



Office of the
Deputy Prime Minister

Creating sustainable communities

Evaluation of Local Strategic Partnerships

Rationalisation

A briefing note for LSPs by LSPs
Report of the Action Learning Set

August 2005



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Summary

This report is based on the work of an action learning set (ALS) commissioned by ODPM and DfT as part of the National Evaluation of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) to provide guidance materials developed from local perspectives to support other LSPs, their local and regional partners and policy-makers. The report does not necessarily represent the views of government.

The Rationalisation ALS sought to learn about existing practice in rationalising plans and partnerships, examine barriers and problems and identify models of change and ways forward. Although many of the topics covered were general, the set looked particularly at the theme of employment and associated issues such as skills and economic development. The participants were from thirteen LSPs from the North East, Yorkshire and the Humber and North West, Government Offices and Jobcentre Plus. There was also input from the North West Development Agency. All but one of the LSPs represented were ones in Neighbourhood Renewal Fund areas. Members of the set drew upon their own experience but also looked at material from other areas and relevant research.

What is rationalisation?

The original guidance for LSPs indicated that a key task for them would be to co-ordinate and rationalise partnerships with the purpose of improving the delivery of services and simplifying consultation and other arrangements for agencies and local people. Whereas very often the term 'rationalisation' in this context is used as though it primarily means reducing the number of local partnerships, the set's working definition was "making sense of structures and processes and establishing fit-for-purpose ones".

LSPs function in a very complex policy and partnership environment. This means there are local and internal drivers to rationalise as well as national and external ones. These include:

- the need to maintain strategic perspective and focus on where the LSP can make a real difference and avoiding trying to do everything;
- the need to overcome the difficulties of collaboration and joint working, for example by standardising planning and budgetary cycles;
- the desire to incorporate more of the customer/user perspective (demand and need), have access to grassroots intelligence from local communities through arrangements at neighbourhood level that will enable this to be captured; and
- the desire to reduce provider mentality, fund-chasing and supply side clutter in some areas such as the delivery of the government's skills agenda.

Steps towards rationalisation

Mapping partnerships

A necessary prerequisite of rationalisation is knowing the starting position. A number of the participant LSPs had conducted audits of the partnerships within their area either across the whole range of policy areas or within specific ones. The set referred to models of classifying partnerships, including the method devised by Wycombe Council to map partnerships onto a matrix showing, along one axis, whether they are strategic, operational or consultative and, along the other, whether they are critical, desirable or peripheral to the Community Strategy. Camden refined this further so that as well as building a profile, the audit could help the LSP and partners to review their involvement in existing or emerging partnerships. It also became a means of assessing tasks:

- does the task require a partnership?
- could it be done within an existing partnership?
- if not, what type of partnership is required?
- if yes, which partnership does it belong to?
- what is the added value in each case?

There can be particular challenges relating to different policy domains. For example, a mapping exercise of organisations and partnerships dealing with learning and skills underlined:

- the overlapping work at different spatial levels;
- the lack of connection between different policy dimensions;
- the discontinuity across age groups.

Another audit focusing on training and employment highlighted that a further complicating factor can be the wide range of agencies from other policy spheres that nevertheless have a potential contribution to make; for example, health and social service organisations in relation to people with disabilities or on Incapacity Benefit.

Fit-for-purpose structures

Adapting the LSP's wider structures and relationships to evolving needs and circumstances is clearly central to rationalisation. Cross cutting themes in Community Strategies can add to the organisational complexity and the challenge of integration.

Major drivers for restructuring can be to:

- achieve a better fit with the requirement for LSPs to be strategic, inclusive, efficient and action-focused;
- ensure that the LSP embodies the values of, and is able to drive forward the Community Strategy.

More specific drivers are to:

- fill gaps in coverage and/or reduce duplication;
- find a better balance between inclusiveness and being action-oriented;
- gain better synergy between partners and their strategies;
- facilitate the joining up of programmes;
- improve information sharing;
- provide better connections across policy themes;
- balance thematic/area-based/people-based approaches.

Equipping for partnership

In addition to the overall LSP structures, processes and relationships, there are challenges to individual partners or linked partnerships to build capacity and have the confidence to subordinate narrower interests to fit with agreed goals and accommodate to working collaboratively.

Level of working

Different levels of intervention are appropriate for different policy areas or programmes. For example, in the sphere of employment and skills, labour markets and travel-to-work areas seldom correspond to local authority or LSP areas. This means that the issues relating to them require strategies covering a wider spatial area. It is also the case that the relevant agencies are mainly sub-regional. Regional or sub-regional organisations and partnerships need to relate to multiple LSPs, which puts greater demands on them.

Jobcentre Plus has produced a framework for strategic partnerships to help partner organisations understand how it makes decisions about partnership working. The set emphasised the need for clarity and transparency.

Amongst the barriers that Regional Skills Partnerships face in delivering their agenda are factors that LSPs also identify as obstacles to rationalisation:

- a plethora of targets;
- inappropriate measures;

- confusing labour market intelligence from multiple sources;
- misaligned planning cycles;
- lack of clarity about roles;
- confusion/competition over the attribution of achievement;
- insufficient flexibility in funding.

Role of government

A recurring theme in the ALS was the extent to which the limited powers and local discretion of LSPs constrain rationalisation. LSPs are themselves voluntary partnerships whereas some others with which they deal are statutory. They are frequently fairly new whereas others may be long established and they need to demonstrate they are bringing added value. They need to work through influence, persuasion and winning others' commitment.

Working across agencies and partnerships in ways that suit local circumstances presupposes locally based decisions about policies and resource deployment that would require change in central-local relationships. Even where central government is not setting up new partnerships, local players still face the challenge of making sense of national programmes and priorities in the local context and, as the Audit Commission puts it, dealing with the 'Humpty Dumpty effect' by reassembling the strands after they have fractured on their way down from departmental silos. For LSPs, competing interests and priorities for action include:

- different national priorities from different government departments;
- competition between national, regional and local priorities;
- inspection, regulation and performance management;
- different policy emphases;
- different institutions and professions with different approaches.

Two policy implications emerged:

- the need for more joining up working in Whitehall;
- the need for central government departments to have more 'sense of place' and recognition of the diversity of circumstances, which in turn would lead to a greater understanding of policy impacts and interconnections.

Many LSPs are using the scope that they have to make progress towards making sense of the local operating environment. Now there is also a view that if government made LSPs' position in the local governance scene clearer and strengthened the accountability of their partners, this would help to create a more supportive framework for integrated strategic planning and implementation.

1. Introduction

Preliminary

1.1 This briefing paper is an output from a programme of action research sponsored by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Department for Transport, as part of a wider evaluation of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs). An overview of the wider evaluation is included as Appendix 1.

The overall aims of the action research are to:

- Facilitate and support the development of LSPs;
- Evaluate implementation processes;
- Inform relevant government policy.

A list of the topics within the action research programme is included as Appendix 2.

Overview of the Rationalisation Action Learning Set

1.2 The Rationalisation Action Learning Set (ALS) sought to learn about existing practice in rationalising plans and partnerships, examine barriers and problems and identify models of change and ways forward. Although many of the topics covered were general, the Set looked particularly at the theme of employment and associated issues such as skills and economic development. The purpose was to give greater focus and, therefore, a firmer framework to the topic and to the membership of the set (Appendix 3). It allowed the Set to drill down to specifics whilst at the same time covering a field that cuts across various policy areas and entails considerable multi-agency involvement. The participants were from thirteen LSPs from the North East, Yorkshire and the Humber and the North West, Government Offices and Jobcentre Plus. There was also input from the North West Development Agency. All but one of the LSPs represented were ones in receipt of Neighbourhood Renewal Fund.

1.3 The Set provided an opportunity for members to share their experience and examine what is and is not working for their LSPs. It brought together the perspectives of different stakeholders in LSPs, from different levels of government and from different agencies. It drew upon a variety of policy documents and research reports (Appendix 4).

1.4 Members of the Set met four times over a period of several months. The discussions ranged around the following topics:

- the national policy context and the extent to which it encourages or discourages rationalisation;
- partners' perceptions of the role of LSPs in relation to rationalisation: Are they an appropriate mechanism? Do they have the necessary authority/influence? Do they have the capacity?
- how far Community Strategies are a vehicle for aligning plans;

- LSPs' relationship with sub-regional and regional bodies;
- LSPs' progress in rationalisation;
- intermediate steps towards rationalisation, such as joint consultation arrangements.

1.5 There were presentations by some of the participant LSPs and others provided written material drawing on developments within their own LSPs. In addition, there were contributions from Jobcentre Plus, the North West Development Agency and Government Office representatives.

Structure of the report

1.6 The report begins by looking briefly at the policy background and examining what is meant by rationalisation. Chapter 3 goes on to looking at steps towards rationalisation, giving examples of ways of mapping and classifying partnerships and illustrating the way that LSPs have adapted their structures to make them fit-for-purpose. Chapter 4 focuses upon skills and employment, with material relating to Jobcentre Plus and Regional Skills Partnerships as well as LSPs. Chapter 5 looks at the findings of the surveys of LSPs conducted as part of the evaluation to see how far they signal progress towards rationalisation. Chapter 6 turns to the role of central government in providing a policy context for LSPs that encourages an integrated and rational approach to local partnership working. Finally, the report brings together the lessons coming directly out of the Action Learning Set and supported by other research.

2. Policy background

- 2.1 This section looks briefly at the policy context, covering first the drive towards partnership working before discussing where rationalisation fits in. A further key aspect of the policy context for LSPs – central-local relationships – is addressed in chapter 6.

The need for a joined up approach

- 2.2 It is only comparatively recently that there has been explicit policy recognition that the problems that individuals and families face do not correspond neatly with the separate remits of local authority departments and other agencies. Similarly, there has been a growing understanding of the extent to which disadvantage is multidimensional and cumulative not just for individuals but also for whole neighbourhoods. First, this understanding was reflected in the requirements of specially funded area-based initiatives but increasingly the principle of partnership has been extended to the way that public sector agencies and others are expected to conduct their core business.

Community leadership

- 2.3 In addition to the introduction of Local Strategic Partnerships, the trend over the past few years has been towards an increasing recognition that local authorities have a key role in giving leadership in their communities. The Local Government Act 2000 gave councils a clear role in leading their communities with the introduction of the power of well-being as part of the Government's wider approach to modernising local government. Local authorities are distinct from other public sector bodies both because they are democratically elected and because of their wide range of powers and responsibilities. At the same time, there has been a heightened expectation that they should exercise this role by working in partnership with others.
- 2.4 When discussing community leadership in its response to the DETR Consultation Paper¹, the LGA stated that community leadership involves:
- a broad concern for the local authority area and the communities within the area, extending beyond individual services to securing quality of life encompassing the relationship between social, economic and environmental issues; and including finding new ways to deal with cross-cutting issues.
 - a readiness to work in many different ways, providing services directly and indirectly but also working in Partnership with and through other organisations, leading, influencing and networking as well as acting.
 - being close to the communities of place and interest within its locality, listening and learning, informing and responding.
- 2.5 Following the first round of comprehensive performance assessments (CPAs), the Audit Commission identified community leadership as a key driver for improvement. It specifies three aspects of community leadership:

¹ *Modernising Local Government, Local Democracy and Community Leadership*, LGA April (1998).

- Local democratic leadership: bringing people together, developing a vision for the area, producing a community strategy and delivering improvements in the quality of life for local people. Central ideas are transparency of decision-making, accountability for the value for money and impact of local services, and the involvement of local people in political decision-making.
- Leadership through partnership, particularly to tackle cross-cutting issues.
- Communities leading themselves: developing social capital so that local people can become politically, socially and economically engaged. As community development is complex, councils may need to lead and challenge communities as well as support them, for example, to counter prejudice and build social inclusion.

2.6 An LGA survey of local authority approaches to community leadership² showed that the main benefits of the new power of well-being were better, more effective relationships with partners; greater freedoms and flexibilities; greater ability to be innovative and creative. The main barriers were lack of financial resources; lack of human resources; a traditional 'silo' mentality and professional boundaries. Almost all respondents to the survey thought that both officers and members require new skills and competencies such as partnership working and capacity building/engaging and working with local communities. Members additionally need listening skills and officers, competence in consultation.

2.7 Other changes have taken place relevant to the new role:

- There is less emphasis on local authorities as primarily providers and more on them as articulating and being custodians of wider community needs and working in partnership with other agencies to identify and meet the needs of local communities.
- Other local public sector partners are being encouraged to work effectively with councils, other local organisations and communities themselves to tackle local problems and exploit local opportunities to help councils succeed as community leaders (refer White Paper, *Strong Local Leadership – Quality Public Services*).

