



# PtP Case Study: Medway LSP

## Building the necessary leadership to deliver an effective LAA

In the year leading up to the sign-off of its new style Local Area Agreement, Medway's local strategic partnership (LSP) began a journey of transformation in its structure and leadership enabling it to negotiate a more strategic, cross-cutting LAA with an unprecedented level of buy-in from partners, which is hoped to translate into successful delivery.

Through a process which included rigorous self examination, independent guidance and facilitation and wide consultation, the LSP has reconfigured itself to become a more streamlined partnership, with less thematic groupings and greater engagement of partners. This case study looks at the process and what has been learned so far.

**1.** Medway is a unitary council in Kent, covering Rochester, Strood, Chatham, Gillingham, Rainham, the nearby rural areas and the Hoo Peninsula. It is the second largest conurbation in the south east with a population of 250,000. Things are changing fast, however. Located within the Thames Gateway growth area, Medway will experience significant levels of growth in the next two decades – with 16,000 new

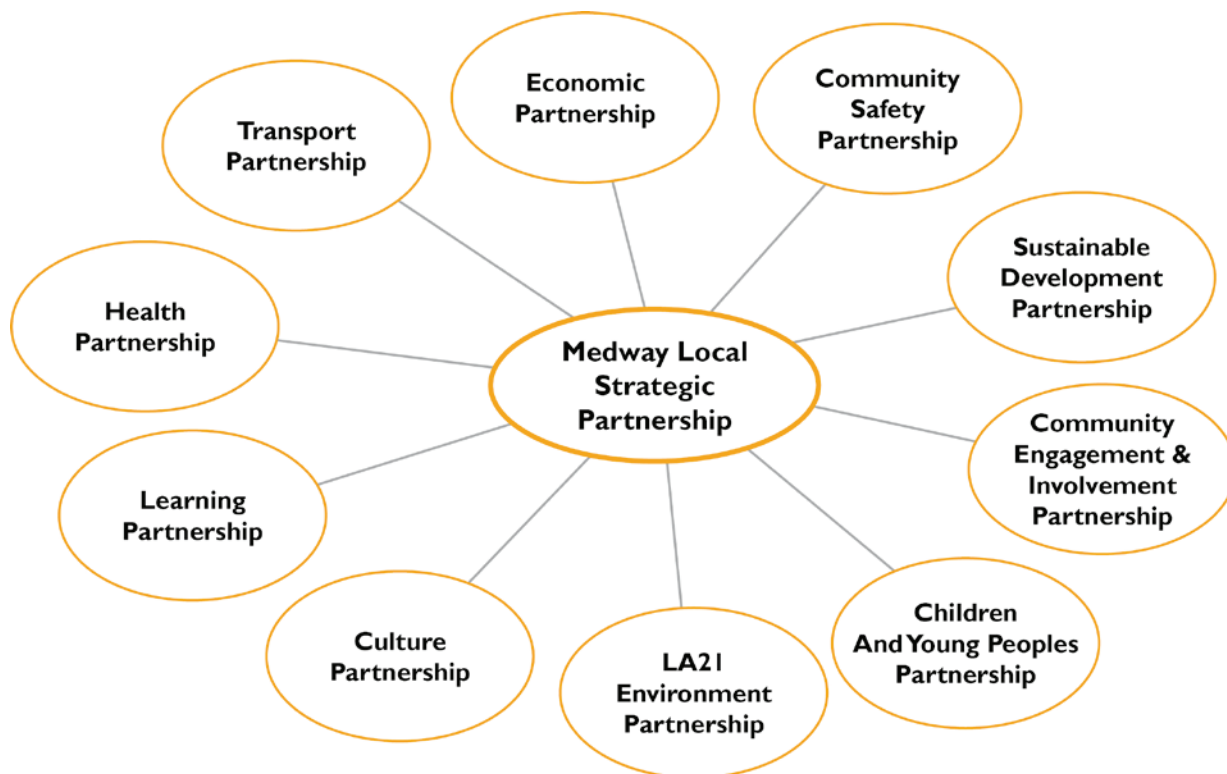
homes and 20,000 jobs planned for the area and population set to increase to 300,000 by 2025.

