

## Review of the Cheshire Partnership

*This paper produced in consultation with and based on thoughts, ideas and suggestions of the Cheshire Partnership Strategy & Monitoring Group, particularly Roger Simpson (Central Cheshire PCT), Chris Turnock, Evan Morris and Geoff Shepherd (Cheshire Fire Service), and the Cheshire Local Area Agreements Group comprising representatives of Cheshire's local authorities.*

*Feedback on any suggested approach will be submitted to the Cheshire (local authority) Chief Executives and Cheshire LSP Chairs for consideration at a meeting to be held on 26 July 2005.*

## Introduction

1 Guidance on the development of Local Strategic Partnerships was published by the DETR in March 2001. This defined a Local Strategic Partnership as a single body that:

- brings together at a local level the different parts of the public sector as well as the private, business, community and voluntary sectors so that different initiatives and services support each other and work together;
- is a non-statutory, non-executive organisation;
- operates at a level which enables strategic decisions to be taken and is close enough to individual neighbourhoods to allow actions to be determined at community level; and
- should be aligned with local authority boundaries (though not necessarily resulting in a separate partnership for each local authority area).

2 The guidance went on to suggest that partnerships need to operate at a level which allows strategic choices and decisions to be made, while at the same time providing close enough linkages to individual neighbourhoods to allow actions to be determined at community level. LSPs should, therefore, consider carefully what is the most effective approach for all the potential partners and the most appropriate level for dealing with particular issues and priorities, possibly also bearing in mind the geographical coverage of existing partners and partnerships.

3 The guidance also noted that the establishment of an effective LSP would present particular challenges in areas with both county and district councils to secure successful action and guard against duplication of effort, conflicting priorities and consultation/partnership fatigue.

*"LSPs present real opportunities to streamline existing partnership arrangements. They should reduce, rather than increase, the burden of 'partnership fatigue' and 'consultation fatigue' that the proliferation of separate partnerships can lead to amongst key agencies and local people."*

## **The Partnership Landscape in Cheshire**

4 Across Cheshire, it was agreed that LSPs be developed at both district and county level to ensure that appropriate strategies and priorities could be developed and taken forward at neighbourhood, local and regional level. To support this process, a protocol for LSP development in Cheshire was agreed by the Cheshire Local Government Association in 2001.

5 This stated that the County & District Councils would:

- Work as equal partners to develop the district-based community plans;
- Work as equal partners to develop the County Community Strategy;
- Work together to address the challenges of community planning and community leadership in two-tier areas;
- Work together to promote the principle of subsidiarity and the development of decision making at the lowest level ;
- Share information to allow the development and implementation of the district-based and county-based community plans ;
- Jointly develop and use, wherever possible, the same structures and processes for both district-based and county-based community plans to avoid duplication, additional costs, conflicting strategies, consultation fatigue ;
- Work together to develop the partnerships needed to deliver district-based and county-based community plans; and
- Jointly develop review mechanisms for both district based and county-based community plans.

## **Role and Function**

6 The role and function of LSPs has evolved considerably since the publication of the guidance in 2001. At the time, the following four core roles for LSPs were identified:

- to prepare and implement a community strategy for the area;
- to bring together local plans, partnerships and initiatives;
- to work with local authorities that are developing a local public service agreement;
- to develop and deliver a local neighbourhood renewal strategy

7 However, subsequent guidance on the development of second generation Local Public Service Agreements and the more recent Local Area Agreement initiative are taking LSPs into new territory. It is therefore important and timely to review the current LSP framework across Cheshire and clarify appropriate roles and responsibilities to ensure continued fitness for purpose.

## **Modes of Partnership Working**

8 To be successful, LSPs need to have effective structures, exhibit leadership and exercise leverage. In particular, organisational representatives need to be able to:

- take a strategic view;

- speak with authority;
- reflect the priorities and goals of their organisation/constituency;
- exert influence within their organisations in order to shape decisions, commit resources, and
- adjust corporate priorities and deliver the necessary changes to front line service delivery.

