



Office of the
Deputy Prime Minister

Creating sustainable communities

Evaluation of Local Strategic Partnerships

*Strategic Planning:
A briefing note for LSPs by LSPs*



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A briefing note for LSPs by LSPs

Report of the Action Learning Set
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CONTENTS

SUMMARY

Definitions and concepts	5
Planning processes amongst LSPs in the set	5

CHAPTER 1 8

Introduction

Background	8
Our brief	9
Development of the set	9
This report	10

CHAPTER 2 11

Some definitions

Generic definition	11
Specific definition	12

CHAPTER 3 13

Strategic planning processes among LSPs in the set

Overview	13
Partnership processes	13
Strategic planning processes	14

CHAPTER 4 16

Challenges in producing strategies

Strategy, partnership and consultation overload	16
Tensions between different priorities	16
Lack of co-terminosity	17
Non-alignment of planning cycles	17
Lack of political commitment	17
The difficulty of remaining strategic	17
Relative immaturity of LSPs	18
Ambiguous position of Government Office representatives	18

CHAPTER 5 19

Overcoming the challenges: overview

Models of strategy development	19
The approach taken by the action learning set	21

CHAPTER 6	23
Processes for strategy making	
Why strategic planning is important for LSPs	23
A continuum of influence	23
LSP strategy development: a possible model	24
CHAPTER 7	29
The role of creativity in LSP strategy making	
Creativity in strategy: Blacon case study	30
A creative technique: the 'virtual child'	30
A creative technique: the neighbourhood focus	31
Future issues for Blacon	33
Pointers for LSPs	34
CHAPTER 8	36
People and relationships in strategy making and delivery	
The local authority role	36
The relationship between local authority strategy and LSP strategy: case study	36
Pointers for LSPs	38
CHAPTER 9	39
Conclusion: general lessons for LSPs	
APPENDIX 1	41
Overview of the evaluation	
APPENDIX 2	42
Action research topics in the programme	
APPENDIX 3	43
Strategic Planning Processes in Participant LSPs	
APPENDIX 4	57
Bibliography	

Summary

This report reflects the work of an action learning set comprising seven local strategic partnerships (LSPs); the paper is written as a report of the action learning set's work, and is not intended to constitute formal guidance. It has been commissioned by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and the Department for Transport (DfT) to provide guidance materials – specifically developed from local perspectives – to support other LSPs and local, regional and central partners and policy-makers¹.

Definitions and concepts

We used the term 'strategy' to mean plans – explicit or implicit – that:

- Enable the organisation to survive and thrive in its changing **environment**
- Express the **purpose** of the organisation or partnership at the highest of levels
- Are designed to deliver real changes in **outcomes** in society
- Are **long-term**, not short-term
- Are **holistic** in the sense that they seek to understand and address the needs of the whole system.

We regarded the Community Strategy as, in principle, the highest-level strategy in a locality and other local strategies as 'subsidiary'. We regarded the Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy as more important than other subsidiary strategies, partly because of the importance placed on it by ODPM. We therefore talked about it as a 'chapter in the Community Strategy'.

Planning processes amongst LSPs in the set

Strategic planning is a vital function of LSPs. It provides the means and the process through which all stakeholders can debate and sign up to shared goals. It also provides the mechanism and space through which (in theory at least) partners can be held to account to each other and to residents. Without strategic planning, the LSP, with no resources of its own, would be a much less significant player in the area it serves.

Establishing the partnership and capacity building has competed for time and attention with substantive activity, including strategy development. In these circumstances producing a Community and/or Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy was a tentative and drawn out process, and the result was seen by some partners as too broad brush and aspirational. Much energy was given to inclusiveness and tying in a wide range of interests. Where partnerships built on previous arrangements progress was quicker, but

¹ As such this report does not necessarily represent the views of government.

the evidence confirms that there are few short cuts to successful partnerships and that expectations of the speed at which LSPs could develop strategic capacity may have been over ambitious.

Nonetheless, the production of both Community and Local Neighbourhood Renewal strategies has had very positive effects. It has provided a stimulus to cross-sector multi-agency working, and in NRF areas the LNRS has been the lever at least to begin to activate the mainstream in new ways of looking at neighbourhoods.

CHALLENGES IN PRODUCING STRATEGIES

LSPs have faced a number of challenges in producing their Community Strategies and Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategies. These include strategy, consultation and partnership overload; tensions between different priorities; lack of co-terminosity of boundaries; non-alignment of planning cycles; lack of political commitment; the difficulty of remaining strategic; the relative immaturity of LSPs; and the ambiguous position of government office representatives.

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO STRATEGIC PLANNING

There are many alternative models of strategic planning. The central challenge of strategic planning for LSPs is not so much a technical one such as data availability or knowing which technique to use – although these can be problematic – but the softer issues of partnership processes and the complex institutional and policy environment within which strategic planning takes place. This limits the usefulness of planning models derived from less complex environments.

There is a continuum of potential approaches to LSP strategy development. At one end, strategies developed by the LSP are accumulations of the main points of existing, subsidiary strategies. At the other end, LSP strategies are the starting point and driver of all the subsidiary strategies in the locality. Most Community Strategies were at the ‘accumulation’ end of this continuum in their first iteration. We expect Community Strategies over time to move towards the ‘driving’ end and increasingly to shape subsidiary strategies.

A MODEL PROCESS FOR STRATEGY MAKING

There is a process for strategy development that, if followed, would help to continue to move LSP strategies along the continuum from ‘accumulation’ to ‘driving’. The main stages of the process are the classic:

- Strategic analysis
- Strategic choice
- Strategic implementation.

We break these stages down further into practical steps, showing how at each stage the process needs to accommodate the complex context in which LSPs operate.

THE USE OF CREATIVITY IN STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

LSP strategy making is likely to benefit from high levels of creativity in order to help organisations in the LSP break out of their traditional organisational mindset and so work more effectively together. We give a case study illustrating the use of two creative planning techniques – the ‘virtual child’ and the neighbourhood. These kinds of techniques are potentially powerful for LSPs engaged in strategic planning because they force attention onto the real problems people and communities face and make it harder for service providers to hide behind the intricacies of the process of service delivery. We therefore offer some pointers for LSPs on using creativity in their strategic planning.

PEOPLE AND RELATIONSHIP ISSUES IN STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

The relationship between local authorities and other partners is fundamental to the strategic planning process in LSPs. We give a case study on the management of tensions between the strategies of the LSP and the political strategies of councillors, and draw pointers for LSPs.

LESSONS FOR LSPS

We conclude with some general lessons for LSPs, focusing on the soft issues of partnership processes. These lessons have relevance beyond the confines of strategic planning.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Background

This briefing paper is an output from a programme of action research sponsored by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Department for Transport, as part of a wider evaluation of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs). An overview of the wider evaluation is included as Appendix 1.

The overall aims of the action research are to:

- Facilitate and support the development of LSPs
- Evaluate implementation processes
- Inform relevant government policy.

A list of the topics within the action research programme is included as Appendix 2.

The paper reflects the work of an action learning set involving representatives from seven LSPs. Membership of the set is given at the front of this report. The set met four times between April and October 2003. Members also worked on specific problems between meetings, with support from the Office for Public Management and Liverpool John Moores University. This paper therefore represents work done by LSPs, for LSPs. Throughout this report, the word 'we' refers to the set members, and the experience drawn on is that of the LSPs we represent. Where the consultants have added a commentary or there is a reference to the wider evaluation research, this is made clear.

The purpose of the set was to help LSPs to design and develop approaches to strategic planning and delivery that would work effectively at local level. The members of the set represented a diverse group of LSPs. We were aware that what worked for one LSP would not necessarily do so for another. The guidance in this paper is not, therefore, intended to be prescriptive; the emphasis is on providing LSPs with a menu of possible approaches and frameworks to help them decide what is right for them in their circumstances.

The aim of this paper is not to provide general guidance on strategic planning. Rather it is to provide guidance geared to the needs of LSPs specifically, although we hope that other partnerships will also find it relevant.

Within the broad parameters initially agreed with ODPM, the action learning set defined its own programme of work, focusing on the issues on which set members thought LSPs would most appreciate guidance. Thus, the agenda was set by LSPs themselves rather than being pre-determined by the research team or sponsors.

Our brief

The idea for this set's focus originated in the 2002 survey of LSPs. A large number of LSPs said they would welcome an action learning set on the working processes of the LSP. This seemed too broad and unfocussed a topic for a learning set, and the project steering group agreed with the consultants' suggestion that the set should focus on strategic planning and delivery as a way of exemplifying wider process issues which LSPs are facing.

Our brief was to examine two key strategic processes that have engaged LSPs so far: the development of community strategies and of local neighbourhood renewal strategies. We were to use these examples to review the effectiveness of the work processes chosen by LSPs. Our remit was then to:

- Offer useful information on the ways LSPs were addressing community strategies and local neighbourhood renewal strategies
- Look carefully at the processes that make LSPs effective
- Identify best practice.

We were to do this by reviewing the processes adopted in 2001-02 and by seeking to develop an analytical framework to identify strengths and weaknesses, and then to develop model approaches to guide effective process in the future. We were to explore the adaptation of the model approaches to particular local circumstances, and gather feedback. We were then to consider issues of transferability and dissemination.

It was agreed from the outset that the action learning sets would be free to respond to our briefs in the way that we thought would be most helpful for LSPs in general. The intention was that the learning set process, in which set members learn from each other by working together on a chosen topic, would be matched by a process of action research to complement the conventional policy research of the main study. The freedom given to the sets was intended to ensure that the work accurately reflected the real issues facing LSPs as apposed to those assumed by policy makers or researchers, and to produce 'bottom-up' lessons from the field rather than official guidance.

Development of the set

We found our brief a considerable challenge. The main reason for this was that LSPs represented in the set were at a very formative stage in terms of their strategy development. We believe – and this is supported by the findings of the wider evaluation – that this is typical of LSPs more widely. Most LSPs in the set had produced only one version of their community strategy and local neighbourhood renewal strategy. They had experienced considerable challenges (set out in section 4) in doing this and were still 'feeling their way'.

The process we followed was an exploratory one. The focus of the set evolved over the course of the months we were working, as we came to realise with greater force the extent to which the challenges LSPs face in strategic planning exemplify the difficulties they face more generally. The cases studies in this report reflect this growing

awareness, and our view that concrete examples set in real places are a valuable aid to learning.

Because of these factors, it was difficult for us to draw out learning from the set with the depth, precision and finality implied by the original brief. Other elements in the evaluation research (notably the formative evaluation case studies, the research on integration of performance indicators, and the review of local neighbourhood renewal strategies) indicate that this picture is typical of LSPs in general. The consultants' view is that the finding that the process of strategic planning is proving challenging for LSPs is in itself significant, with important implications for policy.

This report

This paper is written as a report of the action learning set's work, and is not intended to constitute formal guidance.

Despite the difficulties outlined above, we did, however, make considerable progress. This report covers:

- Initial baseline research to explore the processes LSPs in the set have used in the development of community strategies and local neighbourhood renewal strategies (also shown in Appendix 3);
- The challenges LSPs in the set have faced in producing their community strategies and local neighbourhood renewal strategies;
- The ways in which LSPs in the set are overcoming these challenges. This is at three levels:
 - The evolving process of strategy development. This includes the set's suggestion for a simple model for LSP strategy development
 - The use of creativity in strategy development. This includes a case study on the use of creative planning tools in Blacon in Chester
 - LSPs' work on maintaining relationships to facilitate strategy development. This is illustrated by a case study on the management of tensions between the strategies of the LSP and the political strategies of councillors in an anonymised geographical area
- Some pointers for LSP processes generalised from the lessons about LSP strategy development.