**2.** Medway's local strategic partnership signed off its first Local Area Agreement in April 2007. Prior to commencing LAA1 negotiations it had been acknowledged by LSP partners that the organisation was operating less as a partnership than as a 'talking shop' driven by the council. Although there was good support from the police, including joint funding of the LSP coordinator post, there was limited active engagement of other partners. There was a general acknowledgement within the LSP that it would need to change to become a body fit to deliver an effective LAA. The council's own corporate assessment in August 2006 had already explicitly recognised its overly dominant role. However, capacity constraints moving into LAA1 negotiations made any transformation impossible at that time.



3. Having only just undergone the LAA1 negotiation process, partners were unhappy with the prospect of repeating it with LAA2 for the April 2008 deadline. Furthermore, six months after the sign off, it was becoming apparent that delivery of LAA1 was impeded by inadequate buy-in by some partners and a lack of accountability to and from partner organisations. Some

of this was due to partners' own internal organisational challenges – in particular this applied to the primary care trust (PCT) which was undergoing significant change at the time; but many of the problems were associated with the structure and processes of the LSP itself. What was clear to all was that things needed to change for the next agreement.



#### Initiation – the conditions for change

4. There were a number of circumstances which created the conditions for change in Medway, notwithstanding the early soundings from within the LSP itself that 'things could not go on' as they were. These included:

- The need to negotiate LAA2
- The PtP self assessment procedure and consequently the opportunity to access development support
- Involvement in a Leadership Centre pilot on developing the leadership to deliver an excellent LAA
- The appointment of a new LSP manager
- Large scale physical change planned for the area

#### The need to negotiate LAA2

5. The new style local area agreements, by their nature, necessitate effective partnership working in order to be able to agree on and deliver fewer cross-cutting targets. It was widely accepted by members of the LSP that there was a need for change because of the challenges they had faced in negotiating – and delivering – their first LAA.

#### PtP self assessment

6. The capacity building programme for LSPs in the south east is called Progress through Partnership (PtP). In order to qualify for £6K worth of development and learning support, each LSP taking part in the programme is required to undertake a self assessment exercise to determine their development needs and identify learning activities to meet them. The process uses a 'traffic light' system to rate an LSP on various aspects of its performance.

7. Medway's LSP used the opportunity to embark on a rigorous self-analysis, undertaken by a range of partners represented on the LSP board including the council, police, PCT, voluntary sector and ethnic minority groups. It resulted in the partnership being rated 'green' for vision and strategy; 'amber' for governance arrangements, leadership, and performance management; and finally 'red' for delivery and impact.

8. It revealed that although the LSP was working well in a number of respects including having a strong needs-based vision expressed through its community plan, and good support from some partners, notably the police, it was ailing in others. These included:

- a lack of accountability to agencies involved and local people;
- lack of clarity over roles and responsibilities of different parts of the LSP;
- the work of the LSP not being adequately championed or promoted within partner organisations or built into their plans;
- poor channels of communication between the different parts of the LSP; and
- inadequate performance management arrangements.

9. Further, a number of key agencies were either not represented on the LSP board or not fully engaged with it. Although there was some recognition on the part of LSP partners prior to undertaking the self assessment that the organisation was not functioning as well as it might, the red rating on delivery worked as a 'wake-up call' to action. The LSP subsequently decided to use its £6K of learning support from PtP to buy time from the Leadership Centre facilitator to assist the process of change.

### Leadership centre pilot

10. Following the PtP self-assessment process and leading up to the new style LAA negotiations, Medway was invited by the Government Office to take part in a pilot programme run by the Leadership Centre for Local Government, which looked at how to develop the local leadership approach necessary to deliver 'excellent' LAAs. Medway was one of six LSPs in the south east involved in this programme, which initially comprised a stakeholder workshop and then a regional event. The Leadership Centre then increased its support by providing an adviser to work with the partnership over an extended period, as it became apparent that there was an opportunity to help accelerate and embed a deeper and more sustained process of change.

