



Local Government Association

changing places

Local Area Agreements and two-tier local government



introduction

Councils are providing leadership for changing places. This publication discusses how areas with two tiers of local government can use the new Local Area Agreements (LAAs) to support their goals. It shows how councils are working together with other services to set out plans for the places that they jointly represent. It gives ideas to develop better engagement of councillors in leading this partnership work, and in assessing what it achieves.

The new LAAs are an important opportunity for democratic leadership of the area and all its public services. The LAA should take forward in partnership the main democratically determined priorities of the area, with co-operation from other public services. This creates a stronger means for elected councillors to deliver wide-ranging sustainable community strategies to improve the place they represent. LAAs also provide a means to agree a limited number of targets of importance to both local and central government; recognised as relevant to the place concerned.

In areas with two tiers of local government, LAAs are county-wide. Both county and district councils have democratic mandates, and a duty to produce a long-term vision for the area. These councils will need to work together to make a success of the new LAAs; this publication sets out some early thinking and experience of how this can be done.

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Local Strategic Partnerships in two-tier areas

LAAAs are all about making a success of partnership working, and at their core should be an effective partnership between county council and district councils. This partnership between councils will then be developed through the Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs), bringing in other service providers, community, voluntary and business representation.

In brief: LSPs

- A LSP is a single multi-agency body that relates to council boundaries. LSPs aim to bring together locally, representatives of public, private, community and voluntary sectors. The council takes a lead role and encourages the engagement of others.
- LSPs are non-statutory bodies, although arrangements are now the subject of statutory guidance under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.
- There is no single pattern for two-tier areas, but some form of LSP typically exists at the geographical levels of the districts and the county.
- The LSP is generally involved in the development of the community strategy and LAA. LSPs are not executive bodies; they provide a framework for liaison, co-ordination and agreement of priorities for the locality, without having many staff or large budgets of their own.
- Typically, the LSP has a structure of sub-partnerships covering issues such as crime and disorder, environment, and so on. There is often a board, and a wider membership which meets less frequently.

There are various options for organising LSPs in two-tier areas. Factors to consider in deciding the arrangements include:

- the need to reflect dual **democratic mandates** and patterns of political leadership (for example it may be easier to create very integrated arrangements if one political party dominates all the councils in the area);
- boundaries of the **other organisations** important to the partnership, such as primary care trusts, or police;
- **geography of the area** including patterns of travel, common characteristics of areas, and local patterns of community identity;
- size and scale of the county including both **distance and size of population**, which will impact on opportunities for community engagement;
- the need to provide for various requirements for **sub-partnerships** (such as crime and disorder reduction partnerships) and for implementation of statutory plans (for example local development frameworks, children and young people's plans), some of which are at county level, some at district level.

Some form of LSP frequently exists at the geographical levels of the districts and the county. In some counties, LSPs are at a district level, and a county-wide public service board or LAA executive has been created to lead the LAA partnership. The latter will have district and county representation, and generally other public services. In some other counties there are LSPs at two levels, generally with district representation on the county-wide body. Another option is to have a county-wide LSP, with other arrangements determined

by shared geographical interests: in Kent, Cornwall, Suffolk and other areas there are LSPs representing two or more adjoining district council areas.


Arrangements need to take account of sub-partnerships, some of which (such as children's trusts) are county-wide, others (such as crime and disorder reduction partnerships) which exist at a district level. Statutory guidance on LSPs, under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, called *Creating strong, safe and prosperous communities* has been published, and is available from the Communities and Local Government (CLG) website.

In Kent, there is a county-wide **Kent Partnership**. The partnership has established a public service board to improve co-ordination between public services, and this has a steering group dealing with implementation and performance management. There are twelve district councils, and four districts in East Kent have developed a cluster model, so there are nine LSPs. The Kent Partnership also has various thematic sub-groups, and there are county-wide groupings of the service bodies involved in the partnership. For example, Kent council chief executives meet separately as a group.

