

## Executive Summary

1. Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and Community Strategies were introduced as a result of the Local Government Act 2000. They have helped make great strides to improve the local quality of life. LSPs are now established in all areas and much progress has been made in terms of representation, establishing a common vision and moving to genuinely collaborative working. Community Strategies and Local Strategic Partnerships have a critical role in further developing coherent service provision and genuinely sustainable communities.
2. LSPs are working in an increasingly complex and challenging environment with important expectations being placed on them. This has increased the need to ensure that LSPs are working effectively and accountably, a theme developed in the Audit Commission's recently published paper "Governing Partnerships."<sup>1</sup> This consultation examines the future role of LSPs, their governance and accountability, and their capacity to deliver Sustainable Community Strategies. It poses a series of questions under each of these headings designed to help us understand how LSPs are operating at present and where changes could be made nationally, regionally and locally to help them develop most effectively.

## The consultation's aims

3. This consultation, which is part of the local:vision debate on the future of local government, re-examines the role, governance and capacity of LSPs and Community Strategies both in terms of short-term changes and more radical longer-term adjustments. Discussions with key national, regional and local partners have led us to identify a number of key ambitions for the future development of LSPs. These core objectives are set out below:
  - . Commitment amongst central government departments, regional organisations and local partners to the LSP system of partnerships and the Sustainable Community Strategy as the over-arching local plan;
  - . An evolved role for the local authority including local authority members in facilitating action through the LSP and Sustainable Community Strategy;
  - . LSPs able to effectively identify and deliver against the priorities for joint action in their area through the Sustainable Community Strategy, Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy, Local Area Agreement (LAA) and Local Development Framework, in a clearly accountable way;
  - . LSPs better able to support neighbourhood engagement and to help ensure the views of neighbourhoods and parish councils can influence strategic local service delivery and spending; and
  - . Effective, transparent and accountable governance and scrutiny arrangements for LSPs to enable partners to hold each other to account and local people to hold the partnership to account.

<sup>1</sup> "Governing Partnerships - Bridging the accountability gap" Audit Commission Oct. 2005.

4. Our vision for the role of the LSP is that it takes the strategic lead in the locality by bringing together the views of the local partners, including critically representatives of the private, voluntary and community sectors, with national, regional, and neighbourhood or parish priorities in developing the Sustainable Community Strategy. The strategy would set out the vision and priorities for the area with the Local Area Agreement defining the detailed outcomes, which will be part of the Sustainable Community Strategy's action plan. The Local Development Framework is then the land- use delivery plan for the Sustainable Community Strategy. The outcomes from the LAA would be scrutinised by local authorities and LSPs and then monitored, reviewed and reported on. The Action Plan and its outcomes would then feed into future revisions of the Sustainable Community Strategy and LAA. Diagrams showing these arrangements for different tiers are shown on pages 22-23.

## The changing policy environment

5. The Government has now set out its vision for creating genuinely sustainable communities. Delivering sustainable communities is the core purpose of Community Strategies and Local Strategic Partnerships. There are currently over 360 Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) in England, 88 of which are in areas that currently receive Neighbourhood Renewal Funding (NRF). Some of these partnerships date back to local initiatives in the early 1990s, others have only been set up relatively recently. Over recent years progress has been made in terms of increasing representation of harder-to- reach groups, joining-up working on cross-cutting themes and using well-being powers to facilitate improved local services.
6. Those areas in receipt of NRF are required to have an LSP but outside those areas, LSPs are entirely voluntary. In the past, their role was to develop a vision for their locality through their Community Strategy. This shared vision for the area remains an important part of their role but LSPs across the country are also increasingly becoming involved in delivery. A lot is expected of all LSPs, in particular, the development and implementation of LAAs. This enhanced role provides new challenges to many LSPs. They need to be capable of attracting senior membership, taking difficult decisions and challenging partner members where necessary, in order to drive forward local public service improvements and manage the performance of the elements of the partnership.
7. This builds on the strong emphasis placed on LSPs in the delivery of Neighbourhood Renewal. LSPs were required to develop a Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy and deliver the Neighbourhood Renewal outcomes. LAAs have placed further expectations on the role of LSPs and Community Strategies. First piloted in 21 areas in 2004/05, LAAs are now being rolled out to all upper-tier authorities in England over the next two years. LAAs set out the priorities for a local area negotiated between central government, represented by the Government Office, and a local area, represented by the local authority and LSP. The experience of the pilots bore out the importance of the LSP in bringing together the thematic partnerships in the local area; providing the governance framework for the delivery of the LAA; and ensuring the identification of cross-cutting themes and ensuring community engagement in the LAA. There are also clear links between the LAA and Community Strategy - both of which set out the priorities for the locality - and many areas have taken their Community Strategies as the basis of their LAA.
8. LSPs also have a key role in our proposals to increase .the opportunities for neighbourhood engagement and action following the publication of the local:vision document *Citizen Engagement and Public Services: Why Neighbourhoods Matter* (ODPM and Home Office, Jan 2005). It is envisaged that the LSP will have an important

