

Working better together? Case study

Working with the private sector in
Sheffield First 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** Sheffield First Partnership has its origins in a City Liaison Group that was established in the early 1990s to work primarily on an economic agenda. The Partnership became the LSP for Sheffield in 2002.
- 5** The City Strategy, Sheffield's sustainable community strategy (SCS), outlines five big ambitions that reflect the most pressing priorities for partners:
 - Sheffield's economy matching the best in Europe;
 - excellence in Sheffield's public transport system;
 - every neighbourhood being a successful neighbourhood;
 - everyone able to fulfil their potential through learning and enterprise; and
 - Sheffield as an attractive, sustainable, low-carbon city.

Transformational elements

Leadership and culture

- 6 A small team led by a partnership director provides strong support to the Sheffield First Board. The Sheffield First Partnership is funded by a subscription from each of the partnership agencies. In addition to this, partners regularly take a joint approach to commissioning activity that will influence city-level outcomes.
- 7 Partners have found that having a senior director working for the Partnership has been particularly useful for engaging with and securing the involvement of private sector partners. The Sheffield First 'family' of partnerships has significant private-sector representation: almost half the members of the Sheffield First Board are from the private sector. The three thematic partnerships delivering the works, skills and enterprise elements of the City Strategy are all chaired by private sector representatives.

Meetings and joint working

- 8 Building trust between partners takes time, but is vital for effective performance challenge. The style of the Partnership Chair is also important in helping to create the right environment for performance debate and ensuring it takes place in the context of shared understanding and friendship. Performance discussion in Sheffield is framed around what partners can do collectively to change things.

'Challenging performance is about trust and it's about people coming to the table and not feeling as though there is one organisational agenda that's getting priority.' LSP Director.

- 9 The Partnership tries to ensure that Board meetings do not resemble Council meetings. Taking a different approach has helped break down some of the cultural barriers that can exist between partners. The format can be a few key messages followed by group discussions and feedback around major issues. This helps prevent energy being sucked up by transactional cost.

'I think the most important cultural message is not to operate in the way that the local authority does.' LSP Director.

The benefits of joint working

- 10** The Partnership has played a key role in developing some of the social networks across organisations. These networks are difficult to evaluate, but can be incredibly important for building relationships and trust. Informal relationships between Board members are very important, and conversations outside of the board room are very important in taking business forward.
- 11** The strength of the LSP in Sheffield has enabled significant collective outcomes and results to be delivered. For example, by working together at a strategic level, the Partnership has delivered significant improvements in crime and community safety, including a 5 per cent reduction in all violent crime, a 16 per cent reduction in burglary and a 27 per cent reduction in theft from vehicles.
- 12** The strength of the LSP was particularly evident during the floods that took place in summer 2007, where a multi-agency command structure involving the Council and private and public partners was quickly established. It enabled a relatively smooth transition to the management of the recovery operation.

Transactional elements

Getting things done

13 Key public sector partners have set up an officer-level City Executive Board. This group includes the Council's executive management team, senior police officers, senior Primary Care Trust (PCT) officers and the partnership director. The group is relatively new but it is starting to provide a focus for local area agreement (LAA) priorities and help develop closer alignment between partners' activities.

Common frameworks for collecting and sharing performance information

14 Performance management in Sheffield is supported by a new City Performance Management Framework. The Performance Management Framework links the City Strategy and the Sheffield First Agreement with partnership action plans and partners' business plans, creating stronger delivery mechanisms and driving a pro-active approach to performance management. This stronger connection between strategy and action is an important aspect of the new Performance Management Framework, and helps partners to better understand the steps on the journey to improvement. Central to this is increasing accountability for actions, with an ability to assess and address blockages to progress delivery of improvements.

15 The Performance Framework is forward looking and action focused. The Framework identifies not only where performance is at greatest risk, but whether this risk is related to the speed of performance improvement, the effectiveness of the activities being undertaken, or the gap between current and future performance outcomes. This enables the Partnership to identify how and where it should provide support.

16 This Framework facilitates innovation in areas where all the actions appear to be in place but performance is not improving. For these measures it is clear that something new, creative or different needs to be done.

17 The relationships between the actions and outcomes discussed above means that delivery boards will often share an interest in a critical action. For example, an action to tackle rising childhood obesity will be of interest to the Children and Young People Partnership and the Health and Wellbeing Partnership. The Framework recognises this by making a single individual (the action owner) responsible for providing regular action updates to any delivery board that has registered an interest in that action. Hence, the same performance update on a childhood obesity initiative would be reported to both boards as an integral part of the performance monitoring report for each board.

18 This is an important area, as collective action on joint targets requires co-operation across delivery boards and partner organisations. An example of good practice can be taken from the Health and Well-being board, who have set up joint task and finish groups that enable cross-board working on ‘cross-cutting’ issues.

Systems for understanding and influencing performance, resources and risks

19 Leadership at board level reminds partners that what they are trying to achieve is to move Sheffield. The Partnership has a clear set of aspirations built on concerns about progress to date and a strategy with milestones that the Board tracks. But the operational detail of performance management is handled at thematic partnership level and within partner organisations. The Board’s role is to concentrate on improvement by working across sectors and using its collective powers to deal with difficult issues.

20 The Successful Neighbourhoods Partnership is responsible for leading on narrowing the gap between the most deprived neighbourhoods and the rest of the city. To support the work of this Partnership, the Council and partners have developed a nationally recognised Neighbourhood Information System, popularly known as SNIS (Sheffield Neighbourhood Information System). The system enables partners to track the progress of individual neighbourhoods against a range of indicators.

21 A range of partners have been involved in the development of the system, including South Yorkshire Police, South Yorkshire Fire Service, South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive and Sheffield Health Informatics. Early discussions allayed concerns over the level of data-sharing required and have increased levels of trust. Partners have found that placing all of this diverse knowledge together has enabled closer joint working between departments and across agencies.

22 For example, one neighbourhood, which had shown rising criminal damage, also revealed increasing truancy and lower levels of attainment at school. This led to a targeted response from the police, working with community action groups and schools. Subsequently, the neighbourhood began to show significant decreases in criminal damage.

Learning Points

Transformational learning

- Partners have found that having a senior director working for the Partnership has been particularly useful for engaging with and securing the involvement of private sector partners.
- Board meetings do not resemble Council meetings. Taking a different approach has helped break down some of the cultural barriers that can exist between partners.
- Informal relationships between Board members are really important and conversations outside of the board room are very important in taking business forward.

Transactional learning

- A new performance framework identifies not only where performance is at greatest risk, but whether this risk is related to the speed of performance improvement, the effectiveness of the activities being undertaken, or the gap between current and future performance outcomes. This enables the Partnership to identify how and where the Partnership should provide support.

- A jointly developed Neighbourhood Information System enables partners to track the progress of individual neighbourhoods and has helped provide a framework for more 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. How well does the strategic board agenda reflect the different interests of public-sector, private-sector, voluntary-sector and community representatives?
4. How do key stakeholders (local people, central government, regulators) know that your LSP is making a difference?

Learning Points

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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