



**Redditch Borough Council
Overview & Scrutiny
Committee**

**Local Strategic Partnership
Task & Finish Group**

**Executive Summary of our
Report**



Before we start.....

..... some abbreviations:

- LSP = Local Strategic Partnership**
an umbrella body through which local organisations agree to work together (what this Report is all about)
- SCS = Sustainable Community Strategy**
(every Council is required by law to produce a plan for promoting or improving the economic, social and environmental well-being of their area and contributing to the achievement of sustainable development in the United Kingdom)

Got that? Then we'll begin....

What is the Redditch Partnership?



The Redditch Partnership is our LSP, comprising representatives from:

- Redditch Borough Council;
- Worcestershire County Council;
- West Mercia Constabulary;
- Worcestershire Primary Care Trust;
- Bromsgrove and Redditch Network;
- North East Worcestershire (NEW) College;
- Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service;
- Federation of Small Businesses;
- Hereford & Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce;
- Kingfisher Centre;
- Redditch Community Safety Partnership;
- Redditch Community Forum.

Together these organisations draft and implement our SCS.

Some bad news...

In December 2009 the Audit Commission published its first Comprehensive Area Assessment of Worcestershire.

They found:



**Life
Expectancy**



**Educational
Attainment**

were **much worse in the Redditch area than in the rest of Worcestershire.**

(Things were NOT getting worse in Redditch, we just weren't doing as well as the rest of Worcestershire.)

...and then more news...

In May 2010 the Coalition Government decided to abolish Comprehensive Area Assessments.



Unfortunately, this has not abolished the health and education inequalities.

This required action...

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Redditch Council had already decided to investigate the Redditch Partnership. This added urgency.

Therefore...



... they set up a Committee!

Introduction

The Task & Finish Group



**Cllr William
Norton**



**Cllr Diane
Thomas**



**Cllr Gay
Hopkins**



**Cllr Jack
Cookson**

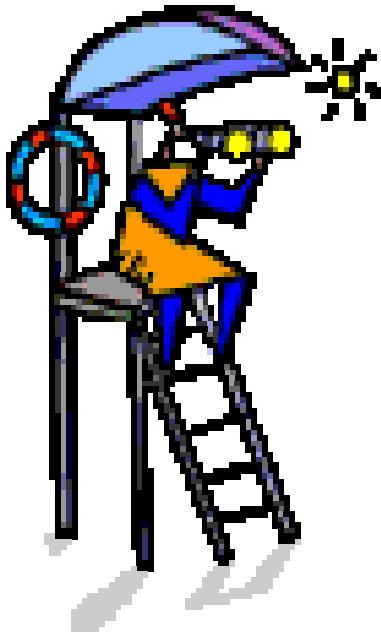


**Cllr Andy
Fry**



**Jess Bayley
Support Officer**

Our objectives



- 1. To clarify how the Redditch LSP works.**
- 2. To review the role of the Partnership in developing the SCS.**
- 3. To determine whether any improvements can be made to the role of the LSP.**
- 4. To examine the methods used to engage and inform Redditch councillors.**
- 5. To review the accountability and transparency of the LSP.**
- 6. To examine financial contributions paid to the LSP.**
- 7. To assess how the LSP encourages wider community engagement.**

Our approach

We set out to answer three questions:

- 1. What is the current position with the LSP and SCS?**
- 2. Is it working?**
- 3. If not, what do we want the new position to be?**

We were not undertaking a comprehensive audit of the LSP or of how it responded to the Red Flag issues. Our role was to devise a system for others to do that.

However, studying how the LSP responded to the Red Flags would indicate how much value it is adding as an organisation.

Our work

We questioned Redditch council officers who work with/for the LSP to discover the issues they had encountered.

We interviewed 6 local witnesses to probe their experiences of working with the LSP and their views of the current SCS.

We reviewed published studies and reports from similar local authorities to benchmark our initial findings and thoughts against current best practice elsewhere.

Findings

The LSP costs little...



The LSP is a “virtual body”, i.e. it has no separate existence from the member organisations.

