

## **INTRODUCTION**

### *Scrutinising Local Strategic Partnerships: The Case for Scrutiny of the Wiltshire Strategic Board (WiSB)*

Following the local elections in May 2005, several councillors approached Wiltshire County Council's (WCC) Overview and Scrutiny function over concern expressed by some of the electorate re: the physical appearance of the local environment, particularly in larger towns. Since the county's Local Strategic Partnership (WiSB) had a project called Street Scene aimed at improving the quality of streets and street life, a scrutiny review of this project was mooted.

This was without precedent and the potential complexities and sensitivities of reviewing a multi-agency partnership warranted the building of a strong case for scrutiny. The case required: wider research of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and scrutiny (external scrutiny in particular); investigation of the potential inter-relationship between these two functions and an assessment of WCC's current external scrutiny status and WiSB's present accountability and scrutiny arrangements.

The need for such research was reinforced by a December 2005 ODPM consultation paper (*Local Strategic Partnerships: Shaping their Future*). This suggested that effective, transparent and accountable governance and scrutiny arrangements were essential for LSPs, especially given that the introduction of Local Area Agreements (LAAs) forced greater focus on the delivery of community strategy outcomes.

In tackling the research title, this study will:

- (a) Contextualise the research topics in appropriate research, theory and policy. *Chapter (1)* gives the background to the development of scrutiny and LSPs, considering common problems inherent to these functions. The potential inter-relationship between scrutiny and LSPs is also discussed.
- (b) Undertake empirical study of WiSB and WCC's scrutiny function via a series of eight interviews, analysis of appropriate documents and a survey of non-

executive County Councillors. Data generated is presented in *Chapters (2) and (3)* and used to evaluate (in light of literature in *Chapter (1)*) both WCC's scrutiny function and WiSB's present partnership status. In the latter's case, assessment both of its current accountability, scrutiny and monitoring arrangements and its engagement (or otherwise) of non-executive councillors, is made.

- (c) Present in *Chapter (4)* broad findings and implications of scrutinising LSPs, as well as specific findings and implications in relation to the Wiltshire case study. As this research piece is due to be presented to both WiSB and WCC's Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, a series of recommendations to tackle the problems identified within are submitted. It is hoped that these recommendations will prompt useful debate.

## **CHAPTER (1)**

### **OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY AND LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS**

The election of a Labour Government in May 1997 heralded a new era for public sector reform under the rhetoric of the 'Third Way', combining "neo-liberal economic policies with social inclusion and citizen participation in governance" (Hartley et al, 2002, p 388). Implementing the Third Way required a programme of "change and innovation in the organisational forms and cultures of the state, and in particular its relationships with citizens, users and civil society" (Benington, 2000, p 3). This programme was developed under the banner of the Local Government Modernisation Agenda (LGMA), an agenda crystallised in 1998 with the White Paper *Modern Local Government: In Touch with the People* (Wilson and Game, 2002, p 355). A full framework for the LGMA can be viewed in *Appendix (1)* but its broad themes centre around:

- Democratic renewal
- Revitalised and strengthened community leadership
- Service improvement via delivering local services in partnership with other organisations

These themes have been inherent across a raft of local government reforms since 1997 and the development of the Overview and Scrutiny function and Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) are no exception.

### **OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY**

#### **Context**

The scrutiny function emerged from the Local Government Act 2000. In accordance with the drive for democratic renewal, this Act required all but the smaller district councils to implement one of three executive models – an indirectly elected leader and cabinet, a directly elected mayor and cabinet or a directly elected mayor and council manager (ibid: p 362). The Government believed these new political management

structures would “guarantee greater openness and accountability and would ensure that local authorities were responsive to their local communities” (Cole, 2001, p 239).

Each of the three new structures featured the introduction of an executive / scrutiny split; executive councillors would make key decisions with “non-executives undertaking a role of ‘holding to account’ the executive through the newly introduced overview and scrutiny function” (Ashworth and Snape, 2004, p 538). Essentially, scrutiny was conceived as an accountability mechanism engaging both councillors and the public and possessing four key roles (ibid: p 540):

1. Holding the executive to account
2. Best Value reviews and general performance management
3. Policy development and review
4. External scrutiny

Local authorities have emphasised certain of these roles with differentials in role profiles generating four scrutiny forms (ibid: p 55):

- **Management Tool** – Where scrutiny adopts an executive-driven agenda, developing and reviewing policy rather than providing internal challenge
- **Apolitical Entrepreneurship** – Scrutiny characterised by dedicated support, strong questioning and cross-party consensus
- **Opposition Game** – Where scrutiny is used to score political points, with the executive unlikely to take on scrutiny recommendations
- **Disengaged Scrutiny** – Scrutiny with little buy-in from councillors and consequently, under-resourced and lacking influence

At its best, scrutiny is an education device for councillors, officers and public alike (Walker, 2006, p 14). By participating in scrutiny, non-executives learn more about council processes and works. Subsequently, their engagement with the public improves on a day-to-day level and therefore “the public feel much more engaged in the process because they are getting better explanations about what’s happening from their individual councillors” (ibid: p 14).

Since this dissertation focuses upon the *external scrutiny* of a Local Strategic Partnership, it is worth considering this role further.

### External Scrutiny

As defined by Sandford (2005, p 5), external scrutiny is:

... the term used to describe a political assembly applying the process of scrutiny to bodies *outside* the control of its own executive.

This extension of influence is **not** illegitimate; section 21(2)(e) of the Local Government Act 2000 permits local authorities “to make reports or recommendations to the authority or the executive on matters which affect the authority’s area or the inhabitants of that area” (ibid: p 5).

There are two approaches to external scrutiny:

1. The use of scrutiny to raise public and / or councillors’ awareness of issues, drawing their attention to “politically salient matters, analysing the issues driving them and providing some accountability for the individuals making decisions on them” (ibid: p 8).

Here, scrutiny stimulates public awareness. Indeed, Ashworth and Snape (2004, p 550) cite research indicating that external scrutiny is more successful than its internal counterpart in engaging the public.

2. The use of scrutiny to undertake, in partnership, detailed research, consultancy and consultation over areas of concern (Sandford, 2005, p 9). In short, external scrutiny becomes a participative forum, a means to partnership rather than a means to critique other organisations, where questions are asked “inquiringly but not interrogatively” (Walker, 2006, p 17).

This notion of partnership has crucial implications; external scrutiny committees must build trust relationships with external agencies, convincing them that the scrutiny process will add value to the delivery of their mission (Sandford, 2005, p 6). External scrutiny is thus a joint process and “cannot easily suggest radical alternative policies in the manner of an opposition party” (ibid: p 7). Even if it could, its recommendations carry no sanctions.

### Scrutiny – Common Problems

#### 1. Holding the executive to account

This role should involve scrutinising executive decisions before and after they have been implemented. However, Cole (2001, p 244) argues that scrutiny committees are too weak to fulfil these functions and would benefit from initiatives such as the ring-fencing of adequate resources for scrutiny in order to strengthen their role in the policy-making process.

Ashworth and Snape (2004, p 544) concur and note the lack of use of the ‘call-in’ function whereby scrutiny committees block executive decisions subject to further review. They suggest that because this role “directly challenges the power, influence and culture of the party group system,” it becomes the most problematic to perform (ibid: p 545).

#### 2. Best Value and Performance Management

According to the Improvement & Development Agency (IDeA), councillors should utilise performance information and systems to hold the executive to account, to “allow performance to be assessed from the perspective of customers and citizens” and to develop proposals for future policy (IDeA Knowledge [online]). Yet in practice, Ashworth and Snape (2004, p 547) have found that scrutiny work programmes have been dominated by lengthy, bureaucratic and highly technical best value reviews that have “engendered a very negative reaction amongst the majority of councillors.”

### 3. Policy Development and Review

To date, most focus has been on *reviewing* rather than *developing* policy (ibid: p 546). Scrutiny tends towards the reactive rather than the proactive, reviewing policy already formulated and ratified.

### 4. External Scrutiny

For the majority of councils, progress of external scrutiny remains disappointing “with the large exception of health where surveillance by local authorities is now established” (Walker, 2006, p 15). Ashworth and Snape (2004, p 550) proffer two reasons for slow progress:

- Initial concern to perfect internal scrutiny processes before focusing on external agencies
- Anxiety that scrutinising external organisations might adversely affect otherwise productive relationships

In addition to the above role-specific problems of scrutiny, Cole (2001, p 244) offers two further constraints:

- The continued power of the party group as a substantial obstacle to reform, senior councillors viewing the process as a means to strengthen their control over policy-making
- The persistence of more traditional approaches among councillors who do not wish to expand their community role rather, to possess a significant role in decision-making

Perhaps the crucial dilemma facing the scrutiny function is that it both holds the executive to account and supports it, especially in relation to policy development (Ashworth and Snape, 2004, p 551).

## **LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS (LSPs)**

### Partnership Working

A central element of the Third Way is a discourse of 'joined-up government' by which New Labour looks to "embrace collaboration between agencies as a way of joining up hitherto fragmented services to meet community needs more effectively" (Wilson and Game, 2002, p 139). This discourse necessitates growth in *local governance* with governmental and non-governmental agencies working in partnership across organisational boundaries in the interests of the whole community (ibid: p 138). New Labour envisages partnership working as a means to "overcome both the inefficiency of bureaucracy and the inequity of market solutions" and as a strategy to implement the service improvement and democratic renewal objectives of the LGMA (Lowndes and Sullivan, 2004, p 53).

The dynamics of partnership working are complex with Newman (2001, p 113) suggesting that the inter-relationships between four principal imperatives influence partnership working:

1. Accountability – Having proper structures, formalised roles and transparent procedures
2. Pragmatism – Getting things done, meeting targets
3. Flexibility – Adapting fast to changing conditions, expansion
4. Sustainability – Fostering participation, building consensus and embedding networks to ensure long-term development

Each of the above is likely to exist in any partnership, although the balance between them may be uneven and shift over time. Newman (ibid: p 114) has devised the following model to help track the fluid inter-relationships between these four imperatives within any particular partnership:



<p>Towards SUSTAINABILITY</p> <p>Fostering participation, building consensus &amp; embedding networks</p> <p><b>SELF-GOVERNANCE MODEL</b></p>	<p>Towards FLEXIBILITY</p> <p>Adapting to changing conditions, expansion</p> <p><b>OPEN SYSTEMS MODEL</b></p>
<p><b>HIERARCHY MODEL</b></p> <p>Towards ACCOUNTABILITY</p> <p>Emphasis on structures, roles &amp; procedures</p>	<p><b>RATIONAL GOAL MODEL</b></p> <p>Towards PRAGMATISM</p> <p>Emphasis on getting things done &amp; meeting targets</p>

Attention will return to this model in *Chapters (2) and (3)* to assess the current and potential future dynamics of the Wiltshire Strategic Board.

