

Evaluation of Local Strategic Partnerships

Mapping approaches to integrating performance indicators across local strategic partnerships

Case Study 5 – Coventry Partnership

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Introduction

Coventry was one of the first areas to develop a Community Plan, back in 1997. The City Forum, the forerunner to the Coventry Partnership, was established to oversee the plan. Key features of the City Forum and the partnership's approach to performance management include:

- A long history of partnership working and community planning on which to draw in developing the performance management framework
- Planned restructuring of the partnership to reflect the priorities of the new plan, currently in development
- Project managers from partner agencies to be appointed to drive delivery in the thematic groups
- A Performance and Planning project funded through Invest to Save, to develop a web-based management information system
- A partnership approach to monitoring and evaluation in priority neighbourhoods funded through the NRF.

Development of the Community Plan

Extensive consultation with around 200 organisations at a large city conference led to the identification of six key priorities for the first Community Plan – creating more jobs, tackling crime and making communities safer, tackling poverty, investing in young people, creating an exciting and vibrant city centre, meeting the needs and aspirations of older people. The City Forum established a Programme Delivery Group for each priority, consisting principally of service managers from different partner agencies. These groups were charged with developing and overseeing a five-year action programme for delivering the Plan's targets.

The first Community Plan ended in March 2003. The LSP is currently working on the development of a second Community Plan, and extensive consultation with the local community has already taken place. A range of consultation methods were employed to try to ensure that as many people as possible had the opportunity to be involved with the development of the plan. Special efforts were made to engage residents from priority neighbourhoods and communities of interest through focus groups and participatory appraisal, and by working through existing networks and projects. The LSP hopes to have a new set of priorities by June. Once priorities are identified, a new LSP structure will come into play with theme groups established for each of the priority areas. Theme groups will then be responsible for developing detailed action plans. It is the intention that theme groups will be supported by high-level project managers seconded from partner organizations. They will be charged with helping to drive delivery in the theme groups and providing linkages between individual theme groups and with the community.

Whilst some of the priorities in the first Community Plan focused on the needs of particular groups, priorities in the second Plan will cluster around major fields of policy. However, each theme group will be expected to demonstrate how their plans respond to the needs of priority

neighbourhoods and communities of interest. As was the case for the first Plan, the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy will be completely integrated, with a focus on the most deprived neighbourhoods running throughout the Community Plan.

Performance Management

In developing the first Community Plan, the LSP was keen to identify a work programme that built upon and added value to existing activities of partner agencies. There was therefore an attempt to develop indicators that would enable the LSP to track its particular contribution, rather than to merely bring together indicators already in use.

The final version of the first Community Plan included a mix of indicators – both locally defined and from existing national indicator sets.

Except from Coventry's first Community Plan

Priority 5 – Create an exciting, vibrant, City Centre

Targets:

- Majority of shops open late to 8pm by 2001
- A significant increase in public perception of safety (measured by attitude surveys) by 2003
- 20 new restaurants by 2001
- 1000 new dwellings by 2003
- £100m new investment by 2003
- Regular bus services until 2am by 2000

Targets in the first Community Plan were monitored quarterly and reviewed through the Monitoring and Evaluation Group, a subgroup of the partnership comprising the leads of each programme delivery group, support officers and external experts.

The development of indicators for the new plan is now a high priority for the partnership. In advance of firming up the priorities for the plan, some initial work has been done to identify a range of suitable indicators. A structured list is being developed comprising economic, social and environment indicators as well as some process indicators that will enable the LSP to track improvements in the partnership itself. This work is taking into account indicators from New Deal for Communities, Agenda 21, the government Floor Targets, the Audit Commission Quality of Life indicators and others already developed to measure progress against service improvement plans – for example those used for surveys involving the Citizen's Panel. The LSP is keen to develop new indicators only where there are explicit gaps that need to be filled. Key gaps that have been identified tend to be for softer indicators, for example residents' perceptions about their health and well-being, involvement in decision making, and communications with service providers. The

LSP will also be developing new indicators to complement those that rely on official data where the picture may sometimes be distorted, for example for unreported crime.

The next stage will be for theme groups to explore baseline information, where this is available, and then to agree a set of indicators that will enable them to progress over time. The selection and monitoring of indicators will be overseen by the Progress, Impact and Evaluation Group, which will be set up at the same time as the Theme Groups.

It is likely that the final set of indicators will also include some process indicators that will help the LSP to measure how well it is functioning as a partnership. However, this work has not started yet.

The LSP is planning to develop a performance management framework, which will cover both the internal aspects of the LSP (i.e. how well the partnership itself is working) and the external (i.e. the impact of partnership initiatives on the ground). The partnership is awaiting NRU guidance on developing performance management frameworks before fleshing this out further. However, as part of its Neighbourhood Renewal and Social Inclusion Strategy, the Coventry Partnership has produced a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework that will feed into this.