facilitating role in supporting neighbourhood engagement and ensuring that neighbourhoods and parish councils can influence strategic local priorities. *Why Neighbourhoods Matter* states that 'evidence shows that action at the neighbourhood level is likely to be more effective where councils and the Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) have in place effective arrangements at the more strategic level'.<sup>2</sup> These arrangements should include a co-ordinated approach to community engagement and a commitment to the resources necessary to support it. Neighbourhood management has also proved to be a good way of engaging citizens and influencing service delivery, for example on improving local green spaces.

9. The Government has also set out its commitment to greater involvement of citizens and communities in the improvement of policies and services in the *Together We Can* action plan and the proposals in this document seek to reflect the implementation of that commitment.

10. A further influence on the role of the LSP is the change in focus of Community Strategies to become *Sustainable* Community Strategies. This reflects the increasingly important role of Community Strategies in helping to deliver genuinely sustainable communities which balance and integrate economic, social and environmental goals. Many Community Strategies have, in the past, struggled to articulate how they will address the area's longer-term and cross-boundary issues. Sir John Egan<sup>3</sup> found there was a need for local leaders to establish priorities that were sustainable and connected to the anticipated changes in the local area. He recommended that these be brought together in a Sustainable Community Strategy. We believe that the move to Sustainable Community Strategies, as part of the wider role changes for LSPs and local authorities outlined in this paper, will help them fulfil the requirement in the Local Government Act 2000 to produce Community Strategies, which contribute to sustainable development in the UK.

11. The local:vision document *Vibrant Local Leadership*<sup>4</sup>, published in January 2005, also demonstrated a commitment to developing this co-ordinating community leadership role of each local authority. It suggested that a long-term objective for the next ten years should be:

*"...developing the effectiveness of the community leadership role of councils in relation to the range of local services that contribute to the well-being of an area and strengthening the relationships between local partners",*

12. This emphasis on the 'community leadership' role of the local authority is vital as it points to the way in which this leadership should be exercised i.e. in partnership rather than by command. The benefits of partnership working in addressing difficult issues are widely recognised and we have placed increasing emphasis on partnership working across government, for example, through Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships and, more recently, Children's Trusts. We have also recognised that, to be effective, these different partnerships and their plans must be co-ordinated. This role as the "partnership of partnerships" was always envisaged for LSPs. It is now imperative that this becomes a reality.

<sup>2</sup> The local:vision document "Citizen Engagement and Public Services: Why Neighbourhoods Matter" ODPM Jan. 2005.

<sup>3</sup> The Egan Review Skills for Sustainable Communities. ODPM 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Vibrant Local Leadership, ODPM, 2005

See [http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm\\_localgov/documents/page/odpm\\_locgov\\_034875.pdf](http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_localgov/documents/page/odpm_locgov_034875.pdf)

*'Undertaking these roles effectively is likely to require an increasingly strong focus for dealing with cross-cutting issues at local level, for which the main vehicle is the LSP.'*  
(Vibrant Local Leadership ODPM, 2005)