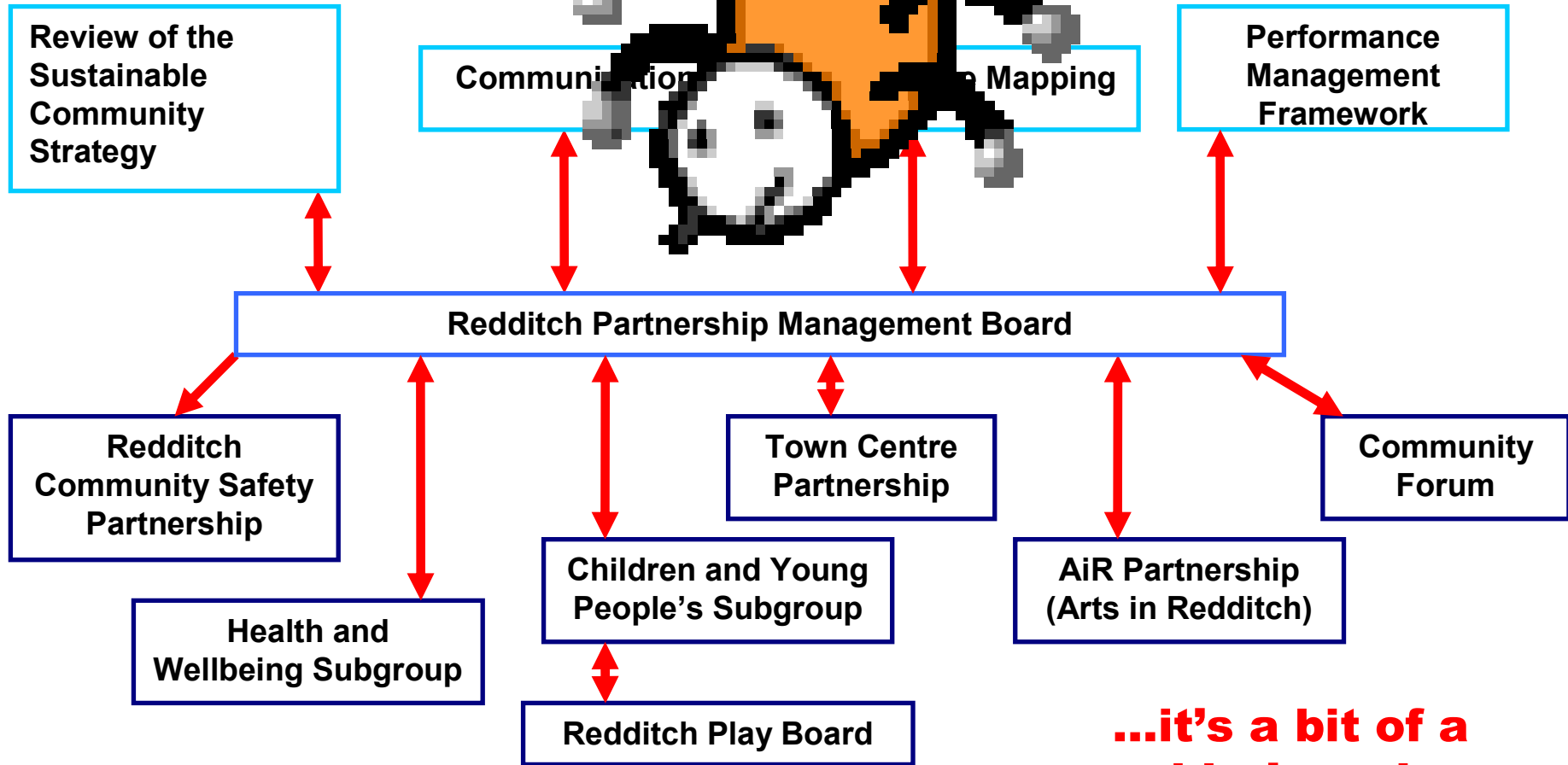
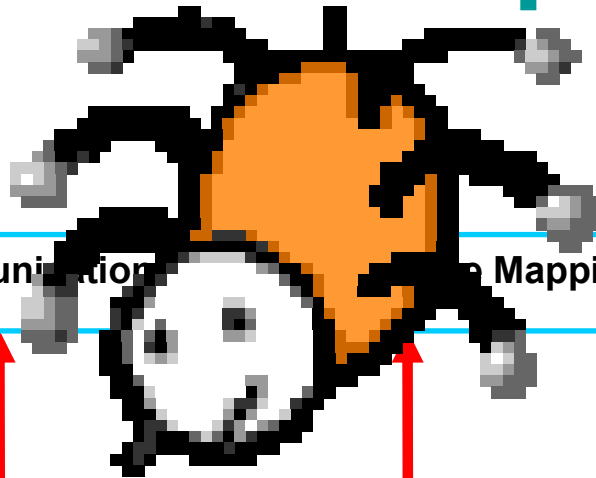
Annual running costs are about £90,000, almost all of which is borne by Redditch Council in the form of officer time. This is small compared to what individual partners are spending on their usual activities.

These costs would have been incurred any way on other or very similar duties even if the LSP did not exist.

The point about the LSP is not how much it spends, but whether it can generate better services through the mutual co-operation of the members...

Findings

The LSP is complicated...



...it's a bit of a spider's web

Findings

The LSP is anonymous....



Nobody knows it exists.

Nobody knows what it does (and this includes most of the elected councillors in Redditch).

