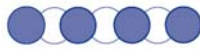


CLES Bulletin is a topical summary of an issue which has recently emerged. Its aim is to provide a pithy précis of the issue, thus creating a quick and easy to read document which directs to more detailed material, if required.

CLES Bulletin No. 38
What is the Future for Local Strategic Partnerships?

CLES BULLETIN





Over the last four years CLES has supported the development and delivery of Local Strategic Partnership activity across England. CLES Consulting for example assisted Wirral LSP to produce a business plan for 2004-2007. Early on in the agenda (2001) CLES worked with Government Office North West looking at the early progress of LSPs in the North West. CLES also produced Local Work No.30 on the implications of Local Strategic Partnerships.

Introduction

Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and their commitment to devise, develop and deliver Community Strategies were introduced as a result of the Local Government Act of 2000. LSPs have been introduced in nearly all local authorities in England, and exist in all 86 authorities that currently receive Neighbourhood Renewal Funding (NRF). The concept of LSPs was developed in a 2001 consultation and guidance document produced by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions¹. The guidance stated that a LSP should:

- Bring together at a local level the different parts of the public sector as well as private business, community and voluntary sectors so that different initiatives and services support each other and work together.
- Be a non-statutory, non-executive organisation.
- Operate at a level which enables strategic decisions to be taken and is close enough to individual neighbourhoods to allow actions to be determined at community level;
- Be aligned with local authority boundaries.

In the early 2000s the Labour Government recognised that the partnership arrangements that had been developed in the 1990s in programmes such as City Challenge were effective in allowing local communities have a say in what happened in their neighbourhoods. It also enabled central and local government to link strategically with

communities and the private sector in deprived areas. Therefore Labour sought to up the ante on partnership arrangements by looking to develop bodies that brought together all key local partners to foster local decision making and priorities. The partnership of public, private, community and voluntary organisations have a key part to play in improving local quality of life, but can also help to ensure that:

- Sustainable growth is achieved across the country;
- Economic, social and physical regeneration happens and is sustained in deprived areas;
- Public services work better and are delivered in a way that meets peoples needs;
- Local people can influence decision making and take action to improve their neighbourhoods;
- Business and the community and voluntary sector can play a full part in local economic development.

The majority of LSPs have been in operation for four years². In this time Government activity and policy making around localities and neighbourhoods has become more intense, especially since the development of a series of *local:vision* policy documents from 2004 onwards and the introduction of Local Area Agreements in 2004. In the latter months of 2005 two policy documents emerged from the ODPM which it is believed will set out future strategic policies and contribute to the further development of LSPs. An evaluation³ sets out details of how LSPs have been set up, how strategy has been developed and actioned and showcasing examples of good practice in partnership and policy development. A consultation paper⁴ released in December 2005, examines the future role of LSPs.

Aims of the Bulletin

² The websites of the majority of Local Strategic Partnerships can be found at: http://www.quest-net.org/info_pages.asp?mode=list&ID=63

³ ODPM (2005) *Local Strategic Partnership Evaluation*. <http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1136876>

⁴ ODPM (2005) *Local Strategic Partnerships: Shaping their future*. <http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1162320>

¹ DETR (2001) *Local Strategic Partnerships: Government Guidance*.

http://www.odpm.gov.uk/pub/896/LocalstrategicpartnershipsPDF175Kb_id1133896.pdf



- Summarise the policy documents included in *local:vision*;
- Highlight the key findings of the LSP Evaluation.
- Look in more detail at the consultation paper on the future of LSPs and the issues LSPs are likely to face in meeting two key objectives of the consultation.
- To conclude and propose a series of questions to be answered in our response to the LSP Consultation.

