

Response to ODPM consultation paper

Local Strategic Partnerships: Shaping their future

Key Questions – 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 figures 1 & 2)?**

Response:

Yes, we agree that the main role of LSPs should be concerned with vision planning and supporting the development of local community strategies and local development frameworks. LSPs should undertake planning and co-ordination responsibilities and hold partners to account. They should also monitor implementation but not act as a delivery agent.

It is important that all relevant partners are involved in shaping the vision, key outcomes and milestones. This should become easier to achieve as LAAs become embedded as part of the work of local authorities and partners.

To achieve effective community strategies and local development frameworks, there is a need to think long term. LSPs need institutional stability to operate effectively and create confidence in their partnerships over the long term.

We strongly support the view that LSPs should be voluntary, non-executive bodies. Maintaining a clear focus on purpose is essential for LSP working. The LSP should identify areas of joint working where value can be added from working collaboratively.

The government's strategy for LSPs should be based on understanding both the strengths and weaknesses of partnerships and assist LSPs perform their role as effectively as possible.

Strengths might include:

- 1 the provision of coordinated solutions
- 2 greater resources,
- 3 engagement between sectors creating innovation and new ideas,
- 4 flexibility.

Weaknesses might include:

- 1 complex accountabilities

- 2 high level decision making limiting participation from the public or participants
- 3 cumbersome arrangements.

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?**

Response:

We believe that it is important that regional and sub-regional strategies reflect local needs. It is therefore essential to have democratic local representation on regional bodies. The community strategy and the local development framework should also be the building blocks of regional and sub-regional strategies.

We believe that greater coordination can be facilitated by ensuring that LSPs have all key regional and local plans of all partner organisations and this responsibility should rest with the individuals who represent their respective organisations on the LSPs.

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?**

Response:

To increase the LSPs ability to take an overarching view in relation to the Sustainable Community Strategy, a stronger requirement than 'have regard' is necessary. For example 'take account of and directly address how they help deliver the Sustainable Community Strategy' may be more appropriate.

Sustainable Community Strategies

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

Response:

Yes the proposed steps appear to be correct.

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?

Response:

LSP members should be represented at theme/sub groups of the LSP focussing on their specific themes and remit. These members would then be best placed to take account of the entire Community Strategy, identifying overlapping issues and work streams. This would better enable a true cross cutting Sustainable Communities Strategy to be achieved.

Partners regional plans tend to be long term visions and should be used to enable a more holistic approach to managing the LSP's vision and longer term impacts.

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?

Response:

We support a co-ordinated and flexible approach to neighbourhood engagement and support different methods of participation. LSPs should however work within agreed structures for community engagement and not create further levels of consultation. There is perhaps a case for the LSP to have an agreed consultation protocol with all partners. There should be an active role for actual community members to engage with LSPs. This can be done via locally elected representatives who should have meetings with other residents to consult on key local issues, which would then be fed back to the LSP.

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

Response:

N/A

Links with Local Development Framework

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?

Response:

This must rest with the Local Authority as a key partner as it is not for the LSP to replace the role of the Local Authority in LDFs.

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

Response:

This should be dealt with through the assessment processes for Local Authorities.

Two-tier areas

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

Response:

It is for each Local Authority to decide.

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

Response:

N/A

Key Questions – 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?

Response:

As stated above, we also see the value in these thematic partnerships however would wish to see overlapping themes effectively managed to avoid duplication and not miss out on opportunities. We also believe that LSPs should involve all key groups and these can be wider than just thematic partnerships.

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 blocks be a sensible way to achieve this?

Response:

The structures and operating arrangements of LSPs (beyond arrangements for financial accounting and probity) should be determined locally. It is for the LSP to decide how partnerships are clustered, including whether they should be clustered around the four blocks of the LAA. There may, however, be a case for some rationalisation.

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

Response:

Co-terminous boundaries for public services are very important for partnership work, particularly the development and implementation of a community strategy and related tasks. The consultation paper identifies common boundaries as vital in developing co-ordination, and we endorse this.

For some services, greater emphasis on local accountability and common boundaries would be helpful. It would appear that some organic and service specific approaches to changing boundaries by individual government departments are unhelpful. This can undermine the joined up approach to problem solving which the government itself advocates. The frequency with which a number of agencies and services are being reorganised and reconfigured is also a problem eg., PCTs.

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

Response:

We do not agree that the introduction of single delivery vehicles would be helpful in the context of the LSP as there are issues around organisational remit, accountability, responsibility and identity.

We would like to see a voluntary approach taken to structures including 'Local Public Service Boards', and single delivery vehicles. If there is to be legislation, it should support flexibility and experimentation, with the choice made locally whether a different legal framework should be tried.

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?

Response:

N/A

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

Response:

Although the local authority has the lead role in encouraging participation, others should also share responsibility for ensuring this. Central government agencies could do more to encourage business representation, for example by promoting it as a form

of corporate social responsibility; promoting it to national business organisations; and/or perhaps supporting an award or some other form of recognition. Partners as well as the council should be responsible for funding infrastructure and participation.

It should also be the responsibility of each sector to choose its own representation.

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 LSPs on a firmer footing and better enable their enhanced delivery co-ordination role?

Response:

We strongly favour a duty to be placed on all public services to participate in community planning, including implementation. Legislation on this would encourage the departmental management of these services to take greater account of community planning and local priorities.

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

Response:

The duty should include a requirement to take part in council-led scrutiny, including access to information. It should include a duty to participate in community planning in a way which contributes to sustainable development in the UK.