It is difficult to prove how much value it adds.

Nobody is really clear what the Sustainable Community Strategy is meant to achieve.

We think these are drawbacks...

...but our research suggests that these are common problems all across England.

Findings

The LSP lost its way in the past...



The LSP was established in 2001. Since then it has overseen the implementation of several SCS – but it is difficult to assess the level of success because no records have survived from that time.

All our witnesses agree that the LSP lost focus and direction around 2007. The trigger appears to have been the departure and non-replacement of the previous council officer who acted as Partnership Manager.

Although the reasons vary from place to place, our research again suggests Redditch is not unique in this.

Findings

...but the LSP is aware of this....



An officer has been seconded from Redditch Council to act as temporary Partnership Manager for a relaunch of the organisation in the autumn of 2009.

The Partnership has established four task & finish groups from among its members to cover:

- **Communications**
- **Resource mapping**
- **Performance management framework**
- **Review of the SCS**

These four areas are also where we would have concentrated attention...

Findings

...and it is responding well to the Red Flags



An Away Day was held in October 2009 to discuss the Red Flag issues.

A Health Improvement Action Plan is being devised for the borough as a whole.

An Area of Highest Need bid is being assembled for health “hotspots”.

A pilot Health Check exercise has been held in Winyates.

Redditch schools are identifying barriers to educational achievement.

The example of Warrington is being studied to assess lessons learned from elsewhere.

These are encouraging signs – but the momentum must be maintained.

Findings

However, the SCS isn't working...



The current SCS covers the period 2008-2011. It was therefore devised in 2007 when conditions were very different.

The SCS contains 41 priorities across 6 themes. This is far too many, and they do not obviously dovetail into a coherent strategy.

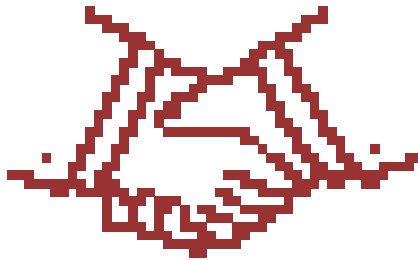
All of our witnesses agree that the SCS no longer guides the work of the LSP and its members. It has ceased to be a living document.

These are major flaws since the SCS is meant to be the “overall strategic direction and long-term vision for Redditch”.

Conclusions

Areas addressed

Our interim report in March 2010 concentrated on:



Engagement

Ensuring that Redditch Partnership involves the public in its work.



Accountability

Ensuring the transparency and openness of the Partnership.

These recommendations (1-8) have already been accepted by Redditch Council and the Partnership and are being implemented.

Areas to be addressed



This final report also includes our further recommendations covering:

Monitoring

Ensuring that Redditch Partnership is subject to regular overview and scrutiny by councillors.



Operational

Suggestions for improving the future work of the Partnership and the next SCS.

Engagement



(1) The Partnership's website, hosted by Redditch Council, should be relaunched with expanded material.

We worked with officers on improving the content of the website and endorsed the proposals. This will give the public far more information about the activities of the Partnership and a much greater opportunity to become involved in its work.

The new website went live in April 2010.

Engagement



(2) The Partnership should hold an annual “We Are Redditch” event for partners to inform the public about their work and consult them about its priorities.

The “We Are Redditch” consultation in the Kingfisher Centre in January 2010 received feedback from 264 members of the public. This should become an annual event, in a form to be determined by officers. January is probably not the best time of year for it.

The Redditch Partnership accepted this recommendation on 27 May 2010.

Engagement



(3) The Partnership should publicise its work and invite public reaction by placing regular items from partners in *Redditch Matters*.

***Redditch Matters* is the Council's quarterly magazine with news and features on its activities, and information from the wider community of interest to residents. About 37,000 copies are distributed to households and businesses in the borough. It is an obvious means for raising the profile of the Partnership.**

Redditch Council Executive Committee agreed to this on 31 March, and the Partnership accepted it on 27 May 2010.

Engagement



(4) The Partnership should advertise and hold an Annual Meeting for partners and members of the public to discuss the state of the borough.

The Partnership's governing Protocol requires it to hold an Annual Meeting, but this has fallen into abeyance since 2007. This could be relaunched as a major showcase event, perhaps linked to the development of the new SCS, to promote public engagement in the town and its affairs.

The Redditch Partnership accepted this recommendation on 27th May 2010.

Accountability



(5) LSP Board meeting minutes should be circulated with the agenda for all Redditch Council meetings as part of the new Leader's Items section.

The Leader of the Council is the Executive member responsible for all partnership matters. Democratic accountability will be improved if LSP minutes are circulated to councillors to provide an opportunity for the Leader to be questioned on its activities.

