

Scrutiny Task and Finish Panel Agenda



Local Strategic Partnership Task and Finish Panel Thursday, 22nd February, 2007

Place: Committee Room 1, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping

Time: 6.00 pm

Democratic Services Officer: Simon Hill - Research and Democratic Services
Tel: 01992 564249 email: shill@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

Members:

Councillors Mrs M Sartin (Chairman), Mrs P Smith (Vice-Chairman), Mrs S Clapp, Mrs A Cooper, J Demetriou, Mrs J Lea, A Lee, Mrs J H Whitehouse and J M Whitehouse

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- 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**
 - 2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

(Head of Research and Democratic Services). To declare interests in any items on the agenda.

In considering whether to declare a personal or a prejudicial interest under the Code of Conduct, Overview & Scrutiny members are asked pay particular attention to paragraph 11 of the Code in addition to the more familiar requirements.

This requires the declaration of a personal and prejudicial interest in any matter before an OS Committee which relates to a decision of or action by another Committee or Sub Committee of the Council, a Joint Committee or Joint Sub Committee in which the Council is involved and of which the Councillor is also a member.

Paragraph 11 does not refer to Cabinet decisions or attendance at an OS meeting purely for the purpose of answering questions or providing information on such a matter.

3. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

(Head of Research and Democratic Services) To report the appointment of any substitute members for the meeting.

4. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING - 15 NOVEMBER 2006. (Pages 3 - 6)

To confirm the minutes of the last meeting of the Panel (attached).

5. TERMS OF REFERENCE AND WORK PLAN (Pages 7 - 10)

Attached.

6. LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS: SHAPING THEIR FUTURE - SUMMARY BY MARINA SHERRIFF, COMMUNITY STRATEGY AND PARTNERSHIP MANAGER (Pages 11 - 20)

To consider the attached report.

7. FINAL REPORT (Pages 21 - 34)

(Lead officer – J Scott/Chairman of Panel) To consider the attached draft report.

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP TASK AND FINISH
PANEL
HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 15 NOVEMBER 2006
IN CONFERENCE ROOM, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET, EPPING
AT 2.00 - 4.10 PM

Members Present: Mrs M Sartin (Chairman), Mrs P Smith (Vice-Chairman), Mrs A Cooper and Mrs J H Whitehouse

Other members present:

Apologies for Absence: Mrs S Clapp, Mrs J Lea and J M Whitehouse

Officers Present J Scott (Joint Chief Executive), C Overend (Policy & Research Officer) and Z Folley (Democratic Services Assistant)

Also in attendance:

27. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Pursuant to the Council's Code of Member Conduct, Councillor Mrs M Sartin , Mrs J H Whitehouse and Mrs A Cooper declared a general personal interest by virtue of being members of the Epping Forest Local Strategic Partnership. They declared that their interests were not prejudicial and that they would remain in the meeting.

28. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING - 25 OCTOBER 2006.

Noted.

29. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

Noted that there were no substitute members.

30. CONCLUSIONS AND REPORT

The Joint Chief Executive (Community) drew attention to the government consultation document ' LSPs – Shaping their future'.

He referred to the intention to pass responsibility for the LSP as a whole to the Local Authority Executive and the indication that the Council itself should become the lead agency for its activity and accountable for its work.

The Panel had before them copies of the notes for all their previous meetings and their terms of reference.

The Panel were asked to consider and begin to draft their final report and agreed the following:

(a) EFDC/ Member involvement.

Agreed that the Council should not take the lead in appointing the Chairman of the EF LSP. **Agreed** that the post should continue to be open to any constituent partners based on merit as per the existing arrangements.

Noted the value Members could add to the LSP as the democratically elected representatives. **Agreed** that back bench Member involvement in the Action Groups be encouraged and promoted by way of promotional items in suitable outlets and the Members Bulletin.

Agreed that the Council should continue to be represented on the LSP Steering Board by two Portfolio Holders. The Panel felt that this level of representation was proportionate and ensured a fair balance between the agencies. The Panel considered whether the Leader of the Council should become a member of the steering group.

Agreed that the issue of the LSP should be ascribed to a specific Portfolio to present reports on the Partnership and provide clear accountability. **Agreed** that the subject matter would best fit in with the Community Wellbeing Portfolio. **Agreed** that this Portfolio Holder should be involved in the monitoring arrangements for the Partnership and therefore should not be one of the Portfolio Holder representatives on the Steering Board.

Agreed that a procedure be established to formally recognise the Councils Member representatives on the LSP and Action Groups. **Agreed** that steps be taken to enable them to report back to full Council on activities to keep Members up to date on current work activities.

Noted a report from Councillor Mrs P Smith on her experience at a recent GO –East Seminar on LSPs. The seminar was attended by six other representatives from agencies in the region and highlighted the good practices of the District LSP.

(b) Scrutiny involvement

Agreed that the role of scrutiny needed to be increased and that it should become a key forum for monitoring and holding to account the arrangements. **Agreed** that the Chairman of the Partnership should be asked to attend an Overview and Scrutiny meeting once a year. **Agreed** that the Council's Member representatives should also be subject to Member scrutiny.

(c) LAA/County LSP

Agreed that the LSP should be actively involved in the decision making process for the LAA funding streams and should liaise with the County LSP to promote and secure local needs and facilitate two tier working.

Noted the opportunities in the white paper concerning two tier working with the County. **Noted** the need to work with Local Authorities elsewhere to influence regional planning policy.

Reference made to a presentation from County on the current position on the LAA and the current 'refresh' of the priorities. **Noted** current thinking aimed at changing the way the rewards grants for the achievement of LAA targets were allocated and

stressed the need for Council involvement in this process. **Noted** that the LAA performance targets were submitted to the Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel for scrutiny

(d) Funding

Noted that the Partnership was supported by a CSB sum of £10,000 and by voluntary donations from the constituent agencies. **Noted** that recent developments might result in changes to the level of contribution made by this external source and loss of financial support. The operational budget for the partnership was £45,000 per annum.

