

**LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS:
SHAPING THEIR FUTURE
(Report by Head of Policy)**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an opportunity to consider and comment on Local Strategic Partnerships: Shaping Their Future, a consultation paper issued by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. Copies of the consultation document are available at <http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1162320> or on request from the Policy Division.
- 1.2 This report summarises some of the main points of the consultation paper under four sections –
- the role of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and *Sustainable Community Strategies* (SCS);
 - governance;
 - accountability; and
 - capacity.
- 1.3 The consultation is based on the development of existing models and thinking about LSPs and community strategies and is informed by a recent national evaluation and work undertaken by the Audit Commission. It poses a series of questions, set out in the Annexe to this report.
- 1.4 The consultation paper is being considered by a number of the partners involved in the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership (HSP), who will submit their own comments to the ODPM. The Board of the HSP has also considered the implications of the proposals and where appropriate their comments have been incorporated into section 7 – Implications and Conclusions, post.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The consultation is part of the Government's debate on the future of local government and includes key ambitions for the future development of LSPs, including –
- a commitment from to the LSP model of partnerships and the SCS as an over-arching local plan;
 - the involvement of local authorities, including Members, in facilitating action through the LSP and SCS;
 - delivering against the priorities for joint action in the SCS, Local Area Agreement (LAA), Local Development Framework, etc; and

- engagement with neighbourhoods and parishes so that they can influence service delivery.

3. THE ROLE OF LSPs AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGIES

3.1 The Government suggests that LSPs should increasingly become involved in the delivery and commissioning of services.

3.2 LSPs also have key roles in terms of increasing the opportunities for neighbourhood engagement and in supporting such engagement by ensuring that neighbourhoods and parish councils can influence priorities. Linked to this role is the development of coordinating community leadership through partnership.

3.3 A further influence on the role of the LSP is the change in focus of Community Strategies to become *Sustainable* Community Strategies with fully integrated social, environmental and economic objectives. The Government envisage enhancement of strategies by better definition and analysis of baseline data and evidence, input from neighbourhoods/partners and links to regional and sub-regional activities.

3.4 The Government therefore envisage the role of LSPs as —

- a partnership of partnerships, providing the strategic coordination and linking with other plans and bodies at regional, sub-regional and local level;
- producing and delivering a *Sustainable* Community Strategy;
- developing and driving the effective delivery of Local Area Agreements; and
- agreeing an action plan for achieving Sustainable Community Strategy priorities, incorporating the LAA outcomes.

3.5 In two tier areas, it is expected that —

- **County level LSPs** will agree the LAA and relevant action plan, taking into account priorities identified by District Councils and LSPs in their community strategies;
- **District level LSPs** will, through their Sustainable Community Strategies, be fully involved in the drawing-up and implementing of the County-wide Sustainable Community Strategy and will reflect the LAA outcomes in the District LSPs' action plans and future iterations of District-led plans including Local Development Frameworks.

3.6 The consultation paper also re-states the need to make explicit the relationship with Local Development Frameworks to ensure that the land use requirements of the SCS are implemented.

3.7 In two tier areas the consultation paper supports arrangements where either District level SCS are aggregated to form a County Strategy or the County Strategy focuses on where it can add value to District Strategies.

4. GOVERNANCE

4.1 The consultation paper identifies that transparent and effective governance arrangements are essential to enable LSPs to —

- fulfil their coordinating role as a partnership of partnerships;
- move from advisory to commissioning’
- avoid duplication; and
- ensure wide representation, particularly the involvement of local authorities.

4.2 It is recognised that the model of governance for LSPs must reflect local circumstances and detailed structures are not specified. However, the paper outlines a basic structure which includes an Executive Board which is able to take strategic decisions, underpinned by local thematic partnerships which will effectively be the delivery mechanisms for the partnership. Consideration is being given to the issue of geographic boundaries of partner organisation and whether these can be aligned. The consultation paper also discusses the idea of Local Public Service Boards, which it believes should be established within the LSP, rather than as a rival to it to avoid the blurring of accountability and decision-making.

4.3 Local Area Agreements are seen as a means of delivering outcomes to achieve the priorities of the LSP and SCS and the consultation paper suggests the usefulness of structuring LSPs around the four blocks of LAAs (safer, stronger communities; children and young people; healthier communities and older people; and economic development and enterprise) with other partnership groups as necessary.

