What are local strategic partnerships?

A local strategic partnership (LSP) is a single body that: brings together at a local level the different parts of the public sector as well as the private, business, community and voluntary sectors so that different initiatives and services support each other and work together; is a non-statutory, non-executive organisation; operates at a level which enables strategic decisions to be taken and is close enough to individual neighbourhoods to allow actions to be determined at community level; and should be aligned with local authority boundaries.

Why better partnership working matters
Public, private, community and voluntary sector organisations all have a part to play in improving quality of life. The more they can work together, with local people, the more they can achieve and the more likely it is that: the benefits of sustainable growth are achieved across the country; economic, social and physical regeneration happens and is sustained in deprived areas; public services work better and are delivered in ways which meet people's needs; local people can influence decision-making and take action to improve their neighbourhoods; and business and the community and voluntary sectors can play a full and equal part.

Tackling key issues for local people such as crime, jobs, education, health and housing requires a range of local organisations working together. There are already many successful partnerships involving local government, local providers of other public services (such as health, the police, the Employment Service and the Benefits Agency), and local businesses and voluntary organisations. Tackling the biggest challenges, such as social exclusion and the renewal of our most deprived neighbourhoods, demands concerted and co-ordinated effort across all sectors. The Government wants to work with other organisations and with local people to establish 'local strategic partnerships' that can achieve this. These partnerships will bring the key organisations together to identify communities' top priorities and needs and to work with local people to address them.

A number of recent initiatives seek to foster the establishment of such partnerships: the introduction of statutory community strategies; steps to rationalise and simplify existing partnerships; the piloting of local agreements between central and local government to tackle key national and local priorities on health, education, community safety and other quality-of-life issues; and the launch of a national strategy to renew the country's most deprived neighbourhoods.

Further information on each of these initiatives is set out in Box 1.

Box 1:
Programmes promoting partnership working Programme

Community Strategies: new duty on local authorities in England and Wales under Local Government Act 2000 to prepare community strategies. The steps central government will take will be set out in summer 2001.

Rationalisation of the many current separate partnerships, plans and initiatives. The steps central government will take will be set out in summer 2001.

Local Public Service Agreements (PSAs): pilots with 20 authorities in 2001/02. With 130 other 'top tier' authorities on a voluntary basis in the two years following 2001/02.


Objectives

To improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of each area and its inhabitants, and contribute to the achievement of sustainable development in the UK.

To integrate existing plans and initiatives so that it is easier to deliver improvements in health, education, crime and so on; reduce duplication and unnecessary bureaucracy; and make it easier for partners, including those outside the statutory sector, to get involved.

To allow local authorities to commit themselves to delivering key national and local priorities in return for agreed flexibilities, pump-priming funding, and financial rewards if they meet their targets.

To narrow the gap between the most deprived neighbourhoods and the rest of the country, with common goals of lower unemployment and crime, and better health, education, housing and physical environment.

Why working together is important

Local authorities have many of the responsibilities and powers needed to bring about improvements in their communities. But other public services, local people, business, and the voluntary and community sectors also need to be given opportunities to contribute.

Complex problems need concerted and co-ordinated action. Partners need to ensure they work effectively across all of their activities. They need to be able to do so in ways that avoid duplication and wasted resources.
Local authorities will need to show that their proposals are supported by local people and other local partners. Joint working will almost always be needed to deliver local PSA targets.

Effective neighbourhood renewal depends on services working together to plan and deliver concerted improvements in public services. Local people, business and the voluntary sector all need to have opportunities to contribute.

Government guidance was issued in December 2000 on Preparing Community Strategies.

The need for rationalisation is set out in the report on the review into Government intervention in deprived areas (GIDA), which forms chapter 23 of the 2000 Spending Review (Prudent for a purpose: building opportunity and security for all), published in July 2000.

Local Public Service Agreements: A Prospectus for Local Authorities was issued in July 2000.

A New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal.

What will LSPs do and how will they operate?

Local partners will decide the full range of work of their LSP. To begin with, core tasks will be to: prepare and implement a community strategy for the area, identify and deliver the most important things which need to be done, keep track of progress, and keep it up to date; bring together local plans, partnerships and initiatives to provide a forum through which mainstream public service providers (local authorities, the police, health services, central government agencies and so on) work effectively together to meet local needs and priorities; work with local authorities that are developing a local public service agreement (PSA) to help devise and then meet suitable targets; and develop and deliver a local neighbourhood renewal strategy to secure more jobs, better education, improved health, reduced crime and better housing, closing the gap between deprived neighbourhoods and the rest and contributing to the national targets for tackling deprivation (set out in Box 2).
Box 2:

Key PSA targets tackling deprivation
These targets will ensure that everybody, wherever they live, can expect a minimum level of basic services:

Education:
Increase the percentage of pupils obtaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C (or equivalent) to at least 38 per cent in every LEA by 2004. A target to reduce the attainment gap at Key Stage 2 (age 11) in English and Maths will be announced later in 2001.

Employment:
Over the three years to 2004, taking account of the economic cycle, increase the employment rates of the 30 local authority districts with the poorest initial labour market position, and reduce the difference between employment rates in these areas and the overall rate.

Crime:
Reduce the level of crime in deprived areas so that by 2005, no local authority area has a domestic burglary rate more than three times the national average; over the same period, reduce the national rate by 25 per cent.

Health:
By 2010 reduce by at least 10 per cent the gap between the 20 per cent of areas with the lowest life expectancy at birth and the population as a whole. Reduce, by at least 60 per cent by 2010, the conception rate among under 18s in the worst 20 per cent of wards, and thereby reduce the level of inequality between these areas and the average by at least 26 per cent by 2010.

