

Appendix A

Local Strategic Partnerships:

A Consultation

Purpose

The Government have now produced a consultation paper on the way forward for Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP's) in the context of the changing environment and the growing role perceived by Government. This report outlines the key elements of the consultation paper on which views are requested by 3rd March 2006.

Context

Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and Community Strategies were introduced as a result of the Local Government Act 2000. LSPs are now established in all areas and progress has been made in terms of community strategy development and partnership working.

This consultation examines the future role of LSPs, their governance and accountability, and their capacity to deliver Sustainable Community Strategies. It poses a series of questions so that Government can get a better idea of how LSPs are operating at present and where changes could be made nationally, regionally and locally to help them develop effectively.

The Government's ambitions for the future development of LSPs include:-

- Securing commitment amongst central government departments, regional organisations and local partners to the LSP system of partnerships and the Sustainable Community Strategy as the over-arching local plan;
- An evolving role for the local authority developing in facilitating action through the LSP and Sustainable Community Strategies; LSPs being able to effectively identify and deliver against the priorities for joint action in their area through a Sustainable Community Strategy, Local Area Agreement (LAA) and Local Development Framework, in a clearly accountable way;
- LSP's being better able to support neighbourhood engagement and helping to ensure the views of neighbourhoods and parish councils influence strategic local service delivery and spending; and
- Securing effective, transparent and accountable governance and scrutiny arrangements for LSPs to enable partners to hold each other to account and local people to hold the overall partnership to account.

Role of Local Strategic Partnerships and Sustainable Community Strategies

The Government see the role of LSPs developing as follows:-

1. To be the partnership of partnerships in an area, providing the strategic co-ordination within an area and linking with other plans and bodies established at the regional and sub-regional and local level.
2. 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 founded on a solid evidence base
3. To develop and drive the effective delivery of the LAA locally.
4. To agree an action plan for achieving the Sustainable Community Strategy priorities, including the LAA outcomes

In relation to Sustainable Community Strategies, these are seen as an evolution of the Community Strategy requirement introduced in the Local Government Act 2000. They should take on board policy developments arising from the introduction of Local Area Agreements, Local Development Frameworks, the Government's new Sustainable Development Strategy and the Government's desire to see Sustainable Communities in every place – communities where people want to live and work.

A Sustainable Community Strategy will need to be developed through a number of stages. The Government's views on the stages proposed are outlined below.

1. Baseline current performance
 - The strategy should outline a long-term vision for the area, using the definition and components of sustainable communities. This should not be a tick-box exercise, but an accurate consideration of how the components should contribute to communities with their own unique identities – a positive sense of place.
 - It will need to be built on robust data available from such sources as the Neighbourhood Statistics and Area Profiles websites, individual local partners, as well as surveys and discussions with local citizens and businesses.
 - It needs to establish baselines where data is new and map trends and trajectories where data has been available for a while.
 - Where possible, surveys and area data should disaggregate demographic and socio economic information into race, gender, disability, faith, age and sexual orientation.

2. Evidence : analysis of performance and local conditions

- The vision needs to be explicitly grounded in an analysis of the local area's needs and ideally an understanding of the totality of resources coming into the area.
- Forecasting: this should produce a medium-term plan for the next 5 – 10 years which builds upon the evidence and data referred to above and an evaluation of priorities identified in other local and regional partnerships' plans and strategies.
- Wherever possible, it should also relate closely to Local Development Frameworks in the area, ideally using common data (e.g. from Geographical Information Systems), and common consultation mechanisms.
- As previously recommended by the Government, planning relating to neighbourhood renewal, culture & biodiversity should be subsumed within Sustainable Community Strategies.

3. Local Area Agreements

The outcomes and targets included in the LAA should reflect this over-arching vision.

4. Revised action plan

The current Community Strategy Plan and the LAA delivery plan should become one and the same.

