

Policy and Priorities: the future of partnership working

Outbreak paper from 14 June 2010 held at LGA, Local Government House.

Introduction

The first PtP event, Policy and Priorities: the future of partnership working, since the coalition Government came into power took place on the 14 June 2010 at the LGA, Local Government House. LSP managers, LSP practitioners, voluntary sector leaders, elected members and other delegates that engage with partnerships came together to explore the future of partnership working and to discuss emerging issues, post election.

Over 40 delegates took part in the day's event that was opened by the PtP chairman, Councillor Neville Whiteley. The event included presentations from Ben Lucas, Director of the 2020 Public Services Trust, Nigel Keohane, New Local Government Network and Davy Jones, an independent consultant who specialises in areas around citizen empowerment, participatory budgeting, performance management and Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs).

Councillor Whiteley opened the event with encouraging thoughts on how partnerships can strive for better outcomes and that LSPs sharing thoughts and experiences can add value and generate efficiencies. Mark Palmer, South East Employers (SEE) and PtP Development Director facilitated the day's proceedings and introduced the key note speakers.

Keynote speakers from the day

Ben Lucas was the first keynote speaker of the day who explored 'Collaborative Localism' and the future of partnership working. The presentation explored immediate pressures left by the financial deficit and it was discussed that the real pressures will arise when public services try to produce outcomes that are of a similar or equal of service with fewer resources. Ben discussed the parameters left from the legacy of Beveridge that is over 60 years old and produces a static view of problems and issues facing the public sector, when what we really need is to take a dynamic approach and look at prevention, capabilities, responsibilities and innovations.

Ben presented two possible futures that the public sector may face; 'Retrenchment and residualisation' or 'Citizen engagement and reform'. Either way Ben expressed there needs to be a shift in culture from social security to social productively. The Q and A session at the end of the presentation raised some interesting points; Councillor Mike Cosgrove, Swale Borough Council, raised the "rebadging issue" (Councillor Cosgrove 2010) and said that the language used creates barriers towards engaging with the general public. How realistic citizen engagement is and how motivated people will be to get involved was an issue raised by the Kent Partnership, as often people can't cope with that level of involvement required. The presentation concluded with the message that "social capital will benefit from a higher involvement of community engagement" Ben Lucas 2010.

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The first workshop session

The first workshop of the day, 'Challenges and Opportunities: The shape of partnerships post election' asked the LSPs what they thought the likely challenges would be for them. Some key thoughts included; responding to greater autonomy, the role of the elected member, LSPs being grouped into geographical 'silos', what is localism and how 'local' do we go as well as the risk of increasing differences and fragmentation (otherwise known as 'post code' lottery). The second question in the workshop asked 'How do you think your partnership will meet these challenges?' Groups responded in a variety of ways but many ideas grouped around leadership and organisation. Allowing LSPs to bring budgets to the table and for LSPs to feature in business plans of organisations was seen as key to meeting future challenges. The workshop concluded by asking 'What would you like your LSP to look like in the next 2 -3 years?' Some key points taken from the roundtable groups included; smaller with an increase in democratic control, the ability to share budgets and to make LSPs more local and focused.

The afternoon session began with a presentation from Nigel Keohane, Head of Research at NLGN, on the recent report 'Greater than the sum of its parts: Total Place and the future shape of public services.' Nigel, the author of the report, looked in detail at what the public sector can do to meet the uncertainty and that if public services intervene early enough, final outcomes are prevented i.e. tackling NEETs (16-24 year olds not in employment, education or training) will reduce the growing costs on the public sector. In order to re shape public services Nigel suggested that we need to develop a model of local democratic accountability and control and push the reduction of ring-fencing suggested in the Coalition Government's agenda.

The question and answer session raised some thought provoking responses on whether other sectors are ready for a collaborative approach and if the ring-fencing continues sectors are going to be increasingly reluctant to share funding and resources. On a positive note they are directly linked to the treasury and the coalition would be more interested if we all agreed to work on a specific approach, i.e. worklessness. The emphasis here would be on reduction and expenditure and if LSPs do not get the direction they need from Central Government, then it will be up to the local authorities to take the lead. Rother District Council raised an issue on fragmentation and that it often gets viewed as being negative. Nigel pointed out that in most cases fragmentation is a necessity as areas do not have the same needs, a postcode lottery maybe an effective way forward.

The second workshop session

The second workshop of the day presented the delegates with two questions. The first; 'Where can efficiencies be made and how can partnerships help?' produced interesting outcomes, some key points included;

- First step: transparency, second step: share evidence and third step: outcomes
- The ability to think 'out of the box'
- Remove all ring-fencing
- Establish a single priority
- Have a 'zero based budget' approach



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Key points from the second question, 'How will efficiencies be made in your area and what will be the impact of those efficiencies locally?' included;

- The merger of East Hampshire and Havant
- Use the local knowledge of partnerships to drive effective cost reduction
- Build on existing community engagement mechanisms
- Increase productivity that has reduced over the last three years
- Transfer services to neighbourhood community groups

The day concluded with a lively presentation from Davy Jones, Policy Specialist, titled 'Place, Partnership and Participation under the coalition Government.' Davy examined the degree of centralisation in this country, citizen involvement and policy changes that have occurred in the last few months and that are set to occur in future months. Key themes emerging from the coalition Government included; the economy, the debate on public sector cuts continues but with what mechanism? Total Place may be re-branded to 'Single Place'. Localism, the devolution of power will be brought down to the citizen and moving forward, with more elections and constant interaction to increase transparency, will lead to an increase in accountability.

Davy explored 'Real Local Area Agreements' where all partnerships could work on 3 year SCS and action plans that would not need to be signed off by the Government, instead they would be signed off by the local people. The event concluded on a positive note towards other policy changes, the consensus based on one particular point; that one body needs to be in place to bring accountability together.

Overall summary and closing remarks

The day's event brought together the opportunity for shared thoughts and experiences to add value and generate efficiencies. Views were expressed that we now need to take a more dynamic approach to looking at public services rather than be left with the Beveridge approach from past generations. Workshops highlighted the challenges that are facing LSPs, including defining the role of Elected Members and the definition of Localism as well as exploring where efficiencies can be made and the sharing of best practise for LSPs in the south east.

All the presentations for the day can be downloaded by following this link [Policies and Priorities: the future of partnership working](#)