



Report to: Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee

15th February, 2006

Report of: Roger Hughes,
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Title: Local Strategy Partnerships

1 Purpose of the Report

1.1 This reports advises Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee about an Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) consultation document "Local Strategic Partnerships: Shaping their future" and invites Members to consider the draft Coventry response included as Appendix A. Of particular interest to Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee will be the discussion in the document about the role of Scrutiny in relation to Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and whilst this report covers the whole of the document particular emphasis is placed on this part of the consultation.

1.2 A presentation outlining the main points in the consultation document will be made at your meeting.

2. Recommendation

2.1 Members are asked to consider the report and to make any recommendations to Cabinet regarding the Council's response to the consultation paper.

3. Introduction

3.1 Like Coventry, many Councils have several years experience of leading Local Strategic Partnerships, and in many instances these built on earlier local partnership arrangements. LSPs have been engaged with the development and implementation of community strategies (required under the Local Government Act 2000), in co-ordinating the wide range of strategies and partnerships required locally, in developing Neighbourhood Renewal Strategies (in applicable areas), and in delivering Public Service Agreements (PSAs) and more recently Local Area Agreements (LAAs).

3.2 LSPs are not required by law, but the development of the objectives indicated above have meant that all areas now have partnership arrangements of this type. Accredited LSP were a condition of neighbourhood renewal funding, and accordingly LSPs are better developed in areas with NRF programmes.

3.3 As part of its evaluation of the local government modernisation programme, the ODPM has commissioned and published research on aspects of the progress of LSPs, which are available on its website (www.odpm.gov.uk). The Audit Commission has also published a

major piece of work on LSPs "Governing Partnerships – Bridging the Accountability Gap" (December 05, available at www.audit-commission.gov.uk).

4. The Consultation

The ODPM has now published a consultation paper, Local Strategic Partnerships: Shaping their future, (full version also available at www.odpm.gov.uk). The deadline for responses to this consultation is 3 March 2006, and councils are encouraged to take part. The outcomes of this consultation are likely to influence the White Paper on local government due in late spring or summer.

4.1 The Government's Vision

In "Shaping their future" the Government makes clear its vision for Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs)

The Government wants LSPs...

1. To be the partnership of partnerships in an area, providing the strategic co-ordination within the area and linking with other plans and bodies established at the regional, sub-regional and local level.
2. To ensure a Sustainable Community Strategy is produced that sets the vision and priorities for the area agreed by all parties, including local citizens and businesses, and built on a solid evidence base.
3. To develop and drive the effective delivery of their Local Area Agreements.
4. To agree an action plan for achieving the Sustainable Community Strategy priorities, including the LAA outcomes.

4.2 Issues covered by the consultation

Issues covered include:

4.3 The roles of Local Strategic Partnerships

- Defining the overall roles of LSPs, and whether councils agree with the ODPM view (see box above)
- Should LSPs move from an advisory role to a commissioning one
- How the LSP can relate to regional and sub-regional strategies and organisations
- How thematic and service-based strategies which are required, can better relate to the community strategy
- How community strategies, (which it is proposed be retitled 'Sustainable Community Strategies') can better promote sustainable development
- How neighbourhood engagement can best be encouraged
- How the links between spatial planning, particularly the Local Development Framework and the community strategy can best be developed

4.4 **Governance and LSPs**

- What action by government could help create greater co-ordination between partnerships within the framework of the LSP
- Whether local partnerships should be clustered around the four blocks of the LAA (Crime and Disorder, Children's Trust, Health Partnerships and Economic Partnerships)
- Issues around common boundaries of public services and LSPs, to support co-ordination
- Structures which might support LSPs, including Local Public Service Boards, and single delivery vehicles
- How wide representation within LSPs can be ensured and developed, including neighbourhood and parish representation, and private, community and voluntary sector involvement
- Legal issues, in particular whether there should be a duty on some public agencies to participate in producing and implementing the community strategy.