Community planning

2.8 The Local Government Act directed that every local authority should prepare a community strategy, which "should aim to enhance the quality of life of local communities and contribute to the achievement of sustainable development in the UK through action to improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area and its inhabitants".³

2.9 To do this, a community strategy has to meet four objectives:

- allow local communities (geographic or interest) to articulate their aspirations, needs and priorities;

² *Follow the leaders: a survey of local authority approaches to community leadership*, LGA (2001).

³ Preparing community strategies: government guidance to local authorities.

- co-ordinate the actions of the council, and of the public, private, voluntary and community organisations operating locally;
- focus and shape existing and future activity of those organisations so that they effectively meet community needs and aspirations;
- contribute to the achievement of sustainable development locally and more widely.

A community strategy must have four key components:

- a long term vision for the area focusing on the outcomes to be achieved;
- an action plan identifying shorter-term priorities and activities that will contribute to achieving longer term outcomes;
- a shared commitment to implement the action plan and proposals for doing so;
- arrangements for monitoring implementation, periodically reviewing the CS and for reporting progress to local communities.

2.10 This community planning role gives tangible expression to community leadership. The process of community planning may point to the need to review internal political and decision-making arrangements. It can be argued that “Community Planning contains the seeds of a ... fundamental change in the ways of working and the culture of local authorities and their partner organisations – a change that will impact on the role of elected and appointed representatives as well as on managerial and operational staff”.⁴

Rationalisation

2.11 LSPs provide the arena for partnership activity. Internally, the driver prompting LSPs to address issues of rationalisation is the local imperative of achieving a more rational, integrated operating environment for the LSP. The external driver is the national expectations of LSPs. The LSP Guidance issued in March 2001 talked about LSPs co-ordinating and rationalising partnerships. The way that the guidance defined the task gave an indication of what it meant by rationalisation “A key task for LSPs will be to create and exploit opportunities to:

- simplify and where possible reduce the number of separate partnerships in which local partners are engaged, since the same key partners are likely to be involved in a number of different high level partnerships;
- improve the links between local partnerships so that they know how they fit into the wider picture, and enhance rather than cut across the achievement of one another’s objectives;
- move to more straightforward structures and working arrangements where it makes sense to do so. For example, the Department of Health recommends that the planning of services for vulnerable children should be undertaken by children and young people’s strategic partnerships, which could then operate as a subset of the LSP;

⁴ Steve Rogers, Mike Smith, Helen Sullivan, Michael Clarke, School of Public Policy, University of Birmingham, Community Planning in Scotland – an Evaluation of the Pathfinder Projects, Convention of Scottish LAs (COSLA), September 1999.

- integrate new work that would benefit from a partnership approach. Successful LSPs are likely to be the starting point for co-ordinating new partnership working arrangements, thus avoiding the need to create further separate high-level partnership arrangements.” (p.23)

2.12 The purpose is “to improve the delivery of services and cut down the number of separate partnership and consultation arrangements which local agencies and local people need to deal with”. (p.29)

What is rationalisation?

2.13 Dictionary definitions of rationalisation are: “the organisation of a business according to scientific principles of management to increase efficiency” and “make logical and consistent; make more efficient by eliminating waste.” Austen Cutten⁵ asks what rationalisation means. He says that, as a process, it is not just seen as the ability to reduce the number of partnerships or plans but also as an opportunity to realign existing structures for a more joined up approach.

2.14 This wider concept corresponds with the ALS participants’ working definition of rationalisation as “making sense of structures and processes and establishing fit-for-purpose ones”. Participants recognised the complexity of the policy and partnership scene in which LSPs currently work. For example, one unitary authority identified at least 85 strategies and plans, often involving their own separate consultation processes. However, although frequently in debates about it, there seems to be an underlying assumption that rationalisation only means reducing the number of partnerships, this may or may not be the case. It could equally entail setting up new structures where there are perceived gaps. Reduction is only one option. Others include:

- better linkages;
- reorganisation along more workable lines;
- encompassing a broader spread of work under the LSP umbrella.

2.15 As Cutten indicated, the goal is better synergy through being more systematic and achieving better working relationships. The benefits of rationalising can be:

- an opportunity to improve joint working towards agreed goals;
- efficiency savings by using public, private and voluntary sector resources more efficiently;
- improved targeting of resources on agreed priorities;
- opportunities for partners to share ideas and information so that everyone benefits.

⁵ Austen Cutten, *Rationalising Partnerships and Plans*, Local Government Information Unit, February 2004.

Local drivers

2.16 Research conducted for the Scottish Executive found a wide range of reasons at local level for rationalising partnerships:

- simplifying complex structures;
- changing practices, conventions and expectations;
- minimising duplication and overlap;
- improving the performance of services;
- maximising the impact of available resources;
- making things more efficient and speedy;
- making things more understandable;
- designing better solutions to problems.

2.17 Similarly, participants in the ALS explored various factors driving rationalisation:

- the need to maintain strategic perspective and focus on where the LSP can make a real difference (e.g. filling gaps, joined-up thinking, other innovations) and avoiding trying to do everything;
- the need to overcome the difficulties of collaboration and joint working, for example by standardising planning and budgetary cycles;
- the desire to incorporate more of the customer/user perspective (demand and need) and have access to grassroots intelligence from local communities through arrangements at neighbourhood level that will enable this to be captured; and
- the desire to reduce provider mentality, fund-chasing and supply side clutter in some areas such as the delivery of the government's skills agenda.

Barriers to rationalisation

2.18 Participants also identified a range of barriers to rationalisation:

- Organisations and individuals are sometimes jockeying for control and/or influence.
- Some LSP members seem to find it hard to think beyond their 'silos'.
- Some agencies bring a 'provider mentality' and a preoccupation with fund chasing rather than focusing on outcomes.

- There can be a lack of ownership of cross-cutting issues and failure to write responsibility for them into job descriptions.
- The lack of co-terminosity of operational boundaries is a complicating factor. It is more difficult to engage partners and handle cross-cutting themes at different spatial scales.
- The scope/ability of agency representatives on LSP to influence their own organisation is often limited.
- Agencies are under pressure to deliver their welter of mainline national targets.
- Different performance management frameworks impose different demands.

2.19 In other words, these barriers are a mix of issues relating to:

- personal and organisational capacity;
- organisational culture;
- tensions between agency specific agendas and that of the LSP;
- tensions between local and national pressures.

Examples in the next sections of the report will illustrate all of these drivers and barriers.

3. Steps towards rationalisation

Mapping

3.1 A first step towards rationalisation must be to know the starting position. In 2000, DETR commissioned a survey of local authority partnerships⁶ that aimed to provide “a holistic view of partnerships, assess perceptions as to the motivations for engaging in partnership working, understand the management arrangements and evaluation techniques and obtain views as to the impact of Best Value and the future role of partnerships”. This provides interesting material as a benchmark for mapping at local level because it can provide a framework for local players to use to analyse their own situation. Although the focus is upon local authorities, the findings have wider application (Box 1).

Box 1: Mapping partnerships in eleven local authorities (1)

External drivers of partnership formation:

- Accessing funding opportunities.
- Best Value – greater partnership working in response to service reviews and stakeholder consultation and involvement in defining future service provision.
- Local Government legislation putting responsibility on LAs to work in partnership to deliver specific outcomes (e.g. Crime & Disorder Act 1999).
- Response to modernisation agenda with pressures for ‘joined-up’ government and focus on LAs providing community leadership and vision.

Internal drivers for partnership:

- Working with communities.
- Service improvements by widening access, increasing integration and improving quality and customer perceptions.
- Making best use of, and increasing, resources.
- Extending the scope of influence by providing a strategic influence over delegated services, such as education, and those services provided by other organisations.

Barriers to partnership:

- Financial – inability to fund projects, inconsistency in accounting methods and annual budgetary constraints.
- Cultural – resistance to change, lack of willingness to, or clarity about, working in partnership.
- Resources – limited resources to develop and implement partnerships and lack of capacity of members and partner organisations to support projects.
- Existing government legislation – fiscal policies that restrict LAs’ funding methods and a focus on national initiatives that may divert resource from local priorities.

3.2 The survey showed there are both external and internal drivers towards partnership. External ones tend to spring from the conditions attached to, or criteria of, funding streams, policy directives and/or inspection regimes. Internally they are associated with maximising the impact of resources and producing better outcomes through services that are better integrated and tailored to need.

⁶ Mapping partnerships in eleven local authorities – part of a broader study of partnerships conducted by Newchurch and Company for DETR, 2000.

Barriers are similarly external and internal. There are limits imposed on local planning by the constraints and inconsistencies of different financial regimes and resource limitations, but also there are local inhibitions arising from organisational and personal resistance and/or incapacity.

A framework for auditing partnerships

3.3 The ALS looked at the example of Wycombe District Council’s audit and review of partnerships as a preliminary to rationalisation (Box 2). Although it was devised by a local authority prior to setting up an LSP, in practice, partners were involved in the exercise and their participation was essential to validate its findings. Wycombe developed a matrix showing the Community Plan policy themes/priorities along one axis and a classification according to whether they were strategic, operational or consultative along the other. There was then a second stage analysis to determine whether they were ‘critical’, ‘desirable’ or ‘peripheral’.

Box 2: Wycombe District Council Audit, Review and Rationalisation of Partnerships

An Improvement and Development Agency Peer Review in November 1999 commented on both Wycombe’s “Excellent progress in forming partnerships” and its “Myriad of different arrangements for joint working and consultation”. It recommended an audit of the partnerships to ensure there were no gaps or overlaps and the appropriate level of resources were being committed to them. The following shows the exercise that Wycombe carried out and the thinking behind it.

Stage One: Mapping the Partnerships (with the IDEA)

Step 1 – How many partnerships/partner arrangements are we involved in?

This involved an internal mapping exercise of all our partnerships and partner arrangements. It was an inclusive self-defining exercise involving all Directorates.

They were categorised as follows:

Community Plan Area	Strategic	Operational	Consultative	Total
Community	15	48	9	72
Economy	18	10	2	30
Environment	24	12	4	40
Value for Money	4	4	7	15
Total	61	74	22	157

Step 2 – How many of these are critical?

Definitions of level of partnership:

- *Critical:* Targets cannot be achieved without this Partnership.
- *Desirable:* The partnership adds value, however, work would still proceed, although targets may not be achieved.
- *Peripheral:* The partnership is mainly Council driven and the output is determined by us.

This revealed the following “critical” partnerships/partner arrangements:

Community Plan Area	Strategic	Operational	Consultative	Total
Community	7	18	1	26
Economy	13	8	0	21
Environment	7	4	0	11
Value for Money	2	0	0	2
Total	29	30	1	60

Box 2: Wycombe District Council Audit, Review and Rationalisation of Partnerships (cont.)

Step 3 – Do our partners share this view?

Workshop sessions were then held with our critical partnerships/partners for three of the four Community Plan areas. This enabled us to share our results and discuss and obtain feedback on the targets, level of future involvement and introduce the concept of the Local Strategic Partnership.

Stage two: Review and Rationalisation

Step 4 – What should be our level of partnership involvement in the future?

Using the attached methodology (Diagram 1 following), we identified 18 of the 29 critical strategic partnerships for face to face “honest conversations”. These were led by the appropriate Cabinet Member and involved a joint assessment on:

- The extent of clarity regarding
 - Roles and responsibilities
 - The level of contribution (financial and in-kind)
 - The benefits and outcomes being sought
 - Feedback to the Council at Member level
- Effectiveness of the Partnership
- The level of Council involvement
- Representation on the Local Strategic Partnership

Step 5 – Implementation

- 10 critical strategic partnerships have been identified for the Local Strategic Partnership. A number of individual action points are in hand to strengthen individual partnership working arrangements.
- This work led directly into a revised Community Plan set of targets and establishment of the Local Strategic Partnership.
- Other issues, such as membership and possible exit or containment strategies are currently being worked through.

Outcomes

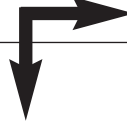
- Identified the number of critical partnerships for the Authority.
- The composition of the Local Strategic Partnership.
- Greater clarity on outcomes from individual partnerships.
- A more focused approach to our joint-working.
- Cabinet Member ownership.
- Stronger Community Plan and more shared ownership.

Issues/Learning Points

- Relating this exercise to the Community Plan and Local Strategic Partnership was critical.
- It does take time, especially the face to face conversations.
- Training for Cabinet Members.
- Cross activity partnerships and impact on Cabinet Member responsibilities.
- Wide all-embracing approach or a more focused exercise?