5. The Sustainable Community Strategy/LAA Action Plan

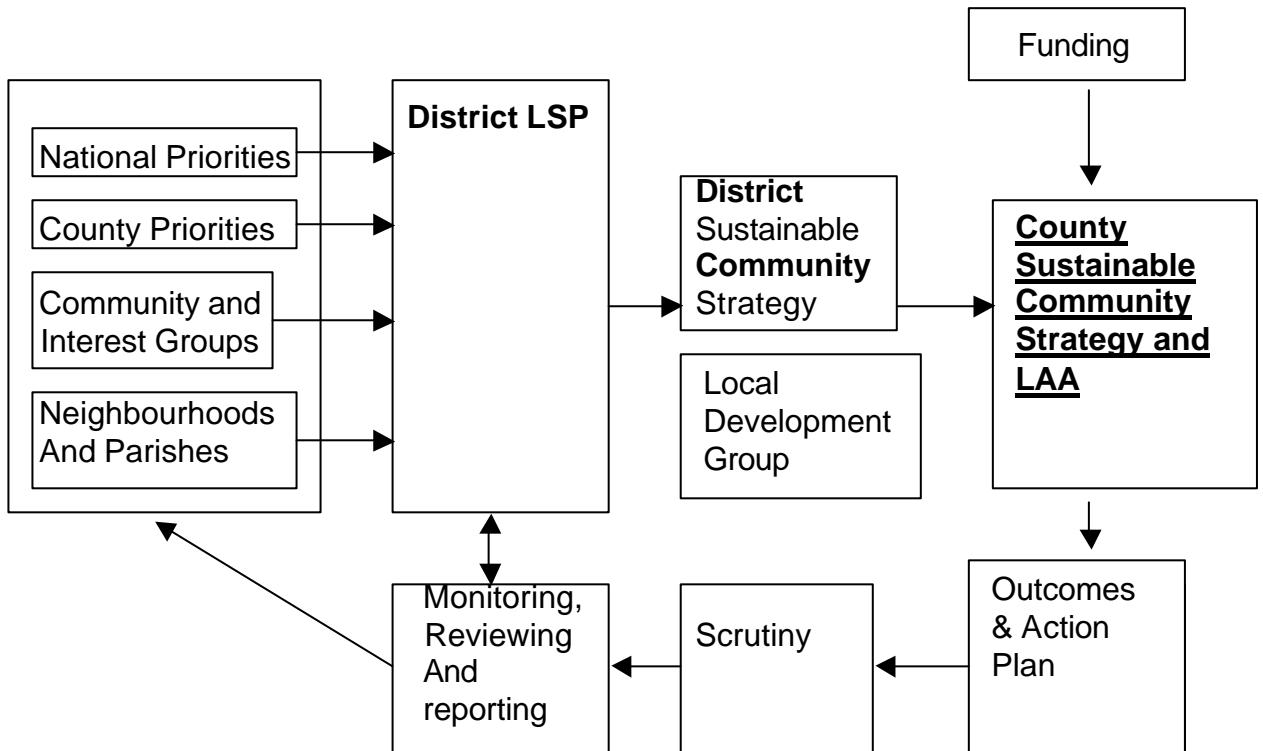
- This should state who is accountable for what actions, with what resources and to what timescale. Where appropriate, these should be neighbourhood or area-specific. The plan should also state how progress will be monitored, reviewed and reported on to citizens, businesses, partner organisations and, where appropriate, to central government. There is no need for the action to duplicate the work already done in the development of other plans e.g. the Children and Young People's Plan could become the children and young people's part of the Action Plan.
- Future iterations of theme, area or service-based plans should take into account the overall Sustainable Community Strategy and vice versa.

6. In line with the LAA review timetable the Government would expect a Sustainable Community Strategy to be refreshed on an annual basis and reviewed every three years.

