

Working better together? Case study

'Bolton first, politics second' in
Bolton Vision Partnership



Cross cutting

Case study

April 2009

 **audit**
commission

Background

- 1** Local strategic partnerships (LSPs) have a responsibility to bring together local services to deliver a shared vision for the area. But creating highly effective partnerships is difficult and LSPs must operate across a complex policy environment.
- 2** The public sector 7S model has been used to interpret the findings from the LSP study. This model enables LSPs to understand how to bring a series of interdependent elements together to achieve their long-, medium- and shorter-term goals. The seven elements of the model are super-ordinate goals, three transformational elements and three transactional elements. The transformational elements are most important when policy problems are complex.
- 3** An effective LSP needs to link both transformational and transactional activities to achieve its goals. The transformational elements of the model are staff and skills (including culture and leadership), style (identity and how the LSP comes across) and synergies (achieving better results collectively than working alone). The transactional elements are standards (frameworks for partnership working and quality standards), steering (using internal processes to drive change, for example through resource pooling) and systems (performance, resource and accountability).

Long-term objectives

- 4** Bolton was one of the first areas to establish a broad, multi-agency, cross-sector partnership – the Vision Partnership in 1995. The Council and other agencies recognised that they were unable to tackle large, cross-cutting problems in isolation and saw the potential for a partnership approach, based around a shared vision, to accessing funding streams. Bolton's first take on a community strategy, Vision for the Future, was published in 1997.
- 5** Bolton's sustainable community strategy (SCS) 2007–2017 (its third community strategy) is focused on delivering economic prosperity, while at the same time narrowing the gap between the most and least well off.

Transformational elements

Leadership and culture

- 6 Strong officer leadership on partnership working exists across the whole of the Council and is not restricted to the Partnership team. The Partnership team is small – two members of staff plus additional support around the Local Area Agreement (LAA).
- 7 The importance placed on partnership working is manifest in the recruitment of key staff throughout the partner agencies. The appointment of a new Chief Executive for the Primary Care Trust (PCT) in 2007 emphasised the strong partnership culture present in Bolton. The process included question and answer sessions with community representatives and a wider meeting with other partner stakeholders.
- 8 In 2007, the Council and Greater Manchester Police responded to a vacant Head of Community Safety post by establishing a joint management post. A Police Superintendent is now also the Assistant Director of Community Safety at the Council. This has led to greater integration between the two agencies and cost savings. Both organisations have benefited from a greater understanding of each other's perspectives and expertise.
- 9 The Partnership's culture and values position personal relationships as fundamental to performance management. Regular, ongoing dialogue and conversation to address the following questions: 'where are we at?', 'what works?', and 'what do we need to do

differently?' are as important as systems and processes. The Council recognises the dependency of this approach on the attitude of staff and organisational culture and uses its organisational development programme (and recruitment policies) to instil these values.

Meetings and joint working

- 10 The style of politics, both under the current and previous administration, is inclusive and broadly consensual. This is reflected in the notion of 'Bolton first, politics second.' The three main party leaders sit on the Vision Steering Group, the Partnership's top-level board. There is broad acceptance of a shared agenda and politics do not impinge on joint working. The signatures of all three party leaders appear alongside the signature of the Partnership Chair at the beginning of the SCS.
- 11 These shared values, informed by extensive consultation with local people, led to the development of a partnership brand focused on the 'Bolton Family'. The brand strategy aims to increase civic pride, promote Bolton to investors and visitors and improve external perceptions of Bolton. The brand is increasingly being adopted by partners, including the Council, Bolton Wanderers FC, Bolton PCT and Bolton University, who relate to the concept of a family which is both ambitious for and caring about its members. The Bolton brand is also an award winner – achieving best brand identity in the national Roses Design Awards 2006/07.

12 The style of partnership performance management has evolved to one that is constructive but challenging and emphasises learning. The level of trust among partners enables supportive performance challenge and partners are keen to combine their different perspectives to produce original solutions. There is a strong focus on building a shared evidence base and that what matters is what works.

The benefits of joint working

13 The Council, with partners, is using its Access Points programme as a mechanism to drive and coordinate sharing of physical assets. The programme has been designed to incorporate a range of existing or forthcoming initiatives seeking closer integration between services and agencies for the benefit of local customers. The programme incorporates the NHS LIFT (Local Improvement Finance Trust) initiative, extended services, neighbourhood policing arrangements, UCAN centres (Urban Care and Neighbourhood Centres) and third sector involvement.

14 The PCT, Council and other partners have used the LIFT programme as an opportunity for jointly locating public services within a Primary Care Resource Centre. The Brightmet health centre, built as part of the LIFT programme, includes a new public library that was

funded by the Council using a grant from the Big Lottery fund. The centre also includes adult services, mental health services and a pharmacy.

