

Leading partnerships — the councillor role

The government clearly sees the role of elected members evolving; there is an expectation that they will provide

direction not just for their council but for the communities they represent. Strategic partnerships offer a mechanism for doing this; councillors have a role in influencing the work of other organisations through the LSP, ensuring partnerships are accountable to their local communities

Coming together in East Kent

A single LSP for multiple authorities!



In 2007 the Kent districts of Canterbury, Dover, Shepway and Thanet decided to merge their LSPs to create a new East Kent LSP. Recognising that this transformation would require a well-evidenced understanding of their different priorities, objectives and concerns, the group asked PtP to begin this process by consulting with their stakeholders.

This consultation with the LSPs highlighted an existing broad support for the new structure. Stakeholders felt the new structure would result in enhanced priority-setting, a better fit with the Kent LAA and an increase in senior buy-in, by managing time more efficiently.

When the findings were disseminated at a stakeholder conference in Canterbury the group began work on scoping out the priority issues for the East Kent LSP. These included forging a stronger East Kent identity, tackling labour and skills shortages and improving transport links.

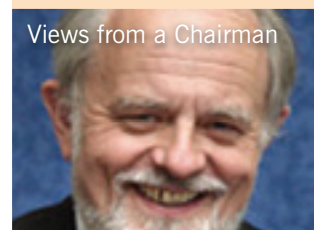
PtP are now assisting with the preparation for the inaugural East Kent LSP meeting in May.

For more information contact Ben Lee on Ben.Lee@sharedintelligence.net



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Views from a Chairman



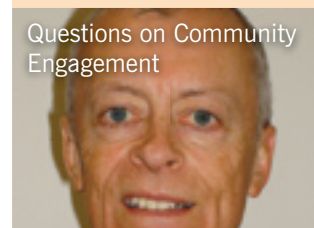
Delivering effective LAAs
Medway LSP Case Study



Promoting Member
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Views from a Chairman!

Thoughts on leading an LSP



Name: Cllr Keith R Mitchell CBE
Role: Leader of Oxfordshire County Council and Chairman of the Oxfordshire Partnership
LSP: Oxfordshire Partnership

1. Introduce yourself

I became a councillor in 1989 after a long career in publishing and professional education. I've been the Leader of the Council since 2001, initially as leader of a coalition administration and, since 2005, as leader of a single-party administration. I also chair the South East England Regional Assembly and the English Regions Network.

Working in partnership is becoming increasingly important to us. Given the increasing pressures placed on the public sector with reduced funding from government and growing customer expectation. It makes sense for us to work together through LSPs and partnership arrangements to generate efficiencies and deliver better outcomes for people in the county. Given our role as community leaders, it is also important that we take a lead in championing the communities we represent and this requires the bringing together of national and local government, together with the burgeoning quangocracy and major private sector and voluntary/ community sector organisations. In this way, we can fulfil our local government duty to enhance the social, environmental and economic well-being of our county.

2. What are the benefits of an elected member leading the LSP?

There are definitely advantages to an elected member taking on the role of LSP Chairman. I became Chairman of the Oxfordshire Partnership in 2007. Since then the Partnership has made real strides in integrating into the day-to-day business of the local authority and partner organisations. I believe that the Oxfordshire Partnership has a higher profile in the council and its priorities are clearly reflected in the County Council's Corporate Plan.

"...the Partnership has made real strides in integrating into the day-to-day business of the local authority..."

3. What do you see as the key challenges to be met for LSPs to become a driver for delivery?

This is the critical challenge for LSPs, particularly as we head towards the government's Comprehensive Area Assessment. Partnerships need to go beyond simply identifying the priorities for their area and writing a strategy. A robust performance management framework and clear action planning are vital to drive delivery and measure improvement.

4. Oxfordshire recently used PtP funds to coordinate a county wide conference 'Partnerships in Oxfordshire – looking to the future'. What difference has that conference made?

The conference provided a good opportunity to bring people from all of the six LSPs together to discuss common issues and partnership development. The event was useful for partners to meet others involved in LSPs in the county and share their experiences which were often similar.