3.4 The following diagram shows how the Council’s involvement was determined on the basis of the classification.

Diagram 1: Wycombe Partnerships Review: *Determining the Council’s Future Involvement*

PARTNERS	STRATEGIC	OPERATIONAL	CONSULTATIVE
<p>CRITICAL</p>  <div data-bbox="395 658 667 792" style="background-color: black; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> LEAD/KEY ROLE Cabinet Member/ Director </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statutory requirement. • “High” strategic target. • Clear purpose. • Written/approved action plan with resourcing. • Formal impact monitoring. • High funding priority. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statutory requirement. • Client/contractor relationship. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statutory requirement. • Links into Council’s decision-making process. • Formal and regular reporting.
<p>DESIRABLE</p> <div data-bbox="395 1010 667 1106" style="background-color: black; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> SUPPORT ROLE Any Member </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Medium” strategic target. • Council role/actions clearly defined and in corporate action plans. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate if clear benefit to WDC services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance at all meetings. • Exception reporting.
<p>PERIPHERAL</p> <div data-bbox="395 1323 667 1420" style="background-color: black; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> CONTACT ROLE Appropriate Officer </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Low” or no strategic target. • Low funding priority. • No formal participation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information exchange only. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance only if relevant agenda items.

3.5 Box 3 shows how Camden used the Wycombe District Council method to map its partnerships as a route to rationalising them. Notably, but perhaps not surprisingly, few partnerships saw themselves as peripheral or consultative. Camden developed the method further to look at how far the partnerships were required to deliver the targets in the community strategy. In addition, the results of the mapping exercise enabled partners to review their level of involvement in partnerships and provided criteria for assessing future arrangements.

Box 3: London Borough of Camden: mapping partnerships

Camden used a method devised by Wycombe District Council to map its partnerships onto a matrix:

- on one axis, partnerships were defined as strategic, operational or consultative;
- on the other as critical, desirable or peripheral.

Using this, Camden then tried to classify the partnerships according to the community strategy by cross-referencing the 110 targets of the Community Strategy (CS) to partnerships in terms of whether the individual targets relied on partnership working to be achieved. As only 35% of targets relied on partnerships, it was concluded it would be difficult to form a hierarchy of partnerships from the CS.

Thematic mapping was used instead and a typology developed to describe them as one of a number of 'ideal types' that vary in terms of:

- *formality* – separate, legal identity, own identity, virtual, etc.
- *scope* – area-based, wide-ranging, single issue.
- *lifespan* – fixed term task, open-ended.
- *role* – service delivery, project, programme.
- *scale* – membership, level of resources, full-time staff, borough-wide, area-based.

As well as building a profile, the audit helped the LSP and partners to review their involvement in existing or emerging partnerships. Camden developed a proforma to collect the following information:

- who developed the partnership?
- what is its status and intended lifespan?
- what are its key objectives and targets?
- how is the partnership evaluated, if at all, is this a requirement of the funding?
- how much money does the partnership have at its disposal and where does the money come from?
- how is the partnership held accountable?
- what is its relationship to other partnerships?
- who is on the partnership?

This approach is also used to assess task orientated issues or functions:

- does the task/purpose require a partnership?
- could the task be done within an existing partnership?
- if not, what type of partnership is required?
- if yes, which partnership does it belong to?
- what is the 'added value' in each case?

- 3.6 It is worth indicating that Wycombe's criteria for reviewing partnerships differ from the current NRU performance management criteria for assessing partnership working, which are strategic, action focused, performance managed, efficient and learning and development. There is no necessary contradiction here but for LSPs wishing to undertake such an exercise, it is important to be clear about the distinction between, on the one hand, looking at the individual pieces of the jigsaw and, on the other, looking at the way they fit together and the total picture they form collectively.

Examples from the Action Learning Set

- 3.7 Two of the LSPs participating in the ALS had conducted mapping exercises in specific policy areas. In Preston (Box 4), this began with a general review of partnerships leading to the development of a database showing the spread of involvement by partners and the main purposes of the partnerships. Preston Strategic Partnership then sought funding to commission more detailed work in relation to drug misuse as a basis for reducing duplication and encouraging more integrated approaches.

Box 4: Rationalisation in Preston: Tackling Drugs Misuse

Rationalising and joining up existing work and partnerships, making use of all resources (both mainstream and NRF) in the delivery of targets is a key function of the Preston Strategic Partnership (PSP).

Partnership Mapping

- **Stage 1** – Information was sought from Preston Strategic Partnership partners regarding their involvement in partnerships. This information was used to develop the PSP partnership database. The database contains a listing of partnerships and a description of their primary purposes, thereby enabling links to be made to Community Strategy themes and cross cutting issues.
- **Stage 2** – The PSP were successful in obtaining Government Office North West funding to carry out further detailed partnership mapping work relating to reducing drugs misuse.
- **Stage 3** – Staff from the University of Central Lancashire were commissioned to undertake a series of interviews (relating to reducing drugs misuse) with PSP Partners who attend Partnership meetings.

It is anticipated that the outcomes of this project will be to:

- Improve sharing of information between partnerships and the PSP
- Better synergy between partners plans and strategies and the ability to join up programmes and focus on Community Strategy priorities
- A reduction of any duplication in partners work

3.8 In Tameside, there has also been a determined focus upon rationalising the LSP structures, this time both to identify gaps where there are no dedicated or integrated mechanisms for addressing priorities in the Community Strategy and to review the existing thematic partnerships in terms of their memberships, structure, remit and reporting arrangements (Box 5).

Box 5: Tameside Strategic Partnership

In Tameside, the LSP comprises approximately 80 organisations that together deliver 27 Community Strategy key measures. Resource streams are also aligned through the LSP structure and Community Strategy priorities.

Rationalisation is an ongoing process that takes place at two levels:

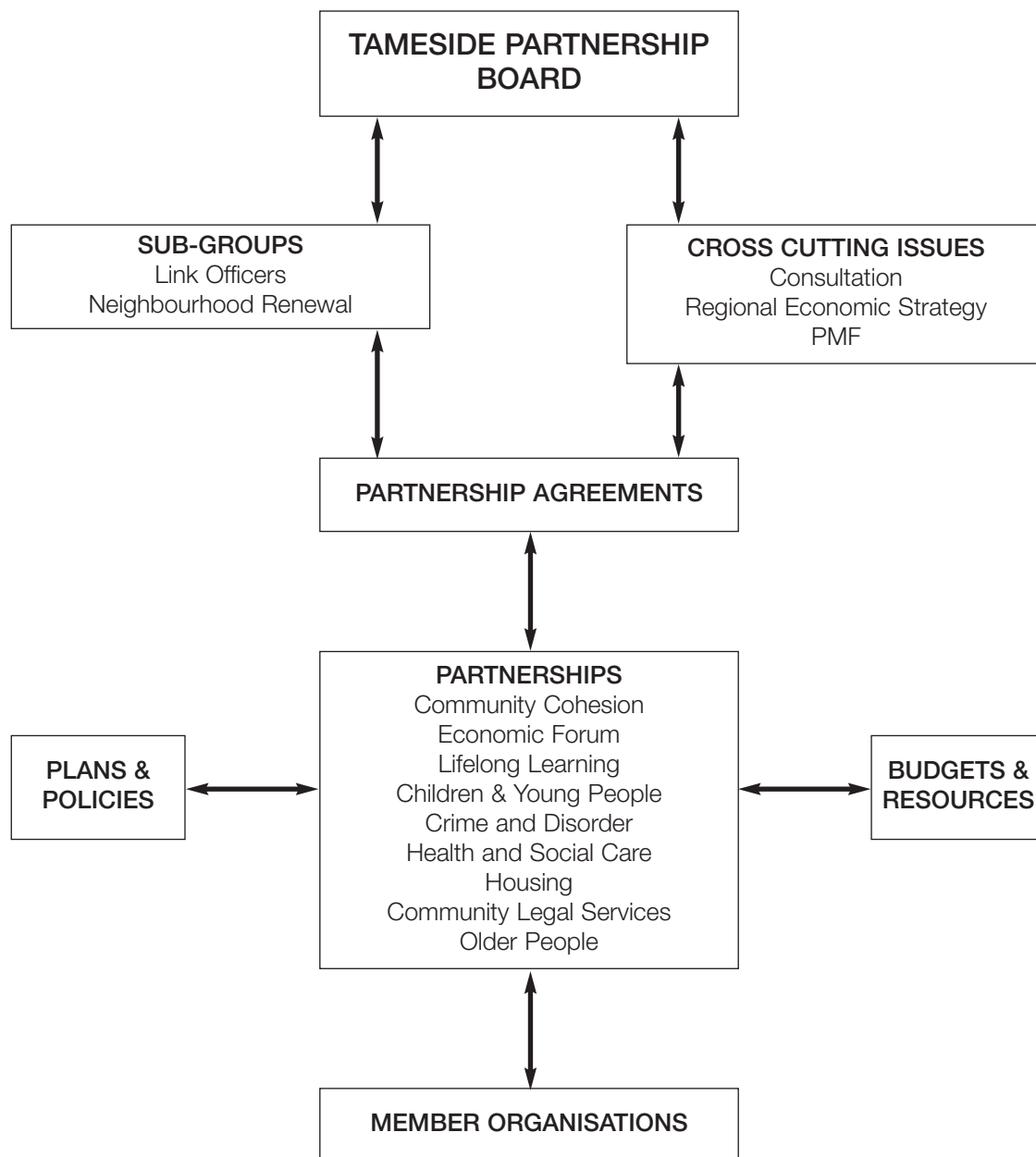
First, potential gaps in strategic delivery can emerge in the partnership structure as policy priorities change or be highlighted through joint working such as in the LSP national evaluation. For example, the LSP was examining how environmental, transportation and older people's issues were being championed and delivered. This could lead to the evolution of further partnerships or the addition of work areas to existing ones.

Second, there is rationalisation of structures within thematic partnerships. In 2004, the following reviews were undertaken:

- review of the role and structure of the Housing Partnership;
- review of the Lifelong Learning Partnership to streamline membership and structure;
- review of Community Cohesion Partnership to extend the membership;
- Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership to integrate the Drug and Alcohol Action Team;
- rationalisation of children's services under the Children and Young People's Partnership.

In the case of the Housing and Lifelong Learning Partnerships, these are long established and the reviews reflected the need to clarify structures, priorities and reporting arrangements in relation to the Community Strategy, PMF and LSP structure. The Community Cohesion Partnership was formed in 2001 and comprised 10 organisations. It needed a broader membership base. For the other two, the goal is to unify service delivery by multiple agencies. CDRP/DAAT integration resulted in a more streamlined and resource efficient partnership structure. Children and Young People's services were affected by 20 major strategies and plans and by the end of 2003 included 19 key partnerships.

Tameside partnership structure diagram



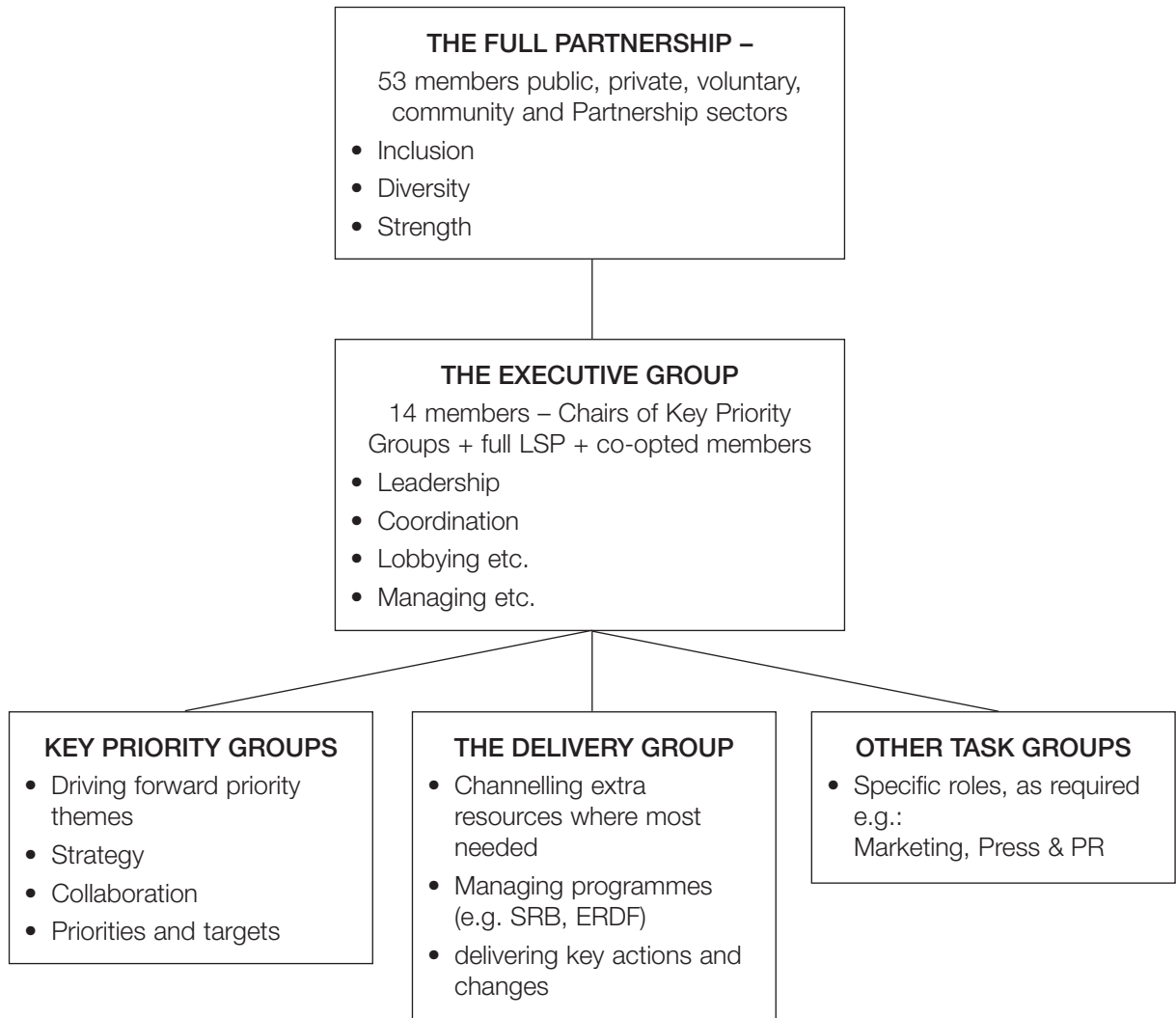
- 3.9 In Tameside, analysis of the LSP structure led to the creation of a ninth thematic partnership, the Older People's Partnership, to improve service delivery to the 30% of the Tameside population aged 50 years and older. In addition, the membership of the Community Cohesion Partnership was broadened to achieve wider representation from organisations representing BME groups and other communities of interest such as faith groups.