15 On a smaller scale, the Partnership used Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) money to provide 15 health trainers. An agreement between the Partnership and the PCT led to the PCT committing to fund the ongoing cost of the trainers after the initial NRF funding runs out.

16 The Partnership is undertaking a 'Better Interventions' pilot project, which is exploring how interventions influence behaviour change and encourage local residents and families to embrace positive lifestyles. The purpose of the project is to help narrow the gap between the quality of life experienced by residents in Bolton's most deprived neighbourhoods and elsewhere in Bolton. Hall i' th' Wood, one of the area's most deprived neighbourhoods, has been the subject of the pilot. A wide range of partners have come together to examine and challenge their activities and interventions.

17 The project is currently tackling issues around sharing of data and intelligence and how to better join up the activities of the various agencies operating in the area. Supported by the University of Manchester, the next phase will include design experiments to further examine how different approaches impact on changing behaviours.

Transactional elements

Getting things done

18 The Council has used the Corporate Assessment process to drive a work programme aimed at ensuring the LSP is ready for the challenges ahead. External challenge has come from government offices and Tribal Consulting and the Partnership has also undertaken a rigorous self-assessment.

19 The Partnership's performance management framework is designed to enable partners to think differently about how resources are spent to deliver outcomes. LAA pump priming and reward grants have been channelled through the Vision Partnership and it will be responsible for £20 million of Area Based Grant this financial year. A challenge for the Partnership going forward is how to embed this emphasis on evidence-based performance management across all the thematic partnerships.

20 Performance management across the Bolton Vision Partnership is driven by the Lead Agencies group. The group is chaired by the Council Chief Executive and includes the Chief Officers of all the main public service providers as well as the third sector. This arrangement was agreed constitutionally by the Vision Steering Group (the Partnership's top-level board).

21 A Sustainable Development Forum that sits under the Vision Steering Group (the Partnership's top-level board) is tasked with ensuring that the strategy delivers lasting benefits. The Forum has implemented sustainable development guidelines to inform all of the Partnership's supporting strategies and plans.

Common frameworks for collecting and sharing performance information

22 The Partnership has developed new governance arrangements as part of changes to its structure that are aligned to the six themes of the SCS. A concordat sets out how each of the constituent parts of the Bolton Vision Partnership will work together to achieve the outcomes contained within the SCS.

23 The concordat has been used to steer changes in the way the Partnership works. It proposes an increased role for elected members in the LSP thematic partnerships. Three Council members (one from each main party) are now appointed on an annual basis to each thematic partnership (including the Children's Trust) to better represent the Council's leadership role in delivering the SCS.

24 The concordat includes terms of reference that provide a uniform governance framework for the thematic partnerships. This has helped the Partnership to ensure commitment to its overall approach to performance management as well as develop the understanding of risk across the thematic partnerships.

25 The mechanism for performance-managing the SCS is a framework built around a three-year plan. The three-year plan comprises 80 performance measures focused on the aims and priority themes of the SCS and incorporates the LAA. The plan is part of a developing focus for the Council and the Partnership on strategic performance management of the twin aims of narrowing the gap and delivering economic prosperity. The three-year plan will provide a set of particularly challenging targets in priority areas, where the Partnership feels it needs to improve faster.

Systems for understanding and influencing performance, resources and risks

26 There are very close links between the Council's Partnership team and its performance staff, and in particular between the LSP Manager and Head of Performance. Recognition that most of the key outcomes that the Council is working towards require joint working has led to partnership performance work and the Council's internal performance management processes being treated as a single agenda.

27 The Vision Steering Group receives highlight reports on performance and retains a strategic oversight, but its principal focus is shaping and setting the overall strategic direction of the Partnership. The Lead Agencies Group has a performance remit across the whole of the three-year plan.

Learning Points

Transformational learning

- A joint management post between the Council and Greater Manchester Police has led to greater integration between the two agencies.
- The importance of partnership working is emphasised in the recruitment process for key staff.

Transactional learning

- A Sustainable Development Forum ensures a focus on delivering lasting benefits.
- A performance management framework for the sustainable community strategy ensures a balance between the Partnership's long-term strategic goals and the shorter-term priorities in the three-year plan.
- A uniform governance framework for the thematic partnerships helps the Partnership to ensure commitment to its overall approach to performance management

- Partners have formally agreed on the most appropriate layer of the Partnership to lead on performance management.

Questions for LSPs and their partners to consider

1. What can your LSP do to recognise the importance of both transformational and transactional aspects and their interdependence?
2. Does your LSP take a layered approach to performance and resource management?
3. How well does the long-term SCS fit with the short-term focus of the LAA?

Further information

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

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