4.5 **Accountability and LSPs**

- How accountability to, and of, the LSP should be understood, and how greater commitment from agencies could be developed
- LSPs are ultimately accountable to local authorities which have the democratic mandate for improving social, economic and environmental outcomes for their areas.
- How to develop the role of councillors, including executive members, backbenchers, and overview and scrutiny bodies, in relation to the LSP
- Whether to extend the powers of Overview & Scrutiny Committees to require more local partners to attend scrutiny panels.
- Whether the involvement of Members of Parliament in LSPs should be encouraged.
- Promotion of community involvement, and greater accountability of LSPs to local communities and businesses.

4.6 **Developing LSP capacity**

- What support could usefully be provided nationally to develop skills and capacity for LSPs, for example through the capacity building fund
- How learning and support can be provided to support community engagement
- Learning and development needs specifically related to sustainable development.

4.7 **35 Questions**

A full list of the 35 questions included the consultation paper are included as Appendix 1.

5 **Responding to the consultation**

- 5.1 The paper asks a range of specific questions, but it is open for the City Council and others to raise any other issues arising from their experience of LSPs, which the paper has not included.

Issues Members may want to consider when developing their response could include:

6. **Participation**

- 6.1 ODPM is clearly taking seriously the idea that a legal duty to participate in community planning, including implementation, should be put on various public services. This already exists in Scotland and could create greater engagement of non-council public services with LSPs. However the Coventry Partnership is seen to be particularly effective, and part of the strength of the Partnership is the conscious decision taken by partners to sit around the table and work together on a voluntary basis. This has resulted in some partners financially supporting the running of the partnership for the past three years. If Members wanted to support a more prescriptive legal framework, it would be important to identify what services, for example government executive agencies and quangos, should be included in this duty.

7 **Links to regional, sub-regional and other local plans**

- 7.1 Only local authorities currently have to demonstrate that they are actively engaged in LSPs and community planning, and only local authorities are assessed (through the Comprehensive Performance Assessment) on their partnership working. When it comes to developing the community strategy most often local authorities are assumed to be taking a lead. Whether or not this requires legislation or rather encouragement to all public sector bodies to get involved is a matter for debate.

8. **Governance**

- 8.1 The Coventry Partnership is an unincorporated association and therefore does not have a bank account. The City Council acts as the accountable body for all finance.
- 8.2 The recent Audit Commission report, Governing Partnerships, raises some useful issues about clarity of responsibilities, in particular financial responsibilities. Neither the Audit Commission nor the consultation paper raise other probity issues, particularly the lack of requirements for declaration of interests, which might arise particularly if community strategies become more engaged with spatial planning issues. Should any more formal governance arrangements be introduced or would this be a barrier to participation?

9 **Accountability**

- 9.1 Clear accountability is seen by the Government as requiring:
- mutually understood and accepted ways of working;
 - internal performance management to check progress; and
 - external scrutiny.
- 9.2 The paper says that: "it would be expected that the Executive Board or equivalent and the local authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee, would be responsible for ensuring that all

cross cutting issues are picked up.” Clarification is required as to whether the use of the word “responsible” is implying a duty rather than a discretionary power.

- 9.3 The consultation paper raises questions about conflicts of interest etc., it should be noted that the Coventry Partnership has a system to deal with these matters that mirrors the City Council's.
- 9.4 ODPM notes that the original Community Strategy and LSP guidance anticipated the private sector being fully involved in the community planning process and its scrutiny but “to date, the evidence suggests that this has been patchy.” This has not however, been the case in Coventry where private sector partners play a full part in the work of the LSP.
- 9.5 The paper says that LSPs are accountable to “different audiences”:
- to local people through the democratic process through the local authority and in “listening to and informing local communities.”
 - to central government in relation to outcomes agreed in the LAA.
 - to the local authority executive, as ultimate responsibility for the LSP's actions rests here.

- 9.6 Whilst there is an acceptance that the City Council is the “accountable body” and an equal partner in the Partnership, whether or not all partners see themselves as accountable to the City Council when working in partnership is not clear. ODPM's view is that overview and scrutiny by “backbench ward councillors” has a clear role in relation to the first of the above bullet points and that:

“Local authorities are democratically elected. As such they have the mandate to improve social, economic and environmental outcomes across the local area. LSPs are therefore ultimately accountable to the local authority.”