The conference also provided a useful opportunity to correct some unfortunate stereotypical perceptions of central government about how the LSP process was developing across the South East. In Oxfordshire, there is strong partnership working within the two tier local government system (three tiers if you include town and parish councils which we most definitely do). The LAA and our Public Service Board have strengthened this working and it was a good opportunity to ensure central government understands this. Each LSP is using the report from the conference to look at areas for development and, collectively, we are looking at opportunities for closer working. There has recently been a review of partnerships across the county which has been driven by a working group drawn from across the local authorities. This review has found a number of specific areas where partnerships need support to develop and move effectively into delivery of the Sustainable Community Strategy.

5. How do you see the role of district LSPs and district councillors in strengthening partnership activities and delivering the LAA?

In Oxfordshire there are strong links between the county and district partnerships. We have worked hard to link our strategies as much as possible and the new Oxfordshire Sustainable Community Strategy will have sections on each district, highlighting their local distinctiveness. All district LSP Chairmen have a seat on the Oxfordshire Partnership, as do district leaders. The Chairmen of all of the LSPs meet on a regular basis to discuss common issues and share progress on the development of our Sustainable Community Strategies. The Oxfordshire Leaders' Group also regularly discuss partnership issues at its meetings.

Districts are our key partners and are involved in leading delivery of many of the targets in our LAA. District LSPs are also vital to delivering the priorities in Oxfordshire 2030; to focus resources more effectively and raise the profile and importance of acting together where we need to do so.

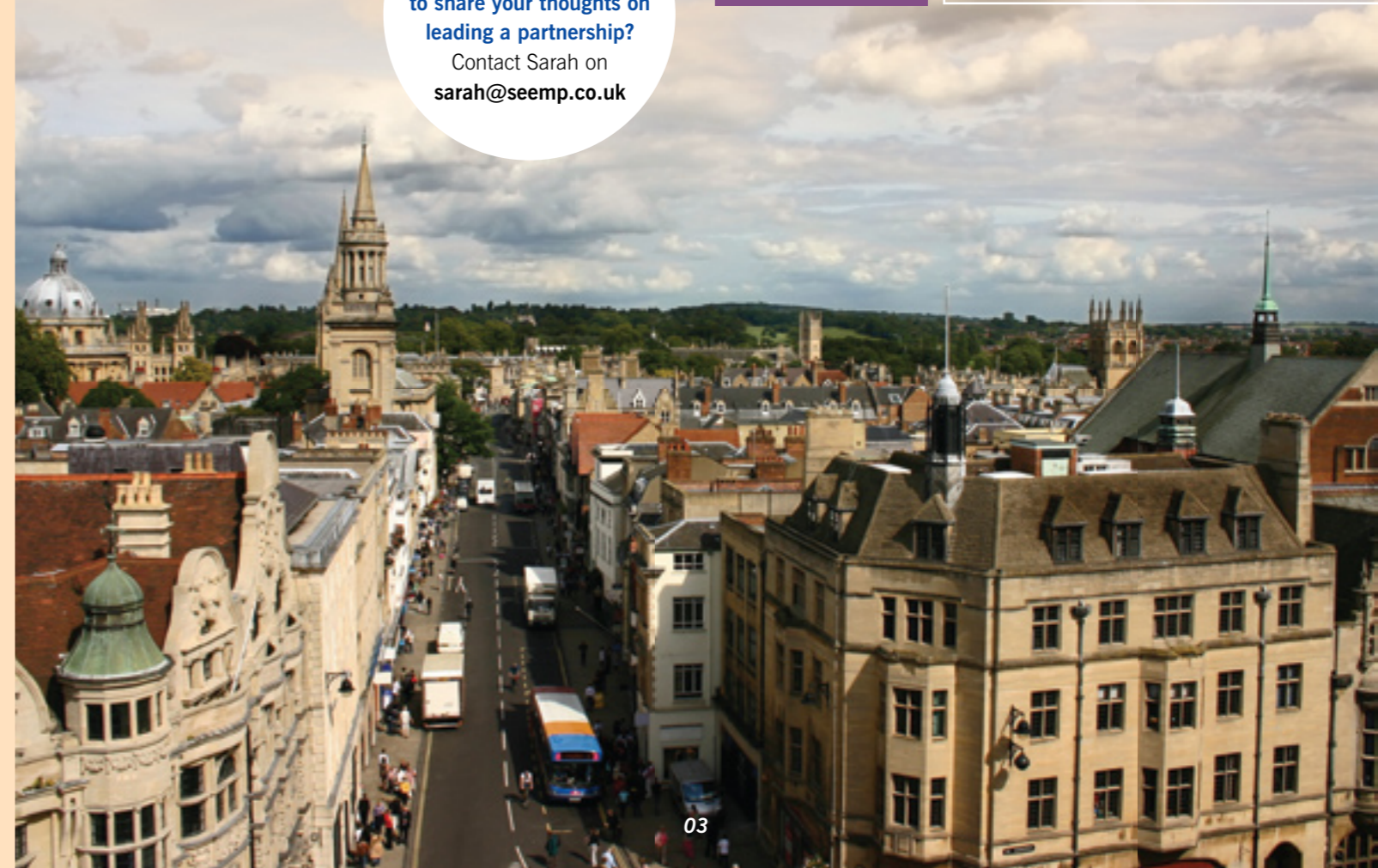
6. How do you evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the LSP delivery and do you encourage external scrutiny?

