

Briefing paper

Key drivers for strategic co-ordination of third sector engagement in local strategic partnerships

Introduction

As the focus on the development and delivery of local services through local cross sector partnerships continues to grow, so has the need for effective third sector engagement in Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs).

The term engagement is used to refer to the active processes and mechanisms, through which third sector organisations are able to contribute to and influence the work of LSPs in planning and delivering local services. Representation, informing, consulting, advising and delivering are all considered to be processes and forms of engagement and relate to the wider empowerment agenda. The *Communities in Control: Real People, Real Power* White Paper defines empowerment as “passing more and more political power to more and more people using every practical means available”.

This paper is presented in two sections and outlines:

Section 1. Key drivers for LSP engagement with the third sector

Section 2. Benefits of strategic co-ordination of this engagement

Section 1. Key drivers for engagement with the third sector

1.1 Local Strategic Partnerships

Local strategic partnerships (LSPs) are key forums for multi sector partnership work. LSPs were set up to bring together representatives of local stakeholders to set priorities for their local area and develop delivery strategies for local services.

These local stakeholders include third sector organisations, as well as local authorities, local public partnerships (such as Primary Care Trusts, Police Authorities and Children’s Trusts) and private businesses.

‘It is essential that representatives from the local third sector and private business sector are represented as part of the formal membership of the LSP and relevant sub-groups.’

Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities – Statutory Guidance for LSPs
Department for Communities and Local Government, July 2008

1.2 Sustainable Communities Strategy

The LSP creates a long-term vision for the area to tackle local needs. The vision is set out in a Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS).

1.3 Local Area Agreements

The Local Area Agreement (LAA) is the mechanism for making the vision set out in the Sustainable Community Strategy a reality. LAAs are three year agreements between central government and a local area. They set out targets for public service delivery measured against national indicators.

Further information:

www.navca.org.uk/localvs/infobank/localisation/laas/

1.4 National Indicator Set

The current national indicator set (NIS) reflects government priorities and was launched in October 2007. At present there are 188 indicators including 4 which focus particularly on the third sector:

NI 4: Percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality

NI 4 captures progress towards the empowerment of citizens. It reflects the government's agenda to create communities in which citizens are empowered to 'have their say' and to influence the decisions that affect their lives and the places where they live, work and spend their leisure. The third sector has a major role to play both in empowering people to speak for themselves on issues that affect them and in representing those who, for whatever reason, find it difficult to do so

NI 6: Participation in regular volunteering

NI6 expresses the government's belief that one sign of strong and healthy communities is high levels of volunteering in relation to both third sector and public services. This indicator is intended to provide local authorities with the incentive to develop a culture in which more people contribute to their communities by volunteering.

NI 7: Environment for a thriving third sector

NI 7 arises from the government's recognition that a vibrant, diverse, and independent third sector is a vital component of a fair and enterprising society, which can help communities to be more cohesive and inclusive. The third sector can also help local statutory agencies to address a wide range of community concerns, including strengthening community cohesion, increasing environmental sustainability, tackling many of the causes and consequences of social and economic disadvantage.

NI 8: Adult participation in sport and active recreation

NI 8 is not always recognised as being a ‘third sector indicator’, but local sports clubs and associations provide key services for local communities. These include providing invaluable opportunities for people from disadvantaged communities to increase their confidence and skills, working to build community cohesion across traditional divisions and, of course, significant health benefits. Sports clubs rely on the support of volunteers to maintain grounds, care for kit and provide refreshments or transport.

Further information:

www.navca.org.uk/localvs/infobank/localisation/laas/nis/Home.htm

1.5 Comprehensive Area Assessment

The Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) is a framework, introduced in April 2009, to provide an independent assessment of how well people are served by the public services in their area. It is a single rolling assessment process, undertaken by the Audit Commission and its five partner inspectorates and replaces the Comprehensive Performance Assessment and a number of other former inspection mechanisms. The assessment takes into account Compact principles and the third sector will contribute to the “Shared Evidence File” and its views will be sought as part of the assessment.

Significantly for the third sector, the CAA will assess:

- All indicators in the NIS including NI6 and NI7 whether or not they are identified as Local Priorities in an LAA.
- How well the Duty to Involve (see below) is being fulfilled in the local area.

Further information:

www.navca.org.uk/localvs/infobank/localisation/caa/

1.6 Duty to Involve

The duty seeks to ensure that local people have their say, embedded in a culture of engagement and empowerment, and dates back to the Health and Social Care Act 2001. It came into force in April 2009 and requires authorities to consider, as a matter of course, the possibilities for the provision of information to, consultation with and involvement of *representatives of local persons* in the exercise of any their functions.

Authorities should consider providing opportunities for representatives of local people to:

- influence or directly participate in decision making (for example, in helping to shape local priorities via citizen panels, service advisory panels, neighbourhood management, participatory budgeting; citizen juries)
- provide feedback on decisions, services, policies and outcomes (for example, a ‘have your say’ section on the local authority’s website; service-user forums; petitions; and feedback forms)

- co-design/work with the authority in designing policies and services (for example, being involved in the commissioning of services)
- co-produce/carry out some aspects of services for themselves (for example, having responsibility for the maintenance of a community centre; the transfer of the management of assets; communities taking part in 'street clean up' or environmental conservation work)
- work with the authority in assessing services (for example, citizens acting as mystery shoppers, user evaluators and as co-opted members of Overview and Scrutiny Committees)

Representatives of local persons refers to a mix of "local persons" including individuals, groups, businesses or organisations likely to be affected by, or have an interest in a local authority function.

