

LEADER'S REPORT TO COUNCIL – 20TH JULY 2009

Agenda Item 8 (i)

LEADER: Cllr Graham Butland**LEADER PORTFOLIO: Overall Vision and Strategic Direction**

Portfolio covers:-

- Strategic Partnerships – National, Regional, County and District
- External Relationships (including PR and reputation)
- Local Strategic Partnership
- Corporate Governance

REPORT COVERS ACTIVITY DURING PERIOD COMMENCING 23RD JUNE AND ENDING 20TH JULY 2009**1. Braintree Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)**

Since the last meeting of the Council the LSP has received the key findings of the independent assessment, carried out by Aspire 2 Perform, of its performance. The purpose of the assessment is to provide the LSP with an understanding of its strengths and weaknesses and identify opportunities for further development.

I have reproduced below the Executive Summary of the findings and recommendations.

The Findings**An Advanced LSP**

In many respects, the Braintree District LSP is in an advance position compared to some other partnerships in the region. It has now got its structure properly established, and this new set-up lends itself to facilitating effective – and genuinely strategic – partnership working. Furthermore, the LSP benefits from an effective secretariat (many LSPs struggle to secure and maintain appropriate officer support) which is already looking ahead to some of the challenges highlighted in this report. The LSP also has good representation from most sectors, including an unusually high level of engagement with representatives from the local business community. Braintree District LSP also benefits from operating in an environment of openness and trust, and all of these factors have meant the partnership can implement significant projects, such as the Village Agents. Interestingly, though, despite these areas of strength, some participants, when answering, gave scores which – in the Aspire 2 Perform team's experience – seemed too low compared to the anecdotal evidence they also provided.

Further to the above, several themes became apparent through the answers given by the different participants. These issues are drawn from the stated perceptions of the partners who participated in the process; the specific comments pertaining to individual questions are detailed in the Analysis section of this document, along with further detail of these themes.

Performance Management

The LSP seems to have good reporting mechanisms in place and, with the move to the present structure, should be able to monitor performance well. However, the next step for the LSP is to move to Performance Management. This will ensure more effective delivery and help to improve partner accountability, which is a topic many participants had concerns about.

Partners' Understanding

It is apparent from participants' responses that not all partners have the same level of understanding about what the LSP is, what it should be doing and what they should be doing to make an effective contribution. This is perhaps to be expected from such a diverse group of individuals and represented organisations, but there are steps the LSP can take to counteract this.

Representation

The Braintree District LSP has very good representation in most areas. This is especially true with the Private Sector (which LSPs often struggle to engage with) and the Third Sector (who have a dedicated Partnership Board). However, the LSP would benefit from further engagement with the local college; while the college is represented on the Economic Development and Transport Partnership Board, it would be beneficial to also have representation from this important local partner on the Steering Group.

Publicise the LSP/Increase Engagement with the Public

Because public awareness helps to ensure the accountability of an LSP, the Aspire 2 Perform team would suggest that the LSP increases public awareness; the LSP is quite advanced and should be able to do this successfully.

Effective Consultation

Combining the development of the Sustainable Community Strategy with that of the Local Development Framework has allowed the LSP to benefit from very wide-ranging consultation that has produced a large number of responses.

Partnership Ethos

There is clearly an established environment of partnership working within the district area. It was apparent throughout the assessment that partners are trusting, ready to share information and are enthusiastic about the prospect of working in partnership.

Good Structural Arrangements

Most participants agreed that the recent structural changes of the LSP were a positive step, even if it will take time for the arrangements to 'bed in'. The arrangements have the potential to allow true strategic planning, good performance monitoring (and then management) and inclusivity without over-burdening any one group/Board. The emphasis going forward will need to be ensuring that all three levels are effectively connected and 'talk' to each other.

Good Partnership Coordination and Support

Having the Partnerships and Performance Manager in post was recognised by many participants as being an important step in the right direction. From our experience of LSPs across the region, we would expect this appointment to give the LSP important capacity and operational drive.

