



Chester-le-Street

District Council

Partnership & Efficiency Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Review to assess the effectiveness of Community Partnerships to the council, its partners and the community



March 2008

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**REPORT OF PARTNERSHIP & EFFICIENCY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
PANEL
REVIEW OF COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**

Foreword of the Chair

The Partnership and Efficiency Overview and Scrutiny Panel investigated the effectiveness of community partnerships as part of its 2007/08 work programme.

The review conducted by the panel was a piece of work that looked into the effectiveness of community partnerships and the value of these to the council, partners and the community as a whole. As a panel we visited a neighbouring local authority, held focus groups with stakeholders and developed a questionnaire for use as part of the review process. Council officers were also interviewed as part of this process.

On behalf of the scrutiny panel I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the officers, organisations and individuals involved in this review for their contributions. The panel found, in particular, the visit to Gateshead Council most helpful during the review process. It is hoped that the recommendations contained within this report will help towards highlighting the worth of community engagement within the District and help towards shaping community engagement within the new authority.

It is further hoped that the review report and evidence gathered contributes to Chester-le-Street District Council's new single priority of 'People and Place'.

The review was carried out between June 2007 and March 2008.

Cllr David Holding

Chair of Partnership and Efficiency Overview and Scrutiny Panel

**REPORT OF PARTNERSHIP & EFFICIENCY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
PANEL
REVIEW OF COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**

MEMBERSHIP OF THE PANEL

| | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Councillor David Holding | Chairman of Partnership & Efficiency Overview and Scrutiny panel |
| Councillor Martin Gollan | Vice-Chairman of Partnership & Efficiency Overview and Scrutiny Panel |
| Councillor Lawson Armstrong | Panel Member |
| Councillor Richard Court | Panel Member |
| Councillor Syd Greatwich | Panel Member |
| Councillor Philip Nathan | Panel Member |
| Councillor Mike Sekowski | Panel Member |
| Councillor John Shiell | Panel Member |
| Councillor Tracie Smith | Panel Member |

**REPORT OF PARTNERSHIP & EFFICIENCY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
PANEL
REVIEW OF COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 With more emphasis being placed on empowering communities and individuals with local decision making through government policy, the importance of community partnerships and their effectiveness is increasingly paramount. Community Partnerships have created links between service providers and communities, provide a channel for information flow between the two and have the ability to increase community influence and develop the social capital.
- 1.2 Issues that have a real impact on local communities at a ground level are of more concern to Community Partnership Representatives than greater larger scale strategic changes that sometimes are difficult to assess or convert into tangible outcomes. Community Partnerships have also helped to narrow the gap between local politicians and community leaders.
- 1.3 The Police as a service provider have been highlighted in a number of areas of this research for their commitment to communities. The engagement undertaken by the police has improved their own legitimacy as well as providing a boost to public confidence. The police have understood the benefits of community engagement and realise that some of their best intelligence gathering can only be provided by developing and improving such engagement and Community Partnerships are seen as an appropriate vehicle. Also in terms of community safety the police have relied significantly on Community Partnerships and their relationship with community organisations for intelligence gathering.
- 1.4 Local people tend to dip in and out of Community Partnerships dependent on subject matter and it is important to note that this involvement is voluntary. Many people want to help or rally to a particular cause and become involved in a local issue. However it is more difficult and ultimately time consuming for people to develop knowledge and skills to engage on a more strategic level with service providers. This time and commitment is something that many people cannot or do not wish to invest in a voluntary capacity. Compounding this is Chester-le-Street's geographical position making it the highest commuter area in the North East with 70% of people working outside the district. This has potential implications in terms of community loyalty and the ability of individuals to invest their spare capacity into community activities.
- 1.5 Without the appropriate feedback on their contribution many local people become discouraged from future engagement especially when weighed against personal and social costs. There is an improved likelihood of developing further engagement if actions and results are seen to result

through adequate feedback mechanisms with feelings of empowerment increased.

- 1.6 There is a suggestion that Community Partnerships operate in a top-down approach with a one-way communication model. The evidence of Community Partnership Representatives does not support this, as those interviewed were satisfied with their involvement and felt supported and valued. This top down perception is perhaps a view taken by those not actively engaged with Community Partnerships and is something that needs to be addressed.
- 1.7 Community Partnerships as a process engage certain kinds of people from within communities and are often criticised for only attracting the 'usual suspects', despite efforts by the LSP to engage wider representation. However, it is important that these 'willing participants' are not discredited or castigated but supported and highly valued. What does need to be looked at is a variety of engagement methods to maximise engagement within communities. While local communities have many similarities they also offer a diversity that ensures the use of the same model of engagement may not always bring success. This is not to say that the model used is wrong simply that it is the wrong 'fit' for that community or that a portfolio of different approaches to community engagement is used, with Community Partnerships just one part of this. To an extent this is true of other parts of the LSP and Council which use different approaches e.g. in relation to children and young people.
- 1.8 Community Partnerships need to be seen as closely related to the Council's activity to support a network of residents and tenants associations across the District, many of which have matured into very effective mechanisms for local action e.g. the Lumley Residents Association and the Lilac House Tenants and Residents Association. Also from the perspective of LSP partners, there are other consultative mechanisms to be borne in mind. Community Partnerships are not a mechanism for engaging young people, and indeed may be an inappropriate vehicle for doing so. However the Local Children's Board (one of the LSPs seven thematic groups) does have a responsibility and mechanisms for engaging with children and young people to inform its work and the work of the LSP.
- 1.9 The structures and support need to be adequately resourced to ensure that expectation, reward and the full potential of community partnerships and engagement generally can be experienced by as many stakeholders as possible. Trust and confidence need to be built and this takes time, resources and commitment; but without investing in local people effective engagement within communities is potentially very difficult. There is a need to look at the community development training needs of local people so they can acquire the knowledge, confidence and skills to think more strategically. If community groups and individuals are given the right tools they are able to organise themselves more effectively becoming empowered to take action and become self sufficient.

- 1.10 The Community Partnerships that operate within Chester-le-Street have developed in different ways and not without casualties along the way; Sacriston and Lumley Community Partnerships have ceased while Chester-le-Street Central and Pelton have developed. It is important, particularly in the light of LGR that any future development or investment looks at the lessons learned.

2 Introduction

- 2.1 The Local Government Act 2000 placed a duty on local authorities to prepare a Community Strategy for improving and promoting the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of their area. Government guidance on Community Strategies makes it clear that Local Authorities are expected to prepare Community Strategies in partnership with other local organisations and agencies and recommended doing this with the establishment of a Local Strategic Partnership (LSP).
- 2.2 LSPs were introduced as a way of improving community inclusion in the development of priorities for service provision on a local level and community participation was viewed as one of the measures of a successful LSP.
- 2.3 A Local Strategic Partnership is a non-statutory, multi-agency body that matches local authority boundaries and aims to bring together, at local level, the different parts of the public, private, community and voluntary sectors. The membership of any LSP should include the private, public, voluntary and the community sectors and representatives on the LSP should have the necessary leadership and leverage in their own organisations. The Government states that 'LSP's are key to tackling deep-seated, multi-faceted problems, requiring a range of responses from different bodies. Local partners working through a LSP will be expected to take many of the major decisions about priorities for their local area.'

