

Performance management and evaluation of English Local Strategic Partnerships, UK¹

Description of the approach

In England there are national guidelines for performance management by local strategic partnerships. These guidelines cover three main areas: strategy development, strategy delivery and performance management and review.

Performance management and review is a process comprising three main elements: Reviewing delivery; reviewing partnership working; and improvement planning. Review of delivery is concerned to assess progress against targets and provide evidence on whether resources are being best deployed in relation to strategic goals, whether projects contribute to strategic objectives, and whether the partnership strategy is effectively influencing partners' plans and spending programmes. Review of partnership working is designed to ensure that the partnership is strategic, inclusive and efficient. Improvement planning follows on from these review processes to identify resource and implement necessary changes to strategy and delivery programmes. The performance management process undertaken by each local strategic partnership is managed by the regional offices of national government.

Many LSPs also commission evaluation studies alongside the performance management process. These may be of local strategy, specific projects, or of partnership working (for example the review of partnership structure discussed in the Devon Strategic Partnership learning model). In addition, national government recognises the need for independent objective evaluation of the progress of LSPs nationally and has commissioned a long term evaluation programme.

The first stage of this programme (2002-2005) was primarily a formative evaluation, intended to provide feedback to LSPs and to government itself. The evaluation, undertaken by a consortium of universities and consultancies, included a number of elements – case studies of nine LSPs, two national surveys of all LSPs, and a programme of action research (see the learning model of an action learning set on two tier issues). Topics covered by the evaluation ranged from 'process' issues such as membership, structures and performance management to 'outcome' issues concerned with the progress of LSPs in developing and implementing their strategic plans. The evaluation has produced a wide range of published reports.

A further stage of the evaluation, of a more summative nature with a greater concern to quantify outcomes, is now under way.

Why the approach is relevant?

The approach is relevant both for local partnerships and for government. It is important for local partnerships to assess their own progress within a national framework, complemented by an evaluative overview of progress nationally.

Reasons for the success of the approach

In England the national government has invested substantial resources in performance management and evaluation of LSPs to ensure that it has a strong evidence base on the successes and problems of this important policy initiative. This is backed up by a requirement placed on LSPs to adopt robust performance management arrangements.

1. Source: Mike Geddes (2007), in: "Building Effective Local Partnerships: Organisational Challenges and Strategic Orientations". OECD LEED Trento Centre Capacity Building Local Governance and Partnerships.

The obstacles that were faced and the quality of the response taken

Initially some LSPs were sceptical of performance management and feared that it was a tool for national government control. Most however have now come to recognise its value in convincing partners and stakeholders of the value of the LSP and ensuring that problems are identified and corrected promptly. Some LSPs are sceptical of the value of evaluation. Involvement of many LSPs in the evaluation, especially in the action learning sets within the action research programme, has been one way to counter this perception.

Considerations for adoption of this kind of approach

The institution of strong performance management systems and a long term national evaluation programme have significant resource casts and require skills development within government, in local partnerships and within the evaluation community. However without performance management and evaluation neither local partnerships nor government will have adequate information to inform policy and practice.

Contact details and website for further information

Mr Matt Carter
Department for Communities and Local Government
E-Mail: Matt.Carter@communities.gsi.gov.uk
Performance management for LSPs:
www.renewal.net/Documents/RNET/Policy%20Guidance/Performancemanagementframework.doc
The national evaluation of English LSPs:
www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1136876E