

Devon Strategic Partnership, UK¹

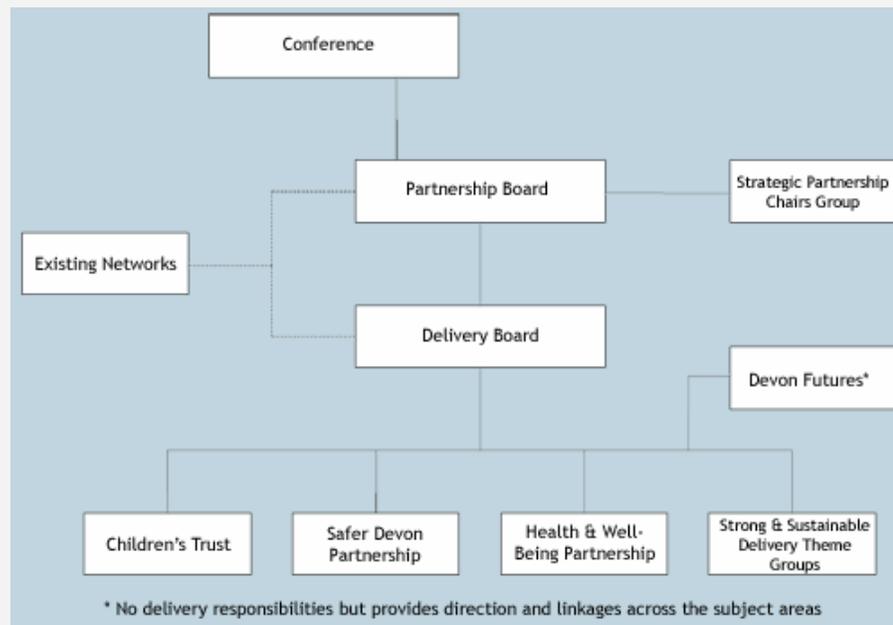
Description of the approach

Devon is a predominantly rural County in England, and the Devon Strategic Partnership is the local strategic partnership for the area. The Devon Strategic Partnership comprises public, private, voluntary and community sector organisations, all working together to improve the quality of life for those who live, work in and visit Devon. Their focus is on delivering real improvements to the issues that matter most to the people of Devon; working towards a joint aim to be "a County with safe, healthy and inclusive communities, a strong and diverse economy and a cherished environment". The partnership is responsible for the development and delivery of the Sustainable Community Strategy (the county strategy for the area) and for the Local Area Agreement which is an agreement between local agencies and national government to improve public services in Devon.

The DSP is an established and permanent partnership, with membership from the County Council (politicians and officials), other local public bodies, business, and voluntary and community organisations. As the diagram shows, partnership arrangements have a number of components:

- A Partnership Board with membership of all key partners (meets four times a year). This includes council leaders from the County and Districts.
- A smaller Delivery Board of chief executives and senior officials from key agencies responsible for the delivery of the County Community Strategy (meets monthly).
- A wider conference giving access to a broader group of interests and stakeholders (meets six monthly/annually).
- Themed partnerships for key issues such as services for children, crime and safety, health.
- A 'think-tank', the Devon Futures Group.

In addition, as Devon has two tiers of local government, a Strategic Partnership Chairs Group comprises the chairpersons of the second tier District partnerships.



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.

Why the approach is relevant?

The Devon Strategic Partnership is a well-established, permanent local strategic partnership. Situated at County level, it nevertheless includes membership from District Council political leaders and from district LSPs. The DSP is responsible for the local development strategy, the Sustainable Community Strategy, which sets out the strategic vision for the county. It provides a vehicle for considering and deciding how to address difficult cross-cutting issues such as the economic future of an area, social exclusion and climate change. Building these issues into the community's vision in an integrated way is at the heart of creating sustainable development at a local level. The Local Area Agreement is the main way of ensuring that all public services contribute to the delivery of the strategy.

Reasons for the success of the approach

The DSP is an example of the Local Strategic Partnerships which exist across England. National legislation and guidance has been important in providing and supporting the application of the concept. Equally important however have been local factors, including political support, growing collaboration between the County and District Councils, and a non-political approach reflected in the fact that the DSP is chaired by the local bishop.

The DSP has developed a sophisticated structure and working arrangements to ensure it is both inclusive and efficient. The current arrangements result from a review of the previous structure in the context of new responsibilities such as the Local Area Agreement. Regular monthly newsletters and an accessible website help to communicate the work of the partnership as widely as possible.

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

Devon is a large and diverse area and it is a challenge to develop a strategic plan which recognises the range of needs and opportunities in the area. A review of the previous Community Strategy is being undertaken to learn lessons as the basis for the new Sustainable Community Strategy which will cover the period from 2008.

In an area with two tiers of local government such as Devon it has not always been easy to maintain effective collaboration but the structures of the partnership have been developed to ensure that District views are represented.

Devon is not one of the areas of England with the worst social deprivation where government financial support is available to help run the local strategic partnership, so local agencies, especially the County Council, have had to provide the support.

Considerations for adoption of this kind of approach

The Devon Strategic Partnership provides a potential model for partnerships in the more rural areas. Other LSPs, such as the Coventry Partnership, provide a similar model appropriate to larger urban areas.

Contact details and website for further information

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