In Suffolk, which has seven districts, there is a county-wide **Suffolk Strategic Partnership**, and six LSPs at a more local level, one covering two and a half districts in Western Suffolk, one covering half of the Babergh district, and the others relating to district boundaries. Each of the six chairs of the more local LSPs (who are leaders of the local authorities) also sit on the county-wide LSP. This relationship is strengthened by each district/borough LSP having a 'chapter'

in the countywide community strategy document reflecting their local priorities. The LAA is managed by an accountable bodies group which includes the county council leader, and the leaders of all the seven districts. Suffolk County Council currently has locality arrangements which ensure that they maintain a corporate presence in localities (districts/boroughs). Seven directors/assistant directors within Suffolk County Council also have a geographical responsibility as well as their service responsibilities. Each is involved with the LSP in their given area and convenes regular meetings with Suffolk County Council elected members in that geographical area to keep them abreast of key developments, and give them the opportunity to raise issues within that locality.

The **Hampshire Senate** has been established with a key aim to improve the governance of the LAA. The members of the senate are the twelve leaders, of the county council and the 11 districts, each with equal status (on the principle of the USA Senate, that representation does not relate to the size of the state represented). The Hampshire Senate will also include public service providers that cover the full spectrum of issues to be tackled under the LAA, including crime, health, social care, education, planning, recycling, fire and the economy. The aim is leadership to drive change, not detailed process management. Its three main areas of focus are ensuring democratic input into the LAA; looking at the potential for shared services efficiencies across the councils; and place-shaping at a strategic level county-wide. The Senate will aim to make an impact on regional and national issues. The new arrangements are intended to strengthen the democratic influence over partnership working.



In Buckinghamshire, the **Bucks Strategic Partnership** includes all the council leaders – county council and all four districts – on its board, and the chairs of the thematic partnerships such as the Children’s Trust. Some of these are portfolio holders, providing additional democratic representation. The LSPs for the four districts: Aylesbury Vale, Chiltern, South Buckinghamshire, and Wycombe, include district and county councillors. There is also an annual conference to provide a wider forum to agree the BSP priorities. Work between Buckinghamshire County Council and the four districts: Aylesbury Vale, Chiltern, South Buckinghamshire, and Wycombe, is also shaped by their two-tier pathfinder programme.

This is one of five Pathfinders agreed nationally with CLG. Governance is provided by: a leaders group of the five council leaders; a joint improvement board of five county councillors; and four district councillors, none of whom are council leaders, but some of whom are cabinet members; and project groups for various work streams, primarily of council managers, but with councillor involvement in some cases. The joint improvement board monitors the various work streams of the pathfinder programme, with each led by a chief executive of one of the councils. Examples of work streams are a combined approach to community involvement, work on waste issues, a big programme of shared services between the councils, covering back-office activities such as finance, human resources, payroll, and others. Value for money is an important focus of these programmes.

engaging councillors in LSPs

Councils are expected to provide a democratic leadership role for LSPs. This is emphasised by the 2006 white paper, *Strong and Prosperous Communities*. However, although the leader of the council and other cabinet members are likely to be very engaged with the LSP, back-bench councillors may feel marginalised. In developing a county-wide LAA, both district and county councillors need to be involved. There are a range of factors which may help ensure this:

- ensure that there are mechanisms for **political liaison** as well as managerial links, for example a leaders’ group (used in Hertfordshire, and Buckinghamshire, amongst others);
- in many areas, the **LSP chair** is leader of the council, but some LSPs prefer either a rotating chair from the main partner organisations, or an independent chair. As county-wide LSPs often include the district LSP chairs, it is important that this person is able to take on this representative role and act as a decision-maker. It may be that the elected council leader is better able to fulfil this role;
- some councillors will have **leadership roles** in other organisations, for example as members of the police authority or the board of the regional development agency, and these are a source of expertise for the council’s partnership work;
- strong member engagement in the development and agreement of the **sustainable community strategy** provides a basis for the work of the LSP and the development of the LAA.