- 9.7 This interpretation appears to differ somewhat from the ODPM's response to a Select Committee report in September 2002 which read :

“Within an LSP it is intended that individual partners will remain responsible and accountable for decisions on their own services and the use of their own resources. Accountability to the partnerships therefore cannot override those individual commitments.

... LSP guidance clearly states that individual partners remain responsible and accountable for decisions on their services and resources [and] that LSPs will need to operate within a transparent and robust framework of local accountability.”

- 9.8 If, as the two statements seem to suggest, the LSP is accountable to the local authority but its constituent members' first duty lies elsewhere, it is not immediately obvious that scrutiny of LSPs would yield any worthwhile outcome without an extension of OSCs' powers (see section 12)

10 Elected Member Involvement

- 10.1 In 2002 ODPM's view on the democratic accountability of LSPs was that while councillors had a “unique community leadership remit” they were “not the only representatives of local communities.” The new consultation document says that “elected members of local authorities have a unique role in carrying responsibility for the overall balance of governance in an area and being directly accountable to citizens.” As such, Government is

recognising that councillors' support is crucial to the success of the LSP and Community Strategy process.

- 10.2 However the ODPM's view is that the function of local authority representatives on LSPs "is not always the most appropriate one" and that "existing mechanisms such as Overview/Scrutiny Committees are not being used to the greatest effect." Research into LSPs' current progress with Community Strategies is said to suggest that "the precise role of elected members ... both the executive and backbenchers, is currently not understood."
- 10.3 The paper cites current guidance that local authority executives ought to draw on the expertise and skills of all members of the council in monitoring the progress of the authority and its LSP partners in realising the aims of the Sustainable Community Strategy action plan.

11 Involvement by Members of Parliament

- 11.1 The consultation paper includes specific reference to enhancing the role of local Members of Parliament in LSPs. MPs have a wide representative role in their respective communities, but they also have a varying but significant workload, coupled with a large time commitment to the House of Commons. It would seem most appropriate that all local MPs are invited to take part in the work of LSPs and that special efforts are made to ensure that they have an opportunity to influence community planning, without placing additional responsibilities on them.

12 Overview and scrutiny

- 12.1 In the past some Members have expressed some frustration at the overall scrutiny of LSP activities. In practice where service level scrutiny has come across partnership working (for example Connexions, the Area Child Protection Committee and the Learning Disabilities Partnership Board) partners have proved more than accommodating in working with Scrutiny Boards when requested to do so.
- 12.2 Current guidance on community strategies is that:
- "Overview and scrutiny committees have an invaluable role to play in working with the executive and the council to identify community needs and initiatives. This role could involve scrutinising the stated plans and priorities of the council(s) and other provider agencies, commenting on the results of local consultation, and initiating audits of resources to meet expressed needs. They may also wish to play a role in evaluating the strategy as it develops, for example against sustainable development criteria."
- 12.3 The present consultation paper says that this role "has the potential to extend ... to scrutinising the four blocks of the LAA because they set out the outcomes for delivering the Sustainable Community Strategy."
- 12.4 It is however noted that OSCs have "limited powers" to require partners other than the local authority and NHS bodies to attend and recognise their recommendations. Whilst the paper suggests that "it may be useful to extend this to other sectors" Members will need to weigh up the pros and cons of adjusting the relationship of the City Council and its partners.
- 12.5 Members and others have noted on many occasions the success of the Health Scrutiny process in Coventry, and this has to be due in some part to the statutory nature of the Health Scrutiny legislation. But Health Scrutiny's success in Coventry has not been replicated everywhere, and what has been particularly important has been the

relationships between the City Council and the Health Community, backed up by the commitment of the various individuals who have been involved in the detail of the work.

12.6 Even if Scrutiny Board's powers were extended to cover more partner organisations, this would not in itself generate new capacity for scrutiny. The amount of scrutiny work that can be undertaken will continue to depend on the resources each council is able to provide for the purpose. The extension of scrutiny into the health field three years ago was legislated for but not funded by Central Government.