3 Purpose of the Review

- 3.1 The purpose of the review was to assess the value of Community Partnerships; investigate future challenges to community engagement as well as looking at models of practice in other local authorities; and to ensure that the council, the community and its partners secure improvement and better value for money from Community Partnerships.
- 3.2 The purpose of this report is to present the findings of the Partnership & Efficiency Overview and Scrutiny Panel following their investigations. The review considered Community Partnerships as a mechanism for community involvement and its benefits to the council, community and partners who are involved.

4 Scrutiny Review Process

- 4.1 Scrutiny reviews are in-depth studies into an issue which has been identified by scrutiny members as important to the community and Council of Chester-le-Street.
- 4.2 Scrutiny reviews investigate issues by a process of gathering evidence through speaking to individuals and groups that are involved or affected. The review panel then formulates realistic evidence based recommendations which are presented to the Council's Executive.
- 4.3 Scrutiny reviews will carry out a number of stages in undertaking and completing a review. The stages broadly are:

Stage 1 Scope The initial stage of the review identifies the background, issues, potential outcomes and timetable for the review.

Stage 2 Investigate The panel gathers evidence using a variety of tools and techniques and arranges site visits where appropriate.

Stage 3 Analyse The key trends and issues are highlighted from the evidence gathered by the panel.

Stage 4 Clarify The panel discusses and identifies the principal messages of the review from the work undertaken.

Stage 5 Recommend The panel formulates and agrees realistic recommendations.

Stage 6 Report Draft and final reports are prepared based on the evidence, findings and recommendations.

Stage 7 Monitor The panel undertakes to monitor agreed recommendations on a regularly agreed basis.

5 Background

- 5.1 In Chester-le-Street the District Partnership is the LSP with the first Community Strategy launched in 2004 and a further updated Sustainable Community Strategy launched in November 2006.
- 5.2 Within the Local Strategic Partnership framework, area based Community Partnerships were established for the purpose of providing a vehicle for dialogue between residents and agencies providing services for communities within the Chester-le-Street district. There are also elected/nominated

Community Partnership Representatives with a specific role in relation to the Community Partnerships and the LSP.

- 5.3 In Chester-le-Street the District Council has supported the LSP by building community engagement pathways through Community Partnerships. The Council supports Community Partnerships in a similar way to resident and tenant associations through staff, advice and grant support to facilitate capacity building within these groups. It should be noted that the review is looking at the Council's work on community engagement and involvement, and the bigger picture is one of a variety of services using an array of approaches to deliver community engagement and engage users in service design.
- 5.4 The Government's aspirations are to empower communities through councils, communities and citizens. There has already been an announced reduction of central performance indicators from 1200 to fewer than 200 for local councils. An agenda of participatory budgeting, citizens' juries and transfer of assets to local groups is moving forward.
- 5.5 The Communities and Local Government Secretary has also announced a new 'empowerment' White Paper to be published in summer 2008. The paper will be based on four themes, regenerating deprived areas, encouraging active citizenship, improving local public services and strengthening local accountability.

6 Terms of Reference

- 6.1 To assess the value of Community Partnerships to the council, partners and the community and to learn from the current arrangements.
- 6.2 To understand the compositions, procedures and functions of Community Partnerships to assess any successes or failings.
- 6.3 To review the concept or nature of Community Partnerships and to develop and consider options for change.
- 6.4 To investigate proposals for the future engagement of the community in relation to the LSP and the Council.
- 6.5 To compare models of practice from other local authorities in relation to the Community Partnership approach.
- 6.6 To review how effective the voluntary sector is represented at Community Partnerships.

7 Methodology

- 7.1 The review panel was working to a clearly agreed timetable. The timetable was a useful tool by which progress could be monitored and also provided a basis for progress reports to the main panel meetings.
- 7.2 A list of publications, papers and documents was assembled by the Scrutiny Officer and a bibliography can be found in Section 12 of this report.
- 7.3 Interviews were conducted with:
- Jeremy Brock (Community Strategy Manager)
 - Jorge Lulic (Community Development Manager)
 - Allyson Rose (Community Engagement Officer)
 - Cllr Linda Ebbatson (Leader Chester-le-Street District Council)
 - Cllr Stephen Barr (Portfolio Holder – Community Engagement & Partnership Working)
 - Belinda Lewis (Chester-le-Street & District CVS)
 - Staff from Gateshead Council
 - Colin Reynolds (Pelton Area Community Partnership Representative)
 - Edna Stokoe (Chester-le-Street Area Community Partnership Representative)
 - Elaine Stockton (Chester-le-Street Area Community Partnership Representative)
 - Ian Miller (Durham County PCT)
 - Nick Springham (Durham County PCT)
 - Trevor Watson (Chief Superintendent – Durham Police Authority)
 - Cllr Brian Ebbatson (Durham County Council)
 - Jayne Mills (Community Engagement – Durham County Council)
- 7.4 A visit was arranged to Gateshead Council as part of the scrutiny panel's evidence gathering process. The purpose was to look at differing models of practice in relation to Community Partnerships. It should be noted that whilst Gateshead is a neighbouring authority it is wholly different to Chester-le-Street DC being a metropolitan unitary authority.
- 7.5 Members of the panel also attended a number of Community Partnership meetings throughout the review period to gain an understanding of the performance and operation of these meetings.
- 7.6 A variety of desktop research was conducted to gain an insight into current developments in community engagement, neighbouring authorities' approaches and highlighted case studies of innovative and successful initiatives in this area.

8 Findings of the Review

8.1 The Council's Community Strategy Manager provided Members of the panel with a detailed overview on Community Partnerships within the Chester-le-Street district.

8.2 Originally Community Partnerships were held four times per year with all district and county councillors invited, covering the following areas:

| | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Chester-le-Street Central | 83 members (Regular attendees' c20) |
| Sacrison | 41 members (Regular attendees' c10) |
| Pelton | 54 members (Regular attendees' c12) |
| Lumley | 80 members (Regular attendees' c40). |

8.3 In 2006 the Communities and Partnerships Team took the decision to move to meetings three times per year. This was in response to concerns over meeting fatigue by participants and Community Partnership Representatives (many of whom attend a range of other resident and community group meetings – with Community Partnerships sometimes seen as an additional layer) and to better reflect the capacity within the team to manage this frequency of meetings.

8.4 In Lumley the Community Partnership had, since its inception, failed to generate a significant level of participants. This was due to several important reasons:

- Community Partnerships had in other areas been set up to link with the established PCT Local Advisory Group structures – in Lumley no such structure existed.
- In Lumley a very active Resident and Tenant Association was in existence and in effect provided competition for resident's time and interest, and that of agencies who might also be invited to attend.
- The reluctance of LSP partner organisations to attend what were seen as smaller/marginal groups/areas.

8.5 In 2006 discussions took place with representatives of the Resident Association to join with them and for it to provide a link to the LSP. This has worked reasonably well with LSP partners discussing issues with the association members, however more thought needs to be given to how best make this work. Seeking a representative from this group to participate in LSP activity is one such issue.

