

ODPM Consultation
Local Strategic Partnerships: shaping their future

A response from Hertfordshire

The 35 questions and our views

The questions converged around a number of themes (bulleted below) and the pragmatic approach is to address these rather than answer each question directly. This paper is structured around each theme, with a brief outline of our thoughts and the key principles emerging (underlined and numbered in brackets). We feel these principles should provide a shared platform for developing LSPs in Hertfordshire. Where consensus between partners hasn't been fully achieved, this is noted.

• **General principles:**

In the first instance the consultation document is far too prescriptive and doesn't encourage us to think more fundamentally about the role of LSPs in the landscape of public services, hence our response doesn't focus on detail and is deliberately conceptual in nature. We feel there should be maximum flexibility and local discretion for LSP evolution. [1]

We support the principle of elected representatives monitoring and scrutinising the local delivery of public services. [2] This consultation, and the overall context in which it is posited (the Lyons' review, the forthcoming White Paper on Local Government) should be seen as an opportunity for local Members to grasp the much wider remit of community advocate than hitherto.

• **The role of LSPs:**

We propose that, broadly speaking, in non-NRF areas, LSPs should focus on outcomes not process. [3]

Para 67 outlines two 'ideal types' of LSP – the 'aggregative' (finding out what a locality wants) and the 'added value' (delivering what the locality wants). In Hertfordshire, as a two-tier area, we envisage the countywide LSP adding value ultimately through the co-ordination of targeted service delivery to localities where they are most needed (through such mechanisms as the LAA). Thus we propose that the countywide LSP adopt the 'value-added' approach. [4]

At the district level however many people struggle with the notion of the LAA as a 'delivery vehicle'. It is clear that the LAA may not fully reflect district-based community strategies and vice-versa. Moreover neither are less important and the LAA does not supersede any of the strategies responding to local needs. Thus district LSPs should be free to choose which of the two models above they wish to adopt. In addition the short term nature of the LAA (compounded by the tight timescales imposed) has mitigated against

developing a 'bottom-up' approach to targeted service delivery. In future (LAA and beyond) LSPs should play a fundamental role here.

Apart from addressing the straightforward and relatively less contentious issues within the county, LSPs should be the forum for mature dialogues over the difficult issues faced, which we are often reluctant to discuss. [5]

Presently, we feel that LSPs are unable to undertake this role as the necessary architecture for decision-making over service provision is not robust. If we are to achieve this ideal, the devolution of powers from constituent organisations to the partnership is one possible means. [6]

- **Accountability and democracy:**

The nature of such devolution, as a means to build LSP capacity, needs further exploration. We suggest however one *possible* manifestation is the delegation of powers from service providing/ commissioning organisations. We thus recognise, and are willing to engage in mature discussion over what devolution means with the assumption that service provision can be devolved. [7] This would entail a consideration specifically about which services could be better delivered and by whom at the local or strategic level.

There are two pre-requisites for this debate to take place. The first is a review of LSP's democratic credentials. [8] An LSP with devolved powers must have a credible democratic basis and this exposes the local democratic deficit within many non-local authority organisations. (*Note: some districts felt that the role of the local authority within an LSP, despite its democratic mandate, should not be overstated. A balance between the different sectors needs to be found*). Secondly, conversation with central and regional government over of the nature of 'double devolution'. The added value model applies at the central and regional level also and we would like to see more evidence of partnership working here to underpin its effectiveness locally. An example is the current crime and disorder review which gives too little consideration to the role of LSPs and LAAs.

We recognise the risk in entering this debate and pursuing such an approach. This is a learning process however and we feel the labels for failure should be removed (eg. CPA). [9]

The democratic basis of LSPs must work for all elected representatives – not simply the few. [10] Executive Members with appropriate service portfolios would naturally sit on the LSP. Backbenchers, whilst not sitting members, have a dual role as representatives, champions and leaders of their communities. The first is through scrutiny and we feel that this function needs to be widened across the breadth of public service provision and welcome recent developments in this area (eg. over health scrutiny). The second is also the opportunity to articulate community needs through involvement in local fora which have established links to the LSP. In addition we feel MPs should be ex officio members of LSPs so there is a link into the scrutiny process of the Whitehall machine.

We recognise that although provision of public services must have strong democratic foundations, some partners sitting at the LSP (most noticeably those from the private sector and VCS) are outside this conception of 'democracy' but are nevertheless important members because of their different resources and expertise. [11] For example the role of the VCS as scrutinizer, user representative and provider should not be underestimated.

We welcome the proposal of a duty to co-operate (paras 102-4) and believe, if implemented, that this should extend amongst government departments also. [12] (Note: some districts feel that such a formal duty isn't necessary and undermines the spirit of partnership. We would welcome further elaboration on what this would mean).

- **Structure and neighbourhoods:**

The issue of co-terminosity is complex in a two-tier area like Hertfordshire. We are clear that form follows function. If LSPs are to be about service provision, the nature of services delivered determines the relevant boundaries. We are equally clear that this is not prescribed and local discretion should be exercised. This same discretion also applies to deciding how and where services are delivered, and how meaningful communities and neighbourhoods are defined within an LSP boundary. Thus the service needs of the locality drives the extent of devolution. [13] Collectively, this may dissolve the question of co-terminosity.

Such devolution inevitably entails cost and a proliferation in bureaucracy to support new structures. We would only support such devolution where ultimately there is no net increase in process or where there is proportionate value for money can be demonstrated. [14]

Our districts feel that responsibility for neighbourhood engagement rests with the district level LSP. This is a sensible approach however, given it is such a crucial activity we are clear that engagement of our communities and neighbourhoods is the responsibility of all those within the public sector at all levels – not just LSPs. [15] In addition, we recognise the importance of engagement at this level is paramount and models to achieve this depend on local circumstances. Engagement of such geographically based community voices is the core activity of needs analysis and establishing what a locality wants. However, evidence that citizens wish to become much more active is thin. Assumptions need to be tested.