Report into the Findings of the Aspire 2 Perform Assessment Undertaken by the Epping Forest Local Strategic Partnership

August 2009

Contents

Executive Summary

The executive summary provides an overview of the key findings of the assessment that was undertaken and offers suggestions as to how the various issues could be addressed. It needs to be recognised that all participants understand that the starting point for delivering better outcomes is for the Local Strategic Partnership to create a shared vision and shared sets of priorities through the development and implementation of the Sustainable Community Strategy.

The purpose of the Aspire 2 Perform assessment is to provide an LSP with an understanding of its strengths and weaknesses and identify opportunities for further development. In order to maximise the potential of the assessment, all of the participants from Epping Forest Local Strategic Partnership were assured that any comments they made would be recorded anonymously and not attributed to any one individual. The A2P team would like to thank the participants for their candour and honesty.

About the Aspire 2 Perform Health Check

The Aspire 2 Perform Health Check is a toolkit designed to offer partners of a Local Strategic Partnership the opportunity to assess the strengths and weaknesses of their partnership. It takes the form of three separate assessments, each of which deal with a different aspect of the LSP's function. *Aspire* looks at the overall fundamental arrangements of the LSP, such as governance provisions and structure. The '2' part of the health check's names represents the assessment that looks at how the LSP functions in a *2-Tier* environment. *Perform* seeks to explore how the LSP is performing and delivering on its aims and objectives.

The key to all three assessments is that they deal with the perceptions of partners within the LSP. When carrying out the assessment for Epping Forest LSP, the partners who participated attended an interview in which they were asked a series of questions designed to provoke comment on the above-described areas of work, as well as scores for each question designed to reflect where, in their eyes, the partnership was exceeding, meeting or failing its expectations and targets. By undertaking this assessment with as varied a sample of partners as possible, the assessments aim to build a picture of where the partners feel the strengths and weaknesses of the partnership lie.

For each question in the *Aspire* assessment, participants were asked to score the LSP on a scale of 0-10, with 0 being very poor and 10 being excellent; this produced an average score for each question. There are six sections in the *Aspire* assessment with 4 questions per section; once participants had assigned a score of 0-10 for each question in a section, their average score for that section was then also created. It is these scores for each section that contribute to the spider chart that represents the overall picture of the LSP in terms of the *Aspire* assessment.

Similarly, the *Perform* assessment has 6 sections, each with four questions, but each question is phrased to produce a 'Yes' or 'No' question from the participant. A 'Yes' is worth 2 points, a 'No' is worth 0 points and the participant is also able to answer

'Partial Yes' which is worth 1 point. To produce the overall spider chart for the *Perform* part of the assessment, the total points for each section are used.

The *2-Tier* assessment has three sections, with each section again having four questions. Participants score each question on a scale of 0-10, with zero being very poor and 10 being excellent.

The Findings

"Taking it to the next level"

It is clear that the prolonged absence at the LSP Manager position combined with other factors affected Epping Forest LSP negatively and led to a period of stagnation. However, the LSP now has a new Chair and Manager, both of whom are providing the LSP with tremendous drive and energy. A new structure is also in place and, with a few adjustments, this will provide the fundamentals needed to allow the LSP to become a vehicle for delivering real change; the changes that are needed will be identifiable through the revised Sustainable Community Strategy. With these facets in place the LSP is provided a real opportunity to 'take it to the next level'; the long term future for LSPs is one where truly significant partnership working will be of paramount importance. The predicted restrictions on public sector finances means that pooled budgets, shared services and strategic commissioning, which have always formed the long-term ambition for LSPs, will have to become reality. The need to deliver more for less will require traditional divisions to be put to one side in order to focus on the needs of the communities which all agencies and partners are aiming to serve. Such challenges are significant, but while most LSPs *should* be beginning to tackle them, Epping Forest LSP is in a position where it *can* begin to tackle them.

Enthusiasm, commitment and trust

Despite the issues the LSP has faced, partners displayed genuine enthusiasm for, and commitment to, the partnership, which is borne out by the continued attendance. Having partners fully 'on board' provides a solid plank for the LSP to tackle some of the issues that still remain. Furthermore, partners seem willing to trust each other, and such an open environment will allow difficult challenges to be appropriately discussed and overcome.

New Structure

The new structure that Epping Forest LSP has adopted should be commended. The Task & Finish groups will allow the partnership a great deal of flexibility without the structure becoming too demanding on partners' time and resources. The first Task and Finish groups had a set up-to-report back turnaround of 4 months which shows they are being used in an appropriately focused way. It is also encouraging that the LSP has a Board and a Steering Group, as this arrangement can allow for greater strategic oversight and Performance Management. However, there are some concerns about the duplication of membership on these two groups – these will be addressed in this report's recommendations.

Good SCS Consultation

It was very interesting to see that the consultation for the Sustainable Community Strategy is being facilitated by Voluntary Action Epping Forest. This should make the consultation process more inclusive, as well as providing the Voluntary Sector with more engagement.

Deprived Localities/Groups Have Been Identified

Most participants were aware of the demographic issues that are present in the Epping Forest district. This knowledge is essential for the LSP as, along with the SCS, it will provide the focus for the partnership's activity, focus which is needed if the LSP is going to add value.

High-calibre LSP Manager

Throughout the assessment, participants were quick to praise the positive contribution the LSP Manager is making to Epping Forest LSP. It is the experience of the Aspire 2 Perform team that a dedicated coordinating officer invariably affects positive change, but the Epping Forest LSP Manager's drive, dynamism and insight into national, regional and local issues are of unusually high quality.

Public Awareness

The LSP is taking steps to increase public awareness, and dedicating a Task & Finish group to this process is an impressive use of the available knowledge base. However, the partnership needs to ensure that all opportunities are explored. Increased public awareness of the LSP leads to increased accountability, and the partnership should encourage public contribution at Board meetings and possibly rotating venues, although it is accepted this may be counter-productive to the webcasting initiative.

Representation

Generally, the LSP has good representation from most sectors and organisations. While there is an acknowledged issue with effectively engaging Private Sector representation, the LSP has recently secured representation from two Private Sector organisations.

Roles, Responsibilities and Relationships of Groups within the LSP

While most participants questioned now have enough first-hand experience of the LSP to informally understand partners' roles and the way in which groups interact, the LSP needs to consider what it can put into place to ensure greater understanding for new partners, especially those who do not come from a public sector background.