Wider Policy Developments relating to LSPs

The Government set out its vision for creating sustainable communities in 2003. Delivering sustainable communities is one of the key purposes of LSPs and in their delivery of Community Strategies. The Government has placed a greater degree of importance on the locality and has awarded greater freedom and flexibility to local authorities to develop strategies and deliver policy. The following documents are part of ODPM's 10 year vision⁵ for local government and identify a number of issues and challenges on the future of local government of which LSPs are likely to play a key role:

- ***Vibrant Local Leadership***⁶ - this document published in January 2005 demonstrates a commitment to developing and coordinating the community leadership role of each local authority in England. The document presents a vision that the community leadership role of the local authority should be based on partnership and that LSPs have a key role to play in this in the coordination of their various partners such as Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships and Childrens Trusts.
- ***Citizen Engagement and Public Services: Why Neighbourhoods Matter***⁷ - this document

produced in January 2005 seeks to ensure that neighbourhoods and their residents have a key role to play in delivering change. LSPs have a key role to play in these proposals to increase the opportunities for neighbourhood engagement and action.

- ***Securing Better Outcomes developing a new performance framework***⁸ - this document sets out the principles of a new performance framework for local government.

The importance and freedom granted to local authorities in recent years is highlighted in the development of Local Area Agreements⁹. LAAs present the opportunity for local authorities, regeneration agencies and the voluntary and community sector to become involved in the local decision making process with regard to the setting of local priorities, the spend of funds and the delivery of targets. Twenty-one Local Area Agreement pilot areas were 'signed off' in March 2005. In June 2005 a further 66 Local Area Agreement areas were announced. There is a key role for LSPs in Local Area Agreements. They are best placed to decide the partnership arrangements that are most appropriate to local circumstances and Local Area Agreement Guidance puts LSPs at the centre of negotiation, delivery and monitoring of the priority outcomes of a local area. The clustering of Local Area Agreements around four blocks can also be related to LSP theme groups.

Local Strategic Partnerships – Findings from the Evaluation

The main objective of LSPs is to set out the vision of an area; and coordinate and drive local services leading to improved outcomes for citizens that go beyond the remit of only one partner. Initially LSPs had four key roles:

⁵ ODPM (2004) *The Future of Local Government- Developing a 10-year vision*.

<http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1137798>

⁶ ODPM (2005) *Vibrant Local Leadership*.

http://www.odpm.gov.uk/pub/901/VibrantLocalLeadershipPDF260Kb_id1162901.pdf

⁷ ODPM (2005) *Citizen Engagement and Public Services: Why Neighbourhoods Matter*.

<http://www.odpm.gov.uk/pub/899/CitizenEngagementan>

[dPublicServicesWhyNeighbourhoodsMatterPDF326Kb_id1162899.pdf](http://www.odpm.gov.uk/pub/841/SecuringBetterOutcomesDevelopingaNewPerformanceFrameworkPDF362Kb_id1137841.pdf)

⁸ ODPM (2004) *Securing better outcomes: developing a new performance framework*.

http://www.odpm.gov.uk/pub/841/SecuringBetterOutcomesDevelopingaNewPerformanceFrameworkPDF362Kb_id1137841.pdf

⁹ For further information on Local Area Agreement view CLES Bulletin 32



- Prepare and implement a community strategy for an area.
- Bring together local plans, partnerships and initiatives through which mainstream public service providers work effectively together to meet local needs and priorities.
- Work with local authorities that are developing a Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA).
- Develop and deliver a local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy.

The effectiveness and efficiency of LSPs has been mixed. The findings of a recent evaluation undertaken by the Universities of Warwick, Liverpool and West of England and the Office for Public Management highlights some core issues. As well as a key findings report, there are also the following four subsidiary reports:

- *LSP Evaluation: Below the Local Strategic Partnership*¹⁰
- *LSP Evaluation: Leadership in LSPs*¹¹
- *LSP Evaluation: Multi-level governance and economic development*¹²
- *LSP Evaluation: Voluntary and Community Sector engagement in LSPs*¹³

The key findings of the evaluation are split into four categories:

- *Setting up the LSP* - the evaluation found that LSPs are making good progress in developing organisational structures and processes. There are however key variations in progress between NRF and non-NRF LSPs. It is also found in all LSPs that there was often a tension in terms of 'process vs delivery'. LSPs have to put energy and resources into process issues whilst also recognising that there is pressure, mostly from government, to deliver change.
- *Developing Strategy* - in terms of developing strategies the evaluation found that LSPs have

responded very positively to developing community strategies, however these strategies do vary in quality.