Recommendations

In some ways, the Braintree District LSP is in an advanced position compared to some of its counterparts within the region. The decision to change the LSP to a three-layer structure could prove very beneficial; LSPs often struggle to be genuinely strategic, and the creation of the Executive Group could help address this. Furthermore, the Steering Group seems to be ideally placed to provide the oversight of the Partnership Boards' activity which is needed. However, even though some issues within this report will be organically addressed by the continued establishment of this new structure, there are, naturally, some areas where the LSP could look to improve and build on the solid foundations it already has in place.

- **Clarify roles, responsibilities, and the LSP's aims:** The LSP would benefit from an induction process. Part of this would be an induction pack 'anchored' by the 'Quick Guide' leaflet. When welcoming new partners to an LSP it is best to assume they know nothing about why they are there or what the LSP seeks to do. This is not a reflection on any of the partners, but a reflection

of the diverse range of backgrounds representatives have and the intrinsic complexity of LSPs. As well as the pack, it would be beneficial for an established member of the LSP to sit and discuss the partnership with the incoming partner. Furthermore, all partners, at least at Executive and Steering Group level should have formal descriptions of their role. This should not be down to individual level, but rather describe what the role of a sector or organisational representative is (e.g.: what a Police/Health/Third Sector representative would need to do effectively engage with the LSP). While this would also be an integral part of an induction pack such, it should also be issued to all existing representatives (issuing it to all partners eliminates the potential embarrassment an established representative may feel at not fully understanding their role). Having role descriptions will also help to increase accountability. The LSP should also consider 'speed dating' to allow partners from different parts of the LSP to establish an understanding of what other Boards/groups do in order to further their overall understanding of the partnership and to avoid silo working.

- **Engage with the local college:** Education representation will clearly play into a variety of cross-cutting themes.
- **Increase public awareness and engagement:** In order to increase its accountability to the public the LSP needs to raise its profile. The website which is being developed should have some content suitable for public consumption. Additionally, the LSP should consider opening some of its meetings to the public. Both Harlow 2020 and Hertsmere Together have successfully done this with their Board meetings, and they also use the opportunity to accept contributions from the gallery. This has allowed them to dispel myths about the LSP and, in Hertsmere particularly, has led to some very positive outcomes, largely because interaction with the gallery allows impromptu intelligence gathering. The Braintree District LSP would also benefit from some type of public forum; an easy solution to this could be to engage the public within the existing structure of the annual Assembly. Finally, the 'Quick Guide' leaflet would also be a suitable tool for raising public awareness.
- **Build on existing Elected Member awareness:** Another important aspect of achieving accountability for the LSP is to effectively engage with the relevant Local Authority's Elected Members. Braintree District LSP is already in a strong position in this area, having full engagement from the Leader of the Council and a number of other Councillors represented with the partnership's structure. However, the LSP should also engage with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (there are examples within Essex of how the normal processes have been modified slightly to be more appropriate to the partnership context) and consider giving an annual report to full Council.
- **Ensure clarity of resource management:** With the new structure in place the LSP needs to ensure that resources are transparently managed in the future and that each partner understands how resources will be used and processed.
- **Ensure agendas, minutes and presentations are received in time:** Some partners felt unable to properly engage in their respective meetings because of a lack of time with which to properly read relevant documentation. If this is not already happening, partners will need to get relevant papers at least 10 days in advance of their meeting.
- **Move to Performance Management:** To increase the LSP's effectiveness in delivery and the accountability of partners, a robust Performance Management framework needs to be implemented. Part of this should be the standardisation of reporting mechanisms if this has not already happened.
- **Influence commissioning in the locality:** In the long term, the LSP needs to move to a position which allows it to oversee and strategically influence the commissioning activity of statutory partners. As a non-statutory body, the LSP can not become a commissioner itself, but the Braintree District LSP's dynamism and progress means it can begin to consider how it can facilitate true collaboration between its partners to ensure the most efficient and effective use of resources.

Members of the LSP met on Tuesday 7th July to consider the report and produce an Action Plan to implement the recommendations.

2. **East of England Regional Assembly (EERA)**

The next meeting of EERA will be held on Friday 17th July and I will make an oral report to Council on key issues.

**FURTHER INFORMATION ON THE CONTENTS OF THIS REPORT CAN BE OBTAINED BY CONTACTING:
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