Fit for purpose structures

- 3.10 LSPs clearly create or adapt their structures in different ways to be fit-for-purpose to suit local circumstances, reflect the LSP's principles and/or meet evolving needs.

3.11 The structure diagram for Pendle Partnership indicates that it seeks to achieve inclusiveness, vision, consensus and strategic leadership at Board level balanced by the operational leadership and an action focus at the Executive level which brings together key players from the key priority groups.

Pendle Partnership – Structure diagram



3.12 West Cumbria already had a strategic partnership prior to the introduction of LSPs. Box 6 shows that it undertook a review to determine whether this early structure remained appropriate. Fundamental to the considerations was how far the Partnership embodied or could drive the cultural and organisational changes seen to be fundamental to the concept of LSPs and to expressing the values that West Cumbria wanted to underpin its partnership. The result was a shift from officer-led arrangements to a much greater emphasis upon:

- working relationships rather than complex structures;
- person-focused working groups replacing thematic policy ones;
- the community leadership and scrutiny role at strategic and neighbourhood levels.

Box 6: West Cumbria

West Cumbria Partnership predated LSPs. At that time, it comprised:

- A “community leadership” Forum which met twice a year
- an Executive Committee of councillors and business leaders
- a Working Group of senior officers and public service managers
- thematic groups for Education, Training and Business; Infrastructure and Investment; Community Regeneration; Built Environment.

It then tested each of these against certain fit-for-purpose criteria:

Fit for purpose?

- capable of playing a key strategic role?
- actively involve all key players from all sectors?
- establish genuine common priorities and targets?
- did it agree actions and milestones leading to demonstrable improvements?
- did it reduce not add to the bureaucratic burden?

What should it be like?

- community-led
- built on existing partnerships and working arrangements
- built on good practice – local, regional, national and wider
- a culture change not a new bureaucracy
- a way of working

How should it function?

- allow local communities to articulate needs, priorities and aspirations;
- co-ordinate the actions of public, private, voluntary and community organisations;
- focus and shape existing and future activities of these organisations;
- contribute to sustainable development, local goals relating to global aims.

What should its values be?

- equality and inclusiveness
- transparency
- plain language
- shared responsibility
- respect for differences in accountability
- validity of disagreement
- learning.

The conclusion of this process was that new structures were needed:

- replacing the ‘Forum’ with a community-led ‘Co-ordinating Group’ which met six times a year, undertaking community scrutiny with policy and research support;
- a “Service Delivery” Network led by senior public sector executives focusing on locality-based service delivery and cross-cutting themes (e.g. Children and Young Persons)
- bringing “Locality” area-based regeneration partnerships under the LSP umbrella and promoting community engagement

Box 6: West Cumbria (cont.)

New Partnership structure

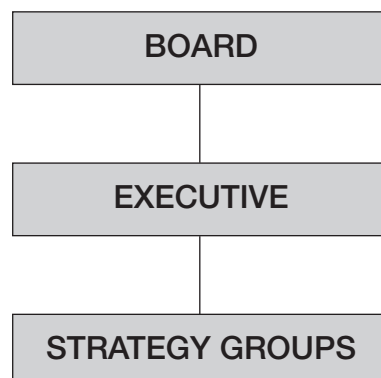
- Community Leadership
 - Strategic Co-ordination Group – lead role re Community Strategy; 27 members: 6 local governance; 12 community of place (the Localities); 6 community of interest; 3 business (incl. Trade Union)
 - X Well-being Review Groups: economic, environmental and social; cross-cutting reviews of major policy and implementation issues; supported by Knowledge Management Hub
- Public Services Delivery
 - the Working Group of Senior Officers and public service managers
 - 9 X Locality Working Groups developing neighbourhood management – based on the existing Locality Regeneration Partnerships
 - cross theme Delivery Groups working across the 14 X Public service themes in Community Strategy
 - Neighbourhood Renewal Panel
 - Community Empowerment Network
- Community Engagement
 - Annual Forum open to all – West Cumbria’s AGM
 - Business Network, Community Networks, Service Forums
 - Locality (Neighbourhood) Forums – scrutinise public services; estate agreements, parish plans, neighbourhood management, ABIs

3.13 The Leeds Initiative has recently restructured its partnerships arrangements. This is a well-established, longstanding partnership, which originated as primarily a public and private sector partnership focusing on economic development. Its first plan, *Vision 1*, was produced in 1999. After that, various incremental changes were made to rationalise groups and fill gaps in the structure in response to local and national policy drivers and circumstances. One of these was the advent of LSPs and the introduction of the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund meant increasing the focus on neighbourhood renewal.

3.14 The latest restructuring was driven by the perceived need for a better fit with:

- the accreditation requirements of LSPs: to be strategic, inclusive, efficient and action-focused;
- its new Community Strategy, *Vision 2*, and interconnectedness of its three aims of Leeds ‘going up a league’, Leeds in the Region, and ‘narrowing the gap’.

The former structure was:

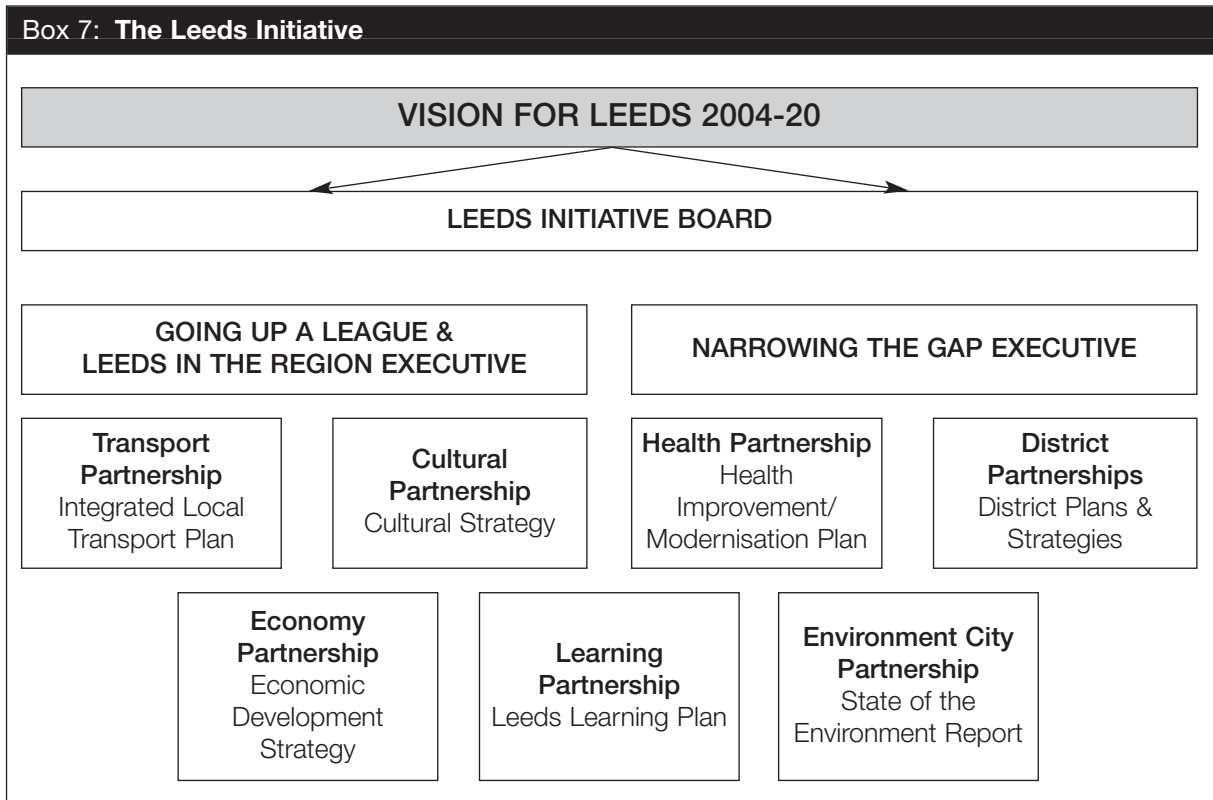


The principles of the restructuring included:

- avoiding wholesale change to structures that were working well;
- ensuring clarity;
- accepting that structures will never be ideal and that how partners work together day by day is more important;
- ensuring that the Vision aims formed an integral part of the revised terms of reference of strategy groups and their plans;
- elevating the role of the former Neighbourhoods and Communities partnership to an 'Executive' to be responsible for delivering the LSP agenda;
- creating district partnerships to develop partnership working on the ground.

The new Leeds Initiative structure (Box 7) comprises:

- the Board;
- two Executives – 'Going up a League' and 'Narrowing the Gap', accountable to the Board and charged with delivering the three aims;
- six strategy groups, accountable to the Board, reporting to both Executives and with a remit to deliver the themes of the Vision;
- Partnership groups supporting delivery of the Vision, reporting to the Board and Executives as appropriate;
- five District Partnerships – responsible for improving the delivery of services through partnership at the 'wedge level';
- a Resources Partnership to replace the Regeneration Board;
- flexibility to incorporate task groups as needed to drive forward key projects.



Emerging messages

3.15 A number of messages emerge from the descriptive material in this chapter. The examples of mapping partnerships show that:

- An audit of the many partnerships operating within an LSP area is a useful starting point but listing them according to their theme and coverage is not enough. It is necessary to specify other criteria that will indicate their precise role and standing and where they fit within the wider governance scene and will enable the identification of any gaps as well as duplication.
- The criteria established for the audit can also be used as a checklist to test any future proposals for setting up new partnerships.
- This sort of mapping can go beyond being a paper exercise to being a developmental tool for the LSP and partner organisations. It can be the basis for raising awareness of cross-cutting issues, achieving better understanding across partners, more clarity about targets and outcomes, improved information sharing and greater commitment to joint working.

3.16 Reviews of partnerships already under the LSP umbrella can also cover:

- their value base and partnership culture;
- their capacity to plan and deliver;
- issues of reporting and mutual accountability.

3.17 LSPs have to combine characteristics that do not necessarily sit easily together; for example, achieving a wide ranging membership without degenerating into a mere talking shop. Striking the right balance requires the wider partnership structures illustrated in these examples. The examples given here reflect the diversity of LSP structures that arise from varied local needs, the different ways that partnerships have evolved and the way that the LSP's role is perceived in the area. However, they also show that all face common challenges when developing their wider partnership structures:

- to be inclusive whilst also remaining strategic and action oriented;
- to provide entry points for/opportunities for participation both for a wider range of organisations and for people in different parts and at different levels of partner organisations;
- to build in connections between policy themes at a strategic level and a neighbourhood focus.
- to ensure that there are champions for particular themes or issues.
- to align resource streams through the organisations delivering the key measures in the Community Strategy.