13. The local authority's involvement is vital to the effective operation of an LSP. The local authority's democratic mandate and accountability provides them with a clear basis on which to determine priorities across the local area. Therefore, we see a clear role for the local authority in initiating and maintaining momentum in the LSP; ensuring appropriate representation across the different sectors including involving local residents; and scrutinising the LSP. The local authority is also responsible for producing the Community Strategy and is ultimately accountable for the LSP's actions.
14. The local authority role is especially vital given the statutory power local authorities have to secure the economic, social and environmental well-being of the local areas. This power is critical as it enables local authorities to step outside the narrow provision of a range of services they are directly responsible for, to look more widely at community needs, such as promoting community cohesion and tackling social exclusion and discrimination. The powers provide greater freedom for local authorities to adopt new and innovative ways of improving quality of life and securing a more sustainable future for the area.

## Our vision of the role, accountability and governance of LSPs

15. We believe it is crucial for the success of LSPs that they are able to co-ordinate delivery of the Sustainable Community Strategy and LAA.

### We want LSPs...

1. To be the partnership of partnerships in an area, providing the strategic co-ordination within the area and linking with other plans and bodies established at the regional, sub-regional and local level.
2. To ensure a Sustainable Community Strategy is produced that sets the vision and priorities for the area agreed by all parties, including local citizens and businesses, and built on a solid evidence base.
3. To develop and drive the effective delivery of their Local Area Agreements.
4. To agree an action plan for achieving the Sustainable Community Strategy priorities, including the LAA outcomes.

In two-tier areas we expect:

*County-level* LSPs to agree the LAA and relevant action plan, taking into account priorities identified by District local authorities and LSPs in their Sustainable Community Strategies.

*District-level* LSPs (and their Sustainable Community Strategies) to be fully considered and involved in the drawing-up and implementing of the county-wide Sustainable Community Strategy and LAA. Relevant LAA outcomes should also be reflected in the District LSPs' action plans and future iterations of all District-led plans, including Local Development Frameworks.

16. As indicated above, the LSP must take an oversight role, ensuring that the lines of responsibility between partners and thematic sub-partnerships are clear and that duplication is avoided. In essence the LSP needs to be the 'partnership of partnerships' encompassing all thematic partnerships in the area. For example Children's Trusts will be expected to be integrated within the LSP system of partnerships whilst retaining their responsibility for co-ordinating children's services.

17. Some of this shift will, and is, coming with time. The process will be significantly enhanced if members of the LSP see their part in the partnership as a key way for them to achieve their goals rather than as an addition to the 'day job'. This requires a joint coherent approach from central government as collaborative working is also hampered by the sheer weight of central target-setting. It is integral to the vision for the future of LSPs, and local governance more generally, that the space for individual local agencies to act innovatively and collaboratively is increased through a reduction in the level of organisation-based/national targets.
18. Performance management by the LSP is a key part of the partnership approach. In NRF areas performance management has helped increase accountability between partners. All partners within an LSP are expected to be accountable for their contribution to the delivery of the Sustainable Community Strategy. They are also expected to play their part in ensuring all partners take an active and effective role. To increase the LSPs' effectiveness it may be appropriate to place obligations on key partner agencies to participate. This model of a statutory 'duty to co-operate' has been adopted in the context of Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships. Similarly, the Children Act 2004 requires wide co-operation arrangements in the context of Children's Trusts. The Scottish equivalents of LSPs, Community Planning Partnerships, are also underpinned by statutory co-operation arrangements with named agencies having a 'duty to participate' in the community planning process. Imposing a statutory requirement upon local authorities and specified bodies to work together would in our view send a strong signal that LSPs have a very significant role in co-ordinating delivery locally. To ensure wide representation there could be a parallel duty on local authorities to involve the business, voluntary and community sectors. We are seeking views on this proposal.

### **Securing the capacity to deliver**

19. To deliver this challenging agenda it is increasingly important that LSP members and staff possess skills in performance management, negotiation, policy development, implementation and community engagement. Training and support packages provided nationally, regionally and locally will need to support the development of this new skill set for some LSPs. We need to learn from and build on the skill development already put in place for those LSPs in receipt of NRF.
20. There is a wide range of support and training presently available for partners of LSPs, some directly focused on LSPs. However, this training to date has been provided by a number of different sources, in a number of different ways, based on a number of different criteria. It is crucial that the support provided is made available to all LSPs, not just those in areas receiving NRF, and that it is provided in a coherent way ideally with one access route.
21. In light of the responses to this consultation paper it may be appropriate to publish Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Strategic Partnership guidance as required by Section 4 of the Local Government Act 2000.

