

Local Strategic Partnerships: Shaping their Future A Consultation Paper

A The Role of LSPs and Sustainable Community Strategies

LSPs, Sustainable Community Strategies and LAAs:

- 1. 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' through the LAA (as set out in figs 1 and 2)?**

We firmly believe that the key role of district LSPs is to develop the strategic vision for the local area through a sustainable community strategy. We also believe that the LSP is the place where the partners will come to an understanding about how they are to deliver their shared strategic objectives.

However, there is a significant bridge to be crossed in moving from a consultative and collaborative partnership, to a model that is considerably more delivery-focused. This is acknowledged in the document, but little guidance is provided about the best way to make the transition. LSPs will need to be managed in ways that ensure that the non-spending, voluntary partners are not disenfranchised; the service delivery priorities of partners are properly reflected in LAA outcomes, and the democratic processes of the partners are respected.

In two tier areas, there are real difficulties in viewing the LAA as the 'delivery contract'. However close the general alignment may be, an LAA drawn up on a county-wide basis to a completely different timeframe, cannot be said to serve as the delivery contract for an existing District/Borough Community Plan. While some of these difficulties may be resolved the next time we go through the process, the County LAA, in seeking to reflect the range of priorities set out in eleven different plans, is inevitably a composite document, and includes those things about which all could agree in order to meet the hugely challenging timescale for second round bids. While District LSPs may be fully supportive of the aims and objectives of their County LAAs, it is difficult to see that they will come to regard them as the delivery contract for their individual plans.

Regional / sub-regional engagement:

- 2. We 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 account of key local needs. How can this greater co-ordination best be facilitated?**

We have moved some way to incorporating regional and sub-regional plans within the work of the LSP this year and understand the need to do so. There is a need for clarity of purpose and primacy of the various policies and plans if they are all to be properly integrated and delivered at neighbourhood level. Further guidance on how the 'many-layered geology' of the planning process fits together would be very welcome.

Links to local plans

3. Would a requirement on bodies producing theme or service-based plans to 'have regard' to the Sustainable Community Strategy in doing so and vice versa, increase the LSP's ability to take the over-arching view in an area?

We hope that our partnership working to date means that we have already embraced the overwhelming logic of this approach. Formal recognition of the need to 'have regard' can only be of further assistance.

Equally important is a clear sense of purpose and an understanding about the links between the various plans. The position is made a good deal easier when boundaries of the various organisations are co-terminous and priorities can be determined in relation to the same area and the same context.

Sustainable Community Strategies

4. Are the proposed steps in the development of a Sustainable Community Strategy correct (see box on page 18)?

We are generally happy with the model, but have some concerns (as set out in the response to 1 above) about the assumptions regarding the degree of fit between the Community Strategy and the LAA in two tier areas.

5. What more could be done to ensure Sustainable Community Strategies are better able to make the links between social, economic and environmental goals and to deal more effectively with the area's cross-boundary and longer-term impacts?

The Community Strategy should be developed using the outcomes framework and monitoring mechanisms should be based on whole population, quality of life indicators that will demonstrate a link between our actions and outcomes.

Strong and effective links will only be formed when there is clarity of purpose behind the various processes and when partners understand the reasons for their participation. Ensuring that operational

boundaries are as similar as possible would also be of great assistance.

Neighbourhood Engagement

- 6. What should be the role of the LSP in supporting neighbourhood engagement and ensuring the neighbourhood/ parish voice, including diverse and minority communities, is heard at the principal local level?**

Good links at all levels between the LSP and the community is essential. Effective means of communication, both to inform and to listen, will be critical. Parish Councils, as the voice of their local communities, have an important role to play and need to be fully engaged with the process. Particular efforts will need to be made to engage with those who do not have a strong voice, the hard to reach and the young, for example.

- 7. In two-tier-areas, is it most appropriate for the responsibility for neighbourhood engagement to rest with the district level LSP?**

Yes, only the district LSP will be able to deliver the appropriate level of community/neighbourhood engagement, focus and accountability. This should not be the sole function, however, as district LSPs should also formulate the strategic vision for their areas.

Links with Local Development Frameworks

- 8. How can spatial planning teams best contribute to Sustainable Community Strategies through the LSP and ensure that LDFs and Sustainable Community Strategies are closely linked?**

By ensuring that there is an understanding of the links through good communication between LSPs and planning teams and through working effectively together. Spatial plans should reflect visions and outcomes drawn from Community Strategies.

- 9. How could revised guidance and accompanying support materials best ensure that Sustainable Community Strategies and Local Development Frameworks join up effectively?**

By providing clear advice about the links between the two processes and by taking care to ensure that there is no duplication.

Two-tier areas

- 10. Should every local authority area have its own LSP?**

This is clearly a matter for individual authorities, but we firmly believe that community planning should take place at the most appropriate local level. It follows from this that we would generally expect every district authority to have its own LSP.