Yes we do. The county council's Corporate Governance Scrutiny Committee held a 'select committee' style day in 2007, focusing on the Oxfordshire Partnership and some of the Local Area Agreement targets. This will be developed into a long term programme of scrutiny of the Oxfordshire Partnership. We are still working through what form this should take and how the thematic partnerships should be scrutinised. We will be involving our partners in this work in the same way that they are involved in the health overview and scrutiny. Strong communications and regular reporting from partnerships are crucial to promoting their work and achievements more widely. Our communications have improved over the last year and we are finding that partnerships are much more firmly embedded as part of 'core business' in partner organisations. The Oxfordshire Partnership and the related thematic partnerships are now reporting regularly to the County Council's Cabinet and to the full County Council. This will help to provide a further element of scrutiny. The recent review of partnerships in the county is also looking at what support partnerships need to develop their structures, governance and performance management systems in the future.

Do you chair an LSP? Would you like to share your thoughts on leading a partnership? Contact Sarah on sarah@seemp.co.uk



Contact Cllr Keith Mitchell on keith.mitchell@oxfordshire.gov.uk



Strengthening governance to deliver effective LAAs



Medway LSP has over the last year been on a journey of transformation revising its structure and leadership to ensure it is able to negotiate a more strategic and cross-cutting LAA which has strong partner buy-in. The process they went through included rigorous self examination, independent guidance, facilitation and wide consultation. The circumstances that created the conditions for change in Medway were the need to negotiate LAA2, the PtP self assessment procedure and the offer of development support. Medway also took up the offer to be involvement in the Leadership Centre pilot to 'develop the partnership's leadership to deliver excellent LAAs'.

Medway's LSP board used the PtP self-assessment as the catalyst for a rigorous review, revealing that although the LSP was working well in a number of respects including having a strong needs-based vision, it was ailing in others. These included a lack of accountability, lack of clarity over roles and responsibilities, an inadequate performance management process and poor communication channels. It also revealed that some key agencies were either not represented on the LSP board or not fully engaged with it.

With the focus on red rating on the delivery dimension of the PtP self-assessment as a starting point, the LSP began a process of change using a combination of independently facilitated stakeholder events, wide consultation and lots of hard work. The process included:

1. Gaining consensus on the need for change through one to one consultation with LSP members
2. Establishing consensus on the priority outcomes at a stakeholder event
3. The drafting of new governance arrangements

Some of the outcomes identified were to:

- Engage all partners and be able to hold them to account
- Demonstrate that partners were working together effectively
- Make the LAA more strategic and cross cutting

What were the lessons learnt?

- Openness of partners is key to their ability to identify problems and accept change
- Getting buy-in of partners as to what the issues are, early on, is crucial
- Build consensus around the case for change
- Focus on outcomes, not processes and structures
- Build an understanding of partners' organisational cultures and targets

- Partnerships operate at multiple levels – strategic, operational and delivery, it's important to work at all to effect sustainable change
- Partnership working must be about relationships between individuals and organisations, cemented by good processes and structures

The Medway LSP has now reconfigured itself to become a more streamlined partnership, with less thematic groupings and greater engagement of partners. A strong LAA2 is near to sign off.

