strategies is available in the areas of: education and young people; work, enterprise and employment; and the physical environment and housing is available. As with crime and disorder policy, there is considerable policy and guidance material available but none which specifically relates to Community Strategies. An exception is in the area of Health and the two NHS Health Development Agency (2002a, 2002b) reports.

Specific policy studies on Community Strategies have also been undertaken. The most prominent of these is the ENTEC report for ODPM (2003), *The Relationships between Community Strategies and Local Development Frameworks* which highlights the difficulties in bringing together the two documents and in particular of how LDFs can be the spatial reflection of the aims and objectives of Community Strategies. ENTEC highlight that the two documents are very different in character and purpose, and in particular the LDF needing to be provide the legal basis for local spatial policy.

### **Guidance with references to Community Strategies**

A wide range of government reports make reference to Community Strategies as part of a wider consideration of how a specific policy issues can be best addressed. Examples include, the report by the Social Exclusion Unit (2004), *Action on Debt*, the reports on Community Cohesion by the Home Office (referred to above), research by Impetus Consulting (2004) for the EAGA Partnership Charitable Trust entitled *Addressing Fuel Poverty through Community Planning. A Toolkit: Developing effective community participation and partnerships*, and significantly the *Egan Review, Skills for Sustainable Communities* (ODPM 2004).

### **Wider Guidance and Policy Developments**

The literature search identified a huge range of material which may have some relevance to Community Strategies: indeed, Community Strategies may be expected to a plethora of central government policies in some way. However the literature identified the following as having specific implications for Community Strategies:

- Performance Management guidance produced both by the Audit Commission and the NRU as part of developing Performance Management Frameworks for Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategies
- Data Sharing and in particular legal implications around data protection (for example Department of Constitutional Affairs (2003), *Public Sector Data Sharing: guidance on the Law*)
- Planning and Sustainable Communities, including for the example the Egan Review and Local Development Frameworks (PPS12)
- Local Compact development with the Voluntary and Community sector produced jointly by the Home Office and NCVO
- Area Based Initiatives, particularly in NRF areas
- Pooling Resources, for example NHS Health Development Agency (2004), *Pooling Resources across sectors: a report for local strategic partnerships*.

### **Studies and Academic Literature**

There was found to be a small number of studies, policy commentaries and academic studies on Community Strategies. Moreover many publications are



prospective in nature, highlighting problems with the implementation of Community Strategies or the implications for a particular area of policy. Examples of policy commentaries include Beaver and Waterford (2001), *Take your partners: why the Environment Agency is key to preparing Community Strategies*, Pilling and Cooper (2002), *Community Strategies and LSPs: fast lane or cul-de-sac for sustainable development*, Cutten (2003), *Breaking down business barriers: on practical ways to involve business in community strategies* and Williams (2002), *Community Strategies: mainstreaming sustainable development and strategic planning*. Articles in academic journals have tended to focus on issues around governance, partnership and community involvement in the preparation of Community Strategies. Examples include, Bailey, N. (2003), *Local Strategic Partnerships in England: the Continuing search for collaborative advantage, leadership and strategy in urban governance*, Doak, Parker and Raco (2004), *Community Strategies in England: reshaping spaces of governance* and Shaw (2004), *Local development documents - the missing spatial dimension of Community Strategies*.

## **2.3 Evaluation Questions**

The literature search also identified documents against each of the evaluation questions. This was in terms both of whether specific guidance had been issued or whether there was a report which identified issues relevant to the evaluation question. The literature search focused specifically on Community Strategies policy.

### **Core Evaluation Questions**

#### *1. Have Community Strategies Added Value*

The starting point for identifying added value is the DETR (2000) guidance on preparing Community Strategies which sets out the intended aims of Community Strategy policy. However, Community Strategies may add value in a number of ways, for example through enhancing community involvement (see CDF 2001, *The New Community Strategies: how to involve local people*), by providing the focus for community leadership (LGA 1998, *Community leadership and community planning: developing a comprehensive strategy to promote the well-being of areas*), connecting service planning to local citizens (Audit Commission 2002, *Connecting with users and citizens* and National Audit Office 2001, *Joining Up to Improve Public Services*).

#### *2. Evaluating progress against central policy objectives*

Except for the DETR (2000) guidance there is no single document which joins up how Community Strategies should deliver central policy objectives. The review above indicated considerable guidance around, for example, community cohesion, sustainability, health improvement and neighbourhood renewal, but that there was a lack of specific material which set out what could be expected of Community Strategies in the fields of Education, Skills, Employment and Enterprise, and Crime and Disorder Reduction. This was seen to be largely because these are huge policy areas in their own right and, as in the case of CDRPs, have statutory local planning and delivery mechanisms in place already. In other areas agencies of central government may be responsible for delivery public services locally (e.g. Connexions, LSC and Jobcentre Plus).

The exception to this is in the 88 NRF areas where the NRU provides guidance and support for how LNRS documents can plan and deliver public services to best address issues of neighbourhood renewal. In most areas LNRS have been developed in tandem with Community Strategies. Performance Management Frameworks and policy on Floor targets, required for all NRF areas also provide a basis for assessing progress against, in particular, national neighbourhood renewal strategy objectives (see NRU 2003, *Performance Management Framework - Local Strategic Partnerships: Aide-Memoire to support the review of partnership working*, NRU 2003, *Aiming High: the power of Floor Targets to create better neighbourhoods*).

### 3. Indicators of performance

A range of indicators of performance could be used to assess progress by Community Strategies, including the DETR (2000) core guidance as well as:

- Audit Commission (2002), *Quality of Life Indicators*
- Audit Commission (2003), *Quality of Life: a good practice guide to communicating quality of life indicators*
- Audit Commission (2004) *CPA 2005 - the new approach*.
- Audit Commission (2000), *Consultation: Voluntary Quality of Life and Cross-Cutting Indicators for Local Authorities*.
- Audit Commission (2003), *Patterns of Improvement: Learning from comprehensive performance assessment to achieve better public services*
- Audit Commission (2003) *Economic and community regeneration: Learning from inspection*
- Community Development Foundation (2001), *The New Community Strategies: how to involve local people*
- Countryside Agency (2002) *Rural Proofing Delivery Checklist*
- Countryside Agency (2002) *Local Strategic Partnership and Community Strategy rural checklist*
- IDeA (2004), *Manager's guide to performance management*
- Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (2003), *Performance Management Framework - Local Strategic Partnerships: Aide-Memoire to support the review of partnership working*

Consultation events highlighted that the core areas of performance management were seen to be CPA and Best Value (for local authorities), Audit Commission Quality of Life Outcomes (for setting and monitoring outcome targets) and the RCU's Performance Management Framework and Floor Targets (for NRF areas). In addition to these, other guidance, for example the Countryside Agency's rural proofing delivery checklist may also be used. More broadly, self-assessment material is seen

as a mechanism through which responsibility for improving performance can be led by the local authority and LSP.

#### 4. Process Outcomes

Process outcomes were identified in the evaluation specification as including: legitimacy and accountability, community cohesion, bureaucracy, and added or reduced value through rationalisation of processes and activities (such as affects upon robustness by sharing data, information or consultation). Other than literature on performance management (referenced above) there was little material which covered all of these aspects. Rather, there was found to be specific guidance on particular areas (e.g. on Home Office guidance on Community Cohesion or DCA guidance on Data Sharing). Although there was limited government guidance and other material on legitimacy and accountability, there was found to be wide ranging academic literature on these issues. Typically, it examined the operation of partnerships and local governance arrangements, for example, Bailey (2003), Doak et al. (2004) and Jones et al. (2004).

#### 5. Monitoring

Literature on monitoring has largely been covered under the review of indicators of performance and comes from three main sources, Audit Commission (BV and CPA), Audit Commission guidance on performance management, and NRU guidance on Performance Management Frameworks and Floor Targets.

#### 6. Constraints and Blockages

The evaluation specification identified the following issues which may constrain LAs/LSPs in developing Community Strategies:

- *Difficulties of ensuring effective engagement of (appropriately graded) partners:* there was found to be limited government guidance specifically on 'who' should be involved in developing Community Strategies although many references in the literature on partnerships and on performance management that this was a key issue.
- *Difficulty in sharing data and information:* the main formal guidance on this is the DCA document on legal issues around data sharing, specifically with respect to the Data Protection Act.
- *Difficulties in pooling budgets and sharing resources.* The only specific documentation on this was by the NHS Health Development Agency.
- *Pressures of mandates such as inflexible sectoral targets.* Reports on joined-up working by the Cabinet Office, Social Inclusion Unit and National Audit Office highlighted that sectoral targets can prevent joint working and successful implementation. However, these documents do not refer specifically to Community Strategies.

- *Personality disputes constraining effective partnership working.* This issue is reflected in some academic literature on partnership working and in some studies on effective partnerships (Audit Commission 1998, *A fruitful partnership: effective partnership working*).
- *Pressures of central government agendas constraining local discretion.* Many of the policy studies and academic literature considered above, particularly good practice guides, highlight how central government agendas have, prior to Community Strategies, constrained local discretion.
- *Lack of appropriate guidance and support.* This issue was highlighted in consultation and is reflected on literature on research utilisation and policy transfer.
- *Lack of appropriate skills amongst leading personnel and Lack of effective leadership and direction* are considered in a range of literature particularly on effective partnership working (see for example Audit Commission)
- *Difficulties that may accrue from long established sectoral teams dominating the agenda e.g. LA21 teams dictating the style of the strategy.* This issue is not considered specifically by the policy literature. However, articles by Evans and Theobald (2002) and Pilling and Cooper (2002) do both examine the implications of including LA21 strategies within Community Strategies with both arguing that the result may be less attention being given to (environmental) sustainable development.

## Other Issues

### *7. Mainstreaming and links to other plans, strategies and partnerships*

The literature search of government documentation highlighted guidance and policy studies on the following topics: rural development and rural proofing, cultural strategies, biodiversity, nature conservation; community cohesion, equalities, sustainable development and health improvement. This documentation tended to recommend a plethora of approaches to mainstreaming and integration, in many cases appropriate to the requirements of specific policy areas. Noticeable gaps in this area are around crime and disorder reduction, education and young people, employment, enterprise and skills, and physical environment and housing. More broadly was also a literature on joining up policies (for example National Audit Office 2001 and Cabinet Office 2000) and policy studies by NRU (2004) on mainstreaming.

### *8. Community Engagement*

This was found to be the area with the most extensive material, both in policy and academic literature. Although few studies had specifically examined Community Strategies, many had considered community involvement in partnerships, including LSPs. The literature in this area included:

- Community Development Foundation (2001), *The New Community Strategies: how to involve local people*
- Audit Commission, (2000), *Consultation: Voluntary Quality of Life and Cross-Cutting Indicators for Local Authorities.*

- Audit Commission (2002), *Connecting with users and citizens (Public Sector Management Paper)*
- Greater London Authority (2002), *A Strategic Planning Framework for Community Strategies and Community Based Regeneration: SDS Technical Report Four.*
- Home Office (2003), *Building a picture of community cohesion: a guide for local authorities and their partners*
- Home Office (2004), *Strength in Diversity: Towards a Community Cohesion and Race Equality Strategy*

Academic literature included Bailey (2003), Doak et al (2004), Jonas et al (2004) and Thomas (2002).

#### 9. Local Democratic Accountability

This was a limited amount of evidence both in the policy and academic literature on democratic accountability. This issue is considered to some extent by the LSP and Local Governance LGMA evaluations, although focuses specifically on the effects of the Community Strategy on Local Democratic Accountability.

#### 10. Public and Private Partners

There was a range of policy and academic literature on this issue, including:

- Audit Commission 1998, *A fruitful partnership: effective partnership working*
- NHS Health Development Agency (2004), *Pooling Resources across sectors: a report for local strategic partnerships*
- Bailey, N. (2003), *Local Strategic Partnerships in England: the Continuing search for collaborative advantage, leadership and strategy in urban governance, Planning, Theory and Practice.*
- Cutten, A. (2003), *Breaking down business barriers (on practical ways to involve business in community strategies), Regeneration and Renewal*
- Doak, J., Parker, G. and Raco, M. (2004), *Community Strategies in England: reshaping spaces of governance.*
- Jonas, AEG, While, A, and Gibbs, DC (2004), *State modernisation and local strategic selectivity after Local Agenda 21: evidence from three northern English localities*
- Thomas, A. (2002) *Route-Mapping Community Leadership, Local Governance v 28, n 3*

This issue is being considered as part of the LSP evaluation.

### 11. Community Leadership and Community Cohesion

There was found to be a wide range of policy literature on these issues, although little related specifically to Community Strategies. The key documentation included:

- *Audit Commission (2002), Connecting with users and citizens (Public Sector Management Paper)*
- *Home Office (2003), Building a picture of community cohesion: a guide for local authorities and their partners*
- *Home Office (2004), Strength in Diversity: Towards a Community Cohesion and Race Equality Strategy*
- *LGA (2002), Examples of Community Cohesion Good Practice*
- *LGA (2002), Guidance on Community Cohesion*
- *Bailey, N. (2003), Local Strategic Partnerships in England: the Continuing search for collaborative advantage, leadership and strategy in urban governance, Planning, Theory and Practice.*
- *Kitchin, H. (2004), We've got the power (on wellbeing powers) Public Finance*

Of the two areas identified there has been limited material, except for the main DETR (2000) guidance on how Community Strategies support the community leadership role of local authorities.

### 12. Crosscutting review of voluntary and community sector

The three main documents outlining the role of the Voluntary and Community Sector in local service delivery are:

- *HM Treasury (2002), The Role of the Voluntary and Community Sector in Service Delivery - a cross cutting review*
- *HM Treasury (2003), Futurebuilders: An Investment Fund for Voluntary and Community Sector Public Service Delivery*
- *Home Office (2004), ChangeUp: Capacity Building and Infrastructure Framework for the Voluntary and Community Sector*

Although none of these documents makes reference to Community Strategies, the intention is that most infrastructure support for the VCS will be provided locally. The implication of this is that Community Strategies, through LSPs, should identify for their local area the most appropriate role the VCS can play in delivering the objectives of the Community Strategy.

### 13. Sustainability

The literature on sustainability was found to be wide ranging, including material developed during the 1990s on LA21 strategies, on biodiversity, energy conservation, and rural development. The material included some guidance prepared by the

London Sustainability Exchange and Cumbria County Council, some of the few documents prepared locally. The documentation included:

- Audit Commission (2000), *Consultation: Voluntary Quality of Life and Cross-Cutting Indicators for Local Authorities*.
- Beaver, C. and Waterworth, J. (2001), *Take your partners: why the Environment Agency is key to preparing community strategies*, EG
- Countryside Agency (2002), *Rural Proofing Delivery Checklist*
- Cumbria County Council (2003), *Integrating Sustainable Development into Community Strategies*
- DEFRA (2004), *Life-Support: incorporating Biodiversity into Community Strategies*
- Energy Saving Trust (2002), *Guidance on the role of community partnerships in sustainable energy issues*
- English Nature (2004), *State of Nature - Lowlands - future landscapes for wildlife* (see [www.english-nature.org.uk/pubs/publication/PDF/SONlow.pdf](http://www.english-nature.org.uk/pubs/publication/PDF/SONlow.pdf) )
- English Nature/RSPB/Wildlife Trusts (2002), *Natural communities (guidance on Community Strategies)*
- Evans, B. and Theobald, K. (2002), *Stop this madness: why collapsing LA21 into community strategies is a big mistake*, in EG
- Jonas, AEG, While, A, and Gibbs, DC (2004), *State modernisation and local strategic selectivity after Local Agenda 21: evidence from three northern English localities*
- LGIU (2004), *Delivering Local Sustainable Development*
- London Sustainability Exchange (2003), *Community Strategies and Sustainable Development: a review of current work by London Boroughs*
- London Sustainability Exchange (2003), *Community Strategies and Sustainable Development: conference proceedings*
- Lucas, K. Ross, A. and Fuller, S. (2003), *What's in a name? Local Agenda 21: community planning and neighbourhood renewal (JRF)*.
- Pilling, A and Cooper, D. (2002), *Community Strategies and LSPs: fast lane or cul-de-sac for sustainable development?*
- Williams, PM, (2002), *Community Strategies: mainstreaming sustainable development and strategic planning? in Sustainable Development*

#### *14 Sustainable Communities and urban renaissance*

The two keynote documents for this area are ODPM (2003), *Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future* and DETR (2000), *Our Towns and Cities: the Future - Delivering an Urban Renaissance*. Neither makes detailed reference to Community Strategies (the Urban Renaissance Paper predating the DETR (2000) guidance on Community Strategies. However, there is an expectation that Community Strategies should, possibly in conjunction with LDFs and regional planning frameworks, identify their contribution to sustainable communities and urban renaissance. The following documents also refer to urban renaissance and sustainable strategies and provide more specific details of issues Community Strategies might be expected to address:

- Audit Commission (2004), *People, places and prosperity: delivering government programmes at the local level*
- Egan, P. (2004), *The Egan Review: Skills for Sustainable Communities*
- ENTEC (for ODPM) (2003), *The Relationships between Community Strategies and Local Development Frameworks Final Report*

Other related documents include: Allmendinger et al (2003) on planning following the Local Government Act, Carmona (2002) on how design issues should be treated by Community Strategies and LDFs and Ellis (2004) who provides a critique of the new planning framework under LDFs and PPS12. The issue of design in LDFs and Community Strategies is also considered in an RTPi publication (2003).

#### *15. Multi-tiered governance*

No material was found which made links between Community Strategies and regional policy frameworks (such as Regional Economic Strategies, Regional Planning Guidance and Regional Spatial Strategies and Regional Housing Strategies). This appears to be a significant gap and was reflected in the consultation, where very different approaches had emerged for regional-local working.

#### *16. Role of Elected Members*

No material was found which made links between elected members and Community Strategies. However, findings from the Evaluating Local Governance project (Stoker et al, 2002, 2003) did highlight the different roles of elected members and the challenges which LSPs posed, especially for 'backbench councillors'. These findings were reflected in the consultation although there were found to be exceptions, where for example councillors were active in coordinating community consultation and involvement.

#### *17. Rural Proofing*

There was found to be considerable guidance material and studies on rural proofing, all of which had been published by the Countryside Agency. This included:



- Countryside Agency (2002), *Rural Proofing Delivery Checklist*
- Countryside Agency (2002), *Local Strategic Partnership and Community Strategy rural checklist*
- Countryside Agency (2003) *Research notes CRN 68 (on rural proofing in local authority policy).*
- Countryside Agency (2004) *Rural Proofing in 2003/2004: A report to Government by the Countryside Agency*

#### *18. Equality and Diversity*

Two documents were found on the promotion of equality and diversity issues in Community Strategies.

- LGIU (2004), *Promoting equalities through the Community Strategy*
- ODPM (LRGRU) (2003), *Equality and Diversity in Local Government in England: a literature review*

### 3. Scoping and consultation: findings

#### 3.1 Introduction

The ODPM has provided guidance to local authorities on both Plan Rationalisation and community strategies. A letter to local authority chief executives (22 July 2003) sets out the government's plans for reducing local authority plan requirements. Guidance to local authorities on the development of Community Strategies was issued in 2000 (Preparing Community Strategies). These documents have been used as reference points in the scoping phase of the evaluation.

The guidance on **Community Strategies** states that it should aim to 'enhance the quality of life of local communities and contribute to the achievement of sustainable development'. If this aim is to be realised, the guidance outlines that Community Strategies will have to meet four objectives:

- Allow local communities (based upon geography and/or interest) to articulate their aspirations, needs and priorities;
- Co-ordinate the actions of the council, and of the public, private and voluntary and community organisations that operate locally;
- Focus and shape existing and future activity of these organisations so that they effectively meet community needs and aspirations; and
- Contribute to the achievement of sustainable development both locally and more widely, with local goals and priorities, relating, where appropriate, to regional, national and even global aims.

The guidance states that Community Strategies must contain four elements:

- A long-term vision for the area focusing on the outcomes that are to be achieved;
- An action plan identifying shorter-term priorities and activities that will contribute to the achievement of long-term outcomes;
- A shared commitment to implement the action plan and proposals for doing so;
- Arrangements for monitoring and implementation of the action plan, for periodically reviewing the community strategy, and for reporting progress to local communities.

The underpinning principles of Community Strategies are that they engage and involve local communities, involve the active participation of councillors within and outside the executive, be prepared and implemented by a broad local strategic partnership, and be based on a proper assessment of needs and the availability of resources.

The guidance on **Plan Rationalisation** stresses that the aim of the government is to reduce the burden on local authorities of producing plans and the reporting associated with these plans. The guidance sets out that a substantial number of plans will be abolished, particularly for excellent authorities. The aim is to achieve, by 2005/06, a significant rationalisation of remaining plans so that there will be just six major service plans required from non-excellent authorities in addition to the Best Value Performance Plan and the Community Strategy (this may not be required by all authorities, for example districts). In addition to the CS and BVPP the residual plan requirements on non-excellent authorities are:

- Housing Strategy
- Local Development Documents (as part of the Local Development Framework)
- Single Education Plan
- Strategy for Children and Young People
- Local Transport Plan
- Civil Contingencies Plan

Additional plans may be required for additional purposes (e.g. Air Quality Action Plan, Municipal Waste Strategies, Food Law Enforcement Plan, Trading Standards Plan, and Emergency Related Plans) and some plans will be the responsibility of local stakeholders or partnerships (for example Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership Strategies).

The residual burden on excellent authorities, in addition to the CS and BVPP, is likely to include plans required by statute for 2003/04 (only), Homelessness Strategy, Air Quality Action Plan and the School Organisation Plan. As new land use policy is rolled out, local authorities will only be required to produce Local Development Documents. Emergency plans, required for health and safety at work legislation will also be required.

In order to receive NRF, the 88 eligible local authorities are required to produce Neighbourhood Renewal Strategies. However, proposals for Plan Rationalisation allow for Neighbourhood Renewal Strategies to be integrated into Community Strategies.

The following sections report the findings of the scoping phase of the research against the criteria provided in the original research specification, in the context of the guidance provided to local authorities, and with respect to possible linkages (existing or planned) between Plan Rationalisation and Community Strategies.

## **3.2 Plan Rationalisation**

### **Processes**

#### *Central Government*

The processes used to take forward Plan Rationalisation were considered through interviews with Central Government departments. These focused primarily on the progress which had been made in implementing the recommendations of the Plans Rationalisation Study report (Portico/NPI, 2002) and in taking forward the guidance on Plan Rationalisation.

Interviewees stressed that the process of Plan Rationalisation both quickened and became more systematic between 2001 and 2002, and that the Portico study was instrumental in this process. The Portico report set out both primary and secondary principles for Plan Rationalisation. The Primary Principles included (Portico 2002, p. 34-35):

- 1 Fit with Shared Priorities: 'Purpose clear and necessary for achieving national policy priorities in line with shared priorities'
- 2 Availability of Alternative Mechanisms: 'Other mechanisms would be more effective (and proportionate)'
- 3 Review Mechanisms: 'Regular Review, assessment against principles'
- 4 Differentiation by Council Performance: 'Requirement and/or degree of prescription vary according to performance of LA'

The Secondary Principles were divided into four categories:

1. Purpose
2. Content of Plans
3. Stimulus to Performance Improvement
4. Integration and Alignment
5. Planning cycles should be optimised.

Interviewees highlighted that the agreed principles were discussed with the Office for Public Sector Reform who supported the recommended approach. Also instrumental in the quickening of the pace of Plan Rationalisation was the establishment of the (Local Government) White Paper (Implementation) Group, together with ministerial agreement that the number of plans should be reduced by 50 per cent. Interviews stressed that the involvement of the OPSR and strong ministerial support gave Plan Rationalisation a high cross-department profile. The development of the principles as a precursor to rationalisation also allowed cross-departmental consensus to be built and to a considerable extent prevented the need for Plan Rationalisation to be progressed through ODPM negotiating with the department sponsoring each plan. The Implementation Group was comprised of senior civil servants (Grades 2 and 3) and this was also seen to be necessary for advancing this policy agenda quickly.

However, there was seen to be considerable variation across departments, both in terms of the response of departments and the effect on policy. This in part reflects the variation in the purpose of plans. As the Portico report highlights, the main purposes of plans are to be used:

- As a mechanism to influence the behaviour of authorities
- As a mechanism for raising the profile of a subject
- As a vehicle for data collection
- As a public document

Departments making greater progress in Plan Rationalisation were DH, DfES and ODPM. In part this may be because the proposals for Plan Rationalisation in these departments were not necessarily seeking to remove all plans, but rather to reduce or merge plans. This development, as in the case of health and education, was also consistent with the core policy agendas of the departments. For example, Plan Rationalisation is consistent with the aims of DfES to reduce the bureaucratic burden on LEAs. Plan Rationalisation in the DfES was taken forward by a Star Chamber. The DH commissioned a study on Plan Rationalisation (Portico 2001) and this made extensive recommendations which have largely been enacted.

Progress in Plan Rationalisation in the ODPM has been seen through the requirement that Local Housing Strategies (instead of Strategies and Business Plans) now only need to be produced on a three or five yearly basis. Revisions to the planning framework, and the introduction of Local Development Documents is intended to reduce the range of land use planning documents local authorities are required to produce.

However, the effect of Plan Rationalisation was seen to fall more heavily on specific departments. DCMS was highlighted by many interviewees as being particularly 'hard hit' by Plan Rationalisation, with proposals to remove the local library plan and local cultural strategies. However, the latter is also seen as an example of a policy area which should be integrated into the local Community Strategy.

