

The Story of the Devon Strategic Partnership - the chronology

1.1. History

The plans for developing a Devon Strategic Partnership emerged in September 2001 at a conference chaired by the Bishop of Exeter and attended by over 120 people from a range of sectors and partnerships. The consensus from the day was that there was great support for creating a county-wide partnership, that there were principles they wished to establish early in the process and that there were some clear priorities to pursue as a partnership. The partnership became active in 2002.

1.1.1. 2001 Structure

Membership

All local agencies and groups were invited to join the DSP. It was recognised that while many may have wished in principle to join immediately others may have wished to become involved when they had a specific interest. In this way it was anticipated the DSP would evolve and grow.

Partnership Forum

A forum by nomination would assess priorities, making sure any barriers were removed so that all the necessary partners were engaged to find solutions and enable real progress to be made. To meet 2-3 times a year. Sector involvement by July 2002 was as follows:

• Voluntary	3
• Community (Race, Young People, Women, Trade Union, Older People, Disability, LGBT)	7
• Environment	3
• Region	3
• Education and learning	4
• Economic	3
• Health	5
• Community Safety	3
• County Council	3
• Parish Councils	3
• LSPs	8
• Officer support	2
Total	47

Partnership Chair

The Bishop of Exeter agreed to continue chairing the Partnership until a nomination ballot prior to the Partnership Conference in April 2002.

Task Groups

Time and task limited groups were commissioned by the Partnership Forum and trusted to lead partnership projects and recommend action. They reported to the Forum in a structured way at each meeting, and were tasked to consult with stakeholders and produce draft, then final, reports. Initial task groups were concerned with Welfare Benefits, Social Inclusion, Renewable Energy and energy Reduction, Developing the VCS Infrastructure, Domestic Violence, Devon Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership, and Devon Rural Task Group.

Partnership Conference

An Annual Conference, open to all to consider Task Group progress, share best practice and review how the partnership was working.

Steering Group

Established in Sept 2002, this small group coordinated the process. It comprised representatives from the county council, police, health, district council, voluntary sector, business, GOSW and RDA, and was chaired by the Bishop of Exeter.

LSP Chairs Group

The Devon Strategic Partnership sought to promote the development of a sharing, two-way relationship with other LSPs, which is cooperative, not competitive. It was proposed therefore that periodic meetings (2-3 times a year) between Devon Strategic Partnership representatives and the eight district/ city / borough LSPs would be convened.

1.1.2. 2002 Principles and Priorities

Principles – these principles, developed at the original 2001 conference are still the principles driving the Devon Strategic Partnership today:

- The needs of local communities and the people of Devon give us our common cause. People come first with services designed around their needs.
- There will be commitment to the principles of subsidiarity with the right people doing the right thing in the right place at the right time.
- No single agency will have control or supremacy within the partnership.
- Business will be conducted with mutual trust and respect. Equal value will be given to all contributions with each partner recognised for the skills they have to offer
- The sovereignty of a particular agency, where that agency has clear responsibility for delivering a particular service will be recognised and respected.
- The success of those partnerships that already work well will be built on.
- Using resources differently and to greater effect will be encouraged.
- The diverse nature of Devon will be recognised through an inclusive approach to partnership working.

Priorities. From the 2001 conference the early priorities identified were:

- Developing a “Vision for Devon” so that we can work with people to meet their needs
- A Rural Strategy for Devon building on the Devon Recovery Plan
- Making sure we work effectively together to deliver the best services for children and young people
- Tackling social exclusion
- Enabling the Voluntary and Community Sector
- These themes have been carried forward into the 2004 Community Strategy and beyond.

Activity 2001-3

Highlights:

- Small group of people from various organisations met several times in 2001 to discuss the possibility of creating a Devon Strategic Partnership. A partnership event with 120 attendees took place on 25th September 2001 and agreed to set up the partnership.

- Forum 1st met 01/03/02. Met 3 times in both 2002 and 2003. Received regular reports from task groups and monitored progress against priorities. In July 02 they agreed that the strategy for developing a vision should involve commissioning a MORI poll, discussion with agencies and partners and developing an action plan. In November 02, the visioning process had shown that the key issues to be addressed by the Devon Strategic Partnership should be affordable housing, public transport, external transport, facilities for young people, older people, cultural tourism, and access to services. The Forum discussed how to take these forward individually, and the need to develop a Community Strategy was recognised.
- Small group met regularly to help organise process but became the steering group in September 2002. At that first Steering Group meeting, the Bishop Michael was confirmed as Chair of the Partnership – Forum, Steering Group and conference, following a ballot of the Forum members. In January 2003 the group agreed the formation of a senior officers group, to be chaired by the Chief Exec of Devon County Council. 13 people were identified to sit on it; however it is unclear whether it met more than once.
- Partnership conference held on 3rd October 2002
- DSP & LSP Chairs 1st meeting held May 2002. Met 4 times in 2003.
- Task group final reports of all groups except Children were published by the end of 2003.