### The Introduction of LSPs

The concept of partnership working lay behind the introduction of LSPs in 2000 by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR). A full definition of LSPs can be found in *Appendix (2)* but essentially, they are multi-agency, meta-partnerships charged with co-ordinating and ideally, reducing, the “disparate range of partnerships and initiatives” in localities (Wilkinson and Craig, 2002 [online]).

The 2000 Local Government Act gave local authorities “a power to promote economic, social and environmental well-being of their localities” (Lowndes and Sullivan, 2004, p 53). In pursuit of this goal, the Act also required local authorities to produce community strategies that provided:

- An integrated approach to the sustainable economic, social and physical development cities, towns and rural areas; and

- A clear strategy and vision for the future

*DETR, 2001, p 22*

Whilst the statutory duty to prepare community strategies lay with local authorities, it was believed their development and implementation required joint-working across the public, private, voluntary and community sectors through LSPs (DETR, 2000, sections 23 – 25). Underlying this belief was the notion of collaborative advantage, theorised by Huxham (1993, cited in Apostolakis, 2004, p 104) as when “each organisation, through collaboration, is able to achieve its own objectives better than it could alone.”

Collaboration was to be transparent and accountable, early DETR guidance (2001, p 16) stating that LSP accountability arrangements should build on the “established lines of accountability of partner organisations to customers and the wider community.” Other DETR guidance (2000, Sections 98 – 101) highlighted the importance of establishing monitoring systems to assess the progress of community strategies and their success in addressing stated priorities. These monitoring systems were to focus on outcomes rather than inputs and efficiency measures, and to involve local authorities, other partners and the wider community.

### The Development of LSPs

Since 2000 LSPs (varying in size, age, membership, localities covered and problems they are trying to solve) have blossomed, conditioned by local historic, geographic and socio-economic contexts and facilitated by permissive government guidance supporting local experimentation and innovation (ODPM, 2004, p 5).

Within this diversity, research (ibid: pp 1 – 9) has identified four broad types of LSP as seen over.

LSP Type	LSP Characteristics
<b>ADVISORY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ LSP a consultation and discussion forum with a large membership</li> <li>▪ Build consensus</li> <li>▪ Co-ordinate and make recommendations</li> <li>▪ No independent power to act</li> <li>▪ Accountability and legitimacy drawn entirely from member organisations, particularly the local authority</li> </ul>
<b>COMMISSIONING</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ LSP has its own staff and authority</li> <li>▪ Implements decisions and commissions projects</li> <li>▪ Actively involved in delivery of the community strategy and NRF / LAA / LPSA2 targets</li> <li>▪ Creates its own forms of accountability and legitimacy</li> </ul>
<b>LABORATORY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Generates new ideas and new ways of designing local services</li> <li>▪ Draws on the combined thinking of senior managers and community leaders to create a breakthrough and to think radically about the way resources are configured</li> <li>▪ Must be linked closely to decision-making power otherwise ideas may never be implemented</li> </ul>
<b>COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Focused on creating strong networks within the community rather than on key public agencies</li> <li>▪ Strong neighbourhood presence with an independent chair</li> </ul>

Few LSPs fit neatly into a particular category, most working to a greater or lesser extent across the categories (ibid: p 5). However, any analysis of an LSP is likely to detect a *primary* category within which the partnership works and if the analysis is over an extended period of time, may note evolution from one primary category to another. National research shows a dominance of 'advisory' and 'commissioning' types over 'laboratory' and 'community empowerment' types (ODPM, 2005, p 14).

### The Accountability of LSPs

LSPs make collective decisions on behalf of the community so there must be transparency over how they are held to account for those decisions (ODPM, 2004, p 14). They must be accountable *downwards* to the local communities they serve. There are also lines of accountability *upwards* (e.g. to central government) and *horizontally* (e.g. to other partners) as in *Appendix (3)*.

LSPs may possess *democratic accountability* by the inclusion of local councillors into partnership arrangements. Councillors carry critical responsibility for “connecting the work of the LSP to the work of the council and to the democratic process within the locality;” effectively, they have a *dual* accountability across to the LSP and back to the council (ibid: p 12).

The Local Government Association (LGA, 2002, p 8) contends that elected councillors must “realise the potential of LSPs to strengthen their representational role by providing an effective voice for the local community.” It proposes eight ways that councillors can be involved in the work of LSPs:

<b>Councillors' Roles</b>	<b>Attributes of Roles</b>
<b>COMMUNITY LEADERS</b>	Councillors sitting on an LSP bring democratic legitimacy to the partnership and provide strategic leadership across a range of services
<b>REPRESENTATIVES OF LOCAL PEOPLE</b>	Councillors should act as 'voices' for their local communities, encouraging inclusion and engagement of minority groups
<b>CAPACITY BUILDERS</b>	Councillors could support other partners on the LSP unfamiliar with bureaucratic and democratic processes. In return, LSP working builds councillors' capacities to engage with local communities and with representatives from different sectors
<b>LYNCHPINS</b>	Councillors could provide the link between the different levels of local government (e.g. with neighbourhood forums or district / county councils)
<b>'EXPERTS'</b>	LSPs could be served well by the expertise and experience that specific councillors might bring to particular policy areas
<b>CONDUITS OF LOCAL OPINION</b>	Councillors are usually involved in the governance of local communities in a number of different forums – e.g. as school governors or on neighbourhood forums. Such involvement means they should have a strong grasp upon local opinion vital to the development and delivery of community strategies
<b>CHAIRS</b>	Leaders of councils may serve as chairs of LSPs or take turns as chairs if a rotating chair system is in operation
<b>SCRUTINISERS</b>	Non-executive councillors might serve of scrutiny committees with responsibility for scrutinising all, or aspects, of an LSPs' work

*Adapted from LGA (2002, pp 8 – 9)*

## LSPs – Common Problems

### 1. Difficulties over accountability and transparency

Few LSPs have followed the 2001 DETR guidance to build on the accountability mechanisms of individual partners, establishing clear lines of collective accountability. Many LSPs contain a mix of accountability lines, making it hard for citizens to “know how to hold different partners to account” (Lowndes and Sullivan, 2004, p 65).

Further, the sheer size of many LSPs has reduced decision-making to a cumbersome, less than transparent process wherein “representatives have to seek approvals from their parent organisations (or constituencies) for decisions and the allocation of resources (ibid: p 65).

### 2. The disengagement of non-executive councillors

LSPs have been slow to engage non-executives in their workings, thus exacerbating suspicions that LSPs are:

- A threat to their traditional community leadership role (Wilkinson and Craig, 2002 [online])
- Undermining the key democratic role of local government

Some councillors are wary of unelected partners on LSPs gaining influence at the expense of elected councillors, thus damaging the democratic accountability of LSPs (Wilson and Game, 2002, p 144). Conversely, LSPs might *complement* formal democratic processes “by providing opportunities for a wider range of stakeholders to influence local policy-making and service delivery” (ibid: p 144).

### 3. Problems with internal relationships

In LSPs, differences in partners' levels of power and resources can lead to the perceived dominance of one member over another. In particular, local authorities are often "major 'players' in terms of power and resource allocation," a reality that could damage the atmosphere of reciprocity within an LSP and threaten collaborative advantage (Apostolakis, 2004, p 109). Additional tensions may arise from confusion over lines of accountability.

## **THE INTER-RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCRUTINY AND LSPs**

### Recent Policy Contexts

In December 2005, the ODPM released the consultation paper *Local Strategic Partnerships: Shaping their Future*. In its foreward, David Miliband and Phil Woolas talk of LSPs as "central to the Government's vision for the future of local decision-making" (ODPM, 2005, p 5).

The paper (ibid: p 8) suggests five core objectives for the future development of LSPs:

<b>OBJECTIVE (1)</b>	Commitment amongst central government departments, regional organisations and local partners to the LSP system of partnerships and the Sustainable Community Strategy as the over-arching local plan
<b>OBJECTIVE (2)</b>	An evolved role for the local authority including local authority members in facilitating action through the LSP and Sustainable Community Strategy
<b>OBJECTIVE (3)</b>	LSPs able to effectively identify and deliver against the priorities for joint action in their area through the Sustainable Community Strategy, Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy, Local Area Agreement (LAA) and Local Development Framework, in a clearly accountable way
<b>OBJECTIVE (4)</b>	LSPs better able to support neighbourhood engagement and to help ensure the views of neighbourhoods and parish councils can influence strategic local service delivery and spending
<b>OBJECTIVE (5)</b>	Effective, transparent and accountable governance and scrutiny arrangements for LSPs to enable partners to hold each other to account and local people to hold the partnership to account

Note the evolved role for local authority members in facilitating action through LSPs and sustainable community strategies. Note also the demand for effective, transparent and accountable governance and scrutiny arrangements for LSPs. Some councils – amongst them, Southwark, Birmingham, Devon, Croyden, Nottingham, Sheffield and Manchester – have pre-empted this demand by either already scrutinising their local LSPs or investigating how to strengthen the links between LSP accountability processes and local representative democratic processes (Birmingham City Council, 2005, p 33).

The move towards increased councillor involvement in delivery of local action, monitored delivery against performance targets and improved accountability and scrutiny arrangements has been fostered by:

- The continued pursuance of partnership working as part of the LGMA
- The second round of the Local Public Service Agreement process
- The introduction of Local Area Agreements (LAAs)

The table on the following page takes a detailed look at each of these ‘change elements’ and their relevance to both LSPs and local authorities.

