



Office of the  
Deputy Prime Minister  
Creating sustainable communities

Department for  
**Transport**

*National Evaluation of  
Local Strategic Partnerships:  
Formative Evaluation and  
Action Research Programme  
2002–2005*

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*Executive Summary to Final Report*



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January 2006

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The findings and recommendations in the report are those of the consultant authors and do not necessarily represent the views or proposed policies of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

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# 1. Introduction

This report draws together key findings from the National Evaluation of LSPs. Jointly commissioned by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Department for Transport (DfT), the first 3 years of the programme has been undertaken by the Universities of Warwick, Liverpool John Moores, West of England, Bristol and the Office for Public Management. It comprised a Feasibility Study, Formative Evaluation and Action Research (March 2002 – March 2005). The objective of this phase of the National Evaluation has been to support LSPs and policy-makers at local, regional and central levels, and to evaluate the progress LSPs are making. A Summative Evaluation of impacts and effectiveness is provisionally planned to commence in 2006.

The evaluation has identified both governance and delivery issues. This summary presents the main findings under these two headings.

This has been a formative evaluation, focused on processes and policy development but only preliminary impacts. This reflects government's view in commissioning the evaluation that it was too early to fully evaluate the *impact* of LSPs until after they have bedded down and have had several years to implement their strategies. This is consistent with the findings of much research on partnerships which suggests that effective partnership working relationships can take a considerable time to become embedded.

## 2. Governance issues

Governance issues encompass a wide range of factors (from leadership to representation and accountability) concerning the ways in which LSPs are organised as institutions and work with other organisations and interests, including their local partners and institutions 'above and below the LSP.

The evaluation shows that LSPs have, in a relatively short time, established themselves as a vital part of the institutional arrangements of modernised local governance. There is a broad positive consensus about the principle and purpose of LSPs.

However there are very considerable differences in the extent to which LSPs can yet be said to have established robust and sustainable governance arrangements. There are important differences between NRF and non-NRF LSPs, and also between those in different kinds of local authority area (as well as between LSPs within these categories). The extent to which the LSP has been able to draw on a positive history of partnership working in each locality and whether it was set up relatively early or late are major factors.

Some LSPs have established governance arrangements which seem both effective and inclusive. In others there is often still a gap between the accepted principle of the LSP and the reality. Many LSPs' structures and arrangements are not necessarily yet fully fit for purpose. There are a number of significant factors concerning governance arrangements.

The **strategic capacity** of the board or executive is important. This in turn relates to issues of membership, leadership and a clear understanding of the role and purpose of the partnership. **Leadership** is a crucial element in determining the capacity of LSPs, but the exercise of leadership within strategic partnerships remains extremely challenging, implying the desirability

of further support to LSPs for leadership development. The importance of strategic capacity and effective leadership is now made all the more important by the roll-out of **LAAs**.

An important task envisaged for LSPs in early guidance was the **rationalisation** of the often overlapping and confusing pattern of partnerships at local level. Little progress has been made on this, but LAAs have also brought this issue into sharp focus.

There has been more progress with **'process rationalisation'** by means of protocols, co-ordination and better ways of working – but it is not clear this is always an effective substitute for structural rationalisation. There has also been progress in **rationalising plans and processes** and reducing the planning burden (on local authorities and their partners), though this is taking time to work out in practice.

Substantial numbers of LSPs identify accountability as an area that needs strengthening. There is a lack of clarity on a number of aspects including the accountability of the LSP *to* partners, and the accountability *of* partners to the LSP, as well as wider public accountability. A key issue is the relationship of the LSP to local democratic processes, where the lynchpin role is that of the local councillor, yet many are not closely connected to, or in sympathy with, the LSP, and it is not clear that even where (mostly senior) councillors are actively and positively engaged with the LSP that they necessarily prioritise issues of democratic accountability. In addition, LSPs can operate as agents or mechanisms of **accountability per se**. For example, effective partnership working, and integrating/aligning plans, targets, performance management regimes and budgets all result in considerable scrutiny of individual agencies' actions and resources by stakeholders (public, private, voluntary and community alike).