A blockage to Plan Rationalisation which was highlighted by interviewees is that plans are linked in many cases to ring-fenced budgets. Removing plans is therefore seen by many as reducing the importance and profile of a policy within central government and in local government. Plan Rationalisation can therefore be seen as a threat and may be resisted for this reason. Finding alternative mechanisms to deliver policy objectives, and providing evidence that they work, was highlighted as being critical to the success of Plan Rationalisation and more generally in ensuring that sound systems of performance management exist. This may also require significant shifts in organisational cultures as to how government delivers its policy objectives.

Regional Government Offices have no formal role in Plan Rationalisation. For example, they do not facilitate processes or provide guidance, as they do in other aspects of their 'Whitehall in the Regions' role. This was reflected in interviews. Some interviewees suggested that Government Offices could have been given a greater role in this process. However, central and regional interviews stressed that they would face considerable barriers in this role, not least because of capacity constraints but also because of the potential breadth of issues covered by Community Strategies was often outside the areas of policy expertise and competence in Government Offices. However, it should be noted that Government Offices do play an active role in supporting local authorities and LSPs in receipt of NRF, in particular in the development and implementation of Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategies, and this may allow them to provide support in the related area of Plan Rationalisation.

Interviewees also suggested that Plan Rationalisation should be seen alongside other policies. These include, the development of the CPA methodology, BVPIs and plans to remove ring-fenced grants. It was also suggested that the links between these areas could have been closer as they have largely been developed separately with under the remit of different departments and agencies (in particular ODPM and the Audit Commission).

There was a perception across some government departments, and in local authorities, that the pace of Plan Rationalisation had reduced and that it was now being given less importance. Some interviewees reflected that this was due to a reduction in the policy profile of Plan Rationalisation at ministerial level, and some caution over how some national policies would be implemented without plans. However, except for these leadership and profile factors being identified as key drivers, it was unclear whether there were now additional organisational, procedural, external, political and capacity factors which were reducing the pace of Plan Rationalisation. The issue of implementing Plan Rationalisation needs to be explored in more detail, and in particular the blockages remaining to the removal of plans. Specific attention should be given to working through the processes for Plan Rationalisation and the feasibility of proposed timescales. This will be the focus for additional interviews, and will form a key part of the next wave of central government interviews.

### *Local Government*

Interviews with regional Government Offices and local authorities/LSPs provided mixed and incomplete evidence on progress of Plan Rationalisation. Typical responses were that Plan Rationalisation was seen primarily as the merging of existing strategies, or that where the central government requirement for a plan had been removed, that a local service plan would still be produced. There was also a degree of scepticism that Plan Rationalisation would actually lead to a shift in centre-local relations. A common perception was that individual local authorities had not developed an overall strategy or approach for developing their Community Strategy: moreover, some perceived that was not a need for an overall approach. This meant that explicit linkages between Plan Rationalisation and Community Strategies did not exist. Exceptions to this included the inclusion and reflection on issues of sustainability, local development frameworks, cultural strategies and neighbourhood renewal strategies in Community Strategies. Local interviews were primarily undertaken with LSP managers and officers whose main responsibility had been the development of Community Strategies with external partners, and the organisation of community involvement, rather than the development of LSP-local authority service linkages. Further progress on Plan Rationalisation-Community Strategies links could exist which have so far not been identified in the scoping phase of the research.

Process factors which appear critical in the completion of Plan Rationalisation in the next two years included:

- Guidance on Plan Rationalisation, specifically around issues of: residual audit, information and monitoring requirements
- Good practice and development of networks
- Links with Local Development Frameworks.

Other factors seen to be crucial in advancing Plan Rationalisation in the next two years were seen to be ensuring that PR had a high national and local profile, that the process was led (both centrally and locally) and that clear links were made with Community Strategies. Few respondents associated Plan Rationalisation with the wider modernisation of local government, and in particular the role of LSPs and Community Strategies. Regional consultation events highlighted that Plan Rationalisation could be accelerated if three issues were addressed. Firstly the process needed to be driven much more by central government, secondly, that the

fuller development of Community Strategies in due course would help Plan Rationalisation (in particular once Action Plans and Monitoring frameworks were established and operational, and thirdly, that greater clarity was required around what was being rationalised with guidance on how specific issues (e.g. data gaps or planning processes) could be addressed in the future.

**Key evaluation questions regarding processes to emerge from the scoping interviews for future central government research include:**

- 1. The need for a clear assessment of progress in implementing Plan Rationalisation across Government Departments.**
- 2. Identification of blockages in areas where progress has been slow (e.g. Transport, Accessibility, Waste and Sustainability).**
- 3. An assessment of the effectiveness of the mechanisms for Plan Rationalisation, such as departmental and inter-departmental gateways and the effectiveness of procedures to coordinate the development and issuing of guidance in the future.**
- 4. An assessment of the political and leadership factors which can sustain the pace of Plan Rationalisation; in particular, ministerial and civil service leadership in central government departments and the extent to which wider organisational and cultural change is required for successful and lasting Plan Rationalisation.**
- 5. The identification of appropriate mechanisms for centre-local relations both in achieving Plan Rationalisation and finding new ways of working in the future.**

**Three further evaluation questions which apply to local government can also be identified from the scoping findings:**

- 1. Assessment of the progress made locally in implementing Plan Rationalisation**
- 2. Identification of the processes through which local authorities have sought to rationalise plans**
- 3. Identification of the blockages and constraints which have prevented Plan Rationalisation**

## **New Approaches to Working**

### *Changes to Central Government Ways of Working*

Interviews briefly explored the extent to which Plan Rationalisation had brought, or required, new ways of working. The implementation of the principles in the Portico report highlighted how government departments worked together. However, it was less clear how departments were influenced by changes (and their timing) in other departments.

A concern expressed by some departments was that the removal of a plan could diminish the importance of the policy or the initiative. This was not the case so much

for departments holding large budgets, such as health and education. In these cases, budgets also came with significant and high profile targets. The greater concern was in departments where national policies came with no new funding, or only a small budget, and where objectives had less clarity. This appeared to be the case in areas such as sustainable development (DEFRA) and community cohesion (Home Office). To some extent both policy areas require, and encourage, a diversity of local approaches, rather than through central prescription. In the case of Community Cohesion, where a requirement for a new plan has not been announced, the Home Office, LGA and CRE have issued joint guidance. The Community Cohesion Unit sees the Community Strategy being the main vehicle through which Community Cohesion aims can be achieved.

A concern raised in interviews was that Plan Rationalisation would be a one-off exercise by which current planning requirements were reduced, but that no mechanisms would be in place to ensure there was not an increase in plans at a future date. Moreover, Plan Rationalisation (coupled to Community Strategies, CPA and Best Value) would not bring a significant cultural and organisational change in centre-local relations. Understanding the *new ways of working* required for such an organisational and cultural shift will be examined in the main element of the evaluation, and can only be fully explored over time. The focus of this element of the evaluation will be on the gateway(s) established to review the need for any new plan requirement. This is being led by ODPM but individual departments may (and have) develop their own gateways.

The scoping interviews did not highlight whether central bodies (Audit Commission, LGA, IDeA) thought that the removal of plans would bring a worsening in performance in specific policy areas. This issue needs to be explored in more detail. One view was that although centre-local plans would be removed, local authorities would still produce service plans, and that these could still be the basis for audit and inspection. However, further guidance may be required, and there may be a need to harmonise standards for developing service plans (e.g. setting of minimum requirements) and for identifying mechanisms through which performance can be improved.

#### *Staff implications and work changes*

Plan rationalisation should bring significant changes in terms of the type and level of work undertaken by staff in central government. The major shift will be in the setting of common standards and requirements to which all authorities must adhere. These will no longer be required. Moreover, the collection and processing of plans from all authorities will, similarly, no longer be required. This is the case for those plans which are being removed. However, there will be a greater requirement for common guidance to all authorities and, potentially, for a more individualised or variegated approach to relations with local authorities. If central demands for information and reporting from local government were to remain as they are now, such an approach would place undue burdens on central government departments, be inappropriate and probably work against the aims of the wider LGMA. These principles are reflected in proposals for local area agreements and public service boards.

Instead, central government departments (with central agencies) will be required to produce common guidance (passed through a gateway) and to focus efforts on particular areas of need or opportunity. For example, identifying which areas require greatest support to meet sustainable development objectives or floor targets.



Regional Government Offices may have a greater role to play in these new central-local relations.

Further research is required to explore the full staff implications of Plan Rationalisation. This is likely to be through focused case studies of specific policy areas and/or government departments, rather than a review of all departments. The examples of sustainable development, neighbourhood renewal and, education or health targets would be appropriate for further investigation.

### *Information and Data Gaps*

Further research is required to explore the scope and scale of any data gaps which may be created by Plan Rationalisation. An area where such a gap was thought likely was in the monitoring of commitments to EU legislation and international agreements, particularly in the field of sustainable development and waste management. However, it may be possible to address these gaps through other monitoring mechanisms, such as surveys or collecting information through other agencies (such as the Environment Agency).

Further research will therefore focus on specific areas where data gaps are thought likely but also seek to identify, across departments, what would be the sufficient requirements to place on local government to provide information. Alternative mechanisms may use new approaches from central government (e.g. survey based approaches), collecting data through Community Strategy monitoring (although this may raise issues of standardisation) or through inspection and audit procedures.

### *Guidance*

Most Departments with plan requirements already issue guidance to local authorities (or their partners) in some form. A concern raised by local and regional interviews was with the impact this guidance had. For some authorities (specific types or in specific locations) such guidance was either inappropriate to their requirements or needed additional 'translation' to be applicable. This perception was often held by rural local authorities (both counties and districts).

The issuing of 'voluntary' guidance can therefore require additional support for it to have an effect. For example, issuing joint guidance with the LGA or other central agency may increase the profile and make guidance more accessible. In some cases there was a call for additional support to better promote guidance, as there was a perception that current guidance, whether by the ODPM or another agency, for local authorities was not being adequately taken on board. Finally, there are risks that authorities may adopt an *a la carte* approach to guidance: drawing on what appears relevant at a particular time to their economic, political and organisational circumstances. This problem may be addressed through ensuring that the guidance is both relevant and timely but also that clearer signals are given as to its importance.

Further research will examine the impact of guidance on Community Strategies (and their implementation) and, tied to this, how central government gateways work in filtering and focusing the guidance issued by central government.

**Two main evaluation issues emerge from the review of new ways of working:**

- 1. The development of new ways of working appear critical to fulfilling the wider aims of Plan Rationalisation. These are, and should be, closely**

**ted to the development and implementation of Community Strategies. The evaluation will therefore explore these issues across both Plan Rationalisation and Community Strategies.**

- 2. A focus of attention will be on the effectiveness of mechanisms established to coordinate new ways of working (gateways and inter-department groups). This is likely to involve consideration of specific policy areas, which should be agreed with Central Government departments. There is also an opportunity to follow through the effectiveness of new ways of working by looking at how Community Strategies (and their implementation strategies and monitoring frameworks) address these policy areas. This work will also require the involvement of central agencies.**

## **Performance Management**

### *Mechanisms and Approaches to Performance Management*

It was not possible to gain an in depth understanding of the performance management mechanisms associated with Plan Rationalisation and how performance management will be dealt with in the future at this initial stage of the research. Further research is required to examine the performance management mechanisms central government is considering, making use of, or relying on. These will help identify the extent to which Plan Rationalisation is dependent on these and examine the perception (or reality) that Plan Rationalisation has left, or will leave, a gap in this respect. Alternative mechanisms which may be more appropriate will also be considered.

Central government interviews indicated that Plan Rationalisation would leave a gap in this respect although it was also recognised that new methods of performance management were also required. This is likely to be through BVPIs and CPA. However, it will also be necessary to identify gaps which may emerge through Plan Rationalisation: for example where a plan provided information for either BVPIs or CPA. Given the scope and scale of performance management mechanisms it is appropriate to focus on a limited number of policy areas and/or approaches to performance management.

### *Auditing*

Plan Rationalisation potentially creates difficulties in having a consistent basis for auditing local authorities. This needs to be explored in more detail with the Audit Commission and through local case studies, although a view was that local authorities were still likely to produce local service plans for their own purposes and these would provide a basis for audit. However, and as discussed previously, this may raise issues of harmonisation.

### *Monitoring Mechanisms and Requirements*

Some monitoring of local authorities will still be required to ensure the delivery of the remaining six plans and the time-limited residual plans. The nature of targets is also likely to change from output-based (around funding) to outcome-based. An example of this is the introduction of floor targets. This area will be explored further in the next phases of the research.

The monitoring mechanisms established by local government (and by LSPs) were not explored in the scoping phase of the research. This will be the subject of the detailed case studies and was also a proposal in the original tender for a 'light touch' case study.

### *Outcomes and Impact*

The case studies and survey will be used to explore how Plan Rationalisation will produce and contribute to improvements in local government (e.g. freedoms and flexibilities, reduced bureaucracy, better accountability and community engagement). These are issues which are also central to the evaluation of Community Strategies and to any joint work with other LGMA evaluations (Wellbeing Powers and LSPs in particular), for example through the rationalisation of partnerships and joint consultation strategies.

The case studies will also identify and examine the processes through which Plan Rationalisation may (or may not) contribute to the achievement of wider government policy objectives (e.g. in health, education, crime and neighbourhood renewal). Identifying the causal mechanisms in each case will be difficult and it is highly likely that such mechanisms, where they do exist, will be contingent on a range of other policy and context factors. However, this area could be explored for a specific policy (e.g. education) or for a limited number of authorities to provide an indication of how Plan Rationalisation may have helped remove constraints to the achievement of wider targets.

**A series of evaluation issues emerge from the scoping phase of the research. It was envisaged in the original tender that Performance Management issues would form the basis of a stand-alone piece of additional research, possibly undertaken through a case study crossing central and local government. This case study should focus on specific policy areas or on specific performance management mechanisms. It should draw on data from other elements of the research (case studies, survey and action learning sets) and it may be appropriate to include a longitudinal element.**

### **Contribution to Better Government**

The scoping phase of the research did not explore in detail the contribution Plan Rationalisation makes to the following aspects of better government:

- Forward looking
- Outward looking
- Innovative, flexible and creative
- Evidence-based
- Joined-up

An underlying principle of Plan Rationalisation is that in some way it will contribute to each of these. However, measures are clearly required to form some judgement as to how this contribution occurs and its extent. A starting point for this is the establishment of baselines of current practice. For example, in what ways do specific

existing plans contribute to better government? Although this may provide a crude assessment of before-and-after change, there are a range of other factors which are likely to reduce the confidence with which these can be attributed to Plan Rationalisation. These factors include other elements of the LGMA (not least Community Strategies) but also external factors such as wider central government policies, as well as local and regional developments.

It is proposed, therefore, that the contribution to better government be primarily made jointly through the processes adopted locally to undertake Plan Rationalisation and to develop Community Strategies. This will be explored through the case studies and in particular through examining change over time. This will provide qualitative evidence as to the contribution to better (local) government.

The contribution of Plan Rationalisation to better (central) government will be undertaken through drawing on the material uncovered in the research on new ways of working and performance management.

### **Overall Assessment**

The process evaluation of Plan Rationalisation will provide an overall assessment of progress. It will identify measures which are used to identify performance under existing plans and other measures which following the removal of plans. Drawing on case studies and central government interviews this will explore differences between types of plans (e.g. statutory, funding based, information based) and policy areas.

## **3.3 Community Strategies**

### **Progress and Processes**

Findings for this section are drawn from interviews with central government departments, regional government offices and local authorities. Regional government offices reported that all or nearly all local authorities in their areas had prepared a Community Strategy. Those areas which did not have a Community Strategy were in the process of finalising a draft. Delays in preparing a Community Strategy were often due to problems in forming an LSP, or in some cases where an LSP had to reform. Many areas were now working on a second draft of their Community Strategy or were looking to develop Action Plans and Monitoring Frameworks.

However, progress in terms of preparing drafts but also in the detail of the Community Strategy was variable. Some areas had only produced relatively thin documents (of around 12 pages) which did little more than set out a vision for the area and key headline issues. However, these documents were the exception. Interviews with Government Offices reported that second drafts of Community Strategies were much more focused on priorities and tended to reflect more detailed involvement and consultation with stakeholders and local communities.

Although the statutory duty is on local authorities to prepare Community Strategies, in most areas the process of development is being led by the LSP, although with close involvement of the local authority. Local authority involvement was typically through the support of executive officers and officers, with active involvement of councillors being more variable. Moreover, many of the staff in LSPs involved in

drafting Community Strategies are in fact local authority officers, either seconded to the LSP or because the support team or secretariat for the LSP is part of the local authority.

The development of Community Strategies has followed the guidance issued by the ODPM and LGA. This is seen to be useful. Authorities and LSPs are also aware of work being undertaken by different government departments which needed to be reflected in Community Strategies. The most prominent examples include the integration of Community Strategies with Local Development Frameworks (following work by ENTEC for the ODPM and the proposed launch of new land use planning procedures around LDFs in summer this year), links with sustainability, and with culture. Other policy areas, through their broader guidance, are also making increasing reference to Community Strategies. These include health and education as well as cross-cutting issues such as community cohesion. The effectiveness of these links and their impact on Community Strategies will be an important focus for the evaluation and, in particular, to understand how central government policies and priorities are implemented locally. These issues were also reflected in regional consultation events.

However, authorities and LSPs had also sought wider support for the development of Community Strategies. This took a number of forms. The most common mechanism was the development of sub-regional and regional networks (usually coordinated by Government Offices) through which good practice could be shared. Experience in preparing area based strategies in the past had also been influential, in particular where authorities and their officers had experience of preparing Local Agenda 21 documents. It was unclear whether this experience has ultimately been beneficial or detrimental to the Community Strategy. Many authorities had also employed external consultants to undertake work in developing Community Strategies. This had been at different stages of the process of developing the Community Strategy and included work around developing a 'vision' for the area, consultation and involvement (in particular with communities), needs assessment, development of themes (e.g. around culture, health or education) and in production and communication.

The drivers for Community Strategies are becoming more focused. This is happening both centrally and locally. Centrally, work by the Innovation Forum and the proposals for Public Service Boards and Local Area Agreements suggest a refocusing of both partnerships and the strategies they produce. To some extent this is already being reflected locally, with second drafts of Community Strategies more likely to be less aspirational and wide ranging, and more focused on the delivery of services within the control of local authorities and some local stakeholders. A possible outcome of this may be a more differentiated role for voluntary and community sector and the private sector vis-à-vis large public sector organisations.

Scoping interviews identified that there are a range of blockages to further progress of Community Strategies. Issues explored included organisational, procedural, political, external and capacity factors. Responses suggested the main barriers to developing Community Strategies were the capacity to develop and implement Community Strategies (within LSPs or authorities) and the commitment of partners. Wider factors were the relative priority given to Community Strategies by the authority and more generally the profile of LGMA in the authority and LSP. Some of these issues reflect key fault lines across localities. These include NRF and non-NRF areas, rural and urban differences, and related to both, differences in type of authority. Government Office interviewees reflected that Community Strategies and the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategies in the 88 NRF areas tended to have a very high priority and came with additional resources for both capacity for the

improvement of services. Although progress in developing Community Strategies and LNRs is variable across the 88 areas, the additional capacity provided by the NRF (for both local authorities and their Government Offices) had accelerated progress. Outside the 88 areas progress was more mixed but capacity was frequently highlighted as a key constraint.

Differences in the development of urban and rural areas were also marked, and was frequently related to resources. For many (small) local district councils it was reported by Government Offices that the development of the Community Strategy was only one part of someone's job. Although some had found considerable support from stakeholders (for instance in helping to arrange consultation events), capacity was a key constraint on the development of the Community Strategy. However, capacity constraints also reflect the relative priority local authorities give to the preparation of Community Strategies (as the main provider of resources). Two-tier authorities also compounded urban-rural differences. Many rural district councils were reliant on developing their community strategy within a broader county structure. However, there was also some variation in progress being made by rural district councils. One difference was whether they had received, and how they had used, regeneration aid from sources such as SRB and Structural Funds, and more recently from the NRF. Some areas, for example former coal mining communities in the North East, had used SRB assistance in the past to build local capacity to develop Community Strategies. This had provided them with a sound basis for developing Community Strategies. However, central government consultation also highlighted that the extent to which Community Strategies reflected central policy objectives around issues such as culture, biodiversity, sustainability and community cohesion was also extremely variable. Moreover, it was seen that certain issues, such as housing, may prove difficult for Community Strategies to address.

Factors identified as being crucial for Community Strategies over the next two years were wide ranging. Many respondents emphasised that their profile needed to be raised both centrally and locally to ensure that they become an effective vehicle through which Community Leadership and Well-being Powers can be delivered. In some areas there was a perception that they were 'just another plan'. A second factor was seen to be how effective Action Plans would be in shaping service delivery. Action Plans are intended to provide the link between the strategy and services and are therefore of critical importance for this possible area. The success of this is contingent on the relationship between LSP and other strategic groups and services. A final factor was the capacity of monitoring systems to track performance and, in particular, and critically, to allow authorities and LSP to monitor change over time and reflect on priorities.

**The key evaluation issues to emerge from the review of progress to date and processes are:**

- 1. Identifying the mechanisms through which central government policies can be implemented locally, and monitored.**
- 2. Identifying the effectiveness of stakeholder and community involvement.**
- 3. Gauging the progress and effectiveness of Action Plans and Monitoring Frameworks.**

4. **Examining the effect of CPA and proposals for new corporate assessment on driving progress. This is closely tied to new ways of working.**
5. **The identification of key areas of difference and the determinants of progress across localities. The scoping phase of the research suggests that these relate to: urban-rural differences; capacity issues and specifically the receipt of NRF; and the relative priority given locally to Community Strategies in relation to other aspects of the LGMA. For instance, some authorities may prioritise improvement of specific (weak or failing) services over the development of Community Strategies.**
6. **Looking at the existing and potential continuum of Community Strategies from accumulations of existing plans through to Community Strategies as a driving force of other plans and activities. The research will identify the blockages which may constrain Community Strategies becoming such a driving force.**

### **Added Value**

Central government objectives for Community Strategies are wide ranging and cross departments. Ideally, Community Strategies provide a mechanism by which central government objectives can be delivered in ways which reflect and meet local needs and priorities. Guidance from central government typically allows different approaches to be taken as long as overarching objectives are achieved. Further work is required to identify and examine government objectives for Community Strategies, to examine differences and fault lines, and to explore how effectively they are being achieved in practice. This will be the focus of further interviews and a literature review as well as the case studies. It is anticipated that specific policy areas will be considered in more detail, rather than looking across the whole of government.

Local and regional interviews suggested that the ways in which Community Strategies add value to central government objectives is a contested area. Community Strategies, first and foremost, have focused on reflecting local needs and priorities. Little systematic attention has been given to central government objectives. However, there were some clear fault lines emerging from the research to date. The better performing local authorities (under CPA) appeared to marry, almost automatically, central objectives and local needs. Moreover, government offices may play a critical role in coordinating, or brokering, the relationship between central and local objectives. However, it was noted that central policy objectives were not recognised as being a key plank of Community Strategies. The reasons for this are wide ranging but were often due to flaws in Local Strategic Partnerships, lack of capacity and weak services. For example, where LSPs were not operating effectively, there had been disagreements between partners and it had been difficult to reach a consensus over the Community Strategy. These issues will be explored in more detail through case studies and review of Community Strategies. However, it was also noted in consultation events that there was considerable convergence between central and local policy objectives, with policy conflicts arising due to conflicting timescales or short notice given for the implementation of a policy.

Local authorities have to date given most attention to the development of Community Strategies. It was therefore too early to comment on implementation, and what the key indicators of implementation may be. This will come through the development of action plans and through monitoring evidence. However, a first review of Community

Strategies suggests that it may be difficult to identify indicators of implementation based on the current configuration of Community Strategies. For example, some Community Strategies had outlined wide ranging outcome indicators and these were the joint responsibility of a wide range of partners and local authority services. These issues may be addressed in action plans through the identification of SMART objectives (which are owned by single organisations). However, there is a risk that issues of complexity will confound monitoring progress if SMART objectives are not developed.

Community Strategies had, to varying degrees, focused on addressing local needs. This had been based largely on consultation with stakeholders and the community. However, there was some concern from the review of Community Strategy documents that the use of wider evidence to demonstrate need was variable. For example, there was limited evidence that Census data, survey evidence (e.g. Household Surveys), and citizen panels' and juries' evidence had been used in a systematic way.

Regional and local interviews explored the extent to which different approaches to Community Strategies were emerging. A widely held view was that few distinct approaches had emerged and moreover that strategies tended to be excessively visionary, aspirational and promotional. As a result it was unclear how visionary statements would be delivered. There was a tendency in many strategies to simply present broad statements for different themes. As a result it was unclear where priorities lay and how these addressed community needs or delivered central government policy objectives. However, this may reflect the current stage of development of many local Community Strategies. Local interviews frequently stressed that the first draft of the Community Strategy had been a starting point. Many LSPs were now looking at preparing second drafts and these would contain more detailed action plans.

The more advanced plans or second drafts had used the Community Strategy to provide a long term vision and strategy for the area (for example for the period 2001-2010 or 2001-2021) but had then established three or four year action plans. These reflected different approaches. For example one local authority's Community Strategy (2001-2021) had established area-based community plans (2001-2004) which would be used to shape and deliver services. The community strategies also had details of agreed actions, performance indicators, required resources, timescales and partners. These actions followed the core themes developed in the Community Strategy. Elsewhere Community Strategies were being delivered through thematic approaches (for instance around education, enterprise etc.). Both structures often reflected the composition of LSPs and the structure of other related partnerships (e.g. nested partnerships or family of partnerships approaches).