Miliband and Woolas (ODPM, 2005, p 5) contend these change elements (in particular, LAAs) necessitate “the shift from focusing on process to the delivery of outcomes” – i.e. the shift from advisory to commissioning LSPs. Commissioning LSPs:

- Involve closer scrutiny and greater accountability – between partners and from localities to Government – particularly in respect of cross-cutting outcomes where Government has little leverage now
- Involve development of strong performance management combined with effective challenge
- Involve developing a positive relationship between LSPs’ accountability processes and local representative democratic processes

*ODPM, 2006, p 52 & p 124*

Change Element	Change Element Defined	Relevance to LSPs & Local Authorities
<b>LOCAL GOVERNMENT MODERNISATION AGENDA (LGMA)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ New Labour's attempt to deliver democratic renewal, service improvement and revitalised community leadership</li> <li>▪ Partnership working is viewed as a key strategy for the fulfilment of this agenda</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The danger to representative democracy of a non-elected, opaque, unaccountable and publicly invisible LSP</li> <li>▪ Potential for conflict as local authorities develop their wider scrutiny function in respect of services delivered by LSP partners</li> <li>▪ Opportunity for local authorities to engage LSP in ownership of, and responsibility for, community strategy targets</li> <li>▪ Pressure upon local authorities to improve partnership working as Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) ratings increasingly examine such working</li> </ul>
<b>LOCAL PUBLIC SERVICE AGREEMENTS (LPSA2)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ LPSA2 marks the second round of the LPSA process</li> <li>▪ Process involves negotiating 12 local 'stretch' targets with government (i.e. targets that would not have been achieved but for the focus provided by the agreement)</li> <li>▪ Government provides pump-priming grant</li> <li>▪ If after 3 years the targets have been achieved, performance reward grant awarded for spending on local priorities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ In the second generation of LPSAs (LPSA2), a new emphasis upon local targets / priorities and the engagement of partners</li> <li>▪ LSPs given an explicit role as forums to discuss priorities for improvement locally with consideration given to how each partner might contribute to a 'stretch' in performance beyond what might have happened anyway</li> <li>▪ LSPs should play a role in the co-ordination / performance management of implementation of LPSA2 targets</li> </ul>
<b>LOCAL AREA AGREEMENTS (LAAs)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Aim = greater autonomy for local action in return for an agreed set of outcomes (over 3 years) and clearly documented plans for their achievement</li> <li>▪ Will: simplify funding streams from central government, join up public services more effectively, allow local flexibility and streamline bureaucracy</li> <li>▪ Focused mainly upon delivery of outcomes identified within community strategies</li> <li>▪ Delivery arranged around 4 blocks – Safer &amp; Stronger Communities, Children &amp; Young People, Healthier Communities &amp; Older People, Economic Development &amp; Enterprise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Focused upon a range of agreed outcomes, shared by all delivery partners locally and which all agree to work towards achieving</li> <li>▪ LAAs put LSPs at the centre of negotiation, delivery and monitoring of the priority outcomes of a local area</li> <li>▪ Development of an LSP performance management framework an integral part of the LAA process</li> <li>▪ LPSA2s' stretch targets set within broader LAAs</li> </ul>

*Adapted from: ODPM, 2006, pp 30 – 33*



## Scrutinising LSPs

Scrutiny of LSPs incurs:

1. The opportunity to address concerns that LSPs are “more akin to non-accountable quangos than democratically accountable bodies” and suffer from a democratic deficit (LGA, 2002, p 13). Government perceives external scrutiny as a means of producing clear and transparent lines of accountability for LSPs (ODPM, 2005, p 36). As illustrated in *Appendix (4)*, scrutiny arrangements in relation to LSPs can take a number of forms that could: redress democratic deficits; ensure effective accountability relationships with communities; identify areas of under-performance and provide impetus to drive forward policy initiatives and deliver objectives (LGA, 2002, p 17). This impetus is crucial if LSPs are to take on the commissioning role envisaged by Government.
2. The incorporation of non-executive councillors into LSPs. Research (ODPM, 2006, pp 58 – 59) has indicated that at present, LSP – local authority relations actively compound the marginalisation of non-executives through:
  - The predominance of executive councillors on LSP bodies
  - The duplication of neighbourhood / community / area structures between LSPs and councils
  - The failure to link the scrutiny function of local authorities to LSP development in any substantive way

By scrutinising LSPs, otherwise marginalised non-executives will be engaged, thereby strengthening their representational roles and extending LSPs' democratic accountabilities.

## **CONCLUSION**

This chapter has surmised relevant literature (policy, research and theory) in relation to scrutiny and LSPs. In relation to the former, it has argued that four scrutiny forms exist;

the form that dominates a local authority will depend upon which role profiles are emphasised. Particular focus has been given to external scrutiny with recognition that this role necessitates a joint process whereby both scrutinised and scrutiniser gain from engagement with one another. Finally, an assessment of the common problems associated with the development of scrutiny over recent years noted the under-development of the external scrutiny function.

Partnership working is core to LSPs with Newman's model a means to track the fluid inter-relationships between four principal imperatives of: accountability, pragmatism, flexibility and sustainability. Recent research has identified four broad types of LSP (advisory, commissioning, laboratory and community empowerment) with 'advisory' and 'commissioning' types pre-dominating. Finally, LSP accountability mechanisms are often confused and this (combined with the disengagement of non-executive councillors and the public in their workings), means many LSPs suffer from a democratic deficit.

The chapter concluded by arguing that recent policy contexts indicate Government is looking for effective, transparent and accountable governance and scrutiny arrangements for LSPs. The development of LPSA2s and LAAs demand of LSPs a greater focus on delivery of outcomes. Scrutiny is a means to: produce clear and transparent lines of accountability for LSPs; to facilitate delivery of objectives and to engage non-executives and the public, thereby tackling democratic deficits.

The following two chapters seek to apply this chapter's literature to the analysis of Wiltshire County Council's (WCC) scrutiny function and the Wiltshire Strategic Board (WiSB). Specifically, *Chapter (2)* will commence with an overview of the research methodology behind the collation of empirical data, before analysing the current state of WiSB and WCC's scrutiny function. Particular questions addressed include:

- Which scrutiny form pre-dominates WCC?
- What is the state of external scrutiny in WCC?
- What challenges does WCC's scrutiny function face?
- Which partnership imperatives dominate WiSB?
- What type of LSP is WiSB?

*Chapter (3)* then considers the specific challenges facing WiSB in light of the evolving policy context. Analysis is made of the partnership's current accountability mechanisms, its engagement or otherwise of non-executives and its scrutiny and monitoring arrangements.

**CHAPTER (2)****WCC'S SCRUTINY FUNCTION & WiSB****RESEARCH METHODS**

My research methods aimed to collate empirical data in relation to WCC's scrutiny function and WiSB, in order to build a case for scrutiny of the latter. Three key methods were utilised:

1. Semi-structured Interviews

Eight people were chosen for interview for their extensive knowledge either of WiSB or WCC's scrutiny function or in some instances, both:

INTERVIEWEE	ROLE
David Maynard	Corporate Advisor – Policy & Strategy (works closely with WiSB)
Linda Watts	Principal Assistant to WCC's Chief Executive
David Bareham	Project Lead for the LPSA2s and LAAs
Tracy Carter	Street Management Project Lead, Street Scene Champion Project
Councillor Jane Scott	Chair of WiSB
Councillor Jeff Osborn	Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Management Committee
Paul Kelly	Overview and Scrutiny Manager
Sharon Britton	Assistant Director – Performance & Review

Interviews aimed to:

- (a) Gather information on the current operational structures of scrutiny and WiSB to aid classification of these two bodies along the lines in *Chapter (1)*
- (b) Identify challenges facing WiSB and WCC's scrutiny function
- (c) Establish WiSB's current accountability and monitoring mechanisms in relation to its community strategy
- (d) Identify the extent of engagement by WiSB of the public and non-executives
- (e) Register progress on LPSA2s and LAAs and consider how these might impact upon WiSB and scrutiny

Each interview centred on these five aims with the hope that the diversity of people interviewed would result in an accurate and balanced picture. Due to the potential sensitivity of some of the issues discussed, it was agreed that all quotes used would be non-attributable.

## 2. Documentary Analysis

Those interviewed were asked to provide any documentary evidence that could further the aims above. The following were proffered:

- Annual Audit and Inspection Letter for WCC – 2004 / 05
- Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report – 2004 / 05
- Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee Report – March 2005
- Creating 'A County fit for our Children' – WiSB's Third Annual Report
- 'Shaping our Joint Working' – WiSB Discussion Paper – Sept 2004
- Minutes from the last year of WiSB meetings
- The Local Public Service Agreement between WCC and the Government – 2006
- The Project Plan for Wiltshire's LAA
- A 2005 Cabinet Report on the progress of LPSA2s and LAAs

### 3. Survey of Non-executive Councillors

A survey comprising eight questions was devised for WCC's 41 non-executive councillors. Its goals were to:

- Assess their present knowledge, understanding and involvement with WiSB
- Establish their current perceptions of WiSB and identify any areas of dissatisfaction
- Consider the likely future roles of non-executives in relation to WiSB following the introduction of LPSA2 and LAA targets

A copy of the survey and the raw data collated can be seen in *Appendix (5)*. The survey was sent out electronically but was also available in hardcopy if requested. A deadline of two weeks was set for responses within which, 20 replies were received – a response rate of 49%.

### **WCC'S SCRUTINY – FUNCTIONS & STRUCTURE**

*For a full overview of the decision-making process at WCC, see Appendix (6).*

Following the Local Government Act 2000, WCC chose a cabinet and leader style of decision-making. Thus, an overview and scrutiny function was established:

- To initiate public inquiries into matters of local concern and to advise the cabinet and the council on its policies, budget and service delivery
- To monitor the activities of cabinet, including the power to 'call-in' decisions
- To be consulted by cabinet or the council on forthcoming decisions or the development of policy

*WCC(a), 2005, p 35*

WCC's scrutiny function was "designed around being evidence-based, factual and impartial" (WCC(b), 2005, p 2) with the council's constitution framing the ethos that it be:

- (a) Inclusive
- (b) Structured
- (c) Non-adversarial
- (d) Reliant on evidence rather than anecdote

The inclusive and non-adversarial nature of the function was heightened in June 2005 when Full Council voted the Liberal Democrats (the leading opposition group) to take chairmanship of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee. Hence, scrutiny in Wiltshire is a bipartisan affair, ideal since "scrutiny and tribalism do not mix" (Walker, 2006, p 15).

The diagram on the following page outlines WCC's scrutiny function. The process is councillor-led with reviews often instigated by councillor requests (WCC(a), 2005, p 35). The bulk of scrutiny centres around three main committees:

1. *Overview & Scrutiny Management Committee* which scrutinises the work of the cabinet and the council as a whole
2. *Children's Services Scrutiny Committee* which scrutinises the full range of services to children including the council's statutory education function
3. *Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee* which, in line with the Health and Social Care Act 2001, provides a forum for councillors to raise local health issues, to address discrepancies in local need and to tackle inequality in health care

*WCC(b), 2005, p 1*

The above committees can establish *task groups*, small working groups of non-executives that undertake and report back upon specific investigations. Each decides

how to gather evidence and who to invite to meetings to provide further information and advice, producing final reports and recommendations for cabinet, the council and / or outside organisations (ibid: p 6). To date, 68 recommendations have been made with 66 approved for implementation, well above the national acceptance rate of 80% for scrutiny recommendations (Walker, 2006, p 10).

