

North Hertfordshire Partnership

Briefing Note

What Do Local Strategic Partnerships Do?

LSPs aim to improve the way that local services are planned and delivered. They help local agencies and others to focus on improving the quality of life and leadership in a locality.

They often have no resources of their own but rely on negotiations and pooling of resources between partners. In some areas there were partnerships which existed before LSPs that had been set up to organise and co-ordinate a number of services. These included partnerships for regeneration, health and community safety.

It could be that the LSP has developed out of an existing previous partnership. One of the main purposes of LSPs is to try and ensure that the work of all partners fits together in one overall strategy.

Local authorities often provide most or all of the administration and co-ordination for the LSP. This is partly due to local authorities having initial responsibility for ensuring LSPs were set up and for delivering the Community Strategy. However leadership does not have to come only from within the local authority but can come from any organisation that is a member.

An LSP can often be structured as a 'network of networks'. This can mean that views and information are sent from a wide range of community groups to a smaller set of groups until they reach a central LSP group. However it is not always as straightforward as this.

The sub-groups of LSPs often focus on particular sections of the community and issues like disability, older people or unemployment. They are usually called theme groups. Groups can also be focused on geographical areas like a few streets or part of a town.

In some LSPs a lot of the decision-making happens at the theme or area group meetings and not the central LSP group.

There are also existing partnerships, often with statutory responsibilities for the area (for example Children's Trusts or Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships/ Community Safety Partnerships) which need to be fully involved and/or represented on the LSP.

The general idea is to have a Partnership and a Sustainable Community Strategy that:

- helps improve public services through improved planning between public sector agencies and partners
- improves local quality of life through a long-term vision shared by partners
- involves local people in deciding the sort of community they want now and for future generations
- has an action plan explaining who will be responsible for delivering priorities and when
- sets out how progress will be monitored, reviewed and reported on.

The partnership and Sustainable Community Strategy should take particular care to ensure that equalities law and guidance like the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 are taken into account.

Local authority boundaries can be complex. Some areas have only one local authority, responsible for all council services (a unitary authority). Other areas have a district council for some services and a county council for others, like education and social services ('two-tier authorities'). In these cases most of the resources lie with the county council. Rural areas and some urban areas also have a parish council.

Councils at different levels need to talk to each other. Regional bodies may also be involved.

The LSP has to take account of local government boundaries, but the rules are flexible enough to allow local authorities to join together in an LSP to provide better services.

LSPs involve people in different ways and at different levels. Involvement might be at a board level, a theme group or through an area forum. Generally LSPs do not have a separate legal identity.

What is a Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS)?

A Sustainable Community Strategy is the larger plan that draws on and influences future plans from all key local organisations. It should also draw on available data sources and community aspirations to identify what issues are priorities. Previously known as community strategies they have evolved the past four years into sustainable community strategies.

The SCS sets out how services can be improved and delivered in ways that increase the environmental, social and economic well-being of the community.

A sustainable community should be long-lasting, be a place where people want to live and work and enable residents and businesses to be able to meet their aspirations.

LSPs play a key role in driving forward the sustainable community agenda within an area.

By law, all local authorities in England must have a sustainable community strategy to promote or improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area.

The local authority is responsible for producing the strategy but must consult with local residents and partners – normally in partnership through the LSP. The LSP owns the strategy. It is written on behalf of all the partners.

Local Development Framework (LDF).

The Planning System is a key issue for the creation of sustainable communities and the law requires Local Development Frameworks (LDF) to relate to Community Strategies. Local Development Frameworks are the new name for development plans for an area. These need to be drawn up with the involvement of voluntary and community sector (VCS) groups too and LSP and LDF processes should be brought together as much as possible.