- *Action, implementation and delivery* - the evaluation found that the progress from strategy to implementation has been slow and that the issue of 'mainstreaming' is seen as complex by many LSPs.
- *Adding value toward outcomes* - the evaluation found that the added value LSPs to their areas has been on the whole difficult to measure.

The role of the voluntary and community sector in LSPs has also been criticised in both the evaluation and the regeneration press:

LSPs unfit to fulfil their role, Regeneration and Renewal, 16th December 2005 – this article states that many public sector partners are making a strong contribution within LSPs, but adds that other partners including local councillors and the business sector need to be more actively engaged. It also states that voluntary and community sector groups can be made to feel like they have 'junior partner status' on the LSP. The National Association of Councils for Voluntary Service have warned that some LSPs are good at attracting the VCS, but most are between average and poor.

Local Strategic Partnerships: Shaping their Future Consultation

The evaluation of LSPs has found that there are a number of gaps between the principles of LSPs and what is happening in reality. Emphasis has been placed by the ODPM on the importance of LSPs and the consultation on the future of LSPs suggests a number of proposals which will attempt to reduce this gap between principle and reality. On the whole the consultation examines the future role of LSPs, their governance and accountability and their capacity to deliver Sustainable Community Strategies. The consultation also identifies some of the key challenges LSPs will face if effectiveness and efficiency is to be generally improved. The consultation document sets out two core objectives for the future development of LSPs. These are:

- LSPs are able to effectively identify and deliver against the priorities for joint action in their

¹⁰ Available at:

<http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1162337>

¹¹ Available at:

<http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1162331>

¹² Available at:

<http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1162346>

¹³ Available at:

<http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1162334>



area through the Sustainable Community Strategy, Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy, Local Area Agreement and Local Development Framework, in a clearly accountable way.

- LSPs are better able to support neighbourhood engagement and to help ensure the views of neighbourhoods and parish councils can influence strategic local service delivery and spending.

There are four key issues and proposals that the LSP consultation seeks to implement to ensure that these objectives are met in the long term.

a.) The role of Sustainable Community Strategies

The core proposal of the consultation that will impact the future role of LSPs is the proposed change in focus of Community Strategies to become Sustainable Community Strategies. Sir John Egan's Review of Skills for Sustainable Communities found that there was a need for local leaders to establish priorities that were sustainable and connected to anticipated changes in the local area. There is therefore an onus on LSPs to deliver in their Sustainable Community Strategies policies, which balance and integrate economic, social and environmental goals. LSPs must take into account the definition of and components of sustainable communities when evolving their community strategy. Sustainable communities must be:

- Active, inclusive and safe;
- Well-run;
- Environmentally sensitive;
- Well designed and built;
- Well connected;
- Thriving;
- Well served;
- Fair for everyone.

Sustainable Community Strategies must also consider the policy developments arising from the introduction of Local Area Agreements, Local Development Frameworks, the Government's Sustainable Development Strategy and the Government's desire to see sustainable communities everywhere. Linking the Sustainable Community Strategy to the Local Area Agreement

will in effect activate the community strategy. The consultation document highlights a number of stages to the development of a Sustainable Community Strategy.

