

# **Evaluation of the North Wiltshire Partnership**

## **Executive Summary**

**April 2007**

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## Introduction

This document forms the executive summary of the evaluation report of the North Wiltshire Partnership (NWP). The North Wiltshire Partnership brings together public services (including health, local government and police), Voluntary and Community sector, housing associations, young people and the business sector, to focus on issues and take actions that are relevant and important to local communities. The Partnership and its members see the importance of working in partnership with the local community and have outlined partnership working as an essential way in which to work, both through the overarching strategic documents and then through individual corporate plans.

**“By working together across a number of organisations and community groups, we know we can make a difference. The purpose of the North Wiltshire Partnership is to achieve results through good supportive partnership working.”**

*North Wiltshire Partnership Community Strategy*

**“Everything to be underpinned by partnership working and community engagement, working towards building true community spirit and a caring society.”**

*NWDC Corporate plan 2006*

## 1. Background & Overview to the Evaluation

- 1.1 There are a number of factors, which makes it timely to conduct a full evaluation of the North Wiltshire Partnership:
- The membership of the Partnership has continued to grow since it was formed in 2004
  - The LSP Manager was appointed July 06 which has enhanced the capacity of the Partnership
  - Work is underway to establish a clear workplan for the partnership in order for it to be well placed to respond to the emerging agenda
  - The Community Strategy for North Wiltshire was published in 2005 this informed the development of supporting action plans, these were adopted by the NWP in February 07.
  - Discussion is underway to further develop the Community Strategy. The NWP will have a key role to play in this process.
- 1.2 There now needs to be an emphasis on how the NWP can position itself to be both proactive and responsive to the emerging agenda. This includes identification of appropriate membership at an adequate level to enable the effective delivery of key priorities. The NWP needs to take up its role as the Partnership of Partnerships, with a pivotal role in supporting partner organisations to meet shared objectives and enhance capacity through the sharing of resources. A delivery mechanism needs to be introduced so that a work programme can be effectively implemented and performance managed.
- 1.3 North Wiltshire District Council is currently evaluating all of its key partnerships. This is being undertaken as a result of a review of the Councils approach to partnership working carried out by the Audit Commission (2005). Rather than the Council undertaking an evaluation of the NWP as an individual partner, the process has been adapted to meet the evaluation needs of the partnership and to inform its development and progress. By working on the evaluation collectively, will be to the mutual benefit of the partners who form the NWP. The Council is able to provide the framework for the evaluation through the use of the Partnership Evaluation Tool and officer resource.

- 1.4 In a recent CPA inspection the Council was recognised as being a “good partner” to work with, but highlighted areas where the Council needed to improve in order to ensure that partnership working delivers value for money. To better understand these issues and to address them the Council and the Audit Commission have undertaken a joint review of the Council’s approach to partnership working. The review sought to gain opinion from partners, to look into the strategic mechanisms employed to manage partnerships and to assess the outcomes that could be demonstrated to the public.
- 1.5 In response to the Audit Commission’s recommendations, the Council identified in its Corporate Plan that a review of all its key partnerships must take place and that appropriate mechanisms be developed to monitor the outcomes and quality of work delivered (through this way of working).
- 1.6 **The evaluation addresses the following areas:**
- **Does the North Wiltshire Partnership have a clearly defined role with a shared purpose between the members of the partnership and external stakeholders based on local priorities and community need?**
  - **Does the current structure and mechanisms of the partnership enable it to fulfil its role and purpose? If not does the structure need to be modified to enable progressive delivery?**
  - **Is the North Wiltshire Partnership best placed to be the pivotal partnership in order to deliver outcomes against the identified priorities?**
- 1.7 The review has been undertaken, in partnership with the full participation of the North Wiltshire Partnership.

