

Hertfordshire Partnerships 2008/09

Hertfordshire Forward

Audit 2008/09

May 2009

DRAFT

Contents

Introduction	3
National Context	4
Audit Approach	5
Local Context	7
Executive Summary	8
Recommendations	9
Main conclusions	11
Appendix 1 – Survey Results	16
Appendix 2 – Telephone Interviews	19

DRAFT

The Statement of Responsibilities of Auditors and Audited Bodies issued by the Audit Commission explains the respective responsibilities of auditors and of the audited body. Reports prepared by appointed auditors are addressed to non-executive directors/members or officers. They are prepared for the sole use of the audited body. Auditors accept no responsibility to:

- any director/member or officer in their individual capacity; or
- any third party.

Introduction

- 1 Local authorities and their partners work in a complex economic, social, and environmental world. In their representation, regulation, and service delivery roles they can deliver better outcomes by working together than they can separately. Joint working can happen at three levels:
 - Strategic: setting a vision or direction for an area, discussing common concerns, agreeing common goals, and overseeing progress;
 - Executive: taking the shared vision and using it to steer resources, set targets, and oversee performance;
 - Operational: managing performance and delivering services to meet the agreed goals.
- 2 Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) have a responsibility to bring together local services to deliver a shared vision for the area. But creating highly effective partnerships is difficult and LSPs operate across a complex policy environment.
- 3 Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) will focus attention on how local service providers work together to improve local outcomes.
- 4 The purpose of this audit was to examine whether partnership working between strategic partners is achieving effective outcomes by appropriate means. In particular, looking at the culture of partnership working between tiers of local government and between sectors in Local Strategic Partnerships.
- 5 The broad objectives of this partnership review is to help key partners in Hertfordshire to:
 - Reflect on and improve their overall approach to working in partnership;
 - Strengthen the connection between partnership goals and mainstream services;
 - Ensure public money is used appropriately, with transparent flows and controls;
 - Encourage full participation of partners and the wider community;
 - Identify and address levers and barriers; and
 - Strengthen the delivery of Local Area Agreements (LAA).

National Context

- 6 The Local Government White Paper: Strong and Prosperous Communities set out proposals for a new performance framework for local services. The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 put the legal framework for many of these proposals in place, including CAA.
- 7 Following the release of the White Paper, the Department for Communities and Local Government, Department for Education and Skills, and the Department of Health and the Home Office issued a joint letter commissioning the inspectorates to develop and implement CAA. The letter also asked us to make any other changes necessary in assessment and inspection arrangements to implement the Local Government White Paper. This legislation has significant implications for partnership working.
- 8 The Audit Commission has published a national study 'Working better together? Managing local strategic partnerships' in April 2009. This study reviews arrangements for performance, resource management, and governance.
- 9 The report identifies Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) as evolving and maturing but local and national partners still need to recognise the key dynamics that support partnership working. Too few LSPs take an area-wide approach to performance and resource management. Some LSPs have well developed performance arrangements, but less developed resource management. And most LSPs have progress to make on their improvement journey if they are to deliver sustainable community strategy and LAA outcomes. LSPs that have good, shared systems for performance management (with performance reporting, resource allocation, and risk management) will find it easier to show that they are on track to achieve agreed outcomes than those that do not.
- 10 The Audit Commission will:
 - Work with other inspectorates to use the lessons from this study in CAA; and
 - Work with the Improvement Network to help LSPs to improve their performance (www.audit-commission.gov.uk/lsp) and develop online improvement tools (www.improvementnetwork.gov.uk/lsp).

