

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET MEETING

16th February 2006

Shaping the future of Local Strategic Partnerships

OPEN	
COMMUNITY STRATEGY THEME	All
CORPORATE PLAN THEME:	Providing Community Leadership
KEY PRIORITY:	<i>Effective Partnership Working</i>
CABINET MEMBER:	Cllr.Stephen Clee
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	Chief Executive
CONTACT OFFICER:	Chief Executive Ext. 2700
APPENDICES	1. Executive Summary 2. Key Questions - Suggested Response

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To outline the key issues of the recent “Local Strategic Partnerships – Shaping Their Future” consultation paper from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and make recommendations for responding to this document. The consultation period runs until 3rd March 2006.

2. RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet is asked to:

- 2.1 Note and comment on the contents of the consultation paper as outlined; and

RECOMMEND to Council

- 2.2 That the suggested response in **Appendix 2** be submitted to the ODPM with or without any agreed amendments

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 On the 8th December 2005 the ODPM issued a 70 page consultation paper “Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs): Shaping their future”. The paper examines the future role of LSPs, their governance and accountability, and their capacity to deliver Sustainable Community Strategies and Local Area Agreements (LAAs).
See Executive Summary Appendix 1

- 3.2 The consultation poses a series of 35 questions under 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. **See Questions Appendix 2.**

4. KEY ISSUES

4.1 The consultation looks at the following issues:

- *Role of LSPs* – this role has changed with the national role out of LAAs which requires LSPs to genuinely co-ordinate delivery in their area. There is also a need for clarity about the relationship between Sustainable Community Strategies, LAAs and Local Development Frameworks.
- *Status of LSPs* – the increasing expectations placed on LSPs calls into question their voluntary nature. The consultation proposes establishing a duty on various public service providers to co-operate with the local authority in producing a Sustainable Community Strategy and LAA
- *Governance of the LSP* – the advent of LAAs also places a strong emphasis on the need for effective governance and accountability of the LSP. The consultation does not propose one model to fit all but specifies some principles of operation.
- *Accountability* – the consultation examines the strength of the accountability upwards to central government and the possibilities of strengthening local accountability to other partners.
- *Capacity of LSPs* – this is key to ensuring their success. The consultation explores the key skills and the support needed by LSPs.

4.2 Broadly, the key issues for the Council are these:

- How can LSPs work better?
- How can people and communities have a greater influence over local decisions, priorities and public services?
- How can LSPs solve local problems?
- How can LSPs be a partnership of partnerships?
- If Local Area Agreements (LAAs) and Sustainable Community Strategies are linked, and given that LAAs are in counties, what will be the role of district LSPs?
- How can partners be more accountable to each other?
- Should every local authority area have its own LSP?
- Should there be a legislative foundation for LSPs?

- What should the Council role be in developing Sustainable Community Strategies?
- What do you see as the key role for executive councillors within LSPs?
- What do you see as the appropriate role for backbenchers particularly in ensuring a high quality of local engagement?
- What would make councillors' powers of overview and scrutiny more effective in scrutinising the LAA?
- What are our LSP's key support/skill gaps? What extra or different support would be most helpful in shifting to a more delivery focused role?

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report and the initial response will be implemented within existing resources.

6. LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no immediate legal or policy implications arising from this report.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 There are no significant risk management issues arising from this report.

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1 It is clear that LSPs are going to play an ever increasing role in the Government's Modernisation Agenda. The challenge is to develop LSPs, and ensure that they are well equipped with the right framework and the right powers to be able to realise their significant potential. The consultation focuses on a number of challenges including the need to develop and drive delivery of Local Area Agreements as well as the need to reshape community strategies. It also seeks views on the role of LSPs, their status and governance.

9. CONSULTEES

- 9.1 Corporate Management Team
9.2 Cabinet

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 ODPM consultation document "*Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs): Shaping their future*". 8th December 2005

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." 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.

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 landuse 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'.² 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 Egan³ 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*⁴, 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.

'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.

Key Questions – Suggested Response

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?