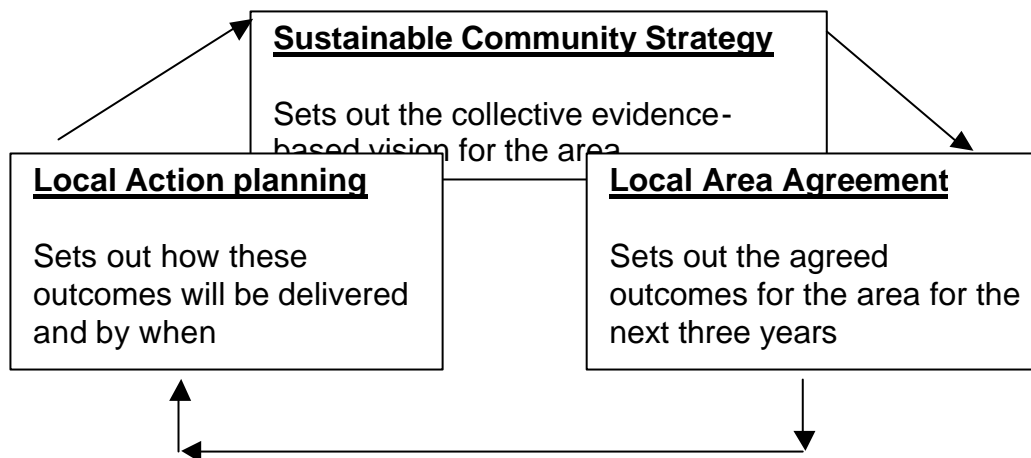
The Government's view is that in future Community Strategies need to be much more evidence based, using neighbourhood statistics produced by the Office for National Statistics and the Area Profiles and Quality of Life indicator information produced by the Audit Commission.

The Government's vision of the relationship between Sustainable Community Strategies, the Local Area Agreement Process and the LSP Action Planning in "two-tier" areas is outlined below.

District Framework



How the process should operate



The Government emphasise in the consultation the importance of the Local Development Framework (LDF) in the delivery of any Sustainable Community Strategy. It sets out the out the long term spatial vision

To ensure that the LDF can become the spatial expression of the Sustainable Community Strategy links need to be made through the process and most importantly LSPs and local planning authorities need to work closely together throughout the planning and delivery cycles of these plans and strategies.

The Consultation Paper outlines that establishing clear roles and responsibilities between LSP's at County level and District level can be problematic.

Research has identified three main ways of working:

1. **Aggregation model** – where district-level Community Strategies are aggregated to form an overarching strategy, at county level
2. **Added Value model** – County Community Strategy focuses on areas where it can add value to district strategies – creating more strategic focus, avoiding duplication and with an emphasis on sub-regional issues
3. **Separatist model** – where the county strategy has been developed with few linkages and in isolation to district strategies

While retaining scope for local discretion, there may be value in being clearer about the roles of different LSPs across a county. The Government wants to encourage more areas to move to a combination of the 'added value' and 'aggregation' models.

A possible model in two-tier areas could be to develop a strategic Sustainable Community Strategy at county level, with a remit to engage with the regional, sub-regional tiers and district authorities/LSPs to reflect their priorities. District-level LSPs could then focus on local/neighbourhood engagement and establishing an analysis of the needs of their population. Research suggests that in several places this is the model that has evolved naturally.

In respect of this consultation, the Government asks the following questions on the role of LSP's and Sustainable Community Strategies –

Governance of the LSP

The key feature of LSPs is that they should be the overarching partnership in a locality bringing together all local thematic partnerships. For this system of partnerships to operate as an effective co-ordinator of delivery, each LSP needs effective, accepted and transparent governance arrangements.

As LSPs move from advisory bodies to commissioning bodies – effective governance arrangements become increasingly vital. A recent Audit Commission report on this subject takes this argument further to commend a

formal partnership agreement between partners to cover the nature of governance. This would be expected to reflect the local situation but should cover the role, membership, responsibilities and accountability between partners.

A local authority's involvement is vital to the effective operation of an LSP. The local authority is responsible for producing the Sustainable Community Strategy and is accountable for the LSP's actions. The local authority is also the accountable body for the LAA. The local authority's democratic mandate and accountability provides a clear basis on which to determine priorities across the local area. Therefore the Government sees a clear role for the local authority in initiating and maintaining momentum in the LSP: ensuring appropriate representation across the different sectors including involving local residents; and scrutinising the LSP.

LSPs must ensure that partnership arrangements are inclusive. This means that members from all sectors of the LSP should agree the partnership structure and have adequate opportunity to influence and hold to account members of the executive. The LSP as the 'partnership of partnerships' must provide the overview and strategic co-ordination that effective partnership working within a locality requires.

