

May 2008



**Friends of
the Earth**

Sustainable Community Strategies & Local Strategic Partnerships

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About this guide

All local Councils are bound to prepare Community Strategies (both England and Wales). A community strategy sets out a long term vision for an area which matches the council's boundaries, backed up by action plans to achieve it. Every local authority should prepare a community strategy 'for promoting or improving the economic, social and environmental well-being of their area and contributing to the achievement of sustainable development in the United Kingdom'. This is a requirement of the Local Government Act 2000. **Given the aim of contributing to sustainable development, the government now prefers the term Sustainable Community Strategy.** This guide explains how they are set up within your locality, how they are run, what they intend to achieve and how you - the campaigner - can use them to your best advantage. A separate guide is published for Community Strategies in Wales.

'The modernisation of local government'

Since the New Labour Government was elected in 1997 a common theme has emerged concerning the delivery of public services, leading to the need to develop 'joined up thinking and joined up working - from the bottom up'! It was felt that many of those responsible for the delivery of public services needed to rid themselves of their departmental 'silo' mentalities and ways of working. They also needed to find ways of consulting and involving local people in the prioritisation, planning and delivery of services if the problems of social and economic disadvantage experienced by many communities were to be successfully tackled.

A range of initiatives have come from Government to develop this way of working in local authorities and other agencies such as the health service and the police. These have included 'New Deal for Communities', 'Neighbourhood Renewal Areas' and 'Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders', as well as projects that target specific sections of the community such 'Sure Start' (families with young children) and 'Education Action Zones'.

All these initiatives have similar aims and characteristics. They:

- provide extra resources;
- are focused on narrowing the gap between the most deprived areas and the rest of the country and place great emphasis on partnership working that includes the community as the important stakeholder;
- have the function of 'bending' main stream services (and their budgets) to work in more co-ordinated partnerships that reflect local needs and priorities.

These measures, together with new constitutions for local authorities that include cabinet arrangements, scrutiny committees and in many cases 'community forums' have moved the modernisation of local government agenda a long way forward.

Local Strategic Partnerships

It was a condition for the Neighbourhood Renewal areas that were established in the 88 most deprived local authorities, that to receive additional funding, they had to establish a Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). LSP's now exist in all areas of England. The LSP was to be a forum consisting of representation from:

- public sector organisations (e.g. Local Authority, Police and Fire Services Job Centre Plus, Primary Care Trust);

- private companies (particularly if they are major employers);
- business organisations;
- the community and voluntary sector.

The actual membership is determined by each LSP to suit what are considered to be the needs of the local authority area. Although it is not a statutory requirement, most of the local authorities not included within the 'Neighbourhood Renewal' programme have also established LSPs as a way of developing partnership working. Usually the LSP is based on a single local authority area, but in some parts of the country LSPs have been formed that include more than one local authority area, and in addition, many County Councils have developed their own additional partnership arrangements.

The role of the LSP is as follows:

- Prepare a Sustainable Community Strategy for the area and ensure that it is implemented according to agreed targets and timetable;
- Bring the partners of the LSP together to encourage joint working that more effectively and efficiently meets local needs and priorities;
- Liaise with local authorities in the development of their public service agreements, and with the 'pathfinder' authorities that are developing the new Local Area Agreements that streamline funding and define priorities in such areas as 'children and young people', 'older people and health' and 'safer, stronger communities'.

The LSP should have a structure that attempts to provide some linkage from community level to that of the decision-making forum. This may be through representation from a local community forum, the voluntary sector (Council for Voluntary Service) and/or extensive community consultation arrangements. They will probably also have a co-ordinating group, usually consisting mainly of public service officers, but also including representatives from the other sectors represented on the Forum.

Sustainable Community Strategy

Every local Authority is obliged by the Local Government Act 2000 to develop and deliver a Sustainable Community Strategy. Most Local Authorities have undertaken this responsibility through a Local Strategic Partnership that brings together a range of relevant partners to help prioritise, plan and deliver its aims and objectives. LSPs also have to be seen in the context of the many other partnerships that have developed to more effectively deliver public services. These include 'Learning and Skills Councils', 'Community Safety Partnerships' and 'Children's Strategic Partnership'. In many LSPs, the work of these other partnerships have been incorporated into the 'Community Strategy', and have been incorporated into the LSP as theme groups. The aims and objects of the Community Strategy are also those used by the Local Development Framework (local plan).

