

Working better together?

Self-assessment questions -
improving partnership working



Self-assessment tool
April 2009

 **audit**
commission

The Audit Commission is an independent watchdog, driving economy, efficiency and effectiveness in local public services to deliver better outcomes for everyone.

Our work across local government, health, housing, community safety and fire and rescue services means that we have a unique perspective. We promote value for money for taxpayers, auditing the £200 billion spent by 11,000 local public bodies.

As a force for improvement, we work in partnership to assess local public services and make practical recommendations for promoting a better quality of life for local people.

© Audit Commission 2009

This document is available on our website at: www.audit-commission.gov.uk

If you require a copy of this document in large print, in Braille, on tape, or in a language other than English, please call: 0844 798 7070

If you require a printed copy of this document, please call: 0800 50 20 30 or email: audit-com-publications@capita.co.uk

**For further information on the work of the Commission please contact:
Audit Commission, 1st Floor, Millbank Tower, Millbank, London SW1P 4HQ
Telephone: 0844 798 1212 Fax: 0844 798 2945 Textphone (minicom): 0844 798 2946
www.audit-commission.gov.uk**

We welcome your feedback. If you have any comments on this report, are intending to implement any of the recommendations, or are planning to follow up any of the case studies, please do get in touch: please email nationalstudies@audit-commission.gov.uk

Self-assessment questions for improved partnership working

-
- 1** These questions should help you to apply the key messages in the Audit Commission national study *Working better together? Managing local strategic partnerships*.
 - 2** The questions will help you and your local strategic partnership (LSP) partners to understand the strengths and weaknesses of current arrangements and to facilitate improvement. You can use these questions to identify issues for further investigation. You can also use them with your LSP board or executive group as part of an improvement planning workshop or discussion.
 - 3** The questions follow the whole systems approach to performance improvement that is used in the national report. There are questions for each of the seven elements. Most questions ask you to evaluate how well your LSP is doing. You can evaluate internally (against the LSP's own plans and goals) and externally (against the performance of other LSPs). Some questions ask for a 'yes/no' answer. If the answer is 'no' you should investigate the reasons.

Self-assessment questions for improved partnership working

The LSP's long-term goals

- How well does the sustainable community strategy (SCS) reflect LSP members' ambition and priorities?
 - How convincing is the 'story of place'?
 - Is the evidence base comprehensive and current?
 - Is an SCS update due?
- How well is the long-term SCS embodied in the shorter-term local area agreement (LAA)?
 - What are the gaps that need delivering?
 - How are partners working to deliver SCS priorities that are outside the LAA targets?
- How well do partners share performance and other information to enable the LSP to track need and progress across all SCS priorities?
 - How could information collection and exchange be improved?
 - How could information presentation and reporting be improved?
 - How can partners use Count Once Use Numerous Times as a principle for improving information use?
- How well do elected members on overview and scrutiny challenge your LSP and partners' performance?
 - How effective is the policy development role of overview and scrutiny in influencing joint working through your LSP?
 - How effective is overview and scrutiny at exercising democratic influence over your LSP?
- How well do chief executives and other senior managers work together to achieve the LSP's vision?
 - Are they open and honest with each other?
 - How do they challenge performance weaknesses?
 - How do they advise, assist, and support each other (and their organisations)?
- How well does your LSP board provide strategic leadership?
 - Does it articulate a clear and ambitious local vision?
 - Does it champion a performance culture?
- How well does the board work to develop effective joint working and trust at all levels between LSP partners?
- How well does the LSP core team support LAA delivery?
 - Does the team have the right skills and resources?
 - Does the core team lever additional support from partner organisations?

Leading the LSP and creating a culture of working together

- How well are elected members engaged at board and theme group levels?
 - How could member engagement be improved?
 - How well are elected members communicating back to their executives, councils, and party groups?

Self-assessment questions for improved partnership working

Meetings and messages

- How well do your LSP meetings reflect a culture of partnership and mutual respect?
 - How do strategic/board meetings ensure there is time for discussion and direction setting?
 - How well does the board's style enable performance challenge?
 - How do other meeting arrangements reflect the different roles in the layered governance of joint working?
 - What aspects of the physical location or arrangement of meetings can be improved to emphasise a collaborative culture?
- How was the chair of your LSP chosen?
 - Is the board clear about the message that its choice of chair sends to stakeholders?
 - What are the arrangements to ensure succession?
- How well does strategic/board membership reflect local diversity?
 - How do neighbourhoods and communities get a 'voice' at the strategic level?
- How well does the strategic board agenda reflect the different interests of public sector, private sector and third sector representatives?
 - Who contributes the most, and who contributes the least?
 - How can the strategic board use different meeting approaches to build a stronger sense of collaboration?
- How (if relevant) has the LSP responded to the challenges of multi-tier working?
 - How well is the relationship between district SCS and the county SCS working?
 - What steps are the different LSPs taking to ensure that partners are not overwhelmed with meetings?
 - How well are the partners working with each other to 'catch up' and learn from other LSPs' experience?
- How well is LSP activity and LAA performance communicated to partners and to the wider community?
 - How do key stakeholders (local people, central government, regulators) know that the LSP is making a difference?