The Government does not believe it is sensible for LSP structures to be specified in detail at national level. However, it feels that the basic structure of an LSP should include some form of executive board, which is able to take strategic decisions, underpinned by local thematic partnerships which need to feed into the board and which effectively are the delivery mechanisms for the LSP. The board will need to be made up of all the key interests in an area: elected representatives, the local authority Chief Executive, senior public sector officials, voluntary, community and business sector representatives and local residents. It is important that as far as possible boards and the core membership of LSPs reflect the diversity of the area. The lead representative from each of the main thematic partnerships, such as the Children's trust and Crime And Disorder Reduction Partnerships would be expected to be a core member of the board, as would a senior planner.

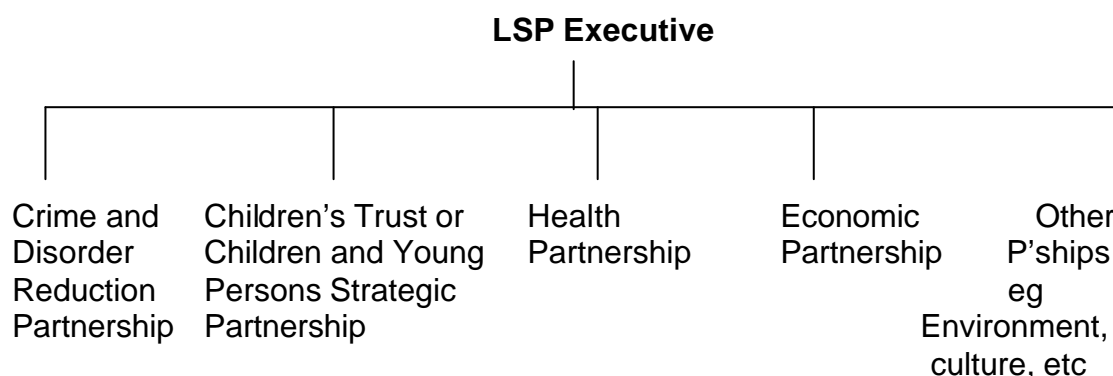
The LAA structure and its relation to the LSP

Local Area Agreements put LSPs at the centre of negotiation, delivery and monitoring of the priority outcomes of a local area. Most LAAs are focussing around four blocks: Safer and Stronger Communities; Children and young People; Healthier Communities and Older People; and Economic Development and Enterprise. Many areas have begun to cluster local partnerships around these four thematic areas to enable more focused discussion and decision-making in the LSP. This clustering of partnerships around blocks is a useful approach though the Government do not want to prescribe this as the optimum structure for LSPs.

Partnership arrangements for LSPs need to reflect the full remit of their Sustainable Community Strategies. This means ensuring themes such as the

environment, transport, culture, and adult learning are catered for effectively in the partnership arrangements. Cross-cutting themes such as sustainable development also need to be considered. It would be expected that the LSP Executive Board or equivalent and the local authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee, would be responsible for ensuring that all cross cutting issues are picked up.

A suggested basic LSP governance structure is outlined below:



A possible legislative foundation for LSPs

As all LSPs begin to move towards a greater delivery co-ordination role, as opposed to operating in a purely advisory capacity, the Government are considering whether to set them on a firmer footing by clarifying and formalising their role, and ensuring the involvement of key agencies. This could better enable them to fulfil a much more substantive role and could also provide the basis for holding the partnership to account.

The main benefits of providing the LSP with some form of legislative foundation would be:

- a) To send a strong signal from national government that partnership working across the whole set of issues in an area is important;
- b) To reinforce and clarify the LSP's role as the 'partnership of partnerships' particularly in relation to individual thematic partnerships with a statutory foundation;
- c) To provide an opportunity to reiterate the centrality of the local authority's role to the LSP by giving them a clear initiation role;
- d) To set out the minimum expectations being placed on partner members and thereby avoid confusion; and
- e) In areas of poorer partnership working, to ensure that the key public sector agencies are engaged in the LSP.

Accountability

Within an LSP, each partner is responsible for the actions that they agree to undertake, and as such are accountable for the delivery of those actions to the LSP, to their parent organisation and to the local community. It is essential that the accountability between partners is clarified and understood. Formal agreements or protocols between partners can be an effective way of ensuring clarity about who is responsible for the different elements of the Sustainable Community Strategy and the LAA delivery.