Although LSPs seeking practical guidance may wish only to dip into this report and the pointers for practice are clearly shown in the contents list, we think the report will be of most value if it is read in order.

CHAPTER 2

Some definitions

We found the subject of strategy development in LSPs large and complex. Right at the start of our discussion we found there was no shared understanding of the meaning of 'strategy'. For example, in some organisations, strategy is the highest level of planning undertaken by an organisation. But, in other organisations, 'policy' is the highest-level expression of an organisation's purpose and strategies are adopted to achieve policy.

We therefore set about to agree a working definition and to agree on the meaning of a number of related terms. In doing so, we were conscious that LSPs operate in a mainly public service environment.

In this report, we use two notions of strategy:

- A generic definition of strategy making for public services
- A specific definition of certain strategies LSPs are required to develop.

These are discussed below.

Generic definition

Many writers on strategy have developed definitions of the term. These are usefully summarised in Johnson and Scholes (2003)² and we have drawn on their work. In this paper we use the term strategy to mean plans – explicit or implicit – that:

- Enable the organisation to survive and even thrive in its changing **environment**.
- Express the **purpose** of the organisation (or, in this case, partnership) at highest of levels. Strategy then drives subsidiary decision making and actions.
- Are designed to deliver real changes in **outcomes** in society. Decisions about outcomes then drive decisions about outputs, processes and inputs, not vice versa.
- Are **long-term**, not short-term. The definition of long-term varies between different organisations and cultures. Public service strategies are subject to political direction and, therefore, a pull towards the short to medium term. They typically cover a period of three years (the government's spending review horizon), five years (many public service organisations are subject to quinquennial review) or, in a small number of cases, longer (the national NHS and transport plans).

2 Johnson G and Scholes J (2003), *Exploring corporate strategy*, FT Prentice Hall

- **Are holistic** in the sense that they seek to understand and address the needs of the whole system.

We also use the terms:

- **Delivery** to mean the achievement of the strategy (or elements of it)
- **Policy** to mean certain rules designed to govern operations so as to bring about delivery
- **Operations** to mean practical measures put in place to bring about delivery
- **Tactics** to mean manoeuvres (such as alliances with other organisations) made in the management of operations.

Specific definition

All local authorities are required by central government to produce a **community strategy** to maintain and improve the wellbeing of their community. In order to receive the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF), eligible local authority areas were also required to produce a **local neighbourhood renewal strategy**. Some local authorities/LSPs that do not receive NRF have produced a local neighbourhood renewal strategy (for example, the London Borough of Sutton) but we did not consider these in the action learning set.

Local authorities are required to produce their community strategy and local neighbourhood renewal strategy *in partnership* with the LSP in their area. The Accreditation Guidance for LSPs in 2001 indicated that, to get NRF funding for 2002/3, local authorities needed to show that they were part of an accredited LSP. Thus, while the *technical* requirement is on the local authority, people often say in *practice* that the *LSP* is required to produce a community strategy and a local neighbourhood renewal strategy.

In the set, we regarded the community strategy as, in principle, the highest-level strategy in a locality and other local strategies as 'subsidiary'. However, we found that there were issues around this in practice, and these are discussed later in this report.

We regarded the local neighbourhood renewal strategy as more important than other subsidiary strategies, partly because of the importance placed on it by ODPM. We therefore talked about it as a 'chapter in the community strategy'.

CHAPTER 3

Strategic planning processes among LSPs in the set

To support the work of the set, the consultants undertook two rounds of interviews with set members. The main focus of these interviews was strategic planning processes, but the responses cast light on LSP processes more widely, echoing findings from other parts of the national evaluation. The findings from these interviews are set out in detail in Appendix 3. In this section the main findings are briefly highlighted, focusing in particular on those which have wider resonance for LSP processes. The comments and queries reflect points made by interviewees.

The interviews underlined the great diversity of places represented in the set, with very different histories of partnership working and current arrangements and resources. At the same time, they showed the extent to which LSPs face shared challenges as well as different ones.

Overview

It is clear that establishing the partnership and capacity building has competed for time and attention with substantive activity, including strategy development. In these circumstances producing a Community and/or Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy was a tentative and drawn out process, and the result was seen by some partners as too broad brush and aspirational. Much energy was given to inclusiveness and tying in a wide range of interests. Where partnerships built on previous arrangements progress was quicker, but the evidence confirms that there are few short cuts to successful partnerships and that expectations of the speed at which LSPs could develop strategic capacity may have been over ambitious.

Nonetheless, the production of both community and local neighbourhood renewal strategies has had very positive effects. It has provided a stimulus to cross-sector multi-agency working, and in NRF areas the LNRS has been the lever at least to begin to activate the mainstream in new ways of looking at neighbourhoods.

Partnership processes

The key messages from the interviews in relation to partnership processes in general are:

- LSPs are trail blazers, and this is hard. It takes time for partnerships to get established, and there is a need for realism about how much can be achieved, how fast.

- The local authority is generally the main driver of the LSP, setting the tone and carrying out much of the work between meetings; other partners are often much less engaged. While local authorities sometimes feel that they shoulder too much of the burden, other partners may resent what they perceive as local authority dominance.
- LSPs rely on their partners for communication with the agencies or stakeholders they represent and to supplement more formal but irregular methods of consultation; the effectiveness of two way communication and the extent to which wider constituencies are involved is crucial.
- LSPs are starting to develop ways of handling conflict, but in some cases cohesion may be achieved at the expense of effective challenge, and more conflict may be expected as LSPs move from the level of high level objectives to specific actions and holding each other to account for the delivery of these. LSPs sometimes pride themselves on being non-political, but is this realistic or sustainable?
- Lack of capacity and inadequate (and insecure) resources are a constraint on the ability of some LSPs to have an independent voice and handle their wide remit.
- LSPs need to be thought of as complex structures linking thematic partnerships and area or neighbourhood structures, rather than single bodies. Getting these structures and the processes that link them right is a major preoccupation for LSPs.
- LSPs are adding value, especially at the level of process, and are beginning to influence partners' core activities.

Strategic planning processes

The key messages specifically relating to strategic planning are:

- It is only the local authority that has the duty to produce a community strategy but it is also meant to be owned by partners and to be informed by community consultation. The extent to which production of the strategy was genuinely a joint effort varied widely. Should the duty be extended to other partners?
- Community strategies need to be tighter and more specific; the delivery framework needs to be worked out at the same time.
- The skills involved in producing the strategy relate to process as much as development of the content. Ensuring the right people are involved at the right stages, to build ownership and ensure that plans will be delivered, is fundamental.

Interviewees variously identified strengths and weaknesses of the process of development and the content as shown in the box below.

Strengths and weaknesses of strategic plans and planning process

Strengths:

- partnership owned
- inclusive and with Council holding back
- participative: right spirit of partnership in the task
- it provided focus and an opportunity to demonstrate commitment to partnership
- successful in keeping to tight timescale
- wide consultation
- flexibility to vary the consultation mechanisms when it was recognised that some groups were being excluded.

Weaknesses:

- complete reliance of some LSPs on the Council for funding, administrative support and research (even NRF, which can be used for developing LNRs, is allocated through the Council)
- because the onus was on the local authority to produce a community strategy, other partners knew that even if they did not contribute financially, it would still get done
- limited involvement of partners
- the strategy was not based upon a thorough interrogation of need
- it was in some parts only a catalogue of what agencies would need to do or would be doing in any case.

CHAPTER 4

Challenges in producing strategies

In our discussions, we identified a number of challenges that LSPs face in producing community strategies and local neighbourhood renewal strategies. These challenges are based on the experiences of members of the set, but we believe that they are more general. These are discussed below.

Strategy, partnership and consultation overload

Local authorities and other organisations are required by government to produce a very large number of strategies and plans; one unitary local authority member of the set identified 85. They are also engaged in many different partnerships for different purposes. These often involve burdensome consultation exercises.

We concluded that the community strategy and local neighbourhood renewal strategy must add value to these existing arrangements if they are to be of any use. The government has recognised this in calling for plan rationalisation.

A real test of this will be if subsidiary strategies, actions and resources follow the community strategy and local neighbourhood strategy. Evidence on whether this is happening is limited and mixed at present. Many of the LSPs in the set felt it was too early to tell but there were signs people were committed to it: *“The LSP is beginning to influence the core agendas of agencies”*.

Tensions between different priorities

There are tensions between the priorities of organisations in the LSP and between individual organisations’ priorities and those of the LSP.

The priorities of individual organisations in the public sector frequently derive from central government targets that have been passed down to the local level. It sometimes seems as though one part of government wants LSPs to drive local strategy-making while another wants Whitehall targets to do so. Similarly, there are sometimes tensions between what:

- The government guidance says should be in the community strategy and the local neighbourhood renewal strategy

- Organisations have already committed themselves to do in their existing strategies
- Local people say they want when the LSP consults.

Lack of co-terminosity

Not all agencies have the same geographical boundaries. Primary care trusts (PCTs), for example, often have different boundaries from local authorities. Some county-level LSPs may include a number of PCTs, while larger public sector bodies may straddle the boundaries of several LSPs at both county and district level. This makes strategic planning harder than it would otherwise be.

Non-alignment of planning cycles

Different organisations in an LSP have different planning cycles. This can make it hard to devise an overarching planning cycle for the community strategy and local neighbourhood renewal strategy.

Lack of political commitment

We identified four issues in terms of political commitment. Some had been experienced by members of the set, others were issues members of the set knew about from other areas:

- In local authorities that are not led by Labour administrations, there is sometimes a lack of political commitment to LSPs, community strategies and local neighbourhood renewal strategies because they are seen as creations of the (Labour) central government. This, however, varies considerably between local authorities and some non-Labour ones take a pragmatic approach.
- In local authorities of all political complexions, there can be concern about the tension between the democratic legitimacy of elected councillors and the 'stakeholder legitimacy' of LSPs.
- Backbenchers can be concerned that the LSP is usurping their role of representing the views of local people to public agencies.
- There can be questions of decision-making protocols. Who votes in the LSP? Does the LSP have final say or is that a matter for the democratically elected local authority?

The difficulty of remaining strategic

The process of reaching consensus over the allocation of even small amounts of funding can severely strain partnership relationships and jeopardise effective strategy-making. Furthermore, funding can have an unintended effect of generating a bidding culture and lead to direct competition between partners for pots of money. This can detract from the desired strategic role of specific funds such as NRF and distract

attention from strategic management of the whole public spend and effort in the area. “*NRF can be a distraction*”, said one LSP with Neighbourhood Renewal Fund. “*Yes, but it’s the kind of distraction we’d like if they gave us the money too*” said another, without NRF.

Relative immaturity of LSPs

Government and local stakeholders have high hopes of LSPs. We concluded that expectations need to be managed because LSPs are not going to solve everything at once. Partnerships take time to form. But many LSPs feel government has forced the pace on the requirements to produce community strategies, local neighbourhood renewal strategies and for accreditation. This has ruffled relationships in some partnerships. However, there was also realism in the set that government would look for rapid progress by LSPs on the delivery of its agenda.

