

Delivering Local Sustainability

Comments on the North Somerset Partnership Review and Delivery of the Sustainable Community Strategy.

“The purpose of this strategy is to improve the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of an area and contribute to the achievement of sustainable development throughout the UK”

(North Somerset Sustainable Community Strategy, 2008)

The publication of the new Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) and structural review of the North Somerset Partnership offers a great opportunity to build on the Partnership's experiences over the last few years, and take fresh approach to sustainable strategic planning for the area.

Sustainable Development Appraisal of the SCS

In December 2007, a Sustainability appraisal was carried out on the draft SCS to make sure it was 'fit for purpose'. The 5 shared priorities and associated aims were found to include all the aspects you would hope to find in a local sustainable development strategy.

Recommendations were made to strengthen a small number of the objectives to better align the document with regional and national sustainable development frameworks. These recommendations were incorporated into the final document.

Main Conclusion

Overall, the SCS was found to have excellent potential to deliver sustainable development at the local level. This was mainly due to the structuring of the strategy under 5 'Shared Priorities' rather than traditional, separate 'theme' areas.

In the sustainability appraisal, an assumption was made that these would truly become **Shared** priorities, and that all partners would be required to consider how they can contribute to the delivery of actions, where appropriate, across the priorities, including those outside of their traditional work area.

The appraisal concluded that this structure would enable and encourage greater recognition of opportunities, increased understanding and better joint working across the partnership.

Feedback on NSP Review

It is hoped that the NSP review will result in these potential opportunities being achieved in practice. This is a unique opportunity to put the structures and mechanisms in place that will enable partners to create new links across traditionally separate work areas, thereby achieving 'added value' across the partnership and ultimately better outcomes for local people.

Main concerns

Looking at review papers, there is a concern that in suggesting the different structures, the overarching sustainability focus has been somewhat lost and there seems to be less emphasis on enabling partners to develop work under all of the 5 shared priorities. In sustainability terms, there is a danger that, whatever structure is ultimately chosen for the Delivery Partnerships, these groups are likely to focus only on a narrow set of aims under one or two of the shared priorities and therefore miss valuable opportunities for cross-cutting work.

This would seem to be quite a wasted opportunity and would mean that the overall aim of delivering local sustainable development would, to some extent, be lost. Also, unless all delivery partnerships are considering all 5 priorities, it seems a little misleading to refer to them as 'Shared Priorities'.

Recommendations:

From a sustainability perspective, how the delivery partnerships are structured is not as important as the mechanisms that are put in place to communicate between them.

Agree with having a smaller number of representatives on the board. This is an opportunity for the NSP to refresh its board structures – enabling more clarity about who is sitting on board, whose interests they represent, what expertise and resources they can bring and what they hope to gain from delivery of the SCS.

The Delivery Partnerships would presumably be responsible for setting priorities in their individual work areas, reporting to the board and, critically, ensuring communication with other Delivery Partnerships. It seems to make sense for these to be organised in small groups with closely related interests (Options 1, 3 and maybe 2 would seem potentially suitable).

Ideally, the aims would then be delivered by task and finish groups with representation (at operational level) from all relevant partners bodies, not just those that sit on the Delivery Partnership responsible for that specific aim.

For example:

The Shared Priority of 'Improving Health and Wellbeing' includes the aim to 'Reduce the number of early deaths from heart disease, cancer, stroke, chronic liver disease and preventable accidents'

It is evident that this aim links to a number of objectives in other shared priorities (e.g. access to open space, improving walking and cycling provision, tackling environmental inequalities, access to services etc) so if work is to be done on the health aim, there needs to be provision for it to link to other relevant SCS aims.

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Whilst recognising that this will require some work to develop, it is crucial that mechanisms are put in place that ensure that partners are able to make these links. For example, How will Delivery Partnerships be required to report their contribution to all 5 Shared Priorities? Could reports to the board include a specific section that shows how other Delivery partnerships are being involved in delivering actions?