9 A national evaluation of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) has developed a governance toolkit which describes four modes of LSP working:

<b>Mode of LSP working</b>	<b>Description</b>
1. Advisory:	The LSP acts as a consultation and discussion forum and often forms the basis for consensus building, but has no independent power to act. It draws its accountability and legitimacy entirely from member organisations, particularly the local authority. It co-ordinates, makes recommendations, builds support, communicates, influences and offers moral authority
2. Commissioning:	The LSP has its own staff and authority, is able to make and implement decisions and commission action. It therefore has to create its own forms of accountability and legitimacy.
3. Laboratory:	The prime focus is on generating new ideas and new ways of designing local services, finding creative solutions and thinking longer term. It draws on the combined thinking of senior managers and community leaders.
4. Community Empowerment:	Attention is focused on creating strong networks within the community rather than on the key public agencies. The LSP creates forums for debate, empowers communities, encourages participation / citizenship, creates a process for allocating resources, champions local needs and holds agencies to account.

10 It is suggested that an individual LSP may work in more than one mode simultaneously or over time though each partnership is likely to have one primary mode at any one time determined by its desired outcomes. Each mode has a different purpose and requires different membership, support structures, working methods and reporting systems. The Cheshire Partnership functions mainly in advisory mode but has functioned in the other three modes for specific purposes, such as:

Commissioning:	Developing the LPSA2 targets
Laboratory:	Hosting the “Challenging Cheshire” conference
Community empowerment:	Promoting the Innovations Fund

This balance of modes may be different in the district LSPs and other partnerships across Cheshire (e.g. Sustainable Cheshire Forum, Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnerships, Cheshire & Warrington Information Consortium, Blacon Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder, etc.).

11 Cheshire LSPs need to have a clear set of functions within this context and a clear direction towards their optimal balance of working modes.

For the Cheshire Partnership, these could include:

Advisory:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing a strategic county focus and vision for public services in Cheshire</li> <li>• Bringing together the key agencies</li> <li>• Co-ordinating delivery</li> <li>• Monitoring and managing performance</li> <li>• Communicating outputs</li> </ul>
Commissioning:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Auditing local needs</li> <li>• Monitoring / Managing the second generation Local Public Service Agreement</li> <li>• Developing / Negotiating Local Area Agreement targets</li> <li>• Devolving budgets / responsibility</li> </ul>
Laboratory:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion forum for county-wide innovations</li> <li>• Countywide resourcing and support arrangements</li> <li>• Countywide research / information / data sharing</li> <li>• Partnership protocol development</li> <li>• Partnership training and development</li> </ul>

12 At a more local district or neighbourhood level, the focus may be towards community empowerment or commissioning and could involve community liaison and consultation, providing local knowledge, identifying local priorities and direct delivery.

### **Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement Development**

13 One of the four core tasks of LSPs is to prepare and implement a community strategy for the area. In Cheshire, the generation of seven community strategies has caused difficulties of the sort described in a recent ODPM report about plan rationalisation:

*“Two-tier authorities faced significant barriers in developing Community Strategies. The development of Community Strategies in two-tier authorities was found to pose a series of different potential problems. The ideal model was seen to be one where district Community Strategies were nested within a County Community Strategy, or at least a County-level framework. However, this was contingent on effective district-county working, and to some degree, consensus between districts. There was also a risk that two-tier working may lead to the process of developing Community Strategies proceeding at the pace of the slowest authority. What was found to be happening in some counties was that districts were proceeding at their own pace.”*  
 [Reference: “Process Evaluation of Plan Rationalisation - Formulative Evaluation of Community Strategies - Consultation Findings and Evaluation Framework” (ODPM, Feb 2005)]

14 As a network of many partnerships, Cheshire could benefit from one strategic framework that:

- is generated by advisory partnerships that are locally sensitive to the different needs of all communities and groups;
- acts as a reference point for more local commissioning partnerships;
- provides a context for laboratory partnerships; and
- is responsive to community empowerment partnerships.