Strategic Focus

While the LSP generally is heading in a positive direction, the LSP Board needs to focus in on the strategic objectives for the partnership to ensure it is able to effect real change and work towards the long-term vision that will be set out in the SCS. This is one of the most challenging aspects of LSP working, but it something the partnership needs to focus on as it is the only structure which is capable of setting out the long-term vision for the district.

Recommendations

- **Prepare for the tough financial future:** The current economic climate makes it likely that the next Comprehensive Spending Review will have a significant impact on the resources available to the Public sector and, as a consequence, the Voluntary and Community Sector. Epping Forest LSP is in a better position than some to tackle this difficult challenge because of the willingness expressed by key partners in the interviews to consider contributing funding. The key for the LSP will be to make the SCS inclusive of LAA and partners' corporate aims while delivering change which is reflective of the needs of Epping Forest. With this in place the LSP needs to work towards pooled budgets, shared resources and a truly 'joined-up' approach from partners.

- **Influence commissioning in the locality**: Further to the above, the LSP needs to move to a position which allows it to oversee and strategically influence the commissioning activity of statutory partners. As a non-statutory body, the LSP can not become a commissioner itself, but Epping Forest LSP needs to consider how it can facilitate true collaboration between its partners to ensure the most efficient and effective use of resources.

- **Formalise requirements of partners and raise internal awareness of LSP structures and inter-group relationships:** Some form of induction pack should be considered in order to help new partners become accustomed to the LSP environment and understanding of the requirements of their role and the benefits of this type of partnership working. Although existing partners seem to have worked out their roles and responsibilities through experience, it may also be worth clarifying the function of all levels of the LSP and the relationship between groups so partners can fully comprehend the wider aims, objectives and nature of the partnership.

- **Raise public awareness:** In order to capitalise on the work and ideas of the Communications Task & Finish Group, the LSP should also encourage public contribution at Board meetings and consider whether Neighbourhood Area Panels and other established community-level events/meetings would provide an effective avenue for increasing awareness of the LSP within the Epping Forest district.

- **Use Scrutiny and Overview Committee:** The Aspire 2 Perform team is encouraged that the LSP uses Epping Forest District Council's Overview and Scrutiny function. In light of recent Audit Commission recommendations (which the LSP Manager is already aware of) the LSP should continue to use this function as it increases accountability and raise's Elected Member awareness of the partnership's activity.

- **Formalise decision-making protocol:** LSPs can stagnate if decisions can not be made outside of formal meetings. Although some action has been taken to make this process easier, the Aspire 2 Perform team recommends a formal protocol is put in place.

- **Refresh Board and Steering Group:** It is recommended that the membership of the LSP Board and Steering group is refreshed in order to avoid duplication. The Board should be the part of the LSP which sets and maintains the partnership's strategic focus and the Steering Group should be the part which directly oversees the work of sub-groups and which provides Performance

Management across the LSP. The two groups should be performing different functions and should, consequently, have different membership. There is currently duplication of membership in the two groups and, not only is this a large demand of partners' time, but it is not conducive to effective performance of either group's function. Currently both groups receive exactly the same reports from the thematic groups: the Steering Group should receive these reports and then present a shorter summarised version to the Board. The Board needs to maintain strategic vision for the Epping Forest district area; this is a challenging objective but one which only the district's LSP can fulfil.

- **Ensure robust reporting mechanisms are in place:** Having an effective and robust reporting mechanism up and down the chain will be essential for the LSP to move to true Performance Management. An effective Steering Group will make this easier to achieve, but at the same time the Steering Group itself will be dependent on good reporting mechanisms in order to function effectively.

- **Create a Data Observatory:** Increasingly, data observatories are seen as a critical component of partnership structures. Not only do leading authorities such as the Audit Commission demand a greater emphasis on evidence-led decision making and actions, but a 'warehouse' of data will also help the partnership to Performance Manage its activity. Although a countywide observatory may be preferable, the West Norfolk Partnership's DAWN system provides a good example of how the theory can be applied on a district basis.

- **Move to Performance Management:** To increase the LSP's effectiveness in delivery and the accountability of partners, a robust Performance Management framework needs to be implemented. The Aspire 2 Perform team is aware that Epping Forest LSP has made some progress on this issue, and we also accept that few LSPs in the region have got to grips with this issue, especially those working in a 2-tier environment. The team will offer advice to the LSP Manager on this subject.

- **Collaborate further with Harlow 2020 and Uttlesford Futures:** The Aspire 2 Perform team is encouraged by the work being done to bring the LSPs of Epping Forest, Harlow and Uttlesford together. The possibilities for achieving economies of scale, access to funding opportunities, reducing strain on partners' capacity and creating a partnership with 'critical mass' mean the Aspire 2 Perform team would fully support the creation of a 'West Essex' LSP.

Analysis

The detailed results of the health check begin on the following pages. Each assessment is presented separately, with the results for the *Aspire* and *Perform* assessments being preceded by a graphical representation of the overall results for each. These graphs serve to highlight areas of general strength and weakness; the question-by-question analysis which follows shows how the partnership is perceived to be performing in specific areas.
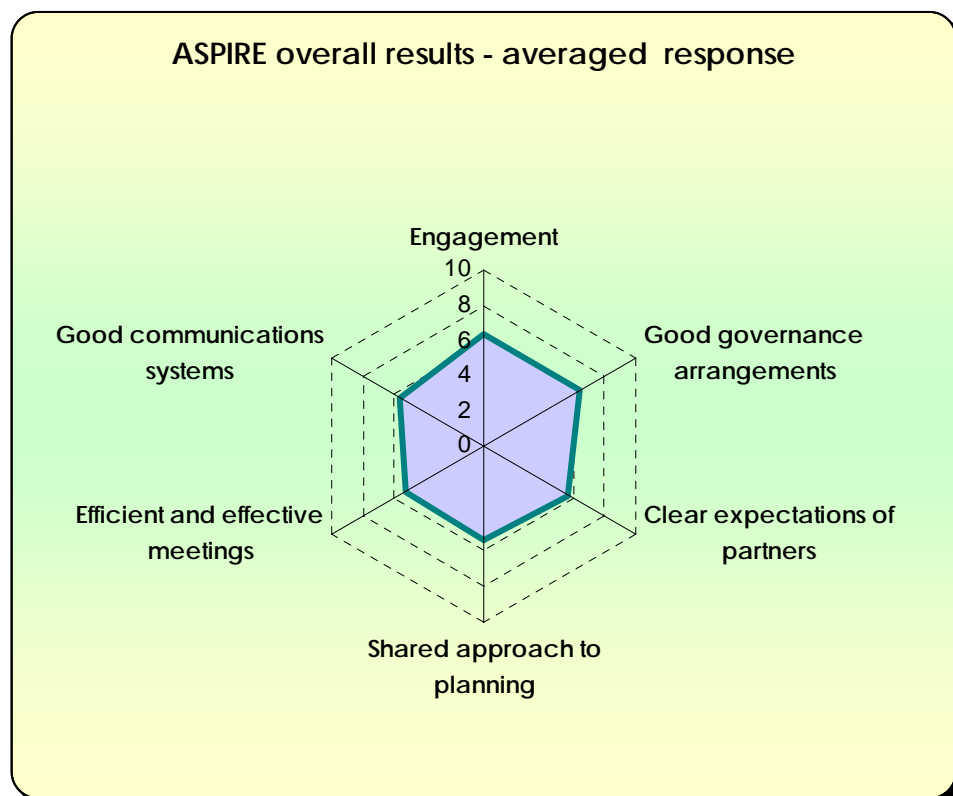
Many participants gave comments on particular issues raised within the assessments; these have been paraphrased from verbatim and are shown next to bullet points throughout the analysis.

