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

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[1] A Sustainable Community Strategy will need to be developed through a number of stages:
- Baselining 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% or 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 and 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% or 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?*
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> *Q19 – If so, what obligations, such as attendance, financial or staff support, would be useful to place on partners?*
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> *Q20 – If so, which public sector agencies would the duty be most sensibly placed on?*
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> *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 principal 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 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 king 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?**
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> **Q32 – What extra or different support would be most helpful in shifting to a more delivery-focused role?**
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> **Q33 – How would LSPs prefer to receive information and support; through guidance, toolkits, signposting to existing information, practical learning opportunities etc?**
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> **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.