Yes we 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. The real challenge, however, is to establish the legitimacy of the LSP as part of the local governance arrangements for the area. It is also important that the LSP is not perceived as a "shell" encasing only partners; it needs to be a dynamic player in the local community.

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?

This greater coordination can be better facilitated by ensuring there is sufficient regional and sub regional representation on LSP Boards. Currently many regional bodies struggle to attend LSP Board meetings on a regular basis due to the two tier local government system that operates in areas like Worcestershire, which means in principle they should attend each of the 9 LSPs that operate. It may also benefit LSPs if specific forums were held in County areas led by regional representatives.

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?

This is an essential requirement to secure the 'buy in' of other bodies and to embed the ownership of local priorities and their delivery across many organisations.

Sustainable Community Strategies

4: Are the proposed steps in the development of a Sustainable Community Strategy correct?

In principle we agree with the proposed steps set out on page 18 of the consultation document.

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?

Local social, economic and environmental priorities should be aligned or mainstreamed into the corporate business plans of all key partners. This consistent approach across all LSPs would help when tackling cross boundary issues.

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?

The LSP should work with a number of identified community champions who can then engage through existing groups and forums at a very local level. The practicality of this will be dependent upon a good infrastructure of existing community / neighbourhood forums.

7: In two-tier areas, is it most appropriate for the responsibility for neighbourhood engagement to rest with the district level LSP?

Yes it is more appropriate for the responsibility of neighbourhood engagement to rest with the district LSP especially if the complexities of most social, economic and environmental issues are to be recognised and dealt with on the basis of subsidiarity.

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?

Closer working relations between the relevant officers and LSP Boards underpinned by realistic action plans and an agreed framework linking to the Sustainable Community Strategies.

9: How could revised guidance and accompanying support materials best ensure that Sustainable Community Strategies and Local Development Frameworks join up effectively?

Further work needs to be undertaken on how Local Development Frameworks can effectively link up with community strategies. This information should then be included in the guidance to support the understanding of LSPs with this.

Two-tier areas

10: Should every local authority area have its own LSP?

Yes. They should be sufficiently resourced and funded by central government to ensure local needs are addressed. There may be a case, however, for the County LSP in two tier areas to become the "strategic overseer" of district LSPs, subject to agreed protocols.

11: Would the establishment of a greater delineation of roles between county and district LSPs as suggested be sensible? (See paras 65 to 69)

Yes it would provide clarity with regard to roles and responsibilities of county and district LSPs. This would remove public confusion and sometimes partner confusion over 'who is responsible for what'.

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?

This is the structure Wyre Forest Matters LSP has adopted and works well.

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?

Clustering of partnerships should be around local priorities which will then sit with one or more of the four LAA blocks. Some priorities are cross cutting in nature and will therefore sit across more than one block.

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?

Locally a number of organisations have realigned their boundaries with the Local Authority to support more effective working. We would encourage other key partners to follow the same approach.

15: Within the LSP framework and its established priorities, would the creation of single delivery vehicles to tackle particular issues be helpful?

We think the practicality of this approach would be dependent upon the type of issues being tackled. It would probably work well for large strategic issues like transport.

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?

*On the executive through a nominated parish / neighbourhood representative
On thematic partnerships through nominated parish / neighbourhood representatives*

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?

Same model as for no 16. The success of this approach is dependent upon the external infrastructure for disseminating information and engaging others to take things forward at a local level.

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?

It should help as long as those other bodies are audited for this purpose otherwise the duty has no 'teeth'. It would also provide clear accountability for producing and implementing the Community Strategy. "Voluntary" co-operation may not capture the key needs and priorities necessary for an effective Community Strategy.

19: If so, what obligations, such as attendance, financial or staff support, would be useful to place on partners?

There is no point having obligations unless they are audited and inspected. A financial obligation is paramount. Finance to support the development of LSPs and the delivery of the Sustainable Community Strategy should be aligned or built into those key partners mainstream budgets to ensure sustainability and not 'one off' donations which can sometimes smack of tokenism.