Ambiguous position of Government Office representatives

In the 87 NRF LSPs, it is not uncommon for Government office representatives to sit in on LSP strategy making sessions. For partners sitting on the LSP, the role of the GO representative is sometimes unclear (is their status as observer, member, regulator, critical friend, representative of funder etc?). In this regard some LSP representatives can perceive GOs to have too strong an influence on strategy – and the ambiguity in their actual role can only exacerbate this feeling.

CHAPTER 5

Overcoming the challenges: overview

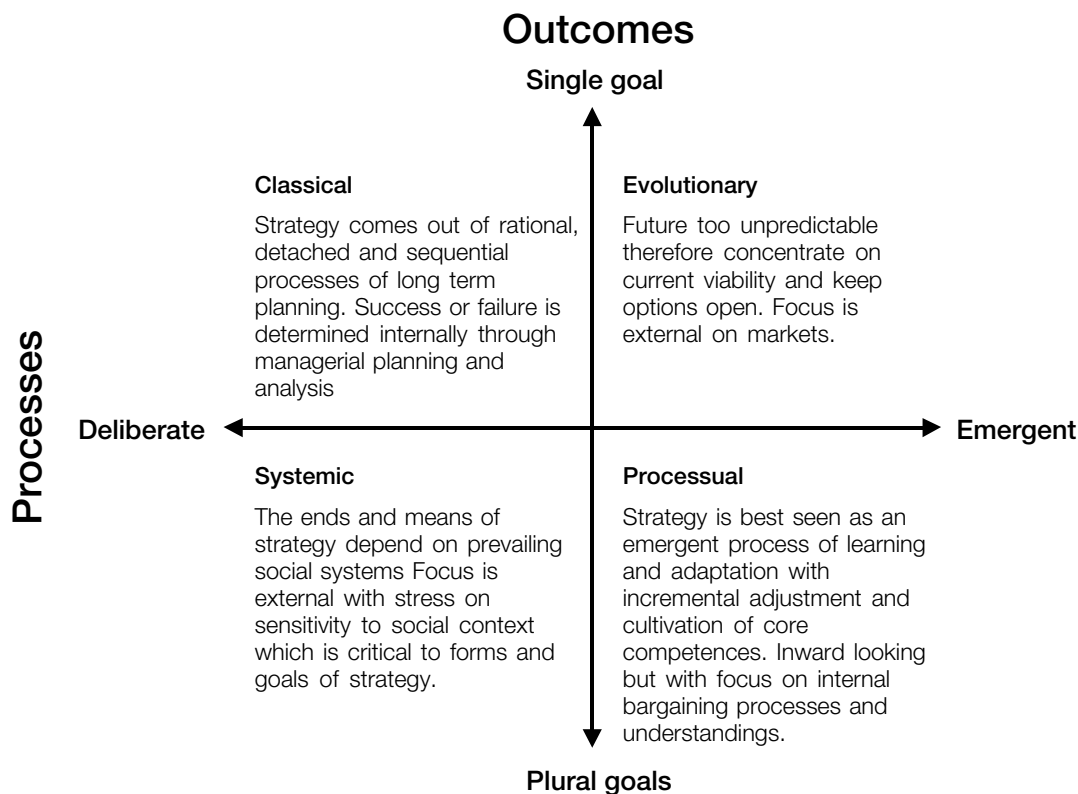
Models of strategy development

The analysis by the consultants in this sub-section is drawn from the literature on strategy development. There are many models of strategy development. For instance, in the sphere of business, Richard Whittington³ indicates that there are four basic theoretical approaches to strategy making, embodying very different assumptions about how strategy works:

- the **Classical** rational planning approach;
- the efficiency-driven **Evolutionary** approach;
- the craft-like **Processual** approach;
- the context-sensitive **Systemic** approach.

The diagram below indicates their difference and where each model sits in relation to the two axes of Outcomes and Processes. Each approach has different implications for issues such as strategic choice, leadership, implementation and innovation. Whittington favours the Systemic approach even within business and sees this as the one most relevant in the public sector or cross-sector partnerships.

³ Whittington R (1993), *What is strategy and does it matter?* Routledge



Adapted from Whittington

Whittington's comment about the central problem of strategy for organisations applies with even greater force to LSPs: *"The problem for strategy is that organisations are, literally, 'mindless'. They have no unity and collectively they are rather stupid. Yet the notion of 'strategy' implies that all the multitudinous individuals who make up an organisation can be united around the effective pursuit of a coherent goal."* (Whittington, p.111.)

Similarly Russell, commenting on the production of partnership strategies as part of the New Commitment to Regeneration, stresses the importance of process and relationships. *"Strategic planning cannot be a wholly centralised or centrally controlled activity. It must balance direction with responsiveness and flexibility, ascertain what is practicable as well as what is desirable and use the knowledge and awareness of people in key positions throughout the relevant organisations. Planning processes must be sensitive to the statutory and territorial roles of individual agencies to avoid duplication or conflict and ensure that emerging strategies can influence and/or be thoroughly embedded in existing activity."* (Russell, p. 28)⁴

It is the consultants' view – supported by the experience of members of the set – that the central challenge of strategic planning for LSPs is not so much a technical one such as data availability or knowing which technique to use – although these can be problematic – but the softer issues of partnership processes, relationships and the complex institutional and policy environment within which strategic planning takes place. This limits the usefulness of planning models derived from less complex environments. Any real life strategic planning process is going to involve a mix of 'ideal types' but the action learning set findings echoed the need for a context-sensitive approach such as Whittington's Systemic one. Participants in the set recognised:

⁴ Russell H (2001), *Local Strategic Partnerships: Lessons from New Commitment to Regeneration*, Policy Press

- the relevance of the wide variation of powers, responsibilities and capacities across member organisations;
- the significance of the style of leadership and culture of the LSP;
- the importance of communication within the larger partner organisations as well as cultural changes and increasing partnership skills;
- the importance of understanding and responding to the distinctive character of the LSP area.

The approach taken by the action learning set

The action learning set considered that many of the models in the literature would be useful to LSPs, especially further into the future. However, we concluded that, in this project, it would be most useful to concentrate on a relatively simple and practical model to help LSPs with strategy development in the short term. This was for a number of reasons.

As Whittington suggests, not all models or approaches are applicable to the public sector or to partnership working. Many strategy development models assume the organisation has strategic flexibilities (such as to specialise or get out of certain areas of business) that are absent or very constrained in public service organisations.

Public sector managers also face more complex pressures than those in the private sector. Based on a model developed by OPM and considered by the set, public managers will always find themselves having to respond to four sets of (often competing) demands at once, discussed in Tarplett and Parston (2000)⁵ and summarised below. These four competing demands are:

- Political direction: national and local politicians have been elected by citizens on the basis that they will govern society in certain ways and, therefore, want to shape public services to meet those commitments;
- Resolving inputs and outputs: managers are expected to meet certain standards or targets or performance indicators (the nomenclature varies between services) within set budgets;
- Public good: managers are expected to deliver public good, often defined by professional and provider-led notions of what that means;
- Individual choice: users of services increasingly demand choice in public service to meet their own particular needs.

⁵ Tarplett P and Parston G (2000), *Managing strategy*, Office for Public Management

Many of the challenges in the previous section will exist for the foreseeable future. Remedies to these challenges are often not within the immediate grasp of the LSP. Guided by the thinking on organisational development of Richard Beckhard (see, as introduction, Beckhard 1997⁶), the set concluded that these challenges should be treated as tensions to be managed on an ongoing basis, not problems to be solved once and for all. In other words, using our earlier definitions, in order to be successful *strategists*, LSPs also need to be good *tacticians*.

We then considered what practical pointers would be helpful for LSPs at three levels:

- Process: what processes facilitate strategy making in LSPs?
- The role of creativity in strategy making in LSPs
- The role of people and relationships – especially between local authorities and other partners – in strategy making and delivery.

Our suggestions are discussed in more detail in the sections that follow.

6 Beckhard R (1997), *Agent of change: my life, my practice*, Jossey, Bass, Wiley

CHAPTER 6

Processes for strategy making

Why strategic planning is important for LSPs

We considered that strategic planning was a vital function of LSPs and one of the key ways in which they can add value. It is the means and the process through which partners come together and debate and agree shared goals for the community they serve. It is also, at least in theory, the mechanism and place in which partners can be held to account for delivery, both to each other and to residents. (This is discussed in more detail in the report of another action learning set, on performance management.) Without strategic planning, LSPs, with no resources of their own (or insignificant resources compared to the main constituent agencies), would be much less significant and powerful.

Meaningful strategic planning and strategic plans are, therefore, fundamental to the success of LSPs as currently conceived. This was shown clearly in a practical example we discussed in the action learning set. The government has, under the comprehensive performance assessment system, removed the requirement to produce certain plans in the case of local authorities that perform well. Croydon LSP has, however, decided that some of these plans should continue to be produced in its area. This is because the production of these plans and the plans themselves give the LSP a 'grip' on issues over which it wishes to have some control in order to achieve its goals. As one member of the set said: *"Plan rationalisation needn't mean fewer plans. It may mean the same number of plans but organised in ways that make more sense for us"*.

A continuum of influence

Based on our discussion and the background research whose findings are set out in appendix 3, we concluded that the processes for strategy development in LSPs are still in their infancy and are evolving.

Our model for the evolution of LSP strategy development processes was as follows. We considered that there was a continuum of potential approaches to LSP strategy development. At one end, strategies developed by the LSP were accumulations of the main points of existing, subsidiary strategies. At the other end, LSP strategies would be the starting point and driver of all the subsidiary strategies in the locality.

We considered that most community strategies were at the 'accumulation' end of this continuum in their first iteration. And, given that many are in their first iteration, they are still at the accumulation end of that continuum. They can, therefore, be considered to be 'baseline documents'. This is not necessarily a weakness. It has allowed their sponsoring LSPs to give the community strategy a legitimate place in the local planning framework but without offending any of the sponsors of the existing strategies, which

might have had to change if the community strategy were at the ‘driving’ end, shaping subsidiary strategies.

We expected community strategies over time to move towards the ‘driving’ end and increasingly to shape subsidiary strategies. They were already starting to do this, more so in some areas than others. We thought this was a good thing because it would introduce greater coherence in local planning.

We considered local neighbourhood renewal strategies to be in a different position. They were already near the middle of the continuum. We considered this was in part because they occupied relatively new ‘planning territory’ and so had not encroached significantly on the territory of other strategies – or their sponsors’ territories. They are also encouraged by central government, and are designed to help meet mandatory floor targets. Their sponsors had, therefore, been able to use these conditions to move them further along the continuum in the first year. And they would continue to move in the ‘driving’ direction, we thought.

LSP strategy development: a possible model

The action learning set felt that there was a staged process for strategy development that, if followed, would help to continue to move LSP strategies along the continuum from ‘accumulation’ to ‘driving’. It could be adopted by LSPs generally, even though it would not necessarily be simple, it would need to be an iterative process and different stages may present different challenges in different places.

The main stages of the process are the classic:

- Strategic analysis
- Strategic choice
- Strategic implementation.

