

Working better together? Case study

Layered performance management in
Sunderland City 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** As with similar urban areas, partnership working in Sunderland began as a response to economic problems affecting the local economy in the early 1990s. When LSP policy emerged, the original economic partnership developed into an LSP.
- 5** Sunderland's new sustainable community strategy outlines five priorities that set the framework for achieving its vision and aims. These five priorities are supported by four cross-cutting priorities – sustainability, creating inclusive communities, housing, and culture – that require a more widespread focus.

Sunderland Partnership's priorities are to create a city that is:

- prosperous;
- healthy;
- safe;
- supportive of learning;
- attractive; and
- inclusive.

Transformational elements

Leadership and culture

- 6 There is a small core LSP team comprising a Partnership Manager working alongside policy, performance, marketing and administrative officers. The team is semi-independent and reports to the independent Chair of the Partnership.
- 7 As part of the LSP board arrangements, the Partnership organises a number of away days, including an annual overnight away day for the Board and management group. By prioritising this event, the chief executives and directors send a message to partners about the importance they attach to the LSP. Partners have found the events extremely useful for developing the sort of relationships that can begin to make a qualitative difference to the working of the Partnership.

‘When you build on [existing relationships] with a residential, you almost achieve more on that residential than in all the rest of the meetings put together. That is something that we’ve discovered has moved the Partnership onto a different level.’ LSP Chair

- 8 The Partnership is assessing whether changes in the structure and membership of its thematic partnerships are necessary in order to ensure they can fulfil their roles in delivering the new LAA. As part of this, the Partnership is ensuring that there is elected member representation on all the thematic partnerships. This is being supported by a programme of partnership training for members to create a better understanding of and closer involvement with the thematic partnerships.

Meetings and joint working

- 9 From its inception, there has been a tradition of having a non-public-sector Chair. This has enabled the Partnership to grow independently of a local authority culture from the outset. Partners feel this has been an important factor in securing cross-sector engagement. The current Chair of the LSP is Canon Stephen Taylor, the Rector at Sunderland Minster.

10 The Partnership is conscious that Board members are faced with many competing demands for their time. A clear focus and a businesslike approach to managing meetings and processes within the LSP helps create an environment where partners feel they are able to contribute, will be heard and can be part of something successful. The Partnership has kept its board relatively small so that discussion can remain focused on strategy.

‘Because we’re a relatively small group, we don’t have a huge amount of turnover and change on the board. There’s enough stability as well as enough freshness. They’ve got that balance right and it’s just a good place to be, which just keeps us sharp.’ LSP Chair

11 The development of the LSP in Sunderland has helped reinforce a particular way of working, but partners also recognise that it is not always appropriate to steer all partnership projects through the LSP.

12 The partners have identified a commonly held misconception that the Partnership is the Board. The Partnership is looking at how it communicates and markets itself to re-balance this view and also to raise awareness of how new area arrangements will fit with the LSP.

The benefits of joint working

13 The Teaching Primary Care Trust (TPCT) and City Council have developed a city-wide wellness service to ensure that all individuals have the opportunity to improve their health, fitness and wellbeing. There are now six wellness centres across the city, which use exercise and lifestyle interventions to address prevalent health conditions. The strong working relationships between the two organisations that are making this project successful were developed through the health thematic partnership of the LSP.

14 Strong performance management has meant difficult issues have emerged that are now being tackled at partnership level. Alcohol misuse has been identified as one such issue. This has led to greater collaboration between the PCT, the health sector and the police. The Director of Public Health and Police Chief Superintendent have been made joint champions for tackling the problem. As a first step, extra resources have been directed to increase analytical capacity and help partners better understand the problem.

Transactional elements

Getting things done

15 Sunderland has not developed a public service board (PSB), primarily because partners feel that imposing an artificial structure on established working relationships would be counter-productive. However, partners have been involved in the recent setting up of a Tyne and Wear PSB.

‘I’ve been of the view, and still am of the view, that we didn’t need a public service board for Sunderland because the working relationships are so good anyway.’ LA Chief Executive.

Common frameworks for collecting and sharing performance information

16 Partners are working on refreshing the local compact agreement. Currently, there are two compacts in existence in Sunderland – an original partnership compact and a separate health and social care compact. All partners acknowledge that these are in need of review and the LSP hopes to apply the learning from these two original sets of guidance to inform the development of a single compact that all partners can sign up to.

17 The Partnership has developed a values framework to guide all actions and initiatives undertaken by its members. The values are: put people first; be fair and open; act with integrity; and strive to be the best. The Partnership is also committed to fair trade. The City Council

and LSP successfully developed a joint bid for Fairtrade City status.

Systems for understanding and influencing performance, resources and risks

18 A key piece of learning from the Partnership’s experience of the first LAA and working together on the performance management of outcomes is the need for increased analytical capacity. The Partnership has made some significant progress on data sharing and is exploring how to develop its research and analysis capability. The Partnership is currently working with the Tyne and Wear research and information to develop a programme of research that addresses some of the current gaps. Boosting analytical capacity is also one of the three key areas of work for the proposed MAA for the Tyne and Wear city region.

19 The Partnership’s management group (the group that sits underneath the Board) fulfils a problem-solving role and provides performance support to the thematic groups. The group also has a role to play in filtering performance issues raised by the thematic groups. This ensures that the Board does not waste time on issues that are, for example, the result of data anomalies. The red flags on performance that the Board then receives are those that may require a change in strategic direction by one or more of the partner organisations.

Learning Points

Transformational learning

- A non-public-sector Chair has enabled the Partnership to grow independently of a local authority culture from the outset. Partners feel this has been an important factor in securing cross-sector engagement.
- Partnership away days have helped board and management group members develop the sort of relationships that can make a qualitative difference to the working of the partnership.
- A clear focus and a businesslike approach to managing meetings and processes within the LSP help create an environment where partners feel they are able to contribute, will be heard and can be part of something successful.

Transactional learning

- Partners have not developed a PSB because they feel imposing an artificial structure on established working relationships would be counter-productive.

- The Partnership's management group filters performance issues raised by the thematic groups. This ensures that the board do not waste time on issues that are, for example, the result of data anomalies.

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 your LSP work to keep its evidence base up to date?
4. How well is performance reporting tailored to board-, executive- and operational-level needs?
5. How do strategic/board meetings ensure there is time for discussion and direction-setting?

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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