Recommendation agreed as amended by Redditch Council Executive Committee on 31 March. It has been implemented from the start of the 2010/11 municipal year.

Accountability



(6) The Leader of the Council should provide a formal Annual Report of the Partnership at the end of the municipal year.

There is an existing informal practice for an end-of-year “State of the Borough” address. There is a requirement under the Protocol for the Partnership to publish an Annual Report. It makes sense to combine the two to provide a significant show-case for the town.

Redditch Council Executive Committee agreed on 31 March. It will be implemented during the 2010/11 municipal year.

Accountability

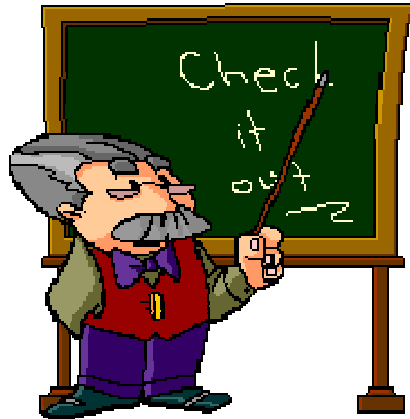


(7) Information about the Partnership should be included in the induction material for new councillors.

Given the importance of the Partnership in the workings of the Council, and its significance for their role in the community, it is essential that new councillors be made aware as early as possible about the LSP and what it does.

Redditch Council Executive Committee agreed on 31 March and it has been implemented for councillors elected in May 2010.

Accountability



(8) An event focusing on the Partnership be included as a standard part of the annual councillor training programme.

Following on from Recommendation (7), to assist councillors in being active community representatives, they should receive annual refreshers about the Partnership's work.

Redditch Council Executive Committee agreed on 31st March and it will be implemented during the 2010/11 municipal year.

Monitoring



(9) There should be pre-scrutiny of each new SCS by the Redditch Council Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

The weaknesses of the current SCS could have been avoided if it had been subjected to a process of external review and challenge before it was adopted.

Monitoring



(10) There should be a full review and audit of each completed SCS by the Redditch Council Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

It will assist the Partnership, and will enable councillors to discharge their duties to the public, if there is a formal review of each SCS at the completion of its three-year life. This will allow the capture of learning-points for future working to be improved.

Monitoring



(11) The Partnership and the SCS should be subject to six-monthly monitoring sessions by the Redditch Council Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

If the Partnership were subject to regular review it would prevent it from becoming moribund and would ensure that it remained focused in its work.

Recommendations

Operational



(12) The SCS should have fewer, more focused, targets - perhaps 4 to 6 - and these should be “SMART”.

A major factor contributing to the irrelevance of the current SCS is the breadth and open-ended nature of its scope.

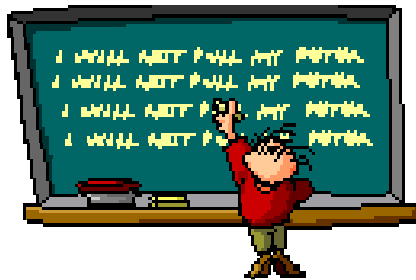
The Partnership will be better able to add value if it concentrates on fewer targets which genuinely cut across the activities of all member partners. These targets should be “SMART” (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound).

Operational

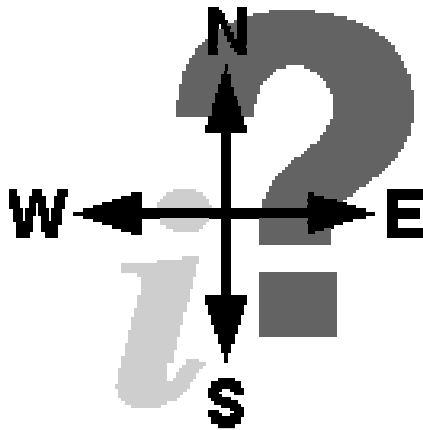


(13) For the foreseeable future, the SCS should include targets relating to the Red Flag items (health and educational inequalities).

It will take a considerable period of time for the inequalities identified by the Comprehensive Area Assessment to be reversed – far longer than the timespan of a single SCS.



Operational



(14) The priorities within the SCS should reflect residents' priorities (identified through consultation under Recommendation 2) and also dovetail with those of the Worcestershire Partnership.

The Redditch SCS should not be regarded as operating in a vacuum. It has to be relevant to the concerns of residents, who are paying for it – and it also has to take into account the operation of the wider Worcestershire context (and influencing that agenda for the benefit of Redditch).

Operational



(15) The Partnership requires the support of a full-time permanent officer.

At present this post is discharged by a council officer seconded across on a temporary basis to handle the relaunch of its activities.

The post should be made permanent to ensure that the Partnership has full-time professional support. The officer should report direct to the Director of Policy, Performance & Partnerships.