We broke these stages down further into practical steps, as shown below, showing how at each stage the process is influenced by the complex context in which LSPs operate.

A. Strategic analysis

This includes understanding the operating environment, the organisation’s (or, in this case, partnership’s) capabilities and capacity to respond to changes in the environment and any constraints on possible responses (such as legislation).

1. CENTRAL GOVERNMENT REQUIREMENTS

The starting point for LSP strategy development is a requirement by central government to produce a community strategy and, in areas with Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, a local neighbourhood renewal strategy. However, to say that these strategies have emerged solely as a result of this is misleading, as many LSPs have grown out of previous partnerships that have been involved in similar activity around, say, the

single regeneration budget. In addition, some areas without neighbourhood renewal fund have produced local neighbourhood renewal strategies. However, we felt the hard reality was that LSPs produced community strategies and LNRs because they had to.

2. LOCAL DEMANDS

Although the process of developing community strategies and local neighbourhood renewal strategies often starts with a requirement from central government, the process is not always totally or even mainly top-down. There are simultaneously local demands for overarching strategies to give a clearer focus to public service modernisation (*'a better sense of direction and more oomph'*), local regeneration and to facilitate plan rationalisation. These local demands seem to marry well with national demands.

3. DATA-COLLECTION

Across organisations, there is then a need to collect data to inform strategy development. This should include data on the neighbourhood, the locality, the sub-region and the region. This needs to show trends, not just the current situation. Some of the data will come from existing strategies; some will have to be collected especially for this purpose.

One of the important reasons for getting good neighbourhood data is to facilitate objective decisions on the allocation of Neighbourhood Renewal Fund to those neighbourhoods in most need. We found a number of examples of this. Newcastle LSP, for example, uses the city council's sophisticated geographical information system, known as the Newcastle Neighbourhood Information Service. Wolverhampton has an information and communications technology strategy group bringing together relevant officers from a range of partner organisations. Croydon has a system known as 'neighbourhood.net' on an intranet.

4. ANALYSIS AND THE GENERATION OF COMMON UNDERSTANDING

Data on its own is not enough. The LSP needs to understand – collectively – true, underlying cause and effect. This requires analysis and debate. It can be useful to facilitate this by using professional analysts.

B. Strategic choice

This is about using the strategic analysis to guide decisions about the direction the organisation (or partnership) is going to take.

5. CREATING THE VISION

The LSP needs to produce a vision of what it wants the future to be like. In this model, the vision is about the future for the area the LSP serves, not the future of the organisations that serve it (though the two are clearly inter-related). LSPs can use a variety of (overlapping) tools for this, including:

- Scenario planning: what do people think are plausible futures for this area? Which of those do they want to bring about?
- Stakeholder engagement: 'lively' methods of public consultation to break open traditional mindsets about what is possible and to try to unlock resources from their traditional destinations. These include, in Harlow for instance, a vision bus, a vision shop, a vision video and vision t-shirts. Some LSPs use existing forums, such as a citizens' panel, black and minority ethnic forums and faith networks.

6. THE CONSTRUCTION OF A MISSION

This encapsulates what the LSP is going to do to bring about the achievement of the vision. It should use a small number of simple words so as to be readily understood by all stakeholders.

The LSP's mission also needs to have focus, or there would be an increased risk of 'mission creep'. LSP strategies should focus on the big, cross-cutting issues that cannot be tackled by any single organisation's strategy.

To help think about this, LSPs may wish to use the matrix below. Down the left hand side are the issues in an area. Across the top are the organisations in the LSP. Issue B is a priority for the LSP because it generates 'multiple hits' with different agencies and there is great scope for synergy at LSP level. In contrast, issue A, for example, is a matter for organisation 5 and the LSP need not trouble itself with it.

Issue	Organisation				
	1	2	3	4	5
A					X
B	X	X		X	X
C	X	X			
D	X				
E			X	X	

7. THE SETTING OF OBJECTIVES

Typically, the mission, while necessary to set the broad direction, is not precise enough to guide action. It is, therefore, necessary to break the mission down into a number of objectives (or 'mini-missions'). These objectives can be based around a mixture of:

- Policy themes, such as health, environment and crime
- Geographical target areas, notably (for the local neighbourhood renewal strategies), deprived neighbourhoods
- Client groups, such as children and young people or pensioners.

The objectives can be derived from a mixture of the results of stakeholder engagement, the highlights of existing strategies and plans, and political decisions.

8. TARGET SETTING

LSPs should set targets for each objective. Targets are designed to focus effort. It is, therefore, sensible to keep the overall number of targets in any one strategy down to a reasonable number. The action learning set's experience and Audit Commission research (Audit Commission, 2000)⁷ shows this is no more than around 20. Having too many targets dilutes focus and makes the delivery of strategies hard to manage.

This process of target setting should lead to a focus in LSP strategies on the really important priorities in the locality. This is not to say other things are not important; but they can be located in other, subsidiary partnerships' or single organisations' strategies.

C. Strategic implementation

This is the stage in which organisations or partnerships decide how their aspirations are to be brought about.

9. DETERMINING ACTIONS

LSPs have to decide what they (or constituent organisations) are going to do in order to achieve the targets and so achieve the objectives and so achieve the mission and so, ultimately, deliver the vision. A variety of methodologies can be used for this.

At one end of the scale, some LSPs currently use fairly sophisticated option appraisal techniques, which would not look out of place in the Treasury's Green book⁸. At the other end, particularly in areas with NRE, it was suggested that this process had degenerated into a somewhat unprincipled bidding round for project funding. In the middle of the scale, some LSPs have developed a simple set of criteria for appraising options and a mix of top down and bottom up thinking about what needs to be done to meet the targets and what local people living on, say, a particular estate say is needed.

10. ASSIGNING ACCOUNTABILITIES

LSPs then assign accountability for the delivery of different parts of the strategy to individual lead organisations or subsidiary partnerships. Typically, in LSP strategies, accountability is best assigned at the level of objectives. Assigning accountability at the level of targets and actions we thought to be more a matter for subsidiary strategies and operational plans. The way we envisaged it, the LSP collectively is then accountable at the level of mission.

⁷ Audit Commission (2000), *Aiming to Improve*, Audit Commission

⁸ HM Treasury (2003), *Appraisal and evaluation in central government (aka 'The Green Book')*, HMSO

11. SETTING UP MONITORING AND EVALUATION ARRANGEMENTS

LSPs need to decide how they will collect data on performance to enable them to manage the implementation and delivery of the strategies. LSPs should also put in place an evaluation to establish the extent to which the strategy had delivered the desired outcomes. These evaluations are often carried out by external academic institutions.

12. ESTABLISHING MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

Clearly, the LSP is itself one such arrangement. However, the LSP should consider reinforcing the capacity for implementation of its strategies by, for example:

- Harmonising governance arrangements. The LSP is itself a joined-up governance body but will need to consider its terms of reference and the ways it will work with other bodies into order to deliver its strategies. Is there scope for partnership rationalisation?
- Agreeing how the strategy will be performance managed. It is essential to go beyond monitoring to active management of implementation. (There has been a separate action learning set on performance management which gives guidance on this.)
- Reviewing organisational structures. Are those in the area the ones we would choose to deliver our strategies? If not, is change desirable or might it absorb capacity that is needed for delivery?
- Attending to cultures. Are there professional or cultural barriers that might get in the way of delivery? How can those be overcome?
- Aligning and pooling resources. How can the resources of partners be aligned to support the achievement of agreed outcomes? Is there scope for joint resourcing? (There has been a separate action learning set on mainstreaming and the alignment of resources which gives guidance on this.)
- Ensuring good communications. LSPs generally need to communicate the strategies powerfully and widely. They often do well by investing in professional and attractive presentation and producing short versions for widespread dissemination.

The above model is described as a classic, linear, rational process, albeit one that allows for a strong external focus. In practice, we believe the process is more likely to be iterative; for example, target setting (step 8) may cause LSPs to revisit their data sources (step 3).

Central government may wish to provide consultancy support to help LSPs develop and deliver the strategies they are responsible for. (ODPM already provides such support to LSPs in NRF areas, in the form of Neighbourhood Renewal Advisors.) Given the evolving nature of LSP business, we believe this is more likely to be effective than further, written guidance to LSPs.

In addition, LSP strategy making is likely to benefit from high levels of creativity in order to help organisations in the LSP break out of their traditional organisational mindset and so work more effectively together. This is described in the next section.

CHAPTER 7

The role of creativity in LSP strategy making

Strategy making is about planning for *possible* futures.

There are a number of useful techniques for thinking about the future. According to Tarplett and Parston (2000), these include:

- **Extrapolation.** This is most useful for short-term thinking about relatively predictable systems: for example, demographic change
- **Modelling.** This is useful for medium-term thinking about reasonably predictable systems, such as the weather or economies
- **Exploration.** This is useful for long-term thinking about highly unpredictable systems.

The consultants consider that the last of these is relevant for much of the public policy environment. Strategy making in this environment involves high levels of uncertainty. As explained in the previous section, techniques such as visioning and scenario planning can help to deal with uncertainty about the future and generate agreement on strategy.

Two other creative techniques are discussed in the following case study on creativity in strategy, set in Blacon in Chester. This covers:

- An overview of Blacon
- A creative technique: the virtual child
- A creative technique: the neighbourhood perspective
- Future issues for Blacon.

Chester LSP was a set member, and the consultants and other members of the set visited Blacon to work on this case study.

Creativity in strategy: Blacon case study

OVERVIEW OF BLACON

Blacon is a deprived area in the city of Chester, with a population of 18,000. It is a Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder, and the government has given a grant of £3.5m over seven years for this. £200,000 a year of this grant is for the management and administration costs of the pathfinder. The remainder of the grant is designed to lever change in mainstream services in the area.

The motto of the pathfinder is '*expertise on tap, not on top*'. The city council is the accountable body for the grant. It has set up a neighbourhood management team of three people. This is deliberately small in order to prevent the creation of a new 'silo'.

The emphasis of the pathfinder is on improving mainstream service delivery, not on topping up inadequate mainstream services with short-lived projects.

The pathfinder has established that there is at least £60m of public spending in Blacon each year. This is a conservative estimate because it is hard to track all the public spending in the area. Around £30m of this is in the form of transfer payments. The aim is to get better value out of the remaining £30m a year. "*We want to produce a new delivery model at local level to prevent 'more of the same'*".

The pathfinder has used creative tools as an aid to strategic planning:

- The virtual child
- The neighbourhood perspective.
- Audit to action process

A creative technique: the 'virtual child'

The first tool is known as the 'virtual child'. Members of the pathfinder team have looked at the life history of two virtual 18 year-old residents of Blacon, now in custody for criminal offences.

In their early years, from before birth to age five, they and their parents were seen by a lot of professionals – their GPs, health visitors, probation officers and police officers – and by their neighbours, all of whom saw that the children were at various kinds of risk. At age five, the children started at school and education welfare officers and social workers began to be involved; they too recognised that the children were at risk.

At this time and until the children reached the age of 10 – the age of criminal responsibility in England and Wales – the emphasis of the professional services was on help and care for children who were at risk through no fault of their own.

From the age of 10 onwards, however, the emphasis switched to treating the young people as criminals whose behaviour needed to be contained and punished. At the age

of around 14 and 15, there was a ramping up of this approach and the young people started to be subject to measures equivalent to today's anti-social behaviour contracts and orders.

