The future of partnership working

All Wards

Report authorised by: Councillor Steve Reed, Leader of the Council

Executive summary

This report outlines issues around partnership working in Lambeth. Some context is provided, an overview of the current situation and some indication about future direction of travel.

Summary of financial implications

This report does not raise any new revenue or capital financial implications for the Council besides its existing resources.

Recommendation

(1) That the report be noted and that council provide commentary on the future of partnership working in Lambeth.
Consultation

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Report history

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Background documents
Lambeth First Annual Review 2009-10

Appendices
none
Partnerships in Lambeth

1. Background

1.1 In 2001 the previous government introduced a requirement on those 88 areas in receipt of Neighbourhood Renewal Funding (NRF) to create Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP). These partnerships were conceived as a place where service providers and service users would come together to decide on priorities in addressing deprivation in their area and in deciding on the use of NRF.

1.2 Two years later the government broadened the requirement to have LSPs to all areas. LSPs were to provide the context in which the Community Strategy – the long term vision and strategy for the borough – was developed and were to be a platform for conversation and co-ordination between the various sectors.

1.3 There was an increased scrutiny of the effectiveness of partnership work, and the failure of Lambeth First to prioritise, take decisions, deliver improvements and effectively involve partners meant that in 2005/06 we were on “special measures” and had an improvement advisor assigned to us.

1.4 Increasingly LSPs were viewed as a vehicle to drive improved performance in an area and the introduction of the National Indicator set and Local Area Agreements together with the “duty to co-operate” in meeting targets, brought an age of managerialism to partnership working and was marked by distinct tensions between national policy and local choice.

1.5 Locally we experienced the best and worst of this. The new focus on partnership work and the need to be serious about co-ordinating work led to a real drive to choose and prioritise with the production of a Sustainable Community Strategy with a distinctive priority at its heart. Our success in partnership working was recognised with a national award in 2009. On the other hand the introduction of Local Area Agreements led to real tensions and arguments with central government about the reality behind freedom to choose local targets.

1.6 Partnership working also became centre stage in relation to audit and inspection with the Comprehensive Area Assessment looking at place rather than organisation and LSPs with their Sustainable Community Strategies and Local Area Agreements at the heart of the area inspection.

1.7 As well as overseeing the commissioning of the Working Neighbourhoods Fund with a range of projects addressing worklessness, the partnership has also been the vehicle for the receipt and delivery of the Migration Impact Fund and the Future Jobs Fund which successfully created 329 jobs.

1.8 Partnership working has produced a range of significant outcomes. These are outlined in the Annual Review which is appended to this report.

1.9 In the last few months of the previous government 13 national pilots and a number of unofficial pilots, including Lambeth, explored the concept of “Total Place”. This was conceived as a way to take account of the total expenditure in any place and to examine the opportunities to drive out duplication and financial
waste whilst, at the same time, produce a better and simpler experience for citizens accessing services

2. Current context

2.1 The coalition government has moved swiftly to remove some of the architecture surrounding partnership working. We have already seen

- The abolition of the government public service agreements from which the national indicator set is derived and the scrapping of many of the indicators themselves. It is therefore highly unlikely that Local Area Agreements will survive in their present form if at all

- The abolition of the Government Office for London which had an enforcement role in relation to performance management

- The scrapping of the Comprehensive Area Assessment

2.2 The government has also indicated a direction of travel with respect to other partnership matters

- The NHS White Paper signals a new direction for partnership arrangements around health. Local authorities will be responsible for:
  - Promoting integration and partnership working between the NHS, social care, public health and other local services and strategies;
  - Leading joint strategic needs assessments, and promoting collaboration on local commissioning plans, including by supporting joint commissioning arrangements where each party so wishes; and
  - Building partnership for service changes and priorities. There will be an escalation process to the NHS Commissioning Board and the Secretary of State, which retain accountability for NHS commissioning decisions.

