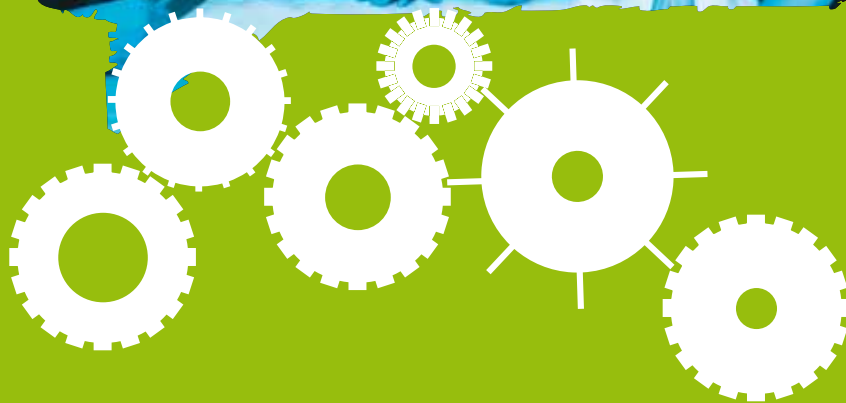


# Working better together?

Self-assessment questions - improving the governance of local strategic partnerships



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**We welcome your feedback. If you have any comments on this report, are intending to implement any of the recommendations, or are planning to follow up any of the case studies, please do get in touch: please email [nationalstudies@audit-commission.gov.uk](mailto:nationalstudies@audit-commission.gov.uk)**

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# Improving the governance of local strategic partnerships

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- 1** These questions should help local strategic partnership (LSP) boards to apply the key messages in the Audit Commission national study *Working Better Together? Managing local strategic partnerships*.
- 2** LSPs have leadership and oversight roles for public services in their area. A locally agreed sustainable community strategy (SCS) lays out the long-term priorities for each LSP. While LSPs are voluntary arrangements, it is virtually impossible for councils to work effectively without them. But creating highly effective partnerships is difficult and LSPs operate across a complex policy environment.
- 3** LSPs operate at the boundaries of their partners' management and governance arrangements. They are voluntary unincorporated associations without employees or resources of their own. LSPs do not own assets, or employ staff. They are not legally accountable bodies for spending public money, or for achieving public objectives. But they do advise and influence local action. Decisions made, or principles agreed, by LSP boards can influence the deployment of staff and other resources, including the use of assets.
- 4** LSPs need to consider the governance arrangements that will ensure the best use is made of public resources for the benefit of local people. Joint working happens at three levels:
  - Strategic: setting a vision or direction for an area, discussing common concerns, agreeing common goals, and overseeing progress.
  - Executive: taking the shared vision and using it to steer resources, set targets, and oversee performance.
  - Operational: managing performance and delivering services to meet the agreed goals.
- 5** The following questions are shaped by our national studies *Governing Partnerships, Are We There Yet?* and *Working Better Together?* They follow the principles in the *Good Governance Standard for Public Services*. We have adapted these principles for LSPs, recognising their voluntary and unincorporated status.

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# Improving the governance of local strategic partnerships

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## How far does your LSP focus on improving outcomes for local people?

- How clear is your LSP board about what it has to achieve for local people?
- What does your LSP board know about whether outcomes for local people are improving?
- How well do agreed local outcomes take account of the needs and aspirations of local communities, as well as equalities, disabilities, and human rights legislation?
- How will the local area agreement (LAA) enable a reduction in the gaps in outcomes between the most vulnerable, and the majority, of local people?
- How does your LSP board ensure that desired LAA outcomes for local people are clearly defined and consistent with the SCS?
- How do partners use shared performance management frameworks to oversee and deliver better outcomes for local people?

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## How does your LSP board oversee the effective use of resources?

- How far has your LSP board mapped the public money (and other resources) spent on LAA delivery in the area? How has it used this mapping to support delivery of improved outcomes?
- How often does your LSP board review the total public spending on SCS and LAA outcomes, to identify opportunities for improving value for money, for example through aligning or pooling budgets.
- Do partners report on the allocation and impact of all budgets and resources spent on SCS and LAA outcomes in the area?
- Are these budgets reviewed to identify opportunities for improving value for money, for example through aligning or pooling?
- Does your LSP board have a policy on the alignment or pooling of budgets?
  - How does it monitor the effectiveness of aligning and pooling at executive and operational levels including the impact on outcomes?
  - How are lessons from the experience of aligning and pooling budgets built into future plans?