At the age of 18, they both went into custody, at great public expense, for criminal offences they had committed. Neither of them could read or write.

The partnership asked itself how this sort of outcome could have come about when public services were spending £30m a year in Blacon. They concluded that it was because the money was spent, and the services were delivered, in vertical silos: police, education, the NHS, social services and so on. The two children had been seen by 36 different public agencies. Everyone had seen the problem building and the outcome approaching but no one had had the responsibility or power to stop it.

The partnership did research to find out whether better outcomes could be delivered cost-effectively. This was necessary to construct an economic case for remodelling services to focus on prevention.

However, the partnership established from existing research, such as the Perry pre-school study in the USA (which has informed the design of the government's Sure Start programme) that the economics of preventive services for children do stack up. In fact, for every pound spent today on prevention, around seven pounds of future spending (in real terms) on remedial services will be saved.

Armed with this information, the pathfinder team has researched the current child population in Blacon. They have established that there are some 50 children aged five to nine in the area who are at the same kinds of risk as the two young people who are now in custody were when they were that age. They have also established that the public services collectively will spend an additional £72,000 (at today's prices) on each of those 50 children by the time they reach the age of 20.

The challenge facing the pathfinder team now is to work with the public service agencies to develop ways of strategically bending mainstream expenditure in ways that will deliver better outcomes for those 50 children and for the people of Blacon.

A creative technique: the neighbourhood focus

The second planning tool the Blacon pathfinder team has used is the story of the King George V Fields in the area.

Along the north side of this field, there is social housing, managed by Muir Housing Association, a small, local social landlord. On the west side of the field, there is more social housing, managed by another small, local housing association, Arena.

Until recently, there was a lot of crime and disorder in the park, especially at night. This ranged from litter dropping and vandalism through to riding motorbikes around the park, joyriding cars around the park, burning them out (around 15 a month) and drug dealing.

This was causing a lot of unhappiness for the residents. One elderly resident was experiencing serious ill-health exacerbated by what was happening in the park. Three other residents were so unhappy that they moved out of their own homes at the weekends (the worst time) and went to stay with friends and relatives.

The problems in the park were, of course, also a burden on public service agencies. For example, each time the fire service was called out to deal with a burning car, this cost £3,700. The energies and resources of local NHS bodies, the city council's environmental service, youth service and warden service, the police and other agencies were all being similarly drained by the activities in the park.

The pathfinder team worked with local people to identify solutions. Using an 'Audit to Action' (see below for an explanation of this) problem-solving approach, they came up with three measures they thought would cut down on the crime and disorder massively.

First, there was a hole in the fence round the park that young people used to bring motorbikes into the park. The city council repaired this.

Secondly, there were no rubbish bins in the park. It was impossible to have a conversation with the young people about litter dropping if there were no bins. The city council installed bins.

Thirdly, there was a gate in the fence on the south side of the park that needed to be locked at night to stop young people driving cars onto the park. All the public agencies agreed it was a good idea to lock the gate at night: they could see it would save them – collectively and individually – a lot of resources that could be better spent elsewhere. However, none of them was prepared to lock the gate, for a variety of reasons:

- Their money had been given to them for certain specified purposes, which did not include locking gates
- They needed to be at their base to wait for emergency calls
- They were concerned that locking this gate would set a precedent and they would be expected to lock a lot of other gates.

At this point, the team hit an impasse. They could not get anyone to agree to lock the gate and the problems in the park continued. Residents were naturally perplexed and angry that the whole machinery of public service set up to help improve their quality of life could not find a way of doing something as simple and commonsense as locking a park gate at night.

But the process of the facilitated meeting did eventually produce a solution. Vandaline, a mobile out-of-hours patrol employed by Chester & District Housing Trust, which already had a contract with Chester City Council to lock the crematorium gates, agreed to lock the park gate.

Crime and disorder in the park have since reduced greatly. The quality of the lives of the people living by the park has improved dramatically. The public service agencies report that there has been some displacement of crime and disorder to other nearby sites. But the amount of displaced activity is much lower than what used to happen in

the park. The pathfinder team believes this is because the public service agencies have shown the young people who were committing the offences that they care about the area and will no longer put up with such behaviour.

Future issues for Blacon

The challenge now facing the pathfinder team is now twofold; they need to:

- Continue to identify and solve problems similar to the ones they already have (the children at risk and the park)
- At a higher level, put in place planning and delivery arrangements that will ensure that all such problems will be identified and solved and new ones will not arise.

To rise to these challenges, they have set up new, neighbourhood planning and delivery structures and processes. First, they have put in place new local partnerships around the themes of community safety, education, children and young people, health, and image and infrastructure.

These are strongly resident-focused. To make sure they are able to produce added value, some of the government neighbourhood pathfinder grant is used to fund new staff to support the partnerships.

Secondly, the partnerships all use a common methodology for planning and delivery, which is an extension of the Audit to Action model discussed above. This has six stages:

- Partnership development: get local people and agencies working together on common issues; build trust
- Audit: analyse the problem thoroughly from different perspectives
- Generate options and apprise them thoroughly.
- Explore good practice examples from other areas
- Take action: develop an action plan, implement and deliver the chosen option
- Monitor activities and outputs
- Evaluate to establish whether the desired outcomes have been achieved and what can be learnt for the future.

The pathfinder team recognises two risks in the approach it is taking:

- The new partnership structures could become preoccupied with allocating the £3.5m government grant over the next seven years and not think about the £30m (or even £60m) that is spent every year by public service agencies and how it could be better used
- Consequently, there could be failure to create sustainable change in mainstream services.

The team has taken two actions to offset these risks:

- It has engaged with the Public Sector Forum where strategic heads of public services routinely meet to discuss such issues, alongside the five partnerships. The job of this forum is to help the partnerships in their work and to take the lessons from the partnerships' work and build them into mainstream services
- It will continue to use planning tools such as the virtual child and the King George V Fields. This is because the partnership believes the use of such vivid and compelling narratives, rather than (or in addition to) more traditional, dry, hard data-driven approaches, helps to unlock people's perspectives and positions and so to create new and innovative solutions to the problems of Blacon.

Pointers for LSPs

We believe the kinds of creative tools used at the neighbourhood level in Blacon have great potential for use by LSPs. Their power is that they focus attention on the real problems faced by real people and communities. They reinforce the accountability of service providers to residents. They make it harder – as the case of the gate that needed to be locked showed – for service providers to hide behind the intricacies of the process of service delivery. They have, thus, great potential for driving improvements in service delivery.

We believe there are some important pointers for LSPs arising from this. These are set out below.

- Use stories to challenge and break open traditional mindsets and professional assumptions and ways of working. These need to be compelling stories and about cross-cutting issues. Use a good storyteller to carry the narrative and bring it to life.
- Back this up with hard evidence. Not everyone will be persuaded by the story, no matter how compelling. Do research, produce the economic case that proves the story is true. In discussing this case study, the set believed this was important because, if the proportion of children who experience the kinds of problems that the two Blacon children had when they were very young and who then go into custody is low, and if the cost of prevention is high, then the economics of remodelling services to focus on prevention may not stack up. 'Cure' may be more cost-effective.
- Work with local people to understand the problems, identify the solutions and exert leverage for change on the public agencies. Invest time to build trust.
- Be rigorous in your methodology for analysing problems, designing solutions and monitoring and evaluating their effect.
- Avoid becoming a 'joined-up silo'. Create links back into mainstream services. Create structures that lock them in. Show how you are helping them achieve their targets as well as your own.
- Working in LSPs requires managers to be brave, creative, empowered and signed up. More 'traditional' approaches will not deliver.

- Be flexible and seize opportunities that come along. If a new funding stream emerges after you have documented your LSP's strategy, do not ignore it just because it was not in the original strategy.
- Think of delivering the strategy as a massive change project for the locality. Use neighbourhood renewal fund or other sources of money as a 'transformation fund'.
- Avoid creating time-consuming bidding rounds. Use 'strategic commissioning' instead.
- Remember that, when making strategies, it is perfectly reasonable to decide to stop doing some existing things as well as to decide to do new things.
- Look for joined up solutions. For example, can GPs prescribe exercise at the local sports centre, rather than drugs?
- When deciding on the LSP's priorities, focus relentlessly on the end user. Always plan at the level of the outcome in society, not the level of service delivery. Challenge people: *'Ask not what you are here to do but what you are here to achieve'*.
- In areas that have neighbourhood renewal fund, integrate the process of producing the community strategy and the local neighbourhood renewal strategy. Then try to work out the relationships with other plans and strategies in your area and how they could be rationalised.
- When conducting stakeholder engagement, consider the diversity of the population. Produce materials in languages other than English that are spoken in your area, and in Braille, video and large print versions. Choose accessible venues, use signers.
- Engage non-local authority partners in all aspects of the production of strategies. Do not confine their role to looking at drafts produced by the local authority. This will help motivate other partners and you will get a wider range of ideas. There is some evidence that this is happening in some areas, Wolverhampton and Bradford, for example.
- Use non-typical local authority ways of working. Avoid prolonging the debate over the minutes of the last meeting. Do not pack the meeting with local authority officers.
- Remember that some organisations in the LSP may cover a wider area than your LSP. They will be able to compare and contrast. Use this knowledge to improve the working of your LSP.

This section has pointed to the importance of creativity in successful LSP strategy making. The previous section showed the importance of sound process in strategy making. The following section is designed to show the important role of people and relationship issues.

CHAPTER 8

People and relationships in strategy making and delivery

This section explores the role of people and relationships – especially between local authorities and other partners – in LSP strategy development.

The local authority role

The responsibility to produce community strategies and local neighbourhood renewal strategies ultimately lies with local authorities. They are expected to do so in partnership with their LSPs. There is then a question of how this partnership approach to strategy development works in practice. Evidence from the set suggests the process of LSP strategy development has been strongly led by local authorities.

At the extreme, other partners felt the local authority ‘dominated’ and partners’ role was confined to looking at council drafts. However, we found dominance was difficult to gauge, partly because it can be hard to know where ‘support’ ends and ‘dominance’ begins. In some cases, without strong local authority leadership, LSP strategy would have been weak. We felt that this kind of lead role is appropriate to the council’s community leadership role.

In other cases, there was a deliberate holding back by the council, though the local authority may have been exercising ‘covert leadership’. For example, in Bradford, the LSP is an independent company. The council has control of the company but some self-imposed limits have been imposed: the three councillors only have one vote between them and the council chief executive, though on the board, is a non-voting member, not a director. Even in such cases (though not necessarily in Bradford), there can be hidden dominance, for example, through the dependence on resource contributions: the extent of involvement is reflected in the council often being the main or only organisation to provide core funding or in-kind resources.

The relationship between local authority strategy and LSP strategy: case study

The case study below concerns tensions between the LSP’s strategies and local councillors’ political strategies and how these could be resolved. Like the case study of Blacon presented earlier, it is based on the experience of one of the set members; the case study was developed on during the course of a meeting by the consultants with the relevant officers from the locality. However because of the sensitivity this case study has been anonymised this case study.

Northwick Borough Council is one of 10 districts and boroughs in the two-tier county of Moorfoot. Moorfoot County Council is led by a Conservative administration. Northwick BC is led by a Liberal Democrat-Conservative coalition. The county councillors representing the Northwick ward are from the Labour party. The county council has lead officers for each district and borough in the county area. There are LSPs at both county and district (or borough) levels.