## **2 Methodology**

- 2.1 The following methodology was implemented to ensure a robust evidence based evaluation was undertaken:
- Use of the NWDC Partnership Evaluation Tool as the framework in which to conduct the evaluation
  - Involving NWP members and wider stakeholders through two focus group sessions
  - Surveys circulated to both Members and Stakeholders each with targeted questions
  - Analysis of the focus group and survey feedback then fed into the Partnership Evaluation Tool
  - Research of best practice and methods adopted by LSP’s considered successful
  - Audit of past Minutes

### ***The Partnership Evaluation Tool***

- 2.2 To review all of its main partnerships in a structured and fair manner, the District Council has developed a Partnership Evaluation Tool. The tool builds on the recommendations outlined by the Audit Commission review, the requirements of the Wiltshire Compact and national guidance on ensuring value for money from public partnerships.
- 2.3 It was agreed by the North Wiltshire Partnership to adopt the tool and use it as the mechanism in which to undertake this evaluation. Using this approach will ensure that a full evaluation of the

partnership takes place. The Council has provided additional resource and expertise through the Partnership Development Officer to support the LSP Manager in undertaking the evaluation.

**2.4** The tool tests four key areas of partnership working:

- **Need** – Is there a robust case for needing to work in partnership?
- **Framework** –Is there a structured approach in place in which to work in partnership?
- **Process** – Is the Partnership effectively managed?
- **Outcomes**-Is the Partnership able to demonstrate achievement and impact as a result of joint working?

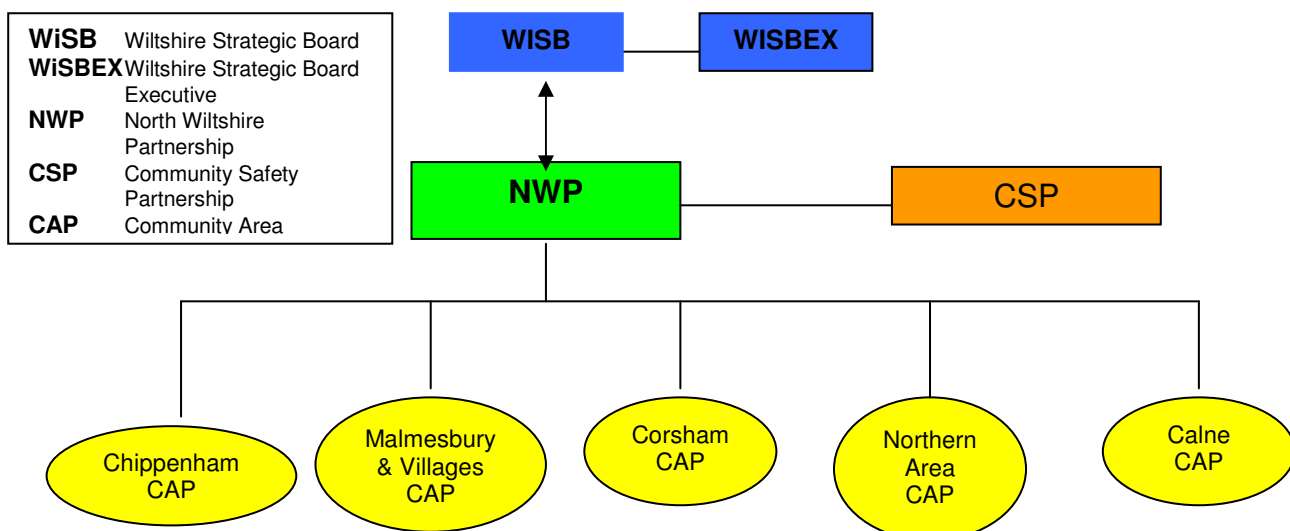
**2.4** Each area consists of at least five key tests and requires evidence to be gathered to review the current performance or position of the partnership. Using such a tool will enable a full review of the partnership to be undertaken, one that is able to address both areas of strength and areas of weakness as well as highlighting where improvements can be made.

**2.5** The evidence gathered through the evaluation tool scoring process and through the analysis of survey results and focus groups informs the recommendations in this report. These will be put into action through the resulting implementation plan, in order to ensure that all findings are put into action over the transitional stages. The findings of the evaluation is presented in a full report, 'Evaluation of the North Wiltshire Partnership, (2007), which was presented to the NWP on 16<sup>th</sup> April 2007.