70. Whatever models are adopted, LSPs in two-tier areas are encouraged to use existing opportunities to foster effective working relationships between tiers. For example using the joint working arrangements between tiers for the production of local development frameworks or developing children's services.

**Key Questions – The role of LSPs and Sustainable Community Strategies**

*LSPs, Sustainable Community Strategies and LAAs*

- 1: Do you agree that the key role of the LSP should be to develop the vision for the local area, through the Sustainable Community Strategy and the 'delivery contract' through the LAA (as set out in figures 1 & 2)

*Regional/sub-regional engagement*

- 2: We believe it is important that LSPs reflect regional/sub-regional plans where relevant in their Sustainable Community Strategy priorities and that regional organisations and partnerships take account of key local needs. How can this greater co-ordination best be facilitated?

*Links to local plans*

- 3: Would a requirement on bodies producing theme or service-based plans to 'have regard' to the Sustainable Community Strategy in doing so and vice versa, increase the LSP's ability to take the over-arching view in an area?

*Sustainable Community Strategies*

- 4: Are the proposed steps in the development of a Sustainable Community Strategy correct? (See box on page 18)
- 5: What more could be done to ensure Sustainable Community Strategies are better able to make the links between social, economic and environmental goals and to deal more effectively with the area's cross-boundary and longer-term impacts ?

*Neighbourhood Engagement*

- 6: What should be the role of the LSP in supporting neighbourhood engagement and ensuring the neighbourhood/parish voice, including diverse and minority communities, is heard at the principal local level?
- 7: In two-tier areas, is it most appropriate for the responsibility for neighbourhood engagement to rest with the district level LSP?

*Links with Local Development Framework*

- 8: How can spatial planning teams best contribute to Sustainable Community Strategies through the LSP and ensure that LDFs and Sustainable Community Strategies are closely linked?
- 9: How could revised guidance and accompanying support materials best ensure that Sustainable Community Strategies and Local Development Frameworks join up effectively?

*Two-tier areas*

- 10: Should every local authority area have its own LSP?
- 11: Would the establishment of a greater delineation of roles between county and district LSPs as suggested be sensible? (See paras 65 to 69)

Key Questions – Governance of LSPs

*LSP as the partnership of partnerships*

- 12: We believe that it is important that the LSP is made up of the thematic partnerships in the area together with an LSP board. What is your view?
- 13: We believe that a rationalisation of local partnerships would help the LSP executive take an effective overview. Would clustering partnerships around the four LAA blocks be a sensible way to achieve this?
- 14: We believe that the geographic boundaries of partners within LSPs is important. What do you see as the opportunities for, and barriers to, co-terminosity shared geographic boundaries?
- 15: Within the LSP framework and its established priorities, would the creation of single delivery vehicles to tackle particular issues be helpful?

*Ensuring wide representation*

- 16: How can the neighbourhood and parish, tiers be involved most effectively on the LSP on a) the executive and b) individual thematic partnerships?
- 17: How can the private, voluntary and community sectors be involved most effectively on the LSP as a) the executive and b) individual thematic partnerships?

*Providing a legislative foundation*

- 18: Would a duty to co-operate with the local authority, in producing and implementing the Community Strategy, help to set LSPs on a firmer footing and better enable their enhanced delivery co-ordination role?
- 19: If so, what obligations, such as attendance, financial or staff support, would be useful to place on partners?
- 20: If so, which public sector agencies would the duty be most sensibly placed on?
- 21: Should there be a statutory duty on local authorities and named partners to promote the engagement of the voluntary and community sectors in the LSP?

