

Devon Strategic Partnership

Conference Report

Devon Strategic Partnership's (DSP's) conference was held at Sandy Park Conference Centre in Exeter on 28th March 2008. It was facilitated by Robin Douglas, a public service development specialist, and was well attended by 120 representatives from the public, private, Voluntary and Third Sectors. The main focus of the day was on the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS), the Local Area Agreement (LAA) and partnership working – what we are already doing well and what we could be doing better – and how.

1. Introduction:

The conference commenced with a brief introduction from Robin Douglas on the shape of the day and desired outcomes. He commented positively on the wide range of organisations and interests represented - stressing the advantage of having such a diverse mix of views, experiences and expertise to call upon throughout the day.

In setting the scene Sally Foxhall (Chair of the Devon Strategic Partnership - DSP) focussed on what has been achieved since the last conference (held in October 2007) and how the input from that day has helped to shape the development of the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) to date. Participants who had helped to flesh out the SCS vision and priorities at the last conference were now being given the opportunity to comment on the outcomes and to start thinking about their role in terms of delivery.

Phil Norrey (Chief Executive, Devon County Council - DCC) went on to paint a more detailed picture of what has been happening in the policy world; in particular - the heightened prominence of the Local Area Agreements (LAA) and, (for statutory bodies), the shift in focus from organisational to 'whole area' and 'outcome-based' inspections; and, fundamentally, how all of this relates to partners. He also talked about the local context and, with reference to the Boundary Committee's current structural review, recognised that the broader picture as represented by the Devon Strategic Partnership was very important throughout this period of uncertainty.

In an attempt to illustrate how innovative partnership working in Devon is already making a real difference, the session continued with a series of brief presentations highlighting some local examples of 'best practice'. Paul Tharby spoke of the successful 'Devon Pound' partnership initiative, Tim Jones introduced the 'Team Devon – Economic and Cultural Legacy of the 2012 Olympics', Matthew Bell summarised some of the benefits associated with the development of the 'Communities in Action' - strategic planning database and Ken Crawford outlined some of the key priorities for the newly constituted Senior Council for Devon.

This session was brought to a close with a summary of where we are today, what the future may hold for Devon and what this could mean for local people and their communities.

2. The Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS)

The second session of the day focussed on the SCS and on verifying the ‘outcomes’.

Participants worked together in groups to review the draft SCS booklet, (which will be used to publicise the SCS and to back up the dedicated website). A number of helpful comments were made, (of which many related to visual style and general readability), and a number of improvement opportunities identified; the most commonly articulated being:

- The link between the issues, evidence and the outcomes should be clearer
- The ordering and layout could be structured to flow more effectively
- It is not clear who the intended audience is supposed to be. It is very general, and would benefit from better signposting to the more detailed website.
- There needs to be greater consistency in the use of language throughout
- The outcomes should be more specific, challenging and measurable

What Happens Next?

Participants gave some very helpful feedback on style, language, general content and specifics which will all form the basis of a separate report for DSP Partnership Board to review.

3. The Local Area Agreement (LAA)

The third session of the day concentrated on the Local Area Agreement (LAA), examining in some detail the delivery role it plays across the county in terms of realising the SCS’s outcomes. Councillor James McInnes, (Leader of West Devon Borough Council and Chair of their LSP), shared his thoughts on the LAA and the opportunities it presents from a partnership perspective before Karen O’Donnell, (Devon Lead for the Government Office South West - GOSW), then went on to talk about the LAA from a regional/GOSW perspective. Karen also made a point of congratulating all of those who have been involved in the negotiations and development of the LAA to date – saying that the way in which partners across Devon have progressed development of the LAA is being applauded regionally.

In the second half of this session John Van de Laarschot (CEX, Torridge District Council), and Ian Hobbs (Social Inclusion and North Devon Lead, Devon County Council) introduced the local aspects of the LAA with an engaging presentation on ‘Places Matter: making the LAA real in communities’. They focussed on how the LAA priorities relate to individual neighbourhoods and localities and posed a number of questions for consideration:

- Which of the LAA priorities are place sensitive?
- Which places do they relate to?
- To what extent do priorities impact on one another?
- When will they benefit from local co-ordination?
- How do we do the job at the local level, who should be involved and how do we resource the work?
- Do different communities have issues in common and what does this mean for delivery?