- In terms of policing and community safety arrangements for local accountability are also changing. The Coalition Programme states ‘We will introduce measures to make the police more accountable through oversight by a directly elected individual, who will be subject to strict checks and balances by locally elected representatives.’ The Government has not yet published detailed plans on how such ‘elected individuals’ will be elected, their precise role, or their formal relationships (if any) to local councils, LSPs or community safety partnerships

- In terms of Children and Young People, the Secretary of State has indicated that there will no longer be any requirement to have a Children’s Trust Board or produce a Children and Young People’s Plan but that these decisions are to be left to local discretion

2.3 On a broader front there are clear signals about a localist agenda
- Government has committed to giving councils a general power of competence. This will be included in the Devolution and Localism Bill, to be introduced in this first session of the new Parliament.

- Eric Pickles, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, said in his first speech: 'I have three very clear priorities: localism, and we'll weave that into everything we do from parks to finance to policy. My second priority is localism, and my third is... localism'.

- The intentions behind the “Big Society” are to deliver in 5 areas
  - Give communities more powers
  - Encourage people to take an active role in their communities
  - Transfer power from central to local government
  - Support co-ops, mutuals, charities and social enterprises
  - Publish government data

2.4 The other highly significant factor at play is the national drive to reduce the budget deficit. This will impact both on the particular grant funds that have come through partnership working and on the ability of local partners to invest in anything other than core business. The partnership is actively discussing how to handle both in year cuts and anticipated cuts to be announced in the Comprehensive Spending Review. The partnership is trying to ensure that it handles these cuts in a way which protects the most vulnerable, continues to invest in innovative solutions to delivery and keeps us focussed on shared priorities. However this task in the sort of financial envelope we are operating in will undoubtedly put strain on relationships and unpalatable choices will need to be made.

2.5 No specific Government statements have been made on the future of LSPs, in terms of their role and responsibilities. On the one hand, the trend towards localism, greater autonomy, and more freedoms should strengthen the role of partnerships. On the other hand, the uncertain future of LAAs and Total Place, and the abolition of CAA, means that the former regular workload of LSPs and their thematic sub-partnerships has changed in a short space of time. Some of the dynamics which brought (and kept) local partner agencies to a shared table are no longer there.

2.6 Many LSPs, including Lambeth First, are in the process of reviewing their sustainable community strategies to meet difficult challenges ahead, and will be looking for ways of making savings through closer joint working with partners, shared asset management, and possible workforce integration. These activities are clearly very relevant to the new Government’s agenda. LSPs also have an important potential role in addressing the questions posed by the shifting boundaries between citizen and state.

3. Future direction

3.1 The previous government’s introduction of a “duty to co-operate” needs to be
replaced with a genuine willingness to co-operate. In truth all real partnership is underpinned by good relationships, by shared values and a shared commitment to the place. Legislation is no substitute for this willingness. All the indications are that in Lambeth there is a strong commitment to continue in partnership without central statute or guidance.

3.2 Partnership working is about far more than what happens formally at Board meetings. Formal meetings are an inevitability of partnership work but in future there should be less of an emphasis on these and a move to more informal and fluid ways of operating. This will mean providing opportunities for a wide range of people to be involved in conversation about priorities and new ways of delivering. It will also mean generating fresh ideas through debate and consideration of the issues we face. The partnership will need to move increasingly to being a platform for conversations about co-design and co-production.

3.3 In an age of financial constraint partnership working will be ever more vital to ensure that we co-ordinate resources better and maintain a focus on shared priorities. Moreover the partnership will need to work hard to co-ordinate resources around national programmes. For example, the new Single Work Programme from DWP will require a local “wrap around” service to ensure that our most vulnerable residents are best able to benefit.

3.4 However we need to find new ways of partnering, more agile and responsive. In particular we need to make sure that partnership working isn’t just a game played between public sector players. Partnership with the public, with service users, with citizens needs to be at the heart of the new arrangements. Lambeth First has been discussing since last November how to move towards these new ways of working which are inherently more collaborative and focussed on co-design and co-production. In this respect the partnership has been discussing what values, principles and mechanisms might produce a co-operative borough.