13 Local Area Agreements

What impact does the Council want LAAs to have on community planning and LSPs. How can the need to negotiate LAAs with the Government Office for the Region be managed so the community strategy is a genuinely bottom-up description of local vision? What are the developments the Councils want to see?

14 Sustainability:

14.1 Community strategies have, under the Local Government Act 2000, a duty to contribute to sustainable development in the UK. However, it is now proposed that they should be renamed Sustainable Community Strategies. The Council may wish to comment on how to make this a reality. Issues might include creating a common understanding of sustainability, influencing partners, whether the agencies and functions typically involved in LSPs include all of those necessary to achieve sustainable development.

14.2 The Coventry Partnership is already recognised as one of the Greenest in operation and recent work on development of a sustainable community strategy has been based on rigorous assessment and an inclusive approach

15 Coventry Partnership response

15.1 The Partnership considered the consultation at their last meeting and came to some initial views which can be summarised as follows:

- Successful partnerships such as the Coventry Partnership do not need legislation to make them work. Legislation runs counter to the ethos of partnership work
- Government should take time to look at why partnerships such as Coventry's are successful not assume legislation is the answer
- Partnership working is already included in some agency assessments. It would be helpful if there could be one assessment rather than several.
- LSPs would become stronger if government departments worked in a more corporate fashion.

15.2 The latest draft of the Coventry Partnership consultation response is attached for Members information (Appendix 2) should a more up to date draft be available it will be circulated at the meeting

	Yes	No
Key Decision		
Scrutiny Consideration	15 th February 2006	

(if yes, which Scrutiny meeting and date)		
Council Consideration (if yes, date of Council meeting)		

List of background papers: Local Strategic Partnerships: Shaping their Future"
ODPM December 2006

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Papers open to Public Inspection

Description of paper

Location

None

Wpdox:P.Barnett/ 2005/2006 re: Report on Local Strategy Partnerships

Key Questions

This is the list of all 35 questions contained in the consultation document “Local Strategic Partnerships: Shaping their future” many of the questions relate to two-tier areas of local government and some others do not apply to the City Council.

The role of LSPs and Sustainable Community Strategies

LSPs, Sustainable Community Strategies and LAAs

- 1: Do you agree that the key role of the LSP should be to develop the vision for the local area, through the Sustainable Community Strategy and the 'delivery contract' through the LAA (as set out in figures 1 & 2)

Regional/sub-regional engagement

- 2: We believe it is important that LSPs reflect regional/sub-regional plans where relevant in their Sustainable Community Strategy priorities and that regional organisations and partnerships take account of key local needs. How can this greater co-ordination best be facilitated?

Links to local plans

- 3: Would a requirement on bodies producing theme or service-based plans to ‘have regard’ to the Sustainable Community Strategy in doing so and vice versa, increase the LSP's ability to take the over-arching view in an area?

Sustainable Community Strategies

- 4: Are the proposed steps in the development of a Sustainable Community Strategy correct? (See box on page 18)
- 5: What more could be done to ensure Sustainable Community Strategies are better able to make the links between social, economic and environmental goals and to deal more effectively with the area's cross-boundary and longer-term impacts?

Neighbourhood Engagement

- 6: What should be the role of the LSP in supporting neighbourhood engagement and ensuring the neighbourhood/parish voice, including diverse and minority communities, is heard at the principal local level?
- 7: In two-tier areas, is it most appropriate for the responsibility for neighbourhood engagement to rest with the district level LSP?

Links with Local Development Framework

- 8: How can spatial planning teams best contribute to Sustainable Community Strategies through the LSP and ensure that LDFs and Sustainable Community Strategies are closely linked?
- 9: How could revised guidance and accompanying support materials best ensure that Sustainable Community Strategies and Local Development Frameworks join up effectively?

Two-tier areas

- 10: Should every local authority area have its own LSP?