The Community Strategy is usually developed around several themes. Typically, these could be:

- Economic Regeneration
- Climate Change
- Community Safety
- Homes and Neighbourhood
- Leisure and Culture
- Lifelong Learning

- Healthy Communities
- Environment
- Transport.

The Sustainable Community Strategy should provide a framework for the application of the funding from government initiatives and the starting point for the preparation of the Local Development Framework. There have been some important changes since 2007. All areas now have Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and there is new legal duty for a range of groups to cooperate with the LSP in the drawing up of a Local Area Agreement. These measures have made Sustainable Community Strategies, LSPs and the agreements much more important

CHECK!

Local strategic partnership = A body led by the council but including other key local partners who come together to make services better

Sustainable community Strategy = The plan the local strategic partnership draws up to help prioritise and guide their work based on close involvement with the community

Local area agreements = A kind of contract by which all the partners agree to do stuff and now backed by a legal duty for partners to cooperate.

Even more important is the rating your council gets on its performance is based on the indicators agreed by the local authority and the LSP. They are judged through the Comprehensive Area Assessment and a bad performance reduces the money the local government gets from central Government.

How to get involved

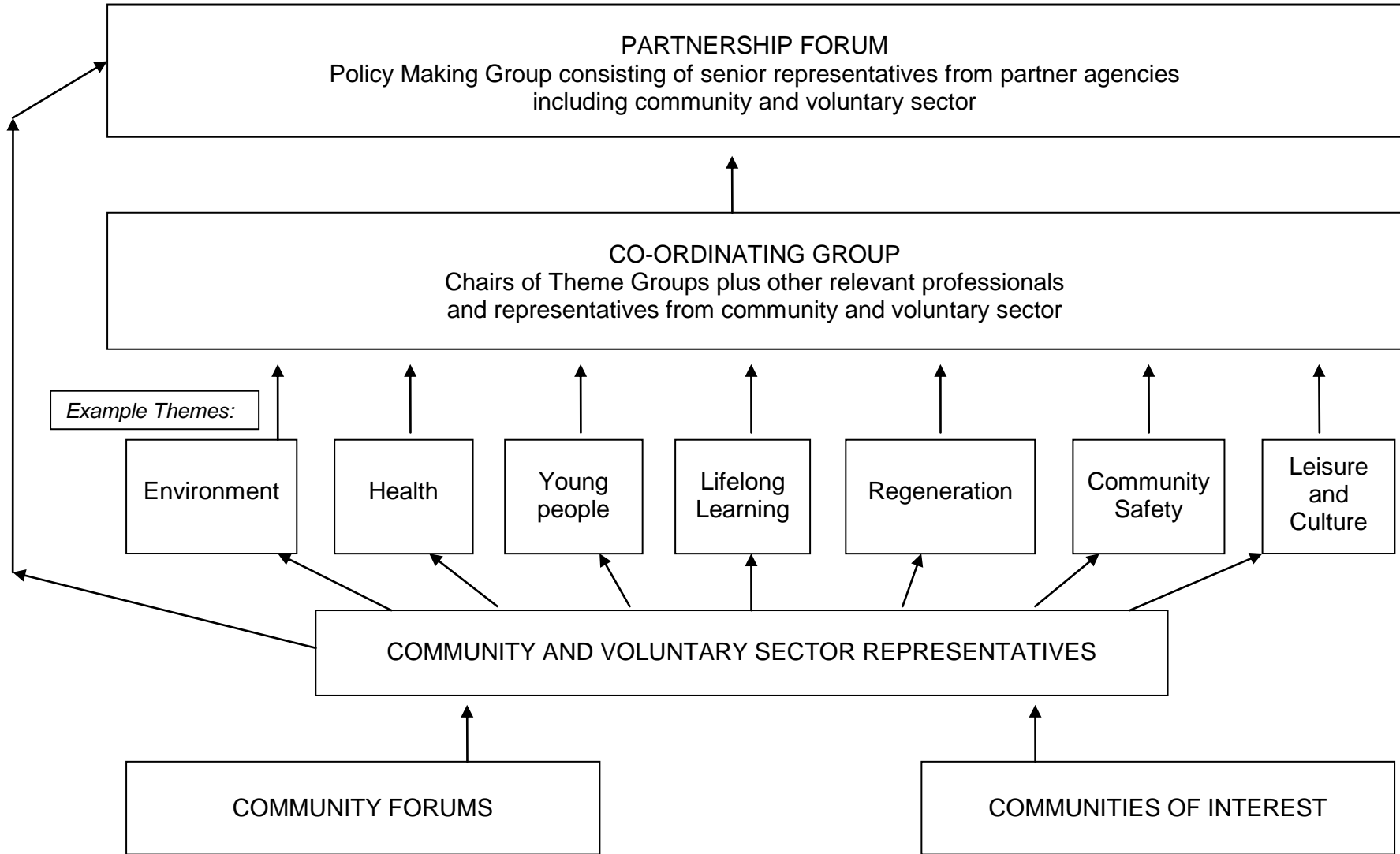
A good starting point is when the Local Strategic Partnership consults on its draft Sustainable Community Strategy. This will usually be through written responses and/or at a public meeting. These are often poorly attended so it is a good chance to have your say and get yourself known. It is also a good opportunity to meet staff and members of the LSP to find out how yours works!