15 Such an approach could help the development of Cheshire's Local Area Agreement (LAA). This will be a national requirement from April 2007. Local Area Agreements - Advice Note 1 (ODPM, Dec 2004) states:

*"14. For two tier areas, there is no doubt arrangements will be more complicated as there may be a number of LSPs and community strategies. However, LAAs provide a real opportunity to improve relationships between county and district councils and the scope to direct funding more effectively across a locality to target priorities for local people. Pilot areas will have to work hard to identify and agree shared priority outcomes and any agreement will need to demonstrate that there has been engagement with district councils and their partners, including amongst others CDRP. We expect pilot areas to set out in their agreement the particular contribution each partner will make to the agreed outcomes and what level of funding they will receive.*

*15. In two tier areas county LSPs should lead the negotiations having demonstrated proper engagement with district LSPs and their partners to agree priority outcomes."*

16 As such, Cheshire will continue to require a county-level LSP to develop the Local Area Agreement across all the partnerships. Advisory and commissioning functions might be inter-changeable at either County or District level. Laboratory functions might be best undertaken by specialised partnerships (such as the Innovation Forum for older people) while community empowerment should be built from community and neighbourhood-based partnerships.

17 The balance between advisory and commissioning modes becomes a real issue for LSPs because of the integration of various funds into the four LAA blocks plus an overlapping fifth strand to be addressed in local authority Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA):

- Children and Young People (LAA)
- Safer and Stronger Communities (LAA)
- Healthier Communities and Older People (LAA)
- Economic Development – Local Enterprise Growth Initiative (LAA)
- Sustainable Communities and Transport (CPA)

Cheshire's proposed targets for the second generation LPSA can be related easily to these four themes:

### **Children and Young People**

Target 1 Tackling youth nuisance (Crewe & Nantwich)

Target 2 Building positive parenting

Target 4 Delivering services for children and young people

**Safer and Stronger Communities**

Target 6 Reducing the fear of crime

Target 7 Increasing safety from domestic abuse

Target 8 Reducing death and injuries on Cheshire roads

**Healthier Communities and Older People**

Target 3 Employment opportunities for people with disabilities

Target 5 Improving the quality of life of older people

**Sustainable Communities & Transport**

Target 9 Improving street environment

Target 10 Increasing public participation in waste recycling (Chester)

Target 11 Community energy

Target 12 Improving housing standards in Cheshire

Consequently, these are likely to be the best building blocks for Cheshire's strategic framework, whether there are seven separate community strategies or just one over-arching county-wide strategy with connected plans, and would provide a consistency between Cheshire's LPSA, the Local Area Agreement (LAA) blocks and the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) themes for local government.

18 Similarly, the evolution of Cheshire's community strategies should be easier, using the four themes as the framework ("what" should be done) to develop local plans ("how" it should be achieved) and targets (by "when"). Within this context every partnership in Cheshire should define its primary mode of working - advisory, commissioning, laboratory, community empowerment - so that its functions are clear and it is fit for its defined purpose.

**In workshop groups, the Cheshire Partnership is asked to:**

- 1) **consider and comment upon the possible future functions of the Cheshire Partnership and any more localised structures as identified in paragraph 11;**
- 2) **consider and suggest the likely membership, support structures, working methods and reporting systems required by the Partnership to fulfil these functions;**
- 3) **consider the scope for improved joint working on processes, e.g. consultation, data sharing, performance management, etc.;**
- 4) **consider and comment upon the suggestion that the future core structure of the Cheshire Partnership and Cheshire Community Strategy be based upon and formulated around the themes of:**
  - **Safer & Stronger Communities**
  - **Children & Young People**
  - **Older People & Health**
  - **Sustainable Communities & Transport (including economic development)**
  - **Innovation & New Ways of Working**