11: Would the establishment of a greater delineation of roles between county and district LSPs as suggested be sensible? (See paras 65 to 69)

LSP as the partnership of partnerships

12: We believe that it is important that the LSP is made up of the thematic partnerships in the area together with an LSP board. What is your view?

13: We believe that a rationalisation of local partnerships would help the LSP executive take an effective overview. Would clustering partnerships around the four LAA blocks be a sensible way to achieve this?

14: We believe that the geographic boundaries of partners within LSPs is important. What do you see as the opportunities for, and barriers to, co-terminosity shared geographic boundaries?

15: Within the LSP framework and its established priorities, would the creation of single delivery vehicles to tackle particular issues be helpful?

Ensuring wide representation

16: How can the neighbourhood and parish, tiers be involved most effectively on the LSP on a) the executive and b) individual thematic partnerships?

17: How can the private, voluntary and community sectors be involved most effectively on the LSP as a) the executive and b) individual thematic partnerships?

Providing a legislative foundation

18: Would a duty to co-operate with the local authority, in producing and implementing the Community Strategy, help to set LSPs on a firmer footing and better enable their enhanced delivery co-ordination role?

19: If so, what obligations, such as attendance, financial or staff support, would be useful to place on partners?

20: If so, which public sector agencies would the duty be most sensibly placed on?

21: Should there be a statutory duty on local authorities and named partners to promote the engagement of the voluntary and community sectors in the LSP?

Accountability between partners

22: Should each partnership be encouraged to produce protocols or 'partnership agreements' between partners to ensure clear lines of accountability for the delivery of agreed outcomes?

23: We believe that if partnership working was included as part of other key agencies' assessments it would be effective in securing greater commitment from other public sector agencies. What are your views?

Involvement of local councillors

24: What do you see as the key role for executive councillors within LSPs?

25: What do you see as the appropriate role for backbenchers particularly in ensuring a high quality of local engagement?

26: What would make councillors' powers of overview and scrutiny more effective in scrutinizing the 4 blocks of the LAA?

Involvement of Members of Parliament

27: What would be the most appropriate way for a Member of Parliament to be involved with the LSP and how can we ensure that it is complementary to the role of local councillors?

Involvement of Communities Served

28: How can we promote effective community engagement and involvement, from all sections of the community in shaping local priorities and public services?

29: How can we maximise the opportunities for joint policy and joint activity on community engagement, including the LDF, the LAA and the Sustainable Community Strategy?

30: How can accountability to local people and businesses be enhanced?

31: What are your LSP's key support/skill gaps?

32: What extra or different support would be most helpful in shifting to a more delivery focused role?

33: How would LSPs prefer to receive information and support; through guidance, toolkits, signposting to existing information, practical learning opportunities etc?

34: How can LSPs ensure that adequate learning and support provision is available to build the capacity of communities to engage with the LSP and its partners at the various levels?

35: What learning or development do you feel is required by LSPs in order to delivery sustainable communities that embody the principles of sustainable development at the local level?

LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS – GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION

DRAFT RESPONSE FROM COVENTRY

1. The role of LSPs and Sustainable Community Strategies (Questions 1-11)

1.1 LSPs: sustainable community strategies and LAAs:

We support the Government's efforts to clarify the role of LSPs in the new policy context set by Local Area Agreements, the ODPM's *local: vision* discussions.

1.2 We agree that the role of LSPs should be to concentrate upon the development of a widely owned 'vision' for a local area, through a sustainable community strategy and action plan. However, we believe that LSPs cannot be described as delivery partnerships and the paper needs to state more clearly that the role LSPs should have is to facilitate better delivery, i.e. drive the delivery of LSP objectives within and across its partner organizations to meet the aspirations set out in its community strategy. This facilitation should include the development of partnership wide learning programmes, an agreed performance management framework, a clear and robust focus upon qualitative and quantitative evaluation, the development of a culture of "peer challenge and review" and a constant focus upon service improvement, added value and cost efficiency. The emphasis for delivery should be more properly placed on the local partners in any LSP. This will be vitally important in ensuring that local agencies 'take ownership' of the community strategy and take real responsibility for making it happen.

