



East Sussex Assembly Conference 2010

Rising to the Challenge

22 July 2010, Winter Garden, Eastbourne

CONFERENCE REPORT

September 2010

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NB. Clicking on any blue underlined text within this document will take you to further information available online via ESSP’s website or other relevant sites.

1. INTRODUCTION

- a. The East Sussex Assembly acts as the consultative and advisory forum for East Sussex Strategic Partnership (ESSP). It comprises almost 100 organisations and partnerships from across the public, private and voluntary and community sectors that are involved or interested in Pride of Place, the Local Area Agreement and, more widely, partnership working in East Sussex.
- b. ESSP tackles the issues that matter to local people through community planning and partnership working across the county of East Sussex. Its main tasks are to:
 - i. Develop and deliver the Sustainable Community Strategy for East Sussex, [Pride of Place](#), a long-term plan for improving quality of life for those living and working in East Sussex
 - ii. Deliver the East Sussex [Local Area Agreement](#), and other action plans, which aim to tackle the biggest priorities set out in Pride of Place
 - iii. Report on [our progress and performance](#) to the Government Office for the South East (GOSE), local partners and the general public, and
 - iv. Provide leadership on countywide issues where no other appropriate organisation or partnership can be identified.
- c. We also work closely with the five district and borough [Local Strategic Partnerships in East Sussex](#) and a number of key countywide thematic partnerships such as the Children and Young People's Trust, the Safer Communities Partnership and East Sussex Housing Officers Group.
- d. This report summarises the objectives and outcomes of the conference and draws some conclusions and next steps for ESSP to consider.
- e. 103 people in East Sussex attended the conference. 47 returned their evaluation forms, of whom 45 stated that the event met or exceeded their expectations. The opportunity to network and to have discussions with partners on difficult issues were cited as the most useful aspects of the day.

2. AIM OF THE DAY

- a. The East Sussex Assembly meets at least once a year to receive a report on ESSP's activities and achievements during the previous year, and to be involved in identifying and agreeing future priorities that ESSP and wider partners should focus on.
- b. This year's event, entitled 'rising to the challenge', focused on finding partnership solutions to the challenges partners are facing. As the Local Government Association summarised earlier this year... "The social, economic and environmental challenges facing our communities are intense. On top of this we are now facing a lengthy period of spending constraint and real-term cuts. Public expectations remain high and people will look to councils and local partnerships to find new ways of maintaining and improving the quality of services which they receive."
- c. The event included a key note presentation by the Audit Commission and a 'café' where delegates could discuss issues and explore ideas.

3. MAIN POINTS FROM KEY NOTE PRESENTATION

- a. Sian Allen of the Audit Commission set out the national context for partnership working, the role of local strategic partnerships past and present, what the future might mean for partners in East Sussex and the risks and opportunities that might arise.
- b. In addition to major budget constraints and cuts, and new Government policies, three themes were being strongly promoted by the new coalition government – localism, transparency and sector led improvement.
- c. ESSP had made an impact in East Sussex, from developing a shared long term vision to delivering outcomes for local people through a range of local delivery plans. There were strong partnership arrangements and relationships in place that put partners in a strong position to meet the challenges ahead including avoiding silo working, delivering value for money, ensuring accountability, and supporting the local economy.
- d. A copy of the presentation is available on the [ESSP website](#).

4. DISCUSSION GROUPS

After the key note presentation, in a relaxed café style environment, delegates were asked to consider three questions, noting down their thoughts and ideas on the table cloths. The three questions delegates considered were:

- a. In the new context, what areas would benefit most from a partnership approach?
- b. What do partners need to do, or change, to realise those areas of benefit?
- c. What – in practical terms – could ESSP do to facilitate the action and/or changes required to ensure benefits are realised?