Self-assessment questions for improved partnership working

The benefits of collaboration

- How does your LSP board ensure that the contributions of different partners build towards the agreed common goals in the SCS and the LAA?
 - How does the board create an ethos of trust between partners?
 - How well does your LSP facilitate networking between partners?
 - What does it do to encourage networking?
 - Could it use social network analysis to improve communications between partner organisations?
 - How well does your LSP assist partners in planning their contributions to achieving common goals?
 - How does it use delivery chain analysis and other tools to align resources and overcome obstacles?
 - How well do partners work together to exploit the potential efficiency gains from joint working?
 - What steps have partners taken to identify potential efficiency gains?
 - How has your LSP facilitated discussions about co-location and sharing of back office or frontline services?
- How do LSP executive and operational groups use performance information to support their roles in influencing resource allocation and service delivery?
 - Does your LSP have a performance management steering group to support common approaches across partners?
- How well is financial management steered by your LSP?
 - How does your LSP board use financial information to improve local service planning, monitoring, and evaluation?
 - How do LSP executive and operational groups use financial information to support their roles in influencing resource allocation and service delivery?
 - Does your LSP have a financial management steering group to support common approaches across partners?
 - How well do the LSP board and its executive groups influence mainstream resources to achieve local outcomes?
 - Does your LSP have a clear and common understanding of the mainstream public sector spending under its influence?
 - Is there a local 'map' or other description of local public sector spending?
 - Is there a local 'map' or other description of local needs?

Getting things done

- How well is performance management steered by your LSP?
 - How does the LSP board use performance information to improve local service planning, monitoring, and evaluation?
- Are partners aligning their internal planning, monitoring, and evaluation processes to focus on LAA and SCS priorities?

Self-assessment questions for improved partnership working

Common frameworks

- Does your LSP have an agreed performance management framework that recognises and builds on the strategic, executive, and operational roles?
 - Do partners understand the different layers of governance and their connections?
 - How well are risk and resource management integrated with performance management?
- Is there an agreed data quality policy and action plan with clear ownership?
 - Are there agreed protocols for collecting and using national indicator set (NIS) data?
 - Are NIS protocols applied to locally agreed indicators?
- How robust is your LSP's (and partners) approach to delivering performance against LAA targets?
 - Is there a clear mechanism for distributing area based grant?
 - Is there a clear mechanism for distributing performance grant?
- How well does your LSP work to keep its evidence base up-to-date?
 - For keeping the SCS fresh and for maintaining the 'story of place'?
 - For demonstrating the impact of the LSP and its partners in achieving LAA and SCS targets?
- How well do your LSP partners understand the costs of maintaining the LSP?
- How well have LSP partners made decisions about aligning or pooling of budgets?
 - How does pooling or alignment contribute to value for money in achieving LAA or SCS targets?

Self-assessment questions for improved partnership working

Shared systems

- How does the LSP ensure there is accountability, through its member organisations, for its actions?
- How far do the LSP and its partners have a shared performance system that extends across the partnership layers?
 - How are the challenges of partners' different accountabilities resolved?
- How well is performance reporting tailored to board, executive and operational level needs?
- How developed is joint commissioning in the LSP?
 - Are the strategic, executive and operational levels clear about their contributions to joint commissioning?
 - Is performance of commissioned activities fed into the LSP information systems?
- How well are elected members involved in challenging LAA performance through the scrutiny process?
 - What are your LSP's mechanisms for responding to scrutiny recommendations?
- Have the LSP and its partners used benchmarking to assess the effectiveness of the LSP?
- How well do partners understand each other's financial management systems?
 - How have partners worked to improve their understanding of each other's financial and performance management systems?
- How far are partners' business plans aligned with SCS and LAA priorities?
 - How has this strengthened local joint working?
 - How have you overcome obstacles to local joint working?

Looking forward

- What are your LSP's priorities for improvement after reading Working better together??
 - How will you make sure everyone supports progress?
 - What practical support will you need from partners?
 - What support will you need from elsewhere?

Further information

Copies of the full report *Working better together?? Managing local strategic partnerships* are available at www.audit-commission.gov.uk/lsp and www.improvementnetwork.gov.uk/lsp

We welcome your feedback. If you have any comments on this briefing, or are planning to use these questions to improve your LSP's governance arrangements, please do get in touch. Please email nationalstudies@audit-commission.gov.uk

For further information on the work of the Audit Commission please contact:
Audit Commission, 1st Floor, Milbank Tower, Milbank, London SW1P 4HQ,
Tel: 020 7828 1212, Fax 020 7976 6187, text phone (minicom): 020 7630 0421

www.audit-commission.gov.uk

**Audit Commission
1st Floor
Millbank Tower
Millbank
London
SW1P 4HQ**

**Telephone: 0844 798 1212
Fax: 0844 798 2945**

**Textphone (minicom): 0844 798 2946
www.audit-commission.gov.uk**

Stock code: GOT3517