

Total Place, shrinking public expenditure and the role and potential of partnerships

Outbreak paper from 7th October 2009 held at the Ramada Hotel in Maidstone, Kent

Introduction

Total Place has offered Kent the opportunity to respond proactively and innovatively to the changing economic picture and to build on existing initiatives. The significant reduction of public resources in the near future will require new ways of thinking in order that public services can be delivered in different ways. Total place has been drawing together partners in Kent and from central government to consider how to minimise the impact of a reduction in the public purse. This resulted in Progress through Partnership (PtP) hosting an event in order to demonstrate examples of best practice amongst partnerships and to share these best practises with other partnership organisations in the South East.

Three different perspectives were explored during the day; Geoff Norris, an independent advisor for Kent and Bradford projects, discussed the 'Total Place' concept, development of the concept and application of 'Total Place'. Robert Hardy, the Director of Improvement and Engagement at Kent County Council, discussed why 'Total Place' is so important for Kent County Council. Tanya Oliver, the Director of Strategic Development and Public Access at Kent County Council, concluded the morning's presentations with a DVD on The Gateways Initiative. Councillor Mike Cosgrove from Swale Borough Council gave a summary of the day's events and left us with some thought provoking ideas.

Panel of presentations exploring different perspective:

All the presentations can be downloaded by following this link:

<http://www.progressthroughpartnership.org.uk/events-lsp/pastevents.htm?eventid=16726&stdate=>

Q and A session with the panel:

Q Jim Latheron, Sevenoaks District Council:

There seems to be a gap in providing the same support in rural areas, seems to just work in the city, will it work in the rural areas?

A Robert Hardy - At the moment we have been making things do able in the time scales that we have had. The same process will be taken seriously but in time, the continuation of the 'Total Place' philosophy will happen at some stage. At the Kent partnership on the 18th November 2009 issues like this will be brought up but as has been said before we have only been able to do what we can in the time scale we have.

Q Bob Jones, Business Link Kent:

Is there a role for 'Total Place' in business?

The support programme for Local Strategic Partnerships in the south east

A Tanya Oliver – Moving forward yes, providing support to small businesses through the Mobile Gateway. This takes the fixed service out into other areas and could also help in supporting the rural areas.

A Robert Hardy – The model we use has three focus areas one of which is the business area. This offers advice and support “for the public good” to support the customer but it is still early days.

Q Bob Jones, Business Link, Kent – Is there somewhere in ‘Total Place’ where we can see assets?

A Geoff Norris – There is a place at the table for everyone. It is an evolving process in which data comes in from local businesses to help towards the contribution for counting. If we apply knowledge we will have a better understanding and a better way of dealing with issues. Businesses have a very significant place in ‘Total Place’.

A Robert Hardy – Financial assessments are a third aspect that are very important to get the public service working together.

Q Jackie Fisk, Buckinghamshire County Council:

The counting/culture aspect of ‘Total Place’ – how are we using this?

A Robert Hardy – Toward counting/culture we have done what we can to put information out there but in the meantime we have to get on with the rest of our targets but we never stop engaging people, and we must always continue to do so in the long term.

Q Tricia Palmer, Medway Council:

At what point is it appropriate to start making links with the workforce?

A Tanya Oliver – We are shifting people around, but this does not mean job losses. We have got to where we are because of the passions of people involved – real outcomes for real people. There has been a big cultural shift in staff attitudes as it is such a different environment to work in. Sometimes it does just come down to the individuals themselves.

A Geoff Norris – I went to The Gateway as a mystery customer and I was impressed with everything, the commitment of the staff and their professionalism. The people who were working there liked to be associated with success.

Q Adam Chugg, Eastbourne Association of Voluntary Services:

Are measures in ‘Total Place’ purely financial?

A Tanya Oliver – National performance indicators are used by the Government and this all started because of a need to improve customer service, not cost cutting. The driver is customer service not totally money saving.

A Geoff Norris – Deliverables have to be both customer service and cost and savings. Without the economic situation we are living in, ‘Total Place’ may not be where it is today.

A Robert Hardy – We are looking at Horizontal not vertical management to improve efficiency. The hardest thing to change is culture and to try not to turn it into KPI’s, we need to be driven by efficiency not KPI’s or restructuring organisations.

Round table discussion

The afternoon session began with a round table discussion where four questions were discussed in groups of eight people. The questions are below along with the main themes that were drawn from the groups.

1. What barriers are there to the ‘Total Place’ approach?

The support programme for Local Strategic Partnerships in the south east

Three main themes have arisen from this question;

1. 'Letting go' – and constraint of need to work to own targets and culture
2. Politics / democratic accountability
3. Cynicism – Is this just yet another initiative?

2. What are the benefits of the 'Total Place' approach?

Four main themes have arisen from this question;

1. Improved services for individuals
2. Partnership working
3. Mapping/Reduction of wastage
4. Strategic / Policy / Transformational Potential

3. What key message(s) should we be communicating about the 'Total Place' agenda?

Four main themes have arisen from this question;

1. Local
2. Efficiency gains and better services – not cuts
3. Economic benefits
4. Here to stay

4. What are the key actions needed to embed the 'Total Place' approach in your organisation/partnership?

Six main themes have arisen from this question;

1. Develop clear vision and strategy
2. Recognise capabilities, constraints and limitations of own organisation and acknowledge what others can bring
3. Political buy in
4. Communication
5. Learn lessons of pilot
6. Culture understand that world has to change

Overall summary and closing remarks

Councillor Mike Cosgrove a Cabinet Member from Swale Borough Council rounded up the days events and gave a presentation on A Local, Political Perspective of 'Total Place'. According to Mike, Total Place is the "greatest opportunity since 1945 to reshape boundaries of the public sector locally." He concluded that 'Total Place' is not about County Council/District merger, but about achieving better outcomes locally and engaging with Central Government departments. A final question was put to Cllr Cosgrove: Do you think it can work with the system we have in place now? Answering in the affirmative, he believes that if people keep talking about it and there is support through shared services, and from IESE and the rest it can happen, though fundamental change is needed.