A prominent feature of the local and regional consultation interviews was the variability between Community Strategies. For some local authorities, Community Strategies appeared to demonstrate a gap between aspiration and vision and a list of discrete tangible actions; there appeared to be no rationale (based on stakeholder and community involvement or needs assessment) as to how these actions had been derived and would deliver the overall vision. Conversely, other Community Strategies had balanced medium term plans for changing the management and structure of service delivery (which would meet longer term objectives) with a series of tangible actions. In these cases, there seemed to be a balance between longer term changes with the delivery of some relatively small actions on which partners were agreed. This approach was relevant in that it provided a mechanism to get the support of partners



and would serve to raise the profile of the modernisation agenda and specifically the LSP locally.

A more fundamental challenge facing Community Strategies is the extent to which conflicts between objectives are recognised and addressed. For example conflicts may exist between environmental and economic objectives. These conflicts were rarely explicitly recognised. This is a concern because local partners may assume that objectives do not conflict and that it may be possible to achieve what turn out to be competing and conflictual objectives. This appears to be a significant tension running through Community Strategies.

**Key evaluation issues to emerge in relation to added value include:**

- 1. Links with Central Government objectives and how Community Strategies add value to specific areas of policy.**
- 2. Links with Corporate Assessment. This should be explored through the case studies and possibly through Action Learning Sets.**
- 3. Performance Management: this is a wide ranging issue which the scoping research highlights should be examined in conjunction with the evaluation of Plan Rationalisation.**
- 4. Scope of Action Plans: the case studies, Community Strategy (and Action Plan) review and Action Learning Sets will be used to examine whether these provide a sufficient mechanism for delivering Community Strategies and wider policy agendas.**
- 5. Management of conflicts between priorities and objectives: what approaches exist to addressing these, how should they be addressed, to what extent can they be, and what are the outcomes. This will be undertaken through the Case Studies, Community Strategy review and through the Action Learning Sets.**

### **Progress Against Central Government Objectives**

From the local scoping and regional interviews there was a consensus that Community Strategies have largely focused on local issues and provided only a limited assessment of how they will achieve central government objectives. An exception to this were Neighbourhood Renewal Areas, where most LNRS tended to have a clear link with central objectives, in particular floor targets. However, it was also noted that this should be seen against a backdrop of considerable policy convergence between local and central policy priorities, and specifically the development of central-local 'shared priorities'. This aspect of Community Strategies is currently under-developed, especially given Plan Rationalisation over the next two years. A concern raised by local interviews was that compressing all central government policy objectives currently achieved through separate plans into one document would make the document unwieldy. Many authorities were unclear as to what should be retained from plans in Community Strategies.

A further barrier to how Community Strategies effectively reflect government objectives, is the extent to which they should be live documents, constantly updated, or whether and more realistically, they are updated periodically. However, the result of this may be that short-term policy objectives are not be picked up by Community Strategies until they are next updated. Issues of how central government objectives are delivered were largely considered in the preceding section. A central issues here, highlighted in consultation with central government departments was how central objectives are communicated and how guidance, alongside other instruments (e.g. inspection, local area agreements or LPSAs) can be made more effective and in particular how different central instruments interact locally to produce desired and undesired outcomes.

However, regional consultation events highlighted that there was a general convergence between local and central government policy objectives and that area of difference arose due to mismatches in timescales or because new initiatives conflicted with existing local activities.

### **Indicators of Performance and Monitoring**

Community Strategies have developed a range of performance indicators. Some of these were outcome-based with clear proposals for how data on outcomes would be collected. For example, some areas have adapted the Audit Commission's Quality of Life Indicators as the basis for their performance management framework. This appears appropriate for the measurement of change over the long term. At the other extreme, other local authorities, through their Community Action Plans, had identified a series of discrete actions (or outputs) and how these would be delivered over the next three years. Although both approaches have merit, there were few proposals for setting milestones and monitoring these over time or for undertaking local evaluations. This approach would appear to bridge the problem of measuring short-term outputs or longer-term outcomes and impacts.

Where Community Strategy actions had been developed there was far greater detail on identifying discrete actions, outputs and longer-term outcomes. Of course, the realism of these outputs and outcomes is something which should be explored in more detail: for example it might be appropriate for a risk assessment of different interventions to be undertaken. However, many Community Strategies had not developed such clarity. Instead they had agreed broad (aspirational statements). For example, 'affordable, good quality, energy-efficient housing for all', 'Establish [town] as a Learning Community', and 'Raise the image and profile of culture in the borough ... to residents'.

The scoping phase of the research did not examine how performance indicators were monitored or how data was collected and shared. Inspection of a limited number of Community Strategies suggests that it will be difficult to use data on current performance indicators, where they exist, for any aggregative or comparative purposes, whether on a regional or national level. An additional gap, potentially, is posed by the void left following Plan Rationalisation. Current Community Strategies and action plans were not systematically addressing these gaps. An example of good practice in this area was found to be the adaptation of Audit Commission Quality of Life Indicators. However, these also have limitations in that they tend to be outcome- and impact-oriented with few milestones or outputs.

It was unclear how Community Strategies would be monitored and what systems within local authorities and LSPs had been put in place to ensure commitments are

met. Those strategies which now have action plans had attempted to formalise this through annual review procedures, although where outputs and outcomes were unclear, this will be problematic. A specific concern raised was with the capacity to monitor progress and in particular how this would be managed in two-tier rural authorities.

Consultation with central government departments highlighted the capacity requirements of effective monitoring and performance management systems and how such capacity can be developed. This consultation also highlighted that performance management around the Community Strategy also needed to be considered in the context of the broader approach of a local authority to performance management. It was noted that where this already existed, performance management of the Community Strategy should be stronger.

These issues will be explored in more detail by the review of Community Strategies (and associated documentation) and through case studies. An issue in undertaking these elements of the research will be their timing: in particular, local areas are at different stages in the development and use of performance indicators.

**The key issues this poses for the evaluation are:**

- 1. The extent to which Performance Management is undertaken at a corporate level and is undertaken jointly with Plan Rationalisation. This will be examined through the review of Community Strategies as well as through case studies.**
- 2. Preliminary research suggests that only in a limited number of areas is the setting and monitoring of targets undertaken in conjunction with a wider risk assessment. This would identify key issues in achieving outputs and outcomes and should provide the basis for monitoring by the LSP. This issue will be explored in more detail through the case studies.**
- 3. The balance between output and outcome measures for monitoring will be explored in more detail through the case studies and review of Community Strategies. A closely related issue is the extent to which Community Strategies balance consideration of needs and opportunities. Some of these issues, particularly opportunities, may require multi-tiered working within their region.**

**It was recommended, in the section on Plan Rationalisation, that Performance Management is critical to the success of this policy area and should therefore be undertaken as a discrete study but which draws upon the findings of different research elements (case studies and Action Learning Sets in particular). This study should explore the use of different performance management mechanisms and look at a limited number of policy domains (e.g. social inclusion, health, education and sustainability).**

### **Process Outcomes**

Process outcomes identified in the research specification included: legitimacy and accountability; community cohesion; bureaucracy; added or reduced value through the rationalisation of processes and activities. Scoping interviews undertaken were with regional Government Offices and with LSP/local authority officers and not with

wider stakeholders or community organisations who could confirm responses from authorities and LSPs.

An overriding question was where accountability for the Community Strategy rested. Although the statutory duty is on local authorities, this had been addressed either jointly between local authorities and LSPs or solely by LSPs on behalf of local authorities. The LSP evaluation suggests that it has largely rested with local authorities alone. More broadly, there are issues of legitimacy, which can only be identified through discussion with stakeholders and communities. A reflection of regional Government Offices was that second draft Community Strategies had sought to reduce the number of priorities and to tie these more clearly to specific stakeholders or service departments. However, Community Strategies often gave responsibility to multiple stakeholders. This may raise problems for accountability.

The Home Office, with the LGA and CRE, have issued guidance on Community Strategies. This follows the Cattle and Ouseley reports into community cohesion following the civil disturbances and riots in specific northern cities. The response of Community Strategies to the community cohesion agenda was found to be variable. Research undertaken by the Home Office shows that links with community cohesion have been wide ranging, including policy areas such as social inclusion, neighbourhood renewal, community engagement, employment, education, culture, housing, youth and health. Some strategies were seen to have actively engaged with debates around community cohesion and these tended to be those with significant BME populations and/or with recent experiences of civil unrest. However, there were exceptions to this pattern, including some London boroughs. As the Home Office report highlights, the guidance on Community Cohesion was published after many areas had drafted their Community Strategies and it was not possible to examine whether LSPs would address community cohesion issues more (or less) systematically in the future.

It was not possible to assess the effect of Community Strategies on bureaucracy at the local level. Most respondents reported that the requirement to produce Community Strategies (whilst still producing plans) meant that bureaucracy had increased. Moreover, Community Strategies, when prepared through extensive consultation had involved extensive increases in local working. In some areas it had been possible to stage joint events. However, a common view was that partnership working had increased, reflecting a finding of the 2002 LSP survey that the number of partnerships had increased.

The previous sections outlined whether there had been a rationalisation of processes and activities and whether, for example, there had been an increase in data sharing. However, with action plans and monitoring systems still to be developed in many areas it remained unclear as to how data sharing would operate.

**Key issues to emerge for the evaluation were:**

- 1. Accountability and legitimacy are likely to be critical to the success of Community Strategies and are closely related to issues of democratic accountability but also the wider legitimacy of the Community Strategy amongst stakeholders and other organisations. This issue can be most effectively explored through case studies.**
- 2. The removal of bureaucracy and associated staff implications are critical to bringing significant changes to local ways of working. This needs to be understood in relation to Plan Rationalisation and more**

**broadly in relation to new freedoms and flexibilities. In particular are Community Strategies (together with Plan Rationalisation) helping to rationalise procedures, or are they adding new layers of bureaucracy? This can most effectively be explored through the case studies.**

**Issues of data sharing and community cohesion can be effectively addressed under other elements of the evaluation.**

### **Constraints and Blockages**

The main constraints and blockages facing local authorities and LSPs in developing Community Strategies were found to be capacity and the time taken to establish effective partnership and community involvement arrangements. For example, large authorities have generally been able to commit significantly more resources to the development of the Community Strategy. A further factor in determining the progress made in developing the Community Strategy was found to be the extent to which a strategic partnership and a local plan existed prior to the Local Government Act 2000. Where localities had these in place, progress has generally been quicker.

Other potential constraints and blockages were also discussed with local and regional respondents and included:

- Difficulties in *ensuring effective engagement of partners* and in sharing data and information. Engagement was found to be variable. The Police and PCTs were found to be fully engaged in LSPs although their involvement was often constrained by other pressures: for example Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships or by health targets conflicting with local priorities. Jobcentre Plus offices were found to have a lower level of engagement, although it was noted that following discretion given by DWP to district managers, this may change. It was also reported that there was a difference between enthusiastic and fully engaged senior and executive officers that sat on LSPs and other partnerships, and the actual changes made to delivery by agencies. Some of these issues were reflected in central and local consultation events, in particular how agencies such as Connexions, Jobcentre Plus and PCTs can be brought more full into the LGMA process.
- Difficulties in *pooling budgets and sharing resources*. There was some evidence that resources had been shared to undertake community consultation and stakeholder events in developing strategies although it was unclear as to the extent to which this had translated into delivery. There is some guidance emerging around this, for example, the NHS Health Development Agency report on pooling budgets across sectors.
- The scoping interviews did not reveal significant evidence either way that *pressures of mandates or inflexible targets had constrained delivery*.
- There was limited evidence as to whether in some localities *personality disputes had constrained effective partnership working*. Where they occurred they were most common between local authorities and the community and voluntary sector, and in rural areas, with parish and town councils. However, it was unclear as to the relative importance of these and the effect they had had on community strategy development. However, consultation events did highlight experiences where local councillors opposed Community Strategies. Moreover, the

consultation events highlighted that changes in the political leadership of councils could slow progress on developing and implementing Community Strategies – particularly where the incoming leader was from a political party which opposed Community Strategies policy.

- Pressures of *central government agendas* constraining local discretion did exist but it was unclear as to the extent to which these constrained strategy development. Some local respondents also highlighted that other agencies and organisations may constrain development: for example Regional Development Agencies, transport authorities and health bodies.
- *Lack of appropriate guidance and support* was not found to be a constraint amongst all respondents. However, some authorities, particularly in rural non-NRF areas, where it was perceived that guidance was often tailored to urban areas, identified it as an issue. LSP and local authority officers also reported that sub-regional and regional partnerships and wider networks (for example of new unitaries) had often been more helpful in providing opportunities to identify solutions to problems.
- *Lack of appropriate skills amongst leading personnel*. This issue could not be explored to a significant extent through single individuals in specific areas: mainly because it was the skills and expertise of the individual being interviewed, which would be discussed. There was a perception that a more significant factor had been capacity constraints. However, those interviewed in areas that had made considerable progress in developing Community Strategies, did combine a range of skills. These included: effective partnership working and communication skills; advocacy and brokerage skills; high levels of complex and cross-policy awareness and knowledge; and the capacity to work with different communities. These skills are typically recognised by professional qualifications but often based on previous experience. However, it was noted that skills development may be required by councillors to more fully take on new roles (for example around community involvement). These issues will be explored in more detail through case studies.
- Difficulties posed by *well established sectoral teams*. Former LA 21 teams had often been closely involved in the early development of Community Strategies. In some cases these teams had been drawn into the team developing the Community Strategy, whether in the local authority or in the LSP. This issue will be explored in more detail through case studies.

Other blockages and constraints were found to be:

- *Variable geometry of boundaries*: for example PCTs, Police and Jobcentre Plus, as well as spatially targeted initiatives (e.g. ABIs and RDA strategic spatial priorities) often did not fit with local authority districts. This presented two sets of problems. Firstly, where boundaries varied but were contained within a local authority district (e.g. PCTs or ABIs) there was scope to engage these in area based or other partnerships. However, where boundaries either crossed the local authority district or covered many authorities there was a need for partnerships to be formed with other LSPs. An example of this was the formation of sub-regional LSP networks. In some cases these were facilitated by Government Offices but in other cases they were a local response to engaging with agencies such as RDAs. A further example was where LSPs covered a number of local authority areas

and had prepared joint Community Strategies (for example, West Cornwall, West Suffolk and East Suffolk).

- *Two tier authorities faced significant barriers* in developing Community Strategies. The development of Community Strategies in two-tier authorities was found to pose a series of different potential problems. The ideal model was seen to be one where district Community Strategies were nested within a County Community Strategy, or at least a County-level framework. However, this was contingent on effective district-county working, and to some degree, consensus between districts. There was also a risk that two-tier working may lead to the process of developing Community Strategies proceeding at the pace of the slowest authority. What was found to be happening in some counties was that districts were proceeding at their own pace.
- A common response in consultation with local authorities and regional government offices was that the development and implementation of Community Strategies was constrained by insufficient capacity. This was held to be most acute in rural districts. There were also significant capacity differences between NRF and non-NRF areas. Capacity was typically seen to be the size of the team developing the Community Strategy (in one case this was only one part of someone's job). However, it was also noted that Community Strategies for larger authorities maybe unwieldy and require substantial structural change (e.g. reorganisation of departments) to be fully implemented. Such change may be more straightforward in smaller authorities.

### **Other Key Issues**

The research specification identified a range of other issues which the evaluation of Community Strategies should explore. It was not possible to cover these in detail in the scoping interviews, although a number of themes did emerge. These are outlined below

*The use of mainstream funding and services:* it was unclear from the scoping interviews how Community Strategies would influence the use of mainstream funding. Although this is being discussed within LSPs, and is to some extent reflected in the more advanced Community Strategies, it is not possible to reach clear conclusions yet as to whether there have been real changes in the use of central government funding locally.

*Community engagement:* most local respondents highlighted that the local authority had led the process of developing the Community Strategy. In most cases community engagement was at two levels. Firstly, in terms of community involvement (and representation) on LSPs and sub-groups. The structure and scope of these varied considerably with some respondents reporting that community organisations had too many seats, and in some cases as many seats as public stakeholders on LSP boards and sub-groups. This sometimes reflected legacies of previous programmes where, rather than review and rationalise partnerships, partnerships had expanded. Many respondents raised questions of community representation: that is, who do voluntary and community sector partnerships represent, and how are they accountable? Secondly, the process of consultation in preparing Community Strategies was extremely variable. Where this worked well a range of methods had been used and had been undertaken in partnership with other stakeholders and community organisations. Elsewhere consultation and involvement was at best cursory. Moreover, it was also highlighted that there may be tensions between councillor involvement and community involvement as to who is accountable for Community Strategies. Some of the best examples were where structures for

consultation had been put place which could be used on an ongoing basis and by different partners in the development of their strategies: for example by the PCT, social services or the police. Comments on NRF areas were that there was some confusion in the range of structures which had emerged and their purpose: in particular, there was seen to be duplication and conflict in some areas between local authority-led areas forums and the time-limited community empowerment networks. Consultation with central government departments highlighted the need to understand whether Community Strategies are driven by a small group of stakeholders (possibly including the 'established' voluntary and community sector) or whether they are genuinely developed by 'bottom-up' processes of consultation and negotiation with communities which may also identify a role for neighbourhoods in service delivery and management. Regional consultation events stressed that it was often unclear what 'involvement of the voluntary and community sector' entailed. This often reflected wider relations between the statutory and non-statutory sectors on the LSP.

*Local democratic accountability and the role of elected members:* a range of issues arose as to the role of councillors in the development of Community Strategies. The key fault line was seen to be between the leader and cabinet (executive) and the non-executive or 'backbench' councillors. The leader and cabinet were typically involved more closely in LSPs and with the development of Community Strategies. Non-executive councillors perceived their new role to be more mixed; there was some feeling that the LSP and community involvement processes had displaced their traditional role. However, some areas reported that non-cabinet councillors had been actively involved in communities in helping develop strategies and area plans. There were also perceived to be problems in rural district authorities as to the role of parish councillors. In some cases there was a perception that they had been excluded.

*Inclusion of Public Sector and Private Sector Partners:* local PCTs and the Police were seen to be the most active partners in the development of Community Strategies. In some areas joint consultation procedures had developed. The involvement of sub-regional and regional organisations was perceived to be extremely weak and most regional respondents reported that RDAs had not engaged in the development of Community Strategies. In some cases this had led to policy conflicts with local priorities differing from those contained in regional strategies (the RES and RPG/RSS). This was most frequently over land use (identification of different sites) and funding (use and allocation of the Single Pot) issues. Involvement of Jobcentre Plus offices was seen to be weak although most respondents were aware that the DWP had now given district managers greater discretion in partnership working and in local working. The role of the private sector was very mixed. Involvement was in two main ways: through involvement in the LSP (for example some LSPs were chaired by prominent local business people) and through working with local Chambers of Commerce to organise consultation activities. However, a common concern was that only a small element of Community Strategies was often directly relevant to local businesses. This issue maybe addressed through proposals for Public Sector Boards which would change the responsibility of LSPs vis-à-vis delivery organisations.

*Community Leadership:* the role of local authorities in relation to Community Strategies appeared to be evolving. Many local respondents reported that the increasing focus of Community Strategies on public service delivery was bringing a greater role for local authorities. However, it was largely unclear from the scoping interviews as to the extent to which local authorities were community leaders and the effect this was having on the development of Community Strategies.

*Community Cohesion:* the Home Office internal review of Community Strategies revealed that Community Cohesion issues were being addressed in different ways



and to different extents: although there tended to be greatest focus on social inclusion, health, crime and youth issues. Local areas with significant BME communities had given community cohesion greater priority than other areas. This was reflected in local interviews.

*Involvement of the voluntary and community sector:* involvement of the voluntary and community sector was considered under community engagement, above. This reflects the conflation of these two issues locally and it was recognised that this had led to problems in the development of Community Strategies.

*Sustainability:* at the heart of many Community Strategies had been a model of local sustainable development. In some cases this reflected previous work as part of LA21 on environmental sustainability. However, it was unclear to what extent broad visions of sustainable development were being translated into actions and implementation. There also appeared to be only limited engagement with potential stakeholders who could advise on sustainable development. However, there were also some clear differences over the treatment of sustainable development: rural districts tended to give greater emphasis to the conservation of natural habitats and issues of accessible transport, whilst urban areas focused on issues of congestion and social cohesion.

*Sustainable communities and Urban Renaissance:* there was limited evidence that the broader aspects of sustainable communities and urban renaissance policy were being addressed. Where they were it was typically through plans for urban regeneration and through strategies for housing. In Communities Plan areas in the South East, it appeared that housing issues featured strongly. These aspects of Community Strategies also reflected examples of active multi-tiered working, particularly in the plans for new housing. However, in both areas of low and high housing demand this was an area of Community Strategies which appeared to be especially contested. For example, authorities in low demand housing areas wanting to increase the number of new homes. There may also be tensions between district and county level developments.

*Multi-tiered governance:* the relationship between local Community Strategies (and their implementation) and regional strategies (and their implementation) appeared to lie at the heart of many of the issues surrounding multi-tiered governance. In most areas new partnership mechanisms had been established to link local and regional tiers. In some cases this was through sub-regional LSP partnerships which reflected strong sub-regional divisions in regional strategies. An example here is the implementation of Regional Economic Strategies and to some extent the development of Regional Spatial Strategies. However, multi-tiered governance was often contested. A particular conflict was over whether Community Strategies were concerned with delivering economic, social and environmental wellbeing or were focused on public service delivery. In the case of the former, and as reflected in the intentions of the Local Government Act 2000, this should require strong and effective links to be established with Regional Economic Strategies and RDAs. These links were often unclear and in some cases conflictual, as noted previously, especially over land use and funding issues. A further concern over multi-tiered governance was raised in regions holding referendums for elected regional assemblies. If these vote for elected assemblies then it is likely that county authorities will be abolished and new unitaries established. In the run up to these referendums some regional respondents (in North West, North East and North East) reported that this had already weakened the role of county-based partnerships and Community Strategies. Finally, regional Government Offices were playing different roles in the development of Community Strategies. In areas in receipt of NRF funding, and through the development of the NRS, their involvement was active. This reflected the resources they had to undertake a strong facilitator and developmental role. Outside NRF

areas, Government Offices were aware of progress by LSPs and Community Strategies but played a more limited role of facilitation (for example coordinating LSP network meetings). Their involvement in informing the content of Community Strategies was very limited. Local respondents commented that in some cases they would have welcomed greater input from Government Offices.

The role by which Government Offices in developing Community Strategies was highlighted in the consultation event with central government departments. This may range from being a 'critical friend' in the development of the Community Strategy where the role is more passive to one of being active catalyst. The extent of this role may also vary due to the resources at the disposal of regional Government Offices, with those with more NRF funding playing a fuller role, largely reflecting their wider responsibilities in terms of the development of Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategies.

*Rural proofing:* local respondents from rural areas, not surprisingly, reported that rural issues lay at the heart of their strategies. However, it was not clear whether their Community Strategies had been formally 'rural-proofed'. This will be examined in more detail through the survey of local authorities.

*Equality and diversity:* local respondents and a review of a limited sample of Community Strategies suggests that these issues are present in Community Strategies. However, without further detailed assessment of the documents and case studies it was unclear as to the extent to which these issues were being effectively addressed. A strong impression is that progress is variable across localities.

**The key evaluation issues to emerge from this part of the scoping research were that there were three broad sets of issues which the evaluation should consider. These are a series of core issues around added value, delivery of central objectives, constraints and blockages and performance management, a series of process questions around issues such as community involvement and multi-tiered working and a series of questions around mainstreaming of specific policy agendas.**

### ***3.4 Linkages between Community Strategies and Plan Rationalisation***

The findings from the scoping phase of the research highlighted that the links being made locally between the Plan Rationalisation and Community Strategies elements of the LGMA varied. In some cases Community Strategies were being used as a *tool* through which to subsume or to rationalise plans. However, many regional and local interviews also suggested the links were also often piecemeal with a focus on particular plans, for example LA21 strategies or culture strategies. There may be reasons for these links not being explicitly identified: for example, the introduction of new ways of working means that those responsible for developing plans may not be involved in Community Strategies (either centrally or locally). There may also be timing issues with local partners likely to more closely link Community Strategies with services in the implementation of action plans. However, the weakness of explicit links between the two elements, especially locally, should give some cause for concern. It raises three particular issues: over how central government policy objectives are achieved, new ways of working, and the development of new models of performance management. The findings from the scoping phase suggest that these aspects will be critical to the success of each aspect of the LGMA.

The recommendation of the scoping phase of the evaluation is that three issues provide the basis for undertaking the two evaluations together. The **achievement of central government policy objectives through Community Strategies**, and following a reduction in the number of plans, remains unclear. Although guidance from many government departments now makes direct links to Community Strategies, this, in most cases, only had the status of voluntary guidance. Clearly, central government has other policy levers (such as inspection, funding allocations and incentives such as LPSAs). The removal of plans reduces a direct route to transmit central government policy objectives. However, this does raise the question of how successful have plans been to date in transmitting central government policy objectives?

Without plans, policies will be transmitted in other ways, ideally with greater success. However, this will require **new ways of working** both centrally and locally to be developed. The interviews highlighted that this would bring significant implications for staffing (with new roles and responsibilities required) but also with changes necessary, centrally and locally to organisational cultures.

