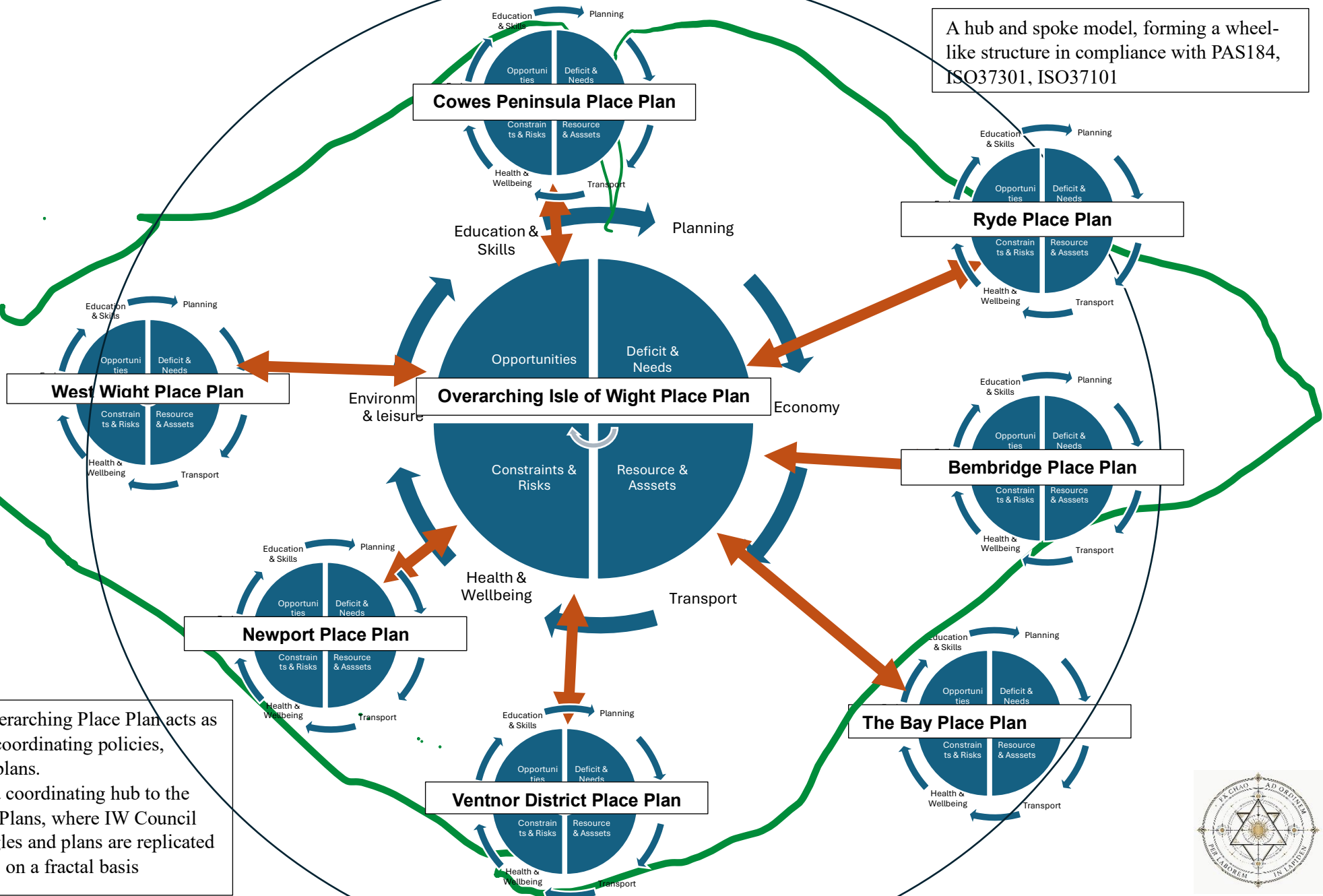


PLACE BASED FRACTAL GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK



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A simple way to connect Island priorities, local plans and community action