Noted that the budget funded the post of Community Strategy and Partnership Manager who provided the main source of administrative support for the LSP. This was allocated on a year by year basis due to the uncertainties around the financial support available to the partnership. **Agreed** that the level of administrative support provided for the work was insufficient.

Agreed that longer term funding should be sought for the partnership and overall the levels of resources allocated to it raised. **Noted** the need to secure more contributions for its work.

(e) Publicity and Participation

Noted that LSP meetings were open to the public. **Agreed** that residents should be involved but this was one task that required more consideration.

(f) Sustainable Community Strategy/ Local Planning Development Framework

Noted the need to produce a sustainable community strategy closely linked to the local planning development framework. **Agreed** to invite an appropriate officer from Planning Services to advise on the issues from a planning viewpoint.

(g) Timescale

Agreed the need to put the final report to the LSP for comments

Noted that the final report of the Panel would be submitted to the LSP itself for consideration prior to submission to the OSC in February 2006.

Agreed that the next meeting of the Panel planned for 11 December 2006 be moved back to the new year, to allow more time to draft the report and circulated it for consideration. **Agreed** that a new date would be fixed in due course and listed in the Members Bulletin.

31. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Noted that the next meeting would be held on 15 December 2006 at 7.30.

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Term of Reference:

To consider the set up and operation of the Epping Forest Local Strategic Partnership and formulate recommendations on its future in light of the government consultation paper 'Local Strategic Partnerships: Shaping their Future' and the Local Government White Paper expected in November 2006.

Aims and Objectives

1. To identify the purpose of the Epping Forest LSP, its work, structure, way in which it is held to account, current strengths and weaknesses and the partner agencies involved.
3. To consider the current and future role and involvement of the Council.
4. To consider the nature of the work to be carried out by the Partnership including how the emerging Sustainable Community Strategy is to be linked into the Local Planning Development Framework and other local plans in the context of the government guidance.
5. To consider who should be involved in the organisation, who should attend meetings; ways to increase involvement from residents and groups and publicity arrangements for initiatives.
6. To review the Local Area Agreement and how it should be implemented locally.
7. To consider the District LSP's relationship with the County and other LSP's in the region.
8. To consider available resources, secretariat support, performance monitoring targets and arrangements.
9. To consider how to ensure greater Portfolio Holder and 'back bench' Member involvement in the Partnership and the future role for Scrutiny.
10. To consult and agree with the partner agencies any recommendations for change.
11. To identify by the end of September 2006 any recommendations that require extra spending.
12. To consider the Council's involvement with other Partnerships and how any issues identified could be applied to these relationships

TASK AND FINISH PANEL PLANNING FORM:

Information required:

Epping Forest LSP Community Strategy 2004-2020
 LAA – updated copy of Local Area Agreement
 LSP response to consultation paper
 Induction pack for new Members
 Details of Structure showing relationship of LSP Board to Steering Group and Action Groups and Membership of each.
 Constitution Terms of Reference for LSP Board, Steering Group and Action Group.

TIMESCALE	ESTIMATED	ACTUAL
Commencement	July 2006	
Finish		
Report.	May 2007	

LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP TASK AND FINISH PANEL: WORK PROGRAMME

Proposed Date	Item	Current Position
24 June 2006	Scoping and Terms of Reference setting.	Terms of reference and work plan formulated
30 August 2006	Discussion with LSP – Chief Executive David Butler, Aiden Thomas and Marina Sheriff	
27 September 2006	Discussion with EFDC officers involved in LSP sub - groups and representatives of partner groups.	
25 October 2006	Discussion with Richard Puleston of Essex County Council.	
15 November 2006	Formulation of final report	
22 February 2007	Formulation of final report	

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Local Strategic Partnerships: Shaping their future An Analysis of Consultation Responses

Introduction

This report outlines the findings of the questionnaire included in the Local Strategic Partnerships: Shaping their future consultation document, which was launched on 8th December 2005.

Its core objectives are:

- To understand the level of commitment to LSPs and the Sustainable Community Strategy
- To investigate the role of local authorities in facilitating action through the LSP and Sustainable Community Strategy
- To assess the feasibility of LSPs to identify and deliver against the priorities of the Sustainable Community Strategy, Local Area Agreement, and Local Development Framework
- To understand how LSPs can better support neighbourhood engagement and ensure the influence of local views on service delivery and spending
- To investigate how governance and scrutiny arrangements for LSPs can be achieved

The questionnaire consisted of 35 open-ended questions, split into four themes, and was distributed to a wide range of individuals and organisations.

A total of 580 responses were received, the main organisations being LSPs (41%), Council (26%) and non-profit organisations (13%). However, not all respondents answered every question.

Caution is recommended when interpreting the findings, as those who responded may not necessarily be representative of the various groups that the Communities and Local Government sought to consult. Where percentages do not sum to 100, this may be due to the fact that multiple answers were allowed. Also, please note that this survey deals with respondent's perceptions rather than facts.

Executive Summary

There are recurrent concerns that responding organisations have, namely to ensure that any future proposals, duties or mandatory requirements are fit-for-purpose and appropriate for all types of LSP, that they are flexible enough to be tailored to suit particular areas and are adequately resourced.

It appears that organisations would appreciate learning from their peers in the form of good practice examples. Government produced materials are also called for.

Theme 1: LSPs, Sustainable Community Strategies and Local Area Agreements

Q1 - Do you agree that the key role of the LSP should be to develop the vision for the local area through the sustainable community strategy and the delivery contract through the LAA?