The Sustainable Community Strategy:

- covers what types of activities, services and support are needed
- addresses deprivation and neighbourhood renewal – this may be through a local neighbourhood renewal strategy that needs to be closely linked to the sustainable community strategy
- explains what is already being provided and considers how well this meets local need
- co-ordinates services better so that overlaps can be avoided
- promotes local people's involvement in planning services and improving the areas where they live
- involves private companies and community and voluntary groups
- develops a future plan for the area
- links with local neighbourhood/parish plans and regional/sub-regional plans.

Since the Local Government Act (2000), decisions about your local community have been made and are continuing to be made with or without you being involved. Your involvement is important to ensure that decisions being made reflect those of people in your situation or whom you may represent. New legislation (the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007) made the LSP., Sustainable Community Development and your involvement even more important.

Voluntary and community groups and residents are expected to be fully involved in the development of the sustainable community strategy.

Groups could make sure that their activities and services are known and taken account of by the LSP when it plans the overall co-ordination of services. Activities or services could include opportunities for people to meet or socialise, or providing personal care or transport.

This is a long-term change to the way services or developments are planned. The process of drawing together services and getting agreement on changes can take time and should be improved and revisited over the years. The involvement of voluntary and community groups and residents should be built into the process throughout so it's never too late to get involved.

Sustainable community strategies can include:

Transport, community safety, education, adult learning, health, reducing poverty, environment, affordable housing, community cohesion, economic well-being and more.

What Are Local Area Agreements?

Local Area Agreements (LAAs) are an important part of the 10-year vision set out by the Department for Communities and Local Government for the future of Local Government (former ODPM 2004).

The key aims of LAAs are to improve outcomes delivered to local people and the effectiveness and efficiency of the way Government works with local authorities and their partners to deliver local public services. This will be achieved by reducing bureaucracy, strengthening LSPs and ensuring more joined-up working within and between different government departments. Local priorities are different for each area and each local authority. A key aim of LAAs is to give local authorities and their partners far more flexibility to agree their priorities, identify and meet their objectives and allocate funding.

A Local Area Agreement is a new way for a local authority, in partnership with the LSP and central government, to agree national and local outcomes in an area and the targets by which progress will be measured. Different pots of Government funding will be brought together to be used in a flexible way that addresses local needs and raises the standard of services.

The Sustainable Community Strategy will be an important document in helping to determine what the needs and outcomes are – the official guidance describes the LAA as “the practical expression of the Sustainable Community Strategy”. Local authorities have to work jointly with other partners including the voluntary and community sector to achieve agreed priorities through LAAs. They need to produce a statement of how the voluntary and community sector (VCS) was involved in drawing up the LAA. LAA is an opportunity to deliver some of the SCS.

The regional Government Office (in our case GO-East) is responsible for negotiations on behalf of central Government and will look to ensure all appropriate partners are involved. Each of the nine regions in England has a Government Office. GOs have some responsibility for the regional work of various central government departments, including DCLG and Home Office.

In “two tier” areas such as Hertfordshire the LAA is at a county level but the district LSPs have an important role in influencing the agreement and may receive “reward money” if the agreed outcomes are achieved.

Local Area Agreements Can Include

- Improved outcomes in education and providing distractions from crime
- Reduced youth pregnancy
- Reduced consumption of illegal drugs by young people
- Increased physical activity
- Reduced serious and fatal road traffic accidents involving young people
- Reduced numbers of young people living in poverty and increased childcare places
- Reduced crime and harm caused by illegal drugs
- Reduced fear of crime
- Empowerment of local people to be involved in decision making and service delivery
- Improved and sustainable environment
- Better libraries, sport and cultural services.
- Improved health, life expectancy and reduced health inequalities
- Improved quality of life for older people
- Increased economic growth and productivity
- Reduce unemployment, increase skills of local people and share prosperity
- Sustainable growth and enterprise promoted.

LAA outcomes vary from area to area. They are often organised into blocks or themes.
A new LAA for Hertfordshire is due to be signed off in June 2008.

Adapted and abridged from the LSP Guide (Third Edition 2006) by Jim Brown, North Hertfordshire District Council, June 2008.