The majority of task groups are time-limited and subject-specific but three are long-standing with responsibility for major strategic areas:

1. *E-Government Task Group* which scrutinises the development and implementation of the council's E-Government Strategy and the 'Customer First' initiative, part of the council's major Change Programme
2. *Budget Process Task Group* which reviews, comments on and monitors the council's revenue budget process at key times of the year
3. *Performance Management Task Group* which monitors performance in achieving the council's strategic and corporate goals and objectives as outlined in the Corporate Plan

WCC(a), 2005, p 37

## **WCC'S SCRUTINY – STRENGTHS & CHALLENGES**

### Key Quotes:

- Scrutiny is not seen as a partisan function and always does a thorough job
- It [scrutiny] allows backbenchers to bring forward matters of concern that would benefit from detailed examination
- Scrutiny's main focus has been on holding the executive to account
- Some councillors still need convincing of the potential of scrutiny to complement their ward work
- There is so much work to undertake but there are limitations in time and resources



The greatest strength of the scrutiny function as perceived by councillors is its impartial, non-partisan features marking it in no way an adjunct to cabinet. Subsequently, it has avoided nationally-identified problems outlined in *Chapter (1)*. For example, rather than shying away from scrutinising the executive, this has been its main focus. Use of 'call-in' has been limited due to both advisory panels and the Forward Plan (see *Appendix (6)*) allowing non-executives to shape decisions *before* they are made.

Through the likes of the E-Government Task Group, the function has influenced the development of new policies rather than simply reviewing decisions already made whilst the Performance Management Task Group has had high level input into reviewing service performance and involvement with Best Value Reviews.

Wiltshire's scrutiny function appears to fit Ashworth and Snape's (2004, p 550) 'Apolitical Entrepreneurship' form. Supported by an officer team of four and with a cross-party consensus, the function does not deter from strong questioning and remains independent. Whilst this is a positive reflection, the function does face three challenges:

1. Whilst the council introduced a health scrutiny model in January 2003, its focus on other forms of external scrutiny has been limited, with initial concern to strengthen *internal* scrutiny processes. Scrutiny is now well-embedded and respected across WCC so the development of its external role seems timely, albeit challenging given the function's already burgeoning work programme.
2. Some councillors still need to be convinced of the value that scrutiny adds to their role as community leaders. A case has to be made for the link between their ward work and the contribution task groups can make.
3. The council's 2004 CPA inspection (WCC(c), 2005, Agenda Item 13) criticised scrutiny's work programme for failure fully to align to areas of corporate priority. Subsequently, the inspectors felt some scrutiny effort was devoted to areas not identified by local people and the council as the most important.

Task group reports and recommendations now state explicitly how they intend to further the council's aims, goals and priorities. However, since the council's Corporate Plan sits within the wider context of the community strategy, it may also be relevant to emphasise how task groups assist in delivery of community strategy priorities.

## **THE STRUCTURE OF WiSB**

WiSB currently comprises representatives of 25 organisations (cross-reference *Appendix (7)*) from the public, private, voluntary and community sectors. Of these representatives, four are county councillors although three attend in their role as leaders of district councils. Meetings of the Board occur quarterly and have always been chaired by the Leader of the County Council.

In addition to the main Board, the Wiltshire Strategic Board Executive (WiSBEx) has been established to support the Board's work and to take operational decisions. Comprising representatives of 20 organisations, its full terms of reference (along with WiSB's) are in *Appendix (8)*. WiSBEx currently meets five to six times per year with the Chair and Vice-Chair roles alternating between representatives from statutory and non-statutory organisations.

In the past, both WiSB and WiSBEx have requested greater clarity in their terms of reference and in the role of their members. A discussion paper – *Shaping our Joint Working: Defining Roles, Responsibilities and Relationships* – was produced in September 2004 to provide just that but its recommendations were not progressed (WiSB, 2005, p 10). However, in light of the introduction of LAAs, the partnership is reigniting discussions on its governance arrangements.

WiSB's work is joined with that of Wiltshire's four District Local Strategic Partnerships. A representative from each district partnership sits on WiSB whilst an officer group brings together the county's LSP managers.

The main focus of WiSB's work is the county's community strategy entitled *A County fit for our Children*, launched in early 2004. This strategy is currently undergoing revision but will retain its original eight policy themes, namely:

- Social Care and Health
- Countryside and Land-based Issues
- Housing and the Built Environment
- Economy
- Transport
- Crime and Community Protection
- Education, Skills and Learning
- Culture

*WiSB, 2004, pp 5 – 14*

Within these themes, WiSB identified four issues to champion where it was aware of public concern and where results would be visible to all Wiltshire residents (ibid: p 15).

The projects were:

1. To become the healthiest county in England in which to live by 2014
2. To become the most waste efficient county in England by 2014
3. To improve Wiltshire's street scene
4. To improve adult basic skills

*Ibid: pp 16 – 17*

Clear targets for progression of each champion project were outlined in the original strategy, with the Street Scene project supported by the Safer Wiltshire Executive and Community Safety Partnerships. Each champion project was assigned its own project board and a detailed action plan promised before the end of March 2004 outlining how WiSB intended to progress (ibid: p 17).

Finally, the original strategy (ibid: p 17) stated that WiSB was accountable:

- To its partners through its annual conference
- To the Wiltshire public through its annual report

- To its constituent organisations through their members on the Board

In light of the above, the diagram over illustrates WiSB's structure.

### **WiSB – PARTNERSHIP WORKING & LSP TYPE**

#### Key Quotes:

- WiSB is primarily structured for inclusiveness rather than decision-making
- WiSB is an important local governance forum comprised of disparate partners that have their own structures, responsibilities etc
- WiSB has so far acted in a visionary role, setting a shared agenda for the county
- It is difficult to conceive of WiSB as a delivery body; it does not possess the capacity for such a role
- Focus must turn to delivering on targets if WiSB's aspirations are to be realised on the ground

Since its 2002 inception, WiSB has looked to foster participation, build consensus and embed networks in order to establish a sustainable partnership. This principal imperative for sustainability has perhaps been to the detriment of more pragmatic partnership working. Consequently, WiSB primarily fits Newman's 'Self-Governance' model (2001, p 114).

Partnerships within this model tend to "focus on 'empowerment' and 'participation'" (ibid: p 116). To illustrate, the County Council Chair of WiSB ruled that any LPSA2 reward grants should be distributed via the partnership rather than WCC. One crucial difficulty Newman (ibid: p 116) notes about the 'Self-Governance' model is the tension that arises between long-term, sustainable goals and delivery against short-term targets. This is a tension WiSB faces between a long-term community strategy versus shorter-term LPSA2 and LAA targets.

Its desire to build consensus and network capacity marks WiSB as a predominantly 'advisory' LSP – it possesses all the common features of advisory LSPs that follow:

<p>An advisory LSP:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Signs off and wins agreement for strategy</li> <li>▪ Has a role in identifying best practice</li> <li>▪ Recommends action to others</li> <li>▪ Comments on draft documents and proposals</li> <li>▪ Monitors and reviews progress</li> <li>▪ Doesn't make major decisions</li> <li>▪ Doesn't hold budgets</li> <li>▪ Tends not to vote; consensus-based influence</li> <li>▪ Doesn't employ staff</li> <li>▪ Has no separate power or desire to act – decisions are implemented through partner bodies</li> </ul>	
<p>Strong Advisory LSPs are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Comprised of members able to wield their organisation's authority</li> <li>▪ Capable of making choices</li> <li>▪ Clear about limitations</li> <li>▪ Effective at building consensus</li> </ul>	<p>Weak Advisory LSPs are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Not listened to</li> <li>▪ Not able to resolve disputes or to build consensus</li> <li>▪ Rubber stamps for council or other agency decisions</li> <li>▪ Talking shops or a cosy club</li> </ul>

*Source: ODPM, 2004, p 6*

WCC has proved central to WiSB's advisory mode. Indeed, the Audit Commission (2004, pp 5 – 6) point to:

1. The council being an effective partner committed to the work of WiSB and considered by its partners to lead by example
2. The council investing substantial time, money and effort into establishing and supporting WiSB without dominating the agenda
3. The cultivation of an open and inclusive approach with WiSB partners
4. The joint ownership of the community strategy with no barriers to partnership working

WiSB has simultaneously built organisational arrangements and processes whilst developing major strategic initiatives and starting to deliver on key targets. Thus it has had *some* capability to commission (e.g. the establishment of its four champion projects). Yet its main focus has been to build consensus and adopt an inclusive approach, a peculiarly advisory role.

## **CHAPTER (3)**

### **THE CHALLENGES WiSB FACES**

#### **A CHANGING CONTEXT**

*Chapter (1)* drew attention to LPSA2 and LAA processes and how Government believes these necessitate a shift to commissioning LSPs focused on delivering outcomes. *Appendix (9)* summarises WiSB's progress in relation to these processes. To evolve into a commissioning partnership, WiSB will need to change the dynamics of its workings, as recognised by its plans to revisit and strengthen its basic governance arrangements in preparation for LAAs. Discussions should consider which of the following characteristics of commissioning LSPs are appropriate and/or viable to adopt:

A commissioning LSP has:

- Delegated authority and capacity to act in its own right
- Ability to make and implement decisions
- Its own staff
- Its own budget
- Ability to enforce decisions – agreement upon mutual accountability
- Legal status – PLC? Formal partnership status?
- Formal and transparent decision-making arrangements
- Joint commissioning arrangements to allocate resources and commission services
- Contractual relationships between partners
- The power to monitor implementation

#### **Strong Commissioning LSPs:**

- Have effective decision-making structures
- Commission radical decisions
- Use resources effectively
- Are able to prioritise
- Get things done

#### **Weak Commissioning LSPs:**

- Have in-fighting that challenges the legitimacy of decisions
- Do not implement decisions
- Spend large amounts of energy on spending tiny sums of money
- Produce no measurable results
- Possess no clear accountability – are a 'cosy club' of key agencies

*Source: ODPM, 2004, p 7*

As a commissioning partnership, WiSB would no longer fit Newman's 'Self-Governance' model. The focus on shorter-term LPSA2 and LAA targets would necessitate a move to the bottom quadrants of Newman's model wherein policy directives and performance

management systems dominate (2001, p 113). These quadrants feature the 'Hierarchy' model (where the focus is upon internal structures and procedures that ensure accountability) and the 'Rational Goal' model (where the emphasis is pragmatic, on getting things done and responding to government targets) (ibid: p 113). In their demand for the development of an LSP performance management framework, LAAs initially require greater focus upon the former; once appropriate accountability mechanisms have been established, focus can turn to delivery.

As an advisory LSP, WiSB has invested in building sustainable relationships based on trust between partners. Becoming a commissioning body will entail institutionalising this trust through mechanisms that guarantee transparency and fairness (ibid: p 117). To enforce decisions, there must be agreement about mutual accountability combined with the power to monitor implementation.