Sustainable Community Strategies: Proposed Stages

1. Baseline Current Performance – including data from neighbourhood statistics and the recently formed Area Profiles¹⁴ resource. This stage should also outline a long-term vision for the area.
2. Evidence – the vision needs to be explicitly grounded in an analysis of a local area's needs and funding and resources that the area attracts.
3. Local Area Agreements – the outcomes and targets included in the LAA should reflect the over-arching vision.
4. Revised Action Plan – the current Community Strategy Action Plan and the LAA delivery plan will become one and the same.
5. The Sustainable Community Strategy – this should state who is accountable for what actions, with what resources and to what timescale. It should also state how progress will be monitored, reviewed and reported on to citizens, businesses, partner organisations and central government.
6. Refresh and Renew – the Sustainable Community Strategy is to be refreshed on an annual basis and reviewed every three years.

It is proposed that Sustainable Community Strategies must also be more effective than community strategies have been in being influenced by the content of other key local, regional and sub-regional plans. There is little evidence to suggest that links have been made between Community Strategies and regional and sub-regional strategies. The consultation identifies that there are significant benefits to be gained by planning and delivering policy beyond local authority boundaries.

b) changes in the legislative foundations of LSPs

¹⁴ Available at: <http://www.areaprofiles.audit-commission.gov.uk/InformationPages/Information.aspx?info=START&menu=6>



The second key proposal of the consultation paper is the proposed move of LSPs to a commissioning role. In the past, two main roles have been adopted by LSPs – advisory and commissioning. Advisory LSPs have been most common in non-NRF areas and typically have a large membership working to build consensus and acting to co-ordinate and make recommendations. The Shaping the future document is looking to propose that more LSPs take a commissioning role whereby they make decisions, commission action and are actively involved in delivery of targets set both in a Sustainable Community Strategy and a Local Area Agreement.

As part of this movement from advisory to commissioning role for the majority of LSPs, there is increasing emphasis on the setting of a legislative foundation for each LSP tailored to their local area and the nature of their partners. Therefore the consultation offers the opportunity for LSPs to set a firmer footing in their operation by clarifying and formalising their role. There are five key benefits to providing LSPs with a legislative foundation. These are:

- It would send a strong signal from central government that partnership working across a range of issues is important.
- It would reinforce and clarify the LSP's role as the 'partnership of partnerships'.
- It would provide an opportunity to reiterate the centrality of the local authority's role to the LSP.
- It would enable LSPs to set out the minimum expectations to be placed on partner members and therefore avoid confusion.
- It would ensure that in areas of poorer partnership working that the key public sector agencies are engaged in the LSP.

c) The accountability of Local Strategic Partnerships to different partners

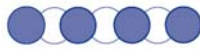
This chapter of the consultation document provides guidance on the levels of accountability Local Strategic Partnerships should have not only to their local authority and partners, but also towards central government and to the communities, which they serve.

- ***Accountability of the local authority and between partners*** – for LSPs to be effective and agree local priorities and actions that improve local services, all parties need to be clear on what role they have within the LSP, what is expected of them and the actions they are expected to deliver. Establishing clear accountability between the LSP and the local authority will potentially lead to the delivery of key outcomes and enhanced performance.
- ***Accountability upwards to central government*** – pressures currently exist between local agencies and partners and their accountability to national government departments and the requirement to deliver national priorities. This often means that partners find it difficult to devote sufficient attention to the delivery of LSP objectives. The consultation therefore recommends that individual local agencies and partners are given the opportunity to act innovatively, collaboratively and most importantly locally through a reduction in the level of national targets.
- ***Accountability to citizens*** – the consultation recommends that the accountability to citizens from LSPs takes greater effect of the role of elected members of local authorities. There is a high level of local authority representation on LSP boards, however the function these members are performing on the LSP is not always the most appropriate one. The support and contribution of these elected members is crucial to the success of the LSP and the Sustainable Community Strategy.

d) Capacity Issues

In order for LSPs to react favourably to the criticisms expressed in the evaluation and to rise to the challenges proposed in the shaping the future consultation document, LSPs must be aware of a number of issues which may hinder their progress:

- ***Skills*** – LSPs face an increasing degree of responsibility especially in the development of Local Area Agreements and the delivery of outcomes. There are therefore new skills that LSPs must consider including those of data collection, leadership and consultation. There



have been concerns especially during the pilot LAA process with regard to LSP capacity and that many LSPs followed the process rather than leading it. The consultation paper therefore recommends four key building blocks for LSPs, namely in terms of: leadership; the delivery manager; the delivery system; and communication.