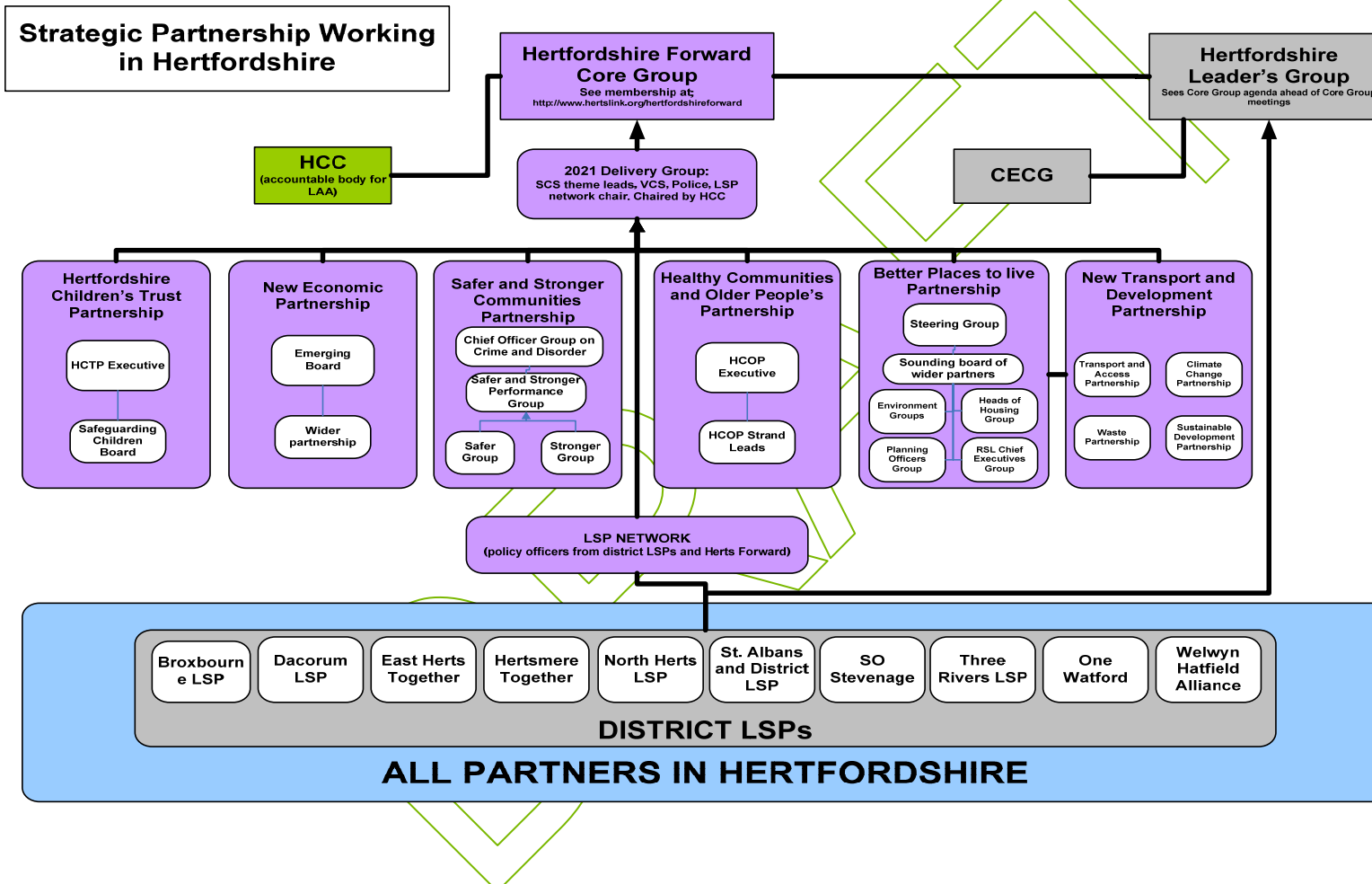
Audit Approach

- 11 Hertfordshire Forward and the Audit Commission both identified the need to examine the approach to strategic partnership work in Hertfordshire. To avoid duplication, and ensure that the work reflects local issues, the Audit Commission and officers from Hertfordshire Forward (HF) have worked closely together to deliver the findings/coordinate the project. Government Office (East of England) has also actively supported the work.
- 12 The organisations participating in this audit were the County Council, the ten district or borough councils, the two Primary Care Trusts (PCTs), Hertfordshire Police, Hertfordshire Probation Service, the Hertfordshire Fire & Rescue Service and the Voluntary and Community Sector.
- 13 This report is structured around nine themes as outlined in the online survey and telephone interviews:
 - Membership;
 - Clarity of purpose;
 - Relationships;
 - Representation;
 - Engagement;
 - Commitment;
 - Performance Management;
 - Ambition; and
 - Thematic Groups.
- 14 The audit was undertaken in five stages:
 - Diagnostic: an online survey was completed by 106 partners in November and December 2008 to test the qualities of partnership working as they stand - see Appendix 1 for detailed results.
 - Fieldwork: The survey prompted areas to explore in telephone interviews with partners during January 2009. 52 partners have been interviewed and the results are included in Appendix two.
 - Hertfordshire Forward: Headline messages from the fieldwork, including indicative recommendations, were shared with members on this group in February 2009.
 - Workshop: The findings from the diagnostic and fieldwork stage were shared at a workshop in March 2009, which was attended by 94 representatives of Hertfordshire Police, the Hertfordshire Fire service, health and local government bodies.
 - Hertfordshire Forward: The final stage is to share the main conclusions of this report with Hertfordshire Forward in May 2009 and agree a way forward.

- 15 The implementation of this report and responses to the recommendations will be monitored through CAA work in 2009/10 and also be explored through the LAA review later this year with the Government Office.

DRAFT

Local Context



Executive Summary

- 16 There is evidence of strong commitment and willingness to work together with a range of examples of where partnership working has produced successful outcomes. However, there is a general lack of clarity about the roles and functions of partnership structures, how partnerships link together and their composition with impedes the ability to work across sectors and partnerships.