74% of respondents agree, and this is fairly consistent amongst the various sub-groups of respondents. 1% expressed outright disagreement with the proposed role. The remaining 25% were either ambivalent, undecided or see both advantages and disadvantages to the proposal.

31% of district council respondents feel that 2-tier LAAs do not adequately cover local issues or issues relevant at a community level. This is far higher than both the overall figure for all respondents (14%) and the proportion of county council respondents (19%).

Of the 129 who do not explicitly agree with the proposal, their key concern was that the LAA needs to reflect local priorities (37%) followed by a desire for clarification of the roles and responsibilities at each level of an LSP (27%).

Of the 359 who explicitly agree with the proposal, they share the same key concerns about the LAA (30%) and the roles and responsibilities (14%).

Theme 2: Regional/Sub-Regional Engagement

Q2 – We believe it is important the LSPs reflect regional/sub-regional plans where relevant in the Sustainable Community Strategy priorities and that regional organisations and partnerships take account of key local needs. How can this greater coordination best be facilitated?

The most common improvement suggested is more effective joint working between LSPs and regional organisations (45%), closely followed by the need for regional bodies to consider local needs (42%). Other suggestions included a general improvement in communication (16%).

Theme 3 – Links to Local Plans

Q3 – Would a requirement on bodies producing theme or service based plans to ‘have regard’ to the Sustainable Community Strategy in doing so and vice versa, increase the LSP’s ability to take the over-arching view in an area?

Most agree that this is the case (62%) and 6% already have such an arrangement in place. 13% feel it is important to formalise cooperation through legislation but feel that in order to do so greater partnership working and cooperation is needed.

Those who did not explicitly agree with this proposal had specific concerns. 33% felt there was a greater need for more partnership working and cooperation, 24% thought a duty to cooperate should be enforced, and 10% identified a need for more resources.

Theme 4: Development of Sustainable Community Strategies

Q4 – Are the proposed steps in the development of a Sustainable Community Strategy correct?¹

Q5 – What more could be done to ensure Sustainable Community Strategies are better able to make the links between social, economic and environmental goals and to deal more effectively with the area's cross-boundary and longer-term impacts?

The majority of respondents (61%) agree with the proposed development steps set out for SCS. There is no outright disagreement; however 7% feel that these steps should be for guidance only and that following them should not be a mandatory requirement.

A key caveat expressed by respondents who agree (27%) is that the proposed steps need to make room for more local emphasis and must take local needs into account. They also identified a need for more resources (16%).

Looking at the responses of those who do not explicitly agree, 38% identify a need for local emphasis and 25% a need for more resources in order to adhere to the steps.

When asked question 5, 31% of respondents say that cross-boundary targets should be set and 22% feel that a local emphasis is required, whereby locally set targets and needs are taken into account. Again there is a demand for more flexibility within the proposals to account for locally specific circumstances.

Theme 5: Neighbourhood Engagement

Q6 – What should be the role of the LSP in supporting neighbourhood engagement and ensuring the neighbourhood/parish voice, including diverse and minority communities, is heard at the principal local level?

Q7 – In two-tier areas, is it most appropriate for the responsibility for neighbourhood engagement to rest with the district level LSP?

The main roles suggested for LSPs are:

- To consult local forums and partners in order to facilitate neighbourhood engagement
- To focus on its local area and engage more directly with its local communities

Important requirements for LSPs to be facilitators of neighbourhood engagement are:

- Improved communications
- Provision of best practice examples

¹ A Sustainable Community Strategy will need to be developed through a number of stages:

- Baseline current performance
- Analysing performance and local conditions
- LAA outcomes and targets reflecting overarching vision
- Community Strategy Action Plan and LAA delivery plan becoming one and the same
- Refreshing on an annual basis and reviewed every three years

56% of those who answered question 7 agree that the responsibility for neighbourhood engagement should rest with the district level LSP and 18% added that County LSPs should be sensitive to district LSP's priorities. 14% want to see more focus on local areas and 12% say consultation with local forums and partners is needed. Respondents from county councils are more likely to hold the view that they just need to have more regard to district LSPs, rather than district LSPs having sole responsibility for neighbourhood engagement.

Theme 6: Links with the Local Development Framework

Q8 – How can spatial planning teams best contribute to Sustainable Community Strategies through the LSP and ensure that Local Development Frameworks and Sustainable Community Strategies are closely linked?

Q9 – How could revised guidance and accompanying support materials best ensure the Sustainable Community Strategies and Local Development Frameworks join up effectively?

If spatial planning teams are to contribute to the Sustainable Community Strategy, the most important requirement cited by respondents is to ensure closer working and better communications between planning teams and the LSP rather than structural or policy changes at the centre.

Some suggested way to achieve this are:

- Using the LSP as a key consultee in the development of the LD
- Regular communication between planning officers, LSPs and LDFs
- Basing the Core Strategy of the LDF around the themes of the Community Strategy
- Using shared evidence/consultation bases
- LSPs and local authorities adopting parish plans as 'local information sources'
- Use of a common set of local quality of life indicators
- Secondment of relevant planning staff to the LSP to aid integration

Regarding question 9, 35% of respondents say more integrated working and better communications are the most important factor to consider. 29% identified the need for clear best practice guidance to be produced.

Theme 7: Two-tier Areas

Q10 – Should every local authority area have its own LSP?

Q11 – Would the establishment of a greater delineation of roles between county and district LSPs as suggested be sensible?

Reaction to Q10 is mixed. 44% are in agreement and only 8% express downright disagreement. However, 46% of respondents answer 'it depends', citing different local circumstances as the reason for them not being able to answer a simple 'yes' or 'no'.

When asked Q11, 34 % say 'yes' and 28% feel that it is dependent on local circumstances.

Theme 8: LSP as the Partnership of Partnerships

Q12 – We believe that it is important that the LSP is made up of the thematic partnerships in the area together with an LSP board. What is your view?