**3 The Current Structure of the North Wiltshire Partnership**

**3.1** The Partnership brings together key statutory organisations, (Local Authority, Health, and Police), alongside the Voluntary sector, Young Peoples Council, Community Partnerships: working together to meet community need. Also to raise key priorities at a County level with the Wiltshire Strategic Board on local needs, raising their profile on the County agenda.

**3.2** There are fifteen core members that currently form the NWP and it currently meets on a six weekly basis. Until recently the partnership had no designated resource. In July 2006 an LSP Manager was recruited to support the further development of the Partnership.



## 4 Key Findings

### Overall Strengths of the Partnership

- 4.1 There is clear evidence that North Wiltshire needs an LSP as an opportunity for identifying gaps in service provision and building capacity across the area. The NWP is a robust way to identify community need and form a mechanism for community consultation. This directly, informs the content and focus of the Community Strategy. Action plans are now in place to deliver on the key outcomes of the Community Strategy and provide a means of monitoring performance. The Community Strategy links with the five Community Area Plans, these are produced by the five Community Area Partnerships.
- 4.2 The NWP benefits greatly from a good range of partners and the commitment of the majority of its members, with meetings being well attended. Their functions are laid out clearly in a formalised constitution ensuring that its work is performed under a set of shared guidelines.

**“We will work closely with Local Authority Partners through Local Strategic Partnerships and other public policy initiatives to deliver a more joined up approach and better use of resources”.**

*Westlea Business Plan, (2007/2008).*

**The Community Safety Partnership state they aim, “...To work closely with their Local Strategic Partnership and make sure that their Community Safety priorities are contained in the Community Strategies produced with these partnerships”**

*Taken from the Community Safety Strategy for Wiltshire*

- 4.3 The NWP participates in consultation processes both locally and nationally and is recognised by wider partners as well as being approached to give input to various strategies to inform service development.
- 4.4 The main strength of the Partnership is its recognition that things need to work better, and changes need to be put in place to raise the NWP’s profile and its ability to deliver. In particular a key area for development has long been communication; it is a real strength that work has started through the formation of the Communication sub group, who will develop a communications strategy. A newsletter is now produced and the website is in place.

### Overall Weaknesses of the Partnership

#### ***Need for working in partnership***

- 4.5 Currently the NWP has struggled to optimise the benefits of partnership working which means there is a real risk of it becoming a drain on the valuable partner resource and therefore failing to make an impact and add value.
- 4.6 There are frustrations within the partnership and recognition that there are requirements within their role that they are unable to meet, there is however, a lack of clarity or shared thinking on how this can be corrected. The Partnership has not defined key headline areas for collective focus, or agreed a long-term vision; as a result there is no means of performance management or mapping of progress or where added value has been achieved. The NWP is yet to put in place clear objectives for how it can best deliver on the outcomes of the Community Strategy, the

action plans have offered some direction but no agreement has been reached on how this can be progressed.

- 4.7** The current structure of the NWP is hindering progress, as it does not lend itself easily to a strategic approach. By only having one tier the roles of strategic vision and decision making and the process for delivery have become merged, leading to confusion and the partnership unable to progress. This has resulted in an inward looking culture and much of its time is spent self-analysing rather than progressing. This has also meant that the opportunity for linking with other key delivery partnerships has been missed, resulting in gaps in focus.
- 4.8** A more inclusive approach to partnership working needs to be adopted. This will ensure that the partnership embraces the needs of the whole community, making good use of existing groups ability to identify and work with harder to reach sections of the community and access their data and information gathering to inform and expand the NWP's focus. This can also be used to identify gaps in areas where no work or group exists, which could result in sections of the community not being represented. For example, there is currently no BME network in place in the District, a group such as this will enable close working with minority groups to ensure that people are welcomed and integrated into the community.
- 4.9** The Community Strategy no longer represents the current picture of the District, as key priorities for focus have changed and new factors need to be incorporated, enabling the strategy to have a more sustainable base and a clear platform for delivering far reaching services and outcomes. This needs to be developed in a cohesive way to include key policy drivers such as, the Local Area Agreement and the Local Development Framework.
- 4.10** There have been many changes to the membership of the NWP and differing representation from organisations. This has led to a lack of continuity and gaps in information. There have been long period of times where key representation has been missing. The Partnership members need to adopt a culture where by if they are unable to attend, a replacement from their organisation attends, with a full brief and delegated responsibility, this includes the right to vote. This would promote continuity.
- 4.11** For the Partnership to reach its full potential it must engage with the Community, both in the setting of its priorities and their subsequent delivery. An effective mechanism must be in place so that the Community can access the Partnership in the most meaningful way. The evaluation indicates that the current structure and process for involvement is restrictive. It is also clear that the NWP needs to balance its needs against valuable resources and recognition that the Community element is offered on a Voluntary basis.