130. The 2004 survey of all Community Strategies shows that the community was involved to a moderate or great extent in 88% of strategies. Community Strategies have, in the past, not always been well publicised. This is often the result of limited resources. This lack of visibility may reduce the credibility and impact of the Community Strategy amongst LSP partners and the general public. As Sustainable Community Strategies and LAAs continue to grow in importance LSPs should consider how to better promote the Sustainable Community Strategy in their area. By contrast, the level of publicity already operating for Local Development Frameworks is generally a lot higher. There could be some useful opportunities for joint use of resources for community engagement, especially on Local Development Framework Core Strategies.

**Key Questions:**

*Accountability between partners*

- 22: Should each partnership be encouraged to produce protocols or 'partnership agreements' between partners to ensure clear lines of accountability for the delivery of agreed outcomes?
- 23: We believe that if partnership working was included as part of other key agencies' assessments it would be effective in securing greater commitment from other public sector agencies. What are your views?

*Involvement of local councillors*

- 24: What do you see as the key role for executive councillors within LSPs?
- 25: What do you see as the appropriate role for backbenchers particularly in ensuring a high quality of local engagement?
- 26: What would make councillors' powers of overview and scrutiny more effective in scrutinising the 4 blocks of the LAA?

*Involvement of Members of Parliament*

- 27: What would be the most appropriate way for a Member of Parliament to be involved with the LSP and how can we ensure that it is complementary to the role of local councillors?

*Involvement of Communities Served*

- 28: How can we promote effective community engagement and involvement, from all sections of the community in shaping local priorities and public services?
- 29: How can we maximise the opportunities for joint policy and joint activity on community engagement, including the LDF, the LAA and the Sustainable Community Strategy?
- 30: How can accountability to local people and businesses be enhanced?



Questions

- 31: What are your LSP's key support/skill gaps?
- 32: What extra or different support would be most helpful in shifting to a more delivery focused role?
- 33: How would LSPs prefer to receive information and support; through guidance, toolkits, sign-posting to existing information, practical learning opportunities etc?
- 34: How can LSPs ensure that adequate learning and support provision is available to build the capacity of communities to engage with the LSP and its partners at the various levels?
- 35: What learning or development do you feel is required by LSPs in order to delivery sustainable communities that embody the principles of sustainable development at the local level?

**Caradon District Council**

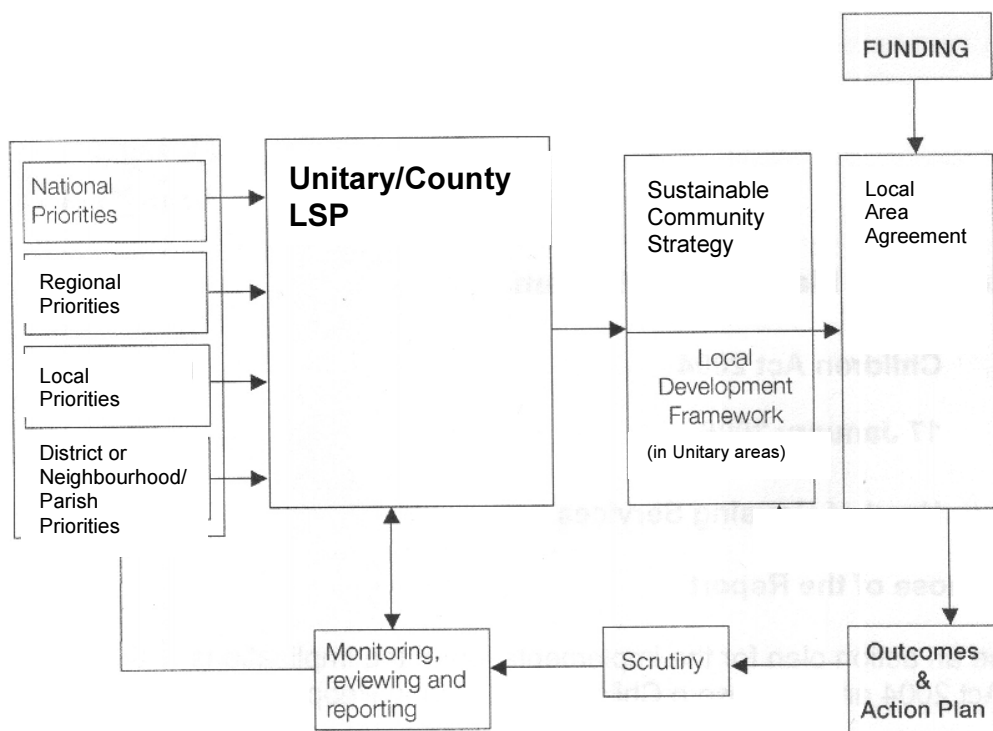
In Caradon the Parish Plan Action Group Chairperson is a member of the LSP. This ensures close working links with all projects and actions that have arisen from the Community Strategy. It also serves to position the parish planning process alongside the key issues, such as transport, health & housing, the local economy and vulnerable people, that make up the headings of the Community Strategy. It ensures that the interests of parishes are represented in the Community Strategy.