8.6 In Sacrison, the Community Partnership initially worked effectively but due to the activity of the Sacrison Development Group leading on action such as the 'Urban Renaissance' regeneration scheme, numbers quickly dwindled. The

reluctance of LSP partner organisations to attend what were seen as smaller/marginal groups/areas was also a significant factor.

- 8.7 In 2007 the decision was made to suspend Community Partnership in Sacriston and invite members on our contact list to the other meetings in the Pelton Area and Chester-le-Street Area.
- 8.8 Whilst there may be a perception that Community Partnership agendas are determined in a 'top-down' fashion the evidence of this research would suggest this is not shared amongst Community Partnership Representatives. Agendas are determined via a process of regular pre-meetings with Community Partnership Representatives, the LSP manager and the Community Development Team.
- 8.9 A variety of topics have been discussed at Community Partnership meetings including:
- Regeneration Strategy and Town Centre Regeneration
 - Neighbourhood Management
 - Local Government Reorganisation
 - Transfer of Council Housing Stock
 - Provision of local bus services.

The list is not exhaustive but does provide examples of the themes and issues that have been discussed at partnership meetings.

- 8.10 It can be difficult to measure and even demonstrate effectiveness when much of the achievements of community partnerships revolve around information sharing, creating dialogue and developing discussion rather than measurable projects. To date there have been no surveys conducted into this area with Community Partnerships.
- 8.11 Key events have demonstrated the value and interest amongst residents and communities in LSP activities including:
- Launch of Sustainable Community Strategy in November 2006 attended by approx. 160 people with the majority being local residents and community group representatives.
 - LSP consultation event on proposals for Local Government Reorganisation held on 22 May 2007 attended by 75 local residents and community group representatives.
- 8.12 Community Partnerships provide a forum for dialogue and information sharing. They have no funds to deliver interventions, unlike many neighbouring authorities, and are not currently a mechanism for delivering neighbourhood services, or for developing neighbourhood regeneration schemes. Whilst there is no funding there is commitment from the local

authority in officer time and support. However developments in this area are being considered including:

- **Community Engagement and Involvement Strategy:** Adopted by the Council and the District Partnership in 2006. Implementation of this strategy may lead to changes in the way partners work together to share resources and simplify engagement mechanisms. One of the issues is to ensure that LSP community engagement is more inclusive.
- **Multi-agency Locality Arrangements:** A number of partner organisations including LSP policy groups are keen to base delivery arrangements around this approach.

8.13 The Leader of the Council and Executive Member with Portfolio responsibilities for Community Engagement and Partnership Working were invited to a focus group as part of the review process. The complete notes from this meeting are attached at Appendix 1 of this report. The main points however, were as follows;

- Community needs are not just about providing services but also developing communities to make them stronger
- The Council can only deliver on its aims and objectives in partnership with other organisations and by empowering citizens.
- LSP organisations are made up of bodies from the public, community and voluntary sectors. Community Partnerships within Chester-le-Street and have had to develop their strength from necessity due to lack of external funding.
- Strong partnership working is evident across the district.
- Representatives from Community Partnerships on the LSP Steering Group bring the voice of communities to the table.
- Issues of capacity and understanding for community representatives.
- There will always be issues of disengagement but the role of the local authority is that of enabler not controller.
- People and communities must have the desire to engage and develop the social capital or it will not work.
- Issues of Local Government Review will ultimately have a major impact on the future of LSPs; however, local communities and neighbourhoods will remain.

8.14 The Community Development Manager and Community Engagement Officer were invited to a focus group as part of the review process. The complete

notes from this meeting are attached at Appendix 2 of this report. The main points however, were as follows;

- Chester-le-Street had not qualified for any Neighbourhood Renewal or Community Empowerment Funding which was available to help establish Community Partnerships in other locations.
- Since inception the Lumley Partnership had disbanded and there continued to be problems with attendance within the Pelton and Sacriston areas.
- New initiatives and engagement techniques were being explored with public events always increasing the overall turnout of people.
- People tended to become engaged over a particular issue and then there was a tendency to dwindle with the difficulty being how to keep these people engaged.
- Links had been developed with the Learning District Partnership that provided skills for the life learning agenda.

8.15 Community Partnership Representatives on the LSP were invited to attend a focus group as part of the review process. The complete notes from this meeting are attached at Appendix 3 of this report. The main points were as follows:

- The LSP deals with issues at a strategic level and this can give impression that little is happening or being achieved and this can be hard for local communities to relate to.
- The fact that Community Partnerships operate in a strategic context can create a natural disconnection from residents' issues.
- The Police do recognise the merits of Community Partnerships and attend meetings on a regular basis.
- The lack of proper documentation to help support meetings and the propensity to provide verbal reports inhibits the consultation process.
- The use of technical jargon often turns people away. Difficult for people to be fully engaged if they do not completely understand what is being discussed.
- Some partner organisations have not engaged with Community Partnerships as they should have and perceive meetings as a 'tick box' exercise. The Police and local authority representatives do realise the benefits of Community Partnerships as an engagement mechanism.

- The commitment and development factors to the role of a community representative often act as a dissuader for people getting involved.
 - There was a tension between strategic and locally based issues.
- 8.16 The Community Partnership Representatives in attendance were also provided with a questionnaire on community engagement and their experiences with the LSP. Appendix 4 of this report provides a full breakdown of the questions and the responses received from community representatives.
- 8.17 Members of the panel visited Gateshead Council as part of the review process to research practices in a neighbouring authority looking at different initiatives as well as exploring successes and failures of community engagement. The complete notes of this visit are contained at appendix 5 of this report. The main points were as follows:
- The Gateshead Strategic Partnership (GSP) was launched in 1999 and the council's third Sustainable Community Strategy, Vision 2030 was launched in June 2007.
 - A peer review of the GSP was undertaken by Warwick University in March 2007 which identified key strengths and challenges for the GSP.
 - Vision 2030 involved consultation with over 5,300 people from the public, private and voluntary sectors as well as local residents.
 - Gateshead Council introduced area forums in May 2007 to discuss service delivery, develop neighbourhood plans, promote consultation and community engagement as well as feedback to cabinet on the implications of policies.
 - Examples of recent successes included the Gateshead Anti-social Motorcycling Strategy 2007-2009 and the Neighbourhood Management initiative.
 - Area forums were subject led and dealt with strategic matters rather than local issues. Gateshead Council was also looking at different mechanisms to tackle these issues including road shows, consultations and holding surgeries after area forum meetings.
 - Gateshead Voluntary Organisations Council (GVOC) predates Local Strategic Partnerships but has been developed to ensure volunteer organisations did not remain isolated.
 - CVS has a role to develop and support the voluntary sector to ensure they have an effective influence and voice in the Borough.