### **CHALLENGES THAT WiSB FACES:**

To evolve from an advisory to a commissioning partnership, WiSB must address three issues:

- (a) Its current accountability mechanisms and whether these are adequate for a commissioning role
- (b) The present disengagement of non-executive county councillors from the partnership
- (c) Whether current scrutiny and monitoring systems are adequate for a commissioning role

#### **(a) Accountability**

##### Key Quotes:

- I don't really know exactly what will be done from the community strategy and who will do it
- [WiSB] means little if anything to the man on the street. It is this aspect which requires radical improvement and thereby increased accountability for WiSB to operate successfully

- WiSB's accountability to the public is minimal
- A democratic deficit surrounds WiSB and its decision-making is not as transparent as it ought to be
- WiSB lacks a sole, coherent, discrete accountability. Its present accountability is through a default position of an amalgamation of the accountability arrangements of partner organisations
- WiSB's current accountability mechanisms are insufficient. It must now be clearer on how it is governed and who is responsible for what
- Routes of accountability for the partnership as a whole should be developed

*A County fit for our Children* emphasises accountability to partners, the public and constituent organisations. Yet in practice, advisory LSPs often focus on partners and constituent organisations at the expense of the public (ODPM, 2004, p 14). This is problematic since transition to a commissioning state requires greater accountability to funders and the public.

Currently, WiSB's annual report is its only direct accountability mechanism to the public (indirectly, public opinion is gathered via a community planning process). Any public questions or concerns are dealt with by appropriate partners on the Board using their own organisations' accountability mechanisms. This default position makes it "hard for citizens to identify where power lies within a partnership ... or to know how to hold different partners to account" (Lowndes and Sullivan, 2004, p 65).

The lack of a sole, discrete accountability for WiSB also confuses non-executive councillors, as highlighted by survey results. Almost equal numbers of respondents believed WiSB was accountable to elected councillors (45%) as those who felt local people could hold the partnership to account (38%), while the majority felt WiSB had little accountability (55%) and this was a clear indication of a serious democratic deficit (72%).

The perception of a democratic deficit surrounding the partnership is concerning given New Labour's belief that partnership working should *instigate* democratic renewal (ibid: p 53). Strengthening WiSB's democratic accountability requires the engagement of non-executives and the wider public; given the specific focus that LPSA2s and LAAs place on service delivery and outcomes, interest from these groups is only going to grow.



*Local Strategic Partnerships: Shaping their Future* (2005, p 36) states that LSPs must be accountable to:

- (a) Local people through the democratic process through the local authority and, more directly, in listening to and informing local communities. The Overview and Scrutiny role of non-executive councillors has a clear role here.
- (b) Central government in relation to outcomes agreed in the LAA
- (c) To the local authority executive, as ultimate responsibility for the LSP's actions rests here

WiSB's present weaknesses in relation to point (a) have been recognised. Regarding point (b), and as indicated in *Appendix (9)*, WCC already has plans to progress WiSB's LAA. A performance management framework will be developed, enabling the partnership to "monitor and review its performance in order to ensure that desired outcomes are achieved" and subject to external inspection by the Audit Commission (WiSBEx, 2005, Agenda Item 5). Non-executives would welcome such a framework – 95% believe they have a responsibility to monitor LAA and LPSA2 targets but only 26% think WiSB's current accountability mechanisms sufficient to enable this monitoring.

#### (b) Non-executive Councillor Involvement

##### Key Quotes:

- WiSB has not considered how non-executives could be involved in the partnership
- Progress on the community strategy has not been relayed regularly to non-executives save for the LPSA2 process being fed back to those sitting on the Performance Scrutiny Task Group
- The community strategy has not been mainstreamed across non-executives. They must be engaged if they are to be effective champions of this strategy within their local communities
- WiSB shares its information upwards to central government and horizontally with other partners but sometimes forgets to pass information downwards to the public and councillors
- Non-executives are far-removed from the work of the partnership

WiSB's involvement of, and accountability to, non-executive councillors has been somewhat ad hoc, with 42% feeling marginalised. 88% of non-executives have received *periodic* information on WiSB's work but a full 100% want more proactive communication between the partnership and the council re: progress towards targets. Currently, only those non-executives on the Performance Management Task Group have received progress reports on the LPSA2 process.

Non-executives have not been involved in any of the partnership's four champion projects. Hence, for some, WiSB remains rather abstract, its strategy difficult to translate into pragmatic delivery on the ground. The quality of local conversation on the community strategy must therefore be variable – 60% of non-executives felt able to inform people of the effects of this strategy *on some issues only*.

Indirectly, non-executives may influence WiSB's work via membership of a District Local Strategic Partnership or via a role in one of Wiltshire's 20 community area partnerships. However, LAAs necessitate more *direct* councillor – LSP relations in order to demonstrate effective implementation of outcomes on the ground. With 90% of Wiltshire's non-executives wanting greater interaction and involvement in WiSB, more direct relations would seemingly be welcomed.

Forming direct relationships and tackling the marginalisation of non-executives requires:

- Permanent, regular communication channels to raise awareness of LSP activities. Survey results indicated briefing seminars the most popular form of receiving information, although a regular newsletter, regularly updated web-pages and an annual report to Full Council also scored well
- Connecting WiSB more directly to council political structures dominated by non-executives (e.g. scrutiny)

(ODPM, 2006, p 60)

Given WCC's statutory role of community leadership, it bears responsibility to ensure its community leaders are fully engaged with WiSB and able to assist in delivery of the

community strategy, thereby strengthening the partnership's democratic imperative (ODPM, 2004, p 20).

(c) Scrutiny & Monitoring

Key Quotes:

- There is a need for effective, meaningful scrutiny of the Strategic Board
- WiSB has so far had very loose arrangements in place for monitoring progress of the community strategy
- A progress report published in October 2005 has been the sole attempt to date to report on the progress of the community strategy
- There has been little hard evidence of delivery against the community strategy
- A positive relationship needs to be built between WiSB's accountability processes and local representative democratic processes
- Scrutiny of WiSB issues should be undertaken in partnership with district councils where appropriate
- By introducing scrutiny of WiSB, non-executives will take a greater interest in community strategy issues and the partnership will be held to public account

The ODPM (ibid: p 15) maintains for an LSP to be effective, it must be able to monitor the progress of decisions made. Since 2004 WiSB, in its advisory capacity, has operated loose monitoring arrangements. The original community strategy promised a "detailed action plan ... detailing how the Board intends to progress the four issues it has chosen to champion" before the end of March 2004 yet this never materialised (WiSB, 2004, p 17). Instead, the first progress report on progression of the community strategy and champion projects was presented in October 2005.

Prior to this, ad hoc updates for the champion projects were presented to the Board but neither these updates nor the progress report were disseminated to non-executives, leading to some confusion amongst councillors about progress of champion projects, particularly the Street Scene project.

This project (outlined in *Appendix (10)*) centres upon the attractiveness, safety, cleanliness and usability of Wiltshire's street and lane scene, areas of great and proven interest to local people and therefore, also to councillors. Yet there has been little direct communication to non-executives and the public about progress against the project's seven aims listed in the original community strategy. Of course, progress has been made (as illustrated in *Appendix (11)*) although the project's overwhelming focus has been on negotiating LPSA2 targets.

It is the street management aspect (i.e. the maintenance and cleanliness of the street and lane scene) of the Street Scene project that interests councillors since they often receive complaints from constituents over such issues. However, lack of awareness over Street Scene's development has made it virtually impossible for them to monitor or to hold to account that development, or even to have a general overview of the direction of the project.

Difficulties in monitoring development have not been restricted to Street Scene; only 5% of non-executives feel able to monitor progress of the community strategy and its champion projects *in full*. Further, only 10% feel in a position to judge the effectiveness of the delivery of the community strategy *in full*.

At present, the only scrutiny to have taken place in relation to WiSB has been that of the LPSA2 process by the Performance Management Task Group. This lack of scrutiny has led to WiSB's:

- Disengagement from non-executives, with only 45% believing that WiSB is keeping them informed of progress and 35% thinking that the partnership helps them in their role as a community leader
- Disengagement from the public, with only 30% judging that WiSB incorporates local people's views and 30% feeling the partnership able to respond to community concerns
- Struggle to demonstrate its effectiveness as a partnership, with only 35% believing that it has demonstrated effectiveness

The development of an LAA performance management framework will involve monitoring and scrutiny of LAA outcomes and LPSA2 targets. Yet a focus on performance management may not address some of the issues above in particular, the incorporation of, and response to, community concerns / local views and the link non-executives make between WiSB and their community leadership role. These are the areas where specific scrutiny task groups could help.

89% of non-executives believe scrutiny has an essential role to play in relation to WiSB; this would necessitate expansion of WCC's external scrutiny function. External scrutiny is suited to commissioning LSPs as it can generate exercises concerned with their operations or alternatively, concerned with investigation of particular aspects of their work (LGA, 2002, p 25).

Of course, external scrutiny cannot add value unless partners accept the legitimacy of being held to account by the scrutiny function (ODPM, 2006, p 126). Given that WiSB has spent time forging sustainable relationships between partners, such acceptance should prove possible. Indeed, it is vital if the partnership is to evolve into a commissioning role that, by its nature, requires stronger scrutiny of outcomes, governance and effectiveness of contributions (ODPM, 2004, p 15).

In the final chapter, attention will turn to summarising the key findings and implications of this research piece not just for WCC, but more broadly. A series of recommendations for WCC and WiSB will then be made.

## **CHAPTER (4)**

### **CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **BROAD FINDINGS & IMPLICATIONS**

##### 1. Scrutiny

Scrutiny possesses a legitimate role to scrutinise organisations outside the control of its own executive. External scrutiny is different to its internal counterpart as it demands greater focus on working in partnership with those being scrutinised. Hence, it cannot easily suggest radical alternative policies but is effective in engaging the public and, via detailed research and consultation, in adding value to the delivery of organisational missions.

##### 2. LSPs

Recent research has proffered four LSP types, with the vast majority of LSPs either primarily 'advisory' or 'commissioning' bodies. Whilst the former tend towards the informal, being consensual consultation and discussion forums, the latter are more formal and focused upon delivery of outcomes. LSP types will impact upon the dynamics of partnership working, with particular implications for accountability mechanisms.

LSPs possess different lines of accountability: up, to Government; across, to constituent partners; and down, to the public and councillors. Few LSPs have clear lines of collective accountability, instead relying on an amalgamation of the accountability arrangements of partner organisations. Confusion over lines of accountability and the failure to engage non-executive councillors and the public has produced democratic deficits in many LSPs.

These problems must be addressed as the changing policy context is placing a heavier emphasis on LSPs as commissioning, rather than advisory, bodies. This

shift in accent towards delivery is illustrated by the introduction of LAAs. With the emphasis on delivery comes the need for closer scrutiny, greater accountability and stronger performance management structures with effective challenge. Scrutiny offers the opportunity to address democratic deficits by introducing clear and transparent lines of accountability and also, by engaging non-executives and the public alike.

## **WCC CASE STUDY – SPECIFIC FINDINGS & IMPLICATIONS**

### 1. WCC's scrutiny function and WiSB

Wiltshire's scrutiny function is bipartisan, non-adversarial, inclusive and based around task groups that undertake in-depth, subject-specific research and consultation over areas of concern. Such characteristics are ideally suited to external scrutiny. However, WCC's external scrutiny is underdeveloped and some councillors need convincing of the potential of scrutiny to complement their ward work.

