



The LSP Peer Challenge Partnership

Peer Challenge
of the
**Chorley Local Strategic
Partnership**

November 6/7th, 2007

The LSP Peer Challenge Partnership

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Chorley LSP is very new in its current form. Although there has been a history of partnerships in Chorley for some years, it is only within the last year or so that the current partnership can really be said to have been operating and, even within this time, there have been further changes to structures and roles.
- 1.2 The Council has driven the establishment of the current partnership and is continuing to provide considerable support through dedicated staff and finance for projects. While, without exception, partners are positive about the council's commitment and recognise its community leadership role, they also report that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish the partnership from the council.
- 1.3 The new Chorley Partnership has come a long way in a relatively short space of time. It has achieved a great deal in terms of building the infrastructure of the partnership and forming personal relationships which are making a significant impact on the way business is done in the Borough. Much remains to be done to ensure that the partnership matures and is able to produce concrete achievements which are recognised by local people as having made a real difference to their lives. However, there seems no reason to doubt that this is perfectly possible provided the current focus and direction is maintained.

2. Background

- 2.1 The LSP Peer Challenge Methodology has been developed and is offered through a partnership between SOLACE Enterprises Ltd, Warwick University Business School and the IDeA.
- 2.2 The aims of peer challenge are to:
 - Provide an objective, robust and managed external challenge to an LSP's own assessment of its current performance;
 - Encourage thinking about strengths and areas for improvement;
 - Contribute to producing a strong and forward looking improvement plan.
- 2.3 This model of peer challenge involves a team of five people making an assessment over a period of two days. The team comprises a facilitator from one of the three provider organisations, a Chief Executive and an elected member from other local authorities and two

members who represent other public, private or voluntary sector partner organisations

2.4 Principles on which the approach is based include:

- Using credible associates and peers who understand the working of the relevant type of LSP;
- Peers who are independent from and acceptable to the LSP;
- A peer challenge structured around the specially developed LSP Benchmark;
- Written and verbal feedback provided to the LSP by the team.

2.5 The purpose of the model of peer challenge is to help the LSP to ensure that its own assessment is as accurate a reflection of its current performance, achievements and future capacity as it possibly can be and to give pointers towards future development needs.

2.6 The Benchmark which provides the framework for the assessment covers the following four areas and these are used to structure the feedback in this report:

- Achievements and Impact
- Vision and Strategy
- Leadership and Relationships
- Governance and Performance

3 The Chorley LSP peer challenge process

3.1 The peer challenge of the Chorley LSP began prior to the on-site period with a review of key documents provided on C-D Rom together with a self assessment covering the areas of the LSP Benchmark.

3.2 The challenge team was:

- Andrew North, Chief Executive Cheltenham Borough Council
- Cllr James Hakewell, Leader Kettering Borough Council
- Kim Harper, Chief Executive Derby CVS
- Kevin Lambert, Chief Superintendent Northumbria Police
- Patricia Coleman, SOLACE Enterprises Facilitator

3.3 The evening prior to the visit the team met to make final preparations for the peer challenge. The team discussed their views on the background information provided by the LSP, agreed the lines of enquiry to be pursued during the visit and additional activities and documentation which might be needed to gather information.

3.4 The various methods that the team used to gather information included:

- Face to face and telephone interviews with a cross section of stakeholders
 - Focus group discussions
 - Additional document reviews
- 3.5 At the end of each day the team reflected back to the Council, on behalf of the LSP, what they thought they were seeing and learning which provided an opportunity to steer the team to look at additional information if necessary.
- 3.6 The results of the process outlined above are set out in the remainder of this report. In making its comments the team sought to add value by concentrating on those areas where, as peers, they were able to contribute most to the further development of the LSP.
- 3.7 While the team took care to note areas of strengths as well as areas for improvement, since the main aim of the challenge process is to stimulate improvement, comparatively more attention has been given in this report to explaining and evidencing the areas on which the team believes the LSP should focus its attention in the future.