The duty should include a requirement to be accountable locally for relevant targets in the community strategy and to report on these.

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

Response:

The services which should be included in this duty should include all agencies required to participate in the sub-partnerships.

Bodies to which this duty should apply include: Primary Care Trusts, other local NHS bodies, Patient Forums, schools, Environment Agency, further and higher education, Learning and Skills Councils, Regional Development Agency, Jobcentre Plus, transport providers, utilities, police, probation and other law enforcement agencies, the rural delivery agency, housing associations, the Highways Agency.

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?

Response:

We do not think a statutory duty would be helpful as it would create legal duties and liabilities on the voluntary and community sector which it is not clear they want. If you

try and over-institutionalise community and voluntary sector involvement you may lose their distinctiveness.

Whilst we would welcome all sectors having an equal commitment to implementation of community strategies, in reality there is little beyond informal pressure and persuasion which can ensure implementation from the private, community and voluntary sector. Clarity about what is expected, through action plans and protocols can clearly support this.

Key Questions: *Accountability between partners*

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

Response:

Agree

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?

Response:

Agree

Involvement of local councillors

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

Response:

The democratic role of the council as a decision-making body is vital and should be supported, not undermined by LSPs. To create clarity and accountability the council should approve the community strategy and the local development framework as at present.

Within this, the role of councillors, including executive members, ward councillors, and overview and scrutiny bodies, is vital in relation to the LSP. However there are limitations of their role in relation to other public agencies who have other accountabilities to government and its representatives. There is a need to develop engagement from all councillors, both through the scrutiny role and through engagement in strategy development as members of the council.

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

Response:

Backbench members can work with the community to ensure that communities engage not only with the council but also with the strategic partnership.

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

Response:

A statutory role as with Health Scrutiny.

The role scrutiny can play in support of partnership achievement has a growing importance, which can include: performance review; contribution to accountability and openness; thematic analysis; policy development; wider democratic and community engagement.

There may be a case for an additional legal power to support scrutiny by requiring all partners included in any forthcoming duty to participate in community planning, to take part in scrutiny, attending, providing information, and responding to recommendations. The scrutiny role could be developed as a key element of strengthening local accountability.

We also support a move to local, rather than upwards, monitoring of the Local Area Agreement, through scrutiny. The LAA should set out a set of descriptive goals, backed up by performance measures.

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?

Response:

The involvement of Members of Parliament in LSPs should be encouraged. They could be invited to attend and/or be required to attend an annual meeting with the partnership. This would hopefully encourage MPs to take the experiences of public services locally into the legislature.

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?

Response:

The key factor which promotes community involvement is that the LSP is genuinely locally driven, not a delivery agent for local government, and therefore people can influence and make a difference. Consultation is also key to the effective engagement of communities. Methods of good practice for engaging hard to reach community groups exist which are displayed in some NDC's and some NRF areas. The agencies responsible for these should make it a point to market and promote these case studies. There is a wide range of good practice in consultation and

engagement, and formal structures should not be seen as the primary form of community involvement.

Joined up local methods and approaches should be encouraged and duplication of effort avoided.

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?

Response:

A small executive group of key partners/funders could be formed to make the connections. The miasma of sub-groups can make focus, connectivity and impact very difficult. Additionally, there may be limited staff resource to be able to attend a plethora of groups.

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

Response:

It can be enhanced through existing structures operated by public bodies. It is not necessary to invent new accountabilities specifically for LSPs.

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

Response:

Key support/skills gaps:

- Lack of timely consultation on key documents for input from key partners, often driven centrally by government departments.
- An understanding of the work of all key partners and their objectives and the best possible way to measure these objectives for them to be meaningful to all members of LSPs
- Better understanding of the regional element of the work of key partners to create a longer term vision for the LSP.
- Recognise the difference between activity and impact
- Lack of time to do everything required in the LSP

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

Response:

Remedies to suggestions at 31 above and agreement to focus on outcomes followed by the process to achieve them with less emphasis on the process as an end in itself.

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

Response:

Specific guidance is useful, as are practical learning opportunities on what works.

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?

Response:

Learning and development needs specifically related to sustainable development are a very high priority. Skills development should be geared not just to professional skills, but also to support councillors, other community, voluntary and business representatives. Development should be multi layered, so it is equally applicable to the inexperienced through to the Chief Executives.

35. What learning or development do you feel is required by LSPs in order to delivery sustainable communities that embody the principles of sustainable development at the local level?

Response:

We welcome the increased emphasis on sustainable development and agree that this should be at the heart of community strategies and local development frameworks. However there is a need for a clear and shared understanding of 'sustainable' development. There is tension between what is defined in the Local Government Act 2000 guidance and the ODPM definition.

There should be clarity about what key issues should be tackled, an ability to prioritise and focus on these key issues, and an ability to deal with difficulties that this approach might produce from groups who consider the LSP to be a source of funding. There needs to be further education of partners as to what each organisations remit is and their funding mechanisms. In broad terms there is a need for:

- A common understanding of sustainable development agreed across central and local government.
- More education and information
- Influence over partners and sub-partnerships, with clear and consistent messages from national as well as local government.
- Capacity to take tough decisions, which face some opposition.
- Identification of whether agencies and function typically involved in LSPs include all of those necessary to achieve sustainable development eg. transport, providers are underrepresented.
- LSPs (and their component organisations) to be able to access necessary resources, eg capital investment in infrastructure.
- Spatial planning powers to be strengthened, eg issues of land ownership, powers in relation to utilities.

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