1.3 We would support the desire to see LAAs and community strategies becoming more closely aligned. In Coventry we have achieved this through the development of a single performance management system based upon a national set of targets that can be analysed locally at small area level and which are supplemented by local quality of life surveys. The Local Area Agreement should be developed and refreshed through the performance management process on a regular basis. The fact that LAAs are based around four distinct blocks defined by the ODPM, may mean that LAAs prove to be too narrowly drawn around a small number of public service issues to reflect the breadth of local community strategies. As such, we would be concerned that LAAs do not restrict the scope of LSPs to identify their own priorities and action plans.

1.4 A key issue which the consultation did not cover sufficiently is that the integration of community strategies with LAAs is to a very great extent dependent upon the ability of government departments and their regional representatives to work as a corporate body rather than a range of fragmented and individual initiatives each with their own reporting requirements. This issue needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

2. Legislation, Involvement and the Regions:

2.1 The Coventry Partnership is a strong and effective partnership. The voluntary, community and private sectors are involved at all levels and it has the strong support and leadership of the City Council. We believe that partnerships such as ours do not need legislation or other forms of compulsion to effectively involve partners or to deliver a community strategy. Indeed this could damage the good relations that we have built up over a number of years. We believe it would be far better for government to creative incentives for agencies to work together. These could include financial incentives related to their core budgets, a reduction in their reporting arrangements, partnership-related grants and so on.

2.2 Whilst there has been much research undertaken to monitor the development and assess the effectiveness of partnerships, there has been relatively little work which attempts to identify why the best are so effective and how effective relationships and joint working are developed. To this end, we would like to invite ODPM to work with the Coventry Partnership on a joint research project.

2.3 The involvement of sub-regional and regional agencies in the development and delivery of communities strategies is patchy. Again, we do not think that legislation is the most effective way of improving this situation. Because most regional and sub-regional agencies as arms of particular government departments it should not require legislation to involve them in community strategies. It would, however, as mentioned above need government to act in a more corporate fashion and to direct their agents to work with LSPs and their community strategies.

3. Neighbourhood engagement:

3.1 As the “Partnership of Partnerships” in an area, we agree that an LSP can play an important role in involving neighbourhoods in the development and delivery of a community strategy. It can:

- Help partners to develop common systems of local neighbourhood engagement such as neighbourhood management or area committees;
- Help to broker shared funding arrangements and boundary changes for such configurations;
- Develop a shared ownership of key performance indicators for use at a local level and which relate to the community strategy;
- Engage partners in a joint analysis of their deprived neighbourhoods to enable local communities and agencies to tackle key issues
- Develop joint working arrangements at a local level

3.2 This is, however, based upon the assumption that the LSP itself has the trust of local communities and includes them or their representatives in decision-making at the highest level. In Coventry, we believe that Elected Members and the Community Empowerment Network can play a vital role in this work.

4. Links with Local Development Framework (LDF):

We agree that sustainable community strategies should provide the general framework for the LDF. As such, we feel that spatial planning teams developing the LDF need to share common elements with the community strategy – for example, the conclusions from statistical evidence on the key issues in an area, the key messages from community engagement exercises and the identification of key economic opportunities. All of these should be part of the community strategy process and should also be used to set the direction of the LDF.

The relationship between LDF and community strategy may also be strengthened where the timing of the two policy-making processes is coordinated. This would require, however, a coordinated response from central government.

5. Governance of LSPs (Questions 12-21)

6. LSPs as the partnership of partnerships

6.1 We believe that identifying the main role of LSPs as a ‘partnership of partnerships’ is misleading and only a partial explanation of what LSPs do. LSPs do have a very important

role to play in coordinating and rationalizing the wide range of local partnerships that successive governments have asked councils to set up. However, this is not the only or primary function of an LSP. On the contrary, to be able to develop a realistic community strategy and facilitate the delivery of this, LSPs have an important role to play in bringing key public, private and voluntary or community agencies together to take ownership of the strategy. As such, LSPs are strategic partnerships of the 'key-players' in any locality and provide an opportunity for these key players to look beyond immediate service priorities and identify long-term aspirations.