4 Headlines

The Team's overall assessment of the LSP was of:

"A sea change from a low base, going in the right direction, high ambitions and expectations, still early days but now poised to deliver real change"

Positives:

- The new Partnership is actively developing its infrastructure, key strategies, plans and processes and has established a number of significant cross-cutting projects
- This is a Partnership that is keen to learn, is aiming to be inclusive and is ambitious for Chorley
- The new Chief Executive and Council Leader, who are determined that the Borough achieves, have brought focus
- Partners seem to trust each other
- There is positive engagement by key partners e.g. Police and PCT
- The private sector is making a significant contribution
- The Voluntary, Community & Faith sector is feeling positive and wanting to be accountable

- The LSP is now better placed to engage with the next LAA and ensure the Borough's priorities are addressed

Issues to Consider:

- It is time to start consolidating and investing in the Partnership's capacity
- Partnership working involves compromise and "letting go" without losing focus – all partners should ensure that they retain sensitivity to the needs of different sectors so some don't get left behind
- Partners need to take responsibility for being proactive and not wait for the council to always take the lead
- Do more to check back with Partners and the Community about proposals
- Who owns the Chorley brand? How far have other Partners adopted it?
- Other roles for the LSP may include:
 - Lobbying on behalf of the Borough (e.g. to government)
 - Promoting the Borough's successes beyond the immediate area
 - Celebrating successes of partners, individually as well as collectively

These headline points constitute the feedback given to the Chief Executive of the council at the end of the visit. They are developed further in the main body of this report.

5 Achievements and Impact

Strengths

- 5.1 Partnership working has considerable history in Chorley dating back, according to some, to 1996. During recent years some specific partnerships e.g. Community Safety, have been very active and have achieved practical outcomes but the overall partnership or LSP did not have a good reputation for action and was considered to be largely "a talking shop".

- 5.2 The inception of the current LSP dates from around the time of the arrival of the Borough Council's Chief Executive and the new administration about 18 months ago. The impact of the new Leader's and Chief Executive's desire to see the Borough succeed is regarded by most partners and stakeholders as the reason for the drive and energy which now exists in the partnership. The LSP is now seen as a reliable performer by the Government Office.
- 5.3 Given the newness of the current LSP it would be unrealistic to expect much in the way of practical outcomes. Some practical achievements claimed by the LSP e.g. reduction in crime, increase in employment, reduction in infant mortality, are either the result of work through specific partnerships or the efforts of individual agencies including the council.
- 5.4 However, in the past year the partners in the LSP have worked hard to build a new infrastructure and membership. Six themed sub- groups have been established and through the provision of £85,000 of funding from the council which has levered in further funding from partners, each group has either established or is working to establish a cross-cutting project through which to deliver the priorities identified in the Sustainable Community Strategy. The injection of funding, which has now been committed by the council for subsequent years, has had a substantial impact in unblocking barriers to partnership working. In addition, the council has appointed a full time officer to support the LSP and all of the council's senior managers are fully on board with the partnership agenda.
- 5.5 The LSP is now poised to deliver practical achievements through the on-going work of specific partnerships it has subsumed e.g. The Multi-Agency Tasking and Coordinating Project within the Community Safety theme and the new projects which are being established e.g. Vulnerable Households. The projects are proving to be extremely useful in developing relationships between partners, a culture of partnership working and practical approaches.
- 5.6 The existence of a strong LSP now means that there is much greater ability than previously to input to the development of the new LAA and to ensure that it incorporates the Chorley Partnership's priorities.

Areas for Development

- 5.7 The LSP does not receive Neighbourhood Renewal Funding nor other external grants which would make it easier to support partnership activity. Therefore it will be essential to begin, as soon as possible, to work towards aligning mainstream budgets to focus on priorities, joining up between services and, where appropriate, to pool

budgets. If the LSP simply continues to work through a limited number of projects its impact will, inevitably, be limited. Other partners have indicated a willingness to contribute, alongside the council, to the support costs of the LSP, especially in specific areas e.g. consultation. This should be encouraged in order that the LSP is seen genuinely to be a partnership.

- 5.8 Partners should build on existing experiences e.g. the joint Community Safety Team and consider opportunities to locate and commission services jointly wherever this makes sense. For example, there would appear to be considerable scope to re-assess the various information and advice outlets within Chorley Town Centre and to co-locate these in a single building e.g. the Borough Council's Customer Contact Centre, under a Chorley Partnership branding. This would also be extremely helpful in giving the partnership a profile with local people.