WiSB functions primarily as an advisory body, building an open and inclusive approach to partnership working suggestive of Newman's 'Self-Governance' model, wherein the focus is sustainability. However, the longer-term goals of WiSB's community strategy now conflict with a need to deliver shorter-term LPSA2 and LAA targets. The need to strengthen governance arrangements to reflect this change has been recognised, with discussions underway.

These should include conversations about the *extent* of change partners deem necessary for WiSB to evolve into a primarily commissioning body. The Government's shift in focus to LSPs as delivery bodies requires initial focus on WiSB's accountability structures (Newman's 'Hierarchy' model) before a shift towards pragmatic delivery (Newman's 'Rational Goal' model). A predominant concentration on sustainability is not now compatible with the delivery of shorter-term targets.

## 2. WiSB's Challenges

Presently WiSB lacks effective, transparent and accountable governance and scrutiny arrangements to enable partners to hold each other to account and local people to hold the partnership to account. Such arrangements are vital if the partnership is to increase its delivery focus. Specific challenges centre on:

- Accountability

WiSB has no single, coherent, discrete accountability instead relying on a confusing mix of constituent partners' accountability mechanisms, exacerbated by weak communication downwards to the public and non-executive councillors. Consequently, there is a strong perception of a democratic deficit surrounding the partnership.

- Non-executive Councillor Involvement

A substantial minority of non-executives feel marginalised from the partnership, with 100% wishing to see more proactive communication from WiSB about its work. Their present knowledge of this work is haphazard making it difficult for them to champion it within local communities. Yet positively, 90% of non-executives want greater involvement in WiSB.

- Scrutiny and Monitoring

Due to loose monitoring arrangements for WiSB's community strategy, non-executives are confused about its progress and its four champion projects, most notably, Street Scene. The LPSA2 process has been scrutinised by the Performance Management Task Group yet a more comprehensive scrutiny framework in relation to the partnership is needed, with 89% of non-executives believing scrutiny has an essential role to play.



### 3. How Scrutiny could Help

The introduction of a formal scrutiny process into WiSB would:

- Produce clear and transparent lines of accountability
- Formalise monitoring arrangements for the community strategy
- Engage non-executives and expand their knowledge of WiSB affairs so they are better able to promote the partnership and its work to the general public
- Proffer the opportunity for public participation in task groups and provide an avenue for action on local concern, reassuring local people that wrongs can be righted and grievances addressed
- Reduce the partnership's democratic deficit through clearer accountability lines (especially downwards) and better engagement of non-executives and public alike
- Help in promotion of the partnership's work (the scrutiny function has its own communications strategy)
- Provide effective challenge to the LAA performance management framework once developed
- Address the relative lack of external scrutiny undertaken by WCC and illustrate to non-executives the relevance of such scrutiny to their community role
- Via targeted research and consultation over issues of concern / under-performance, facilitate improved delivery of champion projects and LAA outcomes (once identified)

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

WCC's scrutiny function and WiSB should produce, in collaboration, a scrutiny framework. To develop an effective scrutiny process that does not damage the council's relationship with the partnership, discussions (as outlined in the table over) should take place to identify any potential issues and problems.

In producing a framework, both WiSB and WCC may wish to revisit the discussion paper, *Shaping our Joint Working – Defining Roles, Responsibilities and Relationships*, offering the chance to:

- Develop a partnership protocol that would promote greater transparency
- Adapt the report to clarify accountability mechanisms, including the production of an appropriate scrutiny framework

After establishing such a framework, the following recommendations should be considered:

### 1. Scrutinising the Four LAA Blocks

The development of WiSB's LAA performance management framework is in its infancy. Strong performance management requires effective challenge; the scrutiny function must ensure that such a challenge is built into this framework.

The present Performance Management Task Group may provide an answer, receiving monitoring reports with relevant performance indicators and the progress against them for the LAA blocks. Yet consideration should also be given to how outcomes falling *outside* the remit of the four LAA blocks will be monitored and scrutinised. Is a default system of constituent accountabilities for those outcomes adequate?

FOR CONSIDERATION	AREAS OF DISCUSSION
<p><b>How any perception of over-dominance by the County Council could be overcome</b></p>	<p>The council has a key role on WiSB but there is no requirement that it should chair or 'lead' the partnership. If it is an 'equal' partner, why should it assume the scrutiny function? Ideally, responsibility for monitoring the effectiveness of WiSB should be a shared function.</p> <p>Some initial ideas for operating an inclusive scrutiny process include ensuring:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ non-members of partnership organisations are co-opted onto task groups where relevant to share their expertise</li> <li>▪ joint scrutiny (in partnership with district councils) is undertaken wherever investigations concern both district and county remits (e.g. if investigating the Street Scene champion project)</li> </ul>
<p><b>What expectations are realistic?</b></p>	<p>WiSB has been established to tackle complex socio-economic problems and to develop a long-term vision for Wiltshire. As such, there are no 'quick fixes' to tackling many of the issues in <i>A County fit for our Children</i>.</p> <p>Any scrutiny investigation's terms of reference must be realistic about what can be achieved in a short timescale and must ensure that all councillors involved are fully aware of WiSB's role.</p>
<p><b>How to avoid undermining the trust built up in WiSB</b></p>	<p>As WiSB is non-statutory it has to operate on the basis of a shared commitment by all partners to the local community. Scrutiny investigations should take care to avoid being overly aggressive or critical otherwise they risk alienating some partners and / or undermining WiSB's work in recruiting and retaining partners.</p> <p>Transparent terms of reference for scrutiny investigations and the commitment of WiSB's partners to the scrutiny process should avoid any risk of undermining trust within the partnership.</p>
<p><b>Other mechanisms available for holding WiSB to account</b></p>	<p>The council's scrutiny function must take care not to replicate existing review processes. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ the establishment of an LAA performance management framework by March 2007 will provide an avenue for scrutinising performance information</li> <li>▪ the Performance Scrutiny Task Group already plays a part in monitoring performance information and so may wish to have ties with the LAA framework</li> <li>▪ district councils may undertake investigations of relevance to WiSB, so there should be greater communication between county and district scrutiny functions about work programmes to identify where joint scrutiny of WiSB issues may be appropriate</li> <li>▪ the County Council's advisory panels and other committees may already (indirectly) monitor aspects of the community strategy (e.g. service delivery re: Highways Contracts (of relevance to the Street Scene champion project) is reported annually to the Overview &amp; Scrutiny Management Committee)</li> </ul> <p>Only by taking care to ensure that review processes are not replicated will the scrutiny function 'add value' to WiSB's work.</p>

*Adapted from LGA, 2002, pp 17 – 18*

## 2. Tackling WiSB's Democratic Deficit

WiSB must reinforce its downward accountability to non-executive councillors and the public. There is an overlap between accountability problems (in particular, the perception of a democratic deficit surrounding the partnership) and inadequate communication channels. WiSB must formalise its role of reporting back to councillors (especially non-executives) so that greater engagement is fostered and councillors made aware of issues and projects relating to their electoral divisions.

The partnership should produce a communications strategy and institute formal arrangements that facilitate public accessibility and the quality of public participation (e.g. questions and deputations).

## 3. Aiding the Delivery of WiSB's Champion Projects

Within scrutiny task groups there is potential to improve the effectiveness of delivery in line with champion project plans. Given non-executives' interest in the Street Scene project, an initial task group should be established to review the street management element of the project – its aims, progress and effectiveness – and to support future delivery as appropriate. Before undertaking any such external scrutiny exercise, careful preparation must occur, the LGA (ibid: p 15) advocating the guidelines in the table over.

Finally, all task group reports and recommendations, whether centred solely upon WiSB or not, should state explicitly how they further *A County fit for our Children*, just as they presently state how they progress the council's aims, goals and priorities. Making links explicit will help align work programmes with both corporate and LSP priorities.

GUIDELINE	EXPLANATION
<b>Work Programmes</b>	LSP work will be cross-cutting and likely to involve all council services. To avoid different sets of scrutiny members examining the same issues, a scrutiny work programme must be drawn up to co-ordinate investigations
<b>Clear Terms of Reference</b>	Every scrutiny investigation should begin with terms of reference that: set out the scope of the investigation, propose a programme of meetings and any consultation exercises, list relevant written evidence and identify any witnesses to give oral evidence. <b>The LSP should be consulted upon re: terms of reference</b>
<b>Meetings and More Meetings</b>	As with internal scrutiny, every effort should be made to limit the number of meetings and to ensure that when they do take place, they are carefully planned to make optimal use of councillors' time
<b>Involving the People who 'Know'</b>	LSP managers and others closely associated with the LSP should be involved in discussions about developing an effective LSP scrutiny process
<b>Involving the Public</b>	<p>Local people, as consumers of services, are well placed to be able to judge whether an LSP's policies have 'added value' to their local community so mechanisms should be put in place to elicit their views. Such mechanisms could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Newspaper adverts inviting evidence</li> <li>▪ Local surveys</li> <li>▪ Citizen panels</li> <li>▪ Face-to-face interviews</li> </ul>
<b>Appointing Co-opted Members</b>	<p>Scrutiny committees have the power to co-opt non-voting members onto the committee, members who can then fulfil a number of functions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Providing expertise that may be lacking on the committee and / or introducing an element of 'independent challenge' to the committee's investigation</li> <li>▪ Widening the representation of the committee to include people who are under-represented on the council</li> <li>▪ Providing a 'users' perspective when scrutinising particular services</li> </ul>
<b>Scrutiny Member Training</b>	Councillors serving on scrutiny committees require training and support before embarking on investigations, with the role of chair particularly crucial in setting an appropriate tone for meetings and in ensuring investigations are robust but non-confrontational
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Scrutiny committees have no executive powers and can only make recommendations.</b> Those relating to council services will either be referred to the Cabinet or to Full Council. Those relating to non-council functions should be referred to the relevant organisation for consideration

The aforementioned recommendations will require some realignment of the council's scrutiny work programme. Decisions will have to be made about the balance between WiSB-related work and other scrutiny work, as well as whether realignment can be implemented sufficiently within present resource constraints or whether additional investment is required. These decisions are essential given the added value that scrutiny would bring to the progression of WiSB's operational structures and the delivery of aspects of the community strategy.