Northwick's LSP grew out of a previous, well-established and inclusive single regeneration budget partnership. The chair is the vice-chancellor of the local university.

The LSP has worked on a long-term vision for the future of the town. This is based on extensive consultation with residents. Residents were clear that they wanted the town centre to be regenerated and to have a wider range of bigger, smarter shops. The LSP's vision was that this regeneration should be 'floated' on a significant growth in the population of the town taking advantage of strong growth in the region. Put simply, the big, high-street department stores will not come to Northwick unless it has a bigger catchment population.

The problem is that residents are also strongly anti-growth. They wish to preserve the town's green spaces and character. The LSP commissioned future scenarios and decided the most plausible and, on balance, desirable one included significant growth.

The district councillors on the LSP became very nervous about the direction the LSP was taking. This was spurred by a campaign in the local press against growth and accusations that decisions were being taken by the LSP – an 'unelected quango' – over the heads of elected members.

The LSP's approach was to continue to engage with local people through a series of open conferences and seek to build understanding that it would not be possible to have both regeneration and no growth.

The politicians recognised the validity of this process but felt the need for more control over the direction the debate was taking. They therefore established a new group within the LSP alongside the LSP board, known as the 'management group'. This is also chaired by the vice-chancellor. The county council appointed a Conservative councillor from another area (as stated above, all Northwick's county councillors are from the Labour party) to the management group.

The creation of this structure, though unusual in management and governance terms, has helped to ease political tensions and to prevent a potential showdown between the LSP and councillors. It has not been tested in the sense that it is not clear who would prevail if there was a stand-off. But it has created organisational space in which the tensions between a technocratic and a political view of the town's future can be discussed and nerves can be calmed and steered. The debate about the future of Northwick goes on. The LSP intends to build support for its vision of growth and regeneration. The councillors have a safety valve.

Pointers for LSPs

We believe our discussions on relationships (including the Northwick case study) pointed up lessons for LSPs. These are set out below.

- Do not try to do everything at once. Build trust, be careful and patient. Councillors, in particular, because of their strong accountability to the public, need to feel safe to discuss contentious issues.
- Develop a set of values that describe how LSP members will behave towards each other when the water gets choppy. This can then be policed through peer pressure. This has happened in Bradford, for example: the LSP's articles of association (the LSP has constituted itself as a limited company) set clear parameters within which members must operate. Harrow LSP's constitution has a conflict resolution procedure written into it.
- When developing strategies, design fair and open processes that facilitate dialogue engagement with the public. Do not duck the big issues but find sensitive ways to approach them.
- Develop a solution tailored for your area.
- Expect and allow that solution to develop over time.
- Allow and enable conversations to take place outside formal structures to facilitate the resolution of conflicting priorities. Make sure people know who to talk to.
- Have structures in place so that, when key people leave or join, there is continuity. Do succession planning for key people.
- Express confidence in the LSP's vision. Have an external communications strategy, consider employing a public relations expert and try to shape the media agenda, not react to it.

The report of the action learning set on governance covers some of these points in more depth.

CHAPTER 9

Conclusion: general lessons for LSPs

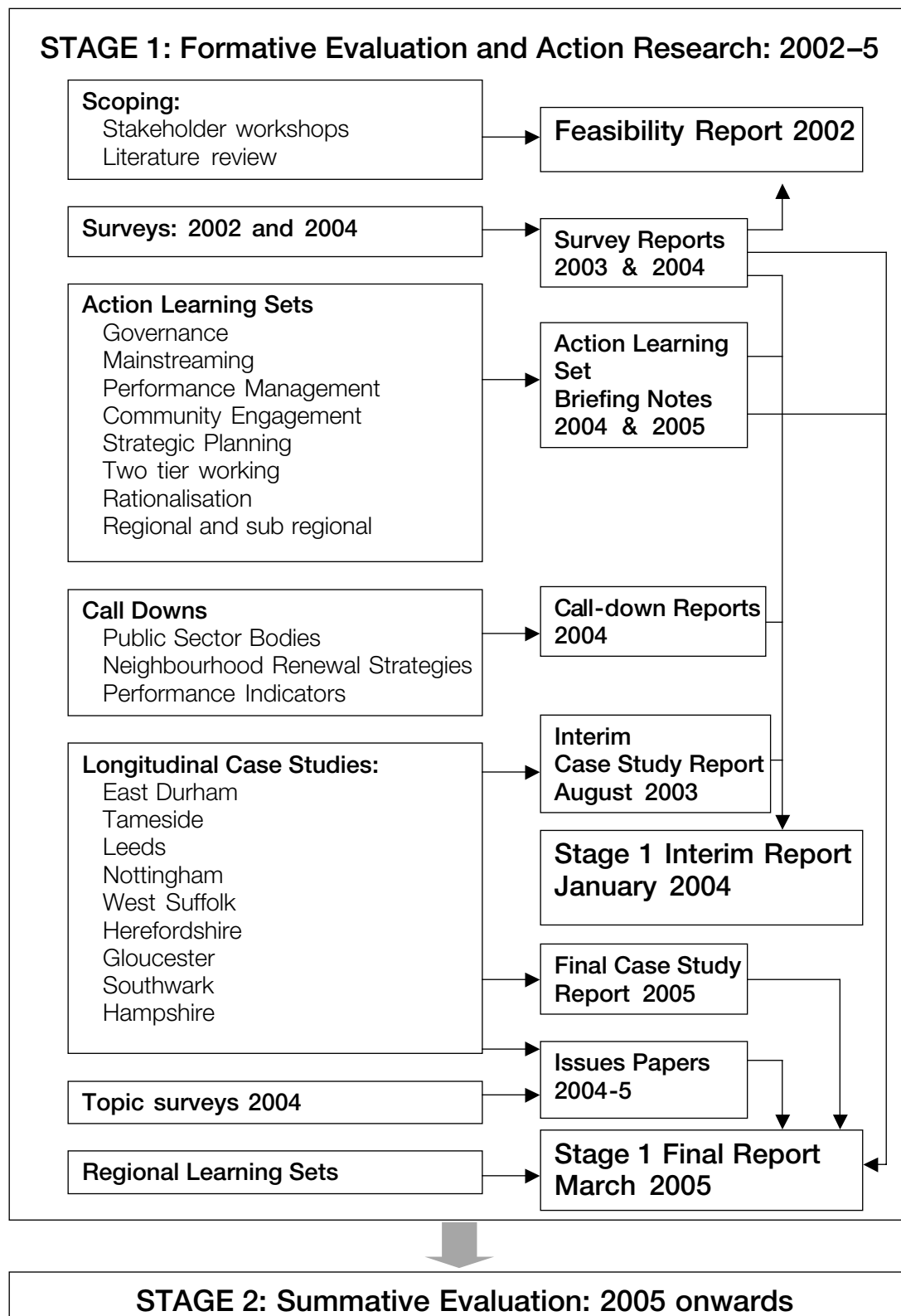
Based on our study of LSPs' development of community strategies and local neighbourhood renewal strategies, we considered that there were a number of general lessons for LSPs. These lessons focus on the soft issues of partnership processes, and have relevance beyond the confines of strategic planning. These are set out below.

- Remember that dealing with the challenges LSPs face will require LSP members and the LSP collectively to approach the task with a flexible mindset and to behave equally flexibly. There are few rules on LSP business. There is no body of tradition to draw on.
- Getting through these challenges requires partners to be open and honest. Partners must understand each others' constraints and the limits on their 'ability to trade'.
- It can also help if the LSP lobbies collectively on behalf of the whole area to get central government to remove unhelpful constraints government is placing on individual members. *'Challenge central government. Negotiate with them. Don't just accept that things have to be like that. Bring forward evidence to show your LSP's way of doing it would deliver a better result for the community.'*
- The LA's role is critical and complex. On the one hand, they must not dominate and expect everyone else to follow meekly. On the other, they are the only body with democratically elected leaders and they have to demonstrate community leadership.
- LSPs need to bear in mind that getting the representative of organisation A who sits on the LSP board signed up is not the same as getting organisation A signed up. This means the LSP may need to relate to its member organisations more deeply.
- LSPs should also remember that different actors in the systems will see things from different perspectives and use different language.
- It is sensible to build on existing partnerships. Do not reinvent everything. Use the LSP board to moderate between the needs and demands of subsidiary partnerships.
- LSPs should strike a good balance between charging forward to delivery and putting good processes in place for the conduct of the LSP. *'Expect the voluntary sector members of your LSP, which have few formal levers of power, to want to agree protocols and compacts with statutory bodies so the playing field feels more level to them.'* Conversely, LSPs should avoid getting bogged down in over-engineered processes that do not deliver any real change.

- LSPs should introduce rewards for good partnership working among partners: *'Partnership working needs to count much more in CPA [comprehensive performance assessment]'* Use it as a way of reviving the interest in work of jaded managers who have 'seen it all before'.
- Senior managers need to model partnership working. *'It's no good 'smiling the smile' in the LSP meeting and then making disparaging remarks in front of staff about partners outside the meeting'*.
- LSPs should empower the officers who support the LSP. These are mostly local authority officers, many working on LSP business on a part-time basis. But they should not function like a traditional local government secretariat. They are potentially the only people in the system who are on the side of the LSP collectively, not its constituent organisations. Although they are typically employed by the local authority, they need to be allowed and encouraged to think outside the local authority's traditional frame of reference.

APPENDIX 1

Overview of the evaluation



APPENDIX 2

Action research topics in the programme

SPRING–AUTUMN 2003

Performance management

Mainstreaming: aligning and pooling resources

Strategic planning and delivery: making partnership working effective

Community engagement

Governance

AUTUMN 2003–SPRING 2004

Two tier working

Regional and sub-regional issues

Rationalisation of plans and partnerships

APPENDIX 3

Strategic Planning Processes in Participant LSPs

Two rounds of telephone interviews were conducted by the consultants with the action learning set participants: one prior to the first meeting and the other halfway through the duration of the set. Many of the messages are embedded in the rest of the report but it is worth summarising here some of the key findings from both sets of interviews. This appendix is the summary of the interviews, written by the consultants.

The purpose of the first round of interviews was to serve as a starting point for the set. The interviews looked at arrangements in the different areas and the processes adopted for producing their Community Strategy and, where appropriate, their Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy. These interviews underlined the great diversity of places represented in the set, with very different histories of partnership working and current arrangements and resources. At the same time, they showed the extent to which LSPs face shared challenges as well as different ones. The second round focused particularly at the interface between the LSP and the local authority including issues of local political representation and the locus of strategic planning and also looked at the added value the LSP is bringing.

Although the main focus of these interviews was strategic planning processes, the responses cast light on LSP processes more widely, echoing findings from other parts of the national evaluation.

1. The LSP

1.1 INDEPENDENCE OF THE LSP

Where the LSP is a separate organisation, there is a perceived advantage in that it can establish and work to its own goals without being either beholden to, or skewed towards, the agendas of any of the member organisations.

It is clear that in some cases, the partnership is still dominated by the local authority. This extends to the content and style of meetings, but also, in some cases, it seems other partners engage very little in LSP activity outside of meetings. In many cases, meetings were seen to be very 'public sector', with a heavy emphasis on reports. However, there are also signs of conscious efforts to change, for example, by making positive moves towards wider engagement; the use of break-out groups in LSP meetings; avoiding a local authority-type format at meetings.