### ***Infrastructure & Governance***

- 4.12** Although the Partnership has a Terms of Reference in place the evaluation has identified that the Partnership has not fully implemented them. The Partnership was originally structured to function with both a Board and a delivery arm each with clear remits. During the last year it has become clear that the Partnership has merged the two groups and as a result the current partnership structure is flat, which has led to a confusion of roles and a lack of clarity on when decisions are required and the process for making them.

The current Terms of Reference have not evolved with the Partnership, nor has there been a formal review. The arena in which the Partnership operates has changed and developed and with the future implementation of the recent White Paper, the Local Area Agreement and the Sustainable Communities Agenda, these will all set new challenges for the partnership to respond to.

- 4.13 In essence the current Terms of Reference do not underpin nor reflect what the NWP is there to do. As a result, the evaluation has identified that one of the significant weaknesses faced by the Partnership is that there is a lack of understanding and clarity around roles and responsibilities of partners.
- 4.14 One of the main frustrations voiced by both partnership members and stakeholders is that it has been difficult to achieve an understanding of what the Partnership is doing and the impact it is having as a result of its working. Although a strategy and subsequent action plans exist, the partnership has not embedded a culture of review or developed effectively a mechanism for delivery.
- 4.15 The Partnership needs to set headline outcomes, agree a workplan detailing how it will fulfil its roles and develop a process as part of its governance infrastructure to undertake review and performance management at all meetings. Having conducted an audit of recent meetings it has become clear that there is limited follow through of actions from meeting to meeting. Partners are not using the NWP as an opportunity to review and cross-reference their service provision against the common goals of the partnership.

### ***Demonstrating Impact & Outcomes of the Partnership***

- 4.16 When evaluating the Impact and outcomes of the NWP there was good evidence to demonstrate that progress is being made and that a number of significant steps have been taken to address the original need. Accepting this, a number of weaknesses were also found which require attention in order for the partnership to further develop.
- 4.17 One of the key reasons why the partnership is finding difficulty in demonstrating what it has achieved; and the subsequent impact it has had on service provision is that the governance issues described above are creating a barrier. If work is done to clarify roles and responsibilities and the partnership adopts a clearer approach to what it monitors and subsequently delivers, then this will result in the partnership being able to better demonstrate its impact and raise its profile.
- 4.18 There is a real weakness surrounding governance and infrastructure arrangements within the Partnership, in particular a lack of clear outcomes that the Partnership is working towards. The current Community Strategy although strong on community consultation has leaned to a more output focused approach. The difficulty in following this is that it has resulted in the Partnership only being able to address issues in a narrow way. For example, at present there is no scope within the environment section of the Community Strategy to look at issues regarding bio-diversity or climate change, (which are current issues that should be addressed).
- 4.19 Opening up the focus of the partnership will achieve greater flexibility and better enable partners to demonstrate how the services they are providing, or seeking to provide impact positively against the Partnership vision. For the Partnership to progress requires it to define a number of headline outcomes which it then sets a number of indicators to demonstrate where work or developments are taking place.
- 4.20 A clear message, which has resulted from the consultation with wider stakeholders, is that they are unclear as to what the Partnership is doing and achieving. Alongside this was a feeling they don't know how or when they should access the NWP. Similar feedback has also come from members of the NWP themselves; particularly associated with the level of impact the Partnership is having on the community. Whilst addressing some of the current governance issues and adopting a more outcome focused approach will present a clearer framework, a weakness the Partnership must address is that of how it communicates with its stakeholders and the wider community.