11. Would the establishment of a greater delineation of roles between county and district LSPs as suggested be sensible (see paras 65 to 69)?

A greater degree of clarity would certainly be welcome. We support the added-value model and believe that County LSPs are well placed to bring this added-value to the process by concentrating on the broader pan-County strategic issues.

B Governance of LSPs

LSP as the partnership of partnerships

12. We believe that it is important that the LSP is made up of the thematic partnerships in the area together with an LSP board. What is your view?

It is essential that there is a clear relationship between the various themed partnerships and the LSP, and that the LSP is generally seen as bringing all partnership activity together. However, the LSP's structure should reflect the nature of the local area and the problems to be resolved ie form should follow function, not vice versa.

It should be remembered that it is not just public sector and statutory bodies that come together in the LSP. The consultation paper does not adequately acknowledge the contribution made by voluntary and community organisations.

Over emphasis on working in themes may give rise to an unwelcome degree of compartmentalism. Developing shared outcomes can help to break this down and lead to a more integrated approach.

13. We believe that a rationalisation of local partnerships would help the LSP executive take an effective overview. Would clustering partnerships around the four LAA block be a sensible way to achieve this?

Rationalising is certainly important; there is still potential for duplication and confusion about the plethora of partnerships in existence. Using the LAA model is one way of doing it, but Districts would probably prefer to see partnerships clustered around the issues they have determined to be the local priorities.

14. We believe that the geographic boundaries of partners within LSPs is important. What do you see as the opportunities for, and the barriers to, co-terminosity shared geographic boundaries?

Our partnership has had to come to terms with the challenges presented by a significant lack of co-terminosity. We have no doubt that things would be very much easier with a greater degree of geographic consistency, but at a district level, we recognise that exact co-terminosity is likely to remain unachievable. More realistic is a situation where there is a direct relationship between single partner organisations ie the district sits within a single PCT/police division/social services area (as opposed to there being more than one of these organisations within the district's boundaries).

15. Within the LSP framework and its established priorities, would the creation of single delivery vehicles to tackle particular issues be helpful?

In appropriate circumstances, we can imagine that the single delivery vehicle might be a very suitable way of tackling particular issues. We believe it is important for LSPs to be flexible in terms of systems and structures, and to be prepared to adopt different approaches as circumstances require.

Ensuring wide representation

16. How can the neighbourhood and parish tiers be involved most effectively on the LSP on a) the executive and b) individual thematic partnerships?

Parish councils are represented at Partnership Board level through the district-wide Association of Parish Councils. Neighbourhood representation tends to be through the involvement of elected members but could be increased at theme group level if the issue has a clear geographic focus.

The challenge presented in a diverse area such as Test Valley in capturing the interests of all the different communities should not be underestimated. The role of democratically elected representatives is important in ensuring that it is not just the loudest voices that are heard.

We have some difficulty with the use of the term 'executive', which is not necessarily descriptive of the top tier of partnership management (in our case the Partnership Board).

17. How can the private, voluntary and community sectors be involved most effectively on the LSP on a) the executive and b) individual thematic partnerships?

By valuing the contribution that these sectors bring to the LSP at all levels and letting it be known that they have an equal place at the table. The Voluntary Sector Compact has an important part to play in this respect.

Experience suggests that effective involvement arises when there is a clear set of objectives, well-defined outcomes and positive roles for the partners, including the business sector. Maintaining an appropriate balance of membership on the Board and themed groups is important in order that voluntary/community sector representatives do not feel overwhelmed.

Providing a legislative foundation

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

We welcome the proposal to provide LSPs with a legislative foundation. We recognise the benefits set out in paragraph 103 of the consultation paper and see this as an important step in raising the profile of LSPs. We are less convinced about the merits of introducing a statutory duty to co-operate which of itself would not guarantee the necessary commitment or enthusiasm. Clarity of purpose is likely to prove more beneficial. However, if such a duty were to be introduced, it would be necessary to consider how it could be applied equally to all parties.

19. If so, what obligations, such as attendance, financial or staff support, would be useful to place on partners?

An effective LSP is one that establishes its own rules because they are owned and understood by the partners. We need to be wary of introducing increased bureaucracy at the expense of a loss of goodwill. We hope that partners come to the LSP table because they recognise that there is a benefit in being there.

While a requirement simply to attend meetings is unlikely to be effective, a duty on public sector organisations to engage and to evidence their engagement, through committing time and a contribution towards the running cost of the LSP, would be welcome.

20. If so, which public agencies would the duty be most sensible placed on?

As appropriate.

21. 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?

Based on our own experience to date, we would have to say that, given the local authority's willingness to engage with the voluntary and community sectors, and the latter's willingness to participate, we are not convinced of the need to introduce a statutory duty. We can though, imagine that in some circumstances, such a duty might be helpful.

