

Working better together? Case study

Neighbourhood working in Blackburn with
Darwen Strategic Partnership



Cross cutting

Case study

April 2009

 **audit**
commission

Background

- 1** Local strategic partnerships (LSPs) have a responsibility to bring together local services to deliver a shared vision for the area. But creating highly effective partnerships is difficult and LSPs must operate across a complex policy environment.
- 2** The public sector 7S model has been used to interpret the findings from the LSP study. This model enables LSPs to understand how to bring a series of interdependent elements together to achieve their long-, medium- and shorter-term goals. The seven elements of the model are super-ordinate goals, three transformational elements and three transactional elements. The transformational elements are most important when policy problems are complex.
- 3** An effective LSP needs to link both transformational and transactional activities to achieve its goals. The transformational elements of the model are staff and skills (including culture and leadership), style (identity and how the LSP comes across) and synergies (achieving better results collectively than working alone). The transactional elements are standards (frameworks for partnership working and quality standards), steering (using internal processes to drive change, for example through resource pooling) and systems (performance, resource and accountability).

Long-term objectives

- 4** There is a long history of partnership working in Blackburn with Darwen, which has provided a strong foundation for the LSP. Prior to becoming a unitary authority, Blackburn with Darwen was a City Challenge area and the LSP was pre-dated by a regeneration-focused community business partnership. Private-sector involvement remains an important part of the LSP, reflecting the regeneration needs of the town. A local businessman is Chair of the LSP.
- 5** Through consultation on the new local area agreement (LAA) and assessment of local information, the Partnership has refined its vision for the area and has re-focused on four key delivery priorities. These priorities are: improve the local economy; improve health and well-being; build stronger and safer communities; and improve educational achievements.

Transformational elements

Leadership and culture

- 6** A Partnership Board between the Primary Care Trust (PCT) and Council has provided a streamlined mechanism for strategic planning since 2003. Both organisations were keen to build on a strong foundation of joint working in health and social care. To create the desired change in the level of partnership, a proposal to appoint a jointly accountable chief executive of the PCT was developed. At the same time, the joint Partnership Board was given wider delegated powers from both the Council and the PCT.
- 7** A jointly accountable chief executive of the PCT has been in post since January 2007. The postholder, while taking full responsibility for the PCT, also leads across all LSP partners on issues of health and well-being and works closely with the director of public health. There is financial input from the Council for the costs of the post, and the post is an integral part of the Council's senior management team as well as that of the PCT.
- 8** This joint working with the PCT has led to the development of an ambitious public health strategy, incorporating the 'Re:fresh' free leisure campaign and strong joint governance arrangements.
- 9** The LSP has recently adopted a staff award scheme, which is based on a scheme originally run by the PCT. The new scheme is joint-funded by the Council and the PCT and recognises paid or voluntary workers who have made an excellent or outstanding contribution to the good of the borough. There are 14 categories, which reflect the priorities and work of the LSP partners.

Meetings and joint working

- 10** At a neighbourhood level, the Partnership has developed five Area Agency Partnerships. The Council and key partners, including the police and the PCT, all operate to these agreed boundaries. Each area partnership has its own neighbourhood team made up of co-located staff from the Council and the police, managed via the Council's neighbourhood coordinator.
- 11** These joint teams were first discussed in response to an issue about a neighbourhood nuisance brought to the LSP by the Community Safety Partnership.

12 Each area partnership is chaired by a different LSP partner. The area partnerships have a role in identifying residents' priorities for that area and flexibly deploying their combined resources to meet those priorities. The Council is putting mainstream funding into these neighbourhood structures. This funding has been supported by an extra £10,000 from the PCT for each area to spend on improvement projects and a significant contribution from the police in terms of officer time.

'The next challenge is to start putting some of the big mainstream budgets in, but also to challenge the police, the PCT and the big public service players to put some of their money into neighbourhood structures.' LA Chief Executive.

The benefits of joint working

- 13** Earlier this year, Blackburn with Darwen became the first place in the country to drop charges for swimming, sport and fitness activities. The LSP, including the Council and the teaching Primary Care Trust, are investing £6 million over the next three years to offer free leisure to anyone who lives, works, is in full-time education or whose GP practice is in Blackburn or Darwen. The scheme also includes a health trainer in each neighbourhood.
- 14** The decision to invest in the promotion of healthy lifestyles was supported by a strong cost-benefit analysis. The cost of implementing the 'Re:fresh' campaign will be split equally by the Council and PCT.
- 15** The Partnership is examining the potential for a joint intelligence unit, co-financed by the PCT and Council. The unit would bolster the research capacity across both organisations and push needs-analysis work across the scope of the LSP rather than just within the Council.