3.18 The examples also demonstrate that an LSP needs to evolve to take account of its stage of development and priorities and to respond effectively to the changing policy environment. It is important, therefore, to 'future gaze' and keep a watching brief on emerging policy priorities at the same time as retaining the dynamic flexibility required to adapt the LSP structures appropriately.

Equipped for partnership?

3.19 It follows from these lessons that another challenge for LSPs is to ensure that their partners are equipped for partnership. The organisation and culture of partner agencies and the extent to which they have the capacity to be effective partners is closely linked to the discussion of LSP structures and underlined the need:

- for greater sharing and understanding about organisations' philosophies, remits, constraints, in order to have realistic mutual expectations and to be able to build effective partnering structures and strategies;
- to explore further the dynamics of whole systems change, where the pushes and pulls for organisational change come from and at which spatial level;
- for staff development/training.

4. A focus on skills and employment

4.1 Although much of the material dealt with in the ALS was general, it was possible to look rather more closely at some issues relating in particular to skills and employment, partly through the experience in the LSPs represented and partly through the participation of colleagues from Jobcentre Plus, the North West Development Agency and three Government Offices, GONE, GOYH and GONW. Examples from two LSPs, Middlesbrough and Newcastle upon Tyne, centred respectively on lifelong learning and bringing learning and employment together.

Middlesbrough

4.2 In Middlesbrough, mapping focused on organisations/partnerships dealing with learning and skills because it was evident that there was:

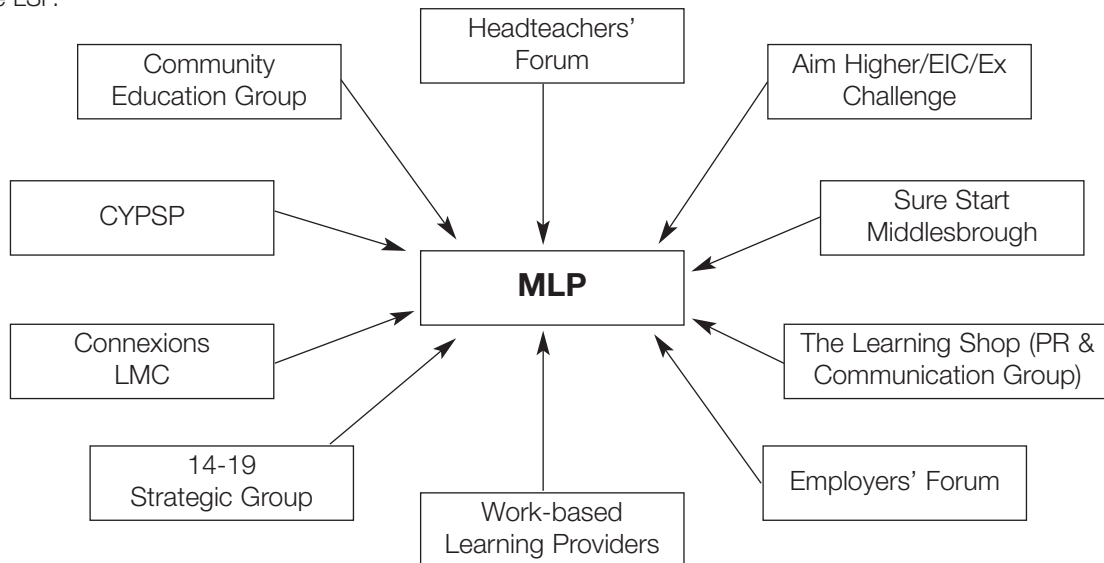
- overlapping work at different spatial levels;
- a lack of connection between different policy dimensions; and
- discontinuity across age groups.

4.3 As a result of this exercise, a considerable amount of consultation and a number of bi-lateral discussions, the Middlesbrough Learning Partnership (Box 8) was set up to as the strategic learning arm of the LSP and the channel through which others could connect with one another and the LSP.

Box 8: Middlesbrough Learning Partnership (MLP)

Middlesbrough LSP came into existence in 2001. It was evident that there was a multitude of partnerships in dealing in one way or another with learning and skills but also that many of the same people belonged to different partnerships. The LSP therefore initiated an exercise to map groups, memberships, links and relationships before undertaking a consultation to determine a way forward.

The outcome was the establishment of Middlesbrough Learning Partnership to be the strategic learning arm of the LSP.



Box 8: Middlesbrough Learning Partnership (MLP) (cont.)

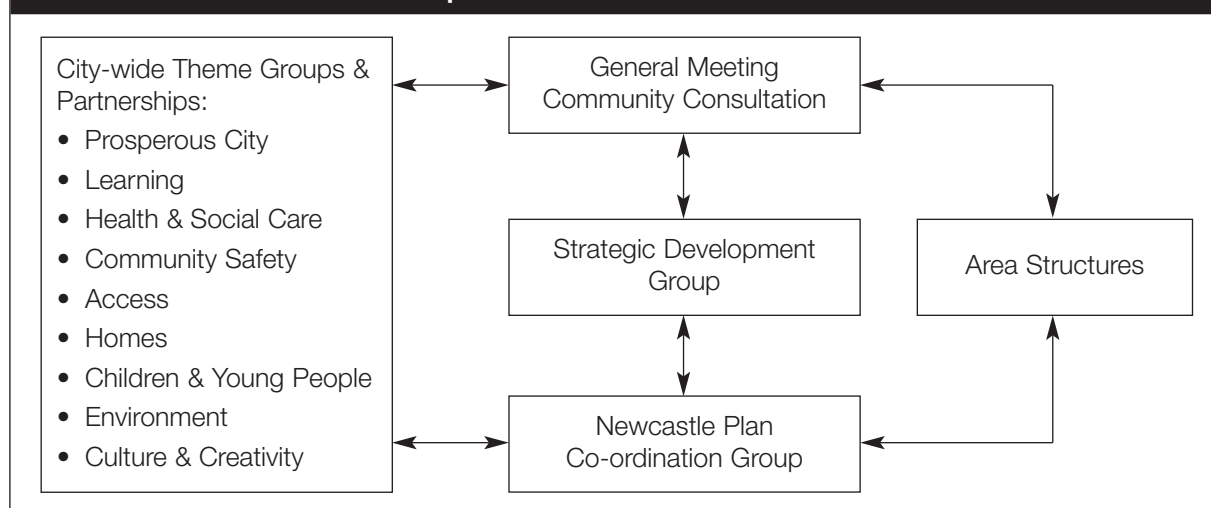
The strategic objectives are to:

- construct a unified learning plan for Middlesbrough;
- represent educational interests at sub-regional, regional and national levels;
- source and co-ordinate bids for new funding opportunities;
- provide a point of contact for Inspection;
- ensure Middlesbrough's active involvement in Tees Valley-wide strategic planning;
- support stakeholders in the Partnership to realise their locally and nationally determined targets for improving educational attainment;
- ensure Middlesbrough Learning Partnership embraces the key initiatives related to learning.

Newcastle

4.4 In Newcastle, various considerations influenced the Partnership model (Box 9). First there was the need to reflect the main objectives of the Community Strategy and, in particular, make connections between the 'Prosperous City' objectives and the 'Learning' ones; in other words, bring together the goals of competitiveness and cohesion. Second, the model needed to integrate thematic partnerships and area-based structures. Third, there was recognition of some specific challenges, such as:

- engaging the private sector and agencies working at a sub-regional and regional level;
- aligning the interests and timetables of different agencies;
- achieving changes in main programmes;
- ensuring sustainability.

Box 9: The Newcastle Partnership Model

Box 9: The Newcastle Partnership Model (cont.)

Prosperous city theme objectives

1. Increase the recognition of Newcastle as a modern business-friendly location ...
2. improve the economic performance of the City ...
3. ...growing demand for high quality skills [linked to] employers ...inform and support the strategic planning and provision of skills ...by public and private learning providers
4. Establish Newcastle as the e-city of the North ...
5. Maximise employment opportunities for all Newcastle residents ... ensuring routes of progression ...and decreasing levels of worklessness.
6. ... supply of suitable sites and premises to meet the needs and aspirations of businesses ...

Links with Learning

- Growing demand for high quality skills [linked to] employers ...inform and support the strategic planning and provision of skills ...by public and private learning providers
 - demand led linked to growth industries
 - workforce development/upskilling
 - higher skills
- Maximise employment opportunities for all Newcastle residents ... ensuring routes of progression ...and decreasing levels of worklessness.
 - entry level
 - tackle barriers to worklessness
 - mobilise disadvantaged people into work

Prosperous City and Learning themes meeting in the middle

- shared objectives
- common understanding of how each theme complements the aims and objectives of the other
- formalised structure: Economic Development/LEA
- structured communication mechanism
- focus/good will/commitment/desire to achieve

Challenges

- keeping the private sector on board and engaged (different cultures: bureaucracy vs. 'do it now')
- aligning sub-regional stakeholders' remits with locality (e.g. JC+ and LSC)
- dovetailing contributory strategies and outcomes (who gets which outcomes?)
- making it happen – resourcing activity, responsibility, accountability
- bending the mainstream/funding to fit projects (rather than bending projects to fit funding)
- aligning project developments/action with funding time lines
- funding post 2006
- ensuring no re-invention of the wheel.

4.5 The cross cutting themes in Newcastle added to the organisational complexity. For example, there was recognition that existing structures needed to be dismantled and re-assembled to ensure that agency strategies fitted together and that partners collaborated to deliver the necessary ingredients for becoming 'a prosperous city'. Particular issues in the training and employment sphere included:

- servicing growth sectors;

- raising educational aspirations and providing progression opportunities;
- engaging health and social service organisations more fully to overcome sickness and disability problems.

4.6 The factor that assisted this process was the common interest in building a skilled workforce that led to goodwill and determination from partners to make progress in aligning strategies and resources. Nevertheless, there were also challenges:

- aligning agencies with a sub-regional remit and operating over different boundaries, such as the Learning and Skills Council and Jobcentre Plus;
- undertaking an appropriate level of consultation whilst still keeping the private sector on board;
- dovetailing strategies and maintaining trust whilst also avoiding double counting;
- developing better knowledge management systems to avoid duplication or the re-invention of wheels;
- aligning projects and funding and securing sustainability, in particular anticipating the end of NRF.

Working at regional and sub-regional levels

4.7 A key emerging theme is that of determining the right level of decision making and action, the extent of local flexibility and the amount of time spent in translating national priorities or standards into local ones. As one participant said:

At present there are a thousand talking shops delivering a hundred actions. We need one hundred talking shops for a thousand actions. For example, currently sector skill standards are set at national level, but then adapted at regional level and again at local level – is this necessary?

4.8 Some of the key partners of LSPs are organisations that work at a regional or sub-regional level. LSPs therefore need to ensure that their Community Strategies and other plans are compatible with regional strategies. For the partner organisations, working with several LSPs raises issues about how to deploy their resources appropriately across them all. It can stretch their capacity so that there is also the risk that a pecking order developing amongst LSPs in a sub-region with those in the area seen to be the main economic drivers attracting more time and attention from senior staff.

4.9 An additional difficulty for sub-regional organisations is that the logical spatial level for engaging with an issue – say, the travel-to-work area – may not correspond with LSP boundaries. A concomitant of this is that LSPs need to understand the extent to which the commitment of partners is influenced by how far they see the local as the right level for their agenda.

Jobcentre Plus – an example of an agency operating at different levels

4.10 The creation of Jobcentre Plus brought together the former Employment Service and the Benefits Agency with an extended remit. Jobcentre Plus brings together employment, training and benefits advice and is committed through its vision “to work more closely with a range of partners to deliver work for those who can and support for those who cannot”. Nationally Jobcentre Plus has calculated that it has over 1,000 partners. It has produced a framework for strategic partnerships to help partner organisations understand what it wants to achieve and how it makes decisions about partnership working.

This indicates that its key partners are:

- local authorities: Jobcentre Plus, as part of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), is committed to an Accord with the Local Government Association, through which there is agreement to work together on
 - regeneration of local economies;
 - Local Public Service Agreements;
 - a duty to improve local communities; and
 - delivering services such as Housing Benefit efficiently.
- Learning and Skills Councils – a shared skills agenda: joint planning and working together to increase economic development.
- Regional Development Agencies – work on skills, economic development and regeneration.
- Other government departments – shared agendas with other parts of DWP, Government Offices, Inland Revenue: to share analysis and make it easier to deliver effective and co-ordinated services.

4.11 The framework acknowledges that Jobcentre Plus will have different relationships even with the same partners at different levels. Some key partners will also be local providers. It is therefore important to recognise that a relationship concerned with delivering services will be different, and is likely to need to be kept separate and managed differently from a relationship concerned with taking forward strategic issues and be aware of the potential for tension between these two roles.

