



Gedling Partnership
Working Together

Report to Gedling Borough Council Cabinet
Gedling Partnership Board

Subject: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) Consultation Paper
 “Local Strategic Partnerships: Shaping their future”

Date: Cabinet – 2 February 2006
 Partnership Board – 7 February 2006

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1. Purpose of the Report

- § To draw Cabinet and Partnership members’ attention to the consultation paper and to the key issues raised in it.
- § To seek views on any response to the consultation to be made by the Borough Council or by the Partnership.

2. Background

ODPM published a consultation paper “Local Strategic Partnerships: Shaping their future” in December 2005.

The main issues covered in the document are set out in its Executive Summary, a copy of which is attached at **Appendix A**.

Specific issues on which ODPM is seeking views are set out at **Appendix B**.

The full document can be accessed at
http://www.odpm.gov.uk/pub/326/LocalStrategicPartnershipsShapingtheirfutureaconsultationpaperPDF469Kb_id1162326.pdf

The deadline for responses to consultation is 3 March 2006.

3. Current Gedling position

Gedling Borough has a Local Strategic Partnership (the Gedling Partnership), though this is not at present a statutory requirement. It is a voluntary, non-executive partnership, in common with 98% of other LSPs¹.

The Partnership includes a wide variety of representation, including representatives from the community, voluntary, public and private sectors. It has developed (or is in the process of developing) thematic groups to address its main priorities. These correspond with local/national shared priorities and with Local Area Agreement blocks to a significant extent (though these national issues have not been the main driver in their development).

The Partnership has sought to become a “partnership of partnerships” by bringing established thematic partnerships that address its priorities under its wing, most notably the Borough Community Safety Partnership.

The Borough Council has a Community Strategy. It chose to deliver this statutory responsibility through the Gedling Partnership, and the Strategy is in practice at least as much owned by the Partnership as it is by the Council.

The Community Strategy sets out a vision for the Borough and a set of priorities. It has recently been substantially updated, to focus on a more streamlined set of priorities. The revised Strategy will be published and launched in the wider community in Spring 2006.

The Strategy includes high level outcome targets, progress towards which will be managed through the Partnership’s performance management framework, which is being further developed.

The Partnership was not originally seen as a delivery mechanism, though this is now changing with the incorporation of the Community Safety Partnership; the development of other thematic sub-groups with their own Action Plans, and with the development of Area-Based Initiatives.

4. Key Issues in the Consultation Document

These represent initial observations on the key points arising from the consultation paper, which may form the basis of any response to this consultation. Comments and further thoughts on these are invited.

§ **Vision and framework for LSPs** – The stated vision of the role of LSPs potentially clarifies the fit between Community Strategies, Local Area Agreements and Local Development Frameworks. The latter, as a land use

¹ As indicated in the ODPM Consultation document

delivery plan for the Community Strategy, is a development which we perhaps have not fully appreciated or made the most of as a partnership. However, the vision seems to be written from a single tier local authority perspective and understates the complexity of such arrangements in two-tier areas.

§ **Leadership and engagement** - The paper proposes a key role for LSPs in providing local leadership and facilitating neighbourhood engagement. There is something of an ambiguity here between LSP roles and local authority roles, given local authorities' role to lead local communities, addressed in part by later statements that local authorities are deemed ultimately responsible for LSP actions (which in turn raises questions around accountability set out below).

§ **Co-ordinating partnership activity** - The concept of the LSP as a "partnership of partnerships" seems sensible (it is a route we have already taken in Gedling), though this need to be addressed carefully in two-tier areas. A rigidly prescriptive approach (for example specifying that all LSPs must have them groups to reflect the shared national/local priority themes) would lose flexibility and could lead to a plethora of unnecessary meetings duplicating efforts.

§ **Sustainability** - The role of LSPs in sustainable development seems sensible and is a direction Gedling has moved in. The increased emphasis on an evidence-based approach, establishing a baseline position against priorities and measuring progress is also something we have taken up. Its specific inclusion here could be seen as a formal shift away from a softer community focused approach to community planning to a harder, more evidence based approach (though these issues need not be mutually exclusive).

§ **Accountability** - The statement that local authorities are "ultimately responsible for the LSP's actions" makes clear the government expectation that local authorities, through their community leadership role, are in effect "first amongst equals" in the LSP. It also raises constitutional concerns around accountability if significant activities led by other agencies and within their respective statutory remits are brought under the wing of an LSP (for example, under these proposals, could the local authority be deemed in some way accountable for the actions of, say, a PCT?). The issue is particularly complex in two-tier areas, where county and district authority accountabilities, already not well understood in the community, could be further blurred. The issues appear not to have been fully thought-through and could be seen to confuse rather than clarify accountability.

§ **Two-tier areas** - Operation in two-tier areas is a consistently problematic theme in each of the examples above – the paper acknowledges "establishing clear roles and responsibilities in two-tier areas can be problematic". Its solutions, set out in paras 65 to 70, seem to be wholly unsatisfactory (see also diagrams at **Appendix C**). While we would not deny that district LSPs are better placed to focus on local/neighbourhood engagement and on establishing the needs of their population framework, the related proposals set out here seem to propose a formal subordination of district LSPs and

Community Strategies to county-level LSP and Community Strategies. If this is the government's intention, it represents a significant constitutional shift, not least because, when linked to the question above that suggests ultimate accountability for an LSP's action rests with the local authority, it effectively makes a district council subordinate to a county council, contrary to existing legislation which created district and county councils as equals constitutionally. It is not acceptable to introduce such fundamental change in effect through the back door – moreover, the use of phrases like “some of this shift will, and is, coming with time” in a consultation document with such potentially profound implications is a cause for concern.

§ **Capacity** - The suggested skill set for partnership members may have some merit, and it can be argued that this skill set is increasingly a desirable requirement for public sector professionals working in these cross-cutting areas, and for elected members leading on these issues. It may also be desirable for private and voluntary sector representatives fulfilling these roles to have such skills, but it would be restrictive to make this a pre-requisite in all instances. The suggestion that participation in an LSP should not be seen as an addition to the “day job” for anyone who takes part in a voluntary capacity is perhaps somewhat naïve, although the intention for public service professionals and members is understood.

§ **Statutory basis** - Though participation by all agencies in Gedling's LSP has been largely good, the proposed statutory duty to co-operate suggested here may further strengthen future arrangements – it has been a feature of the success of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) where such a duty is in place. There would however need to be clarity about which organisations this duty falls upon, and there remains a risk that partnerships become too public sector focused given that such a duty can only realistically be placed on public sector organisations. Care would also need to be taken to ensure that membership does not wholly replicate that already in place for CDRPs. The proposal that LSPs should not be statutory organisations seems to make sense, given fears expressed here that LSPs so constituted might be seen as a rival to democratically elected authorities.

5. Resource Implications

It is clearly too early to address resource implications in any meaningful way, given the range of ideas being floated at this point. There will be implications for all partners in any change eventually addressed, and these would need to be addressed by the Partnership in due course.

6. Recommendation

Comments to inform any response to the consultation, from the Borough Council and/or the Partnership are invited.