Participants' General Comments

There were several comments made that did not relate to any part of the assessment specifically but were about the LSP as a whole, and these have been included below.

- Engaging and developing the public needs to remain a priority for the LSP – it must not be perceived as a quango.
- Not sure that all strategic partners are represented; partnership too statutory focused and should include representation from the forest and farming communities. The Task & Finish groups have been an excellent addition – could these be used to increase engagement? Could meetings be moved out into the community?
- The LSP needs to focus on being strategic; the LSP needs to develop with regard to commissioning; the Board needs clear objectives to ensure that the LSP doesn't try to achieve too much but doesn't just deal with insignificant issues either; the LSP needs to ensure resources are focused in areas of concern.
- Partners recognise there is a long way to go but they are keen to make the necessary progress.
- Public awareness and engagement needs improving, but the LSP has a great opportunity to take things forward.

ASPIRE

ASPIRE overall results - averaged response

Engagement

Good communications systems

Good governance arrangements

Efficient and effective meetings

Clear expectations of partners

Shared approach to planning

The above spider chart is a graphical representation of the averaged responses from participants to each section of the Aspire assessment and the results are fairly solid.

Because the above chart shows the average score for each section, and because each section contains four questions, there are specific areas of strength and weakness that it fails to highlight (e.g. if a participant gave the first 2 questions in the Engagement section a 10, and then gave the next two a 0, then the score that would go towards the above chart would be a 5 – a mediocre score that is isn't reflective of the particular issues where the partnership is perceived to excel and fail). Therefore, over the next pages the report will look at each section of the Aspire assessment in detail, giving the average score for each question (as opposed to each section) illustrating how the partners felt about each topic that was raised and giving a clearer idea of the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the Epping Forest LSP's fundamental arrangements.

For each question, please give an answer on the scale of 0-10, with 0 being an extremely negative score and 10 being extremely positive.

Engagement

To what extent:

[a] is the full range of partners (e.g. key delivery partners, elected members, voluntary and community sector, private sector, key community groups and the general public) represented within the LSP's structure?

Average score: 6.9

Respondents generally answered positively and the score reflects this. However, there were some areas of weakness highlighted. Many LSPs within the East of England struggle to effectively engage the Private Sector and this is something the Aspire 2 Perform is currently looking at with the Government Office for the East of England and the CBI. It is also understood by the Aspire 2 Perform team that a representative from the City of London has joined and this is the body responsible for the forest.

- Gaps more to do with the Private Sector.
- No Private Sector representation
- Used to be good private sector representation not so much anymore
- There is difficulty getting business partners engaged and there are some problems with consistency of attendance.
- There are key players (local employers) from the Private Sector who are not engaged.
- Epping Forest LSP has managed to effectively engage the parishes.
- Attempts are being made to have more effective engagement with the private sector but this remains a weakness.
- Key partners are there but I'm not sure if it has been explored who is else out there (e.g. representation from the forest itself).

[b] does the LSP's planning take into account the results of consultation with a range of stakeholders; reflecting the diversity of local opinion?

Average score: 6.6

There were some concerns raised by participants about the LSP's previous engagement efforts. However, the Aspire 2 Perform team were encouraged that the consultation for the Sustainable Community Strategy is being carried out by VAEF as this should help to ensure the consultation is truly inclusive.

- LSP makes an effort to run some of its own consultations – open stakeholder forums, Place Survey. However there is a lack of coordination in joining-up the consultation processes of partners.
- There is always an effective stakeholder conference, the format of which varies to engage with different groups
- It is difficult to make consultation reflective of the community.
- The SCS consultation is still in progress but once completed the LSP will be in a strong position.
- The Place Survey is limited and the last LSP conference was cancelled.
- Consultation is not as wide-ranging as it could be; it's too LAA focused.

[c] is the work of the LSP seen as core to the work of key partner organisations

Average score: 5.5

- Not sufficiently. Just beginning journey. Partners think and plan within their own organisational hierarchies.
- There's not always a clear distinction between what an organisation is doing anyway and what is actually 'LSP work'. This should improve, especially with further work on the LAA
- In some cases considered core – PCT and Educational representation has been variable.
- Seems to be.
- It can be seen as peripheral; this is something most LSPs struggle with.
- This varies from partner to partner.
- The LAA helps make this so.

[d] are partners enthusiastic about the work of the LSP?

Average score: 7.7

Despite some of the responses below, generally there was a sense that partners are enthusiastic about the LSP and the direction it is now taking. This commitment to the partnership should prove a valuable base from which to build on.

- Partners are committed to the concept but the drive to ensure the necessary cultural change does not yet exist.
- On the whole yes
- There is commitment to the LSP and good attendance reflects this.
- Those who participate regularly are very enthusiastic, others in the LSP aren't.
- The introduction of Task & Finish groups has helped the LSP move away from being a talking shop and this has helped increase partners' enthusiasm.
- Partners are committed, not necessarily enthusiastic.
- There is enthusiasm but this doesn't necessarily translate into output.
- Partners want to be there and they want to be enthusiastic.

Governance arrangements

To what extent:
[a] are you aware of the formal relationship between different groups and agencies within and connected to the LSP?

Average score: 6.1

Although partners' understanding of the way in which the different groups and levels of the LSP inter-relate will improve once the recently-adopted structure is imbedded and new reporting processes are finalised, the partnership needs to be aware of the problems that can be caused by a lack of partner awareness around the internal relations of the LSP. Potential problems include subgroups duplicating effort and a lack of wider accountability.