The local authority being the main driver need not mean that it is dominating (domineering). Nevertheless, very often, it is less a matter of any major power shifts and more one of the local authority trying to be more sensitive in the way it engages and the tone set. For instance, there can be occasions when key decisions are made in the Council Chamber that the LSP effectively has to rubber stamp.

Even where there is thought to be reasonable parity, it was recognised that voluntary or community sector partners, in particular, might disagree. To some extent, those without resources and statutory responsibilities are always likely to have less leverage.

Issues of participation/parity of partnership also arose in relation to:

- organisations operating at a broader spatial level that may be involved with several LSPs.
- achieving greater engagement from the private sector.

1.2 DEBATE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

The extent to which there is conflict will depend partly on how 'safe' the agenda is kept: how challenging (or threatening) it is to the *status quo* or partners' interests. On the whole, interviewees thought that meetings are quite cohesive:

- *"they keep politics out"*
- *"no warring issues though there have been some challenging ones such as the rebalancing of the Partnership's membership"*
- *"after a rocky patch when things were difficult, meetings are now more positive and business like and the partnership is more cohesive than it has ever been"*
- *"discussion is fairly free flowing and dynamic and all are invited to contribute"*
- *"tend to be more a forum for reporting back and presentations rather than an opportunity for vociferous debate. As a consequence they can be described as 'comfortable'"*
- *"people know each other and get on well – but do not challenge one another".*

Some tensions are experienced:

- in two tier authorities where different parties are in power or because of the implications of the Regional White Paper;
- debate can sometimes be stifled where meetings are open to the public and the press.

Potential conflicts can also arise:

- once the agenda moves from the setting of broad objectives to translating these into tighter priorities, actions and responsibilities; *“It is difficult for anyone to object to the objectives, though there could be more dissent when it comes to prioritising them”*;
- once LSPs reach a stage of calling their member organisations to account for delivering targets or objectives.

Some partnerships are trying to build in measures to avoid and/or resolve conflicts. For example:

- using Articles of Association to set clear parameters within which members must operate;
- writing a process for conflict resolution into the LSP’s constitution to prevent individual partners using blocking or other disruptive tactics;
- developing partnership protocols formalising various structures and practices;
- preparing a partnership handbook setting out the roles and remits of partners and featuring conflict resolution.

1.3 BUILDING CAPACITY

Several interviewees mentioned questions relating to developing the LSP’s capacity in various ways through:

- Improvement Plans or Partnership Training and Development Programmes;
- obtaining greater support from partners to develop the LSP’s independent capacity which would also give partners greater ownership and involvement;
- recruiting people with the right skills – which can be a problem in some areas;
- trying to ensure that the LSP has the right tools for its task, such as improving data sets, and ensuring connections are made across sectors, partnerships, agencies, initiatives and individuals, by bringing them together for meetings and other forms of networking.

2. LSPs and their partners

2.1 INFLUENCE ON PARTNER ORGANISATIONS AND THEIR COMMITMENT TO THE LSP

Interviewees themselves – whatever their role or position in relation to the partnership – seemed enthusiastic about LSPs and conveyed the impression that organisations more generally are seeing their potential. *“Participants have realised the potential benefits from involvement in the LSP and seem committed to its future development.”* *“Agencies accept they cannot achieve regeneration alone.”*

There are also some signs of wider ‘cultural’ influence. *“People are generally more comfortable with the language of partnership. It comes more naturally to them, even at elected member level.”*

On the whole, however, interviewees thought it too soon to tell how great an influence the LSP is having on partner organisations:

- *“little influence yet on core activities. The Community Strategy was only ratified in January 2003. It flags up key issues, but time will tell how far these will feed into core activities”;*
- *“the focus on regeneration has been reflected in the plans and priorities of the thematic partnerships and, through these, the public sector agencies”.*
- *“I would expect to see mention of the Community Plan and LNRS in partners’ corporate plans but words are one thing, doing is another”*
- *“Influence varies. The Business Plan contains criteria that partners are supposed to take on board but not much is happening yet. The LSP is influencing the Council and the PCT is very supportive. But with many others, communications and feedback mechanisms are still only embryonic”.*

Some were more positive:

- *“ . . . some influence on core activities in the setting of joint priorities, for instance, in work on crime and disorder”.*
- *“LSP is beginning to influence core activities of agencies. It has been able to refocus those sub-partnerships that had lost direction, sort out their membership and address leadership issues.”*
- *“There are the seeds of integration as partners are starting to understand/take on board others’ visions and strategic plans. The Plan has 9 transformational projects that are at the heart of what we want to do. They are now always referenced in strategies extending to the partners’ corporate plans.”*

There is clearly a relationship between the level of influence the organisation has exercised in the first place and the degree of integration with its own operation. *“Synergy is to be expected with the Council plans because the Council made such a substantial input to the Community Plan and the LNRS.”*

One interviewee thought there is a need to look for ways of encouraging organisations to be influenced. There is also a need to recognise that agencies can face conflicts between the LSP's priorities and their own performance targets: *“The main priority for all agencies remains hitting government targets.”*

2.2 INTERFACE BETWEEN THE LOCAL AUTHORITY AND THE LSP

The interviews indicated the wide variation in terms of political composition, Cabinet arrangements and political representation on the LSP.

Council dominance

Dominance was difficult to gauge especially at officer level, partly because it can be hard to know where ‘support’ ends and ‘dominance’ begins. In cases where the LSP was said to be officer driven, there was the rider that otherwise, it would not be driven at all. Similarly, there is a lead role *‘appropriate to the Council’s community leadership role but this is not the same as hijacking’*.

Another distinction made was between councillors ‘fronting’ the Partnership and leading it. In some cases there was a deliberate holding back by Council, a determination not to dominate whether at officer or member level, although this probably had to be allied to ‘covert leadership’.

In a case of the LSP being an independent company, the Council has control of the company but with self-imposed limits: the three councillors only have one vote between them and the Council Chief Executive, though now on the Board is a non-voting member not a Director. Even so, there can be hidden dominance, for example, through the dependence on partner contributions.

Accountability issues were regularly raised in connection with the Council’s role. It was evident that in some areas, local authority Chief Executives exercised considerable influence especially where the LSP did not have any independent administration. The extent of involvement is reflected in the council often being the main or only organisation to provide core funding or in-kind resources.

Political change and its effects

Most areas had not undergone any significant change. Sometimes, even when there had been a change, this had not necessarily impacted on the LSP. Wider, cross party ownership of the Community Plan was one factor minimising disruption. Other changes, such as a new local authority Chief Executive can have a greater impact. However, LSP officers were alert to the need to look at the potential effects of changing representation and shifting party political positions.

Critical political issues and their fit with LSP issues

In most places, there was considerable overlap or a good fit between the local political issues and the concerns of the LSP. These were largely expressed in the Community Strategy and sometimes the Community Strategy themes feed into Council service

themes and therefore also fit with portfolios. Again, the point was made that the LSP does not feel party political. This could mean that there could be some divergence which is not the same as contradiction. For example, Council Tax levels might feature as a political issue.

Member training relevant to partnership working

In most places, it seemed that little training or development in partnership working had so far taken place for elected members, but it is being recognised as a need. Even when sessions are offered, take-up/attendance is a problem. Opportunities are being taken to piggyback on other development work and LSPs are making use of other contacts with elected members as well as arranging one to ones with new councillors and induction for new Board members.

2.3 REGIONAL AND SUB-REGIONAL AGENDAS

One or two other regional or sub-regional issues were mentioned:

- the extent to which being in London is almost equivalent to being in a two tier authority;
- an increasing regional agenda being driven through GOs and RDAs – a strong steer that all areas have to take into account.
- sub-regional issues such as the impact of economic growth and housing expansion and inter-area competition.

Devolved decision making

The questions were asked: Does the Council have area committees or other forms of devolved decision making? If so, is there any overlap with the LSP's or other community engagement structures? The position varied about

- whether or not there were area committees or neighbourhood partnerships/forums and,
- where there were, whether they were solely consultative or had any delegated responsibilities; and
- the extent to which local councillors were involved and their role.

In some places, area arrangements were currently being considered. An issue for one LSP was whether the local Council committees would be inappropriate vehicles for the LSP or were too tied into formal and formulaic ways of working. Another LSP was seeking to rationalise Council and LSP structures and questions of function as well as form arose: were they to influence policy or do things in their own locality?

3. Strategy development

3.1 THE COMMUNITY STRATEGY

Not all interviewees could comment much on the Community Strategy process, either because they represented partner bodies that had not been centrally involved or because they were not in post at that time.

There was mention of the ‘conundrum’ that it is only the local authority that has the duty to produce a CS but it is also meant to be owned by partners. On the whole, the Community Strategy (CS) process was managed so that the Council was kept involved at all stages, thus overcoming any contentious issues at an early stage and pre-empting any possible challenge of the completed strategy. In some places the local authority drove the process and the LSP’s role was to look at drafts, give feedback and ratify the final document. In one area, the CS was very much seen by the Council as ‘their’ strategy, with the LSP as the vehicle for developing and delivering it. They were working towards genuinely making it a joint strategy. The other ‘balancing act’ that had to be achieved was that of community consultation/involvement. Points that were widely echoed:

- much preparation of the CS facilitated by the Council, though recognising it was being done for the LSP;
- Councils considered the evolving CS formally in parallel with the LSP;
- A lot of CS work was done thematically involving the people best placed to do the work and/or there was an LSP working group leading the strategy development;
- The way strategy development was handled provided an ongoing, internal amendment process which meant the final document held no surprises for the Council.

The following quotations give an insight into the process of strategy formulation:

“When our Community Strategy was being developed, the LSP was very new and remained peripheral to the development process that was led by the Council, with little use made of LSP partners’ resources. Although the Strategy was approved by the LSP, it has not really engaged partners and it is questionable how far it reflects their views. The LSP is now working with the local authority to clarify their respective roles. The LSP will be able to ensure wider involvement in future though the Council is bound to have a major part to play because it holds much of the data required and has a large delivery function.”

“Partners were involved in the process; the Board reviewed the Plan in progress and signed it off. But the Council played a key role though this could be seen as (unquantified) work for the LSP. The process took 6 months up to publication in May 2002. The LSP Director played a key role in making the links between the theme partnerships as delivery vehicles for both the Community Strategy and the LNRS.”

“The vision for the Community Strategy was influenced by a consultant’s report commissioned by the Council; its development was led by the Head of Policy and supported by other Council officers and took about one year. LSP sub groups were set up to comment on different sections.”

“Only two 1-year Community Plans have been produced so far, the latest covering 2001-2. A 10-year Strategy is to be developed by the LSP in 2004 once a community profiling initiative, to provide much more robust baseline data, has been completed. The LSP’s 4 theme groups each developed plans that were circulated amongst stakeholders for comment and thematic prioritisation and formed the basis of draft Plans. Although the strategy groups contributed to both Plans, Council officers undertook most work. It was felt that none of the agencies really took ownership of it or felt responsible for driving it forward. There is now a new Council CEO who is keen that in future the agencies involved accept ownership and responsibility for the CS and the LSP board will be central to the turning of priorities into actions.”