- 17 Whilst there are some examples of performance monitoring in partnerships, performance management is generally underdeveloped. There is an overall consensus that there isn't a consistent performance management system across all partnerships, for example, priorities are generally not underpinned by SMART targets, except those expressed in the LAA; and there is very little awareness of how other partnerships are performing. It is also not clear who the different partners are accountable to and how they could collectively demonstrate that they had achieved their priorities.
- 18 Many partners expressed concern about the capacity to resource partnership working. This suggests that tasks from partnerships are seen as additional workload rather than integral to their organisation's priorities. This in turn points to the need for greater correlation between partnership and organisational priorities and the need to ensure partnership priorities are resourced.

DRAFT

Recommendations

19 The following high level recommendations are addressed to all the Hertfordshire public services which took part in this audit. Given the importance of partnership working and the time invested in this improvement agenda, you may wish to involve external advisers such as Local Improvement Advisors, other LSPs and RIEP to input into the delivery of these recommendations:

Recommendation

R1 Improve the effectiveness of partnership working by moving from working alongside one another to working and delivering together by:

- Setting common agendas on key issues, underpinned by shared knowledge and data;
- Undertaking joint planning and thus joint delivery;
- Developing a long term vision for partnerships to continually develop their skills, capacity and innovative solutions; and
- Ensuring recommendations outlined in this report are adopted and resolved at a senior level

Recommendation

R2 Develop accountability and representation by:

- Reviewing representation and individual responsibilities of the Core Group, Delivery Group members and the role and representation of the chief executives group within HF;
- Developing a cohesive and robust performance management framework;
- Clearly communicating the roles and responsibilities of the thematic groups to other partnerships to encourage engagement and understanding, and enable district LSPs to contribute to the work of HF; and
- Clarifying responsibilities for decision making.

Recommendation

R3 Develop engagement and communication by:

- Producing a countywide communication and engagement strategy which has been built from the good practice identified at a local level and within organisations;
- Making use of the numerous media and public engagement strategies that exist across the Districts particularly with regard to the third sector and business sectors; and
- Identifying opportunities for cross thematic working including shared resources.