**Performance management** processes may be helpful in improving accountability, but these are not yet well established in many non-NRF LSPs while in NRF areas performance management may promote accountability to GOs and the NRU as much as or more than to local partners. Issues of accountability and legitimacy are made vastly more important by the pivotal role of LSPs in LAAs.

There are also questions about the **capacity** of LSPs. These include, on the one hand, how far structures and processes make it possible to take hard decisions, for example resolving tensions between conservation and development in one place, dealing with conflicts between competitiveness and cohesion in another. On the other hand, capacity issues are indicated by the expressed need of LSPs for more support from both government and local partners. In particular, non-NRF LSPs require more support from GOs while NRF LSPs may not be able to rely indefinitely on the NRF to support their operation.

The extent to which LSPs have been successful so far in **engaging partners and stakeholders** varies greatly – both among LSPs, and between different categories of partner and stakeholder. For some LSPs, fundamental processes of engagement such as understanding partners' priorities and sharing information and data still remain largely on the 'to do' list. There is, as yet, little good practice anywhere in mapping partners' spending plans.

The evidence is that many **public sector** partners are now making a strong contribution within LSPs, but this engagement needs to be translated into securing change within partner organisations in line with LSP priorities. Other partners – including **local councillors** – still need to be more actively engaged in the LSP itself. There is still a need to engage the **private and business** sector more substantively in many LSPs though there are a number of cases where business involvement is strong and from which lessons could be learned. The **voluntary**

**and community** sector is stretched and under-resourced, and there is a concern that new remits for LSPs (LPSAs, LAAs) should not marginalise the voluntary and community role.

There is an ongoing debate within LSPs about how to steer a course between centrally determined and enforced **performance management** systems versus locally developed systems, and about how to minimise the danger of over complicated bureaucratic systems taking up too much time and energy. Underlying this debate is the current status of the LSP as a non-statutory, non-executive organisation, and the questions of how far an LSP can performance manage its partners, and whether performance management inhibits or encourages partnership working.

Above the LSP, there need to be stronger ties between LSPs' agendas (especially Community Strategies) and **regional and sub-regional economic strategies**.

