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Oldham Partnership

Abstract

Oldham's SCS and LAA process and priorities have been developed through strong and effective partnership working to deliver social economic inclusion, community cohesion, and regeneration. Oldham Partnership's vision is to make Oldham a place where everyone is proud to belong through increasing life opportunities for all.

In May 2005, the Partnership published its updated sustainable community strategy, which set out the steps that needed to be taken to mould Oldham given its varied and diverse community into a sustainable community. One of the aspects of the vision statement is of 'A Sustainable Borough'.

Oldham is also playing its part with neighboring Authorities in helping shape the new pilot multi area agreement for the City region of Manchester where issues that require collaborative action such as Climate change can also be further tackled.

The issue

The strategy's vision of a sustainable borough is described as follows:

The Borough will have invested in sustainability that will benefit not only the environment but also local people and the local economy. The housing renewal programme of the last ten years will have radically improved the energy efficiency of the housing stock and reduced heating bills for some of the poorest households. The commercial sector will be more efficient in the way it uses resources, especially energy. Companies in the Borough will have found new markets in environmental industries such as recycling, remanufacturing and renewable energy.

Oldham as a place is shaped around its industrial heritage and that legacy has required Oldham to evolve and manage the associated impacts. As a result of these ongoing historic challenges, sustainability has featured heavily, in particular within the local authority's policies, plans and procedures.

What Oldham did

Oldham LSP have developed an extensive knowledge of community engagement processes and have given high priority to strengthening voluntary and community sector networks and infrastructure, to encourage participation in the preparation of the SCS and LAA. This has had 'multiplier' effect throughout the Partnership with strong community representation influencing the social, economic and environmental areas of policy development.

The Oldham approach has been to move towards cross cutting commissioning. To support the delivery of the LAA they are moving towards a single pot that is helping remove duplication in service delivery and enabled the commission of new environmental activities. Increasingly, future commissioning of services will take place which have a cross cutting impact on all LAA indicators.

Oldham's original Round Two LAA focused upon building community cohesion and delivering socio-economic priorities through 'Increasing Life Opportunities for All'. Environmentally, the round two LAA focused upon local and community related environmental issues such as household waste, green flag

parks and street cleanliness. Since then, the scope and role of LAA's has expanded and the Oldham Partnership recognises that the LAA can now be used as a vehicle for tackling resource use issues of regional, national and international significance, such as climate change. Therefore, the Oldham Partnership has added '*achieving the sustainable use of resources*' to drive the sustainable development of the borough with regard to both neighbourhood, regional, national and international issues. Within the new LAA this has been reflected with the inclusion of NI 186 CO2 per capita as a draft tier one indicator. In addition the whole range of environmental sustainability indicators feature throughout the LAA either as tier two, three or as a local priority, which provides a full framework for including sustainability throughout the LAA.

The impact

One major milestone was the process that helped shaped Oldham's award-winning LA21 plan and the subsequent local Environment Forum. From this point forward there has been local interest and a formal group established to help champion local environmental issues and challenge how environmental policy is shaped locally. This up swell of interest has embedded environmental issues within work plans of various Council departments. The Council have also encouraged joint working across Council Departments and partners in the Borough in relation to issues surrounding housing, community cohesion, transport and the economy, using sustainability as a common link to achieve shared goals. An example of this included the undertaking of a Sustainability Appraisal of the land planning Unitary Development Plan done long before it became a requirement and was carried out by a panel that included partners from amongst others health and business. The results were embedded into our UDP, the physical expression of the Community Strategy, which therefore provided a sound basis for our transition to a Sustainable Community Strategy. One direct outcome was the need for all new major developments to derive 10% of their predicted energy from onsite renewable energy generation technologies.

More recently, the increased pressure from Central government and joint working within the city region has raised the awareness and requirement to embed sustainability at the heart of activities occurring in Oldham. The LAA and Community strategies have provided the ideal platform to jointly tackle issues that know no boundaries, such as climate change.

Each step in the sustainable community strategy has a lead organisation and work is mapped to social, environmental and economic indicators. This ensures that the community strategy is structured and manageable, that ownership is clear, and that the organisations and agencies in the Partnership understand their role in the development of Oldham as a sustainable community.