- Aware of all the groups but not necessarily aware of what they are up to.
- There are no written agreements as such
- Not sure of formal relationships but am aware of who does what generally.

[b] is there clarity about who is accountable for different aspects of the LSP and its work?

Average score: 6.25

- This is woolly and vague.
- The LSP has done much to clarify internal issues and has been helped immensely by the appointment of the LSP Manager.
- More clarity is required here. Too much is left to the LSP Manager to drive.
- There is clear accountability when something fits neatly within an organisational aim.
- If a specific piece of work is undertaken then this is understood, but generally this is not much awareness.

[c] is there clarity and transparency about how shared resources of the LSP are managed and accounted for?

Average score: 7.5

- There is clarity within certain service areas.
- Relevant information is supplied.
- Well served by financial information – some inherent difficulties as to how people have reported back in the past. There has been good use of Task & Finish groups.
- Must have buy-in from all partners in order to share cost/responsibility.
- Very clear on budgets.

[d] are there opportunities to receive feedback or 'challenge' from someone outside the LSP, to its decisions and plans, to test their feasibility?

Average score: 6.6

Epping Forest LSP should build on the good work it has done webcasting meetings by encouraging public attendance and involvement with the partnership's Board meetings. It was also of interest to the Aspire 2 Perform team that an LSP Briefing is disseminated to a wide contact list and an article is included in Voluntary Action Epping Forest's 'News' publication, both of which will encourage wider engagement with the partnership.

- Feedback from Essex Partnership. Development of Performance Management will help achieve this.
- There opportunities at conferences and as the result of the webcasting.
- The wider public aren't aware of the LSP as an organisation, don't understand what it does and would not know to question it. People should be encouraged to attend meetings and there should be no fear of 'washing laundry' in public.
- Meetings are open and webcast, and there is a move to make use of The Forrester.

Clear expectations of partners

[a] are you aware of any formal agreements about roles and responsibilities of partners in the LSP?

Average score: 4.3

This question received some of the lowest scores given in the Aspire part of the assessment. Coupled with the comments below, this suggests there is a need to clarify what is expected from partners. Other LSPs have used 'Job Descriptions' to help partners understand what they need to do to effectively contribute to their partnership; while this exact format does not need to be followed it is useful to formally explain what each partner needs to do to properly represent their sector/organisation. This is especially useful for partners who are not from a public sector or are from organisations which regularly change their LSP representative as it reduces the reliance on intuition and experience.

- Terms of Reference
- Not aware of any formal agreements, but major participants are aware of their roles/responsibilities.
- Unaware of any formal agreements. This could be useful, especially for new partners.
- Further clarification is needed.
- There needs to be some formalised clarification, especially around the levels of representation which is needed.

[b] do partners fulfil their obligations to the LSP?

Average score: 6.9

Although the comments below do illustrate a certain commitment from the partners, the greatest pertinence comes from the participants who highlight an uncertainty about what the obligations for partners are. Although some of this speaks to a need for increased clarity around roles and responsibilities, it also ties-in to a need for the LSP to become more strategic in its focus. The new Chair has steered the LSP in a more positive, outcome-driven direction, and this emphasis should be used as the foundation for a more focused partnership which in turn will allow statutory bodies the opportunity to fully resource their engagement.

- Consistent attendance by different organisations.
- On the whole yes. Webcasting seems like it will help this.
- There is a strong commitment and this has garnered results as a consequence of working together (e.g. information sharing; PCT leading work on morbidity and teenage pregnancy with other partners.
- As far as they understand what it is they need to be doing. What partners are working to achieve probably needs more clarity.
- Obligations will be fulfilled if it suits partners' own organisational aims.
- Do they know what their obligations are?
- If the work is tasked they will.

[c] are partners willing to contribute resources to the LSP appropriately?

Average score: 6.7

The LSP should be encouraged by the participants' attitude to this question, which was generally suggestive of a willingness to contribute resources beyond what is already available. However, the partnership needs to be mindful of the likely realities of the future, realities which will call for shared budgets and pooled resources in order

to effectively service the locality. Epping Forest LSP needs to build on the enthusiasm of key partners to ensure the partnership is able to meet future demands.

- Sometimes this is restricted by capacity rather than will.
- Variety of contribution, including both human and financial resources.
- Active partners contribute in a variety of ways, including management support and exec-level commitment.
- Probably, subject to cost. Partners would recognise the benefit in cases that achieve joint priorities and/or avoid duplication.
- To an extent: 'token' funding.
- Partners do contribute, but is it enough?
- This hasn't been tested but the willingness is there.

[d] do partners feel accountable to each other for delivery of activities agreed by the LSP as their responsibility to deliver?

Average score: 6.75

- People will put their own organisations first.
- There is a sense of responsibility to the LSP
- Within the core group of active members.
- Relationships around the table ensure this happens (the 'embarrassment' factor)
- There is a feeling of accountability but it's woolly; public accountability could improve this.

Shared approach to planning

The following four questions are all areas which the LSP hopes to address as a result of the SCS process, and the Aspire 2 Perform team is confident that this will happen. However, Epping Forest LSP does need to be mindful of the need to be inclusive of partners' aims and objectives and the benefits that can be drawn from mapping where similarity of work exists.

To what extent:
[a] do shared strategies reflect targets of all partner organisations?

Average score: 6.1

- Not yet: some areas are more advanced than others (e.g. CYPSP/CDRP)
- Don't think about what else is available
- May not need to as the LSP's aims don't necessarily impact on all partners.
- They reflect partnership strategies of those who attend.
- The LSP is moving towards this.
- The new SCS will do.
- This is necessary to get proper buy-in and it will happen in the new SCS.

[b] has any work been done to identify how key ambitions and priorities of different partners connect or overlap?

Average score: 5.4

- Some work started
- Some work has been undertaken but more is needed in this area

- Not really accomplished yet, but work being undertaken currently to address issue.
- The SCS will pull this together.
- There is not enough cross-cutting/fertilisation.

[c] would LSP partners know what its shared priorities were?

Average score: 6.3

- On the whole yes, within certain parameters.
- Once SCS is refreshed they will.
- Would understand some of the major shared priorities.
- Probably; some partners are starting to organise key areas of joint work.

[d] have targets and milestones been developed to help address joint priorities?