C Accountability

Accountability between partners

22. Should each partnership be encouraged to produce protocols or 'partnership arrangements' between partners to ensure clear lines of accountability for the delivery of agreed outcomes?

Yes, we believe it is essential that LSPs have suitable protocols, partnership arrangements, terms of reference, compacts etc in place and consider that it would be hard to work effectively without such a framework. Partners should clearly be accountable to one another and we believe it is appropriate to develop these partnership arrangements into clear statements (effectively service level agreements) of what partners have committed to deliver.

23. We believe that if partnership working was included as part of other key agencies' assessments it would be effective in securing greater commitment from other public sector agencies. What are your views?

We agree, although we believe that such an assessment is already included in a number of instances. We believe that there is a need for different inspection regimes to be drawn more closely together.

Involvement of local councillors

24. What do you see as the key role for executive councillors within LSPs?

As members of the LSP Board and as active members (very possibly chairing) relevant themed groups.

25. What do you see as the appropriate role for backbenchers particularly in ensuring a high quality of local engagement?

Back bench Councillors have an important representative role and act as the eyes, ears and voice of the local community. They may be directly involved in themed groups and will certainly seek to influence

executive members in carrying out their roles. They should be kept fully informed by providing appropriate access to minutes/agendas.

26. What would make councillors' power of overview and scrutiny more effective in scrutinising the 4 blocks of the LAA?

District Council Members are unlikely to be engaged directly in scrutinising the four blocks of the LAA. They will be more concerned to take an overview of the way in which the partnership is working and how it is engaging with the LAA.

Involvement of Members of Parliament

27. What would be the most appropriate way for a Member of Parliament to be involved with the LSP and how can we ensure that it is complementary to the role of local councillors?

It would be good to have an MP actively engaged at Board level. MPs (and MEPs) would benefit from the understanding of local issues gained through involvement with the LSP and their regional and national perspective would be very advantageous to the LSP. Realistically we must acknowledge the difficulties presented by calls on their time. Consequently contact is likely to be more occasional, but it is important that they are kept fully informed of what is going on.

It is worth pointing out, as it is otherwise often overlooked, that constituency and district boundaries are rarely coterminous.

Involvement of Communities Served

28. How can we promote effective community engagement and involvement, from all sections of the community in shaping local priorities and public services?

Through tried and tested techniques which present issues in ways that are relevant to local people such as parish plans and health checks, for example, and through the adoption of policies to consult widely on important issues. There is a huge task for the LSP (with significant resource implications) to keep the community informed about issues, consequences and solutions. It is important not to raise expectations in the community that it may be impossible to meet.

29. How can we maximise the opportunities for joint policy and joint activity on community engagement, including the LDF, the LAA and the Sustainable Community Strategy?

By ensuring greater integration of the processes and timescales. The ODPM can do much more to demonstrate that joined-up thinking is a reality at national policy level and ensure that a fully integrated approach is apparent in all government guidance and regulation.

30. How can accountability to local people and businesses be enhanced?

We believe that the main issue has to do with the LSP's profile and the extent to which its work has real meaning for local people. The issue of greater accountability is only likely to arise if LSPs succeed in moving from being advisory groups to becoming commissioning bodies.

D Developing Capacity

31. What are your LSP's key support/skill gaps?

Time (all members) and outcome focus.

32. What extra or different support would be most helpful in shifting to a more delivery focused role?

Having a budget and some dedicated resource would make a real difference. However, of equal importance is a clearer understanding of the role of the LSP and a greater commitment to its actions by all the key partners. If partnership working was generally seen as a core activity, and not an unwelcome addition to the day job, the result could be a significant increase in the level of resources (people and financial) available to the partnership.

33. How would LSPs prefer to receive information and support; through guidance, toolkits, signposting to existing information, practical learning opportunities etc?

The sharing of practical experience is the best learning medium. Appropriate financial assistance to facilitate such activities would be far more productive than more academic research or another toolkit.

34. How can LSPs ensure that adequate learning and support provision is available to build the capacity of communities to engage with the LSP and its partners at the various levels?

Learning and support is expensive and often considered to be non-productive time. With the public sector increasingly faced with difficult budget decisions, expenditure on areas often perceived to be of less importance, such as capacity building, is frequently the first to suffer. Financial provision to resource this important area of work is the simple answer to this question. Given their lack of budget, LSPs will inevitably look to the government for assistance.

35. 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?

Most LSPs are relatively immature and still grappling with defining both their role and working arrangements. The changing nature of government expectations has not helped the development process. Once there is greater clarity over their role and a better understanding of how their activities relate to the actions of the individual partners in their own right as service providers; then it will be possible to audit activities and devise development programmes.