- If community groups are to be involved and engaged it is important that representatives from all groups have the opportunity. Also the development of a community champion to provide an impartial perspective should be considered.
 - Important that time is invested into the development of community partnerships as they take time to develop.
 - Important that there is a two-way development of dialogue between the council and partners.
 - Important that community partnerships are re-visited and developed through new ways of information access, communication, decision making and capacity of partners.
 - Within Gateshead the Police took community partnerships very seriously and were committed to partnership neighbourhood problem solving.
- 8.18 As a further aspect of the review process Members of the panel attended central community partnership meetings to experience the functionality and procedures directly.
- 8.19 Both meetings were attended by approximately 24 people; of this 14 were members of the public and the remaining 10 were officers from the Police, County and District Councils as well as elected representatives.
- 8.20 A number of issues were discussed at these meetings, including Bonfire Night advice from the Fire Brigade, Regeneration Strategy and Community Development from the District Council, Local Children's Board from the County Council and Police Reports.
- 8.21 At the meetings service providers sought the opinion of stakeholders through a variety of mediums including questionnaires, presentations and open discussion.
- 8.22 The Chief Officer, Belinda Lewis, of Chester-le-Street CVS (Council of Voluntary Services) was interviewed as part of the evidence gathering process and the main points raised were as follows:
- The CVS was involved from the very beginning of the LSP and through Single Regeneration Board (SRB) funding provided a forum for volunteer and community organisations to share experiences. This acted as an effective communication vehicle between the LSP and CVS organisations. Once the SRB funding ended the forum became unsustainable.

- Chester-le-Street District was highlighted as one of the highest commuter areas within the North East due to its proximity to major cities including Newcastle, Gateshead and Sunderland. This also has implications for the development and engagement of communities within the area.
- The jargon and technical terms used at Community Partnership meetings can leave people confused and unable to provide a real input into discussions and the meeting.
- The subject matter can spark public interest and engage people for a time but it can be difficult to sustain this level of involvement. People become engaged for various reasons and often 'dip' in and out of community engagement.
- There is little linkage between community groups and Community Partnerships due partially to resource and capacity issues and this could be strengthened.
- LSP Steering Group agendas are not always a reflection of Community Partnership agendas but tend to be based around strategic themes and targets set by local authorities, PCT and regional agendas. The data provided by partner agencies is always very good.

8.23 An invitation was provided to 18 Members of the LSP Steering Group to attend a discussion group on the effectiveness of Community Partnerships. Members of the scrutiny review panel acknowledged that many of the members on this board may have prior commitments that would make it difficult to attend such a meeting, so a questionnaire was also developed by Members to gain the views of LSP Steering Group Members unable to attend the discussion group. A copy of the questionnaire, responses (3) and notes from the meeting, attended by 6 Steering Group Members, are all attached at Appendix 6 of this report.

8.24 The main points from the discussion group and arising from the questionnaire responses were as follows:

- It is important that partnership meetings do not get complicated by the use of technical jargon and acronyms. Wherever possible important to use plain English. Nothing turns people away faster than not understanding what is going on.
- Given the limited resources available to the LSP it has done a good job, but tensions are always present between ensuring that there is adequate engagement and getting on with the business required.

- It is sometimes difficult for members of the public to speak with an authentic voice in a formal setting. It is important that all provision is made to allow the community voice to be authentic.
- There are two types of involvement:
 - i. issue based
 - ii. people based.
- In engaging with communities it is important to build trust and confidence which takes time, resources and commitment. Effective engagement will not occur if the time has not been taken to invest in the people first.
- Community apathy may occur as a result of perceived community powerlessness.
- If communities see actions and results, people are more likely to engage and it is important that Community Partnerships receive feedback. Seeing changes happen creates feelings of empowerment.
- Focusing on fewer priorities could potentially lead to less people engaging in the agenda. A wide focus of interest allows for more people to be involved. LSP is in a difficult situation in that its sets priorities based on evidence of need but this is not always what the community sees as the priorities and leads to lack of engagement.
- Current arrangements are adequate but need to be mindful of LGR. The future of LSPs and Area Action Partnerships are uncertain but it is important not to build up expectations that may not be deliverable.
- Area Action Partnerships are a cause for concern for they will not include the PCT and Police Authority who are currently engaged with the LSP and Community Partnerships.

9 Implications of LGR

- 9.1 Local Government Review (LGR) will provide a fundamental change to local government across County Durham and represents a significant opportunity for community engagement both in the way it is delivered and the mechanisms employed to enable it. This ultimately will have implications for Chester-le-Street's Community Partnerships and LSPs as a whole.
- 9.2 The County Durham Strategic Partnership and the Local Area Agreement (LAA) Interim Board have merged to form the County Durham Partnership which effectively will be the county-wide LSP for County Durham which also has 7 district LSP's.
- 9.3 The LGR timetable for reorganisation is relatively short. It will be important that community representation and the local voice in the absence of a district

- authority are considered. Also issues of duplication, capacity and the ability to influence the strategic agenda are considerations. Clarity of opportunity for stakeholder involvement will be important to ensure that people can concentrate their attention at areas of specific interest to them.
- 9.4 District wide engagement varies due to a range of factors and circumstances and there is an LGR work stream 'Areas and Participation' which is looking at community engagement and partnership structures. It is responsible for formulating options which the new council can look at for new engagement/partnership structures.
 - 9.5 The Local Government and Public Involvement In Health Act 2007 (LGPIH) also makes provision to ensure that LSPs are accountable to local people by strengthening the involvement of elected members in both Executive and Scrutiny roles.
 - 9.6 The district LSPs could well provide the link between local communities, the LAA and ultimately the new local authority. The LAA thematic groups of Children and Young People, Environment, Safer/Stronger Communities and Health & Well Being could provide alignment for scrutiny across the county. Within in this there could be a role for LSPs in providing one of the mechanisms for strong community links into the scrutiny process both at a county and local level allowing for a flow of dialogue with local people up and down the unitary structure.
 - 9.7 It certainly seems that LSPs will be retained for the transitional period and it will only emerge as the new authority develops if there remains a role for LSPs and their Community Partnerships as a vehicle for community engagement. Currently the designated LGR work stream is looking into county wide practices, of which there are many and varied arrangements, to develop the future model.
 - 9.8 A key feature of the unitary proposal was the formation of Area Action Partnerships to serve the main natural communities of the County. The Area Action Partnerships would aim to provide more 'local choice and local voice' in the County and would comprise key local representatives such as voluntary and community organisations, unitary and town and parish councillors, faith representatives, business representatives and local people. Concerns have already been voiced within the report over the formation of these partnerships and their potential lack of key partner involvement.
 - 9.9 The recommendations in this report are aimed at enhancing Community Partnerships and achieving a wider community engagement. Mechanisms for community engagement are important no matter what structure of local government exists and it is important to retain and develop locally based structures for engagement. The panel hopes that the recommendations can help to enhance participation within Chester-le-Street and ultimately the new authority.