The final area where Plan Rationalisation and Community Strategies are linked is in the **mechanisms and methods used for performance management**, again, both centrally and locally. Locally, there should be clear linkages developed so that community strategy action plans and monitoring frameworks can both meet local needs but also provide data to central government departments. This may be either for monitoring progress against central government objectives or for capturing data to report on national progress against targets, such as in compliance with EU environmental legislation.

These links will develop at different rates and in different ways across localities. However, as the scoping research highlighted, it might be expected that the key fault lines will be around capacity issues, urban-rural differences, and the relative priority given locally to Community Strategies.

## 4. Evaluation Framework

### 4.1 Introduction

The findings from the scoping phase of the research suggest that four elements appear to lie at the heart of Community Strategies and Plan Rationalisation. These also reflect the wider aims of the LGMA. Firstly, Community Strategies and Plan Rationalisation seek to reshape centre-local relations. This changing relationship is typified by the rationale of Plan Rationalisation. Ideally, this will bring benefits to both central and local government and how they achieve their objectives. Secondly, and related to the reshaping of centre-local relations, is a shift from a plan-based relationship to one shaped by a multitude of methods, including inspection and audit (primarily through the CPA process), through more sophisticated dialogue between central and local government (for example through developing more sophisticated and relevant guidance) and through a more differentiated relationship, whereby central government is better able to target resources and other support to better respond to local needs and opportunities. NRF and LPSAs provide examples of this approach, but they cut across Plan Rationalisation and Community Strategies. This is evidenced by proposals for Local Area Agreements and the likelihood that Community Strategies should be the starting point for developing these.

Thirdly, Community Strategies, and the new freedoms brought through Plan Rationalisation, should allow local authorities to better exercise their role as Community Leaders. This will require strengthened relations with stakeholders and the development of robust mechanisms through which communities can be involved. Fourthly, Community Strategies and Plan Rationalisation should provide for greater local flexibility and in particular for local areas to set priorities to address local needs and opportunities. This should bring implications for local partners who will be required to work in different ways in relation to each other: for example, do Plan Rationalisation and Community Strategies assist in bending mainstream service provision to better meet these needs and opportunities?

The scoping stage also highlighted that three aspects of Plan Rationalisation and Community Strategies appear to be crucial to the success of this part of the LGMA. These included developing new mechanisms through which central government policy objectives could be achieved, developing new ways of (central and local) working and the development of new models of performance management.

Drawing on these findings and the original research tender, this section outlines a draft evaluation design. It considers the scope and utility of a theory-based approach to the evaluation, the key research elements to be undertaken and the links with the wider LGMA evaluation.

### 4.2 Theories of Change

The LGMA Meta Evaluation has identified a number of 'theories of change' which lie at the heart of the LGMA. These include service improvement, increased accountability, community leadership and stakeholder involvement. Community leadership and stakeholder involvement are of particular relevance to the evaluation

of Community Strategies and Plan Rationalisation. Links between these evaluations and the meta evaluation are explored in a subsequent section.

### Methodological Basis of Theories of Change

The development of theory based evaluation techniques, and in particular Theories of Change, approaches have been led by the work of the Aspen Institute in the United States and in particular by Carol Weiss. Advocates of 'Theory Based Evaluation' (TBE) approaches claim that the dominant approach to evaluation, 'Method Based Evaluation' (MBE), has focused unduly on measurements of efficiency and in particular only considered inputs (typically financial) and the measurement of outputs (in simple terms such as training achievements or jobs created). Weiss (1995) argues that under MBE:

“Much effort has gone into developing appropriate outcome measures that can indicate the degree of success – or at least progress – in attaining desirable results. The evaluation strategies . . . have tended to follow standard evaluation practice, emphasising quantitative measurement on available indicators of outcome, sometimes supplemented by case studies. Influential members of the foundation community have wondered whether these evaluation strategies fit the complexity of the new community initiatives and the knowledge needs of their practitioners and sponsors” (Weiss 1995, p.1).

Weiss goes on to argue for a TBE approach which bases evaluation on the 'theories of change' that underlie the initiatives – to go inside of the 'black box' between the policymakers and the direct recipients of assistance. In this approach, “the concept of grounding evaluation in theories of change takes for granted that social programs are based on explicit or implicit theories about how and why the program will work” (Weiss 1995, p.2). These quotations contain three separate criticisms of MBE:

- Too few simple outcomes;
- Quantifiable measures of outcome, and, above all
- Failure to illuminate the *processes* by which the initial activities associated with an initiative result, step by step, in responses by the recipients of assistance.

Weiss (1998) argues that if these processes are to be properly understood it is necessary to pin down and carefully disentangle the policy's 'theories of change' (hence 'theory-based' evaluation). A clear distinction is drawn between an *implementation theory* and a *programme theory*. TBE advocates a detailed step-by-step 'unbundling' of how the target individuals respond to each successive activity initiated by those running a programme. Confusingly, *implementation theory* is not about whether these responses by the target group result in the achievement of final outcomes (i.e. the original objectives of the programme), but rather about the activities of the agency staff at each stage of the programme. “Implementation theory does not deal with the processes that mediate between programme services and the achievement of programme goals but focuses on the delivery of programme services” (Weiss, 1998, p. 58). That is, it is about how agency staff and managers seek to move “from intentions and plans to sound programme activities” (Weiss, 1998, p. 58). Whether the goals (or final outcomes) are actually achieved is altogether another matter beyond the scope of implementation theory. “The *assumption* is that if the activities are conducted as planned, with sufficient quality, intensity, and fidelity to plan, the desired results will be forthcoming” (Weiss, 1998, p. 58 – our italics). This should not, of course, be taken to imply that TBE is

unconcerned with whether or not the final goals are actually achieved – the principal focus of traditional MBE. However, proponents of TBE argue that ‘theories of change’ (i.e. implementation and programme theories) are invaluable in providing information on “*how* the programme worked in achieving its goals’ or if the programme fails by showing ‘where the programme goes off the tracks’ (Weiss, 1998, p.59).

Some of the other proponents of TBE place a greater emphasis on getting at final outcomes. Rossi *et al* (1999), for example, distinguish between ‘programme process theory’ (“consisting of the service utilisation plan and organisational plan” – p. 161) and ‘programme impact theory’ (involving the “sequence of causal links between programme services and *outcomes* that improve the targeted social conditions” – p.162 – our italics).

In developing ‘theories of change’, and in particular the all-important ‘programme theories’, proponents of TBE argue that one should not look for a *single* programme theory. Instead, a set of alternative programme theories is usually appropriate, for “if one theory does not work out as hypothesised, there are alternative pathways to explore” (Weiss, 1998, p. 61). Nor usually would the evaluator take the lead in specifying the appropriate theories since “usually she doesn’t construct theories so much as help the programme people to surface their own latent theories” (Weiss, 1998, p. 61). On the other hand, ‘surfacing latent theories’ is sometimes made easier by the fact that the policymakers have, what Rossi *et al* (1999) call, an ‘articulated theory’, whereas in other cases the task is harder since the theories are implicit (or ‘tacit’). Weiss notes that the issue of who shall settle on the final programme theory is a matter of contention, with some giving social science theory and knowledge, and hence the evaluator, a dominant role (Chen and Rossi, 1983). Others argue that ‘programme personnel and other stakeholders’ (Weiss, 1998, p. 62) should lead (Patton, 1989). Weiss herself argues for a combination of practitioners and evaluators, not least since this process will in itself improve communication and trust between the evaluators and the policy community.

### **Applying Theories of Change to the Evaluation of Plan Rationalisation and Community Strategies**

Theories of Change approaches to evaluation appear highly relevant to programmes such as the LGMA. The scoping research identified four broad theories which may be emerging in Plan Rationalisation and Community Strategies. These were outlined in the introduction to this section and include:

- Changing centre-local government relations to better deliver central and local objectives
- A shift from a planning central-local relationship to one characterised by audit and inspection, guidance and differentiated approaches.
- Development of new sets of local relations based on community leadership and stronger community involvement.
- Increased local flexibility to allow stakeholders to more effectively address the (identified) needs and opportunities of current (and future) of local residents.

Each of these featured strongly in the scoping research and probably represent the ‘dominant’ theories of change. Moreover, the three cross-cutting aspects identified by the scoping research, around achieving central objectives, new ways of working and

performance management, can be explored under each and provide a focus for the research. Moreover, theories of change seem highly appropriate to the evaluation of processes (rather than explaining impacts).

However, a note of caution should be expressed as to the capacity of theories of change to provide robust findings and policy-relevant evidence. The main concern is with the complexity of the LGMA. Theory based approaches can have considerable utility where a significant number of contextual variables (e.g. local economic conditions, prior existence of partnerships and other 'starting conditions') can either be held constant or controlled for. They therefore have considerable merit in being applied to small scale geographically defined interventions, such as local labour market pilots, where experimental or quasi-experimental methods can be employed. In the case of the LGMA this is not possible. Moreover, theory-based approaches can understate the complex interplay between the implementation of policies and contextual factors.

For these reasons it is appropriate to use theories of change as 'guiding principles' for local government evaluation, and to refine and refer back to theories throughout the evaluation, but instead to employ a combination of method- and theory' based evaluation methods. The rationale for this is to be able to provide both extensive evidence (i.e. the progress of Plan Rationalisation as a whole) and intensive evidence (i.e. explaining how Community Strategies address issues of local sustainable development) to policy makers. Multiple approaches will therefore be deployed with a strong focus on the 'surfaced theories' and the 'cross cutting issues' and in particular to seek to determine the existence of key fault lines or differentiating factors in explaining relative performance of different localities. The factors identified included urban-rural differences, issues with two-tier and unitary working and, more broadly, issues of capacity and leadership.

### **4.3 Community Strategies – Evaluation Issues**

The specification for the formative evaluation of Community Strategies set out a series 18 issues or questions. Each contained a series of subsidiary questions. One of the objectives of the scoping phase has been to prioritise these issues, to suggest whether some should be excluded and to identify other issues. The 18 issues have been used to structure the report on the findings from the scoping work and the literature review.

The following table provides a summary of these issues and questions but suggests that the 'Other Issues' identified in the specification can be logically be regrouped under 'partnership, involvement and accountability' issues and 'cross-cutting' issues. However, the table retains a total of 18 questions.

**Table 1: Reconfiguration of Evaluation Questions**

CORE QUESTIONS	OTHER ISSUES	
	Partnership, Involvement and Accountability	Cross-Cutting Issues
1. Have Community Strategies Added Value 2. Evaluating progress against central government objectives 3. Indicators of performance 4. Process outcomes 5. Monitoring 6. Constraints and blockages	7. Community engagement 8. Local democratic accountability 9. Role of elected members 10. Public and private partners 11. Community leadership and community cohesion 12. Multi-tiered government	13. Mainstreaming and links to plans, strategies and partnerships 14. Crosscutting review of the voluntary and community sector 15. Sustainability 16. Sustainable communities and urban renaissance 17. Rural proofing 18. Equality and diversity

The following table outlines that this reconfiguration of the evaluation specification can be extended through merging some of the questions and issues together. This recognises that many of the issues should be examined together and that in many cases it is therefore interaction which should be explored and which is more significant, than progress being made on a specific issue. For example, increasing public and private partner involvement in Community Strategies may have knock-on effects to democratic accountability and to the involvement of the voluntary and community sector.

The Core Questions of the evaluation have been reconfigured so that the question 'Have Community Strategies Added Value' should be seen firmly as the central question which the evaluation will address. The other questions can therefore be seen as constituent parts of this questions. The evaluation questions relating to Indicators of Performance and Monitoring have also been merged under a heading Performance Management. This reflects a key finding of the consultation, both with central government departments and with local authorities, that performance management issues should be examined together. The processes underpinning monitoring and indicators of performance operate closely together locally and should therefore not be treated separately by the evaluation. Issues around blockages and constraints, and process outcomes, should also be merged under a series of Process questions, moreover by addressing many of the blockages and constraints could trigger an array of positive process outcomes. For example, improving guidance and removing central government constraints may be seen to drive reductions in local bureaucracy and increase the accountability of Community Strategies.



**Table 2: Proposed Configuration of Evaluation Questions**

CORE QUESTIONS	OTHER ISSUES	
	Partnership, Involvement and Accountability	Cross-Cutting Issues
1. Have Community Strategies Added Value  2. Evaluating progress against central government objectives  3. Performance Management (Indicators of Performance and Monitoring)  4. Processes: constraints and blockages and process outcomes	5. Partnership roles and involvement (Community engagement; local democratic accountability; role of elected members; public and private partners; community leadership and community cohesion)  6. Working at different geographic levels (neighbourhood involvement; cross-border working; multi-tiered government with regional organisations)	7. Mainstreaming policies and plans (crosscutting review of the voluntary and community sector; Sustainability; Sustainable communities and urban renaissance; rural proofing; equality and diversity)

Partnership, involvement and accountability issues have been divided into two broad groups of questions. Firstly, many of the issues relate specifically to the operation of the partnership and the roles of stakeholders in developing and implementing Community Strategies. Moreover, these issues should be examined together. Secondly, and reflecting the consultations with central government departments and local authorities, a set of questions emerged around the geography of Community Strategies, both in terms of how the documents considered neighbourhoods (e.g. through area plans and delivery frameworks) and how Community Strategies fitted with regional planning and strategy frameworks (e.g. with the Regional Economic Strategy, RPG and Spatial Strategies, and Regional Housing Strategies).

The final set issues relate broadly to cross-cutting issues and to processes such as mainstreaming. These aspects of the evaluation should be examined on a common basis rather than attempting to evaluate each separately. Some issues are likely to be more important in some areas than others, for example urban renaissance and rural proofing. However, the focus of the evaluation should be on the process by which these policies and issues are addressed by Community Strategies.

The following set of tables bring together the research questions set out in the original evaluation specification, the key findings from scoping and consultation, and how these will be addressed in the main evaluation. For the purposes of consistency with the previous sections, the findings are presented around the 18 questions but are presented around the seven issues identified in this section. The Table is reproduced in Annex 3 but in the same order of the 18 original questions. They also give an indication of the balance of work between the main research instruments to be used in the evaluation: the review and screening of community strategies; case studies; survey; light touch case studies; call-off elements; and action learning sets.

The function and operation of each of these is explored in more detail in the next section.

Table 3: Community Strategies - issues to explore around seven key evaluation questions

QUESTION 1: HAVE COMMUNITY STRATEGIES ADDED VALUE?

Research Issues and Questions	Key Evaluation Issues	Scoping Findings	How to address in Evaluation
<p><b>ODPM QUESTION 1. Have CS added value?</b>                      Formative and Summative issue. At the headline level, this will need to assess whether local and national targets and outcomes have been stretched or improved by joint working around CS. Equally it will need to look at whether the work of LAs and other partners has been prioritised in line with consultation with the local community.</p>	<p>Need to identify relevant national and local targets and outcomes</p> <p>Need to examine how these have been prioritised.</p> <p>Need to identify whether they have been stretched/improved</p> <p>Need to attribute to CS (vis-à-vis other parts of the LGMA and wider policies)</p>	<p>-Depth and breadth of CS varies</p> <p>-External support often provided from consultants on visioning activities or on specific themes.</p> <p>-CS first and foremost reflect local needs, not government priorities. However, in some cases there was an automatic coalescence of central and local objectives.</p> <p>-Functioning of LSPs appeared to be a critical factor in determining progress.</p> <p>-Many CS now into their second or third phase of development with APs being prepared.</p> <p>-Different models of CS emerging, often reflecting the structure of the LSP.</p> <p>-Currently a significant gap in many CS between aspiration and vision and achievable outcomes and discrete actions.</p>	<p>Research instruments will examine:</p> <p><b>Community Strategy Assessment:</b> extent of variation in CS; use of local evidence; innovative approaches to Strategies, Action Plans and Monitoring Frameworks;</p> <p><b>Survey:</b> partner involvement in Community Strategies; identify capacity constraints</p> <p><b>Case Studies:</b> exploration of reasons for different models for Community Strategies; development of measures of involvement.</p> <p><b>Action Learning Sets:</b> might identify examples of added value and reasons why CS have added value</p>

**QUESTION 2: ARE COMMUNITY STRATEGIES AN EFFECTIVE MECHANISM TO DELIVER CENTRAL GOVERNMENT OBJECTIVES?**

Research Issues and Questions	Key Evaluation Issues	Scoping Findings	How to address in Evaluation
<p><b>ODPM QUESTION 2. Evaluating progress against central policy objectives. A key to the scoping stage</b> will be to provide conclusions on key central policy objectives for the establishment of CS policy. This needs to take into account both initial objectives, but also the ongoing organic policy-making of refinement and development (e.g. subsumation of plans). Early determination and prioritisation of these objectives are required in order for an effective plan to be instigated to evaluate the achievement of these central objectives through the evaluatory framework. Equally given the diversity of local approaches, an understanding of local objectives is also required.</p>	<p>Identify initial central government policy objectives for CS (e.g. CS guidance)</p> <p>Identify what the current central government policy objectives are for CS</p> <p>Summary of local approaches and policy objectives (some understanding of the diversity of approaches)</p>	<p>-Increasing focus from central government on Public Service Boards and Local Area Agreements.</p> <p>-Evaluation issues identified: -mechanisms through which central government policies can be implemented locally, and monitored -Do APs provide the basis for delivering CS? -NRF areas had a clearer link to floor targets and were using PMF systems. -View that CS would just be a summation of all govt policy objectives form existing plans rather than trying to reconcile differences between them. Link to PR evaluation. -Balance between being living documents (updated continually) or time limited (role of Action Plans). -Mismatch between policy making and implementation 'time' and between central and local policy cycles.</p>	<p>Research instruments will examine:</p> <p><b>Community Strategy Assessment:</b> Overview of how central government policy objectives are delivered (e.g. which objectives are identified, where are there gaps)</p> <p><b>Survey:</b> identify extent to which local authorities see Community Strategies as a vehicle for delivering central government policy objectives</p> <p><b>Case Studies:</b> explore whether Community Strategies provide the basis for Local Area Agreements and whether Action Plans would assist Public Sector Boards</p> <p><b>Call-Off Elements:</b> exploration of whether Community Strategies help to deliver central policy objectives</p>

**QUESTION 3: ARE COMMUNITY STRATEGIES UNDERPINNED BY ROBUST SYSTEMS OF PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT?**

<b>Research Issues and Questions</b>	<b>Key Evaluation Issues</b>	<b>Scoping Findings</b>	<b>How to address in Evaluation</b>
<p><b>ODPM QUESTION 3. Indicators of performance</b> See sections 98-110 of the govt guidance on the required operations and systems for monitoring and reviewing CS and measuring progress. Relevant work includes: 1. NRU-led work on developing an illustrative PMF for LSPs; 2. the ODPM-led LSP evaluation and action research programme; 3. Audit Commission work on QoL. Expectation that CS will use a combination of: a. appropriate existing national indicators such as floor targets and QoL; b. a series of specific local indicators. The scoping phase will need to determine what indicators it will use in the evaluation, commencing from an early baseline.</p>	<p>Identify different targets used.</p> <p>Explore rationale for different (national and local) targets</p> <p>Identify which targets to collect</p> <p>Identify how to analyse targets (as part of summative evaluation?)</p>	<p>Evaluation issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>--Progress and effectiveness of Action Plans and Monitoring Frameworks</li> <li>--Examining the effect of CPA and proposals for new corporate assessment on ways of working</li> <li>-Differing approaches to indicator setting and approaches to monitoring. Mix of national and local systems but also with varying degrees of rigour. Need to clarify and review in CS review.</li> <li>-Monitoring systems were undeveloped.</li> <li>-Issues of monitoring identified in two-tier authorities.</li> <li>-Timing issues: localities are at different stages so like-for-like comparison difficult.</li> <li>-Extent to which monitoring and risk assessment undertaken jointly unclear and undeveloped.</li> <li>-Balance between output and outcome indicators needs to be examined.</li> </ul> <p>Area for separate call-off research or specific issues paper to pull together findings.</p>	<p>Research instruments will examine:</p> <p><b>Community Strategy Assessment and Review:</b> which indicators are used (Audit Commission, NRU PMF, BVPI and locally determined)</p> <p><b>Case Studies:</b> why specific indicators were used; identification of problems in obtaining data (e.g. timing, data sharing etc.) and good practice</p> <p><b>Survey:</b> capacity required to develop and use indicators of performance</p> <p><b>Action Learning Sets:</b> working through most appropriate use of performance indicators</p>
<p><b>ODPM QUESTION 5. Monitoring</b> How are CS being monitored. What processes are in place for ensuring that commitments made by all partners in the AP are being met? How is this overseen by the LA and the LSP? What are the mechanisms for monitoring the impact of CS and in terms of outcomes, for example the use of indicators.</p>	<p>What monitoring systems have been established?</p> <p>How is this system managed?</p> <p>How are partners monitored?</p> <p>What are the implications of this for outcomes, and the use of indicators?</p>	<p>See indicators of performance</p>	<p>Research instruments will examine:</p> <p><b>Community Strategy Assessment and Review:</b> identify whether monitoring systems are in place and their scope.</p> <p><b>Survey:</b> identify the resources required for monitoring</p> <p><b>Case Studies:</b> explore models and effectiveness of different monitoring systems; partner involvement in monitoring; and problems with monitoring specific aspects of Community Strategy implementation</p> <p><b>Action Learning Sets:</b> as part of wider examination of performance management may consider how monitoring can be effective</p>

**QUESTION 4: WHAT PROCESSES ARE BEING USED TO DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT COMMUNITY STRATEGIES AND ARE THESE EFFECTIVE?**

Research Issues and Questions	Key Evaluation Issues	Scoping Findings	How to address in Evaluation
<p><b>ODPM QUESTION 4. Process outcomes</b> The research should demonstrate what outcomes derive from the processes of developing and implementing CS. e.g. affects on legitimacy and accountability, community cohesion, added or reduced value through rationalisation of processes and activities (e.g. data sharing or monitoring)</p>	<p>Identify range of outcomes: including those on the list plus others</p> <p>Identify measures for these process outcomes</p> <p>Identify how these measures can be collected and analysed (summative or formative).</p>	<p>Development of CS being led by LSP</p> <p>Evaluation issues identified include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-effectiveness of stakeholder and community involvement</li> <li>CS were focusing more on achievable outcomes and this may mean excluding partners from the process. Community cohesion should be picked up elsewhere in research or as a separate call-off study. Issues of data sharing should be explored under monitoring.</li> <li>Focus of research should be on accountability and legitimacy issues' and on 'removal of bureaucracy' (is this the case). Also links to issues of added value.</li> </ul>	<p>Research instruments will examine:</p> <p><b>Case Studies:</b> identify extent to which process outcomes have been achieved through Community Strategies</p> <p><b>Survey:</b> identify relative significance of difference process outcomes</p> <p><b>Action Learning Sets:</b> sharing experience on how process outcomes achieved and identifying appropriate actions to maximise positive process outcomes</p>
<p><b>ODPM QUESTION 6. Constraints and blockages.</b> What are the constraining issues that LAs/LSPs face in developing their CS. These may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-ensuring effective engagement at the right level of partners</li> <li>-sharing data and information</li> <li>-pooling budgets and sharing resources</li> <li>-pressures of mandates and inflexible sectoral targets</li> <li>-personality disputes constraining partnership working</li> <li>-central govt agendas constraining local discretion</li> <li>-lack of appropriate support and guidance</li> <li>-lack of appropriate skills amongst leading personnel</li> <li>-lack of effective leadership and direction</li> <li>-difficulties from long established teams dominating the agenda (e.g. LA 21)</li> </ul>	<p>Assessment of which factors are major constraints</p> <p>Are constraints linked and how?</p> <p>Do some constraints affect particular types of authority or particular areas of work more than others?</p> <p>Identify measures of the extent to which they are constraints</p> <p>Identify how they can be removed</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Unclear to what extent LA21 had influenced CS.</li> <li>-Capacity variations in developing and implementing CS (rural/urban, NRF/non-NRF; LA performance; and local prioritisation)</li> <li>-Prior experience of strategy development (e.g. SRB work) helped in rural districts with limited resources.</li> <li>-Key issues was how competing priorities and conflicts are reconciled.</li> <li>-Existence of a local strategy and local partnership prior to LG Act seen to be extremely beneficial.</li> <li>-Engagement of partners was variable: positive responses for PCTs and Police, less so for other partners. Greater flexibility for JC+ offices seen to be beneficial.</li> <li>-Limited evidence on budget pooling, sectoral targets, mandates, personality disputes.</li> <li>-Other targets also constrained delivery (e.g. transport, health and regional agendas)</li> <li>-View that guidance was not tailored for non-NRF rural areas.</li> <li>-Wide mix of skills needed for successful CS.</li> </ul> <p>Other constraints included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-variable geometry of boundaries and two-tier</li> </ul>	<p>Research instruments will examine:</p> <p><b>Survey:</b> will provide overview of existence of constraints and blockages and their relative importance</p> <p><b>Case Studies:</b> will explore why constraints and blockages have emerged and how they may be overcome; as well as the complexity of overcoming some constraints and blockages in specific contexts and localities.</p> <p><b>Action Learning Sets:</b> might explore how constraints and blockages are removed and identify good practice.</p>

**Process Evaluation of Plan Rationalisation / Formative Evaluation of Community Strategies**  
-Consultation Findings and Evaluation Framework-

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**QUESTION 5: WHAT SYSTEMS OF PARTNERSHIP, INVOLVEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY HAVE BEEN DEVELOPED FOR COMMUNITY STRATEGIES?**