A discussion paper for local councillors, Place Plan areas, community partners, Isle of Wight Council members and officers, and other stakeholders

One-minute overview: Place Plans can do more than record local ambitions. This framework would connect each locally owned plan to a small number of Island-wide outcomes, the right Council services and partners, and practical routes to action, resources and review. Local councillors and communities would continue to set local priorities and retain democratic leadership. Isle of Wight Council officers would help by providing evidence, making connections, explaining processes and removing barriers. The proposal would not create another tier of government or require areas to rewrite their plans. It would begin with one or two priorities, test whether better coordination improves delivery, and share what works with other areas.

What partners are being asked to consider: whether to support a short, jointly designed development phase in Cowes; whether Isle of Wight Council members and officers should help shape and enable it; and whether other Place Plan areas wish to observe, contribute or test parts of the framework locally.

1. Purpose of this document

This document sets out a straightforward proposal: Island-wide priorities, local Place Plans and community projects should connect more clearly. It explains how that could work, what it would mean for councillors and partners, and how Isle of Wight Council officers could help areas turn agreed priorities into practical action. It is a basis for discussion, not a finished scheme.

2. Executive summary

In plain English: the same clear set of questions would be used at three levels—across the Island, within each Place Plan area, and for local projects. Everyone would be able to see what the priorities are, who is doing what and whether it is working. Local areas would still decide what suits their own communities.

The approach is called *fractal* because the same simple pattern is used at different levels. Island partners agree shared outcomes, each Place Plan area decides what those outcomes mean locally, and community projects put them into practice. This gives councillors, officers and partners a common way to connect Island-wide aims with local knowledge, responsibility and delivery without making every area the same.

It would not create another council, remove local powers or replace existing plans. Its purpose would be to make current work easier to join up, reduce avoidable duplication, clarify responsibilities and help good local ideas receive the right support.

3. Why an island-wide framework?

Many issues do not stop at parish or town boundaries. Housing, health, transport, skills, town centres, the visitor economy and the environment affect the Island as a whole, but they are experienced differently in each community. At present, useful work can sit in separate plans or organisations. A shared framework could help partners see the whole picture while still responding to local needs.

- A small number of clear Island-wide priorities.
- Local Place Plans that show what those priorities mean in each area.
- Practical projects with named leads, support and timescales.
- Local evidence and experience feeding back into Island-wide decisions.
- Successful ideas shared between areas, without forcing every place to use the same solution.

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4. What “fractal” means in practice

The word *fractal* may sound technical, but the idea is simple. At every level, people ask the same six questions: What are we trying to achieve? What do we know? What matters locally? Who will lead? What support is needed? How will we know whether it is working?

The questions stay the same; the answers will differ from place to place. Cowes, a rural parish and another Island town may contribute to the same broad outcome in different ways. That is a strength of the approach, not a problem to be designed out.

5. The three connected levels

Level 1: Island-wide strategic framework

Across the Island: the Isle of Wight Council and its partners would set out a small number of shared outcomes and show how existing strategies, duties, services and investment fit together. This would help identify overlaps, gaps and opportunities for joint action.

Level 2: Place Plan areas

Within each Place Plan area: local councillors and partners would decide which shared outcomes matter most locally, what needs to change and who should be involved. Existing Place Plans could be used as they are, refreshed or developed further.

Level 3: Town, parish, community and partner delivery

In towns, parishes and communities: councils, voluntary organisations, businesses, public services and residents would turn priorities into practical projects. Their experience would then help improve both the Place Plan and Island-wide decisions.

6. From a stand-alone Place Plan to a working part of the Island framework

Existing Place Plans contain valuable local ambitions, but they do not always provide a direct route into Council services, partner programmes, investment decisions or shared Island outcomes. This framework would help turn a Place Plan from a stand-alone document into an active way of organising support and delivery.