Housing:
All social housing to be of a decent standard by 2010, with the number of families living in non-decent social housing falling by 33 per cent by 2004 and with most of the improvement taking place in the most deprived local authority areas.
For LSPs to rise to the challenges these tasks present, they will need to: develop a variety of means to work with and consult local people, including faith, black and minority ethnic communities; build common purpose and shared commitment; develop and publicise common aims and priorities; value the contribution of all partners, avoiding domination by particular members or organisations; share local information and good practice; identify, encourage and support effective local initiatives; develop a common performance management system; and provide a forum for debate, discussion and common decision-making.

How will LSPs get started?

Local authorities are well placed to take on the initial responsibility of bringing together key partners to establish an LSP. Many have already done so, and those that have not may be able to learn from the experience of those that have taken early steps. To tackle their tasks effectively, LSPs need to secure genuine involvement from all sectors and the local community as quickly as possible. They will need to make real efforts to involve people who are traditionally under-represented, such as faith, black and minority ethnic communities. Existing strategic partnerships involving the main local players provide a good place to start. Their membership and structure may need some adjustment, especially to secure involvement from the community, voluntary organisations and business. Partnerships need to find ways to give everyone a voice on the issues that matter to them, and also to recognise that not every partner will want, or be able, to be involved in all discussions.

Who should be members of the LSP?

The membership and size of an LSP should reflect its aims and the issues with which it is dealing. These will vary from place to place and membership should be determined locally. To ensure that they can tackle their core tasks successfully, each LSP's core membership needs to include: public sector organisations which serve the partnership area; community organisations and local people; voluntary organisations; and businesses.

The Government strongly encourages the involvement of local authority elected members in LSPs. Local authorities are responsible for a range of key services, and also have wide democratic responsibilities for their local communities. The involvement of other local providers of public services is equally important. Effective engagement with communities will be essential to partnerships' success. Voluntary organisations are a key element in communities' social fabric and are often best placed to involve people who might otherwise prove hard to reach. Businesses are significant users and suppliers of local services as well as key providers of local employment. Effective local strategic partnerships will engage with and involve all these sectors.
Who will lead LSPs?

Once the first steps have been taken, members of the LSP should decide who should take the lead. It may often be the local authority, but it does not have to be any partner could lead it. Good leadership of an LSP would inspire vision, enthusiasm and commitment, and command the trust of other partners, including local communities.

Joining up with Government Offices

All LSPs should establish early contact with the relevant Government Office for their region, and agree how the Government Office will work with the partnership. They should also identify as soon as possible any important statutory or non-statutory partners who appear reluctant to participate fully, and ensure they come on board. The Government Offices will be able to help where there are problems.

Opportunities for rationalisation

Early links should be established between LSPs and other existing partnerships, such as those dealing with crime, education, jobs, health and housing. Opportunities to rationalise membership and activities should be identified LSPs should reduce, not add to, the time commitment expected of partners.

What will central government do to help LSPs deliver?

It will help local strategic partnerships to succeed in a number of ways: local deliverers of central government services will play a full part in LSPs; Government resources and programmes will help local organisations to deliver improvements in public services, and to meet the targets for health, crime, jobs, education and housing set out in Box 2; well-argued proposals from effective LSPs to rationalise plans, partnerships and initiatives will meet with a positive response. Further Government proposals on the rationalisation of partnerships and plan requirements will be published in the summer; the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (NRU) will provide drive in the implementation of the national strategy, and join up Whitehall to do so; funds for mainstream public services have been increased substantially to improve their delivery across the board and especially in areas of deprivation; the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) will provide specific additional funding to support neighbourhood renewal (available from 2001/02 for the 88 local authority areas with the highest concentrations of deprivation) and an effective LSP will be a condition for the receipt of the NRF in future years; and in the same 88 areas, the Community Empowerment Fund will support community and voluntary sector activity and involvement in LSPs.
What is the role of Government Offices?

Government Offices will provide a direct channel of communication to Government and will act as: facilitators to support the development of LSPs; mediators to resolve difficulties which may arise over the participation of Government agencies in LSPs, and in the negotiation of partnership and plan-rationalisation proposals; and accreditors to assess whether NRF grant conditions have been met and whether LSPs are effective and involve genuine community participation.

What next?

From April 2001:
The NRU will be operational; Government Offices will support local partners in the development of LSPs, and will form neighbourhood renewal teams to deal with their responsibilities under the National Strategy; the 88 local authority areas eligible for support from the NRF will receive the first year's funding; local PSA pilots will begin with 20 local authorities, and agreements with the further 130 top-tier authorities (unitary, metropolitan, county, and London boroughs) will be rolled out in the following two years; and Government Offices will work with the community and voluntary sector in deprived areas to ensure they are fully involved and participate in LSPs, and provide financial support through the Community Empowerment Fund to help achieve this.
In summer 2001 the Government will publish: the results of Departmental reviews showing how the resources allocated in the 2000 Spending Review will ensure the delivery of the key neighbourhood renewal national targets; proposals on the rationalisation of partnerships and plans; and more information on accreditation for access to the NRF, and a draft NRF Special Grant Report for 2002/03 for consultation.

By April 2002:

LSPs in the 88 NRF areas will have agreed their local neighbourhood renewal strategies.
Response to consultation
This summary, and the remainder of the guidance, takes into account the responses to the comments received on the draft guidance published last year. In particular, the final guidance emphasises even more strongly: the value of successful partnership working in tackling communities' problems and priorities; the importance of involving local people, including faith, black and minority ethnic communities; and central government's commitment to supporting LSPs and helping them to succeed.
A more detailed report on the outcome of the consultation exercise is being published separately.
Copies of the complete report are available from:

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