Research Issues and Questions	Key Evaluation Issues	Scoping Findings	How to address in Evaluation
<p><b>ODPM QUESTION 9. Local democratic accountability.</b> How is accountability to the following groups achieved and to what degree:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Elected councillors or MPs</li> <li>-Other elected reps, e.g. TU members, school governors</li> <li>-Public consultation, engagement participation and appropriate advocacy</li> <li>-Publicity, modes of entry, opportunities for participation</li> <li>-Cross-sectoral and partnership development of the strategy</li> <li>-Roles of partner's (including VCS, private, faith)</li> <li>-Engagement by LA and other public sector officers</li> <li>-Targeting of CS to local needs and issues (rather than following national agendas)</li> </ul> <p>Also, who is accountable for developing and delivering the CS (and its components) and what mechanisms facilitate this</p>	<p>Identify mechanisms for accountability</p> <p>How do these vary across authorities</p> <p>What measures of accountability can be used (e.g. trust, legal measures)?</p> <p>How can the measures be evaluated?</p> <p>Identify who is accountable for the CS? (is this issue recognised by LA/LSP)</p>	<p>Main fault line between cabinet members and backbenchers. There were also perceived to be problems/conflicts with parish councillors. Limited evidence on wider involvement (need to refer to LSP evaluation).</p>	<p>Research instruments will examine:</p> <p><b>Survey</b> will explore significance of local democratic accountability for Community Strategies and breadth of democratic accountability (from role of councillors through to accountability through wider organisations representing civil society – Tus, VCS etc</p> <p><b>Case Studies:</b> could be used to identify whether Community Strategies enhance local democratic accountability</p>
<p><b>ODPM QUESTION 10. Public and Private Partners</b> How do CS engage other partners in design and delivery? Consider the general role of the LSP but also other activities, such as polling data, sharing expertise and developing joint projects. Has the CS given the LSP a focus in non-NRF areas?</p>	<p>Which partners are and are not engaged in design and delivery.</p> <p>Consider issues of who and how partners are involved (i.e. to what extent?)</p>	<p>Limited findings from consultation. Most respondents highlighted the active involvement of a few large public sector partners (PCT, Police and JC+ cited most frequently) with limited roles for smaller and newer partners (Connexions, LSC) and for the private sector.</p>	<p>Research instruments will examine:</p> <p><b>Community Strategy Assessment and Review:</b> will identify which partners identified in Action Plans</p> <p><b>Survey:</b> will gauge whether some partners have been more closely involved in Community Strategies than others and reasons for this.</p> <p><b>Case Studies:</b> will explore mechanisms for engaging partners and constraints they may face.</p> <p><b>Action Learning Sets:</b> might consider models for effective engagement of partners</p>



**Process Evaluation of Plan Rationalisation / Formative Evaluation of Community Strategies**  
-Consultation Findings and Evaluation Framework-

<b>Research Issues and Questions</b>	<b>Key Evaluation Issues</b>	<b>Scoping Findings</b>	<b>How to address in Evaluation</b>
<p><b>ODPM QUESTION 11. Community leadership and community cohesion.</b> To what extent do LAs and other partners develop their leadership role. Have particular partners led the wider process of strategy development. Does the strategy help provide a sense of community cohesion? On community cohesion, has the CS identified and included issues of relevance (i.e. Home Office/CRE/LGA guidance)</p>	<p>How is leadership exercised and by who?</p> <p>Has CS contributed to community cohesion (across sectors)?</p> <p>How has the HO guidance on cohesion been followed or have other models emerged? What has been the effect on community cohesion?</p>	<p>Increasing focus on Public Service delivery was seen to be giving a stronger role to local authorities.</p>	<p>Research instruments will examine:</p> <p><b>Community Strategy Assessment and Review:</b> will identify whether community cohesion issues addressed.</p> <p><b>Survey</b> will identify whether local authorities exercise community leadership through Community Strategies.</p> <p><b>Case Studies:</b> will explore how leadership and cohesion issues addressed.</p> <p><b>Action Learning Sets:</b> might consider issues around cohesion and leadership; although more likely to address these as part of a wider consideration of mainstreaming and partnership.</p>
<p><b>ODPM QUESTION 16. Role of elected members.</b> Councillors can play a number of potential roles: driving force for prep. of CS; providing a route for dialogue with community; and help to scrutinise CS. Research should explore the extent to which the roles are being fulfilled and the barriers to them where they are not.</p>	<p>Identify different roles played by type of councillor (cabinet/backbench) and across authorities).</p> <p>Identify reasons for variation and assess barriers.</p>	<p>Merge with Local Democratic accountability questions?</p>	<p>This will be considered under questions around local democratic accountability and partnership</p>

**QUESTION 6: HOW DO COMMUNITY STRATEGIES OPERATE AT DIFFERENT GEOGRAPHIC LEVELS?**

Research Issues and Questions	Key Evaluation Issues	Scoping Findings	How to address in Evaluation
<p><b>ODPM QUESTION 8. Community Engagement.</b> How does the CS (whole or in parts) engage, consult, advocate needs, aspirations and priorities of all members of the community (including hard-to-reach groups). How are the vol, com and private sectors engaged. Has there been a wider impact on community capacity and civil renewal. To what extent is the engagement one-off or are ongoing mechanisms being established, including mechanisms for feedback.</p>	<p>Identify mechanisms for community consultation, involvement and prioritisation? Are these one-off or ongoing?</p> <p>Examine the effectiveness of different mechanisms.</p> <p>Identify and evaluate how vol, com and private sectors are involved.</p>	<p>Community involvement was variable although models of good practice were emerging. CS seen to be a starting point in process. Community engagement was through: LSP inclusion (in some cases this made LSPs unwieldy as individuals had a mix of mandates and agendas - area forums and CENs) and consultation. Processes seemed to be variable.</p>	<p>Research instruments will examine: <b>Survey:</b> will identify different approaches to community involvement in developing and implementing the CS (e.g. neighbourhood forums and management, area forums and panels, thematic groups) and extent across local authorities of community engagement <b>Case Studies:</b> will explore different approaches to community engagement and identify which appear to be most successful <b>Action Learning Sets:</b> might consider what makes a successful approach to community engagement and how it can be sustained</p>
<p><b>ODPM QUESTION 15. Multi-tiered governance.</b> The research should assess how two tier authorities work together to ensure that the strategies are effective. The research should explore which approaches have been effective. Similar processes should be explored in London with respect to the Mayor's Strategy and Community Strategies. GOs are playing different roles (depending on their resources) to support CS. The research should examine the roles GOs can play in co-ordinating and supporting the establishment of the appropriate balance between central and local objectives. Consideration of the real or potential scrutiny role of regional government would be helpful.</p>	<p>Identify mechanisms for working in two tier authorities. How effective are these (need to define 'effective')</p> <p>Identify mechanisms for working in London. How effective are these (need to define 'effective').</p> <p>What roles do GOs play and with what effect.</p> <p>Identify remit of regional government in CS. What mechanisms are used?</p>	<p>LAs involved in various support networks. Many operating at a sub-regional level but also other groups (e.g. New Unitairies).</p> <p>Unclear whether CS were nested in regional strategies or conflicted. Mechanisms for managing relations were still fluid. Key parameters provided by planning framework (with statutory provision), housing and RES (funding allocations). Other aspects seen to be more voluntary (e.g. culture, biodiversity).</p>	<p>Research instruments will examine: <b>Community Strategy Assessment and Review</b> will identify extent of any multi-tiered and cross-boundary policies or initiatives <b>Survey:</b> will ask areas where multi-tiered governance is critical to success of CS <b>Case Studies:</b> will explore how CS fit within regional framework of policies and whether this produces any conflicts</p>

**QUESTION 7: HOW DO COMMUNITY STRATEGIES MAINSTREAM OTHER POLICIES?**

Research Issues and Questions	Key Evaluation Issues	Scoping Findings	How to address in Evaluation
<p><b>ODPM QUESTION 7. Mainstreaming and links to other plans, strategies and partnerships.</b> How does CS affect mainstream activities? Should focus not just on retargeting of resources but also how CS have allowed for savings (e.g. changes to operational planning of partners and LA depts). Also reflect on how mainstreaming cuts across different spatial tiers (regional, sub-regional and neighbourhood). Are they compatible and reinforcing and how is this managed? Also how are LDFs and CS linked together? Are particular mechanisms used to ensure delivery, e.g. SLAs. Impacts on other policy agendas (urban renaissance and sustainable development)</p>	<p>How does mainstreaming work and with what effect?</p> <p>What are the benefits of mainstreaming (quantifiable)</p> <p>How is multi-tiered working managed?</p> <p>How can Planners be most effectively engaged in the process?</p> <p>Are SLAs used and with what effect?</p> <p>How are sustainable development and urban renaissance policies reflected?</p>	<p>Links with LDFs being identified and taking different forms in LDDs</p> <p>Findings inconclusive on mainstreaming issues.</p>	<p>Research instruments will examine:</p> <p><b>Community Strategy Assessment and Review:</b> will explore extent to which policies are seen to be mainstreamed (e.g. sustainability, community cohesion etc.) and extent to which policy solutions are joined-up (for example addressing links between ill health and worklessness)</p> <p><b>Survey:</b> will identify relative priority given to different policy areas to be mainstreamed within Community Strategy (e.g. health, crime, skills, education, physical environment and housing)</p> <p><b>Case Studies:</b> will explore the processes of mainstreaming and the extent to which there are specific blockages (for example, capacity issues versus constraints of joining-up in larger authorities)</p> <p><b>Action Learning Sets:</b> might explore what makes a successful approach to mainstreaming and linking different activities together</p>
<p><b>ODPM QUESTION 12. Crosscutting review of voluntary and community sector.</b> Need to take an early view on whether the LSP could take a lead role for auditing the capacity of this sector. Links to Guidance Portal work and also to call-off elements</p>	<p>Central issue is the capacity of the VCS to play different roles ascribed to it by the cross-cutting review. This will vary between areas</p> <p>Suggest that this is a Guidance Portal and Call-Off task</p>	<p>Focus tended to be in areas reflecting HO guidance: around social inclusion, health, crime and young people. A more significant issue in areas with larger BME populations.</p>	<p>Research instruments will examine:</p> <p><b>Community Strategy Assessment and Review</b> will identify roles specified for VCS</p> <p><b>Survey:</b> will seek to prioritise relative importance of VCS in service delivery and how this is reflected in CS, Action Plans etc.</p> <p><b>Case Studies:</b> may consider role of VCS in service delivery</p> <p><b>Action Learning Sets:</b> might consider VCS role as part of a wider consideration of partner involvement.</p>

**Process Evaluation of Plan Rationalisation / Formative Evaluation of Community Strategies**  
-Consultation Findings and Evaluation Framework-

<b>Research Issues and Questions</b>	<b>Key Evaluation Issues</b>	<b>Scoping Findings</b>	<b>How to address in Evaluation</b>
<p><b>ODPM QUESTION 13. Sustainability.</b> To what extent are CS promoting sustainable development. Examine balance between economic, social and environmental impacts and outcomes and the long-term consequences of these. What connections are being made between sustainable development policy at different levels (e.g. are World Summit priorities reflected)?</p>	<p>How are CS promoting sustainable development and in what ways?</p> <p>What targets and impacts have been identified?</p> <p>Do CS reflect sustainable development policies and law from national and international organisations.</p>	<p>Conflicting views on whether sustainable development (especially environmental LA21 dimensions) had been marginalized by CS with a greater economic focus.</p>	<p>Research instruments will examine: <b>Community Strategy Assessment and Review</b> will identify whether Sustainability has been considered and how <b>Survey:</b> will ask relative importance of sustainability <b>Case Studies:</b> will explore whether CS are seen as an important mechanism for meeting sustainability objectives and whether they have added value over previous approaches to sustainability (e.g. LA 21)</p>
<p><b>ODPM QUESTION 14. Sustainable communities and urban renaissance.</b> Links to 'Sustainable Communities: building for the future' and Urban White Paper. The evaluation should include an assessment of how far community strategies link in with this agenda and the agencies involved. What impact are the strategies having at the local level on the delivery of these policies?</p>	<p>How are SC and UR policies reflected in CS</p> <p>To what extent are these agendas addressed</p> <p>What local impacts are there? What measures exist for this?</p>	<p>Limited evidence from scoping. Key issue to focus on was housing (in low demand and in sustainable communities areas) and on urban renaissance (e.g. role of URCs).</p>	<p>Research instruments will examine: <b>Community Strategy Assessment and Review</b> will identify whether Sustainable Communities and Urban Renaissance have been considered and how (e.g. seen to be broadly concerned with physical infrastructure and housing, or wider agenda) <b>Survey:</b> will ask relative importance of sustainable communities and urban renaissance <b>Case Studies:</b> will explore issue alongside wider consideration of mainstreaming different agendas.</p>
<p><b>ODPM QUESTION 17. Rural proofing.</b> Assess whether CS have been rural proofed; assess the CS impacts on rural communities; and the inclusion of rural groups (Parish Councils) in development of strategies. The research should also address issues of the urban fringe that can potentially be de-prioritised owing to it falling across LA boundaries.</p>	<p>How do CSs take into account rural issues?</p> <p>Is rural proofing guidance used?</p> <p>How are rural areas involved and engaged?</p> <p>Are there proposals for the urban-fringe and are these feasible?</p>	<p>Unclear to what extent rural proofing had occurred.</p>	<p>Research instruments will examine: <b>Community Strategy Assessment and Review</b> will identify whether rural proofing of Community Strategies has taken place <b>Survey:</b> will ask relative importance of rural proofing of Community Strategies <b>Case Studies:</b> will explore issue alongside wider consideration of mainstreaming different agendas.</p>

**Process Evaluation of Plan Rationalisation / Formative Evaluation of Community Strategies**  
 -Consultation Findings and Evaluation Framework-

<b>Research Issues and Questions</b>	<b>Key Evaluation Issues</b>	<b>Scoping Findings</b>	<b>How to address in Evaluation</b>
<p><b>ODPM QUESTION 18. Equality and diversity.</b> How are aspects equality and diversity treated in the full array of CS activities (from participation through to monitoring and setting targets). The research should draw out examples of how equality and diversity is being treated, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-ensuring different voices are heard and hard to read groups are accessed</li> <li>-ensuring that the full array of communities' 'knowledge' is brought to bear</li> <li>-planning for the needs of elderly frail people</li> <li>-addressing anti-gay and lesbian bullying (in schools, workplaces and public places)</li> <li>-Promoting the involvement of young people in the democratic process</li> <li>-addressing the specific needs of specific sub-sectors (e.g. first generation Muslim women)</li> </ul>	<p>Focus is on identifying examples.</p> <p>Need to review approaches in CS and highlight examples (e.g. consider in specific case studies).</p>	<p>Further assessment required.</p>	<p>Research instruments will examine:</p> <p><b>Community Strategy Assessment and Review</b> will identify whether equality and diversity are addressed by Community Strategies</p> <p><b>Survey:</b> will ask relative importance of equality and diversity in Community Strategies</p> <p><b>Case Studies:</b> will explore issue alongside wider consideration of mainstreaming different agendas.</p>

#### **4.4 Plan Rationalisation - Evaluation Issues**

The terms of reference in the original research specification for the process evaluation of Plan Rationalisation set the following objectives:

- 1. Evaluate the processes adopted by central government departments and agencies as part of the general move towards a rationalisation of plan requirements on local government.
- 2: Evaluate the processes local authorities have adopted in response to rationalisation of plans they have been required to produce
- 3a: Document and assess the extent to which Government Departments seek to achieve the purposes of removed plans through other means
- 3b: Document and assess the burden of remaining plan, strategy and data requirements on local government
- 4: Develop an analytical framework to enable an evaluation of the impacts of plan rationalisation in the longer term.

The table on the following page outlines the main evaluation issues which these objectives raise, the findings from initial interviews in the scoping phase and how these objectives may be addressed in the remainder of the evaluation.

The evaluation needs to consider two key issues: the effectiveness of the processes in central government established to drive forward plan rationalisation since the Local Government Act 2000, variations across departments and plans over this period and in local authorities the effectiveness of different approaches (including the identification of barriers and drivers). A long-term objective of the process evaluation is to develop a summative evaluation framework to enable impacts of Plan Rationalisation to be measured.

The research specification has set out 30 sets of questions for the evaluation to address. As with the evaluation framework of Community Strategies, it is recommended that these be collapsed together into a number of core themes. In contrast to the research on Community Strategies, the Plan Rationalisation is also considering processes in central government. Where possible, the proposed research design for Plan Rationalisation attempts to reflect issues identified in the Community Strategies evaluation (e.g. Performance Management, Processes) and also as far as possible that common issues be addressed in both central and local research.

**Process Evaluation of Plan Rationalisation / Formative Evaluation of Community Strategies**  
-Consultation Findings and Evaluation Framework: DRAFT-

<b>Research Objectives and Questions</b>	<b>Key Evaluation Issues</b>	<b>Scoping Findings</b>	<b>How to address in Evaluation</b>
<p><b>ODPM OBJECTIVE 1: Evaluate the processes adopted by central government departments and agencies as part of the general move towards a rationalisation of plan requirements on local government.</b></p> <p>Help ODPM understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• relevant processes which have taken place</li> <li>• how 'well' the processes operate</li> <li>• reasons behind (un)successful operation</li> <li>• outcome of operation for organisations concerned</li> </ul> <p>Key Question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How PR is driven in Central Government</li> </ul> <p>How is the behaviour of Central Government Departments changing (specifically: what are the resulting performance management frameworks and how does CG achieve objectives without a plan requirement). What is innovative in terms of Performance Management. What trade-offs are made with other approaches such as PIs, grants or funding mechanisms?</p>	<p>Key issues include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ identification of processes (across departments and within departments)</li> <li>○ identification and assessment of changes in government behaviour</li> <li>○ innovation in performance management</li> <li>○ identification of areas in which there have been trade-offs</li> </ul>	<p>Key findings around the sequence of events and activities following the implementation of the Local Government Act 2000. Key milestones include the establishment of the LG Act (Implementation) Group at a senior level (of civil servants), the commissioning of the Portico study and the commitment to reduce the number of plans.</p> <p>Renewed impetus through linking plan rationalisation to performance (removal of plan requirements for excellent authorities) and the establishment of 'gateways' within departments and establishment of LG Gateway Group within ODPM-LG. Since 2003 this has had a role in preparing parliamentary bill to remove plan requirements and in identifying new approaches to plan rationalisation.</p> <p>Progress across departments varies, primarily on size and role of departments with respect to local government. Groups of departments include: large funding departments (DfES, DoH and ODPM), departments with mix of financial and monitoring roles (DEFRA), smaller departments (DCMS).</p>	<p>Focus on processes in specific groups of departments (e.g. large spending departments, departments with smaller funding allocations but key roles in collecting data/implementing legislation, and small departments).</p> <p>Proposal to interview: LG leads in each department, those with responsibility for particular local authority plans, those involved in developing departmental policies.</p> <p>Focus of the interviews around:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-awareness of Plan Rationalisation agenda</li> <li>-key drivers in department and across departments</li> <li>-key blockages (e.g. timing, funding cycles, capacity, departmental ways of working)</li> <li>-information gaps</li> <li>-changes in departmental behaviour</li> <li>-contribution to performance management</li> </ul>
<p><b>ODPM OBJECTIVE 2: Evaluate the processes local authorities have adopted in response to rationalisation of plans they have been required to produce</b></p> <p>Help ODPM understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• relevant processes which have taken place</li> <li>• how 'well' the processes operate</li> <li>• reasons behind (un)successful operation</li> <li>• outcome of operation for organisations concerned</li> </ul> <p>Key Question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How PR affects planning for services in local authorities</li> <li>• How PR is driven in local government</li> </ul>	<p>Key issues include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identification of local processes</li> <li>• Effectiveness of Plan Rationalisation processes</li> <li>• Drivers of Plan Rationalisation</li> <li>• Implications for planning services</li> </ul>	<p>Plan Rationalisation seen to be a low priority at the time of the scoping interviews.</p>	<p>Key part of <b>Case Studies</b> and <b>Survey</b></p>

**Process Evaluation of Plan Rationalisation / Formative Evaluation of Community Strategies**  
-Consultation Findings and Evaluation Framework: DRAFT-

<b>Research Objectives and Questions</b>	<b>Key Evaluation Issues</b>	<b>Scoping Findings</b>	<b>How to address in Evaluation</b>
<p><b>ODPM OBJECTIVE 3a: Document and assess the extent to which Government Departments seek to achieve the purposes of removed plans through other means</b></p> <p>Key Question</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How is the behaviour of Central Government Departments changing (specifically: what are the resulting performance management frameworks and how does CG achieve objectives without a plan requirement). What is innovative in terms of Performance Management. What trade-offs are made with other approaches such as PIs, grants or funding mechanisms?</li> </ul>	<p>Key issues include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishing comment criteria against which to document and measure progress by Central Government Departments and over time</li> <li>Addressing specific issues around trade-offs, innovation and performance management</li> </ul>	<p>Further research required with CG departments</p>	<p>Two elements required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development of common criteria</li> <li>Department-focused research (documentary analysis and interviews)</li> <li>Cross-department work shop to feed back findings</li> </ul>
<p><b>ODPM Objective 3b: Document and assess the burden of remaining plan, strategy and data requirements on local government</b></p> <p>Key Question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The extent to which PR has removed burdens</li> </ul>	<p>Key issues include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identification of residual plan requirements</li> <li>Identification of new freedoms following plan rationalisation</li> </ul>	<p>Further research required with LG</p>	<p>Issues will be addressed through <b>case study</b> and <b>survey</b> research.</p>
<p><b>ODPM Objective 4: Develop an analytical framework to enable an evaluation of the impacts of plan rationalisation in the longer term.</b></p> <p>Help ODPM understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>how different internal outcomes might be linked to wider impacts</li> </ul> <p>An objective is to develop an analytical framework which links processes with their outcomes (e.g. helping LA staff to focus more clearly on local issues). Also needs to establish feasibility for linking processes, their outcomes with impacts such as improved service delivery.</p>	<p>Outcome of Objectives 1, 2, 3a and 3b. The evaluation framework to measure impacts will look at key implications of plan rationalisation for service delivery.</p>	<p>To be developed in subsequent phases of the research.</p>	<p>Key issues to explore in <b>case study</b> research will be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Changes in service planning due to plan rationalisation</li> <li>Variations between services and types of plans</li> <li>Development of measures to gauge impact.</li> </ul>



The original research specification for the process evaluation of Plan Rationalisation identified 20 sets of questions relating to local government and 10 sets of questions relating to central government for the evaluation to address. These questions are reproduced in Annex 4. These have been reviewed following the scoping and consultation phase of the evaluation. These have highlighted that the questions for local government should be explored around six main themes:

- Awareness (Question 1)
- Models of Plan Rationalisation (Questions 2, 19 and 20)
- Strategy and Coverage (Questions 3, 8 and 10)
- Processes (Questions 6.7, 9, 11, 14, 15 and 16)
- Performance Management and Data Requirements (Questions 5, 12, and 18)
- Capacity (Questions 4, 13 and 17)

These are outlined in more detail in the following table. It is proposed that issues of awareness and models can be addressed at a 'top-level' and should be a key part of the **survey** of local authorities. It is recommended that the subsequent issues be addressed through **case studies** and **light touch case studies**. Moreover, for resource reasons it is appropriate to focus this research on specific service areas, for example education or health, environment and culture. The objective of the case studies will be to identify good practice in addressing specific issues and to identify processes which could be adopted by other local authorities.

<b>Plan Rationalisation: Local Authority Themes</b>			
<b>1. Awareness</b>			
-are local authorities aware of Plan Rationalisation and how do they obtain information			
<b>2. Different Models of Plan Rationalisation</b>			
-what models exist, how do these vary across authorities, and what alternative models have developed			
<b>3. Strategy and coverage</b>	<b>4. Processes</b>	<b>5. Performance Management</b>	<b>6. Capacity</b>
-what links exist to Community Strategies -what is the coverage of Community Strategies (are there gaps)	-what are the processes and drivers of Plan Rationalisation -what are the main barriers to plan rationalisation -how has rationalisation change consultation processes -what are the implications of Plan Rationalisation for decision making	-what are the continual burdens of data collection -how is performance managed following rationalisation -has rationalisation affected wider performance management frameworks -how are outcomes of rationalisation measured	-what are the capacity implications of rationalisation -what are the characteristics of authorities which are leading the way on Plan Rationalisation.

The 10 questions for central government should be explored around the following five themes:

- Awareness (Question 10)
- Models of Plan Rationalisation
- Drivers and Blockages of Plan Rationalisation (Questions 1 and 2)
- Ways of Working (Questions 3, 4, and 6)
- Performance Management (Questions 5, 7, 8 and 9)

<b>Plan Rationalisation: Central Government Themes</b>		
<p><b>1. Awareness</b></p> <p>-are central government departments aware of Plan Rationalisation -are central government departments aware of the burdens of Plans (and residual requirements) on local authorities -what concerns exist that Plan Rationalisation may reduce effective policy making and implementation</p>		
<p><b>2. Different Models of Plan Rationalisation</b></p> <p>-have different models of Plan Rationalisation emerged (due to departmental characteristics, plan requirements, residual data requirements)</p>		
<p><b>3. Drivers</b></p> <p>-what have been the drivers and blockages of Plan Rationalisation -how are these sustained or countered</p>	<p><b>4. Ways of Working</b></p> <p>-what are the implications of Plan Rationalisation for ways of working -what alternative approaches are being developed (e.g. guidance)</p>	<p><b>5. Performance Management</b></p> <p>-what information gaps have been created by plan rationalisation what residual data requirements are there -what are the implications of rationalisation for auditing -what alternative mechanisms for performance management have been developed</p>

These issues will be addressed through further research with central government departments which will focus on specific plans in a limited number of departments. It is recommended that three departments be selected including: a large funding department (e.g. DfES or DoH), a department with regulatory and information requirements from plans (e.g. DEFRA) and a smaller funding department addressing cross-cutting issues (e.g. DCMS). Research undertaken will include interviews in departments with personnel with responsibilities for local government, responsibilities for specific plan and policy areas, and personnel involved in ensuring compliance and links with performance management and audit frameworks (e.g. links with Audit Commission). It may also be necessary to undertake some cross-departmental events (workshops and seminars) to explore and share experiences of Plan Rationalisation in central government.