4.4 Active and wide representation in all sections of the LSP is seen to be a key to effective governance and the consultation paper specifically highlights the need for involvement of the voluntary and community sector and business sectors.

4.5 The consultation paper discusses the benefits of providing LSPs with some form of legislative foundation, to —

- signal the importance of partnership working;
- reinforce and clarifying the LSP’s role;
- reiterate the local authority’s role;
- set out minimum expectation on partners; and
- ensure that key public sector agencies are engaged in the partnership.

4.6 However, the Government recognises that such a model could create a new statutory entity and a new layer of local bureaucracy to rival democratically elected local authorities. As such it is not a model

which they wish to pursue and as an alternative suggest a “duty to co-operate” - following the model applied to partnerships such as the Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnerships and, more recently, the Children’s Trust arrangements.

5. ACCOUNTABILITY

- 5.1 The consultation paper identifies that clear accountability requires —
- mutually understood and accepted ways of working;
 - internal performance management; and
 - external scrutiny.
- 5.2 Within the LSP, each partner is responsible for the actions that they agree to undertake and as such are accountable to their organisation and to the local community. The consultation paper suggests that formal agreements or protocols between partners can be an effective way of ensuring clarity about who is responsible for the different elements of the SCS and LAA delivery.
- 5.3 Although the Government are considering creating a duty on public sector bodies to participate, they have no plans to make LSPs statutory bodies. Local authorities with their democratic mandate and community leadership role are ultimately responsible therefore for the LSP, SCS and the delivery of LAAs.
- 5.4 Effective performance management is an important element which will help to ensure accountability for allocating delivery of outcomes to partners and monitoring progress against performance.
- 5.5 Elected members of local authorities have a unique role and as such their support to the LSP and community strategy process is seen as crucial to achieving success. However, in terms of accountability, existing mechanisms like the Overview & Scrutiny role are not being used fully in terms of LSPs. Research supporting the consultation paper suggests that the precise role of elected members – both Executive and non-Executive - is not currently clear and highlights one potential role of Overview & Scrutiny Panels in working with their Executive to identify community needs, in scrutinising plans and priorities, and in evaluating success.
- 5.6 The consultation paper argues that it is crucial that local residents are involved in a coherent way that makes most efficient use of partner resources and residents’ time. It suggests that the alignment of the local development framework’s statement of community involvement with the development of SCS and the LAA would provide an opportunity to establish such a practice.

6. CAPACITY ISSUES

- 6.1 The consultation paper recognises that to meet this changing role the capacity of LSPs is becoming increasingly important, in particular —
- the skills needed to develop effective partnerships;

- the resources available for developing the SCS and the operation of the Partnerships;
 - the availability of general support and training to partners of the LSP.
- 6.2 The consultation paper identifies some of the new or changing skills required by the shift in the role of Strategic Partnerships. It also identifies that the majority of funding for Strategic Partnerships currently comes from resources from within local authorities, but that increasingly partner organisations are allocating resources to the achievement of priorities through partnership.

7. IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1 The consultation on the future shape of Local Strategic Partnerships is intended to form part of the debate on the future of local government. However, it is regarded as premature to consider these proposals in isolation from suggestions for changes in the structure of local government.
- 7.2 The model used in the consultation paper is based on a presumption that each local authority should have its own LSP and sustainable community Strategy. This model is different from the one currently operating in Huntingdonshire/Cambridgeshire. While there is some attempt to discuss the respective roles in a two-tier structure, the consultation paper does not appear to grasp the complexity of partnership working across a number of tiers, nor does it offer the clarity which would avoid duplication or add value to the work of individual partners.
- 7.3 There is a general consensus within the membership of the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership that any guidance on the structure and roles of Strategic Partnerships should not be prescriptive. This would allow effective partnerships to develop which meet local circumstances. Many of the proposals to develop strategic partnerships identified in the consultation paper are being implemented locally, albeit some are in the early stages of development.

8. RECOMMENDATION

- 8.1 The Cabinet are requested to endorse the comments set out in the conclusions to this report for submission as part of the consultation exercise, together with any specific comments relating to the direct questions set out in the Annexe to this report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Local Strategic Partnerships: Shaping Their Future – a consultation paper issued by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, December 2005.

Contact Officer: Ian Leatherbarrow, Head of Policy
 (01480) 388005