

Working better together? Case study

Joint scrutiny in Dorset Strategic Partnership



Cross cutting

Case study

April 2009

 **audit**
commission

Background

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- 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** The Dorset Strategic Partnership (DSP) was established in 2002. Shaping our future, the community strategy for Dorset 2007–2016 was launched in June 2007. This strategy focuses on the interlinked strategic challenges of affordable, sustainable and appropriate housing; developing Dorset's economy; improved access to services; employment and leisure; safeguarding Dorset's environment now and for the future; and an ageing population with a falling proportion of young people.

Transformational elements

Leadership and culture

- 5 The Dorset LSP Chair position was advertised and the current Chair was independently appointed for a fixed term of office. He has been in the post for three years and chairs the Board and the Community Strategy Delivery Group. The Board is political while the delivery group is executive. Core team support is provided by County Council staff.

Meetings and joint working

- 6 The DSP has a bridging group involving the county and district LSP chairs, local authority representatives, the Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils, and the Rural Community Council. It meets quarterly to manage the interaction between local- and district-level community planning and the county-wide strategy. It is also a link between local community partnerships across Dorset and it shares best practice. It ensures that the outcomes of community engagement and community planning activity at district, sub-district and parish level influence county-wide priorities and action.

The benefits of joint working

- 7 The Dorset Affordable Housing Task Group achieved tangible synergies using delivery chain analysis as part of the study. The Group selected 'better and more coordinated use of land for affordable housing' as the outcome to explore in an Audit Commission-facilitated delivery chain workshop. Two groups used the 12 stages of the delivery chain model to self-assess their progress towards the outcome. Each stage was assessed as red, amber or green. The two groups agreed on capacity and levers and incentives as the red areas.
- 8 The groups developed delivery chains for the red areas before action planning. Tangible actions resulted from the workshop including: a resource/capacity audit; the creation of a land campaign; the development of a land disposal protocol; a feasibility study for a shared land database; an approved list of levers and incentives; landowner consultation; links with the pathfinder through property services and asset management; and LSP outcomes in staff appraisals.
- 9 The LSP is now using the 12 stages of the delivery chain to develop a self-assessment tool that can be rolled out across the theme groups.

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- 10** Dorset is home to one of the host venues of the London 2012 Olympic Games: Weymouth and Portland, where the sailing events will be held. Local authorities and their partners across the county see this as a unique opportunity to address many local priorities.
- 11** The DSP is working to secure a community legacy from London 2012. The Partnership has produced '12 for 2012' – a list of key benefits that partners and other organisations seek to gain from the Olympics Games for the long-term benefit of the county's residents and visitors.
- 12** The intended benefits include improvements to transport infrastructure; sports and leisure participation; health; and economic opportunities. These aspirations and actions have been incorporated into Dorset's Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement (LAA). Partners have also supported a five-year Dorset 2012 Legacy Manager post to deliver the legacy and to lead community engagement.

Transactional elements

Getting things done

13 The Partnership Board has been reduced from 40 to 14 members, making it more able to respond quickly to the needs of the county. The community strategy delivery group was established at an executive level with theme group chairs to lead delivery and performance management.

Common frameworks for collecting and sharing performance information

14 A sustainability assessment, including a workshop with partners, was undertaken on the community strategy by Sustainability South West using the Regional Sustainable Development Framework.

15 The DSP has developed a shared performance management system that is accessible by its partners. This is used to performance-manage the LAA. Partners are receiving training on the new system. It is also used by county and district councils for their corporate performance management.

Systems for understanding and influencing performance, resources and risks

16 In November 2006, the informal scrutiny networking group of county and district members wanted to undertake a joint scrutiny of the DSP. As the group had no formal mandate, the County Council's Audit and Scrutiny Committee agreed to establish a task and finish group with each of the six district councils participating. The group met monthly to look at:

- support and development of the DSP;
- performance management arrangements of the DSP and the LAA;
- community strategy implementation;
- DSP governance and use of resources; and
- the future role of scrutiny to monitor and develop the Partnership.

17. The outcome of the review was to:

- develop a DSP communications strategy to raise its profile and achievements;
- increase DSP Board members' understanding of resources;
- address accountability relating to LAA performance;
- put in place a performance framework for the thematic partnerships;
- provide elected members with regular feedback on the DSP and its added value; and
- undertake reviews of each district.

18 The County Council allocates £510,000 to support community strategy implementation, local community planning and the priorities of local community partnerships. Of this, the Council allocates £120,000 across the six district councils to support local community planning and a further £204,000 for projects planned by local community partnerships.

Learning Points

Transformational learning

- An independent LSP chair can help partners to feel more equal.
- A bridging group can help to secure the buy-in from multi-tier partnerships and achieve a common link between local and district community planning and county-wide strategy.
- Delivery chain analysis can help partners to plan LAA delivery and achieve tangible synergies from collaboration.

Transactional learning

- Shared systems help to standardise performance management and achieve consistency across the Partnership.
- Elected member scrutiny has an important role in reviewing the LSP, recommending improvement and challenging performance. In multi-tier areas, joint scrutiny is essential.
- Funding can help pump prime partnership projects to achieve local community benefits.

Questions for LSPs and their partners to consider

1. How well does your LSP recognise the importance of both the transformational and transactional elements and their interdependence?
2. How well does your LSP take a layered approach to performance and resource management?
3. How are partners working to deliver sustainable community strategy priorities that are outside the LAA targets?
4. How well do elected members working on overview and scrutiny challenge your LSP and its partners?
5. How does your LSP use delivery chain analysis and other tools to align resources and overcome obstacles?

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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