10 Summary of Recommendations

- 10.1 The panel recommends the retention and enhancement of the current Community Partnerships and that they continue to be supported and developed.
- 10.2 That the Executive requests that the LSP develops a communication strategy for the LSP and Community Partnerships to demystify and develop a wider contact and engagement with local people.
- 10.3 Ensure that wherever possible meeting dates, agendas and reports are promoted within the public domain prior to partnership meetings.
- 10.4 That the Executive requests the LSP develops a 'jargon buster' to ensure that meetings, agendas and invitations remain accessible to communities.
- 10.5 That a future mapping exercise of the district be conducted to establish the extent and coverage of parish councils, residents associations, Community Partnerships and other community groups as an information base for future engagement as part of the People and Place delivery plan.
- 10.6 That as part of the People and Place delivery plan a survey be conducted into the variety of Community Partnership membership including the experiences and opinions of current members to further reduce barriers to participation, promote membership and aid greater ownership of any new model of community engagement within the new authority.
- 10.7 That the Executive requests consideration is given by the LSP to further investment in the membership of Community Partnerships including training and further support to help local people engage.
- 10.8 That the Executive is recommended to lobby the Implementation Executive through appropriate representation in relation to issues of decision making powers and financial influence of any future community engagement structures in order to encourage community support and remove the perception of powerlessness.

12 Background Papers

- LAA's and LSPs: Update on proposed statutory guidance on 'place-shaping' – IDeA website, July 2007
- Active Governance – Kath Maguire and Frances Truscott, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2006
- Integration of the Local Area Agreement and County Durham Strategic Partnership, Report of the CDSP Officer Support Group and LAA Project Team, April 2007

- Local Development Framework, Core Strategy Issues and Options - Chester-le-Street District Council, March 2007
- Centre for Public Scrutiny – website
- Working of the LSP – London borough of Hillingdon, 2005/06
- A wider conversation: Effective scrutiny of LSPs, IDeA, February 2007
- Community Engagement and Involvement Strategy - Chester-le-Street DC, May 2006
- Municipal Journal, March 2008



Chester-le-Street
District Council

Partnership & Efficiency Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Review to assess the effectiveness of community partnerships to the council, its partners and the community

APPENDICES

Partnership & Efficiency Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Review to assess the effectiveness of community partnerships to the council, its partners and the community.

Meeting: Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement and Partnership Working

Date: 4 October 2007

Venue: Conference Room 3, Civic Centre, Chester-le-Street

Present: Cllrs D Holding (Chair), M Gollan, T J Smith and J Shiell

Apologies: Councillors R Court, S Greatwich, M Sekowski and P B Nathan

In attendance: L Ebbatson (Leader of the Council), S Barr (Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement and Partnership Working), I Forster (Assistant Chief Executive), N Cummings (Scrutiny Officer) and D Allinson (Democratic Services Assistant)

Notes of meeting with Councillors

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

The main points raised from the meeting were as follows:

- The Council can only deliver on all of its aims in partnership with other organisations and groups it cannot do this alone. We are a good council because we have initiatives in place within the community and are looking to empower citizens.
- Even in a small district like Chester-le-Street each community has its own needs and aspirations and these may vary from community to community. It is important that these are identified. In Chester-le-Street we have a fairly good perspective of what these priorities are.
- The council is always looking for new models of Community Engagement in an endeavour to engage with communities more effectively.
- Already looking at community assets following the government report 'Making assets work: The Quirk Review.' Pelton Fell is already facing

massive change and community consultation and engagement are very clear in this area.

- It is important that Members realise that community needs are not just about providing services also need to look to build up communities to make them stronger.
- Formal structures for engagement and consultation need to be looked at to ensure they are the right vehicles for the future. Developing community power and engagement has 3 levels that need to connect and work together. Need to develop the right structures so that local voice can be heard also develop communications between communities so they learn from each other.
- LSP organisations are made up of bodies from the public, community and voluntary sectors. District partnerships within Chester-le-Street are very special and have had to develop their strength from necessity due to lack of external funding, focus on being *real* partnerships.
- Examples of strong partnership working are evident across the district including the new market place development, mechanics institute, healthy lifestyles initiative and Smoke-Free North East being based in Civic Centre.
- Representatives from the community partnerships on the LSP steering group bring the voice of communities to the table. It is important, as part of the review process, to understand how community partnerships work, how effective they are and the positive experiences from different systems used elsewhere.
- Issues of capacity and understanding for community representatives. Community partnerships do have difficulty raising and developing to the next level. The way to move this forward is to use the voluntary and community sectors to develop these skills.
- There are always issues of disengagement and this happens even in affluent areas. The role of local authorities is to understand the concept of the social capital and enable its development and growth but not control it. Unless people and communities want to engage and develop the social capital it will not work.
- If LGR goes ahead the LSP will ultimately come to an end but communities and neighbourhoods will remain.

The Chair thanked everyone for their attendance as the session had been very useful and these views and comments would be fed into the review process.

Partnership & Efficiency Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Review to assess the effectiveness of community partnerships to the council, its partners and the community.

Meeting: Community Development Team

Date: 1 November 2007

Venue: Conference Room 3, Civic Centre, Chester-le-Street

Present: Cllrs D Holding (Chair), L Armstrong, S Greatwich, M Sekowski, J Shiell and T Smith

Apologies: Councillor P Nathan

In attendance: J Lulic (Community Development Manager), A Rose (Community Engagement Officer), N Cummings (Scrutiny Officer), Councillor G Armstrong (Ward Councillor – Bournmoor), and D Allinson (Democratic Services Assistant)

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

The main points raised from the meeting were as follows:

- In the initial establishment of community partnerships 88 areas received Neighbourhood Renewal Funding (NRF) to assist in the setting up of partnerships. Chester-le-Street did not qualify for this NRF funding and therefore received none.
- Four community partnerships were established through a geographical focus in Chester-le-Street and these were Chester-le-Street Central, Pelton, Sacriston and Lumley.
- Since then Lumley community partnership has been disbanded with partnership working continuing through the Residents' Association.
- Problems of varied attendance and engaging communities continued to persist in the Pelton and Sacriston areas.
- New initiatives and alternative engagement techniques needed to be explored to encourage the public to participate and engage more within the community.

- Public events seemed to attract the public more effectively than meetings and resulted in increased turnouts.
- Residents Associations were represented on community partnerships but only by a small number of residents.
- People tend to become involved over a particular issue and once this has reached a conclusion there is a tendency for people to dwindle. The difficulty is trying to keep these people engaged.
- Look at best practice in other local authorities and the impact of the extended schools agenda.
- Links had been developed with the Learning District Partnership that provides skills for the life learning agenda that aim to improve skills in the community. Also looking at 'centres of excellence' as way forward in improving on existing arrangements.

The Chair thanked everyone for their attendance as the session had been very useful and these views and comments would be fed into the review process.

Partnership & Efficiency Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Review to assess the effectiveness of community partnerships to the council, its partners and the community.

Meeting: Community Representatives - LSP

Date: 8 November 2007

Venue: Gloucester Suite, Civic Centre, Chester-le-Street

Present: Cllrs D Holding (Chair), M Gollan, J Shiell, S Greatwich and L Armstrong,

Apologies: Councillors R Court, M Sekowski and T Smith

In attendance: L Loughlin (Community Partnership Representative), C Reynolds (Community Partnership Representative), E Stokoe (Community Partnership Representative), N Cummings (Scrutiny Officer), Councillor R Harrison (Ward Councillor – Sacriston), J Brock (Community Strategy Advisor) and A Rose (Community Engagement Officer)

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

The main points raised from the meeting were as follows:

- Community Partnership Representatives (CPRs) provide a link between community partnerships and the LSP. CPRs find that as part of this role, and because of their extensive contact with local residents, issues are raised with them that might not be raised with local councillors.
- LSP deals with issues at a strategic level. Policy and strategy work taking place in thematic groups can sometimes give the impression that little is happening and can be hard for local communities to relate to.
- As part of this discussion it was recognised that because CPs operate in a strategic context, there can be a natural disconnection from resident's issues. Concerns which by their very nature are more locally focused.
- The Chester Central Community Partnership (CP) is healthy and well attended having good representation from partner organisations. Pelton CP differs in that it has a lower attendance rate and many of the partner organisations do not attend the meetings.