Activity 2004-July 2005

Highlights:

- The Steering Group met twice during 2004 and four times in the first half of 2005; during that time it effectively became the driving force for the process.
- The Devon Strategic Partnership/LSP Chairs met twice in 2004 and three times in 2005
- The potential of the forthcoming Local Area Agreement was discussed with the Steering Group in December 2004, together with implications of the new LPSA2 targets. The LSP Chairs were also briefed in December. It was shown that the new LAA had some elements that were 'given' from Govt, but where possible reflected the Community Strategy as closely as possible.
- The Social Inclusion report, a County for Everyone, was produced in Dec 2004 and Common Ground, the Social Inclusion Task Group produced was launched in March 2005.
- The Forum met in April 04, but then not until April 05 when they agreed to a change in the governance of the Devon Strategic Partnership at a joint meeting with the Steering group in May 2005 – the Forum and Steering Group were to disband and a new structure would take its place. The reasons for this were given as :
 - The need to ensure new arrangements facilitate delivery of the community strategy actions
 - The need to ensure oversight and delivery of the Local Area Agreement
 - The need to address the democratic deficit in relation to elected member involvement
 - The need for a smaller Executive body
 - The need for new arrangements to foster wider engagement, representation and involvement. The steering group has recognised the potential for structural tension between inclusivity and effective, speedy, decision making
 - The need to have clearer and more formal relationships with theme groups and other bodies associated with the DSP

- The need for effective engagement with the network of District Local Strategic Partnerships
 - The importance of effective communications and officer support arrangements
 - The need for new arrangements to be simple, efficient and foster more effective partnership working
- The Community Strategy and Focus on Devon were launched at the conference held in July 2004.

July 2005-2006

Highlights:

- **2005/6 Structure** On the disbanding of the Steering Group and Forum it was agreed that the DSP would be re-organised with people contributing in several ways:
 - Executive group - 34 representatives from key partners with an independent chair, who would oversee the process and drive it forward strategically. The sectoral representation of the Executive was broken down as follows:
 - Elected member representation:
 - Devon County Council x2
 - Devon District Councils x2
 - Devon Association of Parish Councils
 - Senior, non-elected, representation from key sectors:
 - Health x2
 - Police
 - Devon County Council x2
 - District Councils x2
 - Voluntary and Community Sector x2
 - Business Sector x2
 - Environment X2
 - Equalities
 - Faith communities
 - GOSW
 - RDA
 - In addition those accountable for delivery on behalf of the DSP i.e. Theme/Task Group Champions to be involved as co-opted members. These groups comprised:
 - Housing
 - Environment
 - Health
 - Children's Trust
 - Economy
 - Inclusion
 - Safer Devon Partnership
 - Devon Rural Network
 - LAA Project Board

This was to be kept under review as the delivery of the Community Strategy and the LAA developed.

- The Executive would seek to ensure that each District based LSP was represented through the above process. If any LSPs were not represented as a result they would be invited to nominate a member to sit on the Executive. District LSP representatives would be viewed as co-opted members for the purposes of voting, in line with Theme/Task Group Champions.
- The conference - a wider audience of some 230 people representing all aspects of Devon life, across public, private and voluntary sectors. The conference would help to steer the direction and set the priorities of the DSP. It would meet at an (approximately) annual conference.
- Task groups - these groups would continue to carry out some work for the DSP, drawing in experts and commissioning and completing various pieces of work. Existing task groups were said to be in place for housing, environment, health, children and young people, economy, inclusion, safer Devon and the VCS 'Compact' hub. In addition the Devon Rural Network was cited as a group who had expressed an interest in building more formal connections with the Devon Strategic Partnership. All Task Groups would report regularly in a consistent format.
- There should be a direct link to the LAA Project Board
- The first meeting of the new Executive took place in July 2005, and has met approximately quarterly since.
- The officer driving the Devon Strategic Partnership, Eddie Farwell, took extended compassionate leave from August 2004 following bereavement and left the county council's employ in early 2005. He is widely credited as being a very significant driving force behind the Devon Strategic Partnership and he masterminded the production of the Community Strategy.
- In 2006, Devon Improvement Programme and the Devon Strategic Partnership jointly commissioned OPM to carry out a review of governance and partnership working of the Devon Strategic Partnership, particularly in relation to the LAA. The aim was to develop a clear, shared picture about joint delivery in Devon, the best mechanisms for doing this and the right place for delivery to happen. The final recommendations are awaited from this work at the time this evaluation is prepared.

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