### A new LSP manager

11. The appointment of a new LSP manager at around the same time was also pivotal. The new manager came from a background of established partnership working across a range of public sector services, bringing a new set of skills to a post which was previously seen as having a more community development focus. Funded jointly by the council and the police, care was taken from the beginning to ensure that the manager post was recognised and promoted as working for the LSP – rather than as an agent of the council, as the previous manager had been seen.

### Physical change

12. With large scale physical change planned for the area under the Thames Gateway growth plans, the need for better partnership working was apparent to most agencies in Medway. The political leadership is committed to the concept that physical, social, economic and environmental regeneration should go hand in hand. This was the basis of the community plan agreed by the LSP as the first step in preparing the first LAA.

### The change process

13. Using the 'red' rating on delivery from the PtP self assessment results as a catalyst and starting point, the LSP began a process of change which was effected via a combination of a series of independently facilitated stakeholder events and workshops, wide consultation - and hard work. The steps taken are summarised below.

#### STEP 1

##### Gain consensus on the need for change: one to ones with lsp members

14. Many of the difficulties with the LSP had been documented through the PtP self assessment procedure but it was important to ensure that all partners accepted the need for change. The LSP partnership manager kicked off the process by taking the results of the self-assessment to most of the LSP board members and other key people, to get a shared view of what the issues were.

A 'surprisingly high' degree of consensus emerged, with wide acknowledgement that having ten thematic partnerships was unworkable. Further, although each thematic partnership had a seat on the LSP board, it was not always represented by its lead, meaning that links between strategy and delivery were weak. It was also accepted that the partnership was too process-driven, and that its focus should instead be on outcomes.

15. Success factors in this process included:

- An LSP manager who was seen to represent the LSP, not the council alone.
- Opportunity for one-to-one discussions with partners.
- Use of a catalyst – in this case the PtP self assessment.

## Step 2

### Establish consensus on priority outcomes: stakeholder event

16. Using an independent facilitator, a stakeholder event was held to establish the challenges ahead for Medway and by extension, the LSP. Invitees included the existing LSP board and others who had not previously been involved on the board including Jobcentre Plus, the probation service and the fire service. Broad agreement over the findings of the self assessment led into a session identifying the key issues ahead for Medway.

17. A series of short presentations from high level stakeholders on what they saw as the main challenges for Medway were followed by workshop sessions during which attendees sought to identify the priorities as they saw them. Again, through this process an unexpectedly strong consensus was arrived at, with between 6-10 clear priorities for Medway emerging from the event.

18. Once the outcome priorities had been agreed on, the workshop moved on to talk about structure and process – specifically, how the LSP needed to change to deliver on those priorities. That this involved a reduction in the number of thematic partnerships, and could be interpreted as an attack on some groups' power, made it a risky topic to raise so early in the process. However, again, there was wide agreement that some sort of rationalisation was necessary for the LSP to be effective.

19. Lessons from this part of the process included:

- The importance of getting wide support in recognising the need for change.
- Use of a catalyst to spark this agreement – in this case, the self-assessment results.
- Centre discussions around outcomes - rather than structures and process in isolation.
- Joint ownership of problems by all partners without any single partner dominating discussions – in this case, the distancing of the council.
- Willingness of partners to be open about weaknesses.

## Step 3

### Propose a way forward: drafting of new governance arrangements

20. The LSP manager undertook the drafting of new governance arrangements for a refined LSP that could deliver on the priorities that partners had jointly identified. She took her proposals, on a one-to-one basis, to a group which included, but was not limited to, those who had attended the stakeholder event. They were offered two options for governance reform, both of which involved a radical thinning down of the number of thematic partnerships making up the LSP.

21. This was a very labour-intensive process and it was here that some momentum was lost. Without sufficient resources to capitalise on the energy created during the stakeholder event, some support for the changes wavered and opposition emerged among those who had not been involved in the stakeholder event. This reinforced the need to improve linkages between the LSP board and thematic partnerships in any revised structure.