5. KEY THEMES EMERGING FROM DISCUSSIONS

- a. Responses to the first question – in the new context, what areas would benefit most from a partnership approach – fell into three broad themes:
 - i. **Efficiencies and economies of scale** principally by sharing back office services, resources and facilities; place-based budgeting; sharing information and knowledge; and sharing service delivery.
 - ii. **Communications, consultation and engagement** as well as networking within and across sectors.
 - iii. **High priorities** such as economic development, health and social care, road safety, volunteering, pockets of deprivation, high cost families/individuals, and vulnerable people.
- b. Responses to the second question - what do partners need to do, or change, to realise those benefits – the following emerged:
 - i. **Organisational Culture** – being more open, honest, equitable and transparent; more innovative, enterprising, agile and flexible; less bureaucratic; bolder, less risk averse; less silo more collaborative; and working across borders, boundaries and sectors.
 - ii. **Operations** – valuing staff, investing in people; coordinating effort and removing duplication to be more efficient and productive such as multi-

agency case conferencing for families using multiple services; cutting back on bureaucracy, structures, processes and regulations.

- c. In response to the final question - what, in practical terms could ESSP do to facilitate the delivery of the actions or changes listed above – delegates identified:
- i. **Leadership and influencing** including gaining commitment from partners to participate in strategic initiatives such as sharing resources.
 - ii. **Catalyst** for greater collaboration for example, mapping and matching partners' needs with available resources; pooling funds for shared priorities; encouraging corporate social responsibility through public sector contracts.
 - iii. **Campaigning, lobbying and negotiating** (nationally and locally) on behalf of partners for example for greater freedoms and flexibility locally; and to encourage the inclusion of early intervention and prevention in service design and delivery.
 - iv. **Communications** amongst partners and with the public about what partners do together – not just on what is already being done, but the challenges ahead and how they are being met through partnership.
 - v. **More flexible partnership arrangements** – such as greater use of working groups and project teams and a broader membership than just ESSP partners to take specific ideas forward.

6. OPTIONS

A diverse range of ideas were articulated by table groups. The following represents a 'long list' of ideas for ESSP to consider and prioritise for further development:

- a. **Sharing 'back office' services** such as HR, accountancy, payroll, legal, procurement, purchasing, ICT, and estates management.
- b. **Sharing knowledge** including data, information, analysis, intelligence, evaluations, good practice and best practice.
- c. **Joint communications, consultation and engagement** and sharing consultation findings and assessments with partners.
- d. **Better use of physical assets** including police and fire stations, schools outside school hours, co-location of services, hot desking and generic office space.
- e. **Place based budgeting** including pooling budgets and joint service/cost reviews, less ring-fencing, along with participatory budgeting, trading services and expertise, and buying local.
- f. **Closer work on planning** including sharing plans with partners, shared governance arrangements across the public and VCS to agree shared priorities, outputs and outcomes that would make best use of resources.
- g. **Closer collaboration on service delivery** notably in health and social care; drug, alcohol and mental health services, early interventions/prevention and case conferencing for individuals/families with complex needs.
- h. **Closer co-operation with the private sector** including linking voluntary organisations into small to medium sized enterprises, sharing knowledge, and public-private collaboration.

- i. **Stronger partnership working with communities** from having a dedicated community link and better community engagement to identify 'service gaps' that can be filled by communities.
- j. **Supporting the voluntary sector** to ensure it is adequately supported to take up a potentially expanded role in public service delivery.
- k. **Involving/developing social enterprise** and the support needed to sustain them.
- l. **Fewer shared priorities**, perhaps 3 or 4, such as those of greatest cost or where the biggest impact can be made. The following specific priorities, already noted in Pride of Place, were mentioned: economic development; support for volunteering and volunteering infrastructure; health and social care (and managing the impact of the Health White Paper); community safety especially road safety; the environment and links to the economy; pockets of deprivation; social housing; high cost residents and families; vulnerable people; early intervention and prevention; community strength and leadership.
- m. For ESSP specifically:
 - i. **Joint communications** including shared messages from partners/ESSP to the public; and enhancing ESSP web resources including information on partners.
 - ii. **Networking events, workshops and themed sessions** to access and develop relationships, links and connections and to facilitate the sharing of services, best practice and problem solving.
 - iii. **Review governance**, delegate decision making to working groups; be more of an enabler, negotiator, facilitator, problem solver and catalyst; have clear links between ESSP and wider partners, and clear benefits of partnership working.
 - iv. **Deliver short term benefits** and quick wins i.e. focus on action.
 - v. **Monitor outcomes** so as not to lose sight of long term benefits.
 - vi. **Broaden membership** especially with the private sector and GPs.