- arrangements must be made to involve councillors from districts and county in **strategy development**. Clear plans should be made to involve councillors with wider community engagement such as workshops and roadshows;
- the work of the LSP can be linked to **area-based arrangements**, such as neighbourhood/area forums. These can bring together councillors from county and district (and parish representation) as well as representatives from partner organisations such as the police;
- councillors, particularly backbench councillors, need to be kept informed about the work of the LSP and related partnerships. Newsletters, website, briefings, workshops, and joint training can all be useful **tools of communication**;
- clear accountability back to the **council meeting** is important, such as regular leader's reports from the LSP, with an opportunity for questions. Often LSPs operate with an executive, plus a regular community conference to widen engagement with the LSP: all councillors should be invited to this;
- ensure that there is **wide member involvement** from both tiers in partnerships and sub-partnerships: this can include cabinet members, and councillors who are not members of the executive, including relevant scrutiny chairs;
- review **accountability and openness** of the LSPs. A scrutiny enquiry is one route to develop ideas on how to improve member engagement with the LSPs. Ensure links from the neighbourhood to the LSP, as a way to engage ward members.

developing a sustainable community strategy

The new LAAs are a means of implementing the longer-term vision for the area, set out in the sustainable community strategy. This will be underpinned by more specific strategies for children, for crime reduction, and for health, amongst others.

In brief: the sustainable community strategy

- A community strategy sets out a long-term vision for an area, council-wide, backed up by action plans to achieve it.
- It is a requirement of the Local Government Act 2000 that every local authority should prepare a community strategy 'for promoting or improving the economic, social and environmental well-being of their area and contributing to the achievement of sustainable development in the United Kingdom'.
- Both district and county councils have legal duties under the Local Government Act 2000 to produce a community strategy (now known as a sustainable community strategy).

LSP arrangements need to take account of the different responsibilities of counties and districts for strategy development. All councils, counties and districts, have a legal duty to develop a sustainable community strategy, although the *Creating strong, safe and prosperous communities statutory guidance* (2008) suggests this can be in a way which is integrated county-wide. For example, East Sussex and Suffolk are among counties which have a county-wide sustainable community strategy with district chapters. The housing and homelessness strategy (a district responsibility) is

often now integrated with the sustainable community strategy. Arrangements for strategy development also need to accommodate the responsibilities of districts in developing local development frameworks.

This suggests that an integrated approach to the sustainable community strategy in two-tier areas must recognise both geographical levels, but in a co-ordinated way. Options include a county-wide strategy with district 'chapters', county involvement in primarily district level strategies, or agreement on strategies which are planned to focus on appropriate themes. The ambition to create greater integration between sustainable community strategy and local development framework is well advanced in many areas, for example through combined public consultation, and a common core strategy. This indicates the importance of the district level strategy and LSP.

Cambridgeshire's Vision sets out high-level goals for the future of the county. Developed and endorsed by the county council, the five district councils, health, police and fire services, the National Association of Local Councils (parish councils) and a range of voluntary and community bodies. It sets out a plan for 2007 to 2021, which is focused around five goals: growth of population, housing and expanded communities; economic prosperity based on Cambridgeshire as a centre of knowledge and innovation; meeting the challenges of environmental sustainability; supporting equality and inclusion of vulnerable groups and encouraging healthier lifestyles; engaging citizens and creating stronger communities. The five district-based sustainable community strategies, for Cambridge, South Cambridgeshire, East

Cambridgeshire, Fenland and Huntingdonshire, provide the building blocks for the county-wide vision. The vision identifies the particular needs and characteristics of each of these areas, including accommodating housing growth whilst preserving historic cities and valued landscape, helping areas with high levels of rural deprivation, and providing services in sparsely-populated areas. Specific outcomes are set out which can then be implemented through the county-wide LAA.

developing a LAA in two-tier areas

District and county councils will work together to develop and implement a three year LAA.

In brief: the LAA

- A LAA is a three year partnership agreement to take action to tackle the area's most important problems and goals for the future.
- In two-tier areas it is a partnership agreement between all councils, county-wide and other public services.
- Targets will be included which are priorities agreed between the council, other public services and the government, drawn from the National Indicator Set; other targets will be purely local.
- LAAs for 2008-11 are required by law under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

The new LAAs for 2008-11 build on the existing work to develop sustainable community strategies and partnership working between county and districts. Partnership is underpinned by a new legal 'duty to co-

operate' in negotiating the LAA, for a wide range of public services (listed in the appendix).

