

# Working better together? Case study

Area forums in Gateshead Strategic Partnership



Cross cutting

Case study

April 2009

 **audit**  
commission

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# 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** A year-long consultation process involving partners from the public, private and voluntary sectors and over 5,300 local people informed the development of Gateshead's new sustainable community strategy (SCS). Vision 2030 is a highly aspirational document shaped around the six main ideas that emerged from the consultation.

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# Transformational elements

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## Leadership and culture

- 5 The Partnership is proactive in taking steps to overcome some of the cultural and language barriers that can make it difficult for non-public-sector partners to engage with LSPs.

**‘I’ve got some background with the local government but it was a long time ago. They come to the table and they talk in a language that we can understand.’ Third sector LSP Board member.**

- 6 The leader of the Council chairs the Partnership, but does so in an independent capacity.

**‘I don’t think he’s perceived as the Council, and I think that is important, I think he’s perceived as somebody who is passionate about Gateshead.’ NHS LSP Board member.**

- 7 The Partnership is working with the Improvement and Development Agency and is funded by the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership to deliver a partnership training programme for staff. The programme aims to raise understanding of the LSP and encourage staff to think more broadly about their role and the potential for making connections with the activities of other partners.

**‘Those sessions are very much about changing people’s behaviour, so they’re coming in and then hopefully leaving being more likely to work in partnership, to think about who else has an impact on their service,**

**who they could network with, or that they might be able to help contribute towards other things and really changing that culture of “this is my service and this is what I do.” LSP Coordinator.**

## Meetings and joint working

- 8 In the past year the Council has established five area forums to provide a link into neighbourhoods for the LSP. The area forums are led by the cabinet member who holds the corresponding area portfolio: cabinet members are allocated to areas which do not include the wards for which they were elected.
- 9 One or two other councillors (including opposition councillors) represent the wider interests of the area on the forum. All of the partners that are involved with the LSP are represented on each of the area forums, along with any relevant area-specific organisations or groups.
- 10 The area forums have the same status as the top-level theme groups and each forum is represented on the Steering Group (LSP Executive). It is hoped that as the forums develop they will provide an effective mechanism for giving a voice to local issues, involving local people in community planning, targeting action and engaging members.

**‘What we’re encouraging the area forums to do is take the new LAA and look at which five or six outcomes would have a specific resonance in their area.’ Council Finance Director.**

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## The benefits of joint working

**11** Partners are working collaboratively on major investment projects. The Primary Care Trust (PCT) and the local NHS Foundation Trust are engaged in a joint initiative to develop a new health facility. Gateshead Council is providing support to help identify the best site for the new facility.

**‘The council has been hugely influential and important in terms of helping us to identify potential sites. [...] I don’t think that would have happened if we didn’t have the depth of partnership that we’ve got here in Gateshead.’ (NHS LSP Board member).**

**12** Local analysis suggested that current levels of support for people with alcohol problems were not meeting demand. The Partnership used its LAA target on drug and alcohol treatment as a catalyst for a series of meetings between the Council, the PCT and the Community Safety team in order to develop an action plan. Some additional resources were made available, but partners have focused on improving their processes and the way they work together.

**‘Much of the discussion has been about the whole process, from how somebody gets into the system, how the referral processes work between different**

**agencies – because it’s working very well between the police, probation and the health services – and how those pathways work and how we can improve them. I think performance will be improved as much because of changes within those systems as through extra capacity.’ (LSP Coordinator).**

**13** Several times a year, partners undertake a pre-planned multi-agency operation under the banner of Operation Goldfinch. Activity is targeted at specific neighbourhoods. Local communities’ views are sought on what the priority issues are, for example, litter, drug dealing, etc. A number of agencies dedicate resources over a two-week period during which they adopt a high-visibility approach. Agencies work closely with the community to develop an action plan to ensure improvements are sustainable.