Q13 – We believe that a rationalisation of local partnerships would help the LSP executive take an effective overview. Would clustering partnerships around the four LAA blocks be a sensible way to achieve this?

Q14 – We believe that the geographic boundary of partners within LSPs is important. What do you see as the opportunities for and barriers to coterminosity shared geographic boundaries?

Q15 – Within the LSP framework and its established priorities, would the creations of single delivery vehicles to tackle particular issues be helpful?

69% agrees with the proposed LSP structure of thematic partnerships in the area together with an LSP board. However, 18% say that different LSPs have different issues and a certain amount of flexibility is needed. 13% say they already have such LSP structures in place.

Those who do not explicitly agree with the proposed LSP structure cite several reasons including the structure needs to be driven by local circumstances and one size does not fit all.

Regarding Q13, around a quarter of respondents both agreed and disagreed with 36% adopting a more cautious view that one solution doesn't necessarily apply to all LSPs. Other comments were that some themes cut across the four blocks and need to be accounted for and that they are too rigid.

35% of respondents believe that coterminosity is a good idea and makes partnership working easier but 43% think that coterminosity is temporary and boundaries change, causing a barrier to partnership working.

Just under half (48%) feel that the creation of single delivery vehicles to tackle particular issues would be helpful. However, some respondents do point out several problems with the SDVs approach with 5% saying that an LSP is not a delivery vehicle at all.

Theme 9: Ensuring Wide Representation

Q16 – How can the neighbourhood and parish tiers be involved most effectively on the LSP on a) the executive and b) individual thematic partnerships?

Q17 – How can the private, voluntary and community sectors be involved most effectively on the LSP as a) the executive and b) individual thematic partnerships?

25% of respondents explicitly state that neighbourhood and parish tiers should be engaged with thematic partnerships and 12% believe they should be represented at executive level. However, there are others who feel that

stakeholders do not need to be directly involved in order to influence decision making. Instead, they feel it is more appropriate if they feed in to 'umbrella' organisations who are directly involved, as they represent a larger number of groups. Ways of indirect involvement mentioned included community networks or neighbourhood partnerships, nominated representatives from each sector and via regular consultation.

11% stated that they already have wide representation on their LSP and that the current measures they have in place are effective.

33% of respondents to Q17 explicitly state that LSPs should include representatives from the community/voluntary sector and 32% from the business sector. Some respondents feel this should be done indirectly.

A small number of responses indicate that in order to attract the private sector the LSP needs to demonstrate the benefits of partnership working to local businesses and how they can add value.

Theme 10: Providing Legislative Foundation

Q18 – Would a duty to cooperate with the local authority, in producing and implementing the Community Strategy, help to set LSPs on a firmer footing and better enable their enhanced delivery coordination role?

Q19 – If so, what obligations, such as attendance, financial or staff support, would be useful to place on partners?

Q20 – If so, which public sector agencies would the duty be most sensibly placed on?

Q21 – Should there be a statutory duty on local authorities and named partners to promote the engagement of the voluntary and community sectors in the LSP?

63% of respondents explicitly state that they agree in principle that there should be a duty to cooperate placed on key public sector agencies, including 10% who feel that LSPs should be given statutory powers or have some kind of legal status. 25% explicitly disagree that participation should be obligatory. From the responses it is apparent that some feel that a duty will not result in partners being more involved in LSP activities; rather, that coercion will mean they pay lip service to the role. Many feel that the duty can only be placed on public sector organisations, and generally, as these organisations are already engaged with the LSP, they feel the duty would make little difference.

When asked what obligations respondents think would be most useful, the three most frequently mentioned are:

- Pooled resources or adequate financial support (31%)
- Attendance at meetings (16%)
- Dedicated support staff (7%)

Other duties or requirements mentioned include:

- Sharing evidence and performance data across the LSP
- Participating in council-led scrutiny

- Participating in community planning and collaborating on the development, implementation and review of the Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement
- Translating Sustainable Community Strategy priorities into their own service plans and being accountable for its relevant targets

48% of organisations agree in principle that there should be a statutory duty on local authorities and others to promote the engagement of the VCS. This is compared to 15% who think participation should not be obligatory. A further 6% feel that the decision should be taken at a local level, rather than being imposed by central government.

Theme 11: Accountability between Partners

Q22 – Should each partnership be encouraged to produce protocols or ‘partnership agreements’ between partners to ensure clear lines of accountability for the delivery of agreed outcomes?

Q23 – We believe that if partnership working was included as part of other key agencies’ assessments it would be effective in securing greater commitment from other public sector agencies. What are your views?

60% of respondents agree to Q22 and many advantages were cited:

- They can help to clarify roles/responsibilities
- They can increase understanding of aims and operations between partners
- They are a sign of commitment towards delivery against specific targets
- They can help to secure commitment of partners
- They are beneficial to local communities and can help with specific projects

39 respondents disagreed, mainly because protocols are perceived to be bureaucratic or a waste of resources. 11 respondents feel that trust between partners is more important and will lead to stronger partnership than formal protocols or ‘partnership agreements’.

59% of organisations agree that if partnership working was included as part of other key agencies’ assessments it would be effective in securing greater commitment from other public sector agencies.

Theme 12: Involvement of Local Councillors

Q24 – What do you see as the key role for executive councillors within LSPs?

Q25 – What do you see as the appropriate role for backbenchers particularly in ensuring a high quality of local engagement?

Q26 – What would make councillors’ powers of overview and scrutiny more effective in scrutinizing the 4 blocks of the LAA?

Out of the top five roles mentioned for both executive members and backbenchers, four are linked to working with the community. For executive

members these are considered these are considered the most important: community leadership, identifying local issues/needs, communicating/feeding back to the community and being involved in community engagement activities. The fifth most important role is to scrutinise and assess the LSP's performance.

