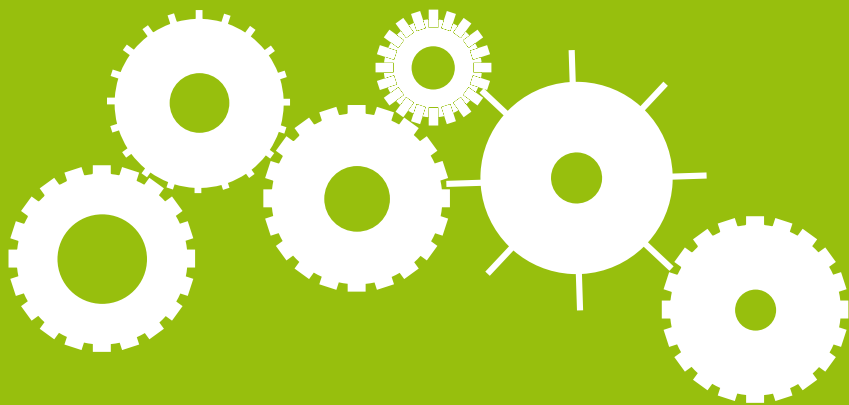


Working better together?

Managing local strategic partnerships



Cross-cutting

Summary

April 2009

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As a force for improvement, we work in partnership to assess local public services and make practical recommendations for promoting a better quality of life for local people.

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For further information on the work of the Commission please contact:

**Audit Commission,
1st Floor, Millbank Tower,
Millbank, London SW1P 4HQ
Telephone: 020 7828 1212
Fax: 020 7976 6187
Textphone (minicom): 020 7630 0421
www.audit-commission.gov.uk**

**We welcome your feedback. If you have any comments on this report, are intending to implement any of the recommendations, or are planning to follow up any of the case studies, please do get in touch:
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Summary

Local agencies work together.

- There is nothing new in local agencies working voluntarily together to deal with complex challenges.
- Government policy has moved from encouraging partnerships towards mandating them, even though voluntarism is the key to effective joint working.
- Many local strategic partnerships (LSPs) have enabled partners to deliver local outcomes, but partners must ensure they get the benefits of joint working with the minimum of costs and administration.

LSPs must bring a complex network of local agencies together to achieve common goals.

- LSPs are part of a complex local governance network that includes local councils, other statutory agencies (including health, police, fire and rescue), and the private and third sectors. LSPs in many areas bring different agencies together to tackle local problems.
- LSPs work through three main layers:
 - strategic: oversight, vision, and direction-setting;
 - executive: resource allocation and performance management; and
 - operational: service management and delivery.
- Local partners, and central government, do not always understand how these layers work.
- A whole systems approach can help LSPs develop both formal and informal aspects of collaboration.

Summary

LSPs work through leadership, culture, and relationship management.

- Effective joint working needs active leadership and purposeful relationship management.
- The leadership styles of the chair, and of the council, affect how others see an LSP. Councils must ensure that partners see local leadership: not domination or control.
- Social network analysis can strengthen working relationships.
- Delivery chain analysis can strengthen the links between LSP objectives and partners' action.
- Partnership working is more complicated in multi-tier areas where there is often less experience of collaboration.
- LSPs need systems to support a culture in which performance is tested and challenged.

Standards and systems must support LSPs' layered roles.

- Partners need performance measurement and reporting for shared objectives; common data quality standards and mechanisms take time to develop.
- Performance management and influence has developed unevenly across LSP activities, weakening joint working and crowding out some objectives.

-
- Most LSPs lack mechanisms for assigning mainstream resources towards achieving the goals of the sustainable community strategy (SCS) and the local area agreement (LAA).
 - Few LSPs have assessed the costs and benefits of joint working.
 - National failure to align planning and reporting cycles makes it difficult for local agencies to align performance and resource management systems.
 - Governance arrangements should support LSPs' accountabilities to member organisations and through them to local people.
 - There is little evidence that councils are using overview and scrutiny arrangements to hold LSPs, and partners, to account.

CAA will assess whether local public bodies and their partnerships are contributing to outcomes.'

- Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) will focus on how local service providers improve local outcomes, acting as a catalyst for better partnership working.
- CAA should help LSPs understand their own performance and learn lessons from others.

! The Audit Commission and the other local service inspectorates published the CAA framework document in February 2009. See <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/caa/framework.asp>

Recommendations

Local authorities and their partners should:

- Monitor and review local achievements against a regularly updated SCS and the LAA.
- Critically assess the costs and benefits of joint working arrangements.
- Test their current arrangements using:
 - notable practice examples;
 - a whole systems model;
 - delivery chain analysis; and
 - social networking tools.
- Ensure that local arrangements support the strategic, executive, and operational layers of joint working.
- Review progress, make decisions and challenge one another based on performance and resource information.
- Engage elected members through training and development, and stronger partnership scrutiny.