The Place Plan would remain locally owned. Its vision, priorities and identity would not be rewritten to fit a central template. Instead, the framework would add the connections needed to show:

- which local priorities also contribute to wider Island outcomes;
- which organisations, services or officers can help;
- where responsibilities and decisions sit;
- what projects, resources and funding opportunities can be brought together;
- how progress and practical barriers will be reported; and
- how local experience can influence future Island-wide policy and investment.

This can turn a Place Plan from a statement of ambition into a shared programme of action. It can provide a recognised route for working with the Isle of Wight Council and other partners, help align projects and funding, and show what local action is achieving. Several areas could contribute to common Island outcomes while retaining different local priorities and solutions.

An area would not need to start again. The first step would be to use its existing Place Plan, identify one or two priorities where stronger connections would help, and agree with relevant partners what support,

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decisions or resources are needed. The framework should add practical value to the plan, not create a second plan beside it.

7. Community voice at the heart of each place

The ultimate aspiration is for every Place Plan area to have broad, meaningful and continuing community engagement—not only occasional consultation. Residents, voluntary organisations, businesses, public services and people whose voices are less often heard should have clear opportunities to shape priorities, test proposals and assess whether action is making a practical difference.

A local advisory group or board could provide a regular link between wider community engagement and local decision-makers. Its members would be drawn from the community and willing to contribute lived experience, local knowledge, professional expertise, practical skills or community connections. The group could test ideas, identify opportunities and barriers, and advise whether proposed action reflects local needs.

These groups would advise, not take decisions away from elected councillors. They would complement open public engagement, statutory consultation and the formal responsibilities of councils and partner organisations. Each area could use arrangements that suit its own community rather than being required to adopt one fixed model.

Cowes already has a lay Advisory Group that can contribute to the development phase. Ryde has a board in place; the proposed framework could give it a clearer way to connect its knowledge and advice to Place Plan priorities, Isle of Wight Council services and shared Island-wide outcomes. Other areas could build on their own existing groups or develop suitable arrangements over time.

The long-term relationship: broad community engagement informs an advisory group or board; elected councillors and Place Plan partners retain leadership and decision-making; the Island-wide framework and Council officers provide support, evidence and connections.

8. What should guide the approach?

- **Keep decisions local where possible:** Island-wide coordination should support—not displace—local leadership.
- **Respect local differences:** each place should choose priorities and solutions that fit its circumstances.
- **Make decisions visible:** people should be able to understand what was decided, why, and who is responsible.
- **Include a wide range of voices:** engagement should reach beyond the organisations and individuals who usually take part.
- **Keep it proportionate:** meetings, paperwork, data and reporting should be no more complicated than necessary.
- **Use evidence and experience:** statistics, professional knowledge and residents' experience should all inform decisions.
- **Protect accountability:** elected members' roles, legal duties, financial controls and formal decision-making must remain clear.

9. What is shared and what remains local

Shared elements could include: a small number of Island-wide outcomes; common definitions; minimum principles for evidence and engagement; a standard way to record decisions and responsibilities; compatible measures of progress; and a regular cycle of learning and review.

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Locally determined elements would include: the area's vision and narrative; priority issues and opportunities; the organisations and people involved; the design of projects; sequencing and delivery arrangements; additional local indicators; and the way residents participate.

10. Potential roles and responsibilities

Isle of Wight Council members and officers

The Isle of Wight Council would be an essential enabling partner. Elected members would retain democratic leadership and formal decision-making. Officers could support locally agreed priorities by providing evidence, connecting local groups with the right services, explaining Council processes, linking work to existing strategies and programmes, helping to resolve practical barriers, and identifying opportunities for coordinated funding or delivery. This would strengthen local leadership without transferring ownership of local priorities to officers.

Place Plan partnerships

Each partnership could convene local stakeholders, maintain the place evidence base, agree priorities, connect projects and resources, monitor progress and report learning. Governance should reflect the area's circumstances and should avoid duplicating effective arrangements that already exist.

Town, parish and community councils

Local councils could provide democratic leadership, convene residents and community organisations, sponsor or support projects, contribute local assets and evidence, and help maintain public accountability. Participation would not transfer statutory powers unless separately and lawfully agreed.