- The Police do recognise the merits of CPs and attend on a regular basis the majority of meetings within the Chester-le-Street area.
- Issue of getting local people involved in community groups/activities. There is a perceived general apathy in this area.
- Policy and strategic matters turn some people away from community partnership meetings. However, others are interested in engaging in debate on strategic matters. There needs to be a clarification in every ones expectations about what different community engagement routes can achieve/are for.
- A key issue is that some LSP partner organisations do not engage with CPs effectively and by failing to bring topics for discussion that are pertinent to the local areas; this has adversely affected CPs and peoples interest in attending them.
- Issues with lack of proper documentation to help support meetings. All too often only receive verbal reports and then expected to provide comments, this can be very difficult. Would like to have advanced notice and written reports to allow for a more meaningful consultation process.
- The use of jargon often turns people away. How can people be expected to engage if they do not fully understand what is being discussed?
- The danger is that partner organisations come along to CP meetings merely as a tick box exercise and do not take the views presented seriously. Police and Local Authority representatives do attend and realise the benefits of these partnerships and the engagement mechanism that they represent.
- Difficulty with LSP is that principally dealing with strategic issues and expectations can be raised that issues will be dealt with quickly and this is often not the case. Processes can be very slow which can lead to frustration and a lack of interest from members of the public.
- Issues of commitment and development in role of community representatives are another factor that often discourages people from becoming involved. Also difficult to recruit new members or keep their level of enthusiasm and commitment to the role.
- Future engagement under LGR can only be developed if learn from the past. Worrying issue of lack of detail on engagement with communities within the county bid. Have to be able to influence spending and funding

or have the ability to influence the spending of money through local representation.

The Chair thanked everyone for their attendance as the session had been very useful and these views and comments would be fed into the review process.

Questionnaire Comments on LSP process

KEY:

PCR C. Reynolds - Pelton Area Partnership representative

CCR E Stokoe - Chester-le-Street Area Partnership representative.

Q1 Please tell the panel about your involvement with the LSP?

PCR I am a local representative on the Pelton Area Partnership of the LSP. In addition I am the Federation of Environment Group's representative on the Environment, Housing and Planning Policy group; and, Voluntary sector alternative representative on the Economic and Regeneration Policy Group.

CCR Have been involved with the LSP from its start in 2000 through the very active residents association in this part of town.

Q2 How can the Council best work together with its partners?

PCR To make this process work, all partners need to be convinced that they have a part to play within it and that it will not be a waste of their resources. Based on current experience, it appears that many partners are not fully involved as indicated by the poor attendance of their representatives at meetings of the Area LSP or policy groups. In the light of current changes in Government policies, the position is unlikely to be improved. {See Comments on Q9 below}

CCR The LSP consists of 'the representatives' who can channel information and get feedback from groups they are involved with in the community. This fails at times through lack of knowledge with the council.

Q3 Have you any views on how the LSP could ensure that the full benefits are obtained from sharing data and information between partners on community needs?

PCR This requires extensive communications with partners. It involves communicating information etc to partners who may not realise they need such information and make no response on receiving it. The task is very difficult and frustrating yet needs to be continued with so that the "democratic deficit" referred to in Q7 below is reduced as far as possible.

CCR More data from the council would be helpful wherever possible.

Q4 Do you think the LSP has a role in raising the aspirations of young people or the community as a whole, or to identify and reflect them?

PCR Yes, through: communication; consideration of proposals suggested; appropriate action; and, reporting on the whole process particularly the reasoning behind the relevant action/inaction on proposals put forward.

CCR Yes, there is a vital need here. More schemes to educate those who for one reason or another have failed at school. More workshops would be helpful to educate them in the practicalities of life. No more YTS.

Q5 What steps could the LSP take to ensure wider community involvement in its work?

PCR As in the response to Q4 above.

CCR The LSP needs to explain what it is all about. No one knows because it's a rather vague title. Less titles of 'LSP' and more 'Local Strategic Partnership' or change the title to something they can understand.

Q6 Some people say there is a “democratic deficit” in the way the LSP operates currently? Have you any views on this? For example is it reasonable that the LSP audits itself in relation to its own targets?

PCR There is a “democratic deficit” in the way the LSP operates currently. It has to be pointed out that this is true of most of the current government processes. This allegation has been made the process of central and local government as well.

In terms of the involvement of the general public, most are not interested in the detail process of government unless they are affected personally and then only in relation to that affect. This particular question affects my own local Community Group and is often asked of itself {Group's Management committee} in regard to its actions on behalf of the Community. The general consensus is that as long as the members are acting in what they believe to be the best interests of the community this is acceptable. I believe this is also true for members of the general public representing their organisations on the LSP. It is often made difficult for such representatives at meetings when they are asked to comment on verbal reports at meetings. I.e. they have been given no advance notice of the detail of the report and so in effect cannot consult their organisations.

I believe that if organisations are using the LSP process for consultation as part of the statutory requirements then the relevant documentation should be made available in advance of the meeting so that the

representatives can consult their organisations and provide a more considered opinion at the LSP meeting.

In terms of auditing its own performance, I do not believe it matters as many of the outcomes involve parameters which are subject to external verification, e.g. the Audit Office; Government Ministries; Inland Revenue. In any case, the general public and or the newspapers can check the published information and if it is incorrect will make the necessary objections.

CCR The LSP should not audit itself. It would be fitting that the 'representatives' should carry out the audit as we know their successes and indeed failures.

Q7 Does the LSP need to focus on fewer priorities – is its current approach making it difficult for people to relate to it?

PCR As noted above, most residents are not interested in the detailed process of government. Those that are and wish to be involved in the process have to make significant efforts to understand the process(es). Often people are only interested in specific topics and may not feel qualified or wish to be involved in other topics.

In my experience however, this does not appear to be problematical at Local area partnership meetings such as the Pelton area. There the matters dealt with are more likely to be of interest to those attending and do not generally involve highly technical matters. Whereas, the policy groups can and generally do involve matters that are more technical and do possibly require persons to have knowledge about/experience in the matters under discussion.

Initially the outcomes proposed were so general as to be useless as no one could be seen as accountable. Recently, the outcomes have been made more specific and accountability is easier to establish. The general public is interested in specific outcomes and who has to deliver them. If these are provided in the LSP documents people will be interested and as a result may wish to become involved. The process is then seen as delivering change and not as a so called "talking shop" that achieves nothing.

CCR The LSP needs more priorities. If they have less it would lead to disintegration of its status within the community, though a greater understanding is important. More full titles and less jargon please.