For back benchers, scrutinising and assessing performance, identifying local issues/needs and getting involved in community engagement activities are considered more important than community leadership and communicating/feeding back to the community.

15 respondents say executive councillors' roles should include being on the executive board, or chairing the partnership and a further four say backbenchers should also perform this role.

Turning to Q26, there are three key areas that respondents believe would make councillors' power of overview and scrutiny more effective. These are:

- A more clearly defined process so there is clarity about what councillors are expected to do
- Training and further guidance about the role
- Clarification of which service providers are responsible and accountable for the targets in the LAA.

Theme 13: Involvement of Members of Parliament

Q27 – What would be the most appropriate way for a Member of Parliament to be involved with the LSP and how can we ensure that it is complementary to the role of local councillors?

Of the 316 organisations who answered this question:

- 27 state MPs should have a seat on the board or be a member of the LSP in some way
- 20 do not think they should have a formal or direct role
- 22 do not think they should have any kind of role at all, mainly due to a lack of capacity as there are so many demands on their time. Another reason provided is one of geography, as there can often be more than one MP working within an LSP's boundaries.

Another role for MPs mentioned is to be aware of developments and kept informed of progress, including problems arising and also to act in a consultancy role with LSPs drawing on their experience particularly around decision making, activities and projects and funding issues.

Theme 14: Involvement of Communities Served

Q28 – How can we promote effective community engagement and involvement, from all sections of the community, in shaping local priorities and public services?

Q29 – How can we maximise the opportunities for joint policy and joint activity on community engagement, including the LDF, the LAA and the Sustainable Community Strategy?

Q30 – How can accountability to local people and businesses be enhanced?

Q28 resulted in many suggestions for promoting community engagement and involvement. The LSP is generally seen to be the body that should be coordinating this rather than the local authority.

In terms of the actions required, the most crucial is considered to be having a shared understanding of what the community needs in order to tailor engagement and involvement activity appropriately. 23% of respondents feel clear communication is important.

21% of respondents mentioned support for community groups as important to build up their capacity to be effectively engaged. Organisations also recognise the importance of joining up community engagement activities in order to reduce duplication of efforts, the wasting of resources and consultation fatigue within communities.

Turning to Q29, again the most important action suggested was to have a shared understanding of community needs. Partnership working skills are also considered to be important, as is clear communication.

38% of those who responded to Q30 feel that communicating clearly, particularly in relation to the LSP's objectives, is best. 15% think that a marketing strategy, which promotes the benefits of being involved in the LSP, would be a particularly effective form of communication. A further 16% believe that by setting targets and monitoring progress towards meeting them will help.

Theme 15: Capacity Issues

Q31 – What are your LSPs key support/skill gaps?

Q32 – What extra or different support would be most helpful in shifting to a more delivery-focused role?

Q33 – How would LSPs prefer to receive information and support; through guidance, toolkits, signposting to existing information, practical learning opportunities etc?

Q34 – How can LSPs ensure that adequate learning and support provision is available to build the capacity of communities to engage with the LSP and its partners at the various levels?

Q35 – What learning or development do you feel is required by LSPs in order to deliver sustainable communities that embody the principles of sustainable development at the local level?

48% of respondents cite a need for more financial support, including dedicated or ring-fenced funding as a key support gap and 15% state staffing issues. In terms of skills, 15% mention partnership working skills followed by project management skills and general training needs.

Only a few responses allude to who should provide this support. Fourteen organisations say they would like best practice examples to be shared amongst LSPs and the organisations they are comprised of, and five organisations feel this information should come from the Government.

Regarding Q33, 19% of organisations that responded say that all of the means mentioned in the question – namely through guidance, signposting to existing information and practical learning opportunities – would be useful. Some organisations also say that it would be best if a variety of methods were used, such as internet/websites, Government, media and non-Government organisations.

Over half of those who responded to Q34 feel that financial support is the most effective way. In addition, many feel that community capacity-building and facilitating the engagement of communities with the LSP should be the role of a Community Empowerment Network, and the additional funding this brings should be used to fund staff and activities. Other ways mentioned include providing training and sharing best practice.

In response to Q35, 22% of respondents feel that some form of training would be useful. 15% feel this training should be about sustainable communities and how to plan to achieve them. Some respondents mention they would benefit from this training being aimed at a fairly basic level and should include a definition of what is meant by a 'sustainable community' so that all partners have a shared understanding of what to work towards.



Epping Forest District Council



SCRUTINY

REPORT OF LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP TASK AND FINISH PANEL

February 2007

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1. Chairman's Foreword

Councillor Mrs Sartin to complete

2. Introduction and Overview

Summary of issues scrutinised

Our Panel was set up by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June 2006. Our primary objective was to study the Consultation Paper "Local Strategic Partnerships : Shaping their future" which had been published by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in December 2005 and to reflect on how the proposals in the Consultation Paper might impact on local arrangements in relation to the Epping Forest Local Strategic Partnership.

We were very clear from the outset that it was not the intention that we should respond to the consultation paper but look to see how the proposals might affect what already happens locally and whether there were any suggestions that might improve current practice that should be taken on board ahead of any legal requirement to do so.

Public Interest Justification

The Local Government Act 2000 put a statutory duty on the District Council to secure the production of a Community Strategy. This was defined as a longer-term vision for the district, which would cover the twenty or so years up to 2021. Government guidance suggested the best way to do this was to bring together all the key players in the area in what was to be known as a Local Strategic Partnership.

The Epping Forest Local Strategic Partnership came into being in late 2002 and was a further development of an already existing Group known as the Epping Forest Community Agencies Group, a group of key players which had been meeting to improve joint working arrangements over a number of years.

The publication of the consultation paper provided the opportunity to look again at those arrangements and advise the Council accordingly.

