

# Working better together? Case study

Influencing mainstream resources in  
Leicestershire Together



Cross cutting

Case study

April 2009

 **audit**  
commission

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# 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).

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## Long-term objectives

- 4** Like most multi-tier areas, Leicestershire is relatively new to broad, cross-sector strategic partnerships. Leicestershire Together, the county's LSP, was formed in 2002, although a rural partnership covering most of the county has been in existence since the early 1990s.
- 5** The rural partnership is now responsible for the development and delivery of the rural chapter of the sustainable community strategy (SCS) and for 'rural-proofing' the whole document – ensuring that rural needs are taken into account by the other partnerships in the structure.
- 6** Leicestershire's new SCS, agreed in 2008, sets out a clear vision of what partners want Leicestershire to look like in the future. The strategy is organised around seven cross-cutting themes, complemented by place-based priorities that were developed jointly with the district LSPs and informed by the 27 Community Forums that cover the county.

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# Transformational elements

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## Leadership and culture

**7** Leading in a partnership arena can require a different approach and different skills than those required for leading a single organisation. The leader of Leicestershire County Council recognises the importance of being able to adjust his approach to suit the role of LSP Chair.

**‘Actually learning the skills to mould a strategic partnership together is important and that’s something that we’ve taken very, very seriously. Personally, I’ve undergone quite a bit of training.’ Council Leader and LSP Chair.**

## Meetings and joint working

**8** The Council have worked hard to ensure that the Partnership develops its own identity. This is reflected in their approach to organising Partnership Board meetings. Meetings are split into two hour-long sessions. The leader of the County Council, in his role as Chair, facilitates discussion of the items for decision on the agenda. The Vice-Chair (the chair of the PCT), leads the debate in the other half of the meeting, which usually centres on a particular issue or topic.

**9** Support and information for Board members at meetings is provided by officers working in the corporate centre at the County Council. However, the layout of the room and the administration of the meeting are designed to enable officers to remain in the background unless dealing directly with a request from Board members. This approach helps counter the risk of meetings appearing council-dominated and, on a more practical level, helps keep numbers manageable.

**10** Each of the partnerships in the structure was responsible for developing both the content and outcomes for the chapter in the SCS that they ‘own’. This means that there was real shared ownership of the outcomes – the priorities for Leicestershire – in the SCS. Similarly, partnerships have developed individual delivery plans for each of the 61 indicators of the second local area agreement (LAA2) (35 negotiated, 10 local and 16 statutory) and there was then a robust process of challenge as each of the other partnerships in the structure had an opportunity to explore linkages, gaps and alternative delivery channels.

**11** Partnership support staff are hoping to develop a more consistent structure for future Board meetings. There are plans to introduce specific slots on the Board agenda for performance, finance, etc., rather than dealing with these issues on an ad-hoc basis.

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## The benefits of joint working

**12** Leicestershire's SCS is built around seven themes. The seventh theme is more effective and efficient service delivery. To help achieve this outcome, partners have agreed to include the national value for money indicator (NI179) in their new LAA. The focus on value for money continues into the Multi Area Agreement (MAA), which covers the city and county.

**13** The LAA finance group have been tasked with taking this work forward and is working on a programme of shared services between the County Council and the seven districts. The County Council and districts are also considering a common approach to customer services, which is designed to improve access and contribute to the delivery of outcomes across a range of themes.

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# Transactional elements

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## Getting things done

**14** The Partnership is very clear that, having agreed a joint set of priorities, it also has a role in influencing how partners' resources are deployed to achieve them. An existing local government finance officers group has been expanded to include finance managers from other partners.

**'You can't just say what you want to happen at the Board, you've got to organise resources as well.'** LSP Chair.

**15** Partners are keen to explore the potential of strategic commissioning as a partnership.

**'Unless we crack this notion of doing strategic commissioning together, and a planned retreat from certain services and a rolling-out of other services, you'll never get pooling of money on a major scale, because nobody's got that much free money around.'** LA Policy and Performance Officer.

**16** A project board has been established to look jointly at a commissioning framework, LAA delivery and a new performance management framework. Partners recognise the cultural differences in their approaches to commissioning, but are seeking to establish some core principles, particularly around enabling third sector participation in the commissioning process.