- **Resources** – there are varied degrees of funding available to LSPs. The consultation therefore recommends that there is onus on LSPs encouraging partners to contribute financially to LSP development and delivery. Variations in funding between NRF and non-NRF LSPs is also contributing to levels of staffing working on for example the development of a Community Strategy. The consultation also recommends that LSPs use creative measures of resources to implement their community strategy including the use of for example the reward grant from LPSAs.
- **Existing support and training** – there is a wide range of support available to LSPs currently. LSPs must ensure that support and training is effectively tailored to their needs and to the priorities they are trying to deliver for their communities. The consultation recommends that LSPs try to attract more support from partners translating their experiences on issues such as data analysis and community engagement.

Conclusion and Consultation Questions

The notion of partnership is currently being increasingly used to deliver local priorities, outcomes and services. Local Strategic Partnership have, since their inception in 2001 become increasingly the driver of this partnership vehicle. Whilst, their impact to date has been criticised in a recent evaluation, there are examples of excellent and innovative practice. The consultation document on shaping the future of LSPs has set a series of new challenges, notably the proposals for development of Sustainable Community Strategies and the switch in emphasis of LSPs from advisors to commissioners. Therefore, the ODPM has set an overarching vision in the consultation paper and want LSPs:

- To be the partnership of partnerships in an area, providing the strategic coordination within the area and linking with other plans and bodies established at the regional, sub-regional and local level.
- To ensure a Sustainable Community Strategy is produced that sets the vision and priorities for the area agreed by all parties, including local citizens and businesses, and is built on a solid evidence base.
- To develop and drive the effective delivery of their Local Area Agreements.
- To agree an action plan to achieve the Sustainable Community Strategy priorities, including the Local Area Agreement outcomes.

The Centre for Local Economic Strategies will be responding to the LSP consultation and therefore seeks your views on the following questions relating to the four parts of the consultation:

a) The Sustainable Community Strategy

1. Are the proposed steps in the development of a Sustainable Community Strategy correct?
2. Do you agree that the key role of the LSP should be to develop the vision for the local area, through the Sustainable Community Strategy and the 'delivery contract' of the LAA?
3. ODPM believe it is important that LSPs reflect regional/sub-regional plans where relevant in their Sustainable Community Strategy priorities and that regional organisations and partnerships take into account of key local needs. How can greater coordination best be facilitated?
4. What more could be done to ensure Sustainable Community Strategies are better able to make the links between social, economic and environmental goals and deal more effectively with the area's cross-boundary and longer-term impacts?

b) Providing a Legislative Framework

1. Would a duty to co-operate with the local authority, in producing and implementing the Community Strategy, help to set LSPs on a firmer footing and better enable their enhanced delivery co-ordination role?



2. Should there be a statutory duty on local authorities and named partners to promote the engagement of the voluntary and community sectors in the LSP?

c) The Accountability of Local Strategic Partnerships to different partners

1. Should each partnership be encouraged to produce protocols or 'partnership arrangements' between partners to ensure clear lines of accountability for the driver of agreed outcomes?
2. What do you see as the key role for executive councillors within LSPs?

d) Capacity Issues

1. What are LSP's key support/skills gaps?
2. What learning or development do you feel is required by LSPs in order to deliver sustainable communities that embody the principles of sustainable development at the local level?

To respond to any of these questions or for further information on Local Strategic Partnerships please contact:

Matthew Jackson

Policy Researcher

Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES)

Express Networks, 1 George Leigh Street,
Manchester, M4 5DL,

Tel 0161 236 7036,

Fax 0161 236 1891

Email matthewjackson@cles.org.uk

Web: www.cles.org.uk

For information about CLES products or services ,
please email: info@cles.org.uk