Q8 In your opinion, what major changes coming up in the District are likely to have an impact on future LSP priorities and/or the way the partnership works?

PCR I see the main future changes that will affect the working of the current LSP process as:
The implementation of Local Area Agreements which is based on the County of Durham; and,
The change in Local Government from the two tier system to a single tier.

In both cases it appears that decisions are/or will be made at the County level with limited provision for change at the more local level.

I was not convinced by the outline arrangements given earlier this year in the current County Council's proposals for Local Government reorganisation that there would be the local representation that there is now. The time table for this reorganisation is so short that it seems unlikely that appropriate arrangements for local representation in these processes can be agreed.

CCR The forthcoming changes could mean larger and more effective LSPs as the number of councillors will be cut drastically and services will likely be cut. Therefore we will need more contact with the public, and the councillors too will need to have greater skill in making it work with their constituents.

Q9 **How useful are the Community Partnerships to the LSP? Do the 2 interact?**

PCR The Partnerships are useful in allowing more local comment on policies that can be affected by the LSP process and in my opinion there is such interaction. It is desirable that such interaction increases but as noted in the response to Q8 above it seems highly unlikely. If so, this would be a shame.

Now, is an appropriate time to examine this process and its likely successor. To obtain the involvement of more representatives of the general public, community groups etc. requires that they be convinced that their involvement matters and that such involvement will produce changes for the better for the representatives' areas.

This is the real challenge for the future.

CCR No response.

**PARTNERSHIP AND EFFICIENCY OSP
VISIT TO GATESHEAD COUNCIL**

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP REVIEW

Notes of a visit to Gateshead Council held on Monday 14 January 2008 at Gateshead Civic Centre at 3pm.

Attendees

Gateshead MBC

Councillor J McElroy (Cabinet Member, Gateshead Council), L Kirkley (Director of Policy and Service), A Rigg (Senior Partnership Officer), C Gibson (Community Safety Unit Performance Co-ordinator), I Stevenson (Neighbourhood Management Team Leader), G Pringle (Director of Gateshead Voluntary Organisations Council), J Moon (Gateshead Community Network)

Chester-le-Street DC

Councillor D M Holding, Councillor J Shiell, N Cummings (Scrutiny Officer), D Allinson (Democratic Services Assistant)

Welcome and Introductions were given by everyone present. Copies of agenda and papers were circulated.

1. Overview of LSP and Neighbourhood Working in Gateshead

A presentation was given by the Director of Policy and Service on Gateshead Strategic Partnership (GSP).

The slides covered the following subjects:-

GSP Achievements, Challenges for the future, GSP Peer Review – March 2007, Outcome, Partnership review and restructure, Role and Remit, Vision 2030, Big Ideas, Gateshead's Neighbourhood Management Areas, The Council's vision, Role of Area Forums, Membership of Area Forums, Key Messages/Conclusions.

Points of interest raised in addition to the slides:-

Warwick University was used for a Peer Review.

GSP awarded Green Award for one of the highest achievements.

Pilot LAA Authority one of the first in England.

Priorities, resources, capacity were agreed by key people and clear on who would deliver them.

There were 36 key improvement targets as part of the Vision 2030.

Identified 5 key areas with approx. 40,000 population tailored to area of need. Key partnerships community network meet 6 weekly and monitor and ensure complex issues are resolved.

Questions –

Q - Structure and membership?

A - 66 members 22 wards. Forums open to the public. 3 elected Members on Area Forums 2 from each party.

Q – To what degree have high mobility rates influenced buy to rent?

A – Neighbourhoods and Wards vary considerably very rural and deprived inner city. Active plans in place. Vision 2030 consultation found strong concept community spirit. Need to look at how manage and plan neighbourhoods and get balance – building on diversity.

Q – Resident Groups – Chester-le-Street Resident’s groups function well but exist in isolation. How do you compare?

A - Developed GVOC GC Network working partnership works in conjunction with paid officers indirectly through the Council. Important to have representatives at all levels and engage with those in isolation.

Private Landlords take part in the scheme. Try to increase capacity and have a team of Officers to link them into work going on. The representatives on the network have themed or area forum reps which interlink.

The community reps nominate a representative for each street to provide information to Councillors on what is happening on estates, which works well.

Q – Attendance at area forums?

A – Normally subject led. Surgeries are held after the event for anyone with issues to raise which are tried to be resolved strategically.

Suggest using different mechanisms in addition to area forums such as road shows, operation goldfinch.

2. Examples of partnership working

(a) Reducing anti-social motorcycle behaviour

The Community Safety Unit Performance Co-ordinator spoke in relation to examples of partnership working and referred to the Gateshead Anti-social motorcycling strategy 2007-2009 to use as an example.

She proceeded to outline the following issues of the strategy as follows:
Combating ASB in relation to motorcycling, improving partnership approach, increasing public reassurance and feedback on how this worked.

Questions -

Q – This may not be a local issue how far do you relate to local community?

A – Publicity through TV, Chronicle, develop links with neighbouring authorities and public rights of way officers.

(b) Working with community partnerships

The Neighbourhood Management Team Leader spoke on partnership working in relation to Neighbourhood Management.

He advised that Neighbourhood Management was a medium term objective the purpose of which to build strong communities and develop appropriate services to meet local needs. The role was to consult and work in partnership to set up a problem-solving group. This group took forward ideas to area forums to look at. He outlined the work undertaken on operation goldfinch from which a mini action plan was developed. He referred to the partnership working with PCT.

He spoke in relation to the work of the tenants and resident associations. He advised that they engaged with residents on choices of environmental schemes and let them have input on which priorities should receive funding through an opti-voting system, which are then implemented in action plans. The forums oversee and monitor these plans. He also spoke in relation to neighbourhood engagement and the community empowerment network. He circulated examples of case studies of community engagement.

3 Partnership Perspective

The Vice Chairman of Gateshead Voluntary Organisations Council gave an account of partnership perspective.

He advised of a new independent and residential project where residents and tenants groups have a strategic influence, however there was a need for investment in time, money and effort. He advised that GVOC houses the empower project which supports the community empowerment network. Support Officers had set up another organisation, which linked to the voluntary sector.

He felt that CVS has a role to develop and support the voluntary section to ensure they have an effective influence and voice in the Borough. He spoke in relation to working in the community and supporting people who are connected.

J Moon from the Gateshead Community Network advised that she was Vice-Chair of one of the themed partnerships and outlined what she thought worked, lessons she had learned and the challenges ahead.

She explained that she was a representative of the community network. Area forums were a new body, which were still being developed and reviewed. She felt that if you want community groups to become involved you need to have

representatives from every single group. She recommended having a champion to give an impartial community perspective.

Lessons learnt – She felt it took time to develop a structure. Strengths are having a two-way development between council and partners and developing a common core interest of the people living in the Borough. Involvement at all levels in the long-term views for V2030.

Challenges ahead – to have equally valid memberships and strong desire to build on that. Continue to re-visit partnership and look ways of information sharing. Needs to be involvement at decision-making levels not just ‘rubber stamp’ exercise. Needs to be community understanding and be aware of capacity of partners.