**17** The Primary Care Trust (PCT) and the County Council are each pooling £0.5 million from their mainstream budgets to contribute to the delivery of priorities agreed in the new LAA. A financial strategy developed for the LAA commits other partners to considering the scope for pooling resources, following the approach taken by the County Council and the PCT. Partners are also looking at how they can better align their own financial planning processes with the LAA timetable.

## Common frameworks for collecting and sharing performance information

**18** The members of Leicestershire Together have agreed a set of principles to guide their work. These principles are: partnership; equality; quality of life; community involvement and participation; sustainability; quality; and accountability. The Partnership defines its mission as: 'Working together we will deliver improved public services so that we make Leicestershire the best possible place to live and work for everyone.'

**19** In response to a peer review, Leicestershire Together drew up a partnership agreement which sets out the roles and responsibilities of the different levels of the partnership structure, and includes a generic job description for a member of the Leicestershire Together partnership family.

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- 20** The Partnership has devoted significant efforts to establishing a relationship between the various district SCSs and the county-wide SCS and LAA. This led to a protocol, agreed between the County and District Councils, about how to work together to set priorities through a joined-up approach to their SCSs, and also the role of district LSPs in terms of delivery. Work is continuing in order to identify further alignment opportunities, both in terms of strategy development and delivery.
- 21** A single county-wide SCS, supported and informed by various place-based district SCSs, identifies the top-level priorities for Leicestershire. The LAA outlines delivery arrangements to meet these priorities. The lead for defining place-based priorities is taken by district LSPs, and these will be reflected in both district SCSs and the county-wide SCS and LAA. District LSPs will prepare delivery plans setting out, for those outcomes indicated in the LAA or theme based strategies, how services will be delivered, taking into account place-based priorities. District delivery plans will also include delivery of specific outcomes set out in district SCSs.
- 22** If partners are to better understand local people's needs and views and how to deliver services more effectively and efficiently, they will need to share information and data more widely. In response, Leicestershire Together is implementing a shared approach to improving data quality and information management across the Partnership.
- 23** The Partnership's Information Management Advisory Group has produced a Vision for Information Management that sets out the broad business aims that information management should support within partner organisations. The Vision is accompanied by a data quality strategy. The strategy sets out a shared approach to data quality that will provide assurance on the quality of data being used to inform decisions and facilitate better joint-working.
- 24** A number of partners have already formally adopted the strategy and it is hoped that all organisations involved in the delivery of SCS outcomes or LAA targets will adopt the strategy.

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

**25** The development of a new SCS for the area led the County Council to decide that its own medium-term corporate strategy was no longer appropriate. The SCS is now the Council's high-level strategy, with an organisational delivery plan sitting under it. Cabinet felt able to agree to this because their party's manifesto commitments were embedded in the SCS.

**26** The Partnership has been using 'Ten' performance software for performance management for a number of years. This experience has helped them identify some key principles, for example around data quality, and methods of joint working that will stand up to audit. Partners are considering which technical system will work best for them in the future.

**'Ten has been a very useful experience in trying to come up with a single performance management system for a range of partners.'** LA Policy and Performance Officer.

**27** The Partnership has identified that it needs to be more forward-looking in relation to assessing risk. Risk management in the performance sense is also being strengthened as part of LAA2. A risk workshop was held during the development of the SCS and LAA2 to identify the main risks to successful delivery of the Partnership's ambitions. The Partnership's new performance framework will include a process for risk identification and mitigation.

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# Learning Points

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## Transformational learning

- The Leader of Leicestershire Council recognises the importance of being able to adjust his approach to suit the role of LSP Chair.
- Board meetings are organised in a style that helps the LSP develop its own identity and prevents it feeling council-dominated. More detailed business is conducted through time-limited task group meetings.

## Transactional learning

- A protocol sets out how the County and District Councils will work together to set priorities through a joined-up approach to their SCSs.
- The Partnership is clear that, having agreed joint priorities, it must also influence partners' resources. An existing local government finance officers group has been expanded to include finance managers from other partners.
- Risk identification and mitigation is an important part of the Partnership's performance management framework.

- The Partnership's Information Management Advisory Group has produced a data quality strategy. The strategy sets out a shared approach to data quality that will provide assurance on the quality of data being used to inform decisions and facilitate better joint-working.

## 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. What aspects of the physical location or arrangement of meetings can be improved to emphasise a collaborative culture?
4. Multi-tier areas: how well is the relationship between district SCSs and the county SCS working?
5. How well do partners work together to exploit the potential efficiency gains from joint working?

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# Learning Points

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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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