Average score: 6.8

- This will improve once the SCS has been refreshed. Is not helped by Epping Forest paying regard to some many priorities.
- Work in progress – good track record of it happening in the past.
- Chair has made it clear the she wants the LSP to produce outcomes.

Efficient and Effective Processes

To what extent:
[a] do meetings of groups within the LSP feel purposeful and productive?

Average score: 7.3

It is clear that the LSP has been helped by the structure it recently adopted and by the direction the new Chair is taking the partnership in, with increased focus on achievements.

- At sub-group level increasingly so, helped by funding being available. The other levels of the LSP are clear about their purpose but not always focused and productive.
- The new structure has helped address this, but development is still in embryonic stage. The Task & Finish groups are a good addition to the LSP.
- Some groups are more so than others. The steering group is 'too close' to Board in terms of membership. The Board is doing alright and becoming more strategic.
- Limited productivity at Board level but this is something that will improve.

[b] is performance against shared priority targets of groups within the LSP reported back to the Board?

Average score: 6.7

- Clearer framework now in place and this is being strengthened – currently more qualitative than quantitative.
- There is good reporting back
- New system will require time to bed in.
- Progress is regularly reported back to the Board.

- This needs improving, but will happen.
- This happens are every Board meeting.
- There's not emphasis on what is being delivered.

[c] do partners have ready access to performance information on the full range of priorities?

Average score: 5.9

- Information is available but not in a collective manner – too bitty at present.
- Work in progress – this is linked to the development of the reporting system.
- Having the LSP Manager in post helps this.
- Partners don't know what they're after.

[d] have partners aligned their systems (performance management, timetables, planning, etc.) with those of other partners?

Average score: 3.6

True alignment of systems is an ambitious task for LSPs, especially those who operate in a multi-tiered system. There are clear benefits to such alignment taking place, but the low score for this question is not indicative of a major issue for the LSP.

- In certain areas partners are starting to align certain systems.
- Targets are aligned with LAA where appropriate. The required level of alignment doesn't exist.

Communications

To what extent:
[a] do partners get the information they need about the work of the LSP, when they need it?

Average score: 7.1

- Information is available. The bigger issue is whether people report back effectively through their own organisational structures.
- On the whole yes – good inter-personal relationships and the website is undergoing an update.
- Getting better as systems are being re-developed
- Information is provided but more could be done.

[b] are partners open about sharing information about their own work with other partners?

Average score: 7

- To a degree.
- As long as it is relevant
- Can't think of any incident where people are being coy about cooperating – the willingness to share is highly commendable
- No identifiable problems in this area.

[c] have protocols or formal agreements been developed between key partners, to allow access to each others' information?

Average score: 6

While protocols for information sharing are essential in the statutory theme groups, they are only genuinely useful on a wider scale if partners are contributing to a robust data observatory. The enthusiasm for such a 'warehouse' that exists within Epping Forest LSP should be harnessed and an observatory should be set up.

- Protocols are in place between the main partners.
- Not aware
- Are going to be.
- There is a countywide agreement.
- There are loose arrangements. The NHS lags behind a bit on this.
- CDRP protocols in place – unaware of others.
- In some areas there are data sharing protocols.
- There is a countywide protocol.
- Not across the range of partners, but this is gradually improving.
- The aim to get a data observatory for the LSP will require some work around this.

[d] is the public kept informed about progress of the LSP?

Average score: 5.8

The Aspire 2 Perform team are confident that this score would be higher in a year's time. The 'Improving Communications' Task & Finish group has looked extensively at the ways in which Epping Forest LSP can raise its profile, and some of the solutions it intends to implement are innovative. However, the group has yet to report back to the Board so it is understandable that most participants did not have enough knowledge of their activity to score higher.

- Yes but not sufficiently. Work is being done to improve this, and meetings have recently started to be webcast.
- Use of the press, the website, webcast meetings and annual events are all helping to address this.
- There is a constant struggle to address this
- Not really at the moment.
- Coming to be – this is a work in progress.
- There is a Task & Finish group looking at how to improve the LSP's communications.

2-TIER assessment

1 Roles and representation

    I. Is there a set of shared principles, joint protocol, compact or letter of agreement between the two tiers showing how they will work together?

Average score: 4.25

- Between the upper 2 tiers yes.
- There are a number of protocols around existing areas of work.
- Shared principles are evident but it is all far too top-down and prescriptive.

    II. Is there a broad understanding and acceptance of what is dealt with by each tier?

Average score: 6.75

- Communication can be difficult between the tiers.
- On the whole yes.
- There is some understanding but more clarity would be beneficial.
- There is a broad understanding

    III. Is there clarity around the role of elected members at each level

Average score: 5.8

- This is a failing of the county LSP. It is too large an animal and some members struggle to grasp the bigger picture and become parochial as a result.
- Members' engagement isn't always effective.

    IV. Is there an effective cross-county mechanism to link Districts within the County, e.g. LSP link/liaison officer, cross-county officers / Chairs group?

Average score: 5.1

- There is never really any focus on hard issues or how to drive change.
- Not as effective as they could be.

2 Geography and structures

    I. Has there been any agreement between the County and Districts LSPs about an overall County-wide approach to strategic partnership working?

Average score: 5.6

- By signing up to the ECC strategy and LAA(2) yes. However, complete sign-up to all targets was somewhat rash.
- Not aware

    II. Has there been any joint discussion and agreement on how to approach specific planning processes collectively, e.g. in developing a Community Strategy / Local Area Agreement?

Average score: 6.1

- Yes, this has happened, but not entirely successfully.
- The diversity of Essex makes it very difficulty to build a consensus.
- Unaware of any work being undertaken at county-level but it is something we are looking to address in Epping Forest.

III. Is it clear at which 'tier' statutory organisations working regionally or sub-regionally should be represented?

Average score: 5.3

- Not 100%

IV. Is it clear at which level voluntary and community sector and business sector organisations working regionally or sub-regionally should be represented?

Average score: 4.8

- The Third Sector can have issues understanding their role across the two tiers. Partners within the district generally can be quite insulated and need to increase their learning from outside.
- Not always.

3 Resources and capacity

I. Are partners able to cope with additional capacity issues they face as a consequence of representing LSPs across Districts or at different tiers?

Essex is a complex area for LSPs to operate in. The county area is geographically large and demographically diverse and this can present issues for representative organisations, one of which is the ability to provide effective attendance. The consideration Epping Forest LSP is giving to working closer with Uttlesford Futures and Harlow 2020 should be commended, as an LSP which combined these three existing partnerships should make it easier for countywide organisations to provide representatives who have the capacity to meaningfully engage.