## **4.5 Evaluation Workstreams**

The previous sections have outlined how the evaluation questions for Community Strategies can be most effectively addressed. These have focused primarily on the research instruments to be deployed. However, the research can also be seen as a

series of four work streams which address the main findings from the scoping and consultation. These are outlined in the following table.

**Table 4: Workstreams (2004-2006)**

<b>SCOPING AND CONSULTATION (January-July 2004)</b>				
	<b>STRAND 1: Central Government Processes</b>	<b>STRAND 2: Local Government Processes and Progress</b>	<b>STRAND 3: Emerging Issues</b>	<b>STRAND 4: Support activities</b>
<b>MAIN PROGRAMME OF RESEARCH (SEPT 2004 - JUNE 2006)</b>	<b>Research Tasks:</b>	<b>Research Tasks:</b>	<b>Research Tasks:</b>	<b>Research Tasks:</b>
	Interviews	Annual Survey	Light touch case studies	Community Strategy Guidance portal
	Literature Review (grey, policy and academic)	Longitudinal Case studies	Call-off elements	Action Learning Sets
	Workshops	Review of Community Strategies (2004)		
		Screening Community Strategies (2005)		
	<b>Focus:</b>	<b>Focus:</b>	<b>Focus:</b>	<b>Focus:</b>
	Drivers of Plan Rationalisation	Processes of Plan Rationalisation	Thematic policy studies on impact on Community Strategies	Collation and Dissemination of Community Strategies guidance
	Achievement of Central Government Policy Objectives	Added value of Community Strategies	Performance management	Engagement of practitioners in research
	New ways of working (e.g. Local Government Gateway)	Progress of Community Strategy objectives		
		Performance Management (monitoring, performance indicators)		
		Community strategy processes: constraints, blockages and outcomes		

Strands 1 and 2 outlined the core research instruments which will be used in the evaluation and their main focus. Strand 3 sets out how emerging issues may be addressed by the evaluation, primarily through light touch case studies (for example which illuminate good practice around performance management) or call-off research elements (for example which consider whether and how Community Strategies are addressing a particular policy area). There will also be scope to address emerging issues through, for example, the survey and case studies, in 2005 and 2006. Finally, Strand 4 sets out the two main support tasks for the evaluation, through the development of a Guidance Portal and the running of Action Learning Sets.

## 5. Research Elements

### 5.1 Introduction

The scoping research did not suggest that additional or fewer research elements were required to those outlined in the original proposal. However, they have suggested that certain elements need to be refocused. The scoping research has also highlighted how elements such as 'call-off' could be used, and issues which the ODPM and OGD may wish to consider further. The following outlines each of the original research elements in turn (except of course for the scoping work which is reported here). Some elements may be clarified through central and regional consultation events: for example these should help to clarify the relative priority of different issues. This section is intended to complement and not duplicate the outline of research elements in the original tender. However, substantive changes have been recommended.

### 5.2 Interviews with Central Government Departments, Central Agencies and Regional Government Offices

The first phase of these interviews has been completed and the key findings highlighted in this report. The next interviews will be undertaken in Autumn 2004. The focus of the next phase of interviews will be around the key themes of the achievement of central government objectives and the extent to which new ways of working have emerged.

A number of methodological issues were identified. The first is the issue of *retrospection*. This was mainly due to the natural turnover of staff in departments but was complicated by the establishment of new organisational structures. We have tried to address this by following up people who have moved on. However, issues of retrospection may become more problematic as the research proceeds. A second issue was around the existence of gatekeepers to particular policy areas. Where possible this has been addressed through simple triangulation processes and using common interview templates. A third issue was around the existence of organisational layers and policy silos. Within the scope of the research this can be addressed by focusing on a limited number of policy areas and undertaking interviews with a cross-section of staff dealing with that policy area. The fourth was to do with assessing how policies were cascaded down but also how operational issues were surfaced. This lay at the heart of whether new ways of working were emerging. The final issue was around the measurement and assessment of change across government departments. This, again, lay at the heart of assessing new ways of working.

Our response to these methodological issues is three-fold. Firstly, that a stronger theme and policy focus should allow the research to concentrate on specific areas of government – rather than trying to cover the full array of plans or policies which may affect Community Strategies. Secondly, the research has yet to systematically examine 'grey' policy literature (e.g. minutes of meetings, position papers etc.). This should help to provide a series of reference points for the interviews. The research team are aware of confidentiality issues this may pose and we suggest that protocols are developed for access, analysis and reporting of this data. Thirdly, the research to

date has primarily used interviews. It may be more appropriate to use more participative approaches such as workshops to explore issues around new ways of working.

### **5.3 Action Learning Sets**

It is proposed that three sets be formed and that these start in Summer 2004 and the remainder on a six monthly basis from November 2004 onwards. Each set should meet six times. A number of topics have emerged from the scoping research and these include: Performance Management; Action Plan and Monitoring Framework development; Stakeholder Involvement; Community Involvement and Needs Assessment; Links between Plan Rationalisation and Community Strategies; and delivering Central Government Objectives.

A key issue in the organisation of the Action Learning Sets was whether there would be demand for the ALS and whether sufficient local and regional officers can be signed up. Many key contacts in Government Offices were already involved in the LSP ALS and did not have the time to join a second. It may be necessary to organise the sets differently: for example, having two rather than three parallel meetings, but covering more themes.

### **5.4 Assessment and Review of Community Strategies, Action Plans and Monitoring Frameworks**

It is proposed that a detailed *assessment* of 50 Community Strategies (with Action Plans and Monitoring Frameworks) be undertaken in Autumn 2004. In Spring 2005 it is proposed that a lighter touch assessment, or *review*, will be undertaken of all Community Strategies (and associated documentation). The assessment of Community Strategies should provide the following information:

1. Whether each local authority has produced a Community Strategy which contains a vision, strategy, action plan and monitoring framework.
2. What structure to each Community Strategy has been used (e.g. thematic, area based, or a combination of both).
3. Who was the author of the Community Strategy (local authority planning team, LSP team, other organisation), the length of the document, its version (e.g. first draft), the time since it was last drafted, the duration of the document and when it will next be redrafted.
4. How local evidence is used in Community Strategies, whether some areas are better developed than others (e.g. more detailed employment data than crime data) and how this is reflected in output and outcome targets and indicators. In the assessment, rather than the review, analysis will also be made as to whether local evidence actually influences the strategy, action plan and monitoring framework.
5. How central government policy objectives are reflected in the Community Strategy, including major policy areas (health, education) as well as crosscutting issues (sustainability, community cohesion).

6. In the assessment of 50 Community Strategies good practice examples will also be sought to illustrate how specific issues have been addressed and also to illustrate the range of approaches developed.

Through the assessment and review of Community Strategies and their action plans it is intended this element of the research will address each of the key evaluation issues identified in the preceding section. This will be undertaken as follows:

1. *Added Value*: The assessment of Community Strategies will be used to show the extent of variation in Community Strategies, how local evidence is used, whether innovative approaches have emerged to developing the Community Strategies (and Action Plans and Monitoring Frameworks) and the variation in the priorities and themes.
2. *Central Policy Objectives*: The consultation exercise highlighted that whilst Community Strategies have responded to the broad guidance provided in DETR (2000) that they had primarily focused on developing strategies which responded to local needs, and did not necessarily provide a basis for achieving central government objectives. With Community Strategies possibly providing the starting point for local area agreements, this suggests that further development of Community Strategies will be required. The assessment will focus on identifying the extent to which central policy objectives are reflected in Community Strategies, whether there are particular gaps, and whether different approaches have emerged.
3. *Performance Management*: This section of the assessment will focus on the Action Plans (which typically contain the Performance Indicators) and the Monitoring Frameworks for Community Strategies. The review will explore which indicators have been used (e.g. Audit Commission quality of Life, NRU PMF and Floor Targets, BVPI and locally determined) and the scope of monitoring systems established (for example using the NRU PMF).
4. *Processes: Process Outcomes and Constraints and Blockages*: The assessment will not consider process outcomes, constraints and blockages. These issues will be explored through the survey and case studies.
5. *Partnership roles and involvement* As with processes it is likely that the assessment will not find considerable evidence on the partnership roles and involvement. Some commentary will be possible around the range of partners identified in action plans (including public, private and VCS) and some indication of objectives for Community Cohesion.
6. *Working at difference geographic levels*: The assessment will identify whether multi-tiered governance issues have been identified (for example, cross-border initiatives and links with regional frameworks) as well as whether a neighbourhood approach has been taken.
7. *Mainstreaming policies and plans*: It is anticipated that assessment (although less so the review exercise) will be able to provide an assessment of how and to what extent other policies have been embedded in Community Strategies. For example this will explore the extent to which policies are seen to be mainstreamed (e.g. sustainability, community cohesion etc.) and extent to which policy solutions are joined-up (for example addressing links between ill health and worklessness). It will also consider whether Community Strategies have

considered only the physical infrastructure aspects of policies such as urban renaissance and sustainable communities or whether broader approaches have been developed. Rural proofing, equality and diversity issues will also be explored.

The 50 Community Strategies to assess will be selected by a stratified sample of all local authorities. It will use the following division:

- Type of Local Authority: with a selection of London Boroughs, Metropolitan Boroughs and Cities, New Unitaries, Counties and Districts.
- Political Control: Community Strategies will be chosen to reflect the main forms of political control (Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat and No Overall Control)
- CPA Performance: the final selection will indicate the performance band of the local authority with attempts made to ensure a relatively even balance.
- NRF/non-NRF: the final selection will ensure a balance between NRF and non-NRF for each type of authority.
- Rural/Urban: the final selection will indicate whether local authority is urban or rural.

The selection of 50 Community Strategies means that a number of overall trends and issues around Community Strategies can be reported on with some degree of confidence. However, the stratified sample will mean that it will not be possible to generalise for a particular type of authority (e.g. new unitary), political control, CPA performance or other criteria based on the review. However, the assessment should provide evidence which may illuminate issues for similar types of authority. The sample of strategies to review will include all those selected as case studies.

The review exercise, by considering all authorities, will be able to be much more definitive on the structure and content of the Community Strategies. However, it will not be possible to provide as much in-depth and qualitative material. For example, it may indicate the number of Community Strategies which have considered sustainability, but not how it has been considered. Both the review and screening exercises will produce a range of cross-tabulated data, primarily against the stratification criteria.

## **5.5 Local Surveys**

Three surveys of all local authorities will be undertaken during the evaluation. These will be in December 2004, May/June 2005 and May/June 2006. The surveys will be used for two main purposes: to provide an indication of change over time (i.e. around common elements/questions) but also to explore specific issues each year. For example the 2004 survey will provide a baseline and that the 2005 survey will have a stronger focus on Plan Rationalisation.

The scoping research has confirmed that there may be methodological problems. The main issues is likely to be getting a clear response on progress being made on Plan Rationalisation as this information may not be held centrally in local authorities. Where possible, a corporate position will be requested. In the first year the surveys will be sent to all local authority Chief Executive officers. They will be requested to

pass on the questionnaires to the relevant individuals within their authorities. As completed questionnaires are returned, it should be possible to compile mailing lists of those with responsibility for Community Strategies or Plan Rationalisation within specific areas within the authorities. This should enable us to target the mailout accurately in subsequent years and thus reduce pressure on chief executives in the process. In all three surveys, telephone follow-ups will be used to increase the response rate.

In 2004, the survey contains banks of questions which will enable the provision of data regarding the extent of development of both Community Strategies and Plan Rationalisation, supported by more general questions regarding the type and structure of the authority. This will provide necessary supporting background as 2004 is essentially a baseline year. Issues addressed, as indicated in Table 3, will include: the perceived role of the Community Strategy in relation to central government policies, the relative importance of specific themes, both partner and community involvement, performance management frameworks, and constraints and blockages in addition to process outcomes.

It is anticipated that the 2005 survey will focus on specific service areas. One possible example is that 50 authorities will be surveyed on housing, 50 on education, 50 on environmental services, 50 on social service and so on. A systematic random sample approach will be used which is stratified by type of authority. For example, each group of fifty authorities will include a representative sample of London Boroughs, new unitaries, metropolitan authorities, counties and districts. However, some service groups may not need to survey certain types of authority: for example districts will not need to be sent a survey on education plans. These authorities would be allocated to one of the other groups.

Options for the 2006 survey will require consideration nearer the time.

## **5.6 Primary Case Studies**

These will form a key part of the research. Eight case study areas will be used and these will represent different types of authority and, to some extent, different geographies and CPA performance. The case studies will provide the main source of intensive qualitative data as to how Plan Rationalisation and Community Strategies are operating in practice. They will also be used to explore the theories of change and key cross-cutting themes in the research. The case studies will be undertaken in Autumn 2004, Spring 2005 and Spring 2006.

As with the survey, the case studies will explore changes over time but may also be used to explore specific themes in each year, for example, performance management and new ways of working. It is proposed that a common template be used to collect material. Additional documentary and data collection will also be undertaken to provide contextual evidence.

Key issues in using the case studies include gaining agreement of authorities and LSPs and sustaining involvement over three years. This is probably going to be most problematic for London boroughs and large metropolitan authorities, primarily because there are a smaller number of these types of authority.



## **5.7 'Light Touch' Case Studies**

The rationale for these case studies is that they would be used to follow-up and provide more detail on issues which emerged during the course of the research. Some emerging themes which may form the basis of early 'light touch' case studies include performance management, action planning processes, stakeholder involvement and staffing/capacity issues. The research specification also identified a long list of issues and these could also be used, for example, rural proofing, links to CPA, democratic accountability and multi-tiered governance.

Key issues in using the light touch case studies will be the process of identifying and agreeing themes, gaining agreement of participants to be interviewed and provide data, and timing. Timing issues relate both to the wider course of the research and to specific policy requirements of ODPM and OGD.

## **5.8 Call-off Provision**

Additional work may be undertaken in line with the arrangements for call-off provision. The original tender highlighted that these will fall in three areas:

- In Plan Rationalisation, individual departments may commission, through the ODPM, additional case studies or surveys to examine specific aspects of the process (and to examine how data gaps could be met)
- In Community Strategies, call-off work may involve exploring specific policy areas, for example the mainstreaming of social inclusion policies in strategies
- Call-off research may also examine the linkages between the two areas.

It is likely that call-off studies will have a strong policy focus and often be commissioned to meet a specific policy demand or requirement.

## **5.9 Development of the Community Strategies Guidance Portal**

The evaluation specification requires an outline of the Community Strategy 'e-portal' (hereafter guidance portal) to be developed for the ODPM, which provides an online routemap to the full range of 'guidance' and 'toolkits' that currently exist across government departments and other local, regional and central agencies. The rationale for the portal is to provide a tool for local authorities and LSPs to self-appraise their Community Strategy.

The guidance portal is intended to be compatible with renewal.net and with info4local. These systems are well established and have a high level of use by local authorities and stakeholders. Moreover, both provide examples of good practice from which the Community Strategy guidance portal should draw.

The literature search and review revealed the wide range of material in existence which may be of relevance in the development and implementation of Community Strategies. However, some is likely to be of greater usefulness than others: either because of its relevance, because of its timing or because of its accessibility for

practitioners. This suggests that the guidance portal should contain some indication of relevance (for example through a star rating).

Following the structure renewal.net it is proposed that material is indexed against the following categories:

**Table 5: Categories and Content of the Guidance Portal**

Document Type	Author	Themes
Guidance	Government Depts	Local Government
Toolkits	Agencies	Planning
Good Practice	Local Authorities	Housing
Legislation		Rural Affairs
Consultation		Health
Research		Enterprise
Evaluation		Employment
		Neighbourhood Renewal
		Enterprise
		Employment
		Crime Reduction
		Community and Voluntary Sector
		Community Cohesion
		Constitutional Affairs
		Regions
		Europe
		Sustainability

Examples of document types, authors and themes are given for each category. The DETR (2000) guidance on community strategies would, for example, appear under Guidance, ODPM and Local Government. Documents will also be indexed by their title, author, date of publication and subject area. This will allow criteria will be the main used in a document search. For example, publications could be listed in date order, by author and by subject area.

The guidance portal may also have an easy access section which highlights most commonly used material. For example this could include a list of the most relevant documents under the following headings:

- Community Strategy requirements
- Processes for development Community Strategies
- Sustainable development
- Use of data and information
- Community engagement processes
- Materials to audit voluntary and community sector capacity
- Performance Management, Monitoring and Evaluation
- Use of national and local performance indicators

- Implementation
- Subsuming plans and strategies
- Effective partnership working
- Pooling and aligning resources
- Sharing data

Documents included under each of these may be in the form of guidance, (self-assessment) toolkits, good practice guides or legislation. The guidance portal could also include a link to all Community Strategies. To aid access this could allow list strategies in alphabetical order, by region and by type of authority.

A further consideration in the development of the guidance portal is the extent to which guidance is accessed via a link to an external website or is held on the site itself. Links to external sites would reduce the amount of material needing to be held on the site (and the risks of material being superseded) but would require periodic checking that the external web link remains valid.

It is proposed that only a small amount of descriptive material about each document would be contained on the guidance portal. In addition to various descriptors required for indexing and searching it is recommended that the guidance portal only contains a very short description of the document which may help to clarify the purpose of the document or its scope.

The findings from the literature search and review highlighted that there is a relatively small amount of material which directly mentions Community Strategies or has been developed specifically to aid the development of Community Strategies. However, there was found to be a much wider range of material, both on specific issues, such as monitoring, performance management and communication, and policy areas, such as sustainability, community cohesion, voluntary and community sector involvement, which may be of relevance in developing and implementing Community Strategies but which does not refer to them specifically. For example, there was found to be a limited amount of material around employment, crime and disorder reduction and education designed specifically for Community Strategies (for example of assessing needs and identifying priorities), but clearly a considerable amount of material produced by Home Office, DfES and DWP on the local delivery of these policies.

Guidance, self-assessment and good practice material on issues around implementation, including performance management, was highlighted in consultation as an area where further assistance was required, specifically for non-NRF areas. Other gaps were seen to be around housing, multi-tiered working (including neighbourhood working, cross-border working and links with regional frameworks) and the assessment of accountability and legitimacy of Community Strategies.

## 5.10 Conclusion

This integrated programme of qualitative and quantitative research offers significant advantages for the evaluation. It allows extensive statistical data to be combined with detailed explanatory information covering all aspects of the research. It also enables

a recognition of the linkages both between community strategies and Plan Rationalisation themselves, and between them and other relevant elements of the LGMA. In addition to the data collected, the research will also make use of various sets of performance indicators, for example Best Value Performance Indicators, quality of life indicators, and CPA assessments. Various methods of analysis will be employed. SPSS will be employed for the survey data. It is not proposed that interviews be fully transcribed. The intention is to use a structured and common workbook for the different elements of the research. However, interviews may be recorded to ensure accuracy and for the inclusion (subject to agreement) of quotes.

## 6. Links with the Wider LGMA Evaluation

### 6.1 Introduction

The following table outlines the main policy levers that underpin the LGMA. Community Strategies are identified as part of Community Leadership, Freedoms and Flexibilities and Partnership Working while Plan Rationalisation is identified under Freedoms and Flexibilities. Together, both policies are intended to contribute directly to four out of the seven levers of the LGMA. They will also, and indirectly, contribute to the other three elements. This was borne out by the scoping phase of the research.

Defining the LGMA: Policy Levers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Service improvement</b> – Beacon scheme, Best Value, CPA, ESD, intervention and recovery planning process, LPSAs, LSPs, service diversity</li><li>• <b>Community leadership</b> – power of wellbeing, capacity building and LSPs, <u>community strategies</u>, shared priorities</li><li>• <b>Democratic renewal</b> – new council constitutions; improved local election, referendum and voting arrangements; regional chambers and elected regional assemblies</li><li>• <b>Public confidence</b> – new ethical framework; improved local election, referendum and voting arrangements; citizen and user engagement, CPA; intervention and recovery planning process</li><li>• <b>Freedoms and flexibilities</b> – LPSAs, single capital pot, freedoms in relation to council tax discounts &amp; exemptions, freedoms to trade and to charge, <u>Plan Rationalisation</u>, CPA</li><li>• <b>Partnership working</b> - LSPs, <u>community strategies</u>, IEG pathfinders, rationalisation of partnerships</li><li>• <b>Improved financial framework</b> - RSG reform, asset management plans, capital finance - prudential scheme, rate reliefs</li></ul>

Source: LGMA Meta Evaluation, 'Modelling the LGMA'

Drawing on the LGMA policy levers, the Meta Evaluation team have identified four 'theories of change' or 'mini-models' which are intended to inform and structure the individual elements of the LGMA evaluation. These include: service improvement; increased accountability; community leadership; and stakeholder involvement. Of these, Plan Rationalisation and Community Strategies have closest links to community leadership and stakeholder involvement, although they are also related in some way to the other elements.

For example, the Community Leadership model identifies the following elements:

- **Strategic direction:** To set local strategic direction and sustain action towards outcomes
- **Collaborative capacity:** To generate the skills and attributes to secure joint action  
**Representation:** To represent citizen/stakeholders aspirations within and beyond locality  
**Environment for innovation and learning:** To stimulate new approaches and to support learning from experience and elsewhere  
**Inclusion:** To involve all citizens in the ways they wish to be

Community Strategies are highly relevant to all elements and especially the first, that of strategic direction. Similar links can also be drawn with stakeholder involvement. More detail on the nature of these links is outlined below.

## **6.2 Improving Community Leadership**

### *Activities and Outputs*

The survey and review of Community Strategies should provide the data on these. The case study work and the surveys will also provide data on the processes involved in Plan Rationalisation and Community Strategies (including stakeholder involvement). The review of Community Strategies will provide the main input into the 'strategic framework' element. This will be complemented by interviews with central government (in years one and two) around Plan Rationalisation. Case studies and survey data will provide the main assessment of the processes by which Community Strategies are developed (the Collaborative Capacity, Inclusion and Representation elements). Evidence of innovation and learning will come through the review of strategies, survey data and be supplemented by the case studies.

## Outputs

The following table outlines our approach to providing data on outputs:

Output	Data
% of community strategies owned by wider partnership with identified priorities	Review of CS (for summary of partnership ownership); survey for data on different interpretations of 'ownership'; and case study data on processes, constraints and releasing factors.
% of Community Strategies outlining programmes of joint action by different stakeholders	Review of CS and thematic strategies (to identify joint actions); survey of local authorities on different interpretations of 'joint action' (e.g. SLAs, new forums etc.) and case study data on processes, constraints and releasing factors.
% of CS with Agreed Performance Framework for assessing progress	Review of CS and Survey of local authorities
Incidence of issues raised by CS [...] facilitated by use of Well-Being Powers	To be confirmed
% of stakeholders who believe that CS have facilitated learning in relation to community priorities	Survey of local authorities will provide an indication of number of stakeholders involved and to what extent. Case studies will give an indication as to whether learning has been facilitated

## Outcomes

We understand that estimation of outcomes will be a key objective of the Meta-Evaluation and will draw on aggregative and generative approaches. However, the Community Strategies and Plan Rationalisation evaluations should contribute some data (largely qualitative) in the following areas:

- Commentary on changing centre-local relations (particularly from the Plan Rationalisation evaluation)
- Understanding by stakeholders of Community Strategy aims and their feasibility
- Use of Community Strategies to drive wider processes (in relation to innovation and learning).

## 6.3 Improved Public Involvement

### Activities and Outputs

The review of Community Strategies will be used as a crude indicator of the scope and scale of public and stakeholder involvement. This will be explored in more detail by the Survey (for instance, asking respondents to indicate which stakeholders were involved and how, and how the wider public was involved). These issues will be explored in more detail by the case studies. This should provide a 'basic partnership audit' with measures developed to gauge the breadth and depth of the partnership working behind Community Strategies. Stakeholder involvement in the linked Plan Rationalisation processes will also be considered.

### *Outcomes and Measurement*

The review of Community Strategies and surveys will also be used to provide data on the significance of new forms of stakeholder involvement (around Community Strategies), the promotion of social inclusion (in how different communities are engaged in Community Strategies) and an indication of the extent to which relationships have improved between the council and other stakeholders. It will also be necessary to assess how the quality of relationships (in terms of interest group involvement) has changed.



## **7. Outputs from the Evaluation**

### **7.1 Introduction**

A range of outputs will be produced by the evaluations and these will have quite distinct purposes, and target audiences and take different forms as appropriate. A summary of these is provided below.

### **7.2 Case Study Reports**

All case studies will be written up as stand alone reports. The primary target audience for these will be the case study authorities and LSPs. The case studies will cover each evaluation, and common or overarching issues. However, they will also be provided to the ODPM and will provide the basis for good practice guidance. Case studies will be produced each year and will be no more than 30 pages in length. They will summarise evidence, key findings and highlight key releasing and constraining factors (where supported by evidence) for Plan Rationalisation and Community Strategies. Draft reports will be submitted to each case study (to the main contact point) for comment. Final reports will be produced within a month of receiving comments. Up to 24 reports will be produced during the course of the evaluation.