Questions -

Q – Community partnerships working in a new Authority. Devolution spending power, support external partners.

A - It was noted that within Gateshead the police took partnership working seriously and were committed to partnership neighbourhood problem solving. They pooled their budget with the police to use within problem solving groups. Allocation of resources should be looked at across Borough and neighbourhoods and be brought together. The LAA identify priorities and make sure resources are allocated to them.

ASSESSMENT OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN THE LSP
QUESTIONNAIRE AND RESPONSES FROM LSP STEERING GROUP
MEMBERS

Q1 *What is your involvement with the LSP?*

R1 Chair of the Health Improvement Group (HIG).

R2 Chair of CDRP for Durham/Chester-le-Street since October 2007.

R3 Board Member

Q2 *To what extent are the wider community involved in the work of the LSP?*

R1 Processes are in place for certain people within the wider community to be involved in the work of the LSP. The voluntary and community sectors are represented but the LSP still fails to engage wider representation regardless of efforts.

R2 Evidenced input from community network representatives brings views relating to CDRP issues to meetings via strategic assessment reports.

R3 Representation on the main board and on sub-themed LSP groups.

Q3 *What steps could the LSP take to ensure wider community involvement in its work?*

R1 Greater Empowerment, Capacity Building, Effective Feedback, Training, Resources, Language (jargon –free). All important but would need adequate resources and people to take this work forward.

R2 No response

R3 Effective Feedback (via regular updates in district newsletter) and Language (jargon-free).

Q4 *Does the LSP need to focus on fewer priorities – is its current approach making it difficult for people to relate to?*

R1 Not really. If the LSP were to focus on fewer priorities it is possible that less people would engage in the agenda. At least with a wide focus of interest more people are likely to be involved. The LSP is in a difficult situation in that it sets priorities based on evidence of need but this is not always what the community might see as priorities, hence lack of engagement.

R2 The current position needs to take account of the LGR and not build up expectations it may not be able to fulfill. The future of LSPs – Area Action Partnerships is somewhat uncertain. Current arrangements are adequate and should remain.

R3 Yes; fewer priorities identified from policy groups and taking cognisance from LAA Sustainable Communities Strategy.

Q5 *How can communities be involved most effectively with the LSP?*

R1 Need to identify interest groups that they can relate to and become involved in and then look at how this group can feed into the LSP processes. To be effective they have to become involved and heard/seen. This can be done either through advocacy of a group representative or communication to the LSP sub group/theme groups.

R2 Anticipate a ‘commissioning’ exercise to identify appropriate community group to take forward community representation with LSP/AAP.

R3 Consultation and feedback potential for LSP audit and scrutiny panel from CVS and stakeholders.

Q6 *Do parish councils have a role to play and what would enable them to play an effective role?*

R1 Unfamiliar with the role of the parish council other than through a colleague who represents the parish he lives in. This could be a good way into the LSP. Parish Councils could find out the views of residents and feed this back to the relevant theme group for discussion. Also will help with targeting interventions based on local evidence.

R2 See comments at Q4 & Q5.

R3 Representation on panel may be broadened when Area Action Partnerships are formalised.

Q7 *What are the future challenges that are likely to have an impact on the way the partnership engages with local communities?*

R1 Changing Demography, Social Inclusion, Community Cohesion, Sustaining Engagement, LAAs, Attracting new partners and LGR.

R2 LAAs and LGR.

R3 Changing Demography, Community Cohesion, Sustaining Engagement, LAAs, Comprehensive Area Assessments, Area Action Partnerships.

Q8 *How effectively does the LSP use community views/opinions together with evidence and data from partner agencies?*

R1 The LSP uses both fairly well. A recent example is the priority setting exercise for the Local Area Agreements. The group looked at the results of the 'places' local survey along with key data relating to data from regional and national sources and used this as the basis for decision making.

R2 From limited contact/experience the LSP is genuine in regard to ensuring effective community consultation.

R3 Does this well.

Q9 *Do you have any other comments/views?*

R1 More could be done to further engage with the public but there are challenges in relation to resources to this and apathy when it comes to getting involved. With all the interventions it is those most passionate about an issue who will engage, still fail to generate full engagement. Community advocates would help if they were representing the communities' views and not the views of a few.

R2 LGR is a significant issue – any recommendation must take cognisance of this issue.

R3 No comment.

Partnership & Efficiency Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Review to assess the effectiveness of community partnerships to the council, its partners and the community.

Meeting: LSP Steering Group Members – Discussion Group

Date: 20 February 2008

Venue: Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Chester-le-Street

Present: Cllrs D Holding (Chair), M Sekowski and J Shiell.

Apologies: Councillors S Greatwich, P B Nathan.

In attendance: Cllr L Ebbatson (Leader of the Council), Cllr B Ebbatson (Durham County Councillor), Elaine Stockton (Community Partnership Representative), Ian Miller (PCT), Nick Springham (PCT), T Watson (Police – CDRP), J Mills (Durham County Council) and N Cummings (Scrutiny Officer).

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

The main points raised from the meeting were as follows:

- Important that plain English is used wherever possible rather than jargon and acronyms.
- Must ensure that the community has a voice and that this is not lost no matter what the future brings. LGR provides an opportunity for rationalisation.
- Acknowledged that the Police Authority have a consistent record of attendance at Community Partnership meetings.
- Given the limited resources of the LSP it seems to have done very best job possible. It shares the tensions of many LSPs in providing adequate engagement and getting on with business and meeting targets.
- It is often difficult for members of the public to speak in an authentic voice in the formal setting of a meeting and to ensure community engagement and development need to make people feel comfortable to ensure that authenticity is not lost.

- In the context of the new unitary authority more important that there is a joined up approach with all groups and service providers. Need to ensure that between partners provision is the best it can be and there is an avoidance of duplication and resources.
- The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 ensure that local authorities will have a legal duty to consult organisations in LAA which indicates ever closer working relations with partners.
- Ensuring that a wide audience is reached through Community Partnerships requires resources and workers at a local level.
- Issues drive Community Partnerships it depends on the topic/issue as to level and volume of engagement from communities.
- Important to build on what we have, one size does not fit all. There are lots of different methods of engagement and need to explore what works best in each situation.
- National trends seem to want to discredit the 'usual suspects' when these people should be highly valued and supported. Also need to provide assistance so that people can dip in and out when they want. Need to tap into any interest even if only short term.
- There are two types of involvement issue based and people based. In engaging with communities it is important to build trust and confidence which takes time, resources and commitment. Effective engagement will not occur if the time has not been taken to invest in the people first.
- Live in complex society where there is a demand for more resources at the local level. Every small community should have dedicated teams to deliver the holistic approach e.g. youth workers, but with limited and diminishing funding questions of achievability and sustainability are raised.
- Community powerlessness is often perceived as community apathy.
- If communities see actions and results people are more likely to engage and it is important that Community Partnerships receive feedback. If changes happen creates feelings of empowerment.
- Area Action Partnerships are a cause for concern for they will not include the PCT and Police Authority who are currently engaged with the LSP and Community Partnerships.

The Chair thanked everyone for their attendance as the session had been very useful and these views and comments would be fed into the review process.