4.12 LSPs and Regional Skills Partnerships are amongst the key partnerships with which Jobcentre Plus is committed to “aim for an appropriate level of involvement”. In relation to LSPs, the framework reports that custom and practice suggests that District Managers may reasonably be expected to devote an average of about 20% of their time on strategic partnership activity. The Regional Business Development Managers are responsible for regional partnerships.

4.13 In addition to partnering in relation to common agendas, Jobcentre Plus sees itself as potentially providing a recruitment service to partner agencies that perhaps do not take as much advantage of it as they might. For example, it has been calculated that the NHS spends over £50 million on recruitment per year and could make major savings by using Jobcentre Plus.

Regional Skills Partnerships – an example of partnership working at regional level

4.14 The last five years have seen the skills agenda gradually converging with wider regional strategic planning. Regional Skills Partnerships (RSPs) provide the opportunity to resolve and join up a range of nationally defined policy drivers in order to make a major contribution to achieving the goals of Regional Economic Strategies. Their terms of reference include agreeing regional priorities on skills, productivity and business support. RSPs deliver sub-regionally through an Alliance for Skills and Productivity.

The advantages of the regional level are seen as:

- scale: sufficient critical mass but small enough to understand the need for variation and flexibility;
- strategic overview: information about differential skill gaps;
- connectivity: putting the skills and employment agenda in the context of capital investment, infrastructure and transport;
- muscle: collective voice for dialogue with government.

Amongst the barriers faced by RSPs in delivering their agenda are also factors identified by LSPs as obstacles to rationalisation:

- a plethora of targets;
- inappropriate measures;
- confusing labour market intelligence data from multiple sources;
- misaligned planning cycles;
- lack of clarity about roles;
- confusion/competition over attribution of achievement;
- insufficient flexibility in funding.

One conclusion from the ALS was that there is a need for greater clarity about the status and accountability of sub-regional partnerships and more transparency about where some decisions are made.

5. LSPs' progress in rationalisation

5.1 As part of the National Evaluation, there were surveys of LSPs conducted in the summers of 2002 and 2004. Together these give some indication of the progress LSPs are making in rationalisation. Although LSPs recognise the need not only to avoid duplication but also prevent multiple partnerships overloading voluntary, community and business sector representatives, *reducing* the number of partnerships has not necessarily been a priority. Instead, the surveys and other strands of the research echo the conclusions of the ALS that the process of rationalisation is more about the effective management of a network of partnerships than about pruning. Establishing new partnerships to fill gaps may sometimes be required and the concept of rationalisation needs to encompass the activities that partnerships undertake and the way that they interrelate.

Links with partnerships

5.2 The 2002 survey findings were based on responses from 207 LSPs. In 2004, 306 LSPs responded, 81% of the total. In both cases, almost all had formal links with other, issue-based partnerships, including sub-partnerships established by the LSP to fill a gap or bring partnerships undertaking related work together under one umbrella. The 2004 survey showed that more than two thirds of LSPs have Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, Drug Action Teams, Health Improvement Partnerships and Local Learning Partnerships working with them or affiliated to them. In general, NRF LSPs have more links with other partnerships than non-NRF ones.

5.3 The 2002 survey showed that pre-existing partnerships had been abolished or ceased to meet in only a minority of LSPs:

- one partnership in the case of 14% of responding LSPs;
- two partnerships in 4% of LSPs;
- three partnerships in 2% of LSPs.

5.4 In total, 51 pre-existing partnerships had been abolished following the establishment of the LSP and a further 18 had ceased to meet. The most common type of partnership abolished was a non-statutory general one. In many cases, these had apparently been the precursor of the LSP or soon subsumed within it. By 2004, 127 partnerships had been abolished as a result of the formation of LSPs. Local Agenda 21 Partnerships were most likely to have disappeared (16%), followed by Regeneration Partnerships (5%) and Health Improvement Partnerships (4%).

5.5 About one quarter of respondents to the 2002 survey stated that new partnerships – usually only one or two – had been formed as a result of the LSP. The overall total of new partnerships was 116. They were mainly in three categories: thematic (63%), locality (24%), community of interest (9%). The thematic ones were either umbrella partnerships covering a broad theme or more tightly focused ones presumably established to fill identified gaps. Sometimes they built on previous partnership arrangements. LSPs were often taking the approach, perhaps as a first step, of bringing existing partnerships together under an umbrella grouping, often following the themes of the Community Strategy.

Routes towards rationalisation

- 5.6 This sort of approach indicated that, as in some of the earlier examples given in this report, LSPs were trying developing structures and effective working relationships that would be conducive to fulfilling their joint goals. In 2004, about 84% of NRF LSPs thought their relationships with sub-partnerships or associated partnerships were effective or very effective compared with 65% of non-NRF ones. Over 90% of NRF LSPs and 80% of non-NRF LSPs have protocols or other 'rules of engagement'. The differences between NRF and non-NRF LSPs could stem from a range of factors, including, on the one hand, how long the LSP had been established, type of area and local authority type and, on the other, the effects of NRF LSPs going through the NRU Performance Management Framework (which has taken over from accreditation).
- 5.7 Non-NRF LSPs have much more limited staff and financial resources than NRF ones. Not only do they have fewer staff, but they were more likely to feel that they did not have adequate staff skills. This affects their capacity, the range of LSP activities and their future priorities.
- 5.8 Whereas all but one of the NRF Partnerships had a performance management system in 2004, only 53% of non-NRF LSPs had developed one. Respondents identified the following as the most important benefits of performance management:
- clarifying strategic objectives;
 - closer alignment of partners' plans and priorities;
 - providing an evidence base for improvement.
- 5.9 Tasks that have a bearing on rationalisation, such as 'evaluation and learning' and 'developing shared data and information systems' are important for many, particularly amongst the NRF LSPs. Similarly, spheres in which LSPs feel they are making progress are relevant to creating a context in which rationalisation can take place. Nearly 88% in 2004 felt they had made progress in ensuring that partners' policies, plans, targets and performance indicators reflected the Community Strategy. On the other hand, less than a quarter overall had made progress in equally important activities such as mapping spending programmes. Again, the picture here differed between NRF and non-NRF LSPs: about 42% of the former felt they had made progress compared with only 15% of the latter.
- 5.10 There was an opportunity for survey respondents to add comments in addition to their codeable responses and many of the individual comments could be grouped under broad headings. One of these categories of concerns was that of excessive demands on LSPs from government. It was commented that "every government consultation document refers to the need for the LSP to be involved" and that this raises over-inflated expectations and then leads to disillusion because demands on LSPs outstrip their capacity. This concern leads to the subject of the next chapter, which is the role of government in supporting LSPs and shaping the policy context in which they work.

6. Local autonomy

“I want to tackle the trend towards excessive central prescription and interference, which dominated central local relations in the 1980s and 1990s. We are reversing that approach. The White Paper marks a pronounced step away from centralisation. It is about increased freedoms, better incentives, and a significant reduction in the number of controls, consent requirements, plans and over-elaborate guidance which had been all too characteristic of the top-down approach to local government So this White Paper has at its heart community leadership and the democratic renewal of local government. For all Councils we want to reduce the bureaucratic burden and give them the freedom to innovate and focus on driving up standards. We therefore intend to cut the number of plans and strategies that councils are required to produce. To scale back the number of area based initiatives and give greater scope to rationalise partnerships.” (Stephen Byers statement to the House of Commons when introducing the White Paper *Strong Local Leadership – Quality Public Services*, 11 December 2001).

- 6.1 A recurring issue in the ALS was the extent to which the limited powers and local discretion of LSPs constrain rationalisation. LSPs themselves are voluntary partnerships, whereas some of those with which they deal, such as CDRPs, are statutory ones. LSPs may have come on the scene later than other partnerships. They need to demonstrate that they are adding value. They have to work through influence, persuasion and winning the commitment of partner bodies. This takes time and those only recently created may still have to work hard to establish their legitimacy. However, it is also the case that some LSPs would like their position in the local governance scene to be made clearer and the accountability of partners to the LSP to be strengthened.
- 6.2 Cutten states “Much of the work being done at a local level to rationalise is still in the embryonic stages and it is evident that more work needs to be done by central government in supporting local authorities to rationalise their partnership working arrangements and to achieve greater synergy between the community plan or strategy and other existing plans and strategies.”
- 6.3 Working across agencies and partnerships in ways that suit local circumstances presupposes locally based decisions about policies and resource deployment and requires a relaxation in the command and control hierarchies of some central government departments. At present, the vertical axis – central government to local – is stronger than the horizontal one. Agencies face tensions between national and local priorities and, when trying to work together, they often have to deal with different timescales, planning cycles and performance management frameworks.
- 6.4 An evaluation of the Community Planning Pathfinder Projects in Scotland⁷ highlighted the issue of co-ordination, rationalisation and simplification of Partnerships. In each case, the Pathfinder audit revealed high numbers of existing partnership arrangements. Moves to achieve rationalisation were seen as an important benefit. The study showed a need for councils “to develop better communication, information and networking skills to allow them to co-ordinate, cross-fertilise and monitor what is going on in their own areas”. However, it also found that the extent to which councils and their partners could

⁷ Steve Rogers et al, op cit.

make progress in rationalising and simplifying partnerships may be limited by the how far funding bodies, including the Scottish Parliament and Executive, “are prepared to review and rationalise their requirements for partnership working in different contexts and for different purposes”. It stated that “There has been an inexorable rise in the demand for partnership working at the local level with little evidence of an attempt to co-ordinate different demands”.

- 6.5 In 2000, reports from the Performance and Innovation Unit⁸ recognised the proliferation of new partnerships arrangements that had taken place and the resulting confusion and duplication. They pointed to the need for co-ordination and better integration of partnerships. As a result the Regional Co-ordination Unit (RCU) was set up in ODPM, as the corporate centre for the nine GORs, with the task of ensuring better co-ordination between central government departments and regional/local government and with control of developing future area-based initiatives.

Reassembling national programmes

“... the Commission’s fieldwork found that many local authorities struggle to make sense of the framework of national policies and programmes given their local context. It also found that national government programmes, targets and funding streams tend to dominate local debates on what should be done. They are seen as a source of the difficulties that local leaders face when they try to improve well-being, rather than a support. In practice, local leaders are left with the task of reassembling the strands of national programmes and initiatives after they have fractured on their way down different departmental silos.” (Audit Commission, *People, places and prosperity*, 2004, p.8)

- 6.6 Even where central government is not setting up new partnerships, local players still have the challenge of making sense of national programmes and priorities in the local context. The Audit Commission called this need to reassemble the strands after they have fractured on their way down from departmental silos the ‘Humpty Dumpty effect’.
- 6.7 For LSPs, competing interests and priorities for action include:
- different national priorities from different government departments;
 - competition between national, regional and local priorities;
 - inspection, regulation and performance management;
 - different institutions and professions with different approaches;
 - economic, social and environmental concerns;
 - different neighbourhoods with varying needs;
 - different interest groups (such as, businesses, residents, young and older people, different faith groups).

⁸ Reaching Out: the role of central government at regional and local level and Wired Up, Performance and Innovation Unit.

- 6.8 Two policy implications emerge from this. First, is the oft-repeated plea from local players for more joining up in Whitehall.⁹ Second, and closely related, is the need for central government departments to have more sense of place, which in its turn would lead to a greater understanding of policy impacts and interconnections. It is notable that when LSPs seek freedoms and flexibilities, they tend to get responses on an issue by issue basis rather than in the context of a dialogue rooted in the particular locality and its distinctive circumstances.

Reducing plan requirements

“The Government draws a distinction between the importance of effective planning by authorities and their partners for service delivery and the limited number of cases where central government has a legitimate need for formal plans to be submitted to give assurance that robust mechanisms are in place to deliver national policy priorities and standards. The Government recognises the cumulative burden of planning requirements has increased in recent years with insufficient regard to whether other mechanisms can deliver the same or better outcomes more effectively.” (Letter to Chief Executives from Director of Local Government Performance Unit, ODPM and Director of Strategy and Communications, LGA, (July 2003) setting out current intentions for giving effect to plan rationalisation process)

- 6.9 In the LGA survey in 2001, 80% of local authorities expected that the development of LSPs and community planning would lead to a rationalisation of partnerships and 62% expected they would lead to a reduction in the number of plans that authorities have to prepare. In other words, they thought that LSPs would facilitate the rationalisation of statutory plans and partnership requirements imposed by central government. The most mentioned plans that would not be needed or would be subsumed were the LA21 plan and the economic development plan – signalling that they thought the principles underpinning these had been “successfully mainstreamed into the community strategy and all that the council does”.
- 6.10 One of the issues that the Local Government Act 2000 could also be seen as trying tackle was the fragmentation of decision making. It therefore provided powers for local partnerships to be rationalised. The 2001 White Paper *Strong Local Leadership – Quality Public Services* identified the need for LSPs to rationalise, subsume and co-ordinate other partnerships. At the same time, it introduced the idea of a performance profile for every council and an Audit Commission ranking. High performing councils were to receive extra freedoms to lead the way to further service improvements.
- 6.11 A government announcement in November 2002 indicated arrangements to reduce and rationalise the requirements for local authorities to prepare plans to central government specifications. This was followed up by a circular and a letter to LA Chief Executives in July 2003 (Box 10).