6 Vision and Strategy

Strengths

- 6.1 The LSP has recently produced a Sustainable Community Strategy. This has built on the previous strategy developed in 2005. The strategy contains a clear vision which has been agreed by the partners as being distinctive to Chorley and reflecting the Borough's urban / rural mix. A new set of five priorities have been developed and targets have been streamlined and made SMARTer.
- 6.2 The existence of this strategy will enable alignment of the Borough's Sustainable Community Strategy with that of the county-wide partnership –Ambition Lancashire - and the Local Area Agreement, both of which are currently being re-freshed.
- 6.3 The 2005 strategy was developed through extensive consultation. For well thought through reasons, this time there was more limited consultation through partner networks. The Voluntary, Community and Faith sector in particular were involved in this through the "Stronger and More Involved" sub- group.
- 6.4 Further strategies are currently being developed which will produce added value to the partnership, including a draft Community Cohesion Strategy currently out to consultation and a Climate Change Strategy.
- 6.5 Other important areas identified as priorities include affordable housing and health inequalities.

Areas for Development

- 6.6 The SCS was prepared quite hurriedly in order to feed into the county-wide processes for developing the SCS and LAA. It would be helpful now to begin checking out with partners the implications of the partnership strategy for their own strategies and operational plans.
- 6.7 Similarly, some of the priorities do not have full sign up. For example, although teenage pregnancies are an issue county-wide, there is not perceived to be a particular problem in Chorley but other aspects of health are e.g. alcohol consumption and the health and social care needs of the growing number of elderly people. The LSP needs to ensure that there is sufficient space for full discussion about specific priorities for the future.
- 6.8 The boundaries of the Borough are not coterminous with those of a number of key partners e.g. Police and PCT. These organisations are unlikely to have the capacity in the longer term to support districts at both a strategic and an operational level. It may be necessary to consider a move towards a Central Lancashire LSP (also covering the boroughs of Preston and South Ribble) at some point in the future and, to this end, the CP should welcome and support sub-regional strategies e.g. for Health and Well-being. This would build on current strategic developments across the sub-region e.g. the Local Development Framework.

7 Leadership and Relationships

Strengths

- 7.1 Although it is still early days, there is undoubtedly trust between most partners. The partnership is seen as inclusive and engagement by all sectors is strong. There is a sense of common purpose and commitment by all to the LSP's overarching strategic objectives.
- 7.2 Relationships between the leaders of the LSP are strong outside of meetings. A lot of business is done through these informal networks e.g. the establishment of Apple Jacks Nightclub for 12-16 year olds. These positive inter-personal relationships are a major factor in motivating the LSP.
- 7.3 Engagement by the private sector is stronger than in many LSPs. Key individuals within the private sector are injecting an inspirational and dynamic vision of future economic development within the area based on clear recognition of its potential as a location for national and multi-national businesses.

- 7.4 There is now an energy and commitment to the partnership from the Voluntary, Community and Faith sector (VCF) sector. This follows a somewhat difficult period of readjustment to the new LSP structure and arrangements to identify membership from the sector through elections, which not all were happy about. The main platform for the VCF is through the Stronger and More Involved Sub-group but individuals from the sector are also influential in other forums of the LSP. The VCF are, therefore, engaged and want to be fully accountable along with other partners.
- 7.5 In recent months a decision has been implemented to incorporate the Local Public Sector Board into the LSP executive structure in order to avoid duplication and focus the capacity of public sector partners. At this point, the Leader of the Council took over the role of chair of the LSP Executive. The LSP Board is chaired by an independent business consultant who also has links with the VCF.
- 7.6 Other council members e.g. relevant Cabinet portfolio holders are engaged in the partnership at Executive and Board levels and within the sub-groups. Council members from both main political groups on the council are supportive of and engaged with the LSP. Consideration is currently being given to how Overview and Scrutiny members might contribute to the progress of the LSP.
- 7.7 Relationships between the Chorley LSP and the county-wide partnership – Ambition Lancashire, are developing e.g. through the Leader's role, as Chair of the CP, on the county partnership and through the engagement of district level partnership officers in the development of the LAA. While the county council is seen as the least engaged partner in the CP and is said to be missing from some key projects, the level of engagement is also much improved and in certain areas is viewed as strong. The Locality Plan developed in conjunction with the County Council is seen as a major step forward in building the relationship.
- 7.8 South Ribble is the closest neighbour and there is considerable cross-boundary working and shared projects. A friendly rivalry appears to exist between the two boroughs.
- 7.9 The LSP newsletter "Chorley People" is attractive and informative and is a means of keeping stakeholders in touch with the work of the partnership.