Residents, voluntary organisations, businesses and public services

Stakeholders could contribute knowledge, co-design solutions, lead delivery, share compatible information and assess whether action is making a practical difference. Participation arrangements should be accessible, purposeful and clear about how contributions affect decisions.

Academic, technical and specialist partners

Where formally agreed, academic, technical or specialist partners could help with research, facilitation, evaluation and data. Any use of formal standards should be optional, proportionate and explained in plain language. The framework does not itself claim certification or compliance.

11. A proposed development phase

A short development phase could test the approach in Cowes, if the relevant councils and partners agree. It would begin with one or two priorities and use existing meetings, plans and information wherever possible. The partners would agree the scope, local lead, officer contacts, responsibilities, timetable and review point before delivery began. Named Isle of Wight Council officers could then help participants reach the right services and information, while local councillors and partners would continue to lead the local conversation.

Cowes already has a working partnership with the University of Southampton through the Future Towns initiative. The University intends to continue working with Cowes and to maintain a dialogue with the Isle of Wight Council. It is keen to see the framework develop across the Island and has offered oversight and specialist expertise to help shape and support that development.

- Can Island-wide aims be translated into a few clear local priorities?
- Can councillors, officers, public services and community partners work together more easily?
- Can useful information be shared lawfully and without unnecessary reporting?
- Can residents see how their views affect priorities and decisions?

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- Can everyone understand who is responsible, what support is available and what happens next?
- Can lessons from Cowes be adapted by other areas without imposing a fixed model?

Any academic or technical involvement should be described as proposed until it is formally confirmed by the parties concerned. Independent evaluation could assess usefulness, inclusivity, administrative burden, decision quality and whether the approach can be adapted by other areas.

12. How other areas could use the framework

Areas could take part at a level that matches their readiness and capacity. An area with an existing Place Plan could select one or two priorities, link them to Island-wide outcomes, identify the relevant Council services and partners, and test whether clearer responsibilities and support improve delivery. Areas reviewing or creating plans could build these links in from the outset. Others could join an introductory discussion before deciding whether to proceed.

- Name a local councillor or partner as the first point of contact.
- Start by mapping existing plans, groups and activity—not by creating a new structure.
- Choose one or two priorities where better coordination could make a visible difference.
- Agree what help is needed from Isle of Wight Council officers and other partners.
- Share lessons with other areas.
- Decide locally whether, when and how to continue.

13. Safeguards and boundaries

- The framework does not create a new statutory tier or override the powers of elected bodies.
- Existing adopted plans, statutory consultations and formal decision processes remain in force.
- Data sharing must meet legal, ethical, security and accessibility requirements.
- Participation must not depend solely on unpaid capacity or exclude smaller communities.
- Common reporting should be proportionate and should reuse existing information wherever possible.
- Responsibilities, funding commitments and public claims about partnerships must be formally agreed.
- The approach should be reviewed and discontinued or revised if it adds bureaucracy without demonstrable value.