⁹ There are indications now that attention is being paid centrally to trying to align performance management and inspection regimes.

Box 10: Letter to Local Authority Chief Executives about reducing plan requirements (July 2003)

In summary, the mechanisms will:

- abolish the requirements for the production and submission of a substantial number of plans especially for 'excellent' authorities;
- achieve a significant rationalisation of the remaining plans so that by the end of 2005/6 there will only be:
 - 6 major services plans for non-excellent authorities in addition to the Best Value Performance Plan and the CS (not all required from all authorities);
 - a small number of plans required for specific purposes or specified areas – requirements for several of these to be reviewed with a view to abolition or further change;
 - a small number of plans that are the responsibility of a partnership of which the LA forms a part.
- For the remaining plans, there will be greater flexibility in the way that authorities are able to group requirements. Many will not be submitted to central government. Monitoring requirements are being reviewed, especially for excellent authorities, to reduce them to a minimum compatible with proper management of expenditure programmes or assessment of progress against targets. There is a presumption against any further imposition of plan requirements.
- For plans based in statute removal or streamlining is taking place in a variety of ways through legislation or Orders under section 6 of the Local Government Act 2000; Departments are progressing in rationalising requirements for 'administrative' plans, for example through the integration of multiple plans into single strategies.
- There is now greater scope for authorities to group existing plan requirements with other plans to provide more flexibility in the way they meet their obligations. There will be different degrees of planning for the subsumed plans depending upon local circumstances and priorities. The CS as a whole should be informed by the purposes for which individual strategies were previously prepared.

6.12 In November 2003, ODPM issued a consultation paper, Removing Plan Requirements, on the modification of legislation requiring certain statutory plans for relevant local authorities under section 6 of the Local Government Act 2000. It proposed to remove plan requirements for all 'excellent' authorities (according to the Comprehensive Performance Assessment) for:

- Youth Justice Plans;
- Homelessness Strategies;
- Rights of Way Improvement Plans;
- Local Transport Plans;
- Air Quality Action Plans;
- Home Energy Conservation reports;
- Local Authority Plans for Adoption Services.

6.13 One of the questions that arises is how far an 'excellent' LA necessarily means an excellent LSP. The first round of CPAs demonstrated that an excellent authority did not necessarily mean an excellent partnership; conversely there could be LSPs performing satisfactorily in areas where the local authority was rated as poor.

- 6.14 A more general issue is the need for this move towards fewer plan requirements to be accompanied by further central government moves towards a more supportive framework for integrated strategic planning and implementation.

7. Learning and good practice

I have some doubts whether “rationalisation” will, over time, lead to significantly fewer partnerships or partnership groups. They may even increase. In my view, however, the important thing is not the number – provided there’s no obvious duplication or inefficiencies, the Middlesbrough Learning partnership experience discussed at the last ALS session was a classic example – it’s the way they work and the way they work with each other that’s important and maybe that is what should provide a definition for what we mean by rationalisation.¹⁰

- 7.1 The research referred to in this paper and the examples taken from the LSPs all provide lessons about various stages of the route towards rationalisation.

A robust partnership base

- 7.2 First there are lessons relating to the basis of partnership as a precursor to rationalisation. Chapter 4 quoted the drivers of, and barriers to, partnership cited in the DETR survey (see note 6). The factors that the same study identified as being important for overcoming barriers resonate with the findings of the LSP evaluation:

- leadership in promoting partnership working;
- clarity and consensus in relation to objectives, roles, relationships and responsibilities;
- fit-for-purpose structures that encourage collaboration and integration.

- 7.3 The attributes of successful partnerships can be classified under the headings of their organisational attributes, their roles and objectives and by their skills (Box 11).

Box 11: Mapping partnerships in eleven local authorities (2)

Characteristics of successful partnerships

- *Partnership organisation attributes*
 - commitment, honesty and trust
 - understanding different partners’ limitations and culture
 - willingness to share advantages and disadvantages
- *Partnership roles and objectives*
 - a clear set-up, purpose and evaluation process
 - a win-win situation with benefits for all partners
 - identification of self-interest/aims for each partner
- *Partnership representative skills*
 - a good leader and decision-maker
 - enthusiastic of the objectives/cause of the partnership
 - professional, efficient, innovative and open-minded.

¹⁰ GO Participant in the Action Learning Set.

- 7.4 Beyond the features of the overall partnership, the DETR survey also indicates that member organisations need to adapt to partnership working and will face different challenges at progressive stages of the partnership’s development, which has implications not only for their external relationships but for their style of working and internal operation (Box 12).

Box 12: Mapping partnerships in eleven local authorities (3)
<p>Characteristics of partner organisations in successful partnerships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • their attitude included commitment, honesty and trust • a common agenda with shared objectives and an understanding of other partners’ priorities. <p>Management challenges for partner organisations vary over three distinct stages of partnership development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • initiation stage – focus on establishing good relationships and on agreeing priorities; • developmental stage – issues relating to deliverables and agreed timetables; • operational – addressing cultural issues and ensuring a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities.

Emerging good practice in rationalisation

- 7.5 It is important to emphasise these partnership characteristics because, as Austin Cutten shows, a level of confidence and maturity within the LSP is a necessary precondition of rationalisation. He summarises emerging good practice in relation to rationalisation as:

- mapping or auditing local partnerships and plans;
- a clear vision and mission statement to guide the LSP and Community Strategy;
- developing consensus regarding key priorities;
- developing a partnership structure that is fit for purpose;
- encouraging joint working arrangements and projects across agencies;
- trying to have a budget or access to mainstream budgets;
- monitoring and evaluating the partnership and strategy regularly;
- communicating successes.

Routes to rationalisation

- 7.6 There are a large number of potential avenues to producing a more rational system:

- Combining groupings to avoid the same personnel having to attend numerous partnerships and reduce transaction costs.
- Encouraging agencies to adopt the same operational boundaries for their service delivery areas.

- Co-location of some agencies/services.
- Adoption of common targets by different agencies, for example in relation to NRF.
- Exploring approaches to measuring the more difficult to quantify aspects of partnership working.
- Developing protocols to share information and developing common systems.
- More detailed mapping of resources and needs at a local level to identify overlaps and mismatches.
- Improving communication and feedback between different groups so that partners become more aware of what others can offer and also to encourage everybody to maintain a focus on cross-cutting issues.
- Obtaining alternative perspectives by handing responsibility for leading discussion of some themes to organisations not usually associated with a lead role for that theme.
- Creating theme groups and area based structures with cross-cutting membership to get at cross cutting issues and also special purpose groups in the hope that this will eventually lead to rationalisation of delivery mechanisms.
- Encouraging partners to work together on issues and outcomes rather than becoming obsessed with imperfections in structures in the expectation that form will eventually follow function.
- Sensitising senior decision makers in partner organisations to overlaps, illogicalities of service delivery by staging problem solving events involving respective front-line workers and role-swapping.
- Preventing the LSP from perpetually becoming a dumping ground for difficult issues by encouraging relevant delivery organisations to take a lead and equipping participants to influence their own organisations.
- Introducing mainstreaming mechanisms (e.g. funding conditions, incorporation of NRF targets alongside mainline targets) to prevent proliferation of temporary schemes and sustainability headaches.

7.7 The Rocket Science study focused on Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) in Scotland (the nearest equivalent to LSPs). Its objectives were to analyse examples of existing attempts at partnership rationalisation across a range of partnership activity at a strategic partnership level in two case study areas and develop general principles of good practice; and to provide practical examples of how partnership working at the local level, on a specific national policy theme (children's services), can be rationalised through an analysis of one case study CPP. Its findings echoed those relating to LSPs. It found a wide range of different approaches to achieving rationalisation, including:

- organisational and structural change;

- partnership audit and mapping;
- sharing knowledge, data, evidence;
- unifying systems for community consultation and participation;
- leadership development, change management and training;
- coherent investment and funding systems from central government;
- transforming services to customers;
- transforming the performance of whole systems;
- creating co-terminous boundaries for public services.

7.8 Box 13 shows its conclusions about the principles needed to guide successful rationalisation and lessons from the case studies.

Box 13: Partnership Rationalisation Research Study, Rocket Science, July 2003

Guiding principles for successful partnership rationalisation:

- rationalisation needs to take place at three different levels: CPP, other local partnerships, national;
- rationalisation is sustained by organisational and structural changes;
- rationalisation is driven by aspirational leadership and strong commonly owned values;
- rationalisation requires, and can benefit from, the sharing of knowledge, data and evidence;
- effective rationalisation must include community consultation and participation and a focus on customer service;
- organisational reflection, review and evaluation can bring benefits if carried out jointly;
- merging support functions across the organisations in a partnership can help bind partners together for the long term;
- rationalisation is strongly aided by coherence in central government funding systems;
- joint investment planning at local level can help bring about rationalisation;
- rationalisation can be strongly aided by applying strategic foresight to the partnership agenda;
- rationalisation requires clear visualisation of improved public service delivery.

Key lessons from case studies

- do not attempt to rationalise too much too soon – a pragmatic, incremental approach is likely to be more effective;
- be clear what you want to achieve by rationalising;
- think of the impact of rationalisation on service users and the community;
- design a rationalised structure around the needs of service users, not around the structures of partner agencies;
- think how to keep the ‘losers’ on board;
- some degree of overlap between partnerships is inevitable, so it is important to be clear on who is leading and to ensure good communications;
- it is important to work with partners to create small wins to illustrate effective community planning as well as strategic transformation;
- ensure that there is adequate forward planning for relationships and communication between groups within the rationalised structure;
- rationalisation of partnership working requires significant rationalisation of policy planning, funding, measurement and reporting systems at national level.

- 7.9 Other studies provide more detailed evidence about specific dimensions such as the institutional context, leadership and skill requirements.

The wider institutional context

- 7.10 It is notable that there have been several studies looking at community planning in Scotland^{11,12,13} – also making reference to Wales. These pay particular attention to the strategic and institutional context (Box 14) and the significance of factors such as co-terminous boundaries and centrally set frameworks.

Box 14: Community Planning in Scotland: A Final Report to the Community Planning Task Force Project, M.G.Lloyd et al

“Whilst ... the spirit of the different organisations may be willing to engage in this new way forward of partnership and common action, the institutional flesh may not.”

Two roles of community planning:

- local focus in which LAs exercise community leadership and establish a common agenda for integrated action by the different organisations involved;
- potential strategic role at sub-national level.

Locally – importance of the institutional landscape: “bewildering array of boundary institutional geographies”:

- questions of the vertical fit of institutional activity: issues of reconciling function and objective in devising common agenda; phasing of activities (e.g. re funding streams); changes to geography of institutions.
- questions of the horizontal fit between organisations’ geography: e.g. re resource allocation by organisations with a wider geographic remit than the LA area. Also similar points about timing and phasing.
- questions of the functional fit: reconciling responding to needs of communities with institutional agendas.

Compared with Wales, community planning in Scotland is taking place in a less robust strategic context. In Wales, the strategic context was set more assertively:

- a new economic development policy agenda was established immediately following the creation of the Welsh Assembly – providing an explicit spatial planning framework together with a reconfiguration of the main institutions responsible for economic development;
- there was a similar move towards strategic thinking in land use planning with the Assembly setting out 4 broad strategic objectives on the future formulation and implementation of planning policy and an emphasis on strategic thinking through regional planning policy, with LAs involved in formulating the strategic planning statements;
- thirdly, the National Spatial Planning Framework took the strategic approach further;
- fourthly, the Assembly set out a course of action to sustain and promote local government, with a lot of emphasis on partnership between LAs, business and the voluntary sector. The Assembly has a Partnership Council that consults with local government and will set out a policy agreement with LAs setting out shared goals and seeking to give local government maximum discretion and, over time, simplify the requirements associated with central-local relationships.

11 Rogers et al, op cit.

12 M.G.Lloyd, B.M. Illsley and F.Graham, (Geddes Centre for Planning Research, School of Town and Regional Planning, University of Dundee) Community Planning in Scotland, Final Report to the Community Planning Task Force Project, August 2001.