22. Rather than trying to push the changes through in spite of this resistance, it was decided that it would be better to take longer over the process and work through some of the objections with key people to solidify the consensus for change. At this stage the graphical presentation of the Red, Amber and Green ratings of the self assessment provided a great visual reminder for the need to change. As a result of the slowly-slowly approach, support was successfully gathered for the reduction from 10 to 5 lead partnerships.

23. Pivotal to the LSP manager's success was:

- Starting with a clean slate – no historic 'baggage'.
- Taking an independent stance – being seen to represent Medway's interests, not the council's.
- Valuing partners' previous contributions and showing them how they could continue to contribute in future.
- Getting buy-in on the need for change first, then dealing with the detail on how this is achieved.
- Taking the time to acknowledge and respond to resistance and if necessary, adapting the approach.
- Presenting partners with options rather than a fait accompli.
- Keeping an unfailing focus on the need for change.

## New governance arrangements

The new LSP arrangements comprise of three tiers, plus an operational group to embed a performance focus – as follows:

### LSP board

Includes the chief executive of key agencies and the chair of each of the thematic partnerships. JobCentre Plus and the further and higher education sector are also represented, along with the voluntary sector and the regional development agency SEEDA. The council's leader, portfolio holder for the LSP and the leader of the opposition ensure effective representation of elected members.

### Five thematic partnerships

Halving the number of partnerships making up the LSP, these five loosely reflect the four blocks of the old style LAA (children and young people, health and wellbeing, community safety, economic and skills), with a fifth comprising a physical regeneration partnership based on the regeneration partnership Medway Renaissance. This group, whose remit will also include housing and environment, previously sat separately to the LSP.

### Operational group

An 'operational group' which is responsible for LAA negotiations and ultimately, for cementing delivery of the LAA through their links back into their individual organisations. This group is made up of first and second officers from the main LSP agencies. Each also sits on one of the thematic partnerships to provide further links between the different tiers of the LSP. It will take a performance management overview and a cross cutting view to ensure issues crossing thematic partnership boundaries are effectively achieved.

Independently facilitated sessions have been run with the LSP Board and operational group continuing the dual focus on desired outcomes and the process of effective working.

### Plenary

The membership of what used to be called the 'full LSP' is currently being reviewed to better represent the full cross section of Medway and act as the consultative body for the LSP as a whole.

## STEP 4

### Building understanding between partners

24. A number of other independently facilitated sessions have been held with the cabinet, elected members and partners looking at the new governance

arrangements as well as broader issues such as partnership working and the community leadership agenda. This has helped build understanding of how the LSP works and how it fits into the wider policy landscape.

25. In addition, the council and PCT took part in an independently facilitated session to build a better understanding of each others' organisational cultures. Both organisations were of the view that lack of understanding and joint working beyond a traditional health/adult social care agenda could be a major risk to the development of more far-reaching partnership working. The lack of understanding on the part of the council, the PCT and other partners, of differing structures and cultures had been a major obstacle to working effectively at LSP level.

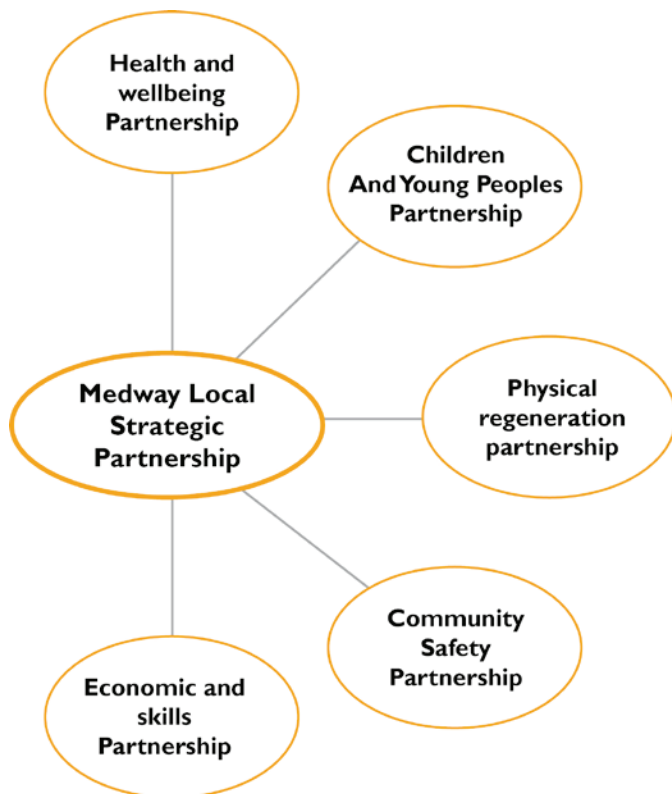
26. The PCT had always had a health partnership board, made up of chief executives of health organisations in Medway. This body had an oversight, rather than a delivery role, but the council and other LSP partners had mistakenly believed that it was also fulfilling a role as part of the LSP. During LAA1 preparation and initial delivery, the PCT was undergoing huge internal change. This, combined with the prescriptive nature of LAA1, made it difficult for the organisation to see the added value and benefit from engaging with the LAA.