14. Expected outputs from an initial phase

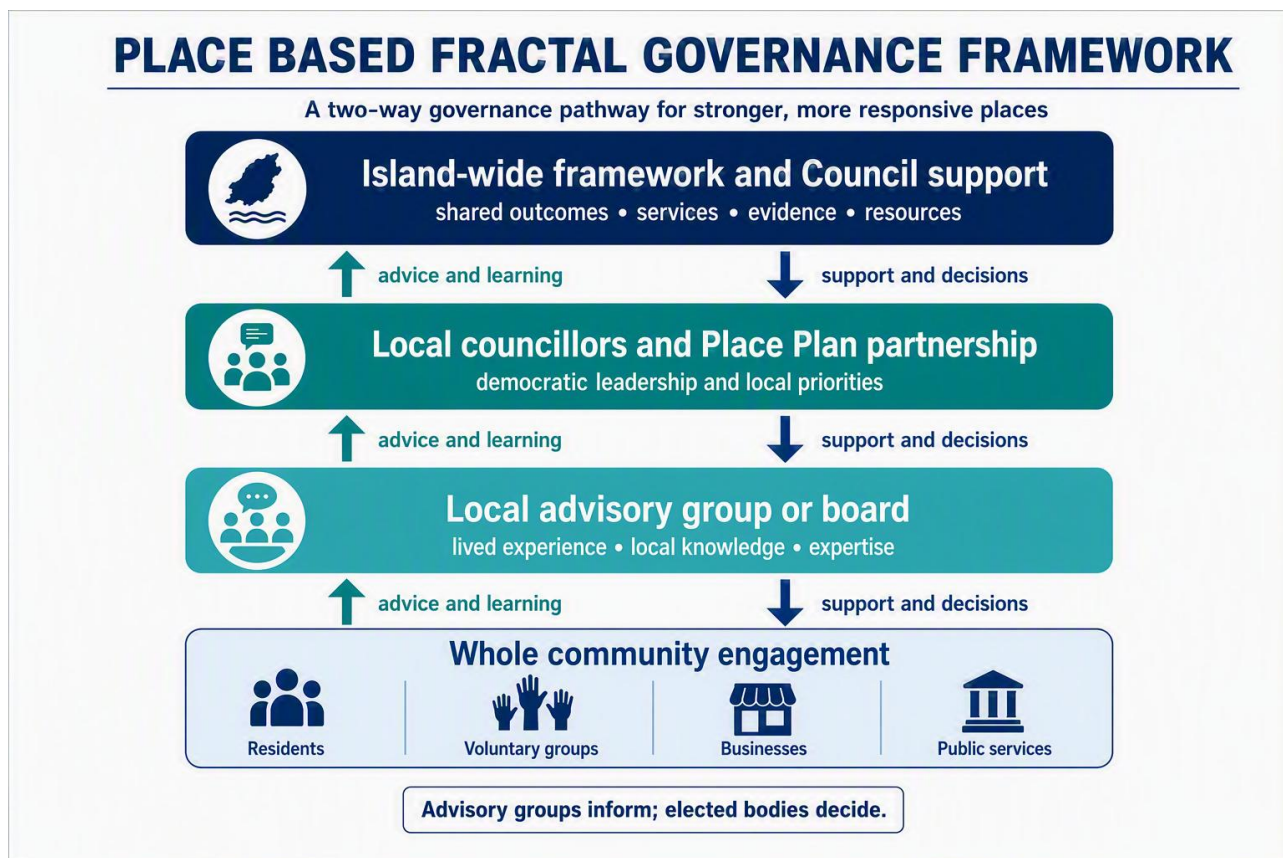
- A jointly agreed description of the model and its boundaries.
- A simple map connecting island-wide outcomes, place priorities and local activity.
- A roles and responsibilities framework.
- A proportionate evidence, engagement and review cycle.
- A small set of measures combining data and community experience.
- A record of lessons, costs, benefits and unresolved issues.
- An adaptable guide for other areas, subject to local decision-making.

15. Questions for discussion

1. Does the three-level model reflect how partners believe island-wide and local work should connect?
2. Which outcomes require island-wide coordination, and which are best determined locally?
3. What existing partnerships and processes should be retained or strengthened?

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4. What would make participation worthwhile for residents, community organisations, businesses and public services?
5. What minimum information is needed to support decisions without creating excessive reporting?
6. What authority, capacity and resources would an initial development phase require?
7. How should success, unintended consequences and value for money be assessed?



8.

16. Conclusion

The proposition is practical: agree a few shared outcomes, connect them to local priorities, identify who can help and learn from delivery. It would give local councillors a stronger route for raising place-based needs, experienced members and stakeholders a clearer line between strategy and action, and Isle of Wight Council officers a constructive way to support coordinated local delivery. The immediate proposal is to test a simple, bounded version in Cowes, report what is learned and then decide collectively whether wider use would add value.