Average score: 5.8

- Partners within LSP find it difficult to resource current attendance.
- It can be major challenge for the PCT to attend.
- Although PCT do have difficulties, in general partners have coped.

II. Is officer support available at the County level to enable the development of District LSPs?

Average score: 6.5

- There is good support at officer level.
- In theory, yes. Not convinced that they speak to each other; they need to work more smartly.
- LSP Manager has helped this by enhancing relationships with ECC officers.
- LSP Manager's relationship with county staff has made a positive difference.

III. Are there any financial resources available at a County level to support District LSPs?

Average score: 7.2

- Financial support is good.
- Financial support does come from the county.
- Good resources from county although there are issues around how the money is spent.

PERFORM

PERFORM overall results - averaged response
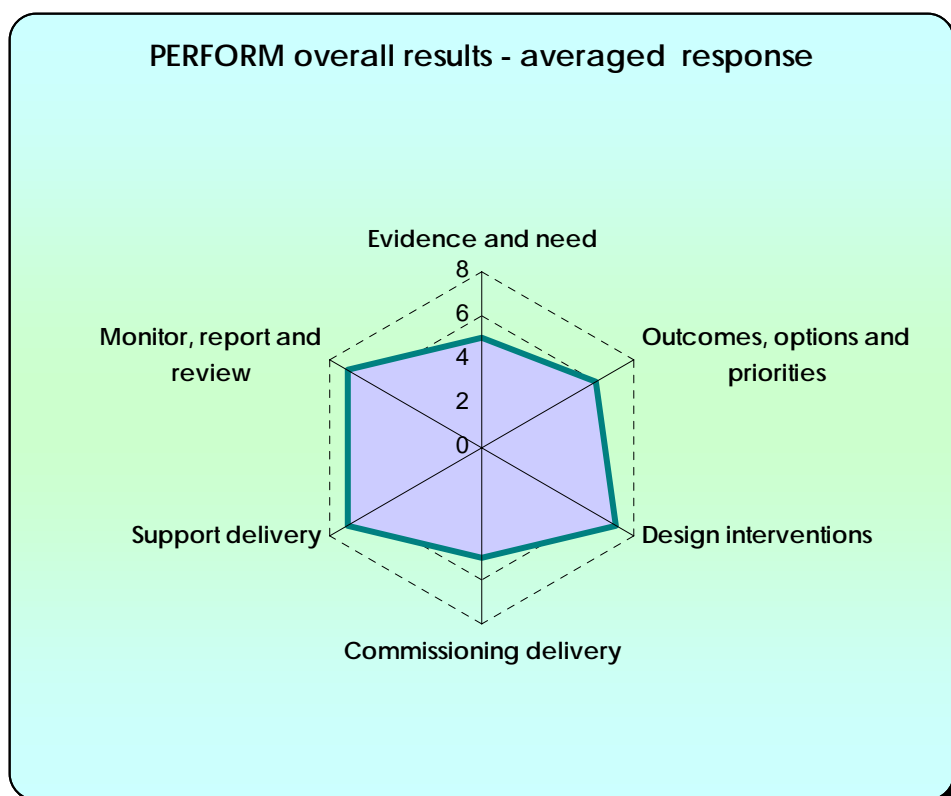
The way the Perform assessment is set up means the highest average score for each section is 8, which would translate to every participant giving a 'Yes' answer to each of the four questions asked in that section.

While participants did not score Epping Forest LSP highly in terms of Evidence and Need, the partnership scored exceptionally well in other areas. Some of these scores are indicative of the high-calibre secretariat support the LSP is now receiving, along with the drive the LSP Chair and Manager are providing. However, some of these scores are based on the expectations partners have of how the LSP will operate once the SCS is finalised and the direction for the partnership is set. While the Aspire 2 Perform team is happy to accept these scores as they coincide with our expectations based on what we have learnt and seen, Epping Forest LSP needs to ensure that once the SCS is in place, the partnership executes proper action planning, backed-up by robust reporting and performance management.

The following pages of the report look in further detail at the answers given to each question. The pie charts show the proportion of participants who answered 'Yes', 'No' or 'Partial Yes'.

The following questions are framed to lead to a Yes / No answer, with 'Partial Yes' also being an accepted answer.

1. Understanding evidence and need

1.i   Is planning based on effective consultation with a full range of groups and in key localities?
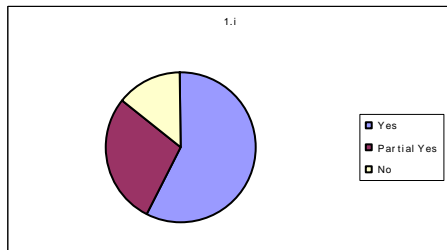
- It has been previously and definitely will be in the refreshed SCS.
- Sometimes happen but is better than it used to be. Partners need understanding as to what everyone is trying to achieve.
- The LSP has worked hard to use open days and workshops, and the partnership is conscious that it needs to get out into the district.

1.ii   Is current performance assessed against baseline / initial performance?
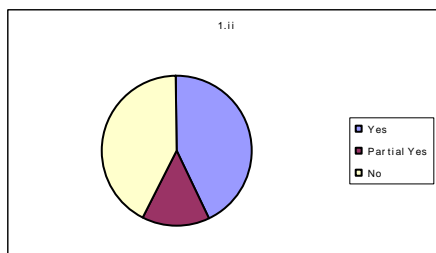
- Baseline information is not used – no process for monitoring this at present.
- This is work in progress.

1.iii   Have key groups and localities been identified as a focus for interventions?
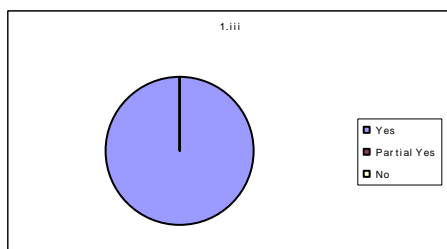
Identifying areas/groups which are in need of intervention is a valuable process for LSPs as it immediately offers a focus for activity, especially in an LSP such as Epping Forest where adding value and doing work which wouldn't otherwise be done are high priorities.

- Young people in Waltham Abbey and teenage pregnancies are two examples.
- Super Output Areas
- Definitely (SOAs)
- Specific areas within the district have been targeted.
- Geographic areas and certain groups within the community (e.g. commuters) will be targeted

1. iv   Have any attempts been made to predict likely future performance levels?