- When can residents and other stakeholders really have an impact and how do we involve them?
- How do we share learning and embed successes across Devon?

With the above questions in mind, participants were invited to explore the spatial aspects of the LAA in more detail. They moved into different District groupings across the room to consider:

- Which of the Devon LAA 2008-2011 priorities are the most relevant to each District and how can you take advantage of them to meet local need?

Participants were encouraged to take part by putting their comments on 'post-its' on the display boards for each District area.

Here is a selection of the comments/suggestions made:

County-wide views/issues:

Those priorities focussing on:

- Environment agenda – County wide and place specific:
 - needs to be delivered by both a bottom up approach and strategic view
 - we can identify “place” specific opportunities and needs

Exeter:

Those priorities focussing on:

- Fuel poverty, housing and health (LAA 33, 26, 30)
- Waste - especially commercial.
- Business – green energy – skills: Exeter Centre for Climate Change and Sustainability
- Community safety – focus on alcohol (links to CYP and health)

East Devon:

Those priorities focussing on:

- Pressure on infrastructure from development. This refers to transport but no linkage with other forms of infrastructure e.g. social/community facilities that are harder to deliver at the necessary level via planning gain etc. (LAA 20 and 21)
- Cranbrook and other new developments
- Ageing population
- Climate change – especially the coastal situation.

Teignbridge:

Those priorities focussing on:

- Co-ordinated support for economic potential of disadvantaged communities (LAA 14)
- Economic inclusion and social integration of vulnerable populations (LAA 15)
- Reducing the gap in benefit claims and employment rates (LAA 24)
- Improve housing options for homeless and vulnerable clients (LAA 27)

South Hams and West Devon:

Those priorities focussing on:

- Access to services – remote rural areas. Recognise need to support and develop access and transport issues. People to services and services to people (LAA 9)
- Affordable housing as essential in order to meet most of the other priorities – need both local ambition and local and national, public and private resources
- Anti-social behaviour – local action

Torridge and North Devon:

Those priorities focussing on:

- Access to services. Delivery – involve education infrastructure, post offices, be smarter, all authorities and agencies need to be involved (LAA9)
- Key communities – Barnstaple, Ilfracombe Central. Delivery – need to coordinate raft of ad hoc activity - Regen programmes and partnerships (LAA 14)
- Northern Devon. Better access to skills providers/training. Use wider range of infrastructure. Smaller, linked schemes (LAA 17)
- Contribution of tourism to economy (LAA 19) - GVA is a particular issue for northern Devon. Delivery – needs funding to deliver effectively. Partnerships – LA, LSC, RDA and businesses.

Mid Devon:

- Recognition of the need for equality of access for all to the services they need - both people to services and services to people (LAA 9)
- Promote active, empowered and influential communities (LAA 16)
- Affordable Housing (LAA 26)
- Demand led employability and skills training (LAA 17)

Other pertinent comments:

- Estuary coastal issues need to be included. Cover the whole range of LAA priorities – education, health, tourism, environment, renewable energy, waste, marine, litter, economic etc, employment, skills, access, flooding, pollution, run-off, climate change etc.
- Many needs (eg access, low income) are rural. Solutions require a focus on mobilising/enthusing local communities. Neighbourhood engagement needs a push work to develop community feelings and action - Ensuring community involvement/ownership of solutions to promote sustainability.
- Physical activity opportunities impact on many agendas, locally led networks are being formed to address locally agreed priorities (community sport and physical activity networks) LAA 13 – Maintain and increase levels of physical activity and sport (NI 8) relates to LAA2, LAA12, LAA16, LAA30, LAA34 and LAA36 as well as LAA 13.

What Happens Next?