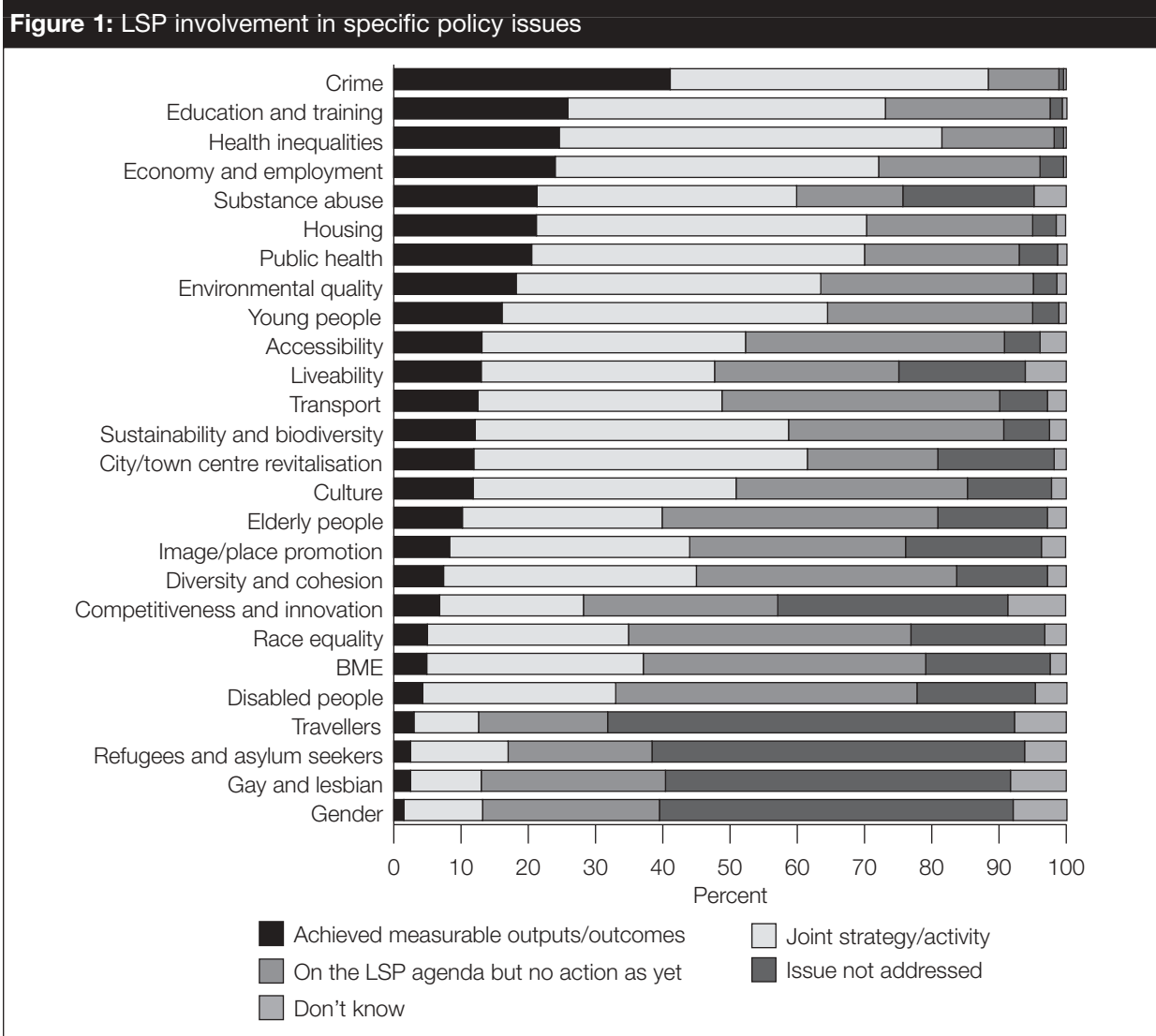
The **neighbourhood governance** agenda makes relationships below the LSP particularly important, and in principle the LSP can be a forum in which multiple sub-local interests can come together. However avoiding duplication of arrangements and involving councillors are important issues.

There are specific issues concerning **two tier areas**. County and district LSPs must be understood as being complementary rather than conflicting, sitting side by side rather than one above the other and underpinned by a common understanding and agreement about their respective roles and strengths. This implies the fuller engagement of district representation in county LSPs in order to engage and legitimise a bottom-up input to strategic thinking, and conversely that of county LSP partners in district LSPs in order to contribute to a more locally responsive and community based application of strategic priorities. In some places, the strategic economic, physical and social issues confronting LSPs at country level do not confine themselves to local government boundaries, and many of the most pressing issues relate to the major urban areas (often unitary authorities) and their hinterlands. Such issues cannot be addressed by county or district LSPs alone.

### 3. Delivery issues

The evaluation shows the primary drivers of activity by LSPs are national policies – Community Strategies and, in NRF areas, neighbourhood renewal – although other potential drivers, such as the Well Being Power, have not been taken up to anything like the same extent.