Lessons

The ability to comply with but adapt to government guidelines on SCS and LAA processes and content has, in part arisen through a perhaps unique management arrangement which has seen the LSP grow from a staff of 4 to 19 –to incorporate commissioning and programme management functions of the Area Based Grant. The team work extensively with the partners who have a range of experiences and involvement within the sustainability field however a large proportion of support is in particular drawn from the local authority's Environmental Policy section within the newly formed Economy and Enterprise Unit.

Early into the round two SCS and LAA deliberations it was identified that the support functions of the LSP needed to be hosted in a new structure within the Local Authority. This revised structure provided the means for encouraging a multi-agency approach, including pooled resources that other LSP's sometimes

struggled to achieve. It also allowed for quicker decision making and for a more streamlined operational system of delivery. This increased efficiency has helped the LSP target new and appropriate activities that have a cross cutting nature.

In the early years of the SCS and LAA capability in terms of leadership and attitude was strong, with community engagement and a real appreciation of the need to combine representative and participatory forms of governance at the centre of the partnerships approach. The leadership for sustainable development has been driven from a variety of quarters. The Chair the of the Oldham partnership Steering Group is also the chair of the local Environment Forum. In addition the local authority has a strong track record with regards sustainable development and this helped the partnership achieve a Local Government Chronicle award for sustainable communities in 2006. The resources and skills needed to realise the founding ideas were underestimated but as the Partnership grew in awareness and self-confidence, measures (resources) were put in place to address initial shortcomings.

In particular, while key partners had historically adopted different approaches to community engagement the Partnership was able to pool this experience and resource to develop a coherent community engagement plan and approach that avoided duplication and adopted good practice, particularly in relation to groups and/or communities that may have been excluded. Activities undertaken by the Borough's Environment Forum have helped see increased engagement in environmental activity by working with its partners across all communities. The development of local Green Olympics, and 20 ward challenges helped see communities take responsibilities for activities in their locality. A while host of projects have been undertaken which have included community clean ups, local walks, establishment of litter watchers, and the expansion of the Eco schools network¹ for which Oldham is now ranked 4th out of the Top Twenty Active English Local Education Authorities (spring 2008).

An integrated appraisal toolkit was used to identify conflicts and areas for joined up working. The original round two LAA appraisal was undertaken by PixelFountain using the PlanIT NW interactive model and the Boroughs Environment Forum. In addition the NW Integrated appraisal Tool kit was used to undertake a sustainability appraisal of the round two LAA. This helped all partners fully appreciate their roles and how their work linked together. The round two LAA also detailed the borough's collective environmental footprint, as determined by the Stockholm Institute. March 2008 will see a new PlanIT LAA event undertaken with a future anticipated sustainability appraisal using either Oldham MBC's approach to sustainability appraisal or the revised regional Integrated Appraisal Toolkit.

Oldham's local area agreement will be the delivery mechanism for Oldham's sustainable community strategy. As well as using a balance of social, economic and environmental indicators, the Partnership will also include the new national indicator on climate change to develop a new programmed of joined up partnership activity to mitigate and adapt to climate change. Generally the whole basket of Climate and environment related national indicators will act as a means of tracking and reporting the longer-term impact of this work.

The support provided which built that capability

The Core team of the partnership is hosted by the Council. Mutual cross working has helped develop a culture to support the overarching change theory of sustainable use of resources in the Sustainable Community Strategy.

¹ Eco-Schools is a Europe-wide project designed to encourage whole-school action for the environment. It is a recognised award scheme, rewarding and accrediting schools that have made a commitment to continuously improving their environmental performance.

External appraisal-type tools have also proved useful, including the PlanIT tool and the regional Integrated Appraisal Toolkit, which was developed by the North West Regional Development Agency, in conjunction with the Government Office, North West Regional Assembly and the Environment Agency.

Barriers faced and how they were overcome

The Oldham partnership ultimately views all issues as interrelated and cross cutting. The partnership and Council helped undertake pilot feasibility testing on a range of the new national indicators from the 198 and highlighted the need for a more streamlined and joined up approach to funding.

It has identified that the partnership inherited policy silos from central government departments and the partnership aspirations to change has helped removed these silos via partnership working. Challenges still remain to some extent around the pooling, commissioning and the deployment of resources to deliver the LAA, and the way in which certain element of public monies have not been placed in the Area based grant.

In addition the scale of resources allocated might still however been seen to be limited given the continuing challenges such as the economic restructuring of the local economy.

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