27. Meanwhile a change in the funding arrangements of the Community Safety Partnership supported small projects across all aspects of LAA1 Safer, Stronger and Cleaner targets, achieving greater buy-in and support of all partners. The chair of the Community Safety Partnership also introduced a performance framework and accountability to the delivery of LAA1 Safer, Stronger, Cleaner targets; while the development neighbourhood policing in 07/08 also led to enhanced partnership working at a community level.

28. Lessons from this stage of the process included:

- ➔ Take the time to build understanding – partnership is based on relationships between organisations as well as individuals.
- ➔ Don't assume what partners know about each other.
- ➔ Make sure partnership working adds value to the core business of partners.

29. Five thematic groups were eventually agreed on - down from ten previously. There was widespread acknowledgement of the need to rationalise the structure of the organisation.



### Step 5

#### Ensuring that each tier of the Lsp is able to operate effectively

30. Concurrently with the work building understanding with partners, the independent facilitator has worked with the LSP board before its first meeting and at successive meetings of the Operational Group to ensure that both were clear about their respective roles and how they will work together. A similar process will be followed with the recast thematic partnerships.

31. The LSP Plenary also had a significant input to the change process, having taken part in a facilitated session where it went through LAA1 priorities and gave a steer as to how it saw LAA2 being more focused and strategic.

#### Impact/outcomes: the new LAA

32. It is too soon to say whether the changes in the leadership and structure of the LSP will ultimately result in the delivery of an 'excellent' LAA. However, the early signs are good - with partners apparently more willing to be held accountable and, significantly, being well engaged in meetings and discussions.

#### Better engagement and accountability of partners in the LAA

33. Demonstrative of the new level of commitment from partners is the fact that the PCT's director of commissioning now sits on the LSP's operational group, while the police have dedicated a sergeant to work specifically on the development of LAA2 and associated performance frameworks. The PCT has also made budget proposals for significant additional funding to support part of the LSP manager's post and delivery of LAA2 targets. Although it should be recognised that much of the change in the PCT's engagement came about because of internal change, the openness of all partner organisations and the willingness to change also played a big part in the process.

#### Partners working together better

34. Partners are also starting to work together in new ways - for example the transport and health agencies are talking to one another about obesity targets and tackling drugs and alcohol has moved from a purely crime and safety perspective to one that public health now leads on with strong support by the Community Safety Partnership and the Police in particular. A strategic review of alcohol and the Medway drug and alcohol scrutiny report has resulted in action by chief officers across three key Medway agencies (council, PCT and police) in developing an immediate one year action plan together with a strategic and tactical focus by all agencies in tackling a specific ward. Agencies are looking together to identify the root causes of deprivation so that both area-based approaches and those focused on groups - for example young people at risk of offending - are coordinated.