### **7.3 Light Touch Case Study Reports**

The light touch case study reports will typically be shorter in length than the full case studies (typically between 10-15 pages). Similar protocols will be used for clearing material. Up to 18 reports will be produced during the course of the evaluation. Topics may include performance management, data sharing and specific theme or policy issues (e.g. how do Community Strategies address sustainability).

### **7.4 Issues Papers**

These will typically be short, policy-oriented papers highlighting key research issues. The papers will be short in length (up to 15 pages in length) and they will draw on specific rounds of research (e.g. case studies, survey, analysis of Community Strategies). They will therefore be produced periodically, reflecting the overall cycle of the evaluation. For example, they will synthesise key case study, survey and documentary review findings. The primary audience for the Issues Papers will be the ODPM (for main drafts), other government departments, agencies (LGA, IdeA) and local authorities and their partners. However, the audience for each issues paper will vary slightly and this will be reflected in style, presentation and content of each. It is envisaged that approximately 10 Issues Papers be produced over the course of the main elements of the evaluations, with further papers being based on call-off research, the light touch case studies and action learning sets. Draft Issues Papers will be presented to the ODPM in the first instance for comment and clearance. In some cases these will also need to be submitted to other departments, agencies and

authorities for comment and clearance. It is anticipated that there will be two months between submission of drafts and production of a final draft.

The findings from the scoping stage of the research suggest that the following may be appropriate topics for issues papers:

1. *Community Strategies - a Literature Review*: this report (to be produced for Autumn 2004) will review and synthesise policy, academic and wider literature on the basis for Community Strategies. It will consider the guidance produced to date and identify gaps in the literature (for example around Community Strategies and performance management).

2. *Plan Rationalisation and Community Strategies - A Central Government Theory Of Change*. This report (to be prepared for Autumn 2004) will draw together the findings from interviews with central government departments and agencies, together with a review of current and recent policy, to set out the theory of change for Plan Rationalisation and Community Strategies. It will consider how the policies are linked together, the strength of these links, and whether variations in approach to Plan Rationalisation and Community Strategies exist across central government departments.

3. *Progress on Community Strategies and Plan Rationalisation: scoping findings*. This will report (to be prepared for Autumn 2004) will provide an overview, based on the findings contained in this report, of the progress which has been to date on these areas, key issues which have been identified (e.g. drivers, blockages and constraints) and provide an indication of why there may be variation.

4. *Review of Community Strategies*. This report (to be prepared for December 2004) would summarise the findings from the review of 50 Community Strategies. Findings would be presented against the dimensions outlined earlier in this report (for example around, use of evidence, central government objectives, structure and performance indicators) together with examples of innovative or good practice.

5. *Typology of Community Strategies*. This report (to be prepared for June 2005) based on the screening of all Community Strategies will provide a summary analysis of all Community Strategies. It will highlight variations in Community Strategies, highlighting for example differences in structure and focus, variation by location (for example regional variations) and by types of authority, as well as considering differences within strategies (for example how different themes are addressed, such as health or education).

6. *Processes for developing and delivering Community Strategies*. This report will draw on case study and survey evidence to outline how Community Strategies are developed and can be implemented. The report will also outline whether Community Strategies have enabled data sharing and pooling budgets, and will identify good practice and the scope for this practice to be used elsewhere. Finally, the report will review practice in performance management, how this has been developed by Community Strategies, and the extent to which this presents robust practice.

7. *Community Strategies and Partnership Working*: this report will draw on case study and survey evidence to explore the variation in partnership involvement and whether Community Strategies have provided a framework for improving partnership working. A particular consideration will be whether there are variations in involvement between different partners (public, private and VCS) and the constraints some partners may face in partnership involvement in Community Strategies (for example,

Police, LSCs, Jobcentre Plus and Connexions). The report will also look at issues of Mainstreaming and Joined-up Working and will outline how effective Community Strategies have been in these two areas.

8. *Managing Conflicting Priorities through Community Strategies*: this paper will consider how local partners have used Community Strategies to reconcile and address priorities which may be conflictual, for example, between economic growth and environmental sustainability, or over the management and allocation of financial resources. Issues around managing conflicting priorities appear to lie at the heart of the success of Community Strategies, and in particular how the delivery of different policies can be designed to have mutually beneficial effects. It will also include evidence on the experiences of multi-tiered working and of community involvement.

9. *Local Processes of Plan Rationalisation*: drawing on case study and survey evidence this report will review the processes by which local authorities are rationalising plans, the barriers they have faced and particular approaches which have been used. It will also seek to identify whether there are different approaches emerging, for example in different types of authority. This report will also explore whether data and information gaps may be caused by Plan Rationalisation, and how these have been addressed.

10. *Central-Local Relations through Community Strategies and Plan Rationalisation*: this report will explore how central-local relations have changed, what new processes are emerging and links to new mechanisms for central-local relations (including inspection and local area agreements). The report will have a particular focus on performance management, monitoring and audit (for example considering central-local relations post plans. Finally, the paper will consider the impact of Plan Rationalisation on Central Government ways of working, for example, variations across government departments, the key drivers of different approaches and the relative success of new ways of working.

## **7.5 Good Practice Guides**

These will be short practice-oriented guides which will be accessible by policy leads in central government as well as policy officers in local government and agencies. The guides will be between five and 20 pages in length. It is envisaged that up to 10 good practice guides will be produced. The guides will be cleared by ODPM before publication. However, it is also intended that the Action Learning Sets will also make an active input into the guides. Drafts will also be developed in these sets. Many of the good practice guides will follow from the Issues Papers, with possible guides including:

1. *Good Practice in developing and delivering Community Strategies: tools and techniques*
2. *Good Practice in Data Sharing and Pooling Budget*
3. *Good Practice in Performance Management*
4. *Good Practice in Mainstreaming and Joining-up Policies*
5. *Good Practice in Community Involvement*

6. *Good Practice in Plan Rationalisation Processes*
7. *Good Practice in Community Strategy Partnership Working*
8. *Good Practice in Community Strategy Service Planning*
9. *Good Practice in developing evidence-based Community Strategies*
10. *Good Practice in Setting Priorities in Community Strategies*

## **7.6 Miscellaneous Reports**

A series of smaller ad hoc reports will also be required. Those identified in the brief include: series of questions for 06/07 BVPI survey; proposals on Community Strategy process and impact issues (for ODPM and department working groups); and issues paper on descriptions of indicators (for collection of Community Strategy baselines).

## **7.7 Annual Report**

This report will be produced in October (draft) and November (final) in 2004 and 2005 and will cover both Community Strategies and Plan Rationalisation. A draft final annual report for Community Strategies will be produced in June 2006 (final in July). It will pull together key findings from the other outputs, will provide a progress check against the workplan, identify key emerging issues which the evaluations may need to address, and summarise key recommendations. It will also provide a short summary of key policy developments. It is intended that the complete report will be primarily for the ODPM. An extended executive summary will be publicly available.

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## Annex 2: Findings from Consultation Events

### ***Consultation Events***

Three consultation events were held, one with central government departments and central agencies and two regional events in Yorkshire and Humber and London with representatives from local authorities, LSPs and regional Government Offices. Following presentations on policy and research findings to date each consultation event included discussion groups around a common set of questions. These are outlined below. The regional events also included a presentation by ENTEC on the findings from the ODPM study into the links between Community Strategies and Local Development Frameworks. This helped to attract both those involved in LSPs and Community Strategies as well as planners. The evaluation team also attended and participated in an event of the North West RTPi Network which examined links between Community Strategies and Local Development Frameworks.

### ***Central Government and Agency Consultation***

The central government and agency consultation event included representatives from ODPM (Local Government, LRGRU, NRU, Urban, Equalities and RCU), DCMS, DEFRA (Sustainability and Biodiversity), Home Office (ACU and CCU), DfT, DfES, Audit Commission and the Local Government Association. 29 participants attended this event. As part of an introductory open discussion attendees were asked to consider the following questions:

- What issues are important for the research to address? What are the key priorities?
- What findings and information would be interesting? How should these be best provided/reported?

Responses to these questions are summarised below:

- *Role of Regional Government Offices*: it was asked whether the research could consider how successful RGOs been as a catalyst for Community Strategies and Plan Rationalisation.
- *Community and Neighbourhood Involvement*: a range of comments were received around the extent to which the evaluation will consider whether Community Strategies are developed by a top-down process (i.e. driven by a core group of larger stakeholders on the LSP) or the extent to which they are bottom-up (and are through a process of neighbourhood and community involvement). A particular concern was the extent to which Community Strategies either through planning or delivery engage neighbourhoods. An example of this was through the involvement of the voluntary and community sector in neighbourhood renewal.

- *Priority Setting, Performance Management and Leadership*: these issues were seen to be strongly linked with the evaluation asked to consider the extent to which priorities are set on the basis of evidence and consultation, the capacity of local authorities to operate effective performance management, and the extent to which this process needs to be led.
- *Guidance and Communication*: there was a perception that guidance needed to be appropriate to the needs of different audiences reflecting a concern that guidance tends to focus on the capacity and competences of the larger metropolitan and unitary authorities and not sufficiently on smaller rural districts. However, it was also noted that in some cases there could be fewer coordination problems in smaller authorities whilst larger authorities often by necessity needed large departments.
- *Government Agencies*: there was seen to be a possible tension between the development and implementation of Community Strategies on a bottom-up basis and the involvement government agencies on LSPs, in particular LSCs, Jobcentre Plus district offices and Connexions.
- *Good Practice*: many participants commented that it was important that the evaluation identify cases of good practice, identify what was the basis for the good practice and how this could be disseminated. Areas identified as requiring good practice guidance were around data sharing and the pooling of resources.

A concluding point to the opening discussion was how the importance Community Strategies could be increased, both locally but also in providing the basis for local area agreements in the future.

Two discussion groups considered the following questions:

- What progress is being made on developing new processes and ways of working (e.g. gateways)?
- What are the key barriers and constraints to new ways of working around Community Strategies and Plan Rationalisation? How will central government policy objectives be achieved?
- What systems of performance management are emerging? Will the rationalisation of plans leave data gaps? How will these be addressed?
- Are more differentiated and focused approaches emerging in central government's relationship with local government?

### **Question 1 – What progress is being made on developing new processes and ways of working?**

Plan rationalisation has meant that departments without plans (e.g. DCMS) have to find new ways of working with local authorities, both in terms of progressing central government policy objectives but also in identifying areas in which there now be information deficiencies. Moreover, some local authorities had continued to produce plans for internal, service planning, purposes despite the requirement being withdrawn from the central government. Alternative planning mechanisms had

developed in other areas. For example in terms of Biodiversity Plans, there has been a recognition that there is still a need for a mechanism to set objectives, targets, ensure rigour etc and so they have developed an online reporting mechanism.

Community Strategies seen to be the keystone to other policies and agendas although CPA assessment does not touch Community Strategies directly, at least in the diagram presented. However, CPA should be around shared priorities and this will be embraced through the objectives of CPA Corporate Assessment. NRU asked where profiles are going. This was seen by ODPM to be a key part to getting data together and being able to shape local strategies and discussions with central government.

### **Question 2 – What are the key barriers and constraints to new ways of working round community strategies and Plan Rationalisation?**

It was noted that NRF makes a difference and provided an additional incentive for some local authorities. The potential of additional funding makes 'a huge difference'. It was also suggested that a lack of capacity was a significant barrier in some local authorities (particularly those without NRF support and rural districts). It was also noted that there was considerable variation in the extent to which authorities had reflected different policy agendas, with considerable further work required in areas such as culture, biodiversity, sustainability and community cohesion.

More emphasis was seen to be needed on performance management at the local level. It was suggested that this was helped where central government priorities were recognised as being important locally and they were then adopted and monitored locally. This could also be a catalyst for reducing the number of plans.

It was suggested that there were two sets of issues: around the performance of the LA and that LSPs were not statutory bodies (except in NRF). There were two tracks to take here: does the partnership have a performance culture – both in LA and partners; and how to deliver key targets when they are responsibility of other partners. LGA concern was that if other partners don't play ball then they may be marked down in CPA. Audit Commission commented that what would be measured would be the Council's contribution and whether the LA was playing a leadership role in forging partnerships – for example what have they done to draw in other partners?

However, there are different ways of working and this goes back to the centre – it is still silo based.

### **Question 3 – What systems of performance management are emerging? Will the rationalisation of plans leave data gaps? How will these be addressed?**

It was suggested that mechanisms needed to be developed that showed value for money, but which were not formal planning processes. NRU's Performance Management Framework has stimulated NRF authorities, and some non-NRF authorities are also now adopting this approach. Some LSPs put a lot of importance on PMF, but there is an issue around capacity and timing. Partner organisations can often be a stimulus to not always take the easiest route and can encourage local authorities to be more challenging.

In discussion on the performance management and improvement diagrams, it was stressed that CPA supported performance management frameworks. However, it

was also noted that performance management produced different effects within the same local authorities, for example, they were embraced more by some services than by others.

Not all 'excellent' local authorities are excellent at everything. The mechanisms are in place to address this, for example there is a protocol for engagement and there can be intervention in particular services. This power is not always used however. It was also suggested that without a plan there is no evidence base for CPA.

From an equality and diversity point of view CPA is critical, as it is a way of making the weak local authorities 'sit up and take notice'. However CPA is not always in line with how individuals departments view it. CPA is out to consultation at the moment and there needs to be an interlocking between what they want or an increase in the role of local authorities in assessing their own performance. Other tools for performance management were suggested including peer reviews of services.

It was suggested that the issues were much more general. A key issue was that ODPM hadn't had to rely on CS yet. Key issue was for LAs to deliver certain policy outcomes and to be able to monitor other indicators: key point for ODPM was ability to have a regular dialogue.

Self-assessment tools as the key to driving delivery. Good practice standards for benchmarking. CPA only a small part of the process – more systematic arrangements. Key point is the quality of guidance provided. Example seen as inclusion of culture in CS.

#### **Question 4 – Are more differentiated and focused approaches emerging in central government's relationship with local government?**

It was suggested that greater use could be made of available statutory instruments than at present. For example all local authorities are statutorily obliged to development race equality schemes and undertake an impact assessment, review and publish the results. This is potentially a good source of data. However, there were seen to be too many indicators, and there is often contradiction between them. There is a danger of too much fragmentation. With CS there is a need to make linkages between policy areas. There is significant potential to use well being powers to pool budgets, second people and to work in new innovative ways.

### ***Local and Regional Consultation***

Regional consultation events were held in Yorkshire and Humber (with 32 participants) and London (with 22 participants). Discussion in both events focused on the following questions:

- What progress to date is being made on Community Strategies and Plan Rationalisation?
- What are the key barriers and constraints in developing and implementing Community Strategies? Are there variations within the region?
- In what ways do Community Strategies differ? Are there different models?

- Are new local ways of working emerging in planning and delivering local services? What links are being made with LDFs, housing and Neighbourhood Renewal Strategies?
- How are Community Strategies being monitored and what systems of performance management are emerging? Will the rationalisation of plans leave data gaps?
- Are Community Strategies sufficiently reflecting central government policy objectives (e.g. around Floor Targets, PSA targets and cross cutting issues)?

### **Question 1 - What progress to date is being made on Community Strategies and Plan Rationalisation?**

Community Strategies were now in their second, third and in a few cases fourth versions. However, in some cases they were still seen to be documents which were 'everything to everyone': they needed to set out more clearly the priorities for local areas. The role of Community Strategies was seen to be at a very early stage. It was recognised other parts of the LGMA, and other policy developments, may increase their role. Development of Community Strategies has evolved from being by merger of plans to one where the Community Strategy is looking to areas where it can add value.

The extent of local commitment to Community Strategies was discussed and respondents highlighted the tensions within documents where they may have both a community leadership and a statutory role. It was also mentioned that a change in the leadership of councils can cause a hiatus and tension between national party political commitments and local needs. It was recognised that much more could be done to integrate Community Strategy and new planning framework (LDFs etc) activities: particularly in the areas of identifying the spatial requirements of Community Strategies and in operating common consultation and involvement processes. However, there remained a tension with reconciling the different purposes of Community Strategies and LDFs and in recognising their different timescales. Assistance from NRF (In London) had provided a greater focus for the development of the Performance Management Framework

Progress on Plan Rationalisation was seen to be slow. This was for three main reasons: Plan Rationalisation needed to be driven much more by central government (it could not be undertaken on a bottom-up and locally-led basis); it was necessary for Community Strategies (including monitoring frameworks and action plans) to be developed much more; and that there was greater clarity as to what was being rationalised and what should be maintained (e.g. the continued need for service plans). On Plan and Partnership Rationalisation a number of points were raised:

- Partnerships are often already in place but are often time limited and/or programme bound. They will change over time but are difficult to 'rationalise' in the short term and that it was necessary to go through a complete planning/funding before they could be fully harmonised.
- Rationalisation of plans need not necessarily involve getting rid of structures of activities if they already have a rational basis and follow from the Community Strategy

- There should be local discretion in the harmonisation of plans

**Question 2 - What are the key barriers and constraints in developing and implementing Community Strategies? Are there variations within the region?**

Key barriers included a lack of capacity to develop Community Strategies (especially in rural district authorities), a lack of skills across authorities in adapting to new ways of working, and a lack of a common understanding across authorities and stakeholders as to their purpose. Other concerns included: Community Strategies had not sufficiently addressed 'difficult planning issues' such as housing; the local government review (particularly of districts); and the relative priority given locally to Community Strategies (some areas did not see them as a priority).

Participants highlighted that the Community Strategies had provided the basis for information sharing between partners. However, it was also felt by some that this should be attributed entirely to the Community Strategy - developments such as LSPs and a general emphasis on partnership and joined-up working had helped in this regard. Community Strategies had however appeared to provide the basis to bring new partners in. It was felt that there was a need to examine more critically what involving the Voluntary and Community sector actually entailed. It was noted that the sector played different roles and that it was a complex sector, making consultation and involvement difficult.

It was also mentioned that a source of tension was often between different levels which were not always joined-up or maybe conflictual. Community Strategies were often also perceived to council documents with difficulties around getting buy in from stakeholders and from communities. There was a sense that areas of mutual benefit had to be identified to get full buy-in.

**Question 3 - Are new local ways of working emerging in planning and delivering local services? What links are being made with LDFs, housing and Neighbourhood Renewal Strategies?**

Community Strategies had stimulated considerable joint working and the development of shared understanding of local needs. Experience of working with different agencies varied, although this was seen to be an inherent part of developing Community Strategies. There was limited evidence of joint target setting and budget pooling in Yorkshire and Humber, although there was evidence of data sharing. .

Progress across themes appeared to vary; for instance greater joint working with economic development agencies and Jobcentre Plus under employment and economic development themes, but less joint working around environmental issues. Other approaches to emerge included: area based working at the neighbourhood level (often tied to neighbourhood management and NRF), and cross-border working (e.g. sub-regional LSP networks).

**Question 4 - How are Community Strategies being monitored and what systems of performance management are emerging? Will the rationalisation of plans leave data gaps?**

Resources for monitoring were seen to be limited: there were no dedicated monitoring systems and resources. However, some participants reported that much could be achieved through the better coordination of existing service-level and thematic monitoring activities. Monitoring also provided scope for innovation. For example, in developing processes which were transparent and engaged both stakeholders and communities, or approaches which fostered cross-organisational working.

It was too early to comment as to whether Plan Rationalisation would leave data gaps. However, it was also acknowledged that there was considerable duplication of data collection activities at present and that Plan Rationalisation might provide an opportunity for coordination and streamlining.

### **Question 5 - Are Community Strategies sufficiently reflecting central government policy objectives (e.g. around Floor Targets, PSA targets and cross cutting issues)?**

It was noted that the remit of Community Strategies in different areas of government policy varied. This may lead to difficulties in developing approaches which balance local needs and central government policy objectives. To date Community Strategies had primarily been developed bottom-up and had not started with central government priorities. However, with Community Strategies now in place, it was possible to identify how central and local objectives could be reconciled and resources most effectively mobilised.

There was a consensus by participants that there was in most areas of policy remarkable similarity between local and central government policy objectives. There were fewest tensions where objectives were similar and where the delivery of a policy was the responsibility of a single agency. There were tensions where: responsibility crossed agencies, for example for floor targets; where a central agency was involved in local delivery (e.g. LSC or Connexions); where there was joint responsibility for the delivery of a particular policy area; or where new central policy initiatives were announced which cut across frameworks for the delivery of existing policies.

### **Other issues identified by the Workshops included:**

The need to see Community Strategies as a process and not to see the documents as outcomes in their own right. It was also necessary to examine different roles and responsibilities of LSPs, authorities and stakeholders in developing and implementing Community Strategies.

There was seen to be a tension between democratic and participatory processes, with Community Strategies in some areas challenging roles traditionally played by councillors.

There was a wide ranging discussion in London and Yorkshire and Humber on the potential for links between Community Strategies and Local Development Frameworks:

- the spatial dimensions of Community Strategies varied. In some areas there is a much stronger focus spatial issues (for example in NRF areas on geographic concentrations of disadvantage or on neighbourhood-based

approaches to renewal) however other Community Strategies considered cross-cutting issues (e.g. support for older people or those with physical disabilities).

- there was a need for much greater joint working between planning and LSP teams to identify the spatial implications of Community Strategies at a much earlier stage.

There was a concern over the pace at which Community Strategies proceed, with some LSPs commenting that they had to go at the pace of the 'slowest partner'. However, other Community Strategies were perceived to be able to proceed at different speeds. Some LSPs, particularly those in areas without NRF support commented that it was difficult to implement Community Strategies once they were prepared: the document appeared to be the end in itself. There were also perceived to be tensions in some areas between those closely involved in preparing Community Strategies and wider groups of partners and communities who may then be expected to deliver it.

A key point made both in London and the Yorkshire and Humber event was that it was necessary 'too look beyond the words' of the Community Strategy.