Transactional elements

Getting things done

16 The Partnership commissioned a resource-mapping exercise to provide a body of evidence on how public sector resources were being spent in the area. Key partners' expenditure was mapped against wards and the priority themes of the community strategy with the aim of driving better coordination of resources and needs. The results have informed some of the Partnerships' more recent work on setting neighbourhood budgets.

'The extra funding you attract as a deprived area in one grant or another is not the prize, the prize is the mainstream resources of the collective group of partners who are willing to deploy it, and be influenced in terms of how they deploy it, to achieve the priorities, that's the prize.' LA Deputy Chief Executive.

Common frameworks for collecting and sharing performance information

17 The LSP has drawn up a formal constitution to formalise some of the working arrangements already in place. The constitution outlines the values and principles that underpin the LSP's framework and includes the terms of reference and operating arrangements for the Board, Executive and theme groups, as well as a code of conduct for LSP members.

18 The LSP has adapted and evolved its long-established performance management systems to respond to the outcomes-based focus of the new national indicator set. The new framework includes a more sophisticated approach of quarterly milestones and represents a break with the traditional input-based service/department model. It is built on a priorities framework that is very clearly focused on four strategic partnership outcomes relating to health and well-being, the economy, stronger and safer communities, and education.

Systems for understanding and influencing performance, resources and risks

19 A public service board (PSB) operates within the structures of the LSP. It aims to provide a leadership and governance role and oversee public expenditure with a view to aligning budget streams through joint planning and resource allocation.

20 One of the Board's early priorities was to identify key issues locally where a partnership of public sector organisations could make a difference. Five priorities were identified: assets and buildings; alcohol; prolific and priority offenders; unemployed young people not in education or training; and financial assistance and benefits.

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- 21** An example of the Board's 'unblocking' role is their work with the drug and alcohol action team. The PSB was instrumental in securing greater involvement with drug-using clients from a variety of statutory services and increased budgets to expand the remit of drug treatment services.
- 22** A new treatment strategy was developed, which aims to address a wider range of issues, including: education, training, employment, relationships and accommodation. The additional funding will pay for a team of 'recovery coaches', who will coordinate the care of clients across a range of agencies. Improved drug treatment should also contribute towards other borough-wide objectives, including unemployment, crime, community cohesion, and families.
- 23** Both the business and third sectors also have their own networks that meet separately. Partners feel that this approach works well and has helped strengthen the LSP executive. The executive drives the partnership-formulating plans and strategies to be agreed by the broader Partnership, and provides strategic performance management. Thematic partnerships are described as autonomous but not independent; the Executive and the Board are able to challenge the thematic partnerships and they report to the Executive on performance by exception.
- 24** A challenge for the LSP going forward is to strengthen different alliances at different levels so that it can respond effectively, not only to neighbourhood issues, but also to issues relating to the sub-regional economy.

Learning Points

Transformational learning

- The appointment of a jointly accountable Chief Executive of the PCT has helped improve the level of partnership working.
- Neighbourhood arrangements have been used to integrate key police and council front-line services.
- A Partnership priority to deliver lasting improvements in health led to a jointly funded intervention to promote healthy lifestyles.

Transactional learning

- The PSB has played a key 'unblocking' role in finding partnership solutions to matters that require more than one agency's input to achieve maximum effect.
- A resource-mapping exercise has helped the Partnership understand the extent of resources available and better match resources with need.

- Jointly agreed priorities and performance management arrangements enable partners to support each other in delivery and, where necessary, hold each other to account.

Questions for LSPs and their partners to consider

1. What can your LSP do to recognise the importance of both transformational and transactional aspects and their interdependence?
2. Does your LSP take a layered approach to performance and resource management?
3. How well is financial management steered by the LSP to achieve local outcomes?

Further information

Copies of the national report *Working Better Together? Managing local strategic partnerships* are available at www.audit-commission.gov.uk/lsp and www.improvementnetwork.gov.uk/lsp

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