The LAA document, (which will be submitted to the Secretary of State at the end of May for approval), will include some detail on the spatial aspects of the LAA – with reference to how the LAA priorities relate to different communities, towns and neighbourhoods at a local level. The feedback from this session will be used by the LAA Co-ordinators and Local Strategic Partnerships to inform some of the content of the final document at the same time as being used to inform various action and delivery plans at the district and sub district level.

4. 'Raising our Game' – Partnership working in Devon

Following lunch, Robin Douglas reflected on the morning's discussions – he talked about the local leadership and partnership agenda and the relationship between the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) and the Local Area Agreement (LAA) and reiterated the importance of using the leverage of the LAA to drive our agenda forward. Robin then went on to talk about the need for us to move partnership working 'forward in a radical way' if we are to meet the challenges ahead.

Following Robin's introduction, participants worked in mixed tables to discuss how we could improve partnership working in Devon. Participants were asked to think about 2 or 3 principles that could drive behaviour, shape or structure to facilitate improvements. The following principles were put forward by a number of the groups:

- We need to build up greater trust between partners ('it doesn't happen overnight') – especially between the voluntary and statutory sector
- We shouldn't be working on old assumptions – 'there are lots of opportunities for learning and change'
- All partners must be engaged in the process
- We should be engaging the third sector and communities more effectively – capacity building
- We need to be able to make 'some painful but essential' decisions such as how to allocate resources (we then need to effectively communicate and implement them!)
- We should rationalise the partnerships that already exist to avoid duplication of effort – perhaps DSP could play a 'gate-keeping' role in the future...

There seemed to be a general consensus that if we are to meet the challenges ahead and be best placed to deliver significant improvements for the people of Devon (particularly in light of increasing pressures on both funding and resources), we really do need to 'raise our game' in terms of partnership working.

Some Interesting Offers...

Prompted by the discussions on the day several participants made some offers to try to move things forward in a practical way.

Mary Anne McFarlane (Chief Probation Officer for Devon and Cornwall) offered:

- To roll out Local Criminal Justice Advice Boards to target particular neighbourhoods
- To use community service hours to help resource projects in the community
- Her own staff time to work on the LAA
- To provide useful information for partners on reducing re-offending
- Financial assistance to help facilitate a reduction in the numbers of short term jail offenders

Diana Crump (Chief Executive, Living Options Devon) offered:

- Expertise, support and advice for the cross-cutting themes

Councillor Des Hannon (DCC Executive Member responsible to the Executive for the co-ordinated improvement of performance across the County Council, including procurement) committed to:

- Ensuring that the forthcoming Procurement Strategy will include something on the Compact for Devon (The aim of the Compact for Devon is to improve and develop the relationship between the voluntary & community and statutory sectors in Devon)

Rob Varley (Government Services Director, Met Office) offered:

- To advise and assist partners in any way he can to support the Climate Change agenda

5. Closing:

In closing and with reference to the day's activities and discussions Sally Foxhall asked all partners to think practically about 'how we are going to do what we have identified needs doing?'

Sally went on to say that we should be 'bolder' about the conversations we have with the general public and think about what our own individual contributions are to the communities where we live. We all need to take responsibility and take ownership of the issues and we need to encourage others to do the same. We need to think about how we can encourage people to change their lifestyles and behaviour – with reference to the climate change agenda for example. We need to communicate the constraints more clearly and make clear judgements about how we invest limited funds. 'We should focus on systematic rather than 'ad-hoc' change'.

Robin Douglas rounded up the day in saying that 'better communication' between partners really is key and that we shouldn't forget that we are being presented with a lot of exciting opportunities for learning and change...and that if things are not working well then try something else. We don't have to get everything right first time – we just need to keep trying...

What Happens Next?

- Feedback from the conference will be considered by DSP Partnership Board and a revised Sustainable Community Strategy published in May 2008.
- Devon's final submission of its Local Area Agreement will be sent to Govt by 30th May 2008 for approval by end June. The final document will include pages prepared by districts on the local element of the Local Area Agreement. The comments made by conference participants relating to this have been passed to district and theme lead colleagues for consideration when developing these pages.
- **The next Devon Strategic Partnership conference will be held in the Autumn of 2008**