

OXFORDSHIRE PARTNERSHIP – 24 FEBRUARY 2010

HORIZON SCANNING

Introduction

Context and Policy Drivers

This paper explores some of the current policy issues and drivers affecting partnership working locally and nationally.

A. Oxfordshire 2030

The Partnership agreed the Oxfordshire 2030 strategy in 2008. Thematic partnerships are currently working on strengthening measures and targets to deliver the objectives in the strategy as set out in the delivery plan. This work will be discussed in more detailed elsewhere in the agenda for February's meeting.

Evidence supporting the Oxfordshire 2030 strategy will change over time and the strategies supporting it will be refreshed. We will need to review performance against our priorities and how the quality of life is changing in the county to ensure that we continue to focus on what is important.

B. Financial outlook

The financial outlook for the public sector is not optimistic in the medium term because government, of any colour, will have a huge budget deficit to address. 2010/11 is the final year of the current Comprehensive Spending Round and it is expected that all public sector organisations will have to make savings, efficiencies and indeed cuts in the next spending round. It is within this context that there are opportunities for greater efficiencies through working in partnership.

Total Place

The government's 'Total Place' initiative looks at how a 'whole area' approach to public services can lead to better services at less cost. It seeks to identify and avoid overlap and duplication between organisations – delivering a step change in both service improvement and efficiency at the local level, as well as across Whitehall.

Total Place has different elements;

The counting process will map money flowing through the place (from central and local bodies) and make links between services, to identify where public money can be spent more effectively.

The culture process looks at the way existing cultures (the way we do things at the moment) actually helps or hinders the process.

Together, these strands aim to identify potential efficiencies and help people and organisations work together to achieve them.

Thirteen areas across the country have been piloting Total Place and are due to report their findings by March. It is expected that government will introduce a national partnership initiative based on the learning from Total Place.

Oxfordshire county council has recently started discussions with partners about Total Place and how we might use this in Oxfordshire. Initial indications are that we would like to use the methodology to focus on reducing the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). Early work suggests that there is a lot of activity across partners but that it is not well aligned or joined up. Through the Oxfordshire Learning and Skills Partnership we are hoping to undertake an 'audit' of current spend and activity in the spring, followed by identification of gaps and duplication and subsequently for all partners to align future work in accordance with a new overarching strategy. A significant barrier to undertaking this work is the current lack of available resource to support this project (project management and external facilitation / challenge).

C. Comprehensive Area Assessment

2009 was the first year of the Comprehensive Area Assessment. Unlike previous inspection regimes the focus is on an 'area' rather than the performance of one organisation. Our area assessment was published in December 2009.

In the Area Assessment, green flags are awarded for exceptional performance from which others can learn; red flags are used to highlight significant concerns where action is needed. Oxfordshire received no red flags or green flags. We were praised for a number of strengths including:

- protecting the environment for future generations
- good partnership working to keep young people out of trouble
- responding well to the summer floods in 2007 and 2008

Overall the Audit Commission indicate that people in Oxfordshire get good value for money from their public services. The Audit Commission would like to see the pace of action quicken in relation to work to address the cycle of deprivation. Educational attainment was also flagged as an area that requires further partnership working. Congestion on Oxfordshire's roads was also mentioned, as was provision of affordable housing particularly in rural areas.

The areas highlighted for improvement provide no surprises for the Partnership and plans are largely in place that address the issues raised by the inspectors. The inspection report notes our current and planned partnership work to improve performance in areas such as:

- Reducing the amount of waste sent to landfill
- Reducing the numbers of people going into hospital by improved preventative work
- Fear of crime
- Teenage conception

There are specific areas for which the inspectors have said they wish to see a change in pace. These are: -

- Oxfordshire Economic Partnership – to ensure delivery

- Those Not in Education Employment and Training – to follow through on plans
- Educational attainment – to see evidence of improvement

There are additional areas where the Audit Commission and other inspectorates intend to do specific follow up work in 2010. They will seek evidence of a quickening pace to address the cross-cutting priority of breaking the cycle of deprivation. They will also turn a spot-light on:

- How successful we have been at meeting our carbon reduction targets
- Provision of affordable housing particularly in rural areas
- Community cohesion in Oxford and Cherwell
- Reducing the impact of alcohol consumption especially in Oxford City.

There is a multi-agency group of lead officers taking responsibility for the CAA and ensuring plans are in place to address priorities.

D. National political direction

We know there will be an election later in 2010 and all three major political parties have indicated the importance of working in partnership. There is a clear shift towards localism and putting decision making and influence with local communities. Added to the pressure for public sector to be more efficient there is scope for strategic partnerships to take a key role going forwards.

E. Best practice from other areas

The Partnerships and Communities team are currently visiting other areas such as Buckinghamshire and Gloucestershire and will report back at the July meeting.