Drawing on the sustainable community strategy, and a shared evidence base, the priorities for partnership action in the next three years are identified in the LAA. Up to 35 targets based on the National Indicator Set are agreed with government, plus whatever local targets the partnership decides to include locally. Although councils and other public services will agree priorities in co-operation, specific targets will be led by county or district councils, (and other public services) typically based on their functional responsibilities such as housing or education.

developing a shared evidence base

The **Oxfordshire Observatory** brings a wide range of data together (including from across both tiers of local government) in an online data observatory. This provides information on a number of key local topics including health, housing, and the economy, and is the single access point for data about the communities of Oxfordshire.


The observatory provides guidance on what type of data is available and how to access it as well as datasets, maps for key indicators and reports. A registered users area provides information on experimental data, new projects and data tools, and the observatory also runs an enquiry service, providing briefing notes, newsletters and presentations. The observatory has become an important tool for partners to discuss and understand key issues for the area using an agreed evidence base and, where possible, it supports strategic policy initiatives in the county.

Both the county and all district councils contribute to the funding of the observatory (along with the Oxfordshire Primary Care Trust) and are represented at the quarterly observatory steering group meetings. In so doing all councils play an important role in steering the strategic direction of the observatory.

Although the general public is a key audience for the observatory, data analysts, policy-makers and strategic decision-makers, county and district councils are its main client groups. As the observatory offers services specifically designed for use in local government it has become an important tool for data experts to identify trends but also for non-experts to help inform decision making. The observatory provides the evidence base to support the identification of LAA priorities through sustainable community strategy theme papers and additional contextual indicators that assist district councils with their local development frameworks.

The observatory is available at: <http://www.oxfordshireobservatory.info/wps/portal/dataobservatory>

Another shared evidence base to support decision-making is the **Lancashire profile**. Ambition Lancashire, the county-wide sustainable community strategy, was initially adopted by the Lancashire Partnership in 2005, and revised in 2008, to properly inform the 2008-2011 LAA, as well as taking the opportunity to recognise changes to significant strategies and policy issues.



In May 2007 the *State of Lancashire* evidence report that was originally produced for the first Ambition Lancashire was reviewed and reformatted. The revised *State of Lancashire* is now incorporated into the Lancashire profile website www.lancashireprofile.com and is continually monitored and updated. This provides an evidence base which can be used by the county council, districts and other partners. Data on a wide range of issues such as population, the local economy, the environment, and health is presented, and clickable maps provide access to information at the level of the 12 districts and two unitaries as well as county-wide information.

developing the LAA

Proactive from the outset in contributing to the LAA for Essex, **Harlow** District Council and the LSP, Harlow 2020, approached the LAA as an opportunity to deliver better outcomes for local people by recognising the diversity of places within Essex.

Asking its partners how they proposed to contribute to the delivery of improved outcomes provided the foundation for discussions which led to the clear identification of priorities and targets for Harlow within the context of Harlow's sustainable community strategy. This in turn led to the creation of the Harlow LAA and to its contribution to the Essex LAA.

Harlow worked on the basis of the need for an aggregation of contributions from places for an Essex based LAA rather than a dis-aggregation of whole county-based targets to places. For example, with male life expectancy across Essex varying by 18 years, a whole county target will not reflect this variance and

the need for it to be a higher priority in some places. Harlow consequently chose to include a local indicator around reducing the risk of cardiac arrest in men.— as this is a specifically local problem that needs local attention. Action to address this problem will improve the quality of life for residents and, cumulatively have an impact across the county as a whole.

The Harlow approach represents a shared, meaningful and dynamic partnership commitment that will make a real difference to people's lives through the identification, prioritisation and delivery of outcomes within the context of the places where people live. This approach has been central to the new Essex LAA for 2008-11 with chapters for each place (district/ borough) within Essex with the result that the new Essex LAA is much more place-centric.