35. The chief superintendent of Medway Police reports that there has been greater willingness, commitment and trust between partners who now seem to want to work together towards joint outcomes. Partners were invited to participate in police strategic management meetings, which have now resulted - in line with the Crime and Disorder Review - into the development of a Community Safety strategic assessment. This accesses partners' data in a nationally accredited business model to deliver outcomes against community based priorities, aligned to LAA1 and now LAA2 priorities. Trust has built between individuals and agencies/ partners enabling quick and appropriate responses to critical incidents that occur on occasion across the partnership. It is absolutely essential the partnership working adds value to the core business of individual agencies and respective partnerships.

**36.** Joint working in the development of the content and funding of the Communities That Care (CTC) survey of young people is a current example that will provide multi-agency opportunities to make a strategic difference having asked, listened and now demonstrating action with the young people of Medway.

### LAA more strategic and cross cutting

**37.** The new LAA as a result, is more strategic, has more emphasis on cross cutting targets and looked more closely at where the partnership can add value. In the words of the independent facilitator: *“The fact that the restructuring of the partnership is happening, that they are moving to a strong LAA and moving to work together more closely at different levels... these are all signs of effective partnerships.”*

**38.** The proof will eventually be, of course, if the LAA is delivered effectively.

### Maintaining momentum

**39.** The sense of shared ownership as to what the future priorities of Medway are, clear lines of where the responsibility lies for delivering targets agreed in the LAA and generally improved partnership working is hoped to maintain the momentum of change.

**40.** The LSP is, by its own admission, still at the early stages of its improvement journey. It has learnt from the experience to date that it is important to invest time and energy to maintain momentum. The low level of dedicated LSP resource (one full time post of LSP manager) is a challenge. To build further capacity the LSP manager is developing a network of LSP support officers. Increasingly the council and other partner organisations will embed partnership working as a key requirement and competency of staff throughout their structures.

**41.** It will be critical that all LSP partners mainstream relevant LAA priorities, targets and the delivery of outcomes as part of their normal daily business, with individuals taking personal and professional responsibility to engage, influence change, take action and deliver positive outcomes. Ongoing consultation, engagement and the training of staff is key to ensure better and ongoing joint working across all five thematic partnerships, the LSP board and its operations group.

**42.** It will also be important for working arrangements and commitments to be documented so that partnership working is not reliant upon personalities.

For example the (council-led) LAA target dealing with congestion will be measured by using police data, and plans are in hand to formalise this arrangement between the partners. Finally the LSP and its various partnerships must regularly engage with the public to listen and understand the local and key issues affecting communities across Medway. Engagement will result in greater ownership and increased pride in Medway by the public of Medway.

**43.** The LSP is committed to reviewing its progress in six months time. The board’s agenda will include a number of important issues including finance and the LAA and ensuring progress against the indicators which, the LSP manager says: *“will involve a new strategic focus – so the changes are not just about new structures.”*

The journey for Medway’s LSP is far from over. However as this case study attests, a wealth of learning has occurred in a very short space of time. It is hoped that this experience will help other LSPs embrace the prospect of change as a positive force. To conclude this chapter of the story, here are some of the lessons that LSP partners have highlighted as key:

- ➔ Openness of partners is key to their ability to identify problems and accept change.
- ➔ Getting buy-in of partners as to what the issues are, early on, is crucial.
- ➔ Where possible ‘personalise’ it – one-to-one communication is time-consuming but leads to greater buy in (agreed particularly during change or performance challenges).
- ➔ Build consensus around the case for change – and keep reminding people that not changing is not an option – especially when the going gets tough.
- ➔ Focus on outcomes, not processes and structures – they are a means to the end not the other way around.
- ➔ It is essential to build understanding of partners’ organisational cultures and targets.
- ➔ Negotiations around the LAA or LSP processes should not be seen to be dominated by a single agency.
- ➔ Partnerships operate at multiple levels – it is important to do work at all of them - strategic, operational and delivery, to effect sustainable change.

- Partnership working must be about relationships between individuals and between organisations, cemented by good processes and structures.
- Don't forget the practical details - importance of persuading important people to get the dates in their diaries.

It takes time! Partnership working is not a quick fix issue.

### Thanks and contacts

This case study has been put together with the help of the following individuals and organisations:



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