**APPENDIX (1)****A Framework for the LGMA**

<b>Perceived Problems</b>	<b>Central Government's Solutions</b>	<b>Desired Outcomes</b>
<p><i>Leadership &amp; Legitimacy</i></p> <p>Localities lack a clear sense of direction</p> <p>Need for a new democratic legitimacy</p> <p>Need for a new ethical framework</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Cabinets &amp; directly elected mayors</li> <li>▪ Separation of executive &amp; representative roles</li> <li>▪ Community planning</li> <li>▪ Make it easier to vote</li> <li>▪ Consultation, engagement &amp; participation</li> <li>▪ New framework of standards &amp; conduct</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A vision for the whole community</li> <li>▪ Recognised leaders</li> <li>▪ Clear accountability</li> <li>▪ Better quality of life</li> <li>▪ Increased voter turnout</li> <li>▪ Revitalised local democracy</li> <li>▪ More stability in council funding</li> <li>▪ Improved local financial accountability</li> <li>▪ Respect from citizens</li> <li>▪ Support from partners</li> </ul>
<p><i>Quality &amp; Integration of Services &amp; Accountability</i></p> <p>Lack of coherence and of vertical and horizontal integration to deliver local services to meet the cross-cutting needs of users, citizens and communities</p> <p>Quality of services too variable</p> <p>Some councils failing to deliver acceptable standards of service</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ More 'joined-up' government</li> <li>▪ Partnership working, including Local Strategic Partnerships</li> <li>▪ New community leadership powers for councils</li> <li>▪ Put the needs of service users ahead of service providers</li> <li>▪ Universal inspection</li> <li>▪ Beacon councils</li> <li>▪ Best Value</li> <li>▪ Universal Inspection</li> <li>▪ New powers for central government to act on service failures</li> <li>▪ Local Public Service Agreements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Shared vision</li> <li>▪ Harnessing the energies of local people &amp; organisations</li> <li>▪ Integrated delivery through ICT technologies (e.g. e-government)</li> <li>▪ Ability to deal with cross-cutting issues</li> <li>▪ Quality services for all</li> <li>▪ Clear service standards</li> <li>▪ Spread of good practice</li> <li>▪ Continuous improvement of services</li> <li>▪ More say for service users</li> <li>▪ Increased flexibilities for well-performing councils</li> </ul>

Hartley et al, 2002, p 390

## **APPENDIX (2)**

### **Local Strategic Partnerships – A Definition**

A Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) is a single body that:

- Brings together at a local level the different parts of the public sector as well as the private, business, community and voluntary sectors so that different initiatives and services support each other and work together;
- Is a non-statutory, non-executive organisation;
- Operates at a level which enables strategic decisions to be taken and is close enough to individual neighbourhoods to allow actions to be determined at a community level and;
- Should be aligned with local authority boundaries

*Source: DETR, 2001, p 4*



**APPENDIX (3)****The Different Accountability Levels within LSPs**

<b>Who is an LSP accountable to?</b>	<b>How is an LSP accountable?</b>
<b>THE LOCAL COMMUNITY</b>	Accountable via: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Community Strategies</li> <li>▪ Cross-sector plans</li> </ul>
<b>CENTRAL GOVERNMENT</b>	<p>LSPs remain accountable to central government for their performance and for meeting any national targets and priorities</p> <p>Local authorities are accountable to central government for delivering community strategies in partnership with other organisations and local people</p> <p>Local authorities are also accountable to central government for any local public service agreements (LPSAs) or local area agreements (LAAs) negotiated</p> <p>The 88 LSPs operating in areas eligible for the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) are accountable to central government for developing and delivering neighbourhood renewal strategies and for their performance in contributing to national floor targets</p>
<b>ELECTED MEMBERS</b>	Accountable to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The local electorate through the democratic process</li> <li>▪ Government for performance in meeting LPSA / LAA / NRF targets</li> </ul>
<b>INDIVIDUAL PARTNER ORGANISATIONS</b>	Are accountable to their own organisations through pre-existent lines of accountability
<b>PEERS</b>	<p>LSP partners are accountable to each other for delivering aspects of community strategies that they have responsibility for</p> <p>Peer accountability is a strong motivator when individual partners' objectives remain aligned with the LSPs, but will be undermined in situations where partners feel torn between their commitment to the LSP and their responsibilities to their own organisations</p>
<b>INDIVIDUALS</b>	Are accountable to the people whose interests they represent

*Adapted from: LGA, 2002, pp 8 - 9*

**APPENDIX (4)****Scrutiny Arrangements in Relation to LSPs**

Scrutiny arrangements can take a number of different forms including:

- The decisions of a council's executive – The LSP is not an accountable body so any decisions about council services and resources must be referred back to the executive / full council for approval. Scrutiny committees of course have the power to 'call-in' decisions of the executive
- The LSPs' operation – Scrutiny that examines the effectiveness of the LSP and that makes recommendations to improve its efficacy
- Scrutiny of a council's contribution to an LSPs' work
- Examination of how a council might help an LSP achieve its objectives
- Assessment of the effectiveness of partners in delivering aspects of the community strategy that they are responsible for
- Progress on the implementation of the LSPs' action plan
- Progress in meeting any performance targets or LPSAs / LAAs
- The operation of the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund
- Investigation into particular themes within the community strategy
- Annual review of the LSPs' operation

*Adapted from: LGA, 2002, p 14*

**APPENDIX (5)**

**As a County Councillor, how do you currently relate to WiSB if at all? (Please answer all the following statements)**

	YES	NO	DID NOT ANSWER
I have read <i>A County fit for our Children</i>	19	1	0
I receive periodic information about the work of the partnership	16	2	2
I receive briefings on the work of the partnership	12	7	1
I partake in the annual State of Wiltshire debate	18	1	1
I feel removed from the work of the partnership	8	11	1

**In your opinion, is WiSB a sufficiently accountable and transparent partnership? (Please answer all the following statements)**

	AGREE	DISAGREE	DON'T KNOW	DID NOT ANSWER
WiSB is sufficiently open and transparent	13	6	1	0
WiSB's membership effectively represents the community	13	6	1	0
Local people are able to hold WiSB to account	7	11	1	1
WiSB's is accountable to elected councillors	9	10	1	0
WiSB's main accountability currently lies upwards to central government	7	11	1	1
There is a democratic deficit surrounding WiSB	13	4	1	2

***A County fit for our Children* contains a number of targets and objectives built around 8 policy themes and 4 champion projects which are to: improve adult basic skills, improve the street scene, become more waste efficient and become the healthiest county in England. Since the community strategy's introduction in early 2004 (or since your appointment to the council), you have been able to: (Please answer all the following statements)**

	Yes, definitely	Yes, but on some issues only	No, not at all
Monitor what progress has been made	1	17	2
Monitor the effectiveness in delivery of the community strategy	2	15	3
Influence delivery of the 4 champion projects	2	13	5
Inform local people about related effects on the community	2	12	6

**How confident are you that as WiSB currently operates, it is able to:  
(Please answer all the following statements)**

	<b>Very confident</b>	<b>Confident</b>	<b>Neither confident nor not confident</b>	<b>Not really confident</b>	<b>No confidence</b>
Keep me informed of progress	1	8	9	2	0
Help me in my role as a community leader	1	6	5	5	3
Incorporate the views of local people	1	5	9	4	1
Respond to community concerns	1	5	8	5	1
Demonstrate its effectiveness as a partnership	1	6	8	4	1

**The introduction of LPSA2 (Local Public Service Agreement) targets and the imminent introduction of LAA (Local Area Agreement) targets will be overseen by WiSB, with the County Council accountable for the LAA targets:  
(Please answer all the following statements)**

	<b>AGREE</b>	<b>DISAGREE</b>	<b>DON'T KNOW</b>
I feel confident that I will be able to monitor progress towards these targets as WiSB currently operates	5	14	1
There should be more proactive communication between WiSB & the County Council about progress towards targets	20	0	0
As a non-executive councillor, I believe I have a responsibility to monitor these targets	19	1	0

**As part of the LAA, the government requires that WiSB has to introduce its own performance management framework. Aside from the potential for scrutiny to be involved in performance monitoring (see next question), which would prove the TWO most useful ways for you to keep track of performance progress?**

A regular newsletter	7
Regularly updated web-pages	7
Receipt of performance reports	5
Periodic briefing seminars	14
Annual report back to Full Council	7

**WiSB should be accountable to local people through the democratic process and, more directly, in listening to and informing local communities:  
(Please answer all the following statements)**

	<b>AGREE</b>	<b>DISAGREE</b>	<b>DON'T KNOW</b>	<b>DID NOT ANSWER</b>
WiSB currently has little accountability	10	7	1	2
As a non-executive councillor, I would like greater interaction and influence in WiSB	18	2	0	0
The role of overview and scrutiny is essential in ensuring WiSB's accountability	17	2	0	1

**Do you have any other comments / opinions about WiSB that you would like to share?**

- A need to move away from the 'great and the good'
- A need for effective, meaningful scrutiny of the Strategic Board
- LSPs – a good idea in theory but do they, will they, work?
- I have not been too involved with this process and the inclusion of a 'Don't Know' slot would have helped
- Councillors have a monitoring role through the Community Area Partnerships and also through LSPs at the district council level
- I don't really know exactly what will be done from the community strategy and who will do it
- This is a difficult issue which means little if anything to the man on the street. It is that aspect which requires radical improvement and thereby increased accountability for WiSB to operate successfully

## **APPENDIX (6)**

### **Decision-Making at WCC**

Full Council, which meets four times a year, is comprised of 49 councillors who serve four year terms. The May 2005 local elections left the political composition of the council thus: 28 Conservatives, 16 Liberal Democrats, 3 Labour and 2 Independents. The Conservatives therefore hold the balance of power with the Leader of the Council, Mrs Jane Scott, heading a cabinet of eight councillors. This cabinet is responsible for most day-to-day decisions and meets at least 12 times per year at times agreed by the Leader.

The cabinet's decisions must be in line with the council's overall policies and budget. If it considers that a decision is required which is outside the remit of the policy or budget framework, it must refer the matter to Full Council for a decision.

As well as day-to-day decisions, the cabinet also discusses and makes major decisions, known as **key decisions**. Such decisions are defined as those which:

- Result in the closure of an amenity or the total withdrawal of a service
- Restrict a service by greater than 5% as measured by reference to current expenditure or hours of availability to the public
- Incur expenditure or produce savings greater than 20% of budget areas as defined in the Council's current Best Value Performance Plan
- Recommend an area reorganisation plan that extends in its effect beyond a single county electoral division in terms of its impact on the delivery of services to the public
- Proposes to change the policy framework

All key decisions are published in the council's **Forward Plan**. This plan is updated monthly and those decisions within it are ones which will be taken by the council over the four month period of the plan.

Outside of cabinet, Full Council delegates powers to six committees – the Regulatory, Staffing Policy, Standards, Officer Appointments, Pension Fund and Final Accounts Committees.

As described fully within the main text, the council also operates an overview and scrutiny function. Supportive of the work of this function are three **advisory panels** (one 'Environment', one 'Children, Education and Libraries' and one 'Adult and Community Services'). These panels (established by the cabinet in 2001) are consultative groups that consider matters requiring decisions by cabinet. This allows non-executive councillors with experience and knowledge of the appropriate service area to provide a preliminary overview of key issues. On receiving the views of the panel, the cabinet member will make appropriate recommendations to the cabinet.