Terms of Reference

The Panel's Terms of Reference were:

"To consider the set up and operation of the Epping Forest Local Strategic Partnership and formulate recommendations on its future in the light of the government consultation paper 'Local Strategic Partnerships: Shaping their Future'

Aims and Objectives

1. To identify the purpose of the Epping Forest LSP, its work, structure, way in which it is held to account, current strengths and weaknesses and the partner agencies involved.
2. To consider the current and future role and involvement of the Council.



3. To consider the nature of the work to be carried out by the Partnership including how the emerging Sustainable Community Strategy is to be linked into the Local Planning Development Framework and other local plans in the context of the government guidance.
4. To consider who should be involved in the organisation, who should attend meetings; ways to increase involvement from residents and groups and publicity arrangements for initiatives.
5. To review the Local Area Agreement and how it should be implemented locally.
6. To consider the District LSP's relationship with the County and other LSP's in the region.
7. To consider available resources, secretariat support, performance monitoring targets and arrangements.
8. To consider how to ensure great Portfolio Holder and 'back bench' Member involvement in the Partnership and the future role for Scrutiny.
9. To consult and agree with the partner agencies any recommendations for change.
10. To identify by the end of September 2006 any recommendations that require extra spending.
11. To consider the Council's involvement with other Partnerships and how any issues identified could be applied to these relationships.

How we went about the task

We met on six occasions and, in addition, individual Members attended meetings of the LSP and its sub-groups. One of our Members also attended a training course run by the East of England Regional Assembly.

Ahead of our first meeting we were supplied with copies of the consultation paper, the response to the consultation paper sent by the Epping Forest LSP, and an information pack about the Epping Forest LSP, which contained:

- The Community Strategy;
- A diagram showing the structure, governance arrangements and relationship between the different levels of the LSP i.e. The Community Conference, The Board, the Steering Group and the 7 Themed Action Groups.
- The Constitution and Terms of Reference.
- The dates of meetings of the LSP and its constitutional parts.



3. Summary of Recommendations:



4. Report

A start to the process:

At our first meeting on 24 July 2006 we thought about the task we had been set and how best to go about it. The consultation paper and its proposals were very clear but we needed to understand how the Local Strategic Partnership works to relate the consultation paper proposals to what happens locally. Therefore, in scoping the arrangements for our study we identified other documents we wished to be made available to us and the people we would like to interview to help us complete the task we had been set. The Joint Chief Executive (Community) gave us an overview to the LSP. He referred to the aims and visions behind the partnership as set out in the Community Strategy 2004-2021, the funding arrangements and the unease by some over the alleged democratic deficit in the LSP (both in terms of the general concept of LSP's and locally in relation to the Epping Forest Local Strategic Partnership, which the consultation paper proposals sought to address.

We noted the consultation paper contained significant proposals which sought to pass responsibility for the LSP as a whole to the Local Authority Executive, which in turn would create a role for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. It also proposed greater involvement in the workings of the Partnership for both Cabinet and "back bench" Members and suggests quite strongly that the Community Strategy should become a "sustainable community strategy" co-terminus with and strongly linked to the new local development framework which the Council has to produce.

We noted that the Council appoints two Member representatives to the Board of the LSP and that for the current year our Chairman, Councillor Mrs Mary Sartin in her role as Cabinet Member with responsibility for Environmental Protection and Councillor Mrs Anne Grigg who is the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Planning and Economic Development hold these positions. We further noted that Councillor Mrs Grigg is the Vice Chairman of the LSP Board. The Joint Chief Executive (Community) is the Vice Chair of the Steering Group and Treasurer to the LSP whilst the Themed Action Groups are chaired by a mixture of District Council Heads of Service and Senior Officers from other agencies.

The LSP has its own performance targets and a performance framework in place. It relies entirely on voluntary contributions in both cash and in kind from its constituent members to fund its activities which includes the employment of the Community Strategy and Partnership Manager, Marina Sherriff via the good offices of Voluntary Action Epping Forest.

It has close links with the County LSP via the Local Area Agreement arrangements and also works with Harlow LSP from time to time but not other LSP's in the region as there is little common ground between the diverse areas covered. That said, however, the LSP is a regular attendee at the LSP Network events organised by the East of England Regional Assembly in association with the Government Office for the East of England where LSP's have the opportunity to come together to share experiences and good practice.

Meeting with the Chairman of the LSP:

At our second meeting on 30 August 2006, we had planned to receive evidence from the past Chairman of the Epping Forest LSP, Aidan Thomas, and the current Chairman, David Butler. Aidan Thomas is the Chief Executive of our local PCT and David Butler, the Principal of Epping Forest College. In the event Aidan Thomas was not able to be present, but he did send us a letter in which he highlighted the achievements of the LSP as he saw them and his expectations for the future (See Appendix *). David Butler did attend and in view of the fact that both he and our Joint Chief Executive (Community) had been involved in the process from the very beginning we had an interesting and fruitful evening.



It was made clear to us that the Partnership had always been aware that it has no legal status and has always worked in that knowledge. Each Member comes to the table on a voluntary basis, working within the limits of their own governance arrangements. The Partnership does not have the ability to direct or overrule the governance arrangements of constituent Members and indeed has always been very clear that it has no wish to do so. This is seen as one of the strengths of the LSP in that agencies work together in the common good because they choose to do so. Whatever they offer, however, is written into LSP Action Plans and the agency making the offer is held to account for delivering against that offer.

The LSP had also recognised that it was asking a lot of busy people and therefore should avoid meetings for meetings sake or the unnecessary creation of new working groups. Wherever possible therefore it adapted existing groups to become the action groups of the Community Strategy Themes. Particular examples can be found in “A Safe Community”, “Fit for Life” and “Lifelong Learning”.