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- How does your board influence the allocation of resources to:
    - reduce the gaps in outcomes between the most vulnerable, and the majority of local people; and
    - achieve SCS and LAA outcomes?
  - Does your LSP board make the most effective use of its influence over partners?
    - How does it ensure that all partners commit appropriate resources to achieving SCS and LAA outcomes?
    - How does it influence reluctant partners?
  - Does your LSP have a joint commissioning strategy?
    - How effectively does it reflect the board's and partners' objectives for the SCS and LAA outcomes?
    - How does it add value to local service provision?
    - How clearly does it differentiate between commissioning and procurement of services at the strategic, executive, and operational levels?
  - How far does your LSP board stimulate joint working between partners to encourage value for money, better access, and improved service quality?
    - Do partners share premises and other assets to support better access to, and quality of, services?
  - Does your LSP executive set targets for, and monitor improvements in, value for money?
    - How does your LSP executive set achievable, stretching targets for executive and operational action?
    - How do performance reports support the board's strategic role?
    - To what extent are partners contributing to shared value for money targets?

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# Improving the governance of local strategic partnerships

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## What are the roles of the LSP partners in delivering improvement?

- What mechanisms does your LSP executive use to allocate and assess responsibilities for achieving the desired LAA and SCS outcomes?
- How does your LSP executive, and its partners, ensure that roles, functions, and responsibilities for achieving outcomes are clearly defined and agreed?
- How does your LSP executive, and its partners, ensure that partners and their staff understand their roles and responsibilities in achieving outcomes?

## How does your LSP board effectively consult, engage with, and involve key stakeholders?

- How does your LSP board make sure it identifies the key stakeholders in delivering improved local outcomes?
- How does your LSP board ensure that the views of local communities and voluntary organisations are effectively represented to them?
- How does the board ensure that diverse groups and interests have a voice?
- How does your LSP board work to ensure that reluctant stakeholders are engaged?
- How does your LSP board demonstrate its accountability to partners, and to local people?

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## How does your LSP board support local capacity building and capability development?

- How does your LSP board ensure that partners develop the appropriate skills and knowledge for:
  - people with governance and leadership responsibilities for SCS and LAA outcomes; and
  - operational staff delivering SCS and LAA outcomes?
- How has your LSP board contributed to the development of partners workforce strategies? How has it worked with partners to equip staff with the relevant skills to deliver LAA outcomes?
- How effectively does your LSP board improve the individual and collective performance of its members', and their knowledge, and skills? How effectively does it review its own performance and that of its board members?
- How does your LSP board respond to unsatisfactory or inappropriate performance by partner organisations? Are there fair and transparent processes?

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### **How are good governance and the principles of public life demonstrated by your LSP board?**

- What are the principles for the conduct of your LSP board business?
  - How far do they reflect the principles of public life, including selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership?
  - How are these principles applied to your LSP executive and operational layers?
- How does your LSP board ensure that sub-groups take a balanced approach to good governance (particularly where they are responsible for pooled budgets)?
- How does your LSP board ensure that best practice in partners' policies for dealing with conflicts of interest are followed in relation to SCS and LAA delivery?
- How does your LSP board ensure that partners' systems (for example, complaints and whistle-blowing) to protect the rights of the public, users, other stakeholders and staff, including access to redress, are working effectively?

### **How does your LSP board manage risks and exercise proper controls?**

- How are board members and relevant partner staff informed about the legal status of the LSP and the decisions it can take on its own behalf and on behalf of its partners?
- How does your LSP board use partners' legal, financial and other professional advisers to inform its decisions?
- How does your LSP board respond to relevant council overview and scrutiny recommendations?
- How effectively does your LSP board use advice, data, performance monitoring information, and programme evaluations to support its deliberations and recommendations?
- What risk management procedures are there to:
  - identify the key risks facing the LSP;
  - identify the key risks facing partners which could impact negatively on the effectiveness or reputation of the LSP;
  - support strategic thinking and forward planning;
  - assess and manage the opportunities, as well as the hazards, of partnership working; and
  - clarify which partners are responsible for managing specific risks at strategic, executive, and operational levels?

# Improving the governance of local strategic partnerships

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## How does your LSP board manage risks and exercise proper controls?

- How does your LSP board ensure there are appropriate controls to ensure probity and value for money in the use of resources it influences?
- What are the protocols for managing and resolving conflicts and disagreements between partners about the achievement of the SCS and LAA outcomes?
- How are the agendas, minutes, papers and decisions taken by your LSP board communicated to stakeholders and the wider public?

## Further information

Copies of the national report *Working Better Together? Managing local strategic partnerships* are available at [www.audit-commission.gov.uk/lsp](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/lsp) and [www.improvementnetwork.gov.uk/lsp](http://www.improvementnetwork.gov.uk/lsp)

Copies of the national report *Are We There Yet?, Improving Governance and Resource Management in Children's Trusts and Governing Partnerships: Bridging the Accountability Gap* are available at [www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk)

We welcome your feedback. If you have any comments on this briefing, or are planning to use these questions to improve your LSP's governance arrangements, please do get in touch. Please email [nationalstudies@audit-commission.gov.uk](mailto:nationalstudies@audit-commission.gov.uk)

More questions for overview and scrutiny can be found in the complementary scrutiny paper.

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