“The Community strategy covers the period to 2004. The Council presented its thinking about improving quality of life at the first LSP Board meeting in August 2001 and this kick-started the debate on what should be included in the Strategy. A working group was set up to steer the process and, in particular, manage the community consultation. Different agencies wrote individual sections and the Council edited them to ensure consistency and flow. The timescale for the process was tight (target for completion Autumn 2002) so that the Council also had to progress chase to avoid slippage. The draft was completed in November 2002 and ratified by the LSP in January 2003.”

In some places, the process was arguably top down because drafts drew upon other recent strategies that had been more bottom up.

- *“It was a matter of ‘top slicing’ other plans already rooted in consultation. The Plan development was concurrent with forming the LSP over the period summer 1998-May 1999.”*
- *“Previous surveys and consultation exercises used for the New Commitment to Regeneration strategy were used, though there was widespread involvement in the subsequent 18-month process.”*
- *“There was an audit of existing strategies to help identify key themes. There were some tensions between the Council and the LSP about how far the Community Strategy could be aligned with the regeneration strategy. The LSP thought this was too narrowly focused on physical regeneration.”*

3.2 DEVELOPING THE LOCAL NEIGHBOURHOOD RENEWAL STRATEGY

Five of the LSPs participating in the Learning Set were amongst the 87 eligible for Neighbourhood Renewal Fund and the associated funds such as Community Empowerment Fund. There were often similarities in the process of developing the LNRSs with that for the Community Strategy. However, there were also differences. Sometimes, the LNRS was more a partnership document because the LSP and community had been much more involved in its development. But at least one LSP

found the process was much more rushed and that the theme partnerships were unable to provide as much information on what needed to be prioritised at neighbourhood level.

3.3 INFORMATION BASES

One of the issues critical to producing strategies is having access to reliable, appropriate, up to date data. A variety of points came out of the interviews:

- The need for mapping exercises and setting baselines as a basis for decision making and tracking change. But this can be a difficult (and dreary) process, especially obtaining spend and service data and socio-economic data at the right spatial level.
- Quality of information is better in some policy areas than others. For example, community safety audits tend to have produced robust material.
- Some LSPs had invested in external consultants; for example to create a framework of neighbourhood data for the LNRS or to get information down to ward level.
- On the whole, problems of sharing data were not encountered though the culture of sharing has not yet developed in some areas. Some LSPs are creating systems and mechanisms for sharing data. One has an ICT Strategy group comprising the information officers from partner organisations. They are trying to link databases and introduce a GIS system. The next step will be to find a host organisation and put the data on a website. Another has neighbourhood.net – an intranet product with geographical and numerical mapping, currently based on IMD 2000, but to be updated using 2001 Census data.
- There can be concerns over sensitive localised data where it may be possible to identify individual households.
- Keeping data systems updated is a challenge.
- Although LSPs are trying to move towards evidence based policy proposals, attempts to review what works are embryonic and, at best, patchy. As with data collection, the quality of what exists tends to depend upon developments in other (thematic) partnerships or regeneration initiatives. In some areas, approaches such as neighbourhood management are being followed to see how far they produce wider lessons.

3.4 CONSULTATION MECHANISMS

LSPs require different forms of consultation and involvement both to inform their decisions and to boost their credibility and legitimacy. First, they must rely on partners for two-way communication with the agencies or stakeholders they represent – canvassing their views and feeding back to them. With public sector bodies, in particular, this is significant not only in terms of the exchange of information but also for embedding a culture of partnership in, and spreading it throughout, the organisation concerned. If only one or two officers are involved without any more extensive engagement of the whole organisation, partnership will remain tokenistic.

Secondly, in the sphere of community consultation, LSPs are using a wide variety of structures and mechanisms:

- *established or emerging community and voluntary sector networks* which can both produce representatives to sit on various bodies within the LSP and be the means of more widespread consultation with, or dissemination to, these sectors. The NRF LSPs have an advantage in CEF funding to develop and build capacity in such networks.
- *panels and forums* such as Citizens' Panels, BME Forums, Young People's Forums, Older People's Forums, Faith Networks;
- working through *specialist staff* in partner organisations, such as consultation officers or community development workers;
- *wider outreach* through such means as drop-in centres, special interest meetings held in neighbourhood venues, road shows, newsletters and/or questionnaires to households, posting information on websites with opportunities for responses.
- *involvement measures* such as provision of material in different language, Braille or large print or in video formats; provision of signers; use of accessible venues.

4. Key Issues and Lessons

Interviewees identified a range of issues from their experience. Although often couched in different words, there was considerable consistency both in the areas of interest and the identification of significant lessons. The points raised by interviewees are listed below under several – not really mutually exclusive – headings.

4.1 GENERAL (INCLUDING LESSONS FOR CENTRAL GOVERNMENT)

- There is a need for realism about organisations, what is deliverable and what is achievable.
- There is a need to identify distinctive role of the LSP: getting to grips collectively with the big strategic issues and recognising how far that means agencies must subordinate their own interests to the wider good.
- There is also, therefore, a need for a vision and strong strategic direction and also to tackle cross cutting issues such as social inclusion.
- There is a need for LSPs to remain strategic, and avoid distraction which can result from competition and bidding for funds such as those available through NRF. Also, it should be recognised that LSPs need to address a wide variety of issues, and their role is much wider than the Neighbourhood Renewal agenda.
- There is a need to encourage innovation and experimentation.

- It is not difficult to get involvement across a wide range of organisations, but there is a need to improve communication within the larger ones: although Board members are supportive and familiar with the LSP agenda, this does not necessarily permeate all parts of their organisation.
- There is also a need to recognise how much depends on individuals; there is a need to spread the load which is another reason for getting into agencies more deeply.
- Cultural changes and increasing partnership skills are as important as resources.
- It should be acknowledged that this sort of trail blazing is hard. It is taking time for partnerships to get established and expecting them to provide leadership during this formative period may be unrealistic.
- The performance management of partner organisations needs to be co-ordinated.

4.2 RESOURCING THE LSP

There are concerns about:

- insufficient resources;
- uncertainty of funding and reliance on year to year negotiation (with GO/NRU) which undermines stability;
- reliance upon goodwill.
- the burden on local authority

4.3 GETTING THE LSP STRUCTURES RIGHT

- Achieving inclusiveness without being too unwieldy.
- The government guidance on LSPs could usefully give greater emphasis to the importance of wider partnership structures, as opposed to its present focus on the LSP as one body.
- It is important to avoid hierarchy and recognise that different parts of the structure have different roles rather than greater or lesser degrees of importance.
- It is necessary to have a structure with appropriate representation at all levels.
- Connecting neighbourhoods with the LSP and councils at ward level is important.

4.4 GOVERNANCE

- In general, there is a need for greater accountability and democratic legitimacy.
- LSPs sometimes pride themselves on being non-political – is this realistic or sustainable?
- Local authorities have the duty to produce a Community Strategy – should this be extended to other partners?

4.5 STRATEGY PRODUCTION

- Community Plans need to be tighter and more specific: they tend to contain too many pledges, varying widely and ranging from the broadly aspirational to the specific. In addition, the delivery framework should be worked out at the same time, partly as a reality check, but also itemising who is responsible for what.
- There is need to ensure that organisations that will be responsible for delivery are sufficiently involved in drafting the plan.
- Lessons emerging about the skills required in producing Community Strategies and LNRs given the need to manage the process as well as develop the content?

Interviewees variously identified strengths and weaknesses of the process of development and the content as shown in the Box below.

Strengths and weaknesses of strategic plans and planning process

Strengths:

- partnership owned
- inclusive and with Council holding back
- participative: right spirit of partnership in the task
- it provided focus and an opportunity to demonstrate commitment to partnership
- successful in keeping to tight timescale
- wide consultation
- flexibility to vary the consultation mechanisms when it was recognised that some groups were being excluded.

Weaknesses:

- complete reliance on Council for funding, administrative support and research;
- because the onus was on the local authority to produce a community strategy, other partners knew that even if they did not contribute financially, it would still get done.
- limited involvement of partners
- the Strategy was not based upon a thorough interrogation of need
- it was in some parts only a catalogue of what agencies would need to do or would be doing in any case.

4.6 LEVELS OF DECISION MAKING AND STRATEGIC INTEGRATION

- The increasing complexity of governance raises the question of where the strategic lead is or should be in relation to a range of issues. There are multiple spatial levels of strategy making: regional (RDAs, etc); sub-regional agencies (LSCs, Police, etc); regeneration zones with different geographical 'cuts' (Objective 2, 'technology corridors', etc); different LSPs within a sub-region; local authority wide; neighbourhood level (NDCs etc). The complexity is confusing to people, especially those not centrally involved, which reduces transparency and risks alienating people from the processes.
- In one region, there is some push towards sub-regional LSPs and discussion starting about possible convergences.

4.7 RATIONALISATION

- The number of area based and thematic partnerships in some areas needs to be addressed but rationalisation is a difficult and sensitive issue.

5. Added Value

Although it is clear that local players are increasingly being asked to develop joint priorities and joint working and there needs to be some vehicle for doing this, the consultants concluded that on the basis of the evidence from the interviews it is still quite often hard to articulate the added value of LSPs let alone quantify it in any way.

Examples of added value extended beyond strategy development to engagement and delivery. In a case study for the IDeA, Croydon lists some of the achievements that can be expected from LSPs:

- to obtain a better understanding of needs;
- to create an aligned vision/strategy between local partners;
- to co-ordinate or integrate services;
- to achieve additional external funding;
- to improve performance.

All of these featured in the responses of the action learning set participants about adding value:

- getting a large number of partners signed up to the Community Strategy which was seen as an achievement in itself and a precursor to more direct impact.
- partner organisations are starting to see what they have in common but also recognise their differences including potentially conflicting aims which it can be helpful to acknowledge and have out in the open.

- vertical as well as horizontal links are starting to be made between organisations and levels of working.
- better relationship already seen between partners resulting in closer working over specific issues.
- together the partners can develop a better strategic view for the area.
- the LSP is providing both the impetus and the arena in which to bring a collective focus on priorities emerging from the CS.
- some LSPs show signs of getting better at joint planning – through coming to grips with different planning cycles for single strategies and getting better integration with corporate plans.
- the LSP can be a catalyst for change through challenging partners on the status quo and providing the mutual support that can encourage innovation and risk taking which would be more difficult for agencies to do on their own.
- influencing the direction of resources towards LPSA targets.
- neighbourhood renewal work has brought added value in some areas because of the focus on engagement and monitoring and evaluation.
- in one area, the LSP has also enabled a partnership approach to neighbourhood management with the designated NM areas having manager from different agencies – Council, PCT, RSL, etc – which has achieved better ownership of the initiative and better inter-agency communication.
- increased information sharing, sometimes going on the joint appointment of a data manager.
- bringing a wider range of people into decision making and making such processes more meaningful.
- the collective voice represented by the LSP can strengthen bids and, therefore, result in leveraging in more external funding.
- there are signs that new national agendas, such as community cohesion, are being routed through LSPs.
- as the LSP is becoming established, the concept of managed performance in relation to partnership working is being introduced, with systems being established at all levels including reporting lines to the relevant groups.
- the LSP can provide a means of bringing different perspectives to particular problems and broadening partners' understandings about how to address them.

APPENDIX 4

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