Sustainable Community Strategies are also often based on more local community consultation. This could be in the form of public meetings or more innovative events such as 'Planning for Real'. The intention will be to find out what the concerns and priorities for local people are, so that a local action plan and/or the Community Strategy can reflect them. Again, this is a useful place to get involved.

LSPs and Sustainable Community Strategies are not just concerned about communities of place. They are also concerned about communities of interest. One way to get your interests registered with them is through the local Council for Voluntary Service (CVS), who often have a place in their own right at all levels of the LSP. It is often the CVS who organise representation of the voluntary sector within the LSP, so this is another useful point of contact. In some LSPs it may well be possible to be nominated from the CVS direct to a theme group of the LSP. In other LSPs, it may be possible to be represented directly. The LSPs in the 88 Neighbourhood Renewal Areas have to organise community representation through a 'community empowerment network' of the LSP, another point at which to get involved.

Finally, it is well worth remembering that the paid officers of the LSP are often lonely! While in theory their role is central to the function of local government and the delivery of services, in practice they are often marginalised, because their role has been inadequately defined by Government and they have no statutory place. Therefore, it is well worth arranging to meet your LSP officers to simply discuss with them how you, as a member of the public, can get involved.

Participation in Local Strategic Partnerships



Further information:

Further information and guidance:

Friends of the Earth – Tel: 020 7490 1555
26-28 Underwood Street, London N1 7JQ
Website: www.foe.co.uk

Planning

Email: planning@foe.co.uk
Website: www.YourPlanningRights.co.uk

Right to Know

Email: Right2Know@foe.co.uk
Website: www.RightToKnowOnline.org

Rights and Justice Centre

Email: legal@foe.co.uk

Useful web sites

Government

Audit Commission
www.audit-commission.gov.uk

Department for Communities and Local Government
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/>

The Planning Inspectorate
<http://www.planning-inspectorate.gov.uk/>

Environment Agency
www.environment-agency.gov.uk/

Environment Agency Public Registers
<http://www2.environment-agency.gov.uk/epr/>

Information Commissioners Office
www.ico.gov.uk

Neighbourhood Statistics
www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk

The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004
www.legislation.hmso.gov.uk/acts/acts2004/20040005.htm

Planning Portal
www.planningportal.gov.uk

Non Governmental Organisations (NGO)

Air Quality – UK National Air Quality site
www.airquality.co.uk

Campaign to Protect Rural England planning site

www.planninghelp.org.uk

Environmental Law Foundation

www.elflaw.org/

Liberty

www.liberty-human-rights.org.uk/

Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation

www.nif.co.uk/

Planning Aid

www.planningaid.rtpi.org.uk

Wildlife and Countryside Link.

www.wcl.org.uk

Specific recommendations

National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal

Social Exclusion Unit

35 Great Smith Street

London SW1P 3BQ

tel. 020 7944 8383

www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/seu

Local Government Association

Local Government House

Smith Square

London SW1P 3HZ

Tel: 020 7664 3000

www.lga.gov.uk/

'Planning for Real'

Registered by the Neighbourhood Initiative Foundation

The Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation

The Poplars

Lightmoor

Telford TF4 3QN

Phone: 0870 7700339 Fax: 01952 591771

<http://www.nifonline.org.uk/>

Croydon Council

With some particularly good ideas about promoting sustainability through the LSP

www.croydon.gov.uk/csp

CHART

(The LSP for Chesterfield Borough Council and North East Derbyshire District Council)

An example of a multi borough LSP with detailed action plans for theme groups available

www.chartlsp.co.uk/

Local Government Act 2000

<http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2000/20000022.htm>