1.iv

- Yes
- Partial Yes
- No
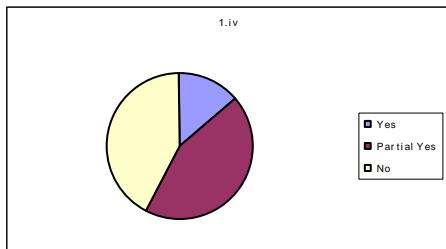
- Very much on the agenda.
- The LSP is aware that this is needed and it will happen.

2. Identifying outcomes, exploring options and setting priorities

2.i   Is there a process in place for identifying the key outcomes needed?

2.i

- Yes
- Partial Yes
- No
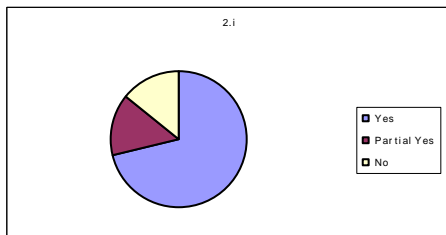
- Requires more attention
- There is a reprioritisation exercise at the annual away day.
- Started process. Awayday looking at evidence: place survey, JSNA etc. Clear view is being established as a result – now need to do something about them.

2.ii   Have a range of options been developed and appraised for each outcome, based on what is known to work?

2.ii

- Yes
- Partial Yes
- No
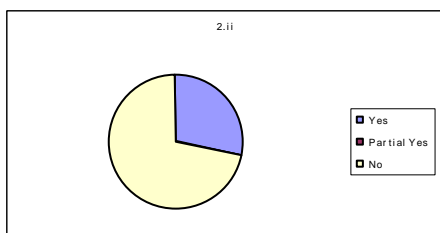
- Should come out as SCS is developed.
- There is awareness that this needs to be done.

2.iii   Have priorities been set for each outcome?
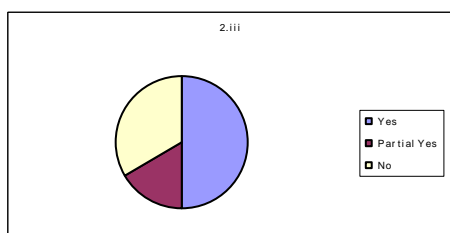
- Work in progress for some groups
- All priorities have equal basis.

2.iv   Does the planning process include some independent constructive 'challenge'?
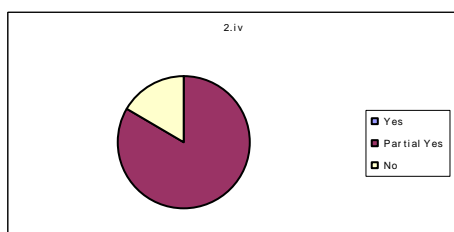
- Use of consultation but no critical methodology for intervention
- It will do, with the use of scrutiny etc.

3. Designing interventions

The answers to the following questions were largely dependent on participants envisioning their expectations for the LSP after the current review of the SCS had been completed. From what we've seen, we are confident that the topics considered in 3.i to 3.iii will not be an issue for Epping Forest LSP, and this is reflected in participants' answers. However, the partnership must be conscious of the challenges soon to be faced by all public sector organisations in terms of funding and, as such, consider how the objectives of action plans can realistically be resourced and fulfilled.

3.i   Is there an action plan(s) in place, covering all priorities, and with a clear timeframe?
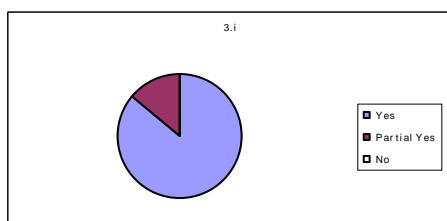
- Not formally agreed
- This is happening

3.ii   Does it target key groups and localities?

3.ii
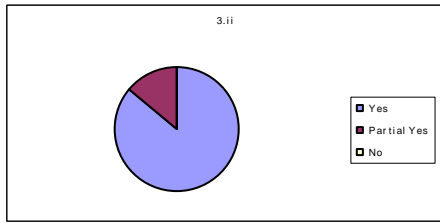
- It will do

3.iii   Is accountability and responsibility for each target clear?

3.iii
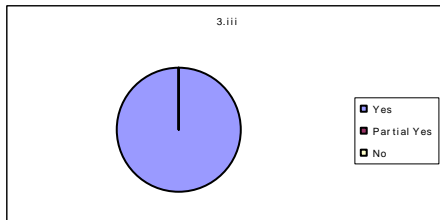
- It will be
- Lead officers and organisations will be included with any action plan.

3.iv   Are resources available to support each target in the action plan?

3.iv
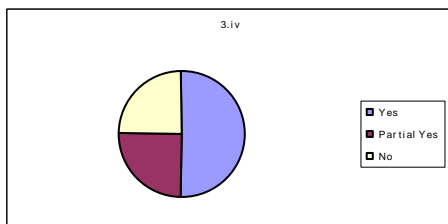
- Pump priming backed up by contributions from other agencies
- Must encourage resources availability to undertake Action Plan.
- Need to be clear on direction of travel and get sign up from constituent partners.

4. Commissioning delivery

The following four questions are about commissioning, which is something that is largely untouched by LSPs in the East of England. Understandably, these questions produced a majority of "No" answers, but the comments given show that there is some awareness of the possibilities for improvement and 'Place Shaping' that Epping Forest LSP provides.

4.i   Is there a commissioning strategy, governing how the LSP 'buys-in' delivery activity?
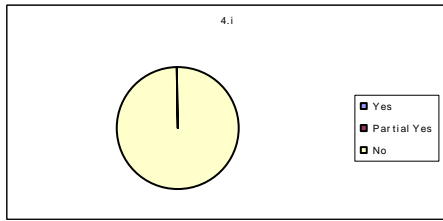
4.ii   Is there a clear understanding of what is needed, linked to specific priorities and key target groups, localities, etc.?
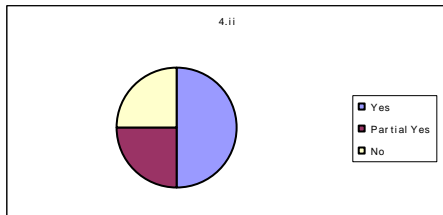

- While there is an understanding there is no formal process in place. Not everyone would see this as the LSP's role.
- We understand what we should be doing, and moving to delivering on this is happening.

