

**ALLERDALE BOROUGH COUNCIL
COPELAND BOROUGH COUNCIL
CUMBRIA COUNTY COUNCIL**

JOINT SCRUTINY REVIEW

WEST CUMBRIA STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

NOVEMBER 2006

Membership:

Allerdale BC	Copeland BC	Cumbria CC
Cllr Mrs Margaret Jackson, (Chair)	Cllr Mrs Anne Bradshaw, (Deputy Chair)	Cllr Ray Cole
Cllr Jeffrey Gardner	Cllr Keith Hitchen	Cllr Duncan Fairbairn
Cllr Margaret Snaith	Cllr Mrs Yvonne Clarkson	Cllr Tim Knowles
Cllr Les Lytollis	Cllr Mrs Margaret Woodburn	Cllr Anthony Markley

Introduction and Terms of Reference for the Review

- 1.1 In April 2006 a joint scrutiny working group of the three local authorities in West Cumbria was formed, in accordance with guidance and best practice, to offer a scrutiny function for the West Cumbria Strategic Partnership.
- 1.2 A perceived, pressing need for scrutiny to input into the Annual Review of the West Cumbria Strategic Partnership to be submitted in June 2006 to the Government Office North West (GONW) was key to the haste in which the working group was formed.
- 1.3 Scrutiny Members, however, were reluctant, owing to the short timescale, to comment on the content of the Annual Review before the deadline for submission to GONW and set themselves the following terms of reference at their meeting on the 12th June:

“To review the processes of the West Cumbria Strategic Partnership including those to be used in creating an effective Community Strategy, and to challenge performance through the Annual Review (*in effect GONW’s assessment*) and any action plans arising from the Annual Review.”

- 1.4 Overview and Scrutiny Members have acknowledged the steep learning curve they have faced in carrying out this scrutiny work and, as their knowledge and interest has increased, it is expected that further reports will arise from regular performance monitoring of the whole of ‘West Cumbria’ and not solely of neighbourhood renewal areas .
- 1.5 The evidence the working group has considered includes evidence from the Interim Director of Neighbourhood Renewal, from the WCSP Coordination Unit, from the Coordinator, from Clare Babbs, the Department for Communities and Local Government’s Neighbourhood Renewal Area Adviser, the Chair of the West Cumbria Strategic Partnership, and written evidence from the Chief Executives.

It has considered Government evaluations of the West Cumbria Strategic Partnership from 2000-2006, monitored progress to meet the conditions set by GONW and it has used a best practice partnership evaluation toolkit to help inform its recommendations.

- 1.6 Members' primary concern in this initial stage of scrutiny has been the effective operation of the West Cumbria Strategic Partnership. It was recognised that the Amber/Green assessment was a conditional assessment and that failure to secure an unconditional assessment would result in financial penalties.

'The processes of the West Cumbria Strategic Partnership'

- 2.1 In comparing previous annual review assessments with evidence received from the Neighbourhood Renewal Area Adviser, and in considering the partnership against an evaluation process, it was recognised that the West Cumbria Strategic Partnership was beginning to regain some ground.

Members considered that the WCSP did measure outputs and performance (at least in the Neighbourhood Renewal Areas), that it was open and transparent, that it showed a willingness to be inclusive and impartial, and that it was adaptable.

- 2.2 Where there continued to be acknowledged weaknesses, it was equally recognised that some effort was being made to improve and Scrutiny Members have largely focused their attention on these areas, particularly as these have been a concern for a number of years.....the three Cs:

- Clarity of Purpose
- Clarity of Roles
- Communication

Clarity of Purpose

- 2.3 It is recognised that while there has been some effort of late to broaden the understanding and appeal of the West Cumbria Strategic Partnership, the forthcoming appointment of a new Director of Public Service Delivery, a change of Government emphasis to evaluate the whole of the WCSP, and the development of the Strategy for Sustainable Communities and the Local Area Agreement provides a golden opportunity for a fresh start.
- 2.4 At one level, the West Cumbria Strategic Partnership is the glue which binds together public, community, voluntary and private sector agencies to deliver government- set targets. This is acknowledged as an important role, not least in addressing social exclusion and deprivation issues, but also in drawing down funding.

- 2.5 At another level, however, it would be hoped that the Partnership would provide the drive, energy and above all the vision to deliver aspirations of ALL of the communities it serves, particularly given that their vision should inform and direct public agencies in developing delivery priorities beyond simply reflecting Government targets.

This comment is not intended as any reflection on the commitment and obvious hard work and enthusiasm of many people from all sectors of the Partnership, but is rather to question whether the West Cumbria Strategic Partnership currently drives delivery for ALL the communities it serves.

- 2.6 For example, some Members would argue quite strongly that there are issues in rural communities in both District Council areas, which have similar consequences in relation to the size of their local populations to those faced by urban areas and which they feel are not currently being addressed. They feel remote from and have difficulty in engaging with the Partnership.

- 2.7 To assist in clarifying the purpose of the West Cumbria Strategic Partnership, the working group would like to recommend

R1: That care is taken in the development of the Sustainable Communities Strategy to spell out the purpose of the West Cumbria Strategic Partnership and for whom the Partners intend to deliver.