An LSP is accountable to different audiences:

- a) To local people through the democratic process through the local authority and, more directly, in listening to and informing local communities. The Overview and Scrutiny role of the Council also has a role here.
- b) Central government in relation to outcomes agreed in the LAA.
- c) To the local authority executive, as ultimate responsibility for the LSPs actions rests with it

Local authorities are democratically elected. As such they have the mandate to improve social, economic and environmental outcomes across the local area. LSPs are therefore ultimately accountable to the local authority. LSPs are voluntary unincorporated partnerships which do not discharge any statutory functions.

Although the Government is considering creating a duty on some public sector bodies to participate with local authorities in regard to Community Strategies, to ensure the LSPs have the ability to lead work across different services, it has no plans to make LSPs statutory bodies. Local authorities with their democratic mandate and community leadership role are ultimately the body responsible for the LSP, Sustainable Community Strategy and the delivery of the LAAs as a whole.

Establishing clear lines of accountability within and from the LSP will enable a clear focus on delivery of agreed outcomes and thereby support good performance. It will also enable targeted action to be taken in any areas of under-performance. Clarity of accountability between partners will enable the partnership to address such issues collectively in advance of any external action from government. Clear accountability and greater transparency will also enable local people and service users to play a key role in holding the LSP to account.

With the introduction of Local Area Agreements (LAAs), all LSPs must be able to manage their performance effectively.

The LAA performance management framework is based around effective performance management by the LSP and an ongoing relationship between the partnership and the Government Office (GO). The LSP will report formally to the GO on performance against the outcomes and indicators in the LAA every six months. At those points in the year there will also be a dialogue between the LSP and the GO about progress in implementing the LAA, how the LSP intends to tackle any problems and support which the GO can offer. Following these dialogues GOs will, in turn, report on progress to Central Government Departments.

Government recognises that pressures that exist between local agencies and their parent departments/ organisations often do not provide incentives for partnership working. Instead many local partnerships are driven by specific national priorities and find it difficult to devote sufficient attention to the delivery of LSP objectives. This contributes to the impression that LSPs sometimes operate more as talking shops with lip service paid to partnership working. Partnership working is viewed as an addition to the 'day job' rather than core business.

The Government consider it would be helpful to clarify partners roles and commitments through partnership agreements or protocols between partners. Partnership agreements can define the role of the partnership, its terms of Reference, and the expected and agreed contribution from all partners. This might include seniority of those attending, financial and staff contributions to the operation of the partnership. However, partnership agreements should not be seen as a substitute for the effort needed to build trust.

To enable accountability between partners to be strengthened requires a lessening of the purely organisation-based accountability between an agency and its central department. It is integral to Government's vision for the long-term future of LSPs, and local governance more generally, that the space for individual local agencies to act innovatively and collaboratively is increased through a reduction in the level of organisation-based/national targets.

The longer-term aim of the LAA performance management framework is to reduce the burden of reporting on local areas – thus enabling a focus on the agreed priorities set out in the LAA.

At present, only the local authority is assessed on the quality of its partnership working through the Comprehensive Performance Assessment and the Primary Care Trust through the Healthcare Commission. It may be more effective in securing commitment and the necessary space for collaborative working from the other public sector agencies if partnership working was included as part of other key agencies' assessments. This and other related issues are being explored as part of the Government's Reducing Inspections consultation.

Elected members of local authorities have a key role in carrying responsibility for the overall balance of governance in an area and being directly

accountable to citizens. As such, their support to the LSP and Community Strategy process is crucial to achieving success.

Currently, there is a high level of local authority representation on LSPs. However, the function they are performing is not always the most appropriate one and existing council mechanisms like the Overview and Scrutiny Committee appear not to be used to greatest effect. Research into the current progress made by LSPs on Community Strategies suggests that the precise role of elected members of the local authority, both the executive and backbenchers, is currently not well understood.

At present Councils have limited powers to require partners other than the local authority and health, to attend Overview and Scrutiny Committees and recognise their recommendations. It may be useful to extend this to other sectors. There is also potential for the neighbourhood/parish sector to have wider involvement in overview and scrutiny where their local knowledge could be of benefit.

Unlike councillors, Members of Parliament are currently not well represented on LSPs. As LSPs become the key strategic partnership in an area, the Government feels it is important that they involve MPs. MPs have substantial democratic legitimacy in the local area and the ability to bring a wide range of partners to the table to produce genuinely collaborative working. However, no prescribed way is suggested for doing this.

