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Cornwall SCS and LAA

Abstract

Cornwall Strategic Partnership has the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) at the heart of their local area agreement (LAA). By using evidence reviews, detailed issue papers and sustainability appraisal, the partnership ensured that sustainable development remained embedded within the strategic aims of the area.

Cornwall's SCS aims to:

- Set the strategic objectives for the big issues for an area
- Be long term
- Consider all aspects of quality of life for all of Cornwall's residents now, and for future generations

The issue

Surveys suggest that Cornwall's inhabitants enjoy a good quality of life. However, average wages are very low, there is a shortage of good jobs and house prices are very high. Severe deprivation and affordable housing are a major issue for this county, which has Objective One status, and is the only county in England to qualify post 2006 as a European Convergence Region.

In light of considerable growth and change in recent years, the process of developing a new Sustainable Community Strategy has involved pulling together the evidence base and developing 20 issue papers with thematic partnerships to identify priorities and cross-cutting themes. The SCS and LAA were developed within the context of significant change to the LAA pooled grant.

Cornwall's draft Strategic Aims now tally well with the UK sustainable development principles.



What Cornwall did

Cornwall Strategic Partnership undertook a complex process which draws on good practice from sustainability appraisals to ensure that links are made between strategic issues and sustainable development priorities. This has been achieved largely through the process of developing the Issues Papers, and the requirement on their authors to consider the components of Egan's sustainable communities wheel, and the causes and effects related to each Strategic Aim.

For example, the 'Living within our environmental means' paper identifies the impacts of poor governance structures, dispersed settlement patterns on travel and disproportional impacts of climate change on the poor and vulnerable. The Issues Papers also identify the current actions and opportunities for achieving the desired outcomes, and have helped partners make links between different aspects of the Partnerships work.

The County's location and the issues it faces in terms of high levels of rural deprivation, second home ownership and a high quality environment mean that people recognise the linkages and importance of addressing the conflicts between, for example, managing the landscape and maintaining economic growth. These issues were also explored through Issue Papers.

Throughout the process, the Partnership has drawn on experience and knowledge within the County, from specialists and amongst the district councils. For example, staff from Penwith District Council have been employed to undertake a sustainability appraisal of the Issues Papers, largely because they have so far been independent from the process of developing them, and because of their recent experience in undertaking a sustainability appraisal of Penwith's Core Strategy.

In addition to relying on people's knowledge, the Partnership has used several tools to ensure that sustainable development was integrated within the draft SCS and LAA. For example, they have used the County Council's own internal sustainability matrix, Egan's sustainable communities wheel, and a sustainability appraisal of the Issues Papers. A rural proofing exercise is also planned and will be undertaken by the Rural Communities Partnership, a sub-group of the Economic Forum.

The partnership has also drawn on the knowledge and expertise of:

- the LAA Management Board (including representatives of key statutory partners);
- Local Intelligence Network Cornwall (LINC) who undertook all the review of evidence for the SCS¹; and
- Cornwall Partnership Officers Group (whose membership includes all LSP and thematic partnership co-ordinators across the County).

The impact

The Policy Officer for Strategic Partnerships found that there was a strong desire amongst the partners to develop "a coherent sense of place" through the SCS.

A notable initiative is Cornwall Strategic Partnership's drive to develop Cornwall as a 'Centre of Excellence for the Natural Environment (sustainability of biodiversity resources)', which is being developed in the context of the proposed LAA stretch outcome 'To have cleaner, greener and safer public open space'. The aim of this is to develop much closer cooperation between the environmental sector (via Environment Kernow) and the land based industries (via Cornwall Agricultural Council). The original proposal envisaged establishing environmental community facilitators to engage all sectors of the community, including schools, land owners and managers and the general public in identifying, managing and monitoring locally important features of the natural environment.

The development of the Sustainable Community Strategy is coordinated by a multi-agency working group, supported by Cornwall County Council. The CSP is chaired by the Chair of the Voluntary Sector Forum and has 15 thematic partnerships.

The Partnership, SCS and LAA have been co-ordinated by a small team including a Team Leader and Strategic Partnerships Officer, a three-person LAA Programme Team, a communications officer and a performance management officer.

Lessons

The greatest barrier has been the pressure of time. As a result the SCS and LAA have been developed in parallel, which has helped link the processes and documents, but has made keeping the SCS at a strategic level, and separate from funding negotiations difficult. Overcoming this confusion has required clear communication from the partnership co-ordinators.

There are differing views about the status of the SCS. Some believe it is an overarching strategy, which encompasses all county-wide and sub-regional strategies, while others understand it to be a strategic document which helps co-ordinate and makes links across different strategies. This has meant that there are differing expectations about the content of the SCS, and whether it should include all priorities.

Integration of economic, social and environmental priorities has meant that some are less visible. For example, many of the economic priorities are reflected in other strategic aims, such as those relating to health inequalities.

Maintaining Council elected members' engagement in the process has been problematic, particularly during the local government review and uncertainty across the sector.

Ensuring that the SCS and LAA were seen as Partnership, rather than County Council, strategies was particularly important. The involvement of partners, district councils, and employment of a former district officer as Strategic Partnerships Officer helped address this balance.

With hindsight, Cornwall Partnership considers that the following support would have been beneficial:

- specialist help on hand to help Partnership officers e.g. identify when and where they could benefit from using different tools - lack of time and workload pressure, rather than awareness prevented officers from using the tools available; and
- a sounding board, available on request, and even when officers don't know they need help, to advise on process, e.g. whether a full Strategic Environmental Assessment is needed.

Data / evidence

An analysis of social, economic and environmental trends over time provides evidence of need and identifies opportunities and constraints within which the partnership will have to work.

The challenge has been to develop an SCS for Cornwall by developing a stronger focus on integrating social, economic and environmental issues and by tackling the longer-term and global impacts of communities. Impact appraisals are being carried out on the draft strategy.

Further information

<http://www.cornwallstrategicpartnership.gov.uk/>

<http://www.cornwallstatistics.org.uk/>

<http://www.cornwall.gov.uk>

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