R2: That Membership of the Board and the Thematic Groups are subject to a holistic review to ensure that there is adequate representation from all communities. (It is acknowledged that in part, this recommendation echoes the recommendation of the county-wide joint scrutiny group who considered the Local Area Agreement.).

R3: That performance management information for all WCSP's 'neighbourhoods' is considered on a regular basis by the Board; and that

R4: Performance management information for all the neighbourhoods are supplied to Overview and Scrutiny on a regular basis.

- 2.9 Members have chosen not to currently comment on the content of an early draft of the Strategy for Sustainable Communities (there will be future occasions), but have considered the development process. They have noted the consultation list, but still have some reservations on the grounds that the Partnership's Membership needs to fully reflect local communities before its strategy can be owned by all communities.

Clarity of roles and responsibilities

- 3.1 Assuming that the purpose of the West Cumbria Strategic Partnership is now better defined and understood through the development of a new strategy, Members feel it would be equally helpful to better define roles and responsibilities of partner organisations and their representatives.
- 3.2 In this respect, Scrutiny Members would like to recommend
- R5 that the terms of reference for the WCSP Board reflect the current constitution or, alternatively, that the constitution is amended to reflect current Membership and approved by the Member Councils; and that the terms of reference for the Thematic Groups Groups are refreshed to more clearly define their roles.**
- R6 that Reporting structures between the WCSP Board and the WCSP Thematic Groups are introduced, clarifying how they will report and delegate to one another, and that similar reporting structures are introduced clarifying reporting between the Cumbria Strategic Partnership and the West Cumbria Strategic Partnership.**
- R7 that formal reporting structures be introduced between the WCSP Board and Member Councils – given the leadership role the local authorities require to take, then ultimate ownership of the partnership must lie with the 100+ elected members who represent the local authority geographical areas of Allerdale and Copeland.**
- 3.3 Scrutiny Members feel that if the purpose of the WCSP becomes clearer and roles and responsibilities are made clearer, then it may equally be helpful to define the role and responsibilities of the representatives from partner organisations. They feel that lack of clarity in the past, may have contributed to some of the tensions of the past. Looking to the future, Members would also like to recommend that
- R8 the introduction of job descriptions for Board Members and the Chairs of the Thematic Groups, setting out expectations and defining their role, would be a helpful way forward.**

3.4 If any of the above recommendations are to be meaningful, Scrutiny Members would also like to recommend,

R9 that a comprehensive training plan is introduced for all those directly and indirectly contributing to the success of the Partnership (staff and elected Members).

Communication

4.1 Appropriate communication is key to the future success of the partnership. If people, irrespective of the contribution they make, do not have ready and timely access to the information they need or fail to appreciate the context of their contribution or are inundated with a barrage of information which is not appropriately targeted, then it is hardly surprising that people either fail to engage or 'disengage'.

4.2 In the evidence Members received from Clare Babbs, Neighbourhood Renewal Area adviser, Members were made aware that private sector partners in particular saw the West Cumbria Strategic Partnership as too time-consuming and irrelevant. This is in spite of the undoubted contribution the private sector makes to local communities, for example its co-operation with the route to work programme which saw 126 local people previously on incapacity benefit find private sector employment. This sector needs to be encouraged back into the West Cumbria Strategic Partnership in a way which is relevant to them.

4.3 The working group would suggest that these relationships, within the partnership, with parent bodies, with private sector, need careful management and well-targeted information. With this in mind, the working group would also like to recommend

R10 that a meaningful communication audit and subsequent strategy is introduced, which is likely to include

- **An up-to-date web site where agendas, minutes and papers for Board and thematic group meetings are easily found.**
- **That the information flow is more specifically targeted and that perhaps a parallel gateway for businesses, bringing together Local Chamber of Commerce members and bigger local business, is developed along similar lines as the community gateway.**

- 4.4 The Scrutiny Members were very supportive of the additional resources made of late to the West Cumbria Strategic Partnership Co-ordination Unit, acknowledging that this unit has been under-resourced for some considerable time and are hopeful that this level of commitment will be sustained (even allowing for their reservations about salary scales). However, it is suggested that additional resources may be needed in support of good communications, particularly with respect to IT.

Conclusion

- 5.1 Members have recognised that a good deal of effort has been put into meeting short-term goals in the past year. The recommendations contained in this report seek to move the Partnership forward again. As has become evident from the monitoring the working group has undertaken, the challenges faced are not underestimated.
- 5.2 The recommendations made reflect the recognition of the Partnership's willingness to be inclusive and impartial. Recommendations made with respect to clarifying roles and responsibilities would be hoped to move progress in a positive way.
- 5.3 Should the West Cumbria Strategic Partnership finds itself able to move forward and accept the recommendations made, then the working group would suggest one further recommendation:
- R11 That a high profile re-launch of the partnership is undertaken in early summer 2007, with a new director, new strategy and new ways of working, giving fresh energy and drive to the local strategic partnership.**