“ Medway is part way on the journey to improving its LSP. We don't have all the answers by any means, but we've learnt a lot about ourselves as well as ways in which to make changes to the LSP to get it functioning better and moving our focus from planning to delivery which was our goal.

The PtP self assessment was a vital starting point for us. It gave a common framework and language to get consensus on the need to change. We rated ourselves red on delivery, and I have used that red/amber/green visual symbol of our need to change on many occasions when the going got tough.

For us external support and challenge was a real positive – a very good use of our PtP funding. The facilitation we have received from the Leadership Centre has been of the highest quality and has helped us to look beyond processes and structures to how we behave as partners, and how we can constructively hold each to account. It has also been invaluable in keeping our focus and momentum.

We took risks along the way; negotiating the new LAA whilst changing the LSP has stretched our limited resources near to breaking point at times. It was a risk worth taking and the quality of debate and engagement in the preparation of LAA2 is significantly different from the process just over a year ago for LAA1.

The journey isn't yet completed, but we have a clear idea of our route and the LAA gives us a clear agreement of the things the new look LSP will focus on – those targets are the prize within the grasp of the LSP.

Stephanie Goad, Assistant Director Communications, Performance and Partnerships. Medway Council

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“...the journey isn't yet completed, but we have a clear idea of our route...”

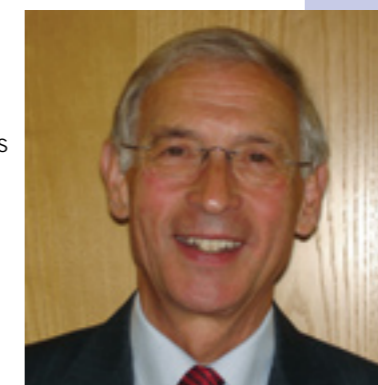
The unabridged version is available on the PtP website.



Promoting Member Engagement

The PtP programme has successfully used its elected member practitioner associates to facilitate focused discussions and promote member engagement in partnership working.

They have aimed to create an understanding of the community leadership role for elected members to enable them to play an enhanced role in the LSP. One of the associates Cllr Melvyn Howell, former Leader of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council has played an essential part in raising member awareness of the role of the LSP in relation to their own democratic mandate. He has a commitment to the LSP concept and in his role as peer associate has credibility with elected members, who can be sceptical at times of the role of the LSP. Member peer support has been used by partnerships to encourage increased involvement by members, increase understanding of the modernising agenda, better inform members and raise awareness of how partnership working can help local authorities to achieve its own objectives.



Cllr Melvyn Howell, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

“ Members' scepticism reflects that LSPs have often been formed and progressed without their involvement, taking a “corporatist” route to meet a legislative requirement, centred on the LSP partners themselves, senior Council officers and Cabinet members. Unsurprisingly there is frequent pointing to the “democratic deficit”. It doesn't have to be this way; nor should it be. Democracy is not uniquely a four-yearly election, but is legitimately a constant engagement with the community.

No-one is better placed than Councillors to be the medium through which community needs and aspirations can be fed into Community Strategies and thence to LSPs for realisation. Similarly, Councillors should be the prime communicators at local level on the rationale of LSP programmes, e.g. why some needs and aspirations can be met quickly; others may be further back in the plan; and some may be unrealisable.

In our complex world of rising expectations and so many unmet needs, partnership working is the only way to address these challenges and LSPs exist to make their results greater than the sum of the parts. By extension, Councillors are now coming to realise that LSPs in turn cannot reach their potential without the indispensable contribution of members themselves – a wider appreciation of this perspective and a full commitment to it are the only things holding Councillors back.

Cllr Melvyn Howell, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

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LSPs – are they connected to the communities they serve?

Interview with Davy Jones, Freelance Consultant

1. Davy can you introduce yourself

I have been a freelance consultant since 2007 specialising in citizen engagement and partnerships. I previously worked for the Audit Commission for eight years on high profile areas such as Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA), Area Profiles, LSPs and citizen engagement. Prior to that, I worked for eleven years in local government mainly in policy development and performance review. I have provided support through PtP to improve LSPs performance management and I am also an associate with the Participatory Budgeting Unit the Consultation Institute and LSP Futures. Recently, I have designed the joint IDeA/Consultation Institute training course on comprehensive engagement strategies, and re- designed the IDeA's website pages on LSPs.