- 4.21 Communication is an essential tool for the Partnership in being able to demonstrate what it is achieving and the impact it is having. A positive aspect is that the Partnership has recognised that the issue of communication is one, which requires greater impetus. It is imperative that the partners address both how the Partnership communicates internally and externally. Partners need to start addressing the wider picture and use the NWP as an opportunity to share information and learn from each other. To do this more effectively will result in greater capacity, more knowledge-based approaches being developed and more opportunities to jointly shape service provision.

## 5 Key Strands for Development

- 5.1 The conclusions within the evaluation of the North Wiltshire Partnership have identified three principal areas for development. These being:

- Direction
- Infrastructure & Governance
- Communication

For each strand of development to be addressed will require the partnership to make a number of changes to its current working practices and be pragmatic in its decision making.

### *Direction*

- 5.2 The direction of the partnership is unclear and as a result is restricting the Partnership from fulfilling its roles, as outlined in the Community Strategy. The current Community Strategy no longer represents, accurately the environment in which the Partnership operates, and this has therefore hindered the NWP from evolving effectively to respond to local priorities. It is also clear in the absence of clear vision and outcomes that both partners and stakeholders are becoming increasingly frustrated with the lack of progress.
- 5.3 It is recommended that the NWP undertake a programme of work, which defines a clear ambition of what the Partnership wants to achieve. This will also require the development of a set of headline outcomes, which describe how the ambition will be achieved and an ability to map progress against milestones, through the setting of key indicators.
- 5.4 It is proposed that this is achieved by the Partnership embedding the Sustainable Communities Agenda through the development of a new community strategy. This strategy will not only set out how a sustainability can be achieved it will also encompass the Local Area Agreement and the Local Development Framework.

### *Infrastructure & Governance*

- 5.5 The evaluation highlights issues associated with the infrastructure and governance of the Partnership as a key priority area for development. Principally this requires development of the current structure and the process by which the NWP operates.
- 5.6 An effective partnership structure needs to be implemented in order to establish a framework for both strategic decision-making, planning and also a line for delivery. The current structure has become one-dimensional leading to confusion around roles and responsibility of partners. This culminates in the NWP becoming ineffective and therefore a drain on partner resources. The introduction of a new structure will enable the Partnership to better deliver on its ambition and will ensure the efficient use of partner resources. This will result in the NWP being able to

demonstrate where it has added value, to its members, stakeholders and the community. This is essential given that the basis for any partnership working is to add value.

- 5.7** The proposed structure (Appendix A), This is more than a illustration of the lines of communication between the NWP and other partnerships but also a demonstration how effective partnership working has an inclusive approach to all networks for delivery. This utilises expert groups for specific areas of work and naturally builds capacity. The NWP should not be the sole delivery agent, but has the pivotal role at a district level to ensure a joined up approach to service development and delivery, which is driven by the Community Strategy.
- 5.8** For the Partnership and its current membership there will be a change in the current methods of working. This will see the development of an NWP Board and the introduction of a Co-ordination Group. The Board will meet on a quarterly basis with the Co-ordination Group meeting more regularly. Alongside this a Project and Development group will be created, this group will be responsive to up and coming pieces of work with a revolving focus to ensure the delivery of key projects. Therefore, the timings of meetings and membership will be reflective of need. It is also proposed that the existing Communications group be maintained.
- 5.9** The NWP Board will need to take up its position as a strategic leader. Its membership will consist of representation from senior members from key partners including Public, Private, Community and Voluntary sector. Each member of the Board will be able to represent and have the autonomy to make clear decisions at this level. The Board's purpose will be to take an overall strategic view that ensures the implementation of the Community Strategy. It will be the forum in which key decisions on service provision are made, influencing the Local Area Agreement process and ensuring it fulfils its role as the direct communication link into the Countywide structures.
- 5.10** The proposed introduction of a Co-ordination group will give the NWP a mechanism for delivery. The membership of this group will be key players who have knowledge of delivery needs who are best able to access the community represent the current needs and identify the gaps in service. Officers from a range of organisations, who are able to provide the necessary skills and expertise to ensure that the partnership is able to progress on the actions agreed by the Board.
- 5.11** The Community is well represented on the NWP, however the evaluation has raised significant questions as to how effective the Partnership is currently utilising this valuable input. It also suggests a need to build on the current role to ensure that the Community is able to access and influence the NWP in a meaningful manner.
- 5.12** It is essential that in any emerging structure of the NWP that the Community Area Partnerships (CAP's) are clear on their role. The effectiveness of the CAP's involvement in the Partnership could be enhanced by the formation of a proposed community group and all CAP's being invited to attend the newly formed Co-ordination group with one member taking forward the key objectives to the Board. Involving the communities in a more effective way given that representation is done on a voluntary basis is essential to achieving sustained involvement by such groups in the partnership. Given the recognised capacity issues facing the CAP's and the likely developments facing communities as a result of the white paper's local focus, this could appear to be an appropriate time to evolve the role of the CAP's in the NWP. The proposals for the nature of the CAP's future involvement should be seen as an opportunity to ensuring they are well placed by giving them a clearer place within the structure and their own line for delivery.
- 5.13** Feeding through the co-ordination groups and directly to the NWP will enable a more progressive approach to integrating local need into the wider agenda.