7. CONCLUSIONS

- a. Some ideas put forward are already being delivered through ESSP and its partners e.g. supporting volunteering. Some partners are already sharing services. Sharing across sectors and between organisations of different scale would be more innovative and challenging.
- b. A number of tensions are implicit in the ideas put forward for example how to reconcile 'buying local' (from a small to medium sized enterprise/VCS economy), with the need to generate efficiencies and sustainability through greater economies of scale; the need for change or new initiatives, but the lack of money and short time scale in which to deliver that change.
- c. Anything that is taken forward needs to be done so within diminishing resources whilst also meeting growing/changing demands. A few tables recognised that partners could not continue to do everything they already do.
- d. Delegates recognised that organisations and partnerships will need to adapt or change to survive and thrive in a more competitive environment. A common theme was cultural change – with organisations needing to be more open,

honest, flexible, transparent and enterprising and less risk averse. Also, that they should invest in people and cut back on bureaucracy, structures, processes, and regulations.

- e. A range of ESSP communications already exist for example a monthly electronic news bulletin, online resources (via the ESSP website) and partnership events. It is clear however that information on ESSP's activities and achievements are not getting through to a sufficiently wide audience.
- f. Partnership working is well established within East Sussex, and many partnership achievements have been delivered. Some of the ideas put forward suggest that partners believe a more flexible approach to collaborative working could deliver greater benefits quicker, as could a broader membership and/or looking beyond existing partnership/s for solutions.
- g. The current governance arrangements for ESSP do not preclude more flexible working or indeed the taking forward of any of the ideas listed above. In addition, East Sussex County Council acts as the accountable body for financial matters and as such has managed funds (such as LAA reward monies) and contracted with other agencies on ESSP's behalf – thereby providing an existing mechanism should ESSP wish to take forward e.g. a joint fund for specific initiatives.
- h. ESSP's ongoing review of its governance arrangements has always been predicated on form following function, and that ESSP should add value to, not duplicate, what other partnerships are doing.
- i. The Constitution clearly states that membership of ESSP does not change, replace, substitute or amend in any way partners' own management or accountability frameworks, or prevent any individual partner organisation from pursuing its own individual actions. In that regard – any initiatives taken forward by ESSP would be on the basis of a 'coalition of the willing'.

8. NEXT STEPS

- a. At the ESSP meeting that immediately followed the Assembly conference, ESSP members agreed to ballot ESSP members on ideas arising from the Assembly (as set out in section 6 above).
- b. Ideas shortlisted via the ballot will be discussed at the next ESSP meeting on 3 November. ESSP would, at that meeting, set up a task group to look at the top priorities in more detail.
- c. ESSP will wish to consider:
 - i. The membership of the Task Group, not just ESSP representatives but also whether ESSP wishes to open it up to wider partners.
 - ii. The criteria against which the Task Group and ESSP can select prioritised ideas to take forward e.g. added value, viability, affordability, and capability to deliver tangible benefits in the short term.
 - iii. The information that the Task Group and/or ESSP needs in order to make informed decisions on which ideas to pursue, how and when.
 - iv. Which ideas to put to others to take forward, because ESSP believes they are better or more appropriately placed to do.

- v. How decisions and progress can best be communicated to partners and the public.
- d. It is suggested that the options relating to ESSP specifically (6 l. above) can be built into ESSP's existing forward programme and plans notably joint communications which ESSP agreed to pursue at its meeting following the Assembly.
- e. Finally, ESSP will wish to consider topics that delegates put forward for future Assembly events, as these could play a role in delivering some of the options listed in 6 above. In addition to feedback from this event, and allowing for a fast moving environment, topics included:
 - i. Pride of Place themes and strategic issues notably the economy, volunteering, road safety, health, and reducing inequalities.
 - ii. Partnership working and development for example private/voluntary and community sector partnerships; co-dependencies e.g. the impact arts, culture and leisure have on other thematic priorities; engaging and empowering communities.
 - iii. Organisational and sector development for example business support; coordinating resources; demonstrating and sharing success and exploring which of these successes can be adapted, rolled out or scaled up to improve future delivery.
 - iv. Information exchange and horizon scanning including the shape of the public service economy; the implications and consequences of the Comprehensive Spending Review in the autumn; and the local impact of specific Government policies such the Decentralisation and Localism Bill and 'Big Society'.