2. What is the context of LSPs having this new lead role around community engagement?

The key thing to understand is the broader changing policy context. First, central government is pulling back from micro-managing local services and is reducing the amount of inspections, indicators and targets. It is giving more control instead to local citizens to ensure that local services are accountable to citizens as much as to Government. Secondly, Government has finally caught up with local services and is moving towards a multi-agency focus, recognising that everything important in the local area is delivered by a multi-agency approach. Thirdly, Government has shifted to looking at an area as a whole through the Local Area Agreement (LAA) and CAA processes. LSPs play a central role in all these shifts in government policy. Most LSPs have not yet grasped that a critical part of this new multi-agency area based approach is an increased focus on citizen engagement and accountability to local citizens, but they will have to take this role on board very quickly.

3. How do you see the role of the LSP in leading effective community engagement?

The 2006 "Strong and Prosperous Communities" White Paper emphasised "the need for comprehensive engagement strategies in each locality". Many local agencies are consulting and involving residents, but what needs to be done now is for LSPs to comprehensively coordinate these diverse approaches to engagement. The LSP needs to be more efficient and coordinated in its approach by using the existing citizen intelligence around services already gathered from surveys and consultation across the partners. The LSP is the natural body to coordinate that. The LAA & SCS are both supposed to be based on a thorough understanding of what the local communities want and need. If

this coordination is not achieved then the LSP will not pick up all of the important messages and miss crucial opinion patterns. When the CAA inspectors come in, partners will be asked whether they actually know what citizens think and be able to demonstrate it. If the LSP can't provide that information then the CAA will question whether the priorities agreed in the LAA are the right ones. LSP partners need to understand that desk research and statistics will not be enough; a comprehensive programme of consultation and involvement will need to be established to bring it all together. I strongly suggest that LSPs audit their existing community engagement work across the partnership early on, with a view to drawing up a comprehensive engagement strategy across the LSP. I suspect that there are huge inefficiencies within partnerships and by pooling expertise and resources then the engagement will be more centralised and coordinated. I have yet to come across an area where partners co-ordinate this work and share the knowledge and learning effectively, and yet it is an obvious thing to do!

4. In your opinion what is the role of partnerships in encouraging and supporting citizens to be active?

There is no lack of techniques that can be used to engage citizens, for example surveys, citizen panels, participatory budgeting and an increase in more innovative web-based IT technologies. There is the recent community empowerment "powerpack" toolkit of local actions available from CLG. The real issue is changing the culture of the LSP partners so that genuinely and thoroughly engaging citizens and service users is at the centre of everything they do. Partnerships have a role in ensuring the engagement is real and that it has the potential to make a difference. The thing that constantly undermines community involvement is the fact that communities feel that decisions have already been taken and that their involvement will not change anything. Above all, partners have to demonstrate that citizen involvement can change things and does make a difference. Historical experience here and abroad is that where people can see a difference being made, they will come back again and get involved in the future.



5. What recommendations do you think the anticipated empowerment white paper should make to encourage active citizenship and strengthen local accountability?

The shift towards a multi-agency and area-based focus inevitably raises the question of the accountability of all the partners. Only one part of the collaboration of partners within an LSP is currently elected and is accountable (the council) and the rest are not. Government is worried about this local "democratic deficit" and is looking at different options for how to address it. One option is to give councils more control over local services (the Local Government Association is pushing this). The second is to elect the heads of the local health and police services. This option tends to splinter power and there can be a danger that it can pull LSP partners in different directions. A third option is to have elected LSPs where the council becomes a delivery body like the police, and the elected body becomes the LSP as an over-arching accountable body (this is the option I personally favour). The final option, which is in my opinion more likely to be supported

"...where people can see a difference being made, they will come back again and get involved..."

by Hazel Blears, is to have an all-powerful local mayor, making them the key person and decision maker for any area with far wider powers over non-council services than currently. It is unacceptable to continue without local agencies being accountable. People know they can vote a party out of office in the council, but they have little control over other services such as public health or community

safety. There are other things that the White Paper should include to encourage active citizenship: for example by introducing proportional representation in local elections to ensure that every vote makes a difference.