4. iii   Does the LSP's work deliver 'best value' in terms of resources and method of delivery?
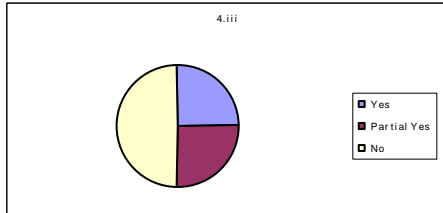
- Clear focus on it not just being a talking shop
- This should always be the LSP's aim.

4.iv   Is there a sound process in place for managing overall delivery against LSP plans?
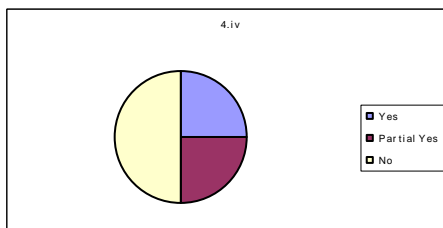
- Once SCS is refreshed this will happen
- This is being monitored by the LSP Manager.

5. Supporting delivery
5.i   Is there a designated delivery manager/ driver to oversee the LSP's planning?

Throughout all of the assessments the Aspire 2 Perform team has carried out in the East of England it has become evident that a dedicated coordinator is essential to the success of LSPs. The experience of Epping Forest LSP attests to this, as the partnership's ability to operate effectively suffered when there was a prolonger absence at the LSP Manager position. However, the current LSP Manager is contributing more to the LSP than a standard coordinator and is providing the partnership with real drive and a rare level of insight. Throughout the assessment, partners were quick to praise the current LSP Manager, and the challenge for the LSP now is to puts measures in place which will help maintain momentum if any change at this post occurs.
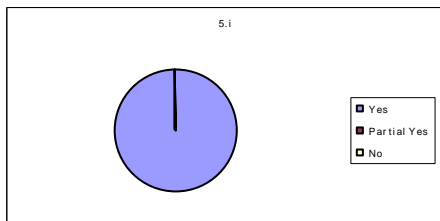

5.ii   Are partners willing to switch resources to support mainstreaming of successful work?
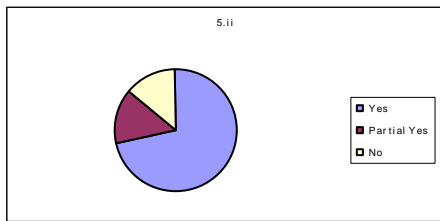
- Unable to provide specific examples but there is a willingness.
- This happened through the CDRP, where Epping Forest DC funded 6 PCSOs and was given tasking rights to 23 via NAPs.
- In theory.
- Not yet been asked to but willingness would be there if suitably justified.

5.iii   Is there rapid access to decision making within the LSP structure?
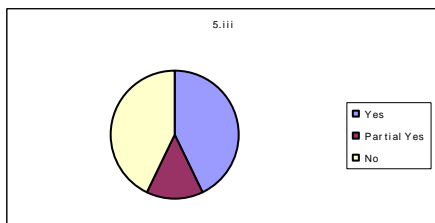
The LSP needs to consider adopting a formal agreement which will allow rapid decision making outside of standard the Board environment.

- At some levels but this is difficult for some issues.

- If an important decision was required this would not be a problem.
- Chair or LSP Manager would be able to make most decisions.
- Some thematic groups can do this but this needs to be addressed in governance for the whole LSP.
- This is an area that needs improving, but one which is getting better. It would be good to see e-conferences or some robust mechanism by reaching agreement by email because the LSP is not dynamic enough on this issue.

5.iv   Is there an open communication process between the LSP's officers and managers and those responsible for delivering it's priorities?
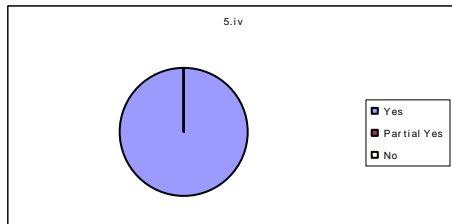
- Still in a transitional phase with this.

## 6. Monitoring, reporting and review

6.i   Is there a system for recording and monitoring performance against priorities, which is effective and to which partners actively contribute their performance information?
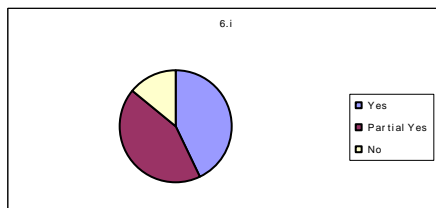
- Process will be put in place once SCS has been refreshed.
- This is being developed.
- Work is in progress to ensure sturdy footing.
- This will be put in place.
- This is currently light touch. Any new system needs to focus on reporting by exception.

6.ii   Is there a clear reporting process within the LSP? i.e.
    o   do thematic partnerships receive progress information from key partners?
    o   is there an effective process for the LSP Board to receive reports on performance and delivery from thematic partnerships?
   o   is there a feedback mechanism to respond back down the reporting 'chain'?
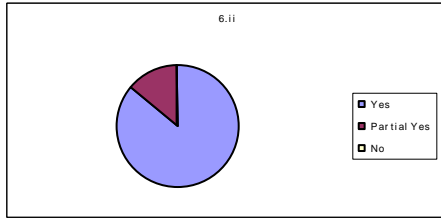
- There is a move to reporting by exception
- Previous reporting processes in the LSP weren't particularly effective but this is being addressed.
- This was addressed at the Away Day.

6.iii   Is there a process for a periodic review of outcomes?
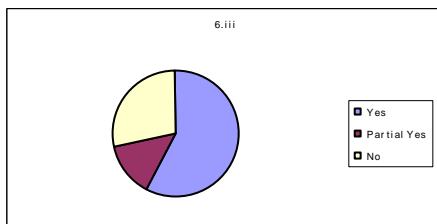
- Via reporting systems/updating of information by partnering agencies.
- To be developed.
- This happens at every Board meeting.

6.iv   Is there a process for evaluating the success of the LSP's approach to delivery?
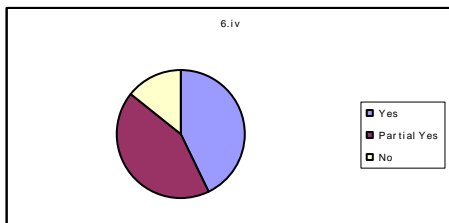
The Aspire 2 Perform team is aware that Epping Forest LSP is going to utilise a Local Improvement Advisor to look at how the partnership monitors and reviews it delivery.

- Not sure how advanced we are present
- Aspire 2 Perform addresses this to an extent.