As Figure 1 below shows, LSPs have become involved in many areas of activity. On many fronts, this activity has already led to either measurable outcomes or the development of joint strategy and/or activity among partners. The greater government requirements of, and support for, NRF LSPs means that in general they have developed more substantial activity and made more progress across most issues (not just in tackling deprivation) than elsewhere. However, many non-NRF LSPs have developed initiatives on a range of issues, from transport to rural development and from economic development to environmental sustainability. There is a clear relationship between the 'maturity' of the LSP partnership and the amount of progress made. At the same time, the evidence indicates a 'tail' of LSPs (mostly but not exclusively non-NRF) where activity so far is limited, including in particular many counties which are or will soon be preparing their LAA. The issue for these LSPs is whether they have the capacity to engage effectively in the process of preparation and delivery of the LAA, or whether they will be marginalised by the process. In this context, the fact that many LSPs consider they need more support from government is significant.



Source: LSP evaluation, 2004 survey

There are also some issues (such as some equalities issues) which are not substantively on the agendas of many LSPs. One effect of LAAs might be to increase the focus on the ‘most important’ issues at the expense of others seen locally as less important, but alternatively the process could provide an opportunity for government to bring such neglected issues up the agenda.

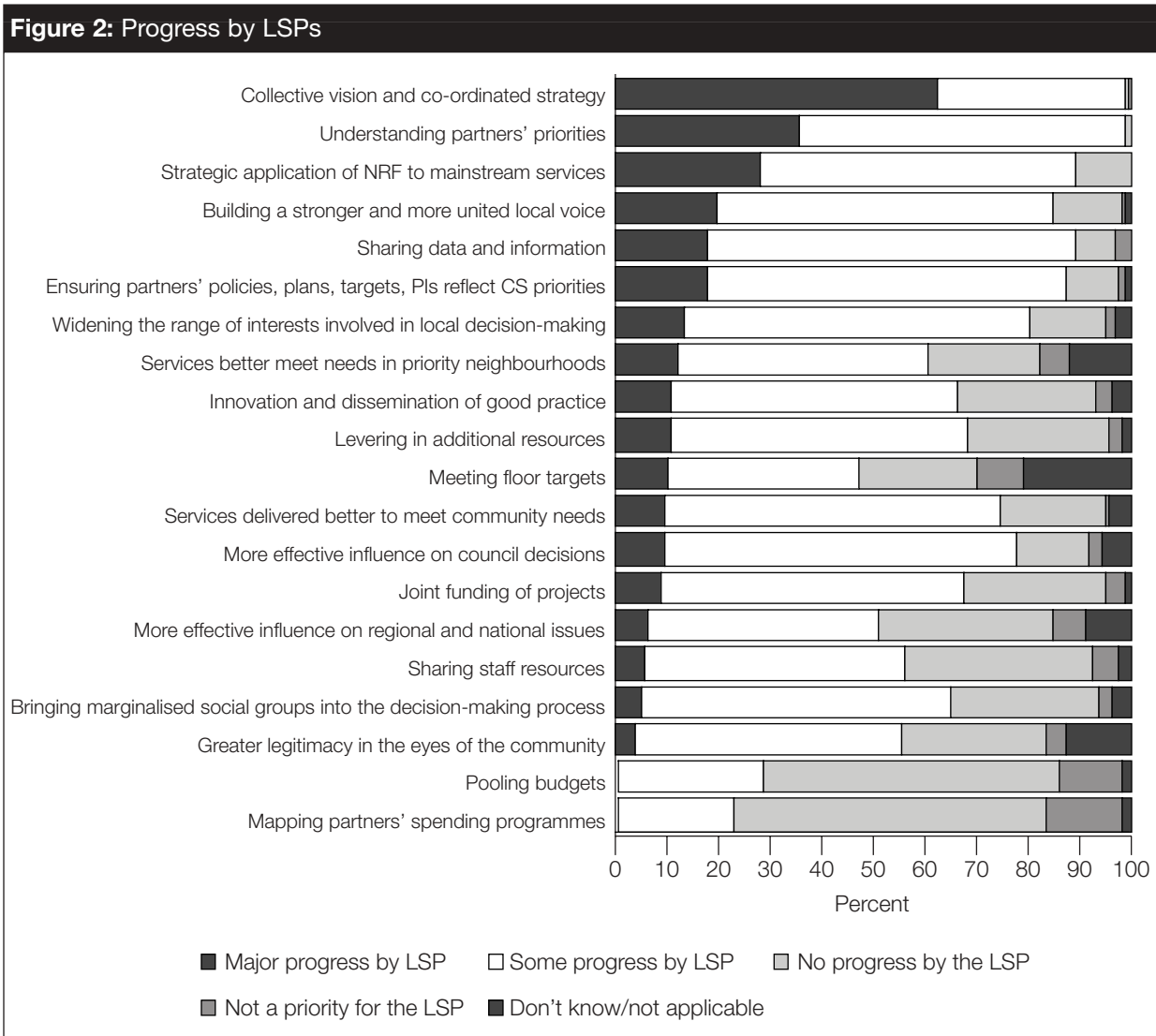
LSPs face a number of tensions in developing activity and action across a broad front. These include the compatibility (or lack of it) of government and local agendas, the question of the level at which to act – strategic or delivery focused and the extent to which the LSP is able to engage both agencies and communities. A further key issue is what action and activity is (and is best) undertaken by ‘the LSP’, by sub-partnerships, or by partners with the collaboration or consent of the LSP.