The draft implementation plan for this sets out a year long programme of work, aimed at piloting a new partnership approach to monitoring and evaluation in 7 of the 31 priority neighbourhoods. Development and delivery of the programme is being conducted in partnership with the University of Warwick and Coventry University, who are members of the LSP. Neighbourhood Renewal funding is being used to resource a number of key sub-projects, including:

A baseline survey of the 7 priority neighbourhoods: This includes the design and implementation of a household survey to collect information not available at neighbourhood/community level – e.g. service quality, social capital, perceptions of the area, lifestyles. A market research company is carrying out this survey in the first instance, however there are plans to use Community Researchers in subsequent years. Benchmarks to city, regional, and national comparators will be included wherever possible.

A programme to develop and train community researchers: a research fellow is being employed to recruit, train and employ community researchers in 7 priority areas and up to 3 communities of interest. The trainees will be involved in identifying information requirements of priority neighbourhoods/communities and feeding requirements into the design of the household survey. They will develop 'communities in profile' reports, which will give a picture of the neighbourhood. They will undertake research on key local issues, and once trained will be available to undertake evaluative studies into service quality, projects etc. They will be trained in a range of techniques including impact assessment, and will be a resource that partners can employ. It is hoped that this joined up approach to research will help to limit consultation fatigue and improve the quality of information available for planning by adding qualitative information to help explain or explore further the statistical information that is collected against the key indicators.

Development of an integrated database of regeneration projects: There are plans to merge two existing databases as a starting point for establishing a single source of information on regeneration projects in Coventry. This will eventually enable the partnership to review the progress of initiatives at project, outcome theme, neighbourhood or partner level. It will help to show the coverage of special initiatives to help with tackling gaps, duplications, and conflicts. Work is being carried out to explore the feasibility of a web-based tool for data collection/entry so that information is only collected once to satisfy the needs of funders and of the partnership.

Evaluation of initiatives to develop a co-ordinated and empowering approach to policy making: This work will be designed and commissioned by the Progress, Impact and Evaluation Group.

Creation of a Monitoring and Evaluation Development Officer post: This new post will support the coordination of the Framework and help to ensure that there is a useful flow of information to support the development, monitoring and evaluation of the Community Plan.

Project to provide an Interim Impact Assessment of Neighbourhood Renewal Fund projects in the 6 priority neighbourhoods: This new project is designed to sample projects to assess their likely contribution towards neighbourhood renewal and to assess the mainstreaming potential of neighbourhood renewal initiatives.

In addition to the initiatives outlined above, a Performance and Planning Project funded through the ODPM Invest to Save Scheme is aiming to produce a management information system that will bring together, in a single database, information about quality of life in Coventry. The system will help to monitor the performance of the Partners' jointly delivered services in the City's Priority Neighbourhoods, assist the partnership in planning more effectively, and enable community access to useful information about their local areas. It will be accessible to the Coventry Partnership, the City Council, and local community groups. Software consultants have just been appointed and development of the data warehouse is beginning. It will produce a web-based application with two levels of access to useful information. The first level will be publicly available via a website and give information in a static form, but using a number of different formats – e.g. maps, tables, charts etc. Access to the second level will be restricted to licence holders, and will allow data users to manipulate data. The system is due to be finished by March 2004. The LSP hopes this technology will provide managers within the LSP with the ability to track changes in performance data across specific services as well as the impact that actions are having on key performance indicators.

The project is managed by a full time Project Manager, who reports to Coventry City Council's Strategic Director. The Project Steering Group consists of link officers drawn from the partner organizations who will be allocated an average of 3 hours a week to support the project. A training and capacity building programme for staff and citizens is being planned to help ensure full utilization of the finished product. The project builds upon a range of existing developments in Coventry, including the work of the Data Exchange Group – a cross-city group led by West Midlands Police that exists to exchange data relating to Crime and Disorder.

It is recognised that under the first Community Plan, the process of holding partners to account for their performance was challenging. In moving forward, this is recognised as a key issue for the next Community Plan. Measures that the LSP plans to implement in order to strengthen accountability include:

- Requiring leaders of theme groups to account to the whole partnership for delivery of their element of the Plan on a regular basis
- Requiring each theme group to complete the Protocol and Terms of Reference templates through which they are agreeing to "do the business" for the partnership
- Arranging for the partnership to approve the completed protocols and Terms of Reference along with the work plans of the Theme Groups in the Autumn
- Making documents from the theme groups available on the new web site
- Encouraging champions in each theme group to use networks to report on the progress of their group
- Progress and performance data made available to the public via the new database outlined above.

Sources

This case study is based on interviews with Jenni Venn, Policy and Planning Manager, and Helen Shankster, Regeneration Officer (Social Inclusion and Evaluation), Coventry City Council. In addition, it draws on a number of key documents, including the first Community Plan, and Coventry Partnership's Monitoring and Evaluation Framework Draft Implementation Plan.

Further Information

For further information about The Coventry Partnership's approach to performance management contact:

Jenny Venn
Policy & Planning Manager
Coventry City Council
T: 024 7683 3741

Helen Shankster
Monitoring and Evaluation Development Officer
The Coventry Partnership
C/o Room 22, Council House
Earl Street
Coventry CV1 5RR
T: 024 7683 1067