**‘It’s about agencies getting together, deciding which area to focus on and what the issues are in that area, and then committing to either having Police Community Support Officers or neighbourhood wardens or whoever else might be on the ground in that area. [...] That’s very much joined up between the housing company, the police, the Council, and other agencies.’ (LSP Coordinator).**

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# Transactional elements

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## Getting things done

- 14** Gateshead PCT is part of NHS South of Tyne & Wear, an integrated management structure that is jointly responsible for Gateshead and South Tyneside PCTs and Sunderland Teaching PCT. The NHS is considering introducing a lead director role for each of the three partnerships that they are involved with in order to strengthen its local focus.
- 15** The Partnership has used performance discussions to influence partners' activities and resource allocation. Improving the long-term health of the population is a key challenge for the LSP. Gateshead's LAA includes a reward target on reducing obesity that could provide up to £0.5 million in extra funding. Progress towards this target was discussed at an LSP Board meeting and partners agreed that, if nothing changed, they were unlikely to hit the target. The Partnership resolved to explore different approaches and invest more resources.
- 16** The Council, acting as the accountable body for the LAA, made £350,000 of LAA money available to the Foundation Trust to help deliver improvements in childhood obesity.

**'It's a mature partnership when the local authority is prepared to say, "Obesity in children is an important issue to us as a population. There are a number of players who have got a role to play in that, and we'll use the cash [...] to help our partners to deliver that agenda for the people.'** (NHS LSP Board member).

## Common frameworks for collecting and sharing performance information

- 17** The performance framework for the SCS Vision 2030 includes 36 improvement targets and a larger number of milestones that make up a pathway for the vision. There are 50 pathway actions to be completed between 2007 and 2010. The new roles and responsibilities of the theme partnerships include ensuring they deliver the elements of Vision 2030 relevant to their theme. Progress is reported on a six-monthly basis to the Steering Group and theme groups identify actions or remedial plans that are required.

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## Systems for understanding and influencing performance, resources and risks

**18** The Partnership set up a working group to undertake a performance management project. The group are keen to embed a performance culture that is not just about monitoring indicators and assessing past performance but is forward-looking and identifies risks to future performance.

**‘I think it’s that kind of mindset of thinking about not just, “What’s my performance over the last 12 months?” but, “Where am I going in the future?” that’s so important.’ (LSP Coordinator).**

**19.** The group were also involved in the Council’s decision to purchase an off-the-shelf performance management system (QPR). The new system will be used by organisations across the Partnership.

**20** The Partnership is keen to ensure a focus on learning and improvement planning for the future. Partners have used a programme of joint best value reviews addressing cross-cutting issues as a method for promoting more joined-up working. Partners have conducted joint reviews of neighbourhood services and health and equalities.

**21** The Council is considering the need for the LSP to have its own medium-term financial strategy to strengthen the link between performance and resources and linked to the delivery of the LAA and Vision 2030. Although the LSP is not a legal entity and is not directly responsible for resources, it has a role in determining how partners allocate their resources. If the Gateshead Strategic Partnership is going to be more accountable for delivering the LAA, it needs to consider how it will demonstrate that it matches resources to performance; partners’ own financial strategies are too high level for this purpose.

**‘I think if the GSP is now going to be more accountable for delivering the LAA, how does it demonstrate that it’s got something in place where it can match resources to performance?’ (Council Finance Director).**

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# Learning Points

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## Transformational learning

- Partners undertake a pre-planned multi-agency operation targeted at specific neighbourhoods several times a year. A number of agencies dedicate resources over a two-week period during which they adopt a high-visibility approach.
- Area forums are being developed to provide a link into neighbourhoods for the LSP.
- A partnership training programme for staff in all partnerships aims to raise understanding of the LSP and encourage staff to think more broadly about their role and the potential for making connections with the activities of other partners.

## Transactional learning

- A performance framework for the SCS holds theme partnerships to account for delivering specific elements of the strategy.

- Performance discussions have been used to directly influence partners' activities and resource-allocation decisions.
- Partner organisations were involved in a working group that was behind the Council's decision to purchase an off-the-shelf performance management system to be used across the Partnership.

## 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 do LSP executive and operational groups use performance information to support their roles in influencing resource allocation and service delivery?
4. How are elected members engaged with the LSP?

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## 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)

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