In **Norfolk**, the county-wide community strategy, Norfolk Ambition, was refreshed in 2007. The aims of the refresh exercise were not only to review the priorities but also to get better "added value" from all partners, to develop an effective delivery structure and to design an improved planning framework which takes account of the needs of all communities in Norfolk. A seminar for all Norfolk LSPs was held in March 2007 following an agreement to work together on a shared approach for the definition and framework of sustainable community strategies at county and district level. Learning from the experience of the first round of community strategies, the partners identified the need to focus on fewer, clearer priorities and to focus at a county-wide level on areas where partners can work together to make a real difference on issues that impact across all their

agendas. With this in mind four priority areas were identified: skills, access, environment and vibrant communities. These priorities subsequently received approval from the district and county LSPs and there was a general consensus that they were the right priority issues for Norfolk.

community involvement in partnership work in two-tier areas

In brief: community involvement in partnership working

- LSPs are expected to have involvement from community and voluntary sector bodies in the locality, and to encourage wide community involvement in the development of strategies and priorities.
- In two-tier areas, both tiers will have community representation on the LSPs, and will want to encourage engagement with strategy development including LAAs. A co-ordinated approach is important.
- The new legal 'duty to involve' local people in local government services will encourage the development of systematic strategies for involvement, which can be used to encourage links between county and district work, links with neighbourhood and locality, and joint work with other partner organisations.

The development and achievement of the LAA will be supported by a wide programme of community involvement. This will include arrangements to include representatives of the organised community and voluntary sector on LSPs.

In two-tier areas, both tiers will have community representation on the LSPs, and will want to encourage engagement with strategy development including LAAs. A co-ordinated approach to the involvement of the community and voluntary sector in the partnership is important. Some forms of feedback, such as survey research, may be implemented at a county level. However, many forms of engagement involving meetings, forums, and so on, are likely to best take place at a more local level. This does not make community involvement a purely district council responsibility. It does mean that all the partners subject to the duty to co-operate, and in particular those involved in the LSP, will need to take a co-ordinated approach. The forthcoming 'duty to involve' (to be introduced for local government from 2009, and extended to other public services later) will encourage this. Some approaches two-tier areas may find helpful:

- councils have often found a council-wide involvement or **consultation strategy** helps to make the best use of opportunities. These could form the basis of two-tier links and co-ordination;
- joint consultation programmes for **strategy development** for the sustainable community strategy and the local development framework (for spatial or land use planning) have been used. Although LDFs are at a district level, they will have relevance to the county council, for example as the highways authority, and counties will need to contribute to this work;

- work **between councils and other service providers** (such as the police, or primary care trust) on community involvement includes shared survey panels/citizens panels, joint work within area or neighbourhood forums, and shared community conferences.

Much of the work of the **Hertfordshire** LSP is taken forward by a relatively small core group. To provide a balance for this, Hertfordshire Forward has a formalised wider conference of partners that meets annually. This conference allows broad representation of those not directly on the core group, including all district-based LSPs. It advises on the agenda of the core group and provides a challenge to its work, including the LAA.

As part of their two-tier pathfinder, **Buckinghamshire** are developing shared arrangements for community involvement. This joint approach to community engagement across two tiers is being piloted in Wycombe and in Aylesbury. This is based on forums defining nineteen community areas across the whole county. This will provide opportunities for community engagement with police and health as well as county and district councils. This links into LSP arrangements, and has relevance for the LAA because of its multi-functional approach.

assessing achievement of the LAA in two-tier areas

Councils and the LSP need to ensure that there are effective performance management arrangements locally to lead the achievement of the targets set out in the LAA, as well as other agreed ambitions. The new powers of scrutiny can be used to contribute to performance management, and to developing new ideas about how to tackle problems included in the LAA. External assessment will be made by the new Comprehensive Area Assessment.

performance management of the Local Area Agreement

LSPs generally have agreed protocols which set out the roles which each organisation within the partnership will play; this will include responsibilities for performance management. The LAA document sets out which organisations are signed up to contribute to the achievement of each of its targets. Generally there will be a lead organisation, and sometimes a lead individual, often amongst the lead organisations, depending on decisions taken locally.