Figure 2 below shows progress that LSPs consider they have made. Overall, this shows that very significant progress is being made in many areas, especially when it is remembered that LSPs have only been established for a very limited time and the initial expectation was that they would often need some time to bed down. In evaluating the progress of LSPs in delivering outcomes, we have made a distinction between process outcomes, governance outcomes and service outcomes.

Much of the activity of LSPs still centres around what can be called ‘**process outcomes**’ – working more closely with partners, sharing information and staff resources, and financial collaboration via pooled funding of activity. There has been good progress on some of these issues but at the same time there are considerable numbers of LSPs which have not yet made progress in these areas. If these issues are indeed important preconditions which are necessary for LSPs to make real and sustained progress towards service and governance outcomes, the implication must be that for numbers of LSPs significant levels of outcomes may still be some way off.

**Local governance outcomes** include the development of a collective vision and agreed strategy; widening the range of interests involved in local decision making; creating a stronger local voice; improving the perceived legitimacy of local governance; and exercising more effective influence locally and nationally.

The development of a **collective vision and co-ordinated strategy** stands out as the predominant issue on which major progress is claimed by LSPs. Many LSPs also claim to have made some progress on others of these issues, though only very limited numbers consider that they have yet made major progress.



Source: LSP evaluation, 2004 survey

The third category of potential areas of progress relate to outcomes in terms of **service improvements**. The issues on which the 2004 survey provides evidence are:

- Ensuring that partners' policies, plans, targets and PIs reflect the Community Strategy's properties.
- Services delivered better to meet community needs.
- Services which better meet needs in priority neighbourhoods.
- Meeting floor targets.

As is the case in relation to progress towards better governance, the overall picture in relation to service improvements is that substantial numbers of LSPs claim to have made some progress towards service improvement, although only relatively small proportions yet claim to have made major progress.

Differentials between **types of LSPs** are significant in terms of both governance and service outcomes. Thus, as might be expected as a result of the neighbourhood renewal agenda, **NRF LSPs** have had more success in bringing marginalised social groups into decision making. Many more NRF than non-NRF LSPs show major progress achieved in terms of improved services and meeting floor targets. **County LSPs** lag somewhat behind other local authority types, with few claiming major progress.

Turning to progress on **specific policy issues** (as shown in Figure 1 above) a number of issues stand out where significant numbers of LSPs claim to be achieving measurable outputs/outcomes. These are led by crime, but there are numerous other issues where at least a fifth of LSPs claim to have achieved measurable outcomes. These tend to be the areas associated with floor targets and key neighbourhood renewal priorities. At the other end of the spectrum, there are certain issues which significant numbers of LSPs are not addressing at all – these include, for at least one third of all LSPs, competitiveness and innovation (distinguished from economic development and employment); gay and lesbian and gender issues; refugees and asylum seekers and travellers. These would seem to be important issues for government policies on the economy and on social inclusion and community cohesion.