There are three possible ways authorities should think about involving the third sector as part of the new duty:

- Local third sector organisations might be affected by, or interested in, a particular authority function. As such an authority might decide that it is appropriate to inform, consult and/or involve the group in some way.
- Third sector organisations might have a role as advocates for local people (particularly marginalised and/or otherwise vulnerable groups). Therefore an authority might decide to involve a third sector organisation in addition to individual citizens and groups.
- Finally, third sector organisations might be able to provide relevant expertise and specialist knowledge that might help the authority in reaching out to marginalised and vulnerable groups.

Further information:

- www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/strongsafeprosperous
- www.navca.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/161CF789-AD6C-440E-98DC-7AEFBB8FFFC0/0/Dutiesonpublicbodies.pdf
- www.cdf.org.uk/pooled/articles/BF_DOCART/view.asp?Q=BF_DOCART_311137

1.7 The Compact

Established in 1998, the Compact is an agreement between Government and the voluntary and community sector in England. It is an agreement that provides an overall framework for promoting effective partnership working between the Government and the voluntary and community sector, according to shared values, principles and commitments. Local Compacts have been developed in most areas often including specific codes/undertakings regarding multi sector partnership work.

The national Compact is currently being revised and will aim to link in further with CAA and other performance frameworks in future.

Further information:

- www.thecompact.org.uk
- www.navca.org.uk/localvs/infobank/compact/Home.htm

Section 2. Strategic co-ordination of third sector engagement

2.1 Third Sector

The Third Sector encompasses a wide range of organisations and can be summarized as:

‘non-governmental organisations that are value driven and which principally reinvest their surpluses to further social, environmental or cultural objectives. It includes voluntary and community organisations, charities, social enterprises, co-operatives and mutuals.’

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This diverse range of organisations has a vast array of knowledge and expertise to contribute to the development and delivery of services through local partnerships. In particular, it is seen to be able to play the following roles:

- Provide evidence and intelligence to inform local needs analysis
- Support the design and delivery of local services
- Support user evaluation of services
- Identify and address the needs of hard to reach and disadvantaged communities
- Raise awareness and progress cross cutting issues which may not easily fit into partnerships structures/thematic groups
- Support good governance and hold partnerships to account

2.2 Strategic Co-ordination

In order, to enable the third sector to play the above roles effectively, there needs to be strategic co-ordination of third sector engagement.

Strategic co-ordination of third sector principally involves:

- Scoping the range of third sector organisations with which an LSP needs to engage according to an inclusive definition of the third sector
- Identifying how and when partnerships needs to engage with such groups according to a Comprehensive Community Engagement Strategy
- Supporting and investing in developing structures and mechanisms within the third sector to support the delivery of this strategy.

This may include

- the establishment and operation of third sector forums and networks to support discussion, debate and networking in the sector
- developing mechanisms and processes for communication and consultation with third sector groups

- identifying and supporting of authentic, accountable representatives from the third sector.

Frequently a third sector forum or agency is developed and funded to co-ordinate the above functions.

For case studies see

- www.navca.org.uk/localvs/goodprac/partnership/Home.htm

For tool kits for representation see

- www.navca.org.uk/localvs/infobank/Representationandparticipation/Home.htm

For the Comprehensive Community Engagement Strategy document see

- www.navca.org.uk/publications/cces/

2.3 Benefits of strategic co-ordination of third sector engagement

In areas where there has been investment in structures and mechanisms which support strategic co-ordination of third sector engagement, the following is evident:

The LSP and its partners are able to map the knowledge and expertise the third sector can contribute to the partnership and identify ways of accessing this. This can lead to improved service development and delivery.

Cost effective investment in third sector infrastructure by a number of public sector partners is enabled. For example, third sector infrastructure can be developed which can serve more than one partner/partnership eg establishment of third sector database can enable support communication and consultation with third sector by a number of partners.

Collaboration and capacity building in the third sector is encouraged through facilitating increased networking between third sector organisations. There are likely to be increased opportunities to work together to identify common needs and issues.

A strategic, collective third sector voice can increase influence and more effectively draw attention to cross cutting issues and the needs of disadvantaged communities.

2.4 Consequences of not co-ordinating strategic engagement with the third sector

In areas where there has been little or no investment in mechanisms and structures which co-ordinate strategic engagement with the third sector, there is evidence of the following:

LSPs and their partners may be wary of or avoid engagement with third sector not knowing where to start.

Inappropriate forms and levels of engagement may lead to misunderstandings and loss of confidence in third sector. For example, if partnerships have not clearly identified and agreed the skills and expertise required by third sector representatives the third sector is unlikely to be able to deliver what is needed.

LSPs may draw only on the skills, knowledge and perspectives of a few known/dominant organisations and therefore not access the views and expertise held within the wider sector.

There may be duplication of investment; for example, LSP partners might be separately funding several organisations to provide engagement functions which could be provided more efficiently and effectively by strategic co-ordination.

Division and conflict may fester in the third sector where organisations do not feel they have equal voices. Collaborative and capacity building work is likely to be undermined.

The third sector's ability to flag up cross cutting issues and the needs of some of the most disadvantaged communities will be limited.

Conclusion

The ability of the third sector to contribute effectively to the development and delivery of local services is dependent upon strategic co-ordination of its engagement with the LSP. Support and investment in the third sector structures and mechanisms to co-ordinate this engagement is crucial. LIOs have a significant part to play in leading this drive towards greater influence and engagement, and challenging inadequate engagement and accountability practice.

Further resources

NAVCA's Improving Local Partnerships Infobank provides easy access to a wide range of resources from both public and third sector organisations:

- <http://www.navca.org.uk/infobank>



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