Areas for Development

- 7.10 The council must take care to balance its legitimate role as a major player in and effective leader of the partnership, with an approach that encourages consensus and openness to other partners' views and needs. There is a danger that the council could become over-dominant and through this leave others behind. A number of partners expressed the view that it was sometimes difficult to see a distinction between the council and the partnership. This is particularly likely if key meetings are always led by the council, held in council buildings and council members and officers out-number other partners. The view was also expressed that some other partners can be marginalized even on issues where they have expertise. This was not thought to be deliberate – as the view is that there is a genuine aspiration to be inclusive. However, there is also a need for partners to be proactive and not always sit back and wait for the council to take the lead.
- 7.11 Now is the time to begin to invest in the capacity within the LSP. This includes the capacity within sector e.g. the VCF so they do not get left behind by the speed and focus of some other key partners e.g. the private sector. There is also a need to provide space for key partners e.g. through the Executive to develop greater awareness about the challenges for each other's organisations and the opportunities provided through the partnership to collectively work on and support the response to these. In particular this means that space must be provided outside of formal meetings or through meetings of a different style to enable and encourage this sharing.
- 7.12 Whilst the self-assessment indicates that there is a formal Compact with the VCF in place, this does not yet appear to be the case. Although not a statutory requirement for the LSP the robust development and implementation of a local Compact, championed by the Council, will provide a framework within which the relationship between the voluntary, community and statutory sectors can be further developed. The Compact is a national model for partnership working underpinned by five codes; partnerships, consultation, funding, volunteering, community groups and equal opportunities. Partnership working is a primary theme of Compacts and its principles and values need to be fully embedded. It provides conflict resolution mechanisms for partners to openly move forward on identified issues, a framework for effective interaction and sets down core principles that maximise the opportunity for co-ordinated and open interaction between partners. Often LSPs appoint Compact champions, resulting in stronger partnerships and the increased development of the local voluntary sector. The development of a Chorley Compact

implementation plan will ensure good practice in partnership working with the voluntary and community sector and generally

- 7.13 There is also a question remaining for some on whether, even after the process of elections, the VCF is truly representative. Some harder to reach groups may be missing e.g. Elderly People's Forum and others may be over-represented e.g. Parish Councils.
- 7.14 The LSP has yet to establish arrangements for consulting and engaging with communities. The council operates 4 Community Forums to which partners are invited to contribute. Current discussions about a possible move towards neighbourhood management might have implications for the future of the forum structure. Any decisions about this need to be seen in the wider context of the relationship between the council and the LSP. Some partners indicated that they were comfortable with the council taking responsibility for community engagement on behalf of the LSP as part of its legitimate community leadership role. Other partners e.g. the VCF are unlikely to share this view.
- 7.14 Related to this is the issue of branding. The "Chorley" logo used by the council is very strong and attractive. With the agreement of key partners, it has the capability of being used as the brand for the place and so be used by all partners to indicate where activities are being delivered jointly through the LSP. As yet this does not appear to have been discussed.
- 7.15 In order to ensure that relationships remain positive and support good cross agency working as the partnership matures, to supplement the formal constitution, the LSP should adopt protocols including a code of behaviour and other agreements covering consultation, use of brand, information sharing etc.

8 Governance and Performance

Strengths

- 8.1 The LSP has established a comprehensive performance management system to connect strategic objectives and high level priorities to specific action plans and targets, although it is very new and is yet to be fully tested.
- 8.2 The council's Performance Plus information system is to be used to administer the performance management framework and all partners will be encouraged to input their performance management information into the system to enable monitoring across the partnership.