It was further explained to us that there are two types of LSP, funded and unfunded. Funded LSP's have some form of statutory basis and come about as a result of the Government's Neighbourhood Renewal Area Programme. Harlow is such an organisation. Others such as that in Epping Forest come about from the guidance issued with the Local Government Act 2000. They receive no funding from Government and there is no statutory basis for their existence. It is debateable whether this is a strength or weakness.

We found the information pack on the LSP which had previously been provided, helpful and were able to explore with Mr Butler what benefits he thought the LSP was able to bring to the Community of the Epping Forest District. We did this through a series of questions about the LSP in general and the Themed Action Group which Mr Butler chaired dealing with the Lifelong Learning. We also heard of the arrangements the LSP had made from the outset of holding an annual Community Conference to provide feedback to the wider community and give them the chance to comment on and influence the work of the Partnership. The Community Conference is held in a different part of the district each year and transport and refreshments are offered to those who attend. The 2006 Community Conference was held in Ongar on 13 October under the banner “Solve it”. A number of us were able to attend and indeed two of our Members have joined Themed Action Groups on a voluntary basis (Councillor Mrs Whitehouse, Lifelong Learning and Councillor Mrs Cooper, Green and Unique).

We explored with Mr Butler the aims underpinning the consultation document which seeks to increase the democratic accountability of LSP's by passing responsibility for the LSP to the Local Authority Executive. We also discussed the suggestion that Local Authority Leaders should chair the LSP.

Mr Butler replied that the District Council had always had a strong influence on the workings of the LSP and he believed that was welcomed by other partners. In Epping Forest, the Council had always preferred not to take on the Chairmanship leaving that appointment to a free vote. This was not dissimilar to what happened in many other LSP's. The District Council had, however, always taken the Vice Chairmanship and in the early days that position had been held by the Leader of the Council. However, over time, the District Council has reviewed its appointments with the result that the Leader was not always amongst its representatives. Mr Butler recognised and acknowledged the direction of the consultation paper but suggested it needed to be handled with care if we wished to encourage others to continue with their voluntary participation.

We explored a number of examples where added value had been achieved or seemed likely as a result of the partnership arrangements within the LSP, the involvement of Town and Parish Councils, the opportunities for public participation and the interaction with the County LSP and the Local Area Agreement process.



Marina Sherriff and Action Group Chairs

At our third meeting we held a discussion with the Community Strategy and Partnership Manager, Marina Sherriff, and some of the Action Group Chairs in order to understand their roles, the membership of their groups, their relationship with the LSP Board and Steering Group and possible ways in which Members of the Council might become more involved in the process.

We were supplied with a range of documents which included:

- Epping Forest Community Strategy – Key Achievements 2005/06;
- Membership lists for LSP Action Groups;
- The Action Group – Action Plans.

This provided us with some real in-depth knowledge and understanding as to how the work of the LSP was taken forward. We were impressed with the range of organisations that participated in the Action Groups and noted that they covered the complete spectrum of statutory, private sector, not for profit and charitable agencies that deliver services within our district. We invited Marina Sherriff to attend all future meetings of our Panel.

We were particularly interested in the interplay between the two non Council Chairmen that were present, Frances Haste (Fit for Life) and Matt Roberts (Green and Unique). Both of these had had involvement with LSP's elsewhere which had compared less favourably with their experiences so far with the Epping Forest Local Strategic Partnership. Matt Roberts in particular advised that he had only recently taken on the Chairmanship of the Green and Unique Group. He said he had been surprised by the past achievements of his group and expressed support for the successful outcomes achieved by others. He reported that he had relayed such positive information back to the Corporation of London and recommended that priority be given to the work of his group. In his view the issue was not so much about what was done but how it was achieved. His group worked with agencies such as the Lee Valley Park, the Environment Agency, DEFRA and National England. He was continuing with his approaches to the farming community and the County Landowners Association and expressed disappointment at their lack of positive involvement.

A full record of this debate is set out in the notes of our meeting but we were impressed by both the enthusiasm displayed and the wide range of issues tackled by the LSP and its Action Groups.

The Local Area Agreement

At our fourth meeting we were pleased to welcome Mr Richard Puleston, the Head of Community Planning and Regeneration for Essex County Council who gave a presentation on the current situation regarding the Local Area Agreement (LAA) for Essex.

We had been supplied with details of the five LAA priorities that EFDC had signed up to, the LAA itself, a copy of a LAA organisation chart produced for the LSP and a letter received from the County Council Chief Executive which gave an update on the LAA.

Mr Puleston gave an interesting explanation of the LAA process, the six-month review and the year one refresher required by Government. He explained that the LAA was a means to join up funding streams at a local level by bringing together a number of public sector partners around shared targets and objectives. The LAA was delivered via the county level LSP in association with District LSP's (a government requirement) and was a mixture of national and local performance targets. The Essex LAA had been signed in March 2006.



He gave a very full explanation of the structure, performance management, funding, research and Member involvement in the LAA process details of which are set out in the notes of our meeting (25 October 2006) along with the slide pack which Mr Puleston used to assist his presentation.

We noted that our Council's achievements against the five LAA priorities, which we have agreed to prioritise, are included within the Council's Performance Management Framework and reported on a regular basis to the standing panel of Finance and Performance Management.

And finally

Over the course of our study we have seen various items from the Local Government Press, received a copy of a briefing note from the Local Government Information Unit (LGIU) and shared information from National Conferences attended by Members of our Panel or Officers which were relevant to the work of the Panel. All of these are contained in our work file or referred to in the notes of our meetings. Finally on 12th January 2007, some of us attended the briefing session held at the Council's offices in association with the Local Government Information Unit on the Local Government White Paper and the Local Government Bill, which is now in process. Some of that will impact on the workings of the Local Strategic Partnership but it is too early in the process to say precisely what the effects will be.



