

# GETTING THE MOST OUT OF SOUTH BUCKS PARTNERSHIP

## Recommendations

### Progress through Partnerships

1. PtP undertook a short piece of work with the South Bucks Partnership which included a review of background papers relating to the role and operation of the Partnership; examples of recent agendas and papers; the draft Sustainable Community Strategy and the Partnership's Annual Report.
2. PtP also facilitated an event on 20<sup>th</sup> July with Partnership members which was an opportunity to reflect on the partnership structures and to discuss how the partnership could best deliver against its Sustainable Community Strategy. There is a separate note which summarises the discussions between partners on the day. This note sets out PtP's recommendations to the Partnership for areas of further development which we believe will strengthen the Partnership's operation and impact.

### Overview

3. The Partnership is a relatively new body which has replaced two existing partnership forums (the LSP and the Joint Local Committee). The Partnership has an agreed constitution and membership.
4. The Partnership has developed a Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) which provides a strong vision for South Bucks and a clear framework for the priorities for the Partnership. It has also recently produced an annual report which sets out progress against these priorities.
5. The Partnership is still in the process of embedding the vision and priorities set out in its SCS within its activities and has not yet settled into an effective pattern of working.

### Role of the Partnership

6. The Partnership **needs to be a strategic forum** focused on how working in partnership can improve services and outcomes for local people. Local or sector-based knowledge is extremely valuable to the Partnership, but the Partnership should not be a forum for addressing issues that are very local and specific in their nature - these are useful as examples but should, wherever possible, be used to illustrate wider strategic points.

7. The Partnership needs to **focus on doing a clearly defined set of things well**. These should be linked to the priorities identified in the SCS and a clear approach to monitoring progress and holding all partners to account for delivery should be agreed.
8. The Partnership needs to **clarify roles and ownership of SCS action plans** and be clear what the role of existing task groups and the Implementation Group is in delivery.
9. The main focus of the Partnership should be on how the collective mainstream/core budgets and resources of its members are prioritised and used to support agreed priorities.
10. The Partnership should play an **important role in facilitating communication** between partners and with their wider networks and local communities. There should be a clear plan about how to share information within the Partnership and how to better use the networks and communication tools (newsletters etc.) of individual members to get shared messages across.

## Understanding of Partnership Structure

11. Members of the Partnership are not yet confident about the detail of the new structures. A simple reference document would help address this. It should include the following information:
  - **The Constitution**
  - The Partnership's **Membership**
  - **An organogram and glossary of terms** setting out the respective roles and responsibilities of the Partnership Board, the Implementation Group and existing task groups
  - Key **contact details**
12. The Partnership should **continue to review** its structures and effectiveness on a regular basis.

## Focus and Organisation of Meetings

13. The **format for meetings needs to be revised** in order to achieve a focus on clear priorities and strengthen the impact of the Partnership. There is no one way of achieving this, but we recommend testing the following:
  - Aim to achieve a balance between:
    - shorter items covering issues that are either a very current concern or need to be dealt with within a specific timescale, or are

about sharing information and/or best practice. This should also include a follow-up on previously agreed actions.

- one larger and longer-term issue at each meeting which would normally be linked to SCS priorities.

- Ensure for each item that there is clarity about why it is there and that at the end of each item 'what happens next' is agreed and noted (and reported back at a future meeting where appropriate).

14. A '**forward plan**' of key future agenda items would aid planning and help to ensure that the Partnership addresses the issues it has identified as priorities.
15. There should be **clearer expectations about accountability**. This should link to the priorities and targets set out in the SCS. Partners need to develop a culture in which they can hold each other to account effectively and which is challenging without tipping over into a 'blame' or 'shame' approach.
16. Planning control is clearly an area of interest to a number of Partnership members, but the focus of the Partnership needs to be strategic and relate to the Local Development Framework, rather than to specific planning applications.
17. We also recommend that you ensure that time is made either within the regular meetings or in additional events to strengthen the Partnership's understanding of the impact of current policy changes and the evidence and data available about South Bucks, including demographics, economic trends, health data, crime statistics and service performance. This would support the Partnership in identifying future challenges/opportunities for the area.
18. Changing some simple aspects of how the meetings are run would help support more effective working:
  - All Partnership members need to support the Chair in keeping **contributions short and relevant** and in creating an atmosphere where **all members feel able to contribute**.
  - Sitting in rows is not conducive to partnership working and creating a sense that everyone is involved in the meeting. **Changing the room layout** to either a full circle, horseshoe or cabaret style should be a simple way of improving the dynamic of the meeting.
  - **Structure agenda papers differently** with a very clear and short covering paper which summarises the key issues and any recommendations, and then a supporting annex with background information, data, more detailed commentary etc. The expectation should be that everyone will have read the covering paper and will have used the supporting information to clarify any issues raised by it or to find out more because the issue is of particular interest to them.