

Regional and local government working together to take forward agreed management priorities - UK

1. Policy Objective & Theme

- SUSTAINABLE USE OF RESOURCES: Preserving coastal environment (its functioning and integrity) to share space
- SUSTAINABLE USE OF RESOURCES: Sound use of resources and promotion of less resource intensive processes/products
- SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH: Balancing economic, social, cultural development whilst enhancing environment

2. Key Approaches

- Integration
- Participation

3. Experiences that can be exchanged

A mechanism of governing where the decision-making power is de-centralised through Agreements with regional authorities (county level or equivalent). Development of management plans and their implementation is then conducted by Strategic Partnerships between these authorities and key stakeholders. This mechanism helps to meet the needs of the community while reducing bureaucracy.

4. Overview of the case

Agreements between central government and the regional authorities are known as Local Area Agreements or LAAs (but hereafter called Agreements) and have been set up so that central government departments can delegate detailed, day-to-day, decision-making power. This case describes how Agreements can be used to support the goals of regional authorities. It further shows how the regional authority is working together with other stakeholders and services in Partnerships to set out plans for the places that they jointly represent. The Agreements give better engagement of authorities in leading this partnership work and in assessing what it achieves. They are an important opportunity for democratic leadership of the area and all its public services.

5. Context and Objectives

a) Context

There has been increasing recognition that sub-national priorities need to be determined by the communities concerned and that the best interests of sub-national areas cannot necessarily be served directly by central government. This has led to the development of Agreements between central government and regional authority (county level or equivalent), starting with 20 pilot areas in England, in 2004/05. They define agreed targets between central government and regional authorities, on outcomes delivered by the regional authority alone or in partnership with relevant stakeholders. As of June 2008, these Agreements are in place for all regional authority areas in England.

b) Objectives

1. That central government and the regional authorities reach Agreement on the priorities for a local area, and,

2. that regional authorities involve the relevant partners and stakeholders by setting up a Partnership.

6. Implementation of the ICZM Approach (i.e. management, tools, resources)

a) Management

The regional authorities are responsible for drawing up the Agreements with central government. The regional authority is then responsible for the overall development and delivery of the Agreement outcomes. The regional authority generally forms a Strategic Partnership with other service providers, community, voluntary and business representation for implementation. This body is non-statutory. It brings in, and provides a framework for, liaison, co-ordination and agreement of priorities for the locality. There is no specified structure for the Partnerships although the regional authority is always the lead partner and the statutory responsible body.

b) ICZM tools

The Agreement is a 3 year contract between central government and a regional authority which work together to develop and implement these Agreements. It is the intention that the Agreements tackle the area's most important problems and goals for the future. Targets are included which are priorities agreed between the regional authorities, other public services and the government. They are drawn from a National Indicator Set although other targets can also be included. These Agreements are statutory, required by law under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. The regional authority has a democratic mandate and a duty to produce a long-term vision for the area. These councils, therefore, have to work together to make a success of the Agreements in co-operation with other public services. They have created a stronger means for elected regional politicians to deliver wide-ranging sustainable community strategies to improve the place they represent.

Implementation by the regional authority is through Partnerships which bring together, representatives of public, private, community and voluntary sectors as well as representatives from both central government and the regional authority (in the UK, they are known as Local Strategic Partnerships or LSPs but hereafter called Partnerships). Such a Partnership is a single, multi-agency body that relates to the authority boundaries. The authority takes the lead role and encourages the engagement of others. They are non-statutory, non executive bodies and can take many different forms. The Partnerships are generally involved in the development of the community strategy providing a framework for liaison, coordination and agreement of priorities for the locality, without having many staff or large budgets of their own. There is often a board, and a wider membership which meets less frequently. There may be sub-partnerships covering specific issues e.g. environment.

This new legal duty to involve the community in regional government services is designed to encourage the development of systematic strategies for involvement which can be used to encourage links within regional work e.g. links with neighbourhood and locality, and joint work with the other partner organisations.

7. Cost and resources

No information available.

8. Effectiveness (i.e. were the foreseen goals/objectives of the work reached?)

The Agreements delegate decision-making, reduce bureaucracy, simplify central funding and allow greater flexibility for local solutions to local circumstances. Generally, most Agreements are managed effectively and an independent evaluation concluded that they successfully achieve many of the goals set. This is reinforced by widespread support for continuing the process. Regional authorities, partners and Governmental Organisations have largely welcomed the initiative. If local partnerships and central government are in broad agreement about priorities then central government policy objectives can be achieved via goals related to local vision. There are currently 152 Agreements in operation.

9. Success and Fail factors

Sometimes, regional authorities have been slow to engage the relevant partners. Considering they were only introduced in 2004, however, these problems have not been considered detrimental to the process. Equally importantly, there has been recognition that Agreements can be different from each other. Central government offices have played an important role in helping local partnerships although the single most important factor seems to have been a determination by local players to improve outcomes. Increased efficiency, cutting costs, reducing bureaucracy and rationalising performance management systems have all variously been seen as important aspects. Adequate preparation is essential if participants are to be confident about entering into negotiations and the Agreement process needs to include sufficient time at the beginning to allow for this preparation to occur and participants need to be aware of the amount of time needed to prepare and to make good use of the early stages of the process. A clear process and set of criteria for establishing priorities provides greater confidence in and ownership of the outcome. Face to face meetings are reported to be very valuable in helping to progress negotiations although these may either be meetings of all the partners or a range of bilateral meetings focussing on specific issues. Agreeing outcomes has sometimes been difficult thus delaying the process.

10. Unforeseen outcomes

Agreements have led to new relationships being formed and furthering the link between agreed targets and the actions of individual partners. They have increased the understanding of local partnerships and Government Organisations about each others' perspectives

11. Prepared by

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12. Verified by

It was not possible to verify this case.


13. Sources

- A process evaluation of the negotiation of pilot Local Area Agreements (2005). Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: London.
- A strategy for promoting an integrated approach to the management of coastal areas in England (2008). DEFRA Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, London.
- Changing places: Local Area Agreements and two-tier local government (2008). The Local Government Association, London.
- Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities Statutory Guidance (2008) Dept. for Communities and Local Government, London
- Developing the future arrangements for Local Area Agreements (2007). Dept for Communities and Local Govt., London.
- LAA Annual Review 2008/09 (2008). Department for Communities and Local Government
- LAA Dry-run negotiations Final Report: Headline Messages (2007) Department for Communities and Local Government, London.
- LAA negotiations in 2008: Lessons Learnt (2008). Department for Communities and Local Government, London.
- Long Term Evaluation of Local Area Agreements and Local Strategic Partnerships: Case Studies Issues Paper (2008). Department for Communities and Local Government: London.
- www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/performanceframeworkpartnerships/localareaagreements/












A Process evaluation of the negotiation of LAAs (633.17 KB) 

A strategy for promoting an integrated approach (2.25 MB) 

Changing Places - LAAs and two tier government (229.95 KB) 

Creating strong safe and prosperous communities (441.47 KB) 

-  Developing the future arrangements for LAAs (382.84 KB) 
-  Dry run negotiations Final Report (540.77 KB) 
-  LAA Annual Review 08-09 (312.48 KB) 
-  Lessons learnt (166.03 KB) 
-  Long term evaluation of LAAs (281.16 KB) 