LSPs should make citizen engagement at the heart of everything they do. Many LSPs have it as a partial add on involving citizens around the small or routine decisions. They also need to engage citizens around the big issues of local priorities. They have a new duty to involve, inform and consult which is not being grasped and taken seriously enough. It is not a sustainable approach and won't hold up in the CAA assessment if LSPs have not connected citizen involvement to the LAA & Sustainable Community Strategy processes and asked citizens what their priorities are for the local area. We need to move towards a virtuous circle of involvement. If the bigger issues of local priorities have a continuous programme of engagement, then involvement of citizens on the smaller issues can feed into the wider consultations.

6. What is the role of elected members in the Community Engagement Agenda?

Most members have very good connections with local people - through standing for election in the first place, being constantly contacted about local issues, and generally having their finger on the pulse locally. But they can feel threatened by the proposed devolution of power to local citizens, especially when they are also being asked to work much more in partnership with other, unelected, local agencies and organisations. With the move towards cabinet and scrutiny systems, sometimes members can feel that their influence is being squeezed all round. But you can look at this in a different way: Through partnership working and LSPs, members arguably have more influence now over other local agencies than they have ever had before; and by giving local citizens a stronger voice, members are able to demonstrate powerfully that the issues they raise have popular support. Experience shows that excluding members from activities designed to give citizens greater voice and choice can lead to suspicion and antagonism, but members are often the most passionate advocates of citizen engagement work, if they are thoroughly involved from the outset.

7. What role and support can PtP provide over the next year to support partnerships in taking forward approaches to community empowerment?

PtP has a role in raising consciousness about this agenda. The ideas that are being considered include:

- Developing short member awareness sessions on community engagement which can be delivered locally
- Supporting participatory budgeting pilots across the region
- Developing a regional network of community engagement / participatory budgeting practitioners

PtP is well positioned to help LSPs to embrace the empowerment agenda, it's not going away and LSPs ignore it at their peril.

Davy Jones Consultancy

Contact Davy Jones on davy@davyjonesconsultancy.co.uk or visit his website at www.davyjonesconsultancy.co.uk

Linking Performance Management and Governance

Price Waterhouse Cooper has been commissioned to deliver tailored Performance Management support for the 6 LAA pilot areas within the South East, by providing a dedicated Performance Improvement Programme for those authorities.

The programme will take place over a six to eight month period and will consist of a joint one-day Performance Pact Workshop, where PwC will assist the authorities to identify the need to improve and the issues they wish to work on during the programme. The second phase will consist of three off-site learning events, followed by tailored support for each participating authority. For further details of the programme contact Mark Palmer on mark@seemp.co.uk



Building strong governance for PtP!

From June 2008 PtP will be governed by a member led board. The board will provide overall strategic direction for PtP. It will be member led with partner and practitioner representation and will report to the Regional Improvement Partnership.



“ Initially PtP was governed by a steering group of officers. I felt that member representation was needed to strengthen PtP’s governance arrangements. I have been working to create a board with stronger elected member representation and one that represents the diverse geography of the region. ”

PtP Chairman Cllr Neville Whiteley, Test Valley Borough Council

Certificate in local governance

London South Bank University (LSBU) in conjunction with South East Employers



(SEE) and London Councils (LC) has designed a unique programme to meet the learning and career development needs of councillors in the south east of England and London area. It builds on established LSBU programmes such as the Masters in Public Administration (MPA) and the work the university has been doing on accredited member development.

The programme will be supported by LSBU’s established research base in the public sector and will benefit from tuition by academic staff with experience of working in local government and with elected councillors. The certificate is taught over a series of Friday/Saturday workshops and a week long (non residential) summer school, taking into consideration the busy schedules of elected members.

For more information on the certificate contact Haleema Salih on haleema@seemp.co.uk

Enhancing local democracy conference



On the 18th & 19th of June, South East Employers is running its annual Enhancing Local Democracy conference at the Goodenough College, London. The overarching theme of the conference will be the implementation of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act. The conference will consider the implications for local authorities, concentrating on partnership working, the enhanced role of scrutiny and the empowerment of local communities. The conference is aimed at councillors and at those officers supporting councillors, in particular, in the areas of democratic services, overview and scrutiny, and the Local Area Agreement.

Further details can be found at: www.seemp.co.uk

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