7. Structure of LSPs

7.1 Whilst most LSPs are made up of thematic partnerships and have an overall LSP board we do not think it wise for government to insist on particular structures or groupings. Whilst there is some merit in clustering themed-based partnerships around the four LAA blocks, there may also be other considerations that the LSP has to address in its structure. Leaving these decisions to the LSP partners is consistent with our view that as much autonomy as possible should be left with LSPs.

8. Accountability (Questions 22-30)

9. Accountability between partners

9.1 The consultation document suggests making partnership working a key part of the assessments for public agencies, as is currently the case in local authorities. We believe this is already happening. Assessments are made of partnership working by agencies such as the Police and Primary Care Trusts as well as the Local Authorities. Whilst it may be a good idea in theory, in practice it could mean more bureaucracy and an overemphasis upon process (i.e. do they work together?) as opposed to results (i.e. what are they achieving together?)

9.2 We feel that a more productive approach would be to develop a single measure of effective partnership working that could be applied once through the LSP which would then be accepted by individual agency inspectors. It would also be helpful for agency inspections to focus upon evidence of delivery of community strategy priorities within individual business plans rather than the involvement of the agency in the LSP.

10. Involvement of local councillors

We believe that the role of councillors is vital to the success of an LSP and the delivery of its community strategy. Based upon our experience in Coventry, we believe that councillors should take a number of different roles. For example:

- Executive councillors – responsible for leading on the key themes of a community strategy through their own portfolios and role in both the LSP and local authority Cabinet. This will mean ensuring that council and local community priorities are accurately reflected in community strategies and communicated to all LSP partners.
- Ward councillors - responsible for feeding local or neighbourhood priorities into the LSP and community strategy, helping to represent their local community within the LSP and ensuring that district wide plans reflect neighbourhood priorities. Ward councillors also have the responsibility for informing local people of the LSPs work and making sure that neighbourhood arrangements are suitable and operate effectively, so that communities can be engaged successfully.

- Scrutiny – responsible for scrutinizing the work of the Council as a member of the LSP. We do not believe it is productive to expect other agencies which have their own systems of accountability, to attend Scrutiny meetings. Such expectations change the relationship between the Local Authority and its partners from one of equals to one partner being “more equal than others.”

10.2 It should be noted that these functions are not fixed and councillors may move between them as their role changes. For example, Executive councillors, are also ward councillors and will move between these roles as necessary. It may also be the case that ward councillors are, as in Coventry, members of the LSP. It is helpful to highlight the different roles but they should not be prescribed by central government.

11. Capacity issues in LSPs (Questions 31-35)

11.1 We have already raised a number of issues throughout this response which, if they were addressed would increase the capacity of LSPs to support the delivery of community strategies.

These are:

- A more corporate approach by central government to the delivery of community strategies and Local Area Agreements. This would need to produce
 - A reduction in reporting arrangements
 - A performance management rather than a performance monitoring approach by central and regional government to LSPs
- A set of incentives which will encourage partners to work together (rather than the “big stick” of legislation.)
- The development of a single measure of effective partnership working that could be applied once through the LSP which would then be accepted by individual agency inspectors. This would contribute to a reduction in bureaucracy and the number of meetings and interviews partners are currently subjected to.

11.2 In addition, LSPs need:

- Continuation of Neighbourhood Renewal Funding post March 2008. As previous evidence from local authority bodies like SIGOMA, the LGA and the Association of London Government have shown, NRF has played a key factor in both the capacity and success of many LSPs.
- Encouragement to provide effective, local development programmes for partner staff. This could be provided on a regional basis as some successful programmes already are. Alternatively, an element of the NRF funding could be earmarked for such programmes. The Egan report has stressed the importance of the development of skills for regeneration but little has been done at an operational level.
- Support to LSPs and regional government in how to collate, analyse, display and use data in order to improve services.

In conclusion, we believe government (i.e. **all** departments) needs to listen more carefully to those who are working through LSPs and to develop a more productive and ongoing dialogue in order that the implementation of new policies can be “road tested” before they are put in place.