13 Robert Stevenson (RDS Consultancy Services), Getting ‘under the skin’ of Community Planning: Understanding Community Planning at Community Planning Partnership Level, Scottish Executive Social Research, 2002.

Community leadership role

7.11 Drawing on an analysis of representative corporate assessment reports, the Audit Commission also identified five factors critical to successful community leadership (Box 15). A Commission report on Manchester Council talks about the Council role requiring “highly developed skills in motivating, facilitating and problem-solving to lead through influence, rather than formal authority, and to encourage the active involvement of all partners in making decisions and managing change towards a jointly agreed set of aims and targets”.

Box 15: Critical success factors for community leadership – Audit Commission analysis of corporate assessment reports: Briefing, March 2003

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    graph TD
      Awareness((Awareness)) <--> BuildingCapacity((Building leadership capacity))
      Awareness <--> FocusPrioritisation((Focus & prioritisation))
      Awareness <--> CommunityLeadership((Community leadership))
      BuildingCapacity <--> CommunityLeadership
      FocusPrioritisation <--> CommunityLeadership
      ClarityRoles((Clarity of roles)) <--> CommunityLeadership
      WorkingTogether((Working together)) <--> CommunityLeadership
      ClarityRoles <--> WorkingTogether
  
```

Awareness in terms of the importance of:

good local intelligence and information sharing;

- good consultation and engagement mechanisms;
- effective networks to enable targets to be set with partners and wider community and provide feedback on reasons behind council decisions;
- self-awareness of officers and councillors of a council's strengths and weaknesses and regular critical appraisal of plans and actions leading to understanding of the council's own capacity and influence and extent of partners' capacities.

Focus and prioritisation

- clear and ambitious vision for the council's communities;
- defined set of priorities;
- a community strategy that provides a coherent framework for service planning for the council and partners, is recognised at all levels within the organisation and that balances national and local priorities;
- CS translated into targeted activity and reflected in more detailed plans; with activity backed by clear targets, robust performance and risk management and tied to resources.

Working together

- recognition of the benefits of improved joined-up working, within the council and with other organisations, at strategic and operational levels, to increase capacity, pool resources and deliver better services to users;
- change of role from traditional service delivery towards mixed economy underlines importance of partnership working with council influencing beyond traditional boundaries and seeking to operate in different ways.

Box 15: Critical success factors for community leadership – Audit Commission analysis of corporate assessment reports: Briefing, March 2003 (cont.)

Clarity of roles within the council and between it, its partners and stakeholders

- entails clear definition from the outset and ensuring roles are fully understood and valued;
- need therefore for robust and effective scrutiny arrangements linked to strategic planning, budget processes and performance planning and measurement;
- increase in partnership working has made clarity of role between councils and their partners more important: need for forum for discussion, sharing and ongoing dialogue as well as formal contracts and SLAs;
- communication of service and delivery arrangements to local community and stakeholders to establish expectations and accountability.

Building leadership capacity

- community leadership is provided by a range of individuals, including the council leader, other councillors, the chief executive, senior officers, partners and community leaders;
- good councils acknowledge and promote their own role as community leaders – and it is widely recognised – but also play key role in encouraging other partners in the community to take leadership initiative by providing support and fostering empowerment;
- community leadership style should be appropriate to the complex operating environment; depending upon the maturity and strengths of partners, this may require strong directional leadership or subtle management, a facilitative approach, sharing control and power and undertaking collaborative work.;
- having the requisite skills can mean investing in training and development programmes for councillors and officers.

Capacity building needs

7.12 Box 16 gives the findings of OPM research into local government capacity-building needs commissioned by ODPM. It showed that the increased emphasis on partnership working has thrown up skills and knowledge issues for most authorities at management and member levels. “In part, this is because organisations are naturally territorial, but also because councils have different politics, egos, cultures and structures, and serve different local communities.”

Box 16: OPM research commissioned by ODPM (June 2003) *Capacity building in local government – research on capacity building needs*

“The challenge for local authorities is to develop inclusive partnerships that add value to the local authority’s work – and to become more proficient at using the capacity of other organisations.”

Key skill gaps

- coalition building
- vision and consensus building
- communicating
- consulting
- managing change
- delegating
- influencing
- negotiating roles and contributions

Box 16: OPM research commissioned by ODPM (June 2003) Capacity building in local government – research on capacity building needs (cont.)

Key gaps in knowledge

- needs and opportunities that provide the basis for common ground
- policy and funding developments
- partner roles, contributions, constraints and motivations
- potential benefits, costs and risks for individual partners
- forms of partnership that add most value
- inter-dependencies between partner activities
- how to overcome barriers to partner engagement and commitment
- use of performance management systems to reinforce partnership.

Top team: Key requirements are ability to think strategically and act corporately.

CPA results and IDeA peer reviews have shown the importance of strong, shared leadership from the chief executive and political leadership. The Audit Commission found three capacities commonly demonstrated in authorities rated as good or excellent:

- ability to focus on priorities;
- ability to build effective partnerships;
- ability to manage performance effectively.

Managing change – difficulties of filtering change through the entire organisation.

Operational management

- need to share/learn from good practice;
- need for performance management skills;
- using management information effectively is a knowledge and skill gap in many authorities.

Looking ahead

7.13 Various developments were heralded during the course of the ALS that are likely to affect the policy and institutional context for rationalisation. Some of these, such as the Innovation Forum work on localism and governance, are bringing forward ideas for new forms of joined up local decision making and service delivery which would strengthen the horizontal links between partners and relax some of the vertical accountabilities to Government.

Countering the proliferation of ABIs

7.14 There have also been some moves towards reducing the complexity and increasing the coherence of future central government initiatives. In Autumn 2003, the Regional Co-ordination Unit issued Guidance to Departments to explain “the essential role that the RCU/GO network performs in supporting the Domestic Affairs (Social Exclusion and Regeneration) Sub-Committee’s collective oversight of new schemes and programmes”. The idea is for the RCU to fulfil a gateway role and that any government departments planning targeted activity should work with the RCU and base their plans on the principles set out in the Guidance. One of the points made in the Guidance is that departments should consider how LSPs in the areas concerned would be involved in any new initiative given their key role “in the rationalisation of partnerships and co-ordination of initiatives in their areas”.

Local Area Agreements

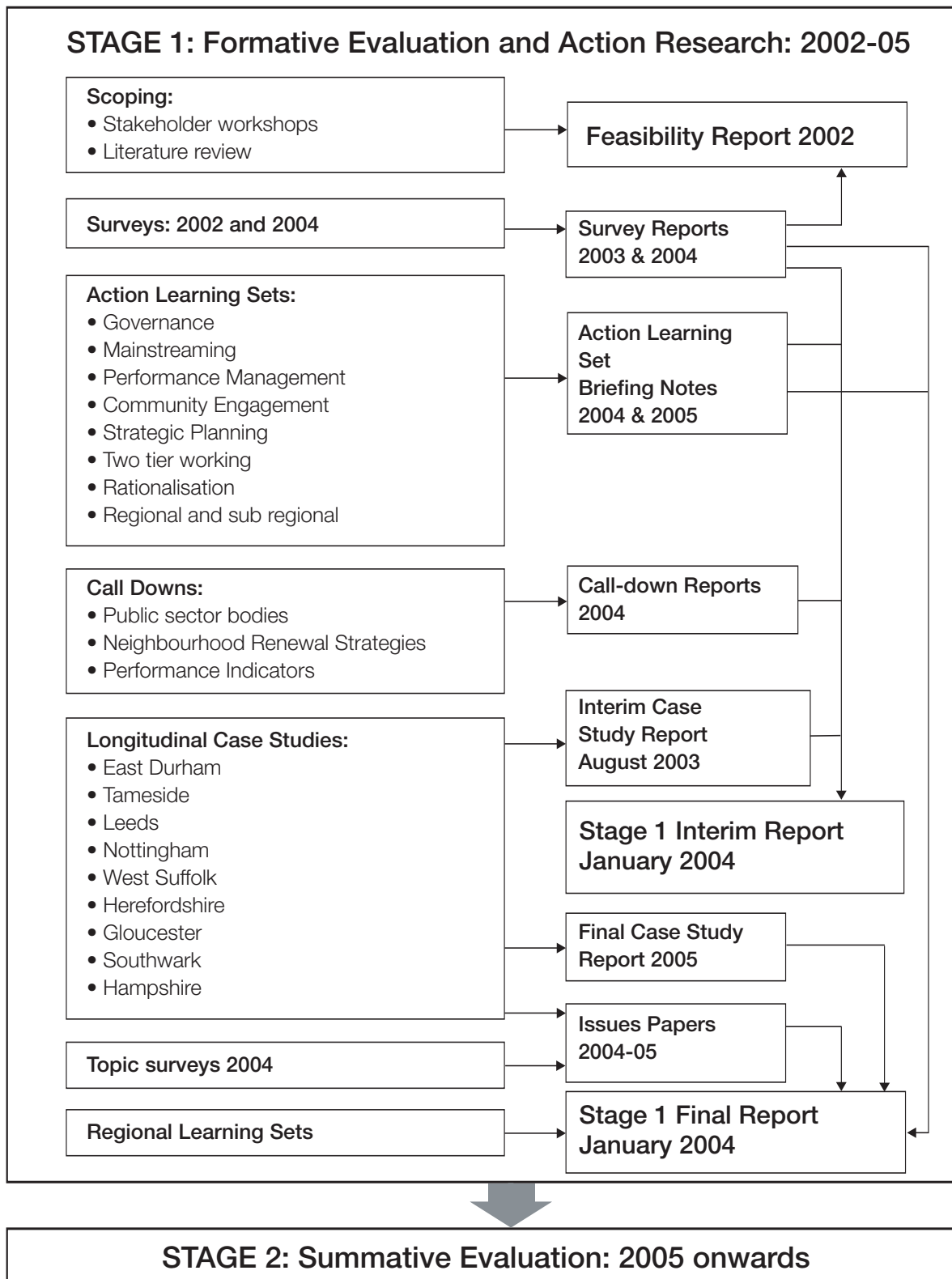
“Local Area Agreements represent a radical new approach to improve co-ordination between central government and local authorities and their partners, working through the Local Strategic Partnership.” (Local Area Agreements: a prospectus, p.5)

7.15 Local Area Agreements are being piloted. Their perceived advantages are that they will:

- focus on a range of agreed outcomes, shared by all the delivery partners locally;
- help partners to join up at local level and enhance the community leadership role of local authorities;
- allow greater flexibility for local solutions for particular local circumstances;
- enhance efficiency by rationalising non-mainstream funding programmes thus reducing administration costs and simplifying monitoring and auditing requirements.

7.16 The pilots offer the chance to learn how far relaxing funding requirements is helpful to LSPs. The introduction of LAAs would strengthen the role of the LSP. They would require a different central-local relationship. Central government would continue to set high level strategic priorities and targets, but would have to let go of the more detailed day-to-day control of their programmes and allow LSPs to decide which priorities best meet local circumstances. The parallel challenge for LSPs is to ensure that their membership, organisation and executive arrangements are sufficiently robust to take advantages of these new opportunities.

Appendix I: Overview of the Evaluation



Appendix 2: Action Learning Set Topics

Year 1

Governance

Mainstreaming

Performance Management

Community Engagement

Strategic Planning

Year 2

Two Tier Working

Rationalisation

Regional and Sub-regional Working

Appendix 3: Membership of the Rationalisation Action Learning Set

LSPs

Helen Barry, Burnley Action Partnership Manager

Kate Brown, Vice Principal Middlesbrough College/Vice Chair, Middlesbrough LSP

John Eley, LSP Co-ordinator, Tameside

Rachel Flood, Community Planning Co-ordinator, Wirral

Katherine Forbes, Policy & Liaison Manager, Newcastle

Mike Heaslip, West Cumbria Partnership

John Murphy, Principal Neighbourhood Renewal Officer, Easington

Sheila Murtagh, Salford Partnership Manager

Samantha Plum, Principal Policy & Partnership Officer, Pendle

Lesley Pritchard, Assistant Preston Strategic Partnership Manager

Sue Stevenson, Strategic Partnership Development Officer, Cumbria

Stephanie Thornton, Community Engagement Team Leader, Rochdale

Sarah Wainwright, Principal Strategy Officer, Community Planning, Barnsley

Government Offices

Janet Munn GOYH

Tony Stephenson, GONE (Regional Housing Board)

Jobcentre Plus

Neil Hickling, Head of Business Development Yorkshire and Humberside

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Material also used from

Bradford LSP

Wycombe DC

LB Camden

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Professor Hilary Russell, European Institute for Urban Affairs, Liverpool John Moores University

Dr Richard Evans, European Institute for Urban Affairs, Liverpool John Moores University

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