5. Conclusions

1. We have found a great willingness amongst the various agencies in the Epping Forest District to work together in order to produce value for money solutions which result in better outcomes for our constituents.
2. Those agencies, public, private, not for profit and charitable are represented by a lively and enthusiastic range of people who demonstrate great affection for the Epping Forest District and the people who live, work or visit our area.
3. The District Council has played a leading role in this process and was the founder Member of the Epping Forest Community Agencies Group which evolved into the Local Strategic Partnership.
4. Senior Members have played an active role in this process but perhaps the reporting back arrangements have not been as good as they should have been. This has led to the situation where Members generally have felt excluded from the process and therefore had suspicions and concerns about the Local Strategic Partnership itself. In our view those concerns are not justified.
5. The minutes of the Local Strategic Partnership are provided in the Council Bulletin so all Members have the opportunity to keep abreast of what is happening.
6. That Portfolio Holders should become members of or take a greater interest in appropriate Action Groups.
7. Those Members of the Executive appointed to represent the Council on the Board of the LSP should be more pro-active in reporting back to the Council on the work of the Partnership.
8. The Local Strategic Partnership has developed its own website which can be accessed via the Council's website where information is freely available.
9. Members with a particular interest in the work of the Theme Groups can volunteer to join those action groups and in our experience will be welcomed.
10. The financial position of the LSP is in our view a matter for concern. It relies on voluntary contributions from its constituent members and survives from year to year. The withdrawal of that support by any one contributor would cause extreme difficulties. The District Council contributes £10,000 each year but this is not assured and is met from DDF funding. The County Council is likely to offer a 3-year funding deal to all LSP's, which comes from top slicing the reward element of the LAA targets. This should be welcomed.
11. It seems clear to us that the consultation paper proposal to give political responsibility and accountability to the Executive of the District Council will become a reality via the Local Government Bill presently before Parliament.
12. This responsibility seems likely to pass to the Leader personally under the new arrangements although as we currently understand it, the Leader will have the power to delegate (i.e. practically what happens now).
13. The Leader will be given the right to chair the LSP or at least to approve the appointment of the Chairman. Whilst recognising the vital role the District Council must play in terms of leadership of the LSP, we are not persuaded this is absolutely necessary and would prefer to see the Chairman of the LSP appointed by its Membership on merit.



14. All of these changes will bring the LSP more closely into the Local Government family and create a stronger role for Overview and Scrutiny to oversee and influence the work of the LSP.
15. We are persuaded that the LSP is already carrying out the role of “Partnership of Partnerships” as envisaged in the consultation document. To that end we were pleased to see it adopt the Children and Young Peoples Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) as its eighth Theme Action Group in accordance with a recommendation we made through the study process.
16. We note the requirement for the Community Strategy to evolve and develop into a “Sustainable Community Strategy”. However, it seems to us that the requirement to align the “Sustainable Community Strategy” with the Local Development Framework, and to reflect regional and sub-regional plans where relevant, turns the original process in the 2000 Act on its head. It now seems that the District Council will have to produce the Sustainable Community Strategy and use the mechanisms of the LSP for the necessary and important consultation process. The legal responsibility for the production of the Community Strategy has always rested with the Local Authority.
17. This is likely to be a resource intensive process, especially when coupled with the production of Local Development Framework. In that context the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economic Development should consider and report to the Council on the implications for the Forward Planning Unit within Planning Services.
18. We have noted the Consultation Paper suggestion that there should be more effective joint working between LSP’s and regional organisations. This seems more difficult to achieve in Shire Counties but to an extent already seems to be happening within Essex. The County Partnership engages with regional bodies on a formal basis and Local Partnerships engage with the County Partnership. Local Strategic Partnerships also have the opportunity to participate in the Regional LSP Network, which the Epping Forest LSP does on a regular basis. However, we accept that this liaison could be further developed.
19. Whilst acknowledging that liaison could be improved we would prefer to see such process evolve rather than be imposed. The East of England is a large and diverse community where it is important to acknowledge that one size does not fit all.
20. We note the debate around the consultation paper proposals that various bodies should have a legal duty to have regard to the Community Strategy in preparing service plans etc. The Council had already taken this on board as demonstrated in the current Council Plan and therefore we feel no further comment is required.
21. Likewise there are mixed views on whether designated bodies should have a legal duty to participate in the work of the LSP as already applies in the case of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership. A little encouragement sometimes helps but on balance we think participation on a voluntary basis is likely to be more productive.
22. We acknowledge that the LSP can have an important role to play in supporting neighbourhood engagement and in ensuring that Neighbourhoods can influence strategic local priorities, e.g. the Epping Forest LSP input into the East of England Plan consultation especially in relation to North Weald and the South and West of Harlow.



6. Acknowledgements

List of people who gave evidence to our Panel

John Scott	-	Joint Chief Executive (EFDC) Vice Chair LSP Steering Group LSP Treasurer
Chris Overend	-	Policy Officer, EFDC Admin Support to LSP
Aidan Thomas	-	Chief Executive (EFPCT) (Written evidence only)
David Butler	-	Principal, Epping Forest College Chairman, Epping Forest LSP Chair, Lifelong Learning Action Group
Marina Sherriff	-	Community Strategy and Partnerships Manager Epping Forest LSP (Voluntary Action, Epping Forest)
Alan Hall	-	Head of Housing Services (EFDC) Chair, Homes and Neighbourhoods Acton Group
John De Wilton Preston	-	Head of Planning Services & Economic Development (EFDC) Chair, Economic Prosperity Action Group
Frances Haste	-	Associate Director of Public Health (EFPCT) Chair, Fit for Life Action Group
Matt Roberts	-	Superintendent of Epping Forest Chair, Green and Unique Action Group
Richard Puleston	-	Head of Community Planning and Regeneration ECC



7. Appendices

If needed to add background information, tables, graphs etc.

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