Working better together? Case study

Narrowing the gap – Warwickshire Public Service Board

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 Warwickshire Public Service Board (PSB) has a vision of narrowing gaps across the county, this is defined as:

'Reducing differences across the county in terms of achievement, opportunity and quality of life.'

5 This vision is supported in the local area agreement (LAA) by three cross-cutting themes: equalities and cohesion; culture, sport and active recreation; and rural issues.

6 Warwickshire PSB first met in April 2007. It fulfils the role as the county-wide LSP in Warwickshire.

Transformational elements

Leadership and culture

7 The PSB is chaired by the political leader of the County Council. The theme groups are chaired by senior executives from the County and District Councils, the police and the Chamber of Commerce. Each theme group has performance, finance and communication support officers from across the Partnership. Core team and administrative support to the PSB is provided by County Council staff.

8 Partners are provided with performance management training as part of the performance framework.

Meetings and joint working

9 Warwickshire PSB has agreed a locality-focused delivery strategy for its new LAA. This includes the development of locality profiles and plans for each of the 23 localities and joint public sector service delivery.

10 The PSB has an LAA communications framework and action plan. It is directed internally to partners and externally to the public.

The benefits of joint working

11 Synergies are achieved through collaborative working. For example, Warwickshire Direct delivers services jointly through one-stop shops in North Warwickshire, Nuneaton and Bedworth, Southam, Kenilworth, Whitnash and Warwick. The partners involved include the District, Borough and County Councils, the Citizens Advice Bureau, the Credit Union, the police, and healthcare providers. One-stop shops allow local residents to speak to customer service advisers in person and access services under one roof.

12 An example of a partnership-led project to narrow the gap is the Healthy Living Network. Since 2003 it has been funded from the Big Lottery. It aims to reduce health inequalities in the nine most disadvantaged areas of Nuneaton and Bedworth. With partners, the Network works directly with local communities to reduce barriers to health, promote well-being and empower local people to take responsibility for their health. Activities have included on-street health checks, men's health checks and weight-buster classes. The project has benefited over 45,000 people and supported 30 schools to achieve health promoting schools status.

Transactional elements

Getting things done

13 The PSB directed £400,000 of the 2008/09 Area Based Grant to narrow the gap in Nuneaton and Bedworth and £100,000 to each of the remaining four LSPs. The biggest challenge for the PSB was getting partners to agree to a geographical variation in resource allocation.

14 Performance management is steered at three levels: the PSB steers LAA high-level performance; the six theme groups steer detailed block-level performance; and district LSPs manage the local impact of LAA performance.

15 A task and finish group helps to ensure that equality and cohesion are part of the LAA.

Common frameworks for collecting and sharing performance information

16 To achieve synergies and consistency across the new LAA, the Partnership has an agreed standard for LAA delivery planning. Delivery plan templates include capital and revenue, and aligned and pooled resources for each theme. The standard has a five-stage approach. The stages each have a series of questions to be addressed during the completion of the delivery planning template. The stages look at:

- how well priorities for action are understood, including an analysis of performance and of local conditions;
- current performance and trends;
- where the Partnership is going and how it will achieve its goals. This includes forecasting whether targets will be met;
- what interventions will enable the outcome and targets to be delivered; and
- how they will be achieved, including an appraisal of available options and what works locally.

17 A performance framework and a performance reporting template are both used by the Partnership to achieve standards across the theme groups.

18 A governance protocol exists for the PSB and the six theme groups operating in Warwickshire: children and young people; safer communities; stronger communities; healthier communities and older people; economic development and enterprise; and climate change and environment.

Systems for understanding and influencing performance, resources and risks

19 The Partnership used the Warwickshire observatory to develop an evidence base to help local partners agree priorities. It also has an information-sharing charter.

20 Warwickshire uses Performance Plus as its partnership performance management system. Reporting takes place quarterly to each governance level on a zero-based exception basis and includes financial planning and risk management. A performance management seminar with performance leads from across the county is taking forward the development of the web-enabled system.

21 The PSB has agreed criteria for the alignment of funding. Funding must contribute to achieving LAA outcomes and targets and must be subject to PSB financial monitoring. Activities supported by the funding must be subject to performance reporting.

Learning Points

Transformational learning

- The PSB and its partners have moved resources to the areas of greatest need to help narrow the gap.
- A locality-focused approach can help to provide local evidence, target resources to local priorities and secure the commitment of local partners.
- Performance management training for partners helps to promote understanding and create a platform for more effective challenges.

Transactional learning

- A standard approach to LAA delivery planning helps to achieve consistency.
- Local observatories help partners to agree priorities and plan local delivery by establishing an evidence base.
- Warwickshire has developed a layered approach to its performance system that includes financial planning and risk management.

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 far are partners' business plans aligned with sustainable community strategy and LAA priorities?
4. How well does your LSP assist partners in planning their contributions to achieving common goals?

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

For further information on the work of the Commission please contact:
Audit Commission, 1st Floor Milbank Tower, Milbank, London SW1P 4HQ Tel: 020 7828 1212 Fax: 020 7976 6187 Text phone (minicom): 020 7630 0421

www.audit-commission.gov.uk