3.5 Across the partnership the language of co-design and co-production is far more prevalent and it is significant that this conversation predates notions of “Big Society” and is, in fact, a local evolution of the work we have been doing in partnership to achieve more citizen focussed solutions. Government recognises our expertise in this area. For example in July we hosted a meeting of Whitehall Permanent Secretaries and Directors asking the question “How to deliver Big Society in deprived neighbourhoods?”

3.6 Part of this is about creating a workforce that is agile enough and creative enough to work in a respectful and collaborative way with Lambeth communities. Our joint workforce development programme is starting to address these issues through joint induction, buddying schemes, action learning sets and middle management masterclasses.

3.7 Partnership working can provide the framework and setting for the new settlement that is needed between state, civil society and the private sector. Delivery of co-operative ideas will entail a shift of the boundaries between the sectors, a shrinking of the state and an expansion of 3rd and private sector activity. How these boundaries shift and how conversations about shared
priorities will be delivered will be crucial. A partnership forum can provide a safe space for such dialogue.

4 Comments from Executive Director of Finance and Resources
4.1 There are no financial implications in this report.

5 Comments from Director of Legal and Democratic Services
5.1 By virtue of section 2, Local Government Act 2000, local authorities have the power to do anything which they consider is likely to achieve the promotion or improvement of the economic, social and environmental well-being of their area. This power may be exercised in relation to, or for the benefit of, the whole or any part of the authority's area or all or any persons resident or present in their area.

5.2 The section 2 power includes power for a local authority to, inter alia, give financial assistance to, enter into an agreement with, or provide staff, goods, services or accommodation to, any person. However, the well-being power does not enable the authority to raise money, nor to do anything which it is unable to do by virtue of any existing statutory prohibition, restriction or limitation on its powers.

5.3 Section 4 of the Local Government Act 2000 places a statutory obligation on the Council to prepare a strategy for promoting or improving the economic, social and environmental well-being of their area and contributing to the achievement of sustainable development in the UK.

5.4 Part 5 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 provides for a Local Area Agreement (“LAA”), which is an agreement between a local authority and certain partner authorities, approved by the Secretary of State. It must be prepared by the local authority which will consult partner authorities and others (including persons from the voluntary and community sector and local businesses). The local authority and partner authorities are required to co-operate with each other in determining local improvement targets for the area to be included in the LAA. Part 5 also amends section 4 of the Local Government Act 2000 to provide that the local authorities which prepare LAA’s must consult partner authorities when preparing their sustainable community strategy.

5.5 The Government issued statutory guidance (“Creating Strong, Safe & Prosperous Communities”) in July 2008, from which the following is reproduced:

2.2 Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) provide the forum for collectively reviewing and steering public resources, through identifying priorities in Sustainable Community Strategies and LAA[s]. But (as non-statutory bodies) they are not the ultimate decision makers on such plans. All target-setting, and consequent financial, commissioning, or contractual commitments proposed by LSPs, must be formalised through the relevant local authority, or through one of the other LSP partners (for example, if policing, or health resources are involved).
2.3 LSPs are not statutory bodies and there are no provisions in the Act that create a legal relationship between either local authorities and ‘the LSP’ or their partners and ‘the LSP’. LSPs are instead a collection of organisations and representatives coming together voluntarily to work in partnership.

6. Results of consultation

6.1 Not applicable.

7. Organisational implications

7.1 Risk management:
Not applicable.

7.2 Equalities impact assessment:
Not applicable.

7.3 Community safety implications:
Not applicable.

7.4 Environmental implications:
Not applicable.

7.5 Staffing and accommodation implications:
None.

7.6 Any other implications:
None.

8. Timetable for implementation

8.1 Not applicable.