20: If so, which public sector agencies would the duty be most sensibly placed on?

Local Authority (District and County), Primary Care Trusts, the Police, Fire Service, Probation Service, Learning and Skills Council, Connexions Service

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?

Yes and should be underpinned by the Local Authority Compact. The practicality of engaging all voluntary and community sectors may prove difficult if there is no umbrella group to provide a strategic voice.

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?

Yes they should. It is the only way to achieve the level of accountability needed. It would be helpful if a national model was available for this purpose.

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?

Yes we agree that this is another mechanism for aligning or mainstreaming the same local priorities into other key agencies corporate business plans.

Involvement of local councillors

24: What do you see as the key role for executive councillors within LSPs?

To act as Community Leaders and Champions for local priorities.

25: What do you see as the appropriate role for backbenchers particularly in ensuring a high quality of local engagement?

Back benchers need to be Community Leaders within their Wards to proactively engage and empower residents to support the shaping and delivery of local services to address local issues and priorities at a neighbourhood level.

26: What would make councillors' powers of overview and scrutiny more effective in scrutinising the 4 blocks of the LAA?

Top tier authorities are better placed to respond to this question as they have the overall responsibility for the LAA and will need to establish appropriate accountability and governance frameworks to support effective scrutiny exercises to be undertaken. Something akin to health scrutiny arrangements may be appropriate

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?

A Member of Parliament should be represented on the LSP Board. This will enable them to be well placed to address strategic local issues as well as the neighbourhood ones they are often requested to look into. The strategic picture will support the MP to represent such policy issues with central government.

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?

More effective community consultation engagement and empowerment of local communities in the work of LSPs. The essential point here is to avoid consultation fatigue and to ensure that there are some highly visible signs of local priorities being delivered which would make local communities more aware of what was going on

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?

By having a more integrated approach to consultation and communications e.g. sharing consultation exercises resident newspapers / newsletters etc. with clear concise messages being delivered.

30: How can accountability to local people and businesses be enhanced?

Should be compulsory that LSP Board meetings are open to the public and that an Annual Report is produced on the state of the community strategy. LSPs should not be seen as an end in themselves; they are a means to achieving social, economic and environmental improvements. Accountability to the wider public is essential if trust and respect is to be built between LSPs and their communities

31: What are your LSP's key support/skill gaps?

No dedicated manager to co-ordinate the LSP. Lack of understanding of how all the different government initiatives e.g. LAA. LPSA 2 etc fit together and the LSPs role in them when accountability sits at a county not district level.

32: What extra or different support would be most helpful in shifting to a more delivery focused role?

Resource support for providing dedicated personnel support to manage and co-ordinate LSP strategy and delivery. Building capacity through existing resources is not an option.

33: How would LSPs prefer to receive information and support; through guidance, toolkits, sign-posting to existing information, practical learning opportunities etc?

Toolkits which can then be adapted to local needs e.g. frameworks for a communication strategy consultation strategy funding strategy etc. In addition there needs to be a dedicated national LSP website which can be a resource for all LSPs.

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?

Resources from government would be needed to employ a dedicated community development officer to focus on this area of work alone.

35: What learning or development do you feel is required by LSPs in order to deliver sustainable communities that embody the principles of sustainable development at the local level?

There needs to be a clear definition of sustainable communities and sustainable development to ensure a consistent interpretation across all LSPs. Standard training for appropriate policy officers should be provided to translate the delivery of that definition to a local area.

Finally we would like to make the suggestion that this opportunity is used to rename

LSPs to Local Strategic and Sustainability Partnerships. LSPs or LSSPs must be based on need - some major definite purpose that could not be achieved by one partner alone. Moreover, the outcomes have to be critical to the way each partner operates its mainstream business whether public or private. This would remove any uncertainty about the core interests of each partner. Put more frankly if a "business case" for each partner cannot be made then LSPs will quickly melt into tokenism and fall out of fashion.

A 'silver bullet' or a bete noir; we would like LSPs to be silver bullets.