Nationally, performance information on the National Indicator Set, including LAA targets, will be brought together in a national website, the Data Interchange Hub. www.communities.gov.uk/hub. Each indicator definition identifies which is the organisation responsible for collecting and publishing performance information: this may be a government department, national executive agency, or a council. This information will be available for data administrators locally to use for comparative information and other performance management activity.

Most targets in the LAA agreed with the government will be at a county-wide level. However, it is possible to agree LAA targets at a more local level, to reflect parts of the county where a problem is greatest, or related to a particular section of the population. There is then local choice to decide what additional analysis is needed for local use. For example, it may be useful locally to have performance information at district level, for particular neighbourhoods where the problem is greatest, to understand the needs of rural areas within the county, or to understand the needs of particular sections of the population. Such analysis will help focus effort and resources on where the problem is greatest.

In the summer of 2007 the **Lancashire Partnership** adopted a new structure to ensure that it would be better able to meet the anticipated requirements of the new LAA.

The Lancashire Partnership structure provides the framework within which the LAA has been developed and within which it will be implemented, managed and monitored. Complex arrangements are needed to manage partnership working for all the different targets, and to maintain both county-wide and more local focus. This is based on a ladder of support and intervention.

Performance of the LAA will be monitored by a partnership performance group reporting to the partnership executive. Membership will include the theme leads and partner LAA leads (including district councils, for example Wyre District Council leads the county-wide target on tackling fuel poverty) and will

be chaired by the county's head of performance. The county council has a cabinet committee on performance improvement, which will keep the county council's contribution to the LAA under review. District LSPs will look at relevant performance information for their area and will refer issues to district council executives where necessary.

Overall the achievement of targets contained within the agreement will benefit Lancashire as a whole. However some issues affect some parts of Lancashire and some sections of the population to a greater extent than others. Appropriate targets in the LAA have therefore also been developed by disaggregating them to the most appropriate spatial level and the one at which the most effective action can be taken. District LSPs have discussed how partners can work together at that level to achieve the greatest improvement and have set district targets that have been fed back into the county-wide projections. So for example, each district has an area target in relation to childhood obesity, which contributes to the county-led target. Some targets have been set with an aim of narrowing the gap between the parts of the county with the biggest problems and the average; an example is related to incidence of fires.

scrutiny powers in relation to the LAA

The new legislation brings additional council overview and scrutiny powers to support the effective implementation of LAAs. In two-tier areas this will need to be developed in a co-ordinated way.

In brief: scrutiny of LAAs

- New council overview and scrutiny powers to support the effective implementation of LAAs are given by the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.
- Organisations subject to the new 'duty to co-operate' with LAAs will be required to provide information to scrutiny investigations, and have regard to recommendations made by council scrutiny bodies, on issues where the organisation's work is relevant to specific LAA targets.
- In two-tier areas, the Act provides for joint scrutiny arrangements between county and district councils, for provision of information to district councils for the purpose of scrutiny, and for some specific aspects of these scrutiny powers to be conferred to district overview and scrutiny committees, depending on local decisions.

Organisations subject to the new 'duty to co-operate' (see appendix) will be required to provide information to scrutiny investigations, and have regard to recommendations made by council scrutiny bodies, on issues where the organisation has agreed and endorsed specific LAA targets. This will extend the scope to use council scrutiny as a tool of community leadership of the whole locality and its public services. These new powers do not apply to the police, to avoid conflict with the powers provided from the Police and Justice Act 2006. Those powers could be used to scrutinise police involvement in achieving local improvement targets, but until the home secretary brings them into law, police contributions to the LAA can be scrutinised on a voluntary basis.

The new powers for scrutiny of LAAs will enable council scrutiny committees or panels to: scrutinise local improvement targets (LAA targets); require information from partner organisations signed up to LAA targets; and, require these organisations to have regard to scrutiny recommendations which relate to a relevant local improvement target. Council scrutiny arrangements already have the power to investigate and report 'on matters which affect the authority's area or the inhabitants of that area.' This enables overview and scrutiny on any aspect of partnership working including the LAA locally.