## The impact of Local Area Agreements

58. As LAAs become part of the local landscape it becomes increasingly important to consider their relationship to the Sustainable Community Strategy. The approach suggested in the LAA guidance<sup>23</sup> is that the Sustainable Community Strategy sets out the overarching vision and priorities for the area and the LAA sets out the detailed outcomes, indicators and targets which relate to the strategy. This ensures that the target" agreed as part of the LAA flow directly from the analysis and priorities agreed as part of the vision and strategy.

59. Set out below in figures 1, 2 and 3 is our vision of the relationship between Sustainable Community Strategies, LAAs and the LSP's action planning.

Figure 1: Unitary & County LSP Framework



23 [www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm\\_localgov/documents/page/odpm\\_locgov\\_038736.pdf](http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_localgov/documents/page/odpm_locgov_038736.pdf)

Figure 2: District LSP Framework

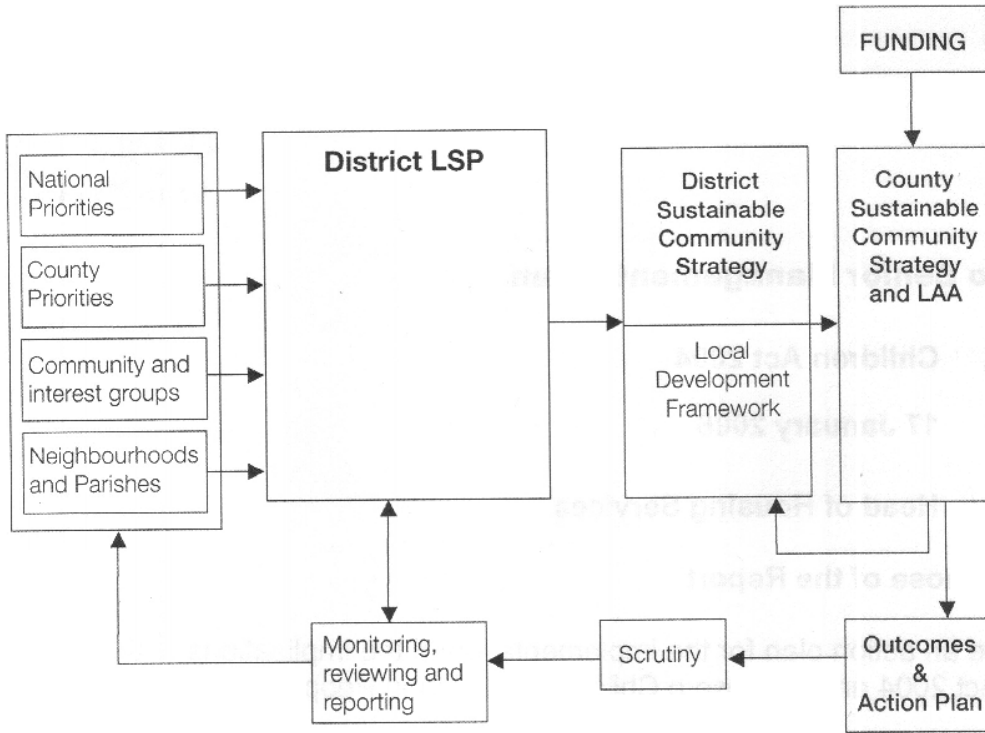


Figure 3: The relationship between Sustainable Community Strategies, Local Area Agreements and local action planning