Recommendation

R4 Enhance performance management arrangements by:

- Producing a countywide performance management framework including disaggregated performance data;
- Developing SMART targets for actions;
- Identifying areas where efficiencies can be made;
- Developing countywide reporting; and
- Ensuring that poor performance is highlighted, challenged and addressed.

DRY

Main conclusions

- 20 The following conclusions reflect the tone and balance of the responses to the survey and the interviews. The details of the survey work are contained in the appendices.

Membership

- 21 This section of the work examined governance arrangements. Most partners understand the 'Duty to Co-operate' and 'Duty to Involve', albeit with less clarity regarding the Duty to Involve.

"Spirit of involvement is commendable"

Most partners consider there is a willingness to work together and so the powers are not necessary. Some considered that using the power would undermine the spirit of co-operation.

Clarity of purpose

- 22 The majority of partners are aware of the terms of reference in place for the partnerships they are involved with. However, some partners think they have limited meaning in practice and that there is little need for them to be re-visited to bring them up to date.
- 23 There is a concern that some partners have a narrow agenda and represent their own organisation rather than the partnership they are involved with. Sending substitutes to partnership meetings is not productive as they are usually not briefed on key issues and are not empowered to make decisions.
- 24 Whilst everyone is clear on their role within the partnership they are involved with, a significant number do not think they have significant influence over decisions made. These views tend to be from partners outside of local government.

Relationships

- 25 There is a general view that relationships between local partnerships and Hertfordshire Forward are not as strong as they should be. To an extent, this is compounded by the two tier structure within the county. There is a lack of definition around the district / county relationship both formally and informally. The perception is that there is little real opportunity to influence Hertfordshire Forward or find an audience for districts' concerns.

"The relationship is there on paper, but not in practice"

People are not clear who is the actual decision making body - Hertfordshire Forward Core Group, Chief Executives Group or the Leaders Group. Overall, there is a sense that there should be more to be gained from these relationships, and that opportunities are being missed.

- 26 The relationships vary between the thematic groups and local partnerships as the thematic groups are at different stages of development. However, some partners

acknowledged that this was affected by their own capacity, such as the amount of staff time they had available for strategic work.

"Leadership on better links between thematic groups needs to come from Hertfordshire Forward"

- 27 Respondents felt that relationships between the thematic partnerships could and should be strengthened through the new Delivery Group. However clear terms of reference need to be developed and the group needs time to mature and develop before outcomes are delivered. It was felt that Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) should have a voice on this group along with key representatives from the thematic partnerships and districts. This Group should also have the capacity and expertise to ensure that thematic partnerships work together on joint projects to deliver the agreed vision.
- 28 A number of partners state that they do not receive information about what is going on. Some partners feel that their views are ignored or they are given information and consulted on things that are not an issue for them.

"It is like being given a choice between having apples or oranges but what we want are pears"

Too much electronic information is produced and is not targeted to the appropriate audience. Newsletters for each thematic partnership, Hertfordshire Forward minutes and electronic bulletins are sent to all partners.

Representation

- 29 The majority of respondents question the appropriateness of the membership of the Hertfordshire Forward group. There is a general view that Districts do not feel their interests are represented and that the VCS is not prominent within the Core Group. This is considered to be an issue given the size of the voluntary sector in Hertfordshire. In addition, there is a common view that the business community are not adequately represented on Hertfordshire Forward. General consensus is:
- Fire and Health should be included
 - There is insufficient VCS representation
 - District level LSPs are under-represented
 - Need more community and business representatives (too heavily weighted toward local authorities)
- 30 Communication with groups who don't have direct representation is patchy, especially the voluntary and community sector. There is a lack of understanding amongst partners about how different groups link together, e.g. how thematic groups and District LSPs link into the Core Group and Delivery Group.