## Annex 3: Community Strategies - developing the evaluation framework

Research Issues and Questions	Key Evaluation Issues	Scoping Findings	How to address in Evaluation
<p><b>ODPM QUESTION 1. Have CS added value?</b> Formative and Summative issue. At the headline level, this will need to assess whether local and national targets and outcomes have been stretched or improved by joint working around CS. Equally it will need to look at whether the work of LAs and other partners has been prioritised in line with consultation with the local community.</p>	<p>Need to identify relevant national and local targets and outcomes</p> <p>Need to examine how these have been prioritised.</p> <p>Need to identify whether they have been stretched/improved</p> <p>Need to attribute to CS (vis-à-vis other parts of the LGMA and wider policies)</p>	<p>-Depth and breadth of CS varies</p> <p>-External support often provided from consultants on visioning activities or on specific themes.</p> <p>-CS first and foremost reflect local needs, not government priorities. However, in some cases there was an automatic coalescence of central and local objectives.</p> <p>-Functioning of LSPs appeared to be a critical factor in determining progress.</p> <p>-Many CS now into their second or third phase of development with APs being prepared.</p> <p>-Different models of CS emerging, often reflecting the structure of the LSP.</p> <p>-Currently a significant gap in many CS between aspiration and vision and achievable outcomes and discrete actions.</p>	<p>Research instruments will examine:</p> <p><b>Community Strategy Assessment:</b> extent of variation in CS; use of local evidence; innovative approaches to Strategies, Action Plans and Monitoring Frameworks; identification of variation in issues prioritised</p> <p><b>Survey:</b> partner involvement in Community Strategies; identify capacity constraints</p> <p><b>Case Studies:</b> exploration of reasons for different models for Community Strategies; development of measures of involvement.</p> <p><b>Action Learning Sets:</b> might identify examples of added value and reasons why CS have added value</p>
<p><b>ODPM QUESTION 2. Evaluating progress against central policy objectives. A key to the scoping stage</b> will be to provide conclusions on key central policy objectives for the establishment of CS policy. This needs to take into account both initial objectives, but also the ongoing organic policy-making of refinement and development (e.g. subsumation of plans). Early determination and prioritisation of these objectives are required in order for an effective plan to be instigated to evaluate the achievement of these central objectives through the evaluatory framework. Equally given the diversity of local approaches, an understanding of local objectives is also required.</p>	<p>Identify initial central government policy objectives for CS (e.g. CS guidance)</p> <p>Identify what the current central government policy objectives are for CS</p> <p>Summary of local approaches and policy objectives (some understanding of the diversity of approaches)</p>	<p>-Increasing focus from central government on Public Service Boards and Local Area Agreements.</p> <p>-Evaluation issues identified:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-mechanisms through which central government policies can be implemented locally, and monitored</li> <li>-Do Aps provide the basis for delivering CS?</li> <li>-NRF areas had a clearer link to floor targets and were using PMF systems.</li> <li>-View that CS would just be a summation of all govt policy objectives form existing plans rather than trying to reconcile differences between them. Link to PR evaluation.</li> <li>-Balance between being living documents (updated continually) or time limited (role of Action Plans).</li> <li>-Mismatch between policy making and implementation 'time' and between central and local policy cycles.</li> </ul>	<p>Research instruments will examine:</p> <p><b>Community Strategy Assessment:</b> Overview of how central government policy objectives are delivered (e.g. which objectives are identified, where are there gaps)</p> <p><b>Survey:</b> identify extent to which local authorities see Community Strategies as a vehicle for delivering central government policy objectives</p> <p><b>Case Studies:</b> explore whether Community Strategies provide the basis for Local Area Agreements and whether Action Plans would assist Public Sector Boards</p> <p><b>Call-Off Elements:</b> exploration of whether Community Strategies help to deliver central policy objectives</p>

**Process Evaluation of Plan Rationalisation / Formative Evaluation of Community Strategies**  
-Consultation Findings and Evaluation Framework: DRAFT-

<b>Research Issues and Questions</b>	<b>Key Evaluation Issues</b>	<b>Scoping Findings</b>	<b>How to address in Evaluation</b>
<p><b>ODPM QUESTION 3. Indicators of performance</b> See sections 98-110 of the govt guidance on the required operations and systems for monitoring and reviewing CS and measuring progress. Relevant work includes: 1. NRU-led work on developing an illustrative PMF for LSPs; 2. the ODPM-led LSP evaluation and action research programme; 3. Audit Commission work on QoL. Expectation that CS will use a combination of: a. appropriate existing national indicators such as floor targets and QoL; b. a series of specific local indicators. The scoping phase will need to determine what indicators it will use in the evaluation, commencing from an early baseline.</p>	<p>Identify different targets used.</p> <p>Explore rationale for different (national and local) targets</p> <p>Identify which targets to collect</p> <p>Identify how to analyse targets (as part of summative evaluation?)</p>	<p>Evaluation issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>--Progress and effectiveness of Action Plans and Monitoring Frameworks</li> <li>--Examining the effect of CPA and proposals for new corporate assessment on ways of working</li> <li>-Differing approaches to indicator setting and approaches to monitoring. Mix of national and local systems but also with varying degrees of rigour. Need to clarify and review in CS review.</li> <li>-Monitoring systems were undeveloped.</li> <li>-Issues of monitoring identified in two-tier authorities.</li> <li>-Timing issues: localities are at different stages so like-for-like comparison difficult.</li> <li>-Extent to which monitoring and risk assessment undertaken jointly unclear and undeveloped.</li> <li>-Balance between output and outcome indicators needs to be examined.</li> </ul> <p>Area for separate call-off research or specific issues paper to pull together findings.</p>	<p>Research instruments will examine:</p> <p><b>Community Strategy Assessment and Review:</b> which indicators are used (Audit Commission, NRU PMF, BVPI and locally determined)</p> <p><b>Case Studies:</b> why specific indicators were used; identification of problems in obtaining data (e.g. timing, data sharing etc.) and good practice</p> <p><b>Survey:</b> capacity required to develop and use indicators of performance</p> <p><b>Action Learning Sets:</b> working through most appropriate use of performance indicators</p>
<p><b>ODPM QUESTION 4. Process outcomes</b> The research should demonstrate what outcomes derive from the processes of developing and implementing CS. e.g. affects on legitimacy and accountability, community cohesion, added or reduced value through rationalisation of processes and activities (e.g. data sharing or monitoring)</p>	<p>Identify range of outcomes: including those on the list plus others</p> <p>Identify measures for these process outcomes</p> <p>Identify how these measures can be collected and analysed (summative or formative).</p>	<p>Development of CS being led by LSP</p> <p>Evaluation issues identified include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-effectiveness of stakeholder and community involvement</li> </ul> <p>CS were focusing more on achievable outcomes and this may mean excluding partners from the process. Community cohesion should be picked up elsewhere in research or as a separate call-off study. Issues of data sharing should be explored under monitoring.</p> <p>Focus of research should be on accountability and legitimacy issues' and on 'removal of bureaucracy' (is this the case). Also links to issues of added value.</p>	<p>Research instruments will examine:</p> <p><b>Case Studies:</b> identify extent to which process outcomes have been achieved through Community Strategies</p> <p><b>Survey:</b> identify relative significance of difference process outcomes</p> <p><b>Action Learning Sets:</b> sharing experience on how process outcomes achieved and identifying appropriate actions to maximise positive process outcomes</p>

**Process Evaluation of Plan Rationalisation / Formative Evaluation of Community Strategies**  
-Consultation Findings and Evaluation Framework: DRAFT-

Research Issues and Questions	Key Evaluation Issues	Scoping Findings	How to address in Evaluation
<p><b>ODPM QUESTION 5. Monitoring</b> How are CS being monitored. What processes are in place for ensuring that commitments made by all partners in the AP are being met? How is this overseen by the LA and the LSP? What are the mechanisms for monitoring the impact of CS and in terms of outcomes, for example the use of indicators.</p>	<p>What monitoring systems have been established?</p> <p>How is this system managed?</p> <p>How are partners monitored?</p> <p>What are the implications of this for outcomes, and the use of indicators?</p>	<p>See indicators of performance</p>	<p>Research instruments will examine:  <b>Community Strategy Assessment and Review:</b> identify whether monitoring systems are in place and their scope.  <b>Survey:</b> identify the resources required for monitoring  <b>Case Studies:</b> explore models and effectiveness of different monitoring systems; partner involvement in monitoring; and problems with monitoring specific aspects of Community Strategy implementation  <b>Action Learning Sets:</b> as part of wider examination of performance management may consider how monitoring can be effective</p>
<p><b>ODPM QUESTION 6. Constraints and blockages.</b> What are the constraining issues that LAs/LSPs face in developing their CS. These may include:                      -ensuring effective engagement at the right level of partners                      -sharing data and information                      -pooling budgets and sharing resources                      -pressures of mandates and inflexible sectoral targets                      -personality disputes constraining partnership working                      -central govt agendas constraining local discretion                      -lack of appropriate support and guidance                      -lack of appropriate skills amongst leading personnel                      -lack of effective leadership and direction                      -difficulties from long established teams dominating the agenda (e.g. LA 21)</p>	<p>Assessment of which factors are major constraints</p> <p>Are constraints linked and how?</p> <p>Do some constraints affect particular types of authority or particular areas of work more than others?</p> <p>Identify measures of the extent to which they are constraints</p> <p>Identify how they can be removed</p>	<p>-Unclear to what extent LA21 had influenced CS.                      -Capacity variations in developing and implementing CS (rural/urban, NRF/non-NRF; LA performance; and local prioritisation)                      -Prior experience of strategy development (e.g. SRB work) helped in rural districts with limited resources.                      -Key issues was how competing priorities and conflicts are reconciled.                      -Existence of a local strategy and local partnership prior to LG Act seen to be extremely beneficial.                      -Engagement of partners was variable: positive responses for PCTs and Police, less so for other partners. Greater flexibility for JC+ offices seen to be beneficial.                      -Limited evidence on budget pooling, sectoral targets, mandates, personality disputes.                      -Other targets also constrained delivery (e.g. transport, health and regional agendas)                      -View that guidance was not tailored for non-NRF rural areas.                      -Wide mix of skills needed for successful CS.                      Other constraints included:                      -variable geometry of boundaries and two-tier working.</p>	<p>Research instruments will examine:  <b>Survey:</b> will provide overview of existence of constraints and blockages and their relative importance  <b>Case Studies:</b> will explore why constraints and blockages have emerged and how they may be overcome; as well as the complexity of overcoming some constraints and blockages in specific contexts and localities.  <b>Action Learning Sets:</b> might explore how constraints and blockages are removed and identify good practice.</p>

**Process Evaluation of Plan Rationalisation / Formative Evaluation of Community Strategies**  
-Consultation Findings and Evaluation Framework: DRAFT-

<b>Research Issues and Questions</b>	<b>Key Evaluation Issues</b>	<b>Scoping Findings</b>	<b>How to address in Evaluation</b>
<p><b>ODPM QUESTION 7. Mainstreaming and links to other plans, strategies and partnerships.</b> How does CS affect mainstream activities? Should focus not just on retargeting of resources but also how CS have allowed for savings (e.g. changes to operational planning of partners and LA depts). Also reflect on how mainstreaming cuts across different spatial tiers (regional, sub-regional and neighbourhood). Are they compatible and reinforcing and how is this managed? Also how are LDFs and CS linked together? Are particular mechanisms used to ensure delivery, e.g. SLAs. Impacts on other policy agendas (urban renaissance and sustainable development)</p>	<p>How does mainstreaming work and with what effect?</p> <p>What are the benefits of mainstreaming (quantifiable)</p> <p>How is multi-tiered working managed?</p> <p>How can Planners be most effectively engaged in the process?</p> <p>Are SLAs used and with what effect?</p> <p>How are sustainable development and urban renaissance policies reflected?</p>	<p>Links with LDFs being identified and taking different forms in LDDs</p> <p>Findings inconclusive on mainstreaming issues.</p>	<p>Research instruments will examine:</p> <p><b>Community Strategy Assessment and Review:</b> will explore extent to which policies are seen to be mainstreamed (e.g. sustainability, community cohesion etc.) and extent to which policy solutions are joined-up (for example addressing links between ill health and worklessness)</p> <p><b>Survey:</b> will identify relative priority given to different policy areas to be mainstreamed within Community Strategy (e.g. health, crime, skills, education, physical environment and housing)</p> <p><b>Case Studies:</b> will explore the processes of mainstreaming and the extent to which there are specific blockages (for example, capacity issues versus constraints of joining-up in larger authorities)</p> <p><b>Action Learning Sets:</b> might explore what makes a successful approach to mainstreaming and linking different activities together</p>
<p><b>ODPM QUESTION 8. Community Engagement.</b> How does the CS (whole or in parts) engage, consult, advocate needs, aspirations and priorities of all members of the community (including hard-to-reach groups). How are the vol, com and private sectors engaged. Has there been a wider impact on community capacity and civil renewal. To what extent is the engagement one-off or are ongoing mechanisms being established, including mechanisms for feedback.</p>	<p>Identify mechanisms for community consultation, involvement and prioritisation? Are these one-off or ongoing?</p> <p>Examine the effectiveness of different mechanisms.</p> <p>Identify and evaluate how vol, com and private sectors are involved.</p>	<p>Community involvement was variable although models of good practice were emerging. CS seen to be a starting point in process. Community engagement was through: LSP inclusion (in some cases this made LSPs unwieldy as individuals had a mix of mandates and agendas - area forums and CENs) and consultation. Processes seemed to be variable.</p>	<p>Research instruments will examine:</p> <p><b>Survey:</b> will identify different approaches to community involvement in developing and implementing the CS (e.g. neighbourhood forums and management, area forums and panels, thematic groups) and extent across local authorities of community engagement</p> <p><b>Case Studies:</b> will explore different approaches to community engagement and identify which appear to be most successful</p> <p><b>Action Learning Sets:</b> might consider what makes a successful approach to community engagement and how it can be sustained</p>

**Process Evaluation of Plan Rationalisation / Formative Evaluation of Community Strategies**  
 -Consultation Findings and Evaluation Framework: DRAFT-

Research Issues and Questions	Key Evaluation Issues	Scoping Findings	How to address in Evaluation
<p><b>ODPM QUESTION 9. Local democratic accountability.</b> How is accountability to the following groups achieved and to what degree:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Elected councillors or MPs</li> <li>-Other elected reps, e.g. TU members, school governors</li> <li>-Public consultation, engagement participation and appropriate advocacy</li> <li>-Publicity, modes of entry, opportunities for participation</li> <li>-Cross-sectoral and partnership development of the strategy</li> <li>-Roles of partner's (including VCS, private, faith)</li> <li>-Engagement by LA and other public sector officers</li> <li>-Targeting of CS to local needs and issues (rather than following national agendas)</li> </ul> <p>Also, who is accountable for developing and delivering the CS (and its components) and what mechanisms facilitate this</p>	<p>Identify mechanisms for accountability</p> <p>How do these vary across authorities</p> <p>What measures of accountability can be used (e.g. trust, legal measures)?</p> <p>How can the measures be evaluated?</p> <p>Identify who is accountable for the CS? (is this issue recognised by LA/LSP)</p>	<p>Main fault line between cabinet members and backbenchers. There were also perceived to be problems/conflicts with parish councillors. Limited evidence on wider involvement (need to refer to LSP evaluation).</p>	<p>Research instruments will examine:</p> <p><b>Survey</b> will explore significance of local democratic accountability for Community Strategies and breadth of democratic accountability (from role of councillors through to accountability through wider organisations representing civil society – Tus, VCS etc</p> <p><b>Case Studies:</b> could be used to identify whether Community Strategies enhance local democratic accountability</p>
<p><b>ODPM QUESTION 10. Public and Private Partners</b> How do CS engage other partners in design and delivery? Consider the general role of the LSP but also other activities, such as polling data, sharing expertise and developing joint projects. Has the CS given the LSP a focus in non-NRF areas?</p>	<p>Which partners are and are not engaged in design and delivery.</p> <p>Consider issues of who and how partners are involved (i.e. to what extent?)</p>	<p>Limited findings from consultation. Most respondents highlighted the active of involvement of a few large public sector partners (PCT, Police and JC+ cited most frequently) with limited roles for smaller and newer partners (Connexions, LSC) and for the private sector.</p>	<p>Research instruments will examine:</p> <p><b>Community Strategy Assessment and Review:</b> will identify which partners identified in Action Plans</p> <p><b>Survey:</b> will gauge whether some partners have been more closely involved in Community Strategies than others and reasons for this.</p> <p><b>Case Studies:</b> will explore mechanisms for engaging partners and constraints they may face.</p> <p><b>Action Learning Sets:</b> might consider models for effective engagement of partners</p>

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<b>Research Issues and Questions</b>	<b>Key Evaluation Issues</b>	<b>Scoping Findings</b>	<b>How to address in Evaluation</b>
<p><b>ODPM QUESTION 11. Community leadership and community cohesion.</b> To what extent do LAs and other partners develop their leadership role. Have particular partners led the wider process of strategy development. Does the strategy help provide a sense of community cohesion? On community cohesion, has the CS identified and included issues of relevance (i.e. Home Office/CRE/LGA guidance)</p>	<p>How is leadership exercised and by who?</p> <p>Has CS contributed to community cohesion (across sectors)?</p> <p>How has the HO guidance on cohesion been followed or have other models emerged? What has been the effect on community cohesion?</p>	<p>Increasing focus on Public Service delivery was seen to be giving a stronger role to local authorities.</p>	<p>Research instruments will examine:</p> <p><b>Community Strategy Assessment and Review:</b> will identify whether community cohesion issues addressed.</p> <p><b>Survey</b> will identify whether local authorities exercise community leadership through Community Strategies.</p> <p><b>Case Studies:</b> will explore how leadership and cohesion issues addressed.</p> <p><b>Action Learning Sets:</b> might consider issues around cohesion and leadership; although more likely to address these as part of a wider consideration of mainstreaming and partnership.</p>
<p><b>ODPM QUESTION 12. Crosscutting review of voluntary and community sector.</b> Need to take an early view on whether the LSP could take a lead role for auditing the capacity of this sector. Links to Guidance Portal work and also to call-off elements</p>	<p>Central issue is the capacity of the VCS to play different roles ascribed to it by the cross-cutting review. This will vary between areas</p> <p>Suggest that this is a Guidance Portal and Call-Off task</p>	<p>Focus tended to be in areas reflecting HO guidance: around social inclusion, health, crime and young people. A more significant issue in areas with larger BME populations.</p>	<p>Research instruments will examine:</p> <p><b>Community Strategy Assessment and Review</b> will identify roles specified for VCS</p> <p><b>Survey:</b> will seek to prioritise relative importance of VCS in service delivery and how this is reflected in CS, Action Plans etc.</p> <p><b>Case Studies:</b> may consider role of VCS in service delivery</p> <p><b>Action Learning Sets:</b> might consider VCS role as part of a wider consideration of partner involvement.</p>
<p><b>ODPM QUESTION 13. Sustainability.</b> To what extent are CS promoting sustainable development. Examine balance between economic, social and environmental impacts and outcomes and the long-term consequences of these. What connections are being made between sustainable development policy at different levels (e.g. are World Summit priorities reflected)?</p>	<p>How are CS promoting sustainable development and in what ways?</p> <p>What targets and impacts have been identified?</p> <p>Do CS reflect sustainable development policies and law from national and international organisations.</p>	<p>Conflicting views on whether sustainable development (especially environmental LA21 dimensions) had been marginalized by CS with a greater economic focus.</p>	<p>Research instruments will examine:</p> <p><b>Community Strategy Assessment and Review</b> will identify whether Sustainability has been considered and how</p> <p><b>Survey:</b> will ask relative importance of sustainability</p> <p><b>Case Studies:</b> will explore whether CS are seen as an important mechanism for meeting sustainability objectives and whether they have added value over previous approaches to sustainability (e.g. LA 21)</p>

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<b>Research Issues and Questions</b>	<b>Key Evaluation Issues</b>	<b>Scoping Findings</b>	<b>How to address in Evaluation</b>
<p><b>ODPM QUESTION 14. Sustainable communities and urban renaissance.</b> Links to 'Sustainable Communities: building for the future' and Urban White Paper. The evaluation should include an assessment of how far community strategies link in with this agenda and the agencies involved. What impact are the strategies having at the local level on the delivery of these policies?</p>	<p>How are SC and UR policies reflected in CS</p> <p>To what extent are these agendas addressed</p> <p>What local impacts are there? What measures exist for this?</p>	<p>Limited evidence from scoping. Key issue to focus on was housing (in low demand and in sustainable communities areas) and on urban renaissance (e.g. role of URCs).</p>	<p>Research instruments will examine:</p> <p><b>Community Strategy Assessment and Review</b> will identify whether Sustainable Communities and Urban Renaissance have been considered and how (e.g. seen to be broadly concerned with physical infrastructure and housing, or wider agenda)</p> <p><b>Survey:</b> will ask relative importance of sustainable communities and urban renaissance</p> <p><b>Case Studies:</b> will explore issue alongside wider consideration of mainstreaming different agendas.</p>
<p><b>ODPM QUESTION 15. Multi-tiered governance.</b> The research should assess how two tier authorities work together to ensure that the strategies are effective. The research should explore which approaches have been effective. Similar processes should be explored in London with respect to the Mayor's Strategy and Community Strategies. GOs are playing different roles (depending on their resources) to support CS. The research should examine the roles GOs can play in co-ordinating and supporting the establishment of the appropriate balance between central and local objectives. Consideration of the real or potential scrutiny role of regional government would be helpful.</p>	<p>Identify mechanisms for working in two tier authorities. How effective are these (need to define 'effective')</p> <p>Identify mechanisms for working in London. How effective are these (need to define 'effective').</p> <p>What roles do GOs play and with what effect.</p> <p>Identify remit of regional government in CS. What mechanisms are used?</p>	<p>LAs involved in various support networks. Many operating at a sub-regional level but also other groups (e.g. New Unitairies).</p> <p>Unclear whether CS were nested in regional strategies or conflicted. Mechanisms for managing relations were still fluid. Key parameters provided by planning framework (with statutory provision), housing and RES (funding allocations). Other aspects seen to be more voluntary (e.g. culture, biodiversity).</p>	<p>Research instruments will examine:</p> <p><b>Community Strategy Assessment and Review</b> will identify extent of any multi-tiered and cross-boundary policies or initiatives</p> <p><b>Survey:</b> will ask areas where multi-tiered governance is critical to success of CS</p> <p><b>Case Studies:</b> will explore how CS fit within regional framework of policies and whether this produces any conflicts</p>
<p><b>ODPM QUESTION 16. Role of elected members.</b> Councillors can play a number of potential roles: driving force for prep. of CS; providing a route for dialogue with community; and help to scrutinise CS. Research should explore the extent to which the roles are being fulfilled and the barriers to them where they are not.</p>	<p>Identify different roles played by type of councillor (cabinet/backbench) and across authorities).</p> <p>Identify reasons for variation and assess barriers.</p>	<p>Merge with Local Democratic accountability questions?</p>	<p>This will be considered under questions around local democratic accountability and partnership</p>

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<b>Research Issues and Questions</b>	<b>Key Evaluation Issues</b>	<b>Scoping Findings</b>	<b>How to address in Evaluation</b>
<p><b>ODPM QUESTION 17. Rural proofing.</b> Assess whether CS have been rural proofed; assess the CS impacts on rural communities; and the inclusion of rural groups (Parish Councils) in development of strategies. The research should also address issues of the urban fringe that can potentially be de-prioritised owing to it falling across LA boundaries.</p>	<p>How do CSs take into account rural issues?  Is rural proofing guidance used?  How are rural areas involved and engaged?  Are there proposals for the urban-fringe and are these feasible?</p>	<p>Unclear to what extent rural proofing had occurred.</p>	<p>Research instruments will examine: <b>Community Strategy Assessment and Review</b> will identify whether rural proofing of Community Strategies has taken place <b>Survey:</b> will ask relative importance of rural proofing of Community Strategies <b>Case Studies:</b> will explore issue alongside wider consideration of mainstreaming different agendas.</p>
<p><b>ODPM QUESTION 18. Equality and diversity.</b> How are aspects equality and diversity treated in the full array of CS activities (from participation through to monitoring and setting targets). The research should draw out examples of how equality and diversity is being treated, for example: -ensuring different voices are heard and hard to read groups are accessed -ensuring that the full array of communities' 'knowledge' is brought to bear -planning for the needs of elderly frail people -addressing anti-gay and lesbian bullying (in schools, workplaces and public places) -Promoting the involvement of young people in the democratic process -addressing the specific needs of specific sub-sectors (e.g. first generation Muslim) women</p>	<p>Focus is on identifying examples.  Need to review approaches in CS and highlight examples (e.g. consider in specific case studies).</p>	<p>Further assessment required.</p>	<p>Research instruments will examine: <b>Community Strategy Assessment and Review</b> will identify whether equality and diversity are addressed by Community Strategies <b>Survey:</b> will ask relative importance of equality and diversity in Community Strategies <b>Case Studies:</b> will explore issue alongside wider consideration of mainstreaming different agendas.</p>



## Annex 4: Plan Rationalisation – developing the evaluation framework

### *Questions for Local Government*

1. Do local authorities understand how plan rationalisation will affect them? Where do they get information and what informs their view of good practice?
2. What is the nature and extent of local authority planning where there are no longer requirements? How influential are earlier required approaches?
3. Do remaining requirements fit with the grain of councils' own planning activities
4. To what extent does plan rationalisation lead to an easing of the burden on local authorities, and how is released capacity used? Which officers are most affected by the process (level and policy/corporate location)? What other savings can be attributed to this change?
5. What data collection requirements still impose a burden? Can and do local authorities benefit from such data?
6. Is there an effect on in terms of local authority members or other local stakeholders and the information they have made use of?
7. To what extent have local authorities responded to the rationalisation of plan requirements with a rationalisation of their planning activity?
8. Is there a greater coherence or integration around the approach local authorities take to planning? Does it allow for flexibility and a clearer response to local or cross-cutting issues? Are there consistent themes around locally determined planning activities? Are themes more wide-ranging than with required planning? Does the approach complement improvement planning?
9. Which strategies or bodies drive or facilitate further plan rationalisation within local authorities?
10. Under plan rationalisation, how are local authorities interpreting sustainable development?
11. Do rationalised approaches allow more time for consultation? Does plan rationalisation lead to lower levels of information provision to the public (e.g. via local authority websites)?
12. Is there an improved link between planning and outcomes? Are locally developed planning approaches clearly a means to an end?
13. Are there clear signs at the local level of a worsening in performance or reduction in attention to the issues some plans were considered to address? Is the support (resources and personnel) lost for some plans - whether from the local authority or stakeholders? Are quality assurances or measures lost through less dedicated administering? Which resources 'move' with subsumed plans?
14. Have any relationships or activities around planning become so institutionalised they are hard to change? Where local authorities continue to plan in a way that had been required, what adjustments do they make in terms of timing, for example?
15. What have been the effects on decision-making within councils (members and officers) of plan rationalisation? Does plan rationalisation mean that decisions are taken with less supporting information?

16. (Statutory plans have been used as the basis for the 'policy framework' which is for a full council to determine and the executive, in such forms, to implement). Does plan rationalisation inadvertently change the balance between executives and full councils?

17. What are the characteristics - in terms of structures, processes and personnel - of councils that are leading the way on plan rationalisation?

18. What can be said about the overall framework for performance accountability following plan rationalisation (including some consideration of CPAm Best Value, LPSAs, data collection, surveys, etc.)

19. Are other mechanisms employed by central government more proportionate to what they achieve at the local level?

20. Are issues in non-metropolitan districts very different to upper-tier or all-purpose authorities?

### ***Questions for Central Government***

1. What are and have been the drivers of plan rationalisation across Government? What are key blockages to further progress? What and who informs decisions taken on this issue?

2. Are drivers sustained in terms of preventing the introduction of new requirements?

3. To what extent are Government Departments influenced by the changes (and their timing) in other Departments? Is there a perception that the importance of the policy of initiative can be diminished by rationalisation? Are there concerns within central bodies (including representative/professional bodies) of a worsening in performance or reduction in attention to the issues some plans were considered to address?

4. What are the implications of rationalisation in terms of type and level of work undertaken by relevant in central government?

5. Have information gaps been created? What other sources are being utilised?

6. Is 'voluntary' guidance offered on planning to achieve policy objectives? What is the nature and extent of such advice?

7. To what extent do Government Departments maintain requirements on local authorities to submit data? Is the data used effectively, and how? Is it a substitute for planning requirements?

8. What alternative management mechanism does central government consider, make us of or rely upon? Has plan rationalisation been considered been considered as dependent on these? Is there a perception that plan rationalisation has left a gap in this respect? Are other mechanisms considered more proportionate at the central level?

9. Does plan rationalisation create any difficulties in terms of having a consistent basis for auditing local authorities?

10. Is there an awareness or monitoring of the requirement being placed on local authorities across particular Departments?

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*Process evaluation of plan rationalisation : formulative evaluation of community strategies : consultation findings and evaluation framework*

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