For LSPs to be effective the local community, voluntary and private sectors must be engaged and their needs, priorities and views taken into account. LSPs need to be actively involving councillors, resident and community representatives in their decision-making.

Under both the Local Area Agreement and Local Development Framework processes, the local authority is required to set out how the local community is involved in determining priorities and actions. The Community Strategy guidance also requires the local authority to consult local stakeholders when producing the Community Strategy. The Government believes it is critical that these different processes for involving the local community are complementary.

The Capacity and skills needed by LSPs

Due to the shift in role towards co-ordinating delivery, the capacity of all LSP's is becoming increasingly important. It is vital that all LSPs develop the capacity to succeed against the expectations placed upon them.

When LSPs were first set up it was important that local areas focused on developing robust partnership arrangements with clear governance and structures. Now, as LSPs are becoming more focused on delivery of outcomes, the skills needed to develop and maintain effective LSPs are changing. LSPs now also need skills in performance management, planning, data collection, analysis and use of evidence and evaluation. Influencing and

collaboration skills are also vital in ensuring strong, effective leadership by the LSP. It is recognised that with the increasing emphasis on engaging communities, LSPs need to develop the skills to ensure that this happens. There is a need for many LSPs to develop new approaches to involve the private sector and community sectors. LSP members and staff might also benefit from a development of specialist skills related to equality impact assessments and mainstreaming equalities.

Sir John Egan's review of skills for sustainable communities identified LSPs as being key stakeholders who would require learning opportunities to improve skills in joining up social, economic and environmental disciplines. The Academy for Sustainable Communities, Defra and ODPM are now exploring the learning opportunities which would best support LSPs in their work to help create genuinely sustainable communities. Initial research has found that significant gaps exist in LSP skills and learning, particularly in their capacity to integrate social, economic and environmental issues to address the area's wider or more long-term environmental impacts. This skills gap must be filled if LSPs are to be able to deliver genuinely sustainable communities.

It also reflects work going on across the public sector to improve skills and knowledge about delivering genuinely sustainable communities; for example the National School for Government's work to include sustainable communities in its training portfolio for civil servants.

Experience of the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund LSPs and the broader evaluation of all LSPs have identified the following key building blocks for successful LSPs:

Leadership – Clarity of vision, commitment of all partners to agreed priorities/targets and embedding these within partners' own business plans

Delivery manager – A senior manager and small team is needed to enable and drive implementation of the local strategy. This involves planning, co-ordinating action with priority places and groups, project management, overcoming obstacles and tracking progress.

Delivery system – a system with sufficient analytical capacity is needed to collate and analyse data, appraise options and provide evidence-based management information to drive and monitor performance

Communication – across the partnership, with all sectors and with the public is vital so there is awareness of goals, actions and achievement.

Resources Available

There is a wide variation in the level of resources made available for developing the Sustainable Community Strategy. Over half of local authorities (57%) had a specific budget for developing the Community Strategy but the remaining had no budget. There is a similarly wide range of staff levels. 69%

of LSPs have only 1 or 2 people involved in development of the Community Strategy.

The Government expects LSPs to be supported by partners within existing budgets as partnership working should be a more efficient way of delivering outcomes. Currently, local authorities provide the vast majority of LSP support and resources (the average annual budget for LSPs is £78,000 (excluding those in areas in receipt of Neighbourhood Renewal Funding)).

Where it is clear that actions agreed by the LSP will have a beneficial financial knock-on effect to partners, resources should be allocated by those partners up front to ease the burden on any one agency that would traditionally be expected to fund the action. For major actions this may require a cost/benefit analysis or impact assessment to be carried out.

There is a wide range of support and training available for partners of LSPs. Some is directly focused on LSPs. Other training develops capacity in areas that have a strong impact on the effectiveness of an LSP such as leadership, negotiation and partnership-building skills. However, the training to date has been provided by a number of different sources, in a variety of different ways, based on several different criteria. It is crucial that the support provided is made much more available to all LSPs, not just those in areas receiving neighbourhood renewal funding, and that it is provided in a coherent way ideally with one access route.