Engagement

- 31 Engagement with other partnerships and stakeholders varies according to subject matter, and the partnership. For example, the engagement between local councils with the Police is considered to be strong in most areas. However, some partners are concerned that the effectiveness of engagement has not been considered.

Main conclusions

- 32 Most respondents consider there is very little engagement with the general public. Some questioned whether there is any need to engage and whether the general public would be interested anyway.

"If you were to ask local people around 95 per cent would not know about the local LSP, and really they don't need to know. The important thing is for them to see improvements locally."

Where engagement has been effective, it has been at a local level such as local area forums. Various methods of communications are used such as newsletters, DVDs, press releases and dedicated websites.

Commitment

- 33 There is recognition within the public service organisations in Hertfordshire that partnership working is essential in order to improve services for local people.

"Partnership working is a good thing"

Survey results, interviews and the workshop all indicated that this commitment is stronger where there are common goals, for example, action taken by partners following the Buncefield explosion. However, some did question the commitment of partners.

"Lack of commitment comes from the absence of any clear sense of progress or benefits from the meetings"

- 34 Most partners consider that organisations send people of sufficient authority along to make decisions at partnership meetings. Problems occur when substitutes are sent. There are also issues where individuals represent the views of more than one organisation.
- 35 Evidence indicates limited examples of pooling resources. Where examples exist, this tends to be when new money is available.

"Often people do not want to give up their own resources. They are better at working together with new money rather than with existing funding. They need to adopt the same principle for existing budgets."

The most noticeable pooling of resources is the joint commissioning arrangements between the county council and the Primary Care Trust (PCT). Recently, the PCT has allocated £10,000 to each LSP to use on health related projects.

"The LAA1 reward grant was split 50 per cent to district LSPs and 50 per cent to the thematic partnerships. An expansion of this approach would help."

Overall, partners agreed that joint working and pooling resources is underdeveloped.

- 36 There are some good examples of joint working between the County Council, District Councils and other partners.

"Pooled skills, knowledge and resources leads to improved outcomes"

For example, the University of Hertford has assisted the Districts with their transport plans; the employment of Police Community Support Officers across the county; the

bus partnership in St Albans; the Biopark in Welwyn and Hatfield; the credit union in East Hertfordshire; the Skills Centre in Stevenage; and Hertfordshire Regional College in Broxbourne. However, partners think that joint working can be further developed. There is a need for a long term strategy for partnership working to be developed based on a shared outcomes and community need rather than just the availability of new money.

Performance Management

- 37 Most partners consider that the partnership they are involved with has agreed priorities.

"Priorities were set at the beginning of the partnership"

At LSP level they are derived from the relevant sustainable community strategy. Within the thematic groups the robustness of priorities varies depending on the maturity of the group. However, there is a view amongst some partners that the priorities set are 'fairly generic'.

- 38 In numerous cases priorities are not supported by S.M.A.R.T¹ targets. Some partners consider targets are not challenging as the priority is to focus on realising reward grants and funding opportunities.

"Targets are not challenging because partners are disincentivised from setting tough targets which they will not achieve"

In addition, target-setting linked to the LAA has been adversely affected by an inability to disaggregate performance data down to district level. As a result of this, districts are unable to identify their contribution to LAA targets and may not be empowered to work towards them.

- 39 There are some examples of performance monitoring, but the general consensus is that performance management is under developed. Generally, performance management arrangements are less well defined at LSP level than they are within constituent organisations.
- 40 There is no formal way of dealing with poor performance. Partners stated that peer pressure has been used in the past to encourage better performance. Partners prefer not to have an adversarial approach.

"There are no formal processes for dealing with poor performance; as in an informal partnership of the type of the LSP, progress has to be based on mutual understanding, support and goodwill."

However, partners recognise the need to develop more formal relationships as part of a general effort to improve governance arrangements. There are no mechanisms in place for challenging poor performance or for highlighting excellent performance and learning from it.