- 8.3 Performance monitoring reports are presented to the LSP Executive and the LSP Board at each meeting.
- 8.4 The targets in the new SCS have been radically pruned from those in the previous strategy. As well as being far fewer in number they are also focused on the outcomes of partnership activity rather than also including what partners are committed to work on individually. They are directly related to achievement of the 6 cross-cutting projects over-seen by the theme sub-groups. It is intended that the new LAA targets should also be aligned to the performance management framework and delivery of the SCS.
- 8.5 The council's impressive Mosaic customer profiling technology and GIS mapping software enables in depth analysis at neighbourhood level and in future partners will be able to use this information to plan partnership activity.
- 8.6 There is a clear meeting structure. The Executive meets every 6 weeks. Its members include the most senior representatives of the partner organisations, the chairs of the 6 sub-groups and the Chair of the Board. In total this is estimated to be 17 people. The Board meets quarterly and has a membership of 40 – 10 from each of the three sectors – public, voluntary and private – plus 10 elected councillors – 6 representing the borough council and 4 from the county council. The sub-groups meet according to their individual work programmes.
- 8.7 The LSP is open to learning as demonstrated by its invitation to the peer challenge team to visit.

Areas for Development

- 8.8 Whilst the structure of meetings is clear some partners were unsure about the distinctive roles of the different fora- Executive, Board and sub-groups - with the relationship between the Executive and the Board being a particular cause of confusion. A key issue is to establish where accountability lies and how accountabilities inter-relate. Some see the Board as having primacy and others the Executive. Role descriptions for members of the different fora would help to clarify this. There is also a need to distinguish the performance management responsibilities of Executive, Board and sub-groups. Some members of the Executive were not sure why they were present. They do not feel that the Executive is taking a sufficiently strategic approach. The role of the Executive should be to drive, support, resource and performance manage the major priorities of the partnership and it should not get too involved in the detail of projects which are within the remit of the sub-groups.

- 8.9 How agendas are arrived at is also unclear to some. The view was expressed that the Board meetings are long, that the agendas are managed by the council and items requested by others and seen as more important are crowded out. Sometimes unnecessary sparring by councillors on matters of party politics or borough /county politics is also seen to take up too much time (although others expressed the view that there had been some improvement here).
- 8.10 There was a suggestion that Executive meetings while "business-like" do not encourage contributions from and dialogue between partners. Poor or irregular attendance at Executive meetings by some partners or the regular attendance of substitutes should be viewed as a cause for concern and the reasons investigated.
- 8.11 Several issues were raised on the role of the sub-groups. The development and management of the projects is an important focus but there is a strong view that should not be to the exclusion of a more strategic focus. The Health group has tried to take a more strategic view and has therefore been slower to develop a specific project. This is a cause for concern by some others. There is an issue about whether sub-groups should have devolved responsibility for deciding on, or at least be consulted about matters which pertain to their area e.g. there was a question about whether the £18,000 funding coming from the county council to spend in the area of climate change would be referred to the Environmental sub-group. Finally on this point there were a number of concerns expressed about the viability of the Children and Young People's sub-group becoming the Children's Trust from January and whether there had been adequate discussion about this with all partners.
- 8.12 There is a desire on the part of some council members who are not currently involved in the LSP to have a role. This should be resisted in terms of inclusion in the Executive or Board but welcomed more generally. However, there is a need to communicate more effectively with *all* councillors about the role and activities of the LSP so that they can become advocates for it and also use it as a means through which to engage more directly with partners at ward and neighbourhood levels.
- 8.13 Overview and Scrutiny does not yet have a specific role in relation to the LSP and this should be developed. However it should not be simply to add a further layer of performance monitoring and must be more focused e.g. to have a role in developing any improvement arrangements which result from this report or to review and produce proposals for specific areas of the LSP which need to be developed. Areas that would be very pertinent to the role of councillors include: how the LSP undertakes community engagement and how effectively the council is using its influence with the LSP.

- 8.14 The performance management framework is very new and over time will need to be further developed to ensure that the priorities and targets for the SCS, LAA, Ambition Lancashire and individual partner organisations are fully aligned and that performance indicators are consistent. Partners seem to welcome the opportunity to contribute to the framework but some are unsure, as yet, about how to do this.

9 Recommendations

The LSP should:

- 9.1 Prepare and implement an Improvement Plan following consideration of this report.
- 9.2 Avoid letting the strong urge to act and continually drive forward crowd out opportunities to discuss and reflect.
- 9.3 Look at other areas where the LSP could start to add value e.g. through:
- Lobbying on behalf of the Borough (e.g. to government)
 - Promoting the Borough's successes beyond the immediate area
 - Celebrating successes of partners, individually as well as collectively
- 9.4 Try to define and promote the added value the partnership brings. Answer the questions "are we collectively making a difference?" and "how do we know?"

Patricia Coleman

On behalf of the team

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