## ***Communication***

- 5.14** Communication has been recognised as a key area for development for the Partnership and it has started to address this through the formation of a communication sub group. It is recommended that this work will continue through the publication of the NWP newsletter, the advancement of its website, and also needs to be further enhanced through the positive use of the media. A communications strategy, needs to be formalised, which includes approaches to both external, and internal communication processes, all aspects of the partnership throughout its structure should embed this into its work.
- 5.15** The partnership has struggled to make best use of the representation around the table, as the current structure and approach to meetings does not have the freedom to learn about the priorities of organisations and service provision. The introduction of a new far reaching and inclusive structure and new direction should provide the platform for gaining and sharing knowledge which will go some way to addressing the communication issues raised throughout the evaluation.
- 5.16** To fully integrate the evaluation findings will require partners to undertake a programme of work over the coming months. To do this effectively an implementation plan will be produced and enable the NWP to enter a period of transition towards future progress.

## **6 Review Recommendations**

### ***Direction***

- The North Wiltshire Partnership agrees a clear vision, which reflects the “Sustainable Communities” agenda
- To meet the vision the North Wiltshire Partnership agrees a number of headline outcomes that detail how progress against the vision will be achieved
- Adopt the Sustainable Communities agenda through the development of the Sustainable Community Strategy
- Streamline and re-define the North Wiltshire Partnership’s roles in line with the vision and headline outcomes

### ***Infrastructure***

- The current structure of the North Wiltshire Partnership is developed in order for it to be able to deliver against its vision and fulfil its role in an efficient and effective manner
- The Terms of Reference are updated and amended to reflect the changes in the partnership’s structure and to ensure that the vision can be worked towards in an effective manner.
- There is a growth in the output and throughput of the partnership to expert groups across the district to enhance delivery across the “whole community” needs and priorities
- Partners will need to re-sign up to the new constitution in order to confirm their agreement with the partnership’s vision, outcomes and expectations

### ***Governance***

- The North Wiltshire Partnership adopts an outcome-focused approach that builds in key developments such as the Sustainable Community Strategy (this includes the Local Development Framework) and the Local Area Agreement
- The North Wiltshire Partnership puts in place a performance management led approach both through the implementation of a monitoring system and also as a key focus for all partnership meetings
- A Partnership work plan is produced that directs how the partnership will fulfil its roles
- Partnership Board meetings become the clear decision making forum at a strategic level

### ***Communication***

- The North Wiltshire Partnership continues to develop its Communication group for external communication purposes
- The North Wiltshire Partnership addresses the lack of consistent internal communications so that there are clear goals and effective resource pooling and sharing
- The language of the partnership is focused around the outcomes it is working towards

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