- 41 Most partners are not aware of how other partnerships are performing in the county. Where there is awareness it is because individuals have a defined role in two or more partnerships. It is not clear who the different partnerships are accountable to and how they can collectively demonstrate that they have achieved their objectives.

¹ Specific, Measurable, Attributable, Realistic and Timebound

Main conclusions

- 42 Some partners consider that things could be improved in the future by linking the reward funding to performance. At present there are not strong links between Hertfordshire Forward and District LSP performance systems.

Ambition

- 43 There is an overall concern that the partnerships do not have sufficient capacity to deliver their ambitions. Reasons for this are that partnerships are not directly funded and therefore do not have the necessary financial capacity; some decisions are made outside of the partnerships and are therefore a barrier to improvement; and some partners have sufficient capacity to attend meetings but not to undertake follow up work back at their organisation.

"It has the potential, whether it has the capacity is more difficult to assess. The problem comes from the short time-scales and the focus on budgets and resources. Opportunity is limited by the budgets and policies, which tend to have a 1- 4 year timescale."

- 44 While partners may be committed to working together, the capacity to deliver partnership outcomes is dependent on those outcomes being consistent with their organisation's priorities. Partners consider that a greater emphasis on the role of the Third Sector is necessary if ambition is to be fully realised.

Thematic Groups

- 45 Only 30 per cent of respondents were clear on the role of the six thematic partnerships. Of these, there was a consensus that these thematic partnerships are at varying degrees of maturity but most have terms of reference.
- 46 Partners agree that strategic issues could be delivered better by cross cutting work. There is a view that the less developed thematic groups are currently working in silos and the link to district LSPs and Hertfordshire Forward is under-developed.

"500 households within the county have the biggest combined problems including crime, health and education etc. A joint approach to these families could impact on a range of performance indicators. At the moment one group looks at children, another looks at the family, another looks at health and another looks a crime etc. They could pool resources for a common approach."

- 47 The more mature thematic groups are delivering positive local outcomes. The safer and stronger thematic group and the adult social care services thematic group are working together with vulnerable people, for example sheltered housing personalised services are supported by personal budgets based on individual need. This involves partnerships between the County Council, district councils and the PCTs.

Appendix 1 – Survey Results

- 48 This survey received 106 responses, the majority of which answered in the capacity of District/ Borough Council Officer or Member (40.4 per cent). 28.7 per cent of respondents replied from within a Voluntary Organisation and 7.4 per cent of people responded from Private Sector Organisations.
- 49 The bulk of the respondents commented on District Local Strategic Partnership's (72.4 per cent), the thematic partnership with the largest percentage of responses is the Safer and Stronger Communities partnership, with 6.7 per cent. Two partnerships with the fewest responses were Healthy Communities and Older People thematic partnership and the Transport and Access and Promoting Sustainable Development thematic partnership, with one per cent of the respondents each.
- 50 The survey consisted of a number of statements, to which respondents were asked to indicate if they strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed, strongly disagreed, or did not know. The percentage results are shown in the table below¹:

	Strongly Agree or Agree	Don't know	Strongly Disagree or Disagree
The partnership you are involved with has a positive approach to working in partnership	87.6%	8.8%	3.5%
The partnership you are involved with behaves in a way that is consistent with effective partnership working	83.8%	7.2%	9.0%
The membership of the partnership you are involved with is appropriate	89.5%	4.4%	6.2%
The roles and responsibilities of the partnership you are involved with are clear	74.5%	9.6%	15.8%
The partnership you are involved in works effectively with district LSP's	52.6%	34.3%	13.1%

¹ Percentages will not always add up to 100 per cent due to rounding and to no replies not being shown