Ways in which the new scrutiny powers could make a positive contribution to the achievement of the LAA include:

- providing an additional means for elected members (particularly those not on the executive) to contribute to **strategy development**, and agreeing the needs of the place and LAA priorities;
- enhancing **democratic accountability and openness** locally in relation to public services which are not under local democratic control;
- performance review: aiming to review and improve what is achieved by the LAA by taking an overview of **performance** against LAA targets;
- using **evidence-based scrutiny reviews** to find new ideas and solutions to achieve specific LAA priorities, through engaging councillors with community and users, partner organisations and independent experts, in finding new ways to tackle complex problems. This gives the LSP an investigative capacity which it would not otherwise have.

developing new scrutiny arrangements

In two-tier areas, these overview and scrutiny powers are given to county councils, as the LAA will be a county-wide agreement. There is also provision (through regulations) for joint scrutiny arrangements between county and district councils, for provision of information to district councils, and for some specific aspects of these scrutiny powers to be conferred on district overview and scrutiny committees.

Councils will need to think about how their existing scrutiny arrangements could use the new scrutiny powers, and whether changes to structures are needed. A new LAA scrutiny committee is one option, but thought needs to be given to how the LAA, covering a wide range of important priorities, may overlap with existing scrutiny committees. In two-tier areas a joint body could be established which plans, co-ordinates and manages scrutiny of the LAA, perhaps taking an overview of performance against targets and indicators, but also sets out a work programme to be carried out by other county and district scrutiny committees. A regular chairs' meeting is one option to provide this scrutiny management role. It is important to think about how scrutiny arrangements for partnership working in a two-tier area relate to the structure of the LSPs county-wide.

The earlier type of LAA was organised around four thematic blocks, and some councils linked their scrutiny arrangements to these blocks. These four blocks are no longer required, but some kind of locally-defined themes are likely as a way of structuring the new LAAs, and this may provide a framework for organising scrutiny. Specific scrutiny

investigations concerning the LAA could be provided by panels including county and district councillors. For example one particular challenging LAA target, on climate change, on the local economy, or on a particular health issue, could be investigated, hearing from expert witnesses, from service users, and from other places which are taking an innovative approach. This would help identify new ways to tackle complex problems. There are already examples of successful two-tier scrutiny projects of this type.

Other issues to think about to help make a success of LAA scrutiny include:

- **building knowledge** and awareness of the new LAA and the new scrutiny powers: member awareness may be a particular issue for district councillors. On the other hand, councillors will have existing expertise from partnership working, such as health scrutiny;
- it will be important to **work with the LSP** and build understanding of how scrutiny arrangements will work with partnership, perhaps in the form of a protocol. The LSP or its executive will be taking a close interest in the performance management of the LAA, and it is important to clarify relative roles;
- the new scrutiny powers are added to a map of accountability for organisations within the LSP which is complicated. In developing a work plan it is vital to identify how **scrutiny can add value**, and not duplicate the role of the LSP board, the council leadership, and inspectorates. The role is to contribute to the achievement of the LAA: scrutinise the issues, not the partners;

- this expanded role will need **enhanced scrutiny support**, which is currently often very limited in district councils in particular. There will be ways in which scrutiny support can be shared between the different councils. It is also important that scrutiny support creates better links with council support for the LSP, as part of a co-ordinated democratic system.

In two-tier areas, styles of scrutiny working may vary between the different councils. This may be a benefit as councils can learn from each other, but councillors from different councils may start with different expectations. If a county-wide scrutiny forum doesn't exist it may be helpful to set one up: this could have an officers' group and a member group. This will help share ideas, encourage co-ordination, organise joint training and information, and get input from national and regional bodies. There may be scope to share support for new scrutiny work, to ensure best use of limited budgets and staffing.

In **Cambridgeshire**, there are five district LSPs, but no county LSP. There is a county-wide LAA board: Cambridgeshire Together. To provide democratic scrutiny of Cambridgeshire Together, a joint accountability committee was set up. This has five county councillors (mainly the county chairs of scrutiny committees), one from each of the five districts, and one councillor representative from the police authority. This will develop a work programme to scrutinise the new LAA, and is backed up by a recently established network of scrutiny officers, county-wide. A joint scrutiny conference was held for councillors from county and districts in Cambridgeshire to learn more about the new powers. This included case studies from the councils of their experience of scrutiny of services

external to the council.

