

PtP Conference – 4th December 2009 The Future of Partnership Working

The Brit Oval, London, SE11 5SS

Conference report

Over a hundred delegates from partnerships across the south east region attended the third annual Progress through Partnership conference, held on 4 December 2009, at the Brit Oval, London.

Top speakers including Professor Tony Bovaird, Roger Gough, senior advisor to Localis, and consultant Davy Jones, inspired the audience with their visions of partnership working in the future. Workshops on the Total Place pilots, the scrutiny of partnerships and performance management, tackled the need for greater efficiencies.



A call for greater localism and more freedom was made by keynote speaker Roger Gough. Starting with a history of councils working collaboratively, Roger pointed to the formation of the multi-purpose authority in the 1880s to the 'rise of the

quangos' a hundred years later. The Localis view is that progress made by Local Strategic Partnerships has been stifled by the 'straightjacket of the National Indicator set'. Localis argue that the monitoring process of LAAs is 'clunky and costly', and little 'real money' is attached. A radical set of solutions could be considered. Firstly, LSPs could be more effective if they had their own legal identity. Partners' mainstream budgets could be top-sliced to resource partnerships and give them commissioning powers. The idea of LSPs taking on a commissioning role, said Roger, needs to be on everyone's 'radar'.

Professor Tony Bovaird gave an overview of which forms of partnerships have been adopted in the UK, posing the question: which have lasted the best? He highlighted international experiences of partnership working in the US, France, Germany, the

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Netherlands and Australia, noting 'waves of outsourcing of municipal services' and the 'whole of government movement' in Australia, a similar concept to Total Place.

Strategic rationales for partnerships are identified by Tony as: economies of scale, economies of scope – 'more varied is more efficient', and opportunities for mutual learning between partners. This latter aspect of partnership working tends to be under-exploited, reports Professor Bovaird. Partnerships can also be viewed as a form of 'relational contracting', to overcome the fact that 'spot purchasing' is wasteful and uneconomic, and that in-house provision can be unimaginative and expensive.

There can be too great an emphasis on partnership evaluation, according to Professor Bovaird, which he likened to pulling up a plant repeatedly to check it is growing well! He concluded that a test of partnership is sharing – where it does not exist, perhaps things can be better achieved through different arrangements. Tony predicts that partnerships are likely to continue to flourish in the public sector, and those that work should be encouraged with greater resourcing.



Davy Jones identifies eight underlying policy drivers which he foresees as having the most influence on the public sector over the next few years, emphasising that they are inextricably linked, and act together on decision-making.

Programmes such as Total Place are a response to the sheer scale of the savings required in the current economic crisis. It is a major restructuring process, involving thinking almost from a clean sheet of paper about expenditure and outcomes, and how to eliminate duplication. The involvement of service-users in such restructuring is crucial, says Davy.

Davy predicts that climate change and its consequences will become the number one issue for councils over the next ten years. Whereas national and international political progress on the issue is erratic, Davy sees a role for local government in bringing about practical change to solve the problem. According to the latest polls, 85 per cent of people consider climate change a 'significant threat', ahead of political leaders on this issue.

The collapse in trust in politics, leading to record lows in voter turnout, is also a dangerous development, according to Davy, pointing to the 'highly unpleasant'

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electoral alternatives which exist. A lack of accountability in LSPs could be tackled by changing to a 'single commissioning model', or elected LSPs.

Further factors influencing policy are: demographic changes and an ageing population; the effects of migration; new ways of working including the shift from a focus on council delivery towards a holistic approach to place. Multi-agency working and an increasingly centralised system of running local services can add to the complexity.

Challenging delegates who questioned citizen involvement in LSPs, Davy referred to extensive literature showing the benefits of an active and politicised population. Confidently anticipating an 'Amazon-style' ratings system for local government services before long, Davy pointed to the internet is an empowering force providing more 'voice and choice'.

For partnerships there are four simple choices, according to Davy Jones:

- Partnerships with scrutiny by elected members – 'but scrutiny has no real teeth';
- Electing leaders, e.g. police chiefs, but this route leads away from collaborative partnership working;
- The single commissioning model; or
- A new form of partnership which is elected.

Workshops

Total Place in Kent – Single Asset Management, Martin Ayre, Kent CC

Clusters of publically owned assets, including local authority property, schools, PCT buildings, and fire service property have been mapped against utilisation rates capturing partner 'buy in' to the development of a single Asset Management Strategy.

Total Place in Gateshead, South Tyneside and Sunderland – Alcohol and Drugs Misuse, Paul Robinson, South Tyneside Council

The team hypothesise that the top 20 per cent of 'customers' (as they term the users of alcohol and drug services) account for 80 per cent of the cost. Indications are also that on-licences (eg pubs) cause less of the problem than off-licenses. Initial ideas on the project prioritised 'kids drinking on the street'. However this was re-thought when

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a medical consultant told the team that the top issue is chronic alcohol and drug misuse. To date, the pilot has involved mapping customer pathways, agreeing data sharing protocols for the priority (top 20%) families and pushing for more flexible funding streams.

Total Place in Worcestershire – cross organisational review (NEETs), Roger Britton and Nicola North, Worcestershire CC

This considered the potential risks of Total Place against the local and national opportunities. The need to collect information about provision and support across Worcestershire using Learning and Skills Council, Jobcentreplus, Connexions, has been identified, as well as resources allocated via the Local Area Agreement, Areas of Highest Need funding, Community led provision and voluntary sector.

Suffolk ‘parallel place’ – the lives we lead, the leaders we need (collaborative leadership and community clusters), Lynne Haig, Director of TaylorHaid and Richard Hewitt, AD Transformation, Suffolk CC

Scrutiny and accountability of partnerships, Jo Dungey, LGA

This worked through three different scenarios, demonstrating how scrutiny can identify benefits and concerns in each: a higher than national rate of worklessness; a rising childhood obesity problem; and a continuing issue of deaths and injuries through road traffic accidents, requiring the examination of local traffic calming, speed limits, and alcohol-related problems.

The challenges of partnership working to develop an MAA, Keith Murdoch, Assistant Director of Milton Keynes, South Midlands Growth Area

This concluded with a need to build on existing governance structures; embed action in strategic priorities; collect evidence of the added value of collaboration; and focus on key actions, including: Next Generation Broadband; skills and learning; and an Inter-urban bus.

Addressing the wider issue of LSPs to deliver outcomes, Janice Wason, East Kent Partnership

This looked at performance management and complexity in an area of: nearly 500,000 residents; four Districts so four of everything; 1 very large County running Education and Social Services as well as Kent Agreement 2, and other County work (Local Economy Assessment); and other agency priorities (Health, Police, Environment).



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Performance management of partnerships, Sian Campbell, PtP Programme Manager, and Rob Ormerod, Hampshire CC

This examined the impact of LAAs in unitary and two-tier areas, asking how the LAA contributes to improved performance, or does not, and how it could be better designed.

Afternoon plenaries

Engaging partnerships through Practitioner Associates, Cllr Melvyn Howell and David East, PtP Practitioner Associates

This reviewed the year's Practitioner Associate assignments with LSPs across the region, indicating how these had helped over specific issues.

How PtP can support partnership working in your area, Katy Donnelly, PtP.

This summarised how the PtP programme can help develop your Partnership, through the Central Fund, the two-tier fund, events, and bespoke support and capacity-building.

A copy of all the day's presentations are on the PtP website [here](#).