Appendix 1 – Survey Results

	Strongly Agree or Agree	Don't know	Strongly Disagree or Disagree
The partnership you are involved in works effectively with Hertfordshire Forward	55.4%	39.8%	4.9%
The partnership you are involved in works effectively with the Economic Development and Enterprise thematic partnership	39.6%	49.5%	10.9%
The partnership you are involved in works effectively with the Safer and Stronger Communities thematic partnership	71.7%	22.6%	5.7%
The partnership you are involved in works effectively with Children and Young People thematic partnership	66%	28.3%	5.6%
The partnership you are involved in works effectively with Health Communities and Older People thematic partnership	59.1%	34.3%	6.7%
The partnership you are involved in works effectively with Transport and Access and Promoting Sustainable Development thematic partnership	39.6%	50%	10.4%
The partnership you are involved in works effectively with Sustaining Hertfordshire's Unique Character and Quality of Life, Housing, Affordable Housing and Quality Neighbourhoods thematic partnership	48.2%	41.7%	10.2%
Thematic partnerships work effectively with each other to ensure a cross-cutting approach to the delivery of outcomes	50.4%	38.9%	10.6%
The partnership you are involved with has an agreed list of priorities	86.9%	11.4%	1.8%

Appendix 1 – Survey Results

	Strongly Agree or Agree	Don't know	Strongly Disagree or Disagree
The partnership you are involved with has the skills, resources and capability to deliver its ambitions, strategies and plans	72.8%	14.0%	13.2%
The partnership you are involved with effectively deals with poor performance/ failing targets	47.4%	35.1%	17.5%
The partnership is making a difference to the people of Hertfordshire	75.3%	18.6%	6.2%
District Local Strategic Partnerships are able to influence the development of the county Sustainable Community Strategy and the work of Hertfordshire Forward	57.8%	33.3%	8.8%

DRAFT

Appendix 2 – Telephone Interviews

- 51 Telephone interviews were held with 52 partners. The interviews included eight chief executives; eight councillors; 18 LSP members; ten thematic group members; ten voluntary representatives; and 12 HF members. Some people represented more than one group.
- 52 The responses have been grouped under Membership; Clarity of Purpose; Relationships; Representation; Engagement; Commitment; Performance Management; Ambition; and Thematic Groups. The percentage results are shown in the table below:

	Strongly Agree or Agree	Strongly Disagree or Disagree
Membership		
The right partners are represented within the Partnership that you work with	48%	52%
Understanding the Duty to Co-operate and Involve	54%	45%
Clarity of Purpose		
The respondent knows whether the partnership has terms of reference	61%	39%
The members of the partnership understand their role	46%	54%
You are clear on your role within the partnership	85%	16%
The respondent understands how they are influencing decision making	65%	35%
Relationships		
The relationship between your partnership and Hertfordshire Forward is positive	32%	67%

Appendix 2 – Telephone Interviews

	Strongly Agree or Agree	Strongly Disagree or Disagree
Communication between your partnership and other partnerships is effective	24%	76%
The respondent is clear how the District LSP influences Hertfordshire Forward	29%	72%
Representation		
Representation on HF core group is adequate and effective	18%	83%
Your partnership is effective at engaging with groups who do not have direct representation on the partnership	18%	83%
Engagement		
Your partnership engages with the general public	9%	91%
Your partnership effectively engages with other partnerships and stakeholders	40%	61%
Commitment		
Your partners work well together	61%	39%
The organisations in your partnership are represented by someone of sufficient authority within the organisation	58%	41%
There is evidence of pooling resources to increase capacity	34%	67%
Partners work jointly on projects	51%	48%
Performance Management		
Your partnership has agreed priorities	74%	26%

Appendix 2 – Telephone Interviews

	Strongly Agree or Agree	Strongly Disagree or Disagree
The partnership sets effective targets	44%	55%
Your partnership has a process to deal with poor performance by a partner	16%	85%
There is a mechanism for escalating poor performance as well as highlighting excellent performance	13%	86%
You are aware of how other partnerships are performing	20%	80%
Ambition		
Your partnership has the capacity to deliver its ambitions	51%	49%
Thematic Groups		
Are you clear regarding the role of thematic groups	30%	70%

DRAFT