Suffolk has a LAA joint scrutiny panel, which is made up of seven councillors from the Suffolk LGA (county and district councils) and six independent community members. This meets quarterly to review the delivery of the LAA. It reports to the Suffolk strategic partnership board and the partner organisations as appropriate. It works to ensure that it co-ordinates its activities with the other scrutiny committees, and produces an information bulletin.

A partnership scrutiny panel was established by **Staffordshire** County Council in 2006. Initially a panel of county councillors, with district co-option, it moved to a two-tier panel with full voting rights for county and district councillors. There are five county councillors and one councillor from each of the eight Staffordshire districts. In July 2007 it was expanded to include representatives from fire, police, and voluntary organisations. These representatives are invited to participate in panel meetings but without voting rights.

Buckinghamshire has a joint chairman's network for county and district scrutiny. This network set up a pioneering joint scrutiny task and finish group, with two councillors from the county and each of the districts, to review the effectiveness of the Buckinghamshire LAA in its early phase. It did this by investigating implementation of two current targets – on tackling drug dealing, and underage sales of alcohol, hearing from police, the drug and alcohol action team, and others. The report's recommendations identify how councillors from county

and districts will work together in future to ensure that the LAA delivers for the people that they represent.

Comprehensive Area Assessment and the LAA

External assessment of the achievement of the LAA and its impact on the needs of the area, will be made through the new Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA). In two-tier areas, this will be county wide. This will look at the needs and problems of the area as a whole, not just local government performance, and will replace the CPA.

In brief: the CAA

- The CAA is still in development and final plans will be published early in 2009. It is intended to provide citizen-focused and forward-looking information about the area and its needs, and how public services are contributing to tackling its problems.
- In two-tier areas, it will be a county-wide assessment of the needs, problems and likely future of the area, backed up with assessments of the use of resources and value-for-money assessments of each of the councils (county and districts) and other public services.
- It will review performance as measured by the agreed LAA, and other indicators from the National Indicator Set, and co-ordinated information from other inspectorates, the councils' own self-assessment and other evidence.

CAA will be introduced with effect from April 2009. It will replace CPA, children's services joint area reviews, APA of services for children and young people and social services star ratings for adult social care. Best value performance plans are also being abolished. CAA will assess those outcomes delivered by councils working alone or in partnership eg health and well-being, community safety and cohesion, sustainable communities, children's and older people's services. This represents a fundamental change in the way councils and their partners are assessed – moving away from the past performance of the council towards a forward-looking assessment of the prospects for the future achievement of shared priorities by the council and other local partners. The inspectorates will place greater weight in future on high-quality local performance management data and will also take full account of any joint self assessment undertaken by the council and partners.

In two-tier areas, there will be an organisational assessment of the county council, of each district council and of the fire and rescue authority, each looking at performance management and effective use of resources, including finance. There will be one county-wide assessment of the area looking at the local priorities and their relationship to community needs and wishes, how well the area is being improved by public services and the prospects for future improvement. The Audit Commission and inspectorates will publish assessments each November.

appendix

Duty to co-operate in preparing a LAA

The following organisations are defined in the Act as partner authorities with a duty to co-operate in negotiating and achieving the LAA:

- Arts Council
- The Broads Authority
- Chief Officer of Police
- District authorities
- English Heritage
- The Environment Agency
- Fire and rescue authorities
- Health and Safety Executive
- The Highways Agency
- Jobcentre Plus
- Joint Waste Authorities
- Joint Waste Disposal Authorities
- The Learning and Skills Council in England
- Local Probation Boards
- Metropolitan Passenger Transport Authorities
- Museums, Libraries and Archives Council
- National Park Authorities
- Natural England
- NHS Foundation Trusts
- NHS Health Trusts
- Police authorities
- Primary Care Trusts
- Probation Trusts and other providers of probation services
- Regional Development Agencies
- Sport England
- Transport for London
- Youth Offending Teams

This list can be added to by legislation or by order from the secretary of state.



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