*Sources: WCC(a), 2005, pp 31 – 41 and WCC[online]*

## **APPENDIX (7)**

### **Membership of WiSB and WiSBEx**

The Wiltshire Strategic Board is made up of 23 individuals representing 25 organisations (i.e. some individuals represent two organisations):

- Voluntary Action Kennet
- West Wiltshire District Council
- West Wiltshire Local Strategic Partnership
- West Wiltshire PCT
- Wiltshire Association of Local Councils
- Wiltshire Churches Together
- Wiltshire County Council
- Wiltshire Police Authority
- Wiltshire and Swindon CFA
- Wiltshire and Swindon Economic Partnership
- Wiltshire and Swindon Lifelong Learning Partnership
- Wiltshire Wildlife Trust
- Association of Wiltshire Towns
- Community First
- Kennet District Council
- Kennet Local Strategic Partnership
- Kennet and North Wiltshire PCT
- Learning and Skills Council, Wiltshire and Swindon
- National Probation Service, Wiltshire Area
- North Wiltshire District Council
- Rural Executive
- North Wiltshire Local Strategic Partnership
- Salisbury District Council
- Salisbury Local Strategic Partnership
- South Wiltshire PCT

WiSBEx comprises a differing selection of individuals from 20 of the above organisations. There are no representatives from the four District LSPs or the Rural Executive sitting on WiSBEx.

*Source: Interview with David Maynard, Corporate Advisor – Policy & Strategy*

## **APPENDIX (8)**

### **WiSB and WiSBEX – Terms of Reference**

#### **Wiltshire Strategic Board (WiSB)**

- To ensure that countywide partnerships are working effectively and tackling those issues that need attention at the county level
- To present a coherent picture of Wiltshire's needs priorities and aspirations to relevant regional, national and European bodies
- To set the directions on the broad strategic issues facing Wiltshire

#### **Wiltshire Strategic Board Executive (WiSBEx)**

- To support WiSB in fulfilling its terms of reference
- To build large-scale external funding bids, where no other appropriate partnership exists to do the job
- To take on any role required by external funders to ensure that Wiltshire gets its fair share
- To ensure national and regional policy issues are 'unpacked' for Wiltshire
- To ensure that overarching themes like sustainability are followed through in developing plans and policies
- To keep an eye on areas adjoining the county to identify and assess problems and opportunities and then take appropriate action
- To support individual organisations by developing common information bases
- To act as a broker to assemble resources to tackle mutually agreed objectives at the county level

*Source: Interview with David Maynard, Corporate Advisor – Policy & Strategy*



## **APPENDIX (9)**

### **WiSB's LPSA2 and LAA Progress**

#### **LPSA2 Progress:**

Guidance for the second round of the LPSA process was issued in December 2003. WiSBEx agreed that the LPSA2 targets should flow from the priorities established in *A County fit for our Children*, with a general consensus that the four champion projects should form the core of the agreement.

Lead officers negotiated with the ODPM over 12 targets. Due to capacity issues within the ODPM, the original deadline of 1 April 2005 for an agreement was not met. The final agreement was not in fact reached until January 2006, with a retrospective start date of April 2005 for targets agreed.

The 12 targets agreed were to:

1. Improve the health and well-being of people in Wiltshire
2. Increase the independence of older people
3. Reduce domestic violence
4. Reduce numbers of domestic fires
5. Improve adult basic skills
6. Improve secondary school attendance
7. Reduce household and commercial waste
8. Reduce homelessness
9. Improve street and lane scene
10. Reduce anti-social behaviour
11. Improve educational attainment of looked after children
12. Reduce numbers of young people not in education, employment or training

WiSB agreed that the pump priming grant of £1,190,821 provided by the government should be allocated by reference to a clear business case for each target. The partnership also agreed that the final performance reward grant (which will be up to a maximum of £10.5 million) should be applied partly to those areas where LPSA2 targets are hit and primarily to the Board's main priorities.

*Source: WCC(d), 2005, Agenda Item 3*

#### **LAA Progress:**

The LAA project is in its early stages and deadlines for its progress are still to be agreed. However, a project plan has been developed, comprising the following stages:

- 1. Establishment of a Strategic Framework** – Involving the establishment of a Project Board

2. **Review of the Community Strategy** – So that it reflects the ODPM's desire for *sustainable* community strategies and is a more robust document from which LAA outcomes can be selected.
3. **Development of top level outcomes** – To be carried out by working groups assigned to each of the LAA blocks. Each working group to review relevant outcomes in the community strategy and other relevant strategies and to use LAA criteria to evaluate which outcomes should be proposed for inclusion.
4. **Development of 'first level' detail of supporting activities and targets and proposed enabling measures (e.g. freedoms & flexibilities)** – To be carried out by Block Working Groups as identified above who must develop outline action plans for delivering the selected outcomes. Proposals must seek innovation and improvement and must explore enabling measures that might allow more effective delivery of outcomes.
5. **Development of final detail of supporting activities, targets and enabling measures** – Again, to be undertaken by Block Working Groups and negotiated with Block leads from the Government Office of the South West.
6. **Establishment of a performance management framework for LAA delivery** – Guidance must be developed for Block Working Groups on setting up targets that drive the right behaviour and can be measured effectively.

Items 1, 3, 4 and 5 are sequential whereas 2 and 6 can be conducted in parallel with other activities.

Source: WCC(e), 2006

## APPENDIX (10)

### The Street Scene Project

#### Original Aims

This project aimed to improve the attractiveness, safety, cleanliness and usability of Wiltshire's street and lane scene. As outlined in *A County fit for our Children*, it aimed to do this by:

- Commissioning work to reduce duplication and harmonise standards with respect to grounds maintenance and cleansing, including grass cutting, leaves, weeds, litter, flyposting and detritus
- Agreeing a co-ordinated approach to the management of abandoned vehicles
- Undertaking an audit of the street scene in Wiltshire's towns, and to identify priority locations for improvement schemes with respect to street furniture, signage, street lighting, quality of pavements and road surfaces
- Carrying out a feasibility study on the financial viability of decriminalised parking enforcement in the Kennet and North and West Wiltshire district areas
- Establishing a baseline of the incidence of anti-social behaviour and street crime in the county
- Exploring ways to enhance the public's use and enjoyment of Wiltshire Street Scene by such things as promoting a café culture, market street entertainment and art, evening activities in town centres that appeal to a wide range of age groups and enabling more people to live in town centres
- Establishing a set of performance indicators to measure technical, financial and public satisfaction improvements in relation to Wiltshire's street and lane scene

These aims cover both county and district functions / duties and so require close partnership working between councils to achieve a better use of existing resources to deliver service improvement.

*Source: WiSB, 2004, p 16*

#### LPSA2 Targets

Recently, the following LPSA2 stretch targets have been set across this project:

- Cleanliness of land within the local authorities' control as measured by:
  - (a) BVPI 199a – litter and detritus – **target = 16.25%** (presently 26.25%)
  - (b) Public satisfaction with the Street Scene – **target = 46.5%** (presently 41.3%)
- Reduce alcohol-related re-offending – **target = 2750** (without LPSA2 = 3055)
- Reduce the percentage of survey respondents who, when asked the question "Over the last two years do you think that anti-social behaviour in you area has:

*increased, stayed the same, got worse, decreased*”, answer ‘increased’ – **target = 28.9%** (presently 33.9%)

To achieve these targets, the project has been awarded by WiSB a total of £188,000 of the £1,190,821 pump-priming grant received from the government.

*Source: WCC(f), 2006, pp 19 – 22*

### Project Structure

Street Scene has a project board comprised of: the Chief Executive of Kennet District Council (who leads the project), an executive county councillor, officers from the county and district councils and representatives from other appropriate bodies such as the Police Authority and the Market Towns Initiative.

Below the project board there are three themed sub-groups (comprising county and district council officers only), one each for:

- Street management (the maintenance and cleanliness of the street and lane scene)
- Community safety (anti-social behaviour)

Each of these sub-groups has their own objectives and targets that feed into the LPSA2 targets above. The Street Management sub-group plans to use some of the LPSA2 pump-priming grant to appoint a project manager and in addition, has received £120,000 from the South West Regional Centre of Excellence for a project focusing on grounds maintenance work, including grass-cutting on highway verges in urban areas.

*Source: WiSB, 2005, pp 4 – 6*

## **APPENDIX (11)**

### **Progress against Street Scene's Original Aims**

#### **1. Commissioning work to reduce duplication and harmonise standards with respect to grounds maintenance and cleansing, including grass cutting, leaves, weeds, litter, flyposting and detritus**

Successful £120,000 bid for a Ground Maintenance project that will involve looking at current policies and standards of delivery to inform a best practice model that will improve public satisfaction and realise efficiency savings

Weeds – agreement has been made with 3 district councils on funding for weed clearing in district areas

Litter – co-ordinated approach has been developed to grass-cutting (County Council function) and litter picking (District Council function) in rural areas

#### **2. Agreeing a co-ordinated approach to the management of abandoned vehicles**

The project is close to going live with a new system for reporting of abandoned vehicles in partnership with district councils, fire and police authorities.

Focus will then turn to deciding what to do with a vehicle once it has been reported as abandoned (currently, district councils remove it and the county council disposes of it).

#### **3. Undertaking an audit of the street scene in Wiltshire's towns, and to identify priority locations for improvement schemes with respect to street furniture, signage, street lighting, quality of pavements and road surfaces etc**

No audit has been undertaken but now that LPSA funding is secured, the project will look to commission detailed survey work in areas where there are high levels of dissatisfaction re: street scene.

#### **4. Carrying out a feasibility study on the financial viability of decriminalised parking enforcement (DPE) in the Kennet and North Wiltshire and West Wiltshire district areas**

A separate officer group and project board has been set-up for this project with Kennet and North Wilts progressing with DPE and West Wilts keeping a watching brief.

#### **5. Establishing a baseline of the incidence of anti-social behaviour and street crime in the county**

This has now been overtaken by the LPSA2 targets as outlined in *Appendix (10)*.

**6. Exploring ways to enhance the public's use and enjoyment of the Wiltshire Street Scene by such things as promoting a café culture, market street entertainment and art, evening activities in town centres that appeal to a wide range of age groups, enabling more people to live in town centres, e.g. above shops, etc**

This forms part of the Urban Design project, ensuring the right balance in residential and retail mix. Much of this theme is dependent on the separate planning functions of district and county councils and the need for commercial representation and expertise to be involved.

**7. Establishing a set of performance indicators to measure technical, financial, and public satisfaction improvements in relation to Wiltshire's street and lane scene**

In conjunction with the LPSA2 targets, there are Best Value Performance Indicators relevant to Street Scene. In addition, further indicators will be developed on appointment of a project officer.

*Source: Interview with Tracy Carter, Street Management Project Lead*

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