Central government should:

- Produce guidance and advice that recognises and encourages LSPs' voluntary status rather than making them an extra level of bureaucracy.
- Avoid one-size-fits-all recommendations for local collaborative working.
- Remove obstacles to coordinating statutory partners' activities by aligning departments' performance reporting frameworks.
- Review national financial management frameworks to allow greater local flexibility.

The Audit Commission will:

- Work with other inspectorates to use the lessons from this study in CAA.
- Work with the Improvement Network to help LSPs to improve their performance (www.audit-commission.gov.uk/lsp) and develop online improvement tools (www.improvementnetwork.gov.uk/lsp).

Figures

A framework for assessing local partnership working

Hard and soft aspects of collaboration support the high-level goals of the SCS.



Source: Adapted from *Modernising Adult Social Care: What's Working* (Ref. 17)

The 7S elements

Effective partnerships must understand all seven elements

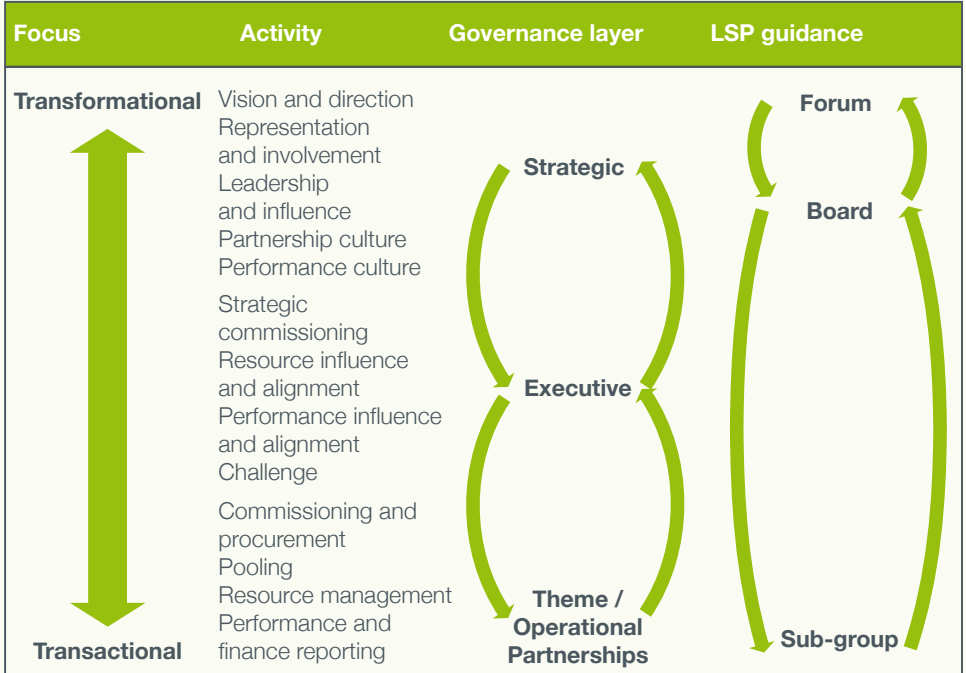
	LSP context	Examples	7S element
	The long-term objectives of an LSP	SCS outcomes and goals	SCS
Softer aspects of partnership working: transformational	LSP leadership and culture	Ability and competence of political and officer leaders LSP support staff skills	Staff and skills
	Management and role of LSP meetings An LSP's approach to joint working	Chair's leadership style Meeting arrangements Relationships between individual partners LSP profile and promotion	Style
	The benefits of joint working	Informal and formal social networks Shared services and efficiency projects	Synergies
Harder aspects of partnership working: transactional	Links between LSP objectives and partners' activity	Influence on mainstream spend Pooled or aligned funding Performance and finance sub-groups	Steering
	Systems for understanding and influencing performance, resources, and risks	Levels of accountability Shared systems Performance, risk and financial reporting	Systems
	Rules for managing the partnership and its impact	Performance and resource management mechanisms Data quality standards	Standards

Source: Audit Commission, 2008

Figures

Each governance layer has different roles and responsibilities

An effective LSP recognises the different activities and people involved



Source: Audit Commission, 2008

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**Audit Commission,
1st Floor
Millbank Tower,
Millbank
London SW1P 4HQ**

Telephone: 020 7828 1212

Fax: 020 7976 6187

Textphone (minicom): 020 7630 0421

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