It is important to be able to show what contribution the LSP has made to such outcomes and that they would not have occurred without the LSP. Some LSPs can now identify, with some degree of precision, ways in which the LSP is enabling positive outcomes to occur which would – at least – have been more difficult in the absence of the LSP. However in other cases LSPs are still find this difficult, and some partners are clearly dubious whether the LSP is **adding value**. In some cases there is a suggestion that LSPs may merely be 'badging' outcomes achieved by partners. Those LSPs which are not yet using some form of **performance management** seem to find it hardest to identify added value.

The evaluation has given considerable attention to the issue of **mainstreaming** as one of the keys to delivery. By mainstreaming we primarily mean 'strategic' mainstreaming – the refocusing of mainstream programmes and funding onto targets which are agreed and shared by local partners, reflecting the pattern of local need; but we can also consider 'initiative mainstreaming' – adopting innovative approaches and learning from localised, short-term pilot projects into the mainstream. The evaluation has identified positive examples of mainstreaming, mostly by more experienced LSPs. However, in many LSPs mainstreaming remains largely undiscussed, ambiguous and a major challenge. Most LSPs think that their public sector

partners would like to realign programmes, but are constrained by both resources and by central government targets and demands. However, well over half also consider that a lack of partner commitment is also an important or very important factor, while more than a third of LSPs do not regard realignment of main programmes as a priority.

The key **drivers** for mainstreaming emerging from the research are:

- That the local authority, the police and health organisations are key players.
- That neighbourhood renewal funding (and area-based initiatives in general) can be a powerful learning tool and stimulus to mainstreaming.
- That 'locality' planning between the level of the LSP/local authority and the neighbourhood) is fertile ground for main programme reshaping – close enough to delivery to be responsive to community; far enough above the small area to make main programme planning feasible.
- That three groups in particular – elected members, senior officers, and middle managers (in all delivery partners) – are important.

**LAAs** are an opportunity for LSPs to demonstrate that they have the capacity to add value by helping to bring about improved performance in shared outcomes. LAAs also represent a significant opportunity for LSPs to exert a more effective governance role, enhancing their role as the forum within which partners come together to agree and deliver on local priorities, and enabling them more effectively to influence the mainstream policies of partner agencies. They will also potentially lead to enhanced accountability of government agencies to local people, to the extent that government agencies are active participants in the LAA (which in the pilots was variable). But LAAs also represent a major challenge to local partnership working. Many LSPs lack the capacity and structures for rapid and effective decision-making which the LAA will require. LAAs may highlight tensions between efficient decision making and wide participation, and weaknesses in communication channels. The LAA process is particularly challenging for county level partnerships, where the number of stakeholders is potentially very large and there may be intra-sector tensions to be resolved, and for sectors which lack responsive decision making structures. LAAs also require some mechanism for focused work and decision making within each of the blocks, and effective links between the LSP and the sub-partnerships that are likely to be best placed to fulfil this role. Furthermore, LAAs potentially represent a radical shift in the relationships between LSPs and government, with the Government Offices' performance management, support and intervention role – hitherto confined to LSPs in NRF areas – being extended to all LSPs.

The full report contains a number of **recommendations** which derive from the research for LSPs, partners and central government.

## 4. Further information

Copies of the full report are available from:

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This summary condenses findings from over three years of LSP case study, survey and action learning research. In addition to the final report, over 30 component reports detail findings on specific issues such as: mainstreaming, performance management, leadership and the LSP survey results. These are available on the ODPM website: [www.odpm.gov.uk/localgov](http://www.odpm.gov.uk/localgov)

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