

# RISK ASSESSING THE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES STRATEGY



PtP CASE STUDY  
APRIL 2009

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Interim and Project Management



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for a better future

## SUMMARY

Following an extensive period of consultation the Mid Sussex Partnership (MSP) developed a Sustainable Communities Strategy 2008-2018. This strategy is built around four key strategic themes - environment, community, economy and health. Each key theme contains 10 or 11 sub-objectives, totalling 43 in all.

Once the strategy was agreed, the MSP board was tasked with translating the ambitions it set for the partnership into action and driving the strategy forward. Board members were concerned about their capacity to do this effectively, however, given the size of the programme involved.



### Brief

The brief was to help the MSP identify where its efforts were most needed by identifying which sub-objectives were at greatest risk of failure. The work was overseen by the Community Partnerships team at Mid Sussex District Council (MSDC) and undertaken by Ellie Broughton, a local freelancer, who was appointed following a competitive selection process.

### Grant Funding:

The cost of the work was met by Progress through Partnership (PtP), whose role is to support the development of local strategic partnerships. PtP is funded by the regional improvement and efficiency partnership, Improvement and Efficiency South East (IESE).

## WORK UNDERTAKEN

In anticipation of the commission, the MSDC Partnerships team undertook a piece of work to identify the lead organisation and officer for each of the sub-objectives, along with any supporting strategies and initiatives.

A series of interviews were then undertaken with the lead officer(s) for each sub-objective, either in one-to-one or small group meetings, or by telephone. In addition, online research was used to check strategies, plans and progress in selected areas.

The purpose was to consider both the **probability** of the sub-objective being met, and the likely **impact** – e.g. on a particular client group and/or on the overall plan – if it were not met.

Key considerations for assessing likelihood were:

- Is a proposed area of activity statutory or discretionary?
- Is there a clear lead organisation and officer?
- Have partners identified the activity as one of their key priorities?
- What targets, plans, initiatives etc. are already in place?
- How simple or challenging is the sub-objective?
- Does it require partners to work together? (i.e. one set of decision making processes, or several?)
- What is the track record in this area – has progress already been achieved?
- Is delivery entirely within the MSP's/partners' control or are there significant factors beyond its sphere of influence?

On completion, the sub-objectives were then coloured green (good prospects of delivery, scoring 1 – 3), amber (some risk of non-delivery and recommended for MSP monitoring, scoring 4 - 6) or red (high risk, requiring intervention of some kind, scoring 7 - 9).



### Problems Encountered:

There were two key challenges in undertaking the work. Firstly, there was an ambitious time frame for completing it - approximately three weeks - and the 'right' people were not always available to speak to. Secondly, scoring is a relatively subjective exercise and benefits from wider discussion.

### Solutions Found:

Rather than aiming for a 'finished product', a degree of expediency was used: Ellie produced a draft colour-coded table based on her assessments of the risks for testing with a wider audience at a partnership conference. Working in break-out sessions aligned to the key themes of the strategy, delegates reviewed the allocated risk scores for each sub-objective, increasing or decreasing them as appropriate. Delegates also discussed where the MSP could most usefully make an impact and how that might best be achieved.

### Outcome:

The Sustainable Community Plan is now colour coded red-amber-green, with consensus achieved around the level of risk associated with each area of activity. The top three risks for each of the four themes have been identified, indicating where the MSP most needs to challenge and monitor progress. There is also consensus as to where the MSP needs to be proactive in championing an issue, finding solutions and directing resources. Finally, some specific partnership activities to tackle the priority areas have been proposed.

### Next Steps:

The set of 'red' objectives as well as the top three risks for each theme now form the basis of a work programme for the MSP board to oversee. This will include setting up 'task and finish' subgroups to tackle priority high-risk areas as well

as designating lead organisations and officers to champion them. Lead officers will report progress to the MSP routinely, with the MSP keeping risk scores under review to identify when and where their focus needs to change.

### Conclusion:

Risk assessments are an effective way of prioritising activities and resources and a good basis for engaging stakeholders in important decisions about local priorities and problem solving.

SUB-OBJECTIVE (ENVIRONMENT THEME)	RISK SCORE	COMMENTS
Clean, safe, accessible parks	3	core priority, Mid-Sussex Council service; multi agency resources to tackle fly-tipping and graffiti
Biodiversity – special regard to species that are vulnerable in climate change	4	Sussex Bio-diversity Plan in place; planning process offers protection; special interest groups exist. Climate change outside MSP control.
Ensure new development is planned with appropriate infrastructure	9	Credit crunch impacting on viability of development schemes. Work already stopped on some improvements.



### FURTHER INFORMATION

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