

Partnership matters

A review of our partnership involvement 2003

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Partnership Matters

Summary

Partnerships are essential to improving the quality of life for people in any local authority area. In fact nearly everything we do involves some degree of partnership working. Effective partnerships **can** make all the difference to quality of life. But without a clear focus, the right partners, sufficient people and financial resources, their impact can be insignificant.

Following our initial CPA self-assessment in 2002, we highlighted the need to review our partnerships to make sure they are delivering benefits to our communities. We started by identifying the 27 formal partnerships we are involved in that consist of 'two or more organisations, where at least one is not a local authority, acting together and using diverse resources to achieve a common purpose with clear goals and aims.' Through these we work with over 80 different organisations, including other councils, statutory agencies, voluntary organisations and businesses.

Between May and August 2003, we carried out 80 structured interviews with Wychavon officers, councillors and partners involved in each partnership. A university student on a work placement with us carried out the interviews. This gave a strong degree of independence to the research. Although the approach we used did have some limitations, for example we were not able to interview every partner, we feel it was a rigorous and robust piece of research.

Our findings are wide ranging. We found that partnership working is not new. **Two thirds of our partnerships have existed for more than two years.** Some, like the Business Start-Up Partnership and Mental Health Liaison Group, have been around for longer. At the time of the interviews, several, including the Droitwich Spa Area LSP and Wychavon Youth Strategy Group, were less than a year old. **64% of our partnerships are viewed as operating at a strategic level. Only six are statutory.**

The partnerships cover a wide range of issues from improving quality of life to more specific activities such as setting up farmers' markets or reducing youth homelessness. We found a high concentration of partnership activity on economic, housing and transport issues and a gap in activity on environmental issues. **72% of the partners we interviewed had a good awareness of our community plan.** Our partnerships contribute to our community plan themes and play a key role in helping us deliver two of our own strategic priorities.

We are involved in twice the number of partnerships at a county level as at a district or sub-district level. Our degree of influence tends to be greatest in partnerships at a district or sub-district level and decreases as the geographical area covered by a partnership widens.

The key features of an effective partnership are a focus on action, evidence that they are making a difference to people, efficient organisation, effective performance management and an inclusive approach. We looked at how our partnerships measure up to each of these characteristics.

The headline messages from the review are positive. **Two thirds of our partnerships are action focused and base their work on local needs.** Our three LSPs, Droitwich Canal Restoration and the Business Start-Up partnerships are amongst those with a strong action focus. Those without a clear action focus include the Riverside Tourism Consortium, Supporting People Strategy Group and Wychavon Youth Strategy Group.

Around a third of our partnerships are making a difference to local people and delivering tangible benefits. We found good examples of physical, social and economic impacts, but relatively few significant environmental outcomes. The two Market Town Partnerships, Mental Health Liaison Group and Worcestershire Farmers' Market Group are good examples of partnerships that are making a real difference. Partnerships with little impact for people in Wychavon include the AONB

Partnership, Better Care Higher Standards and the Riverside Tourism Consortium. We expect the impact of partnerships such as the Droitwich Canals Restoration Partnership and Droitwich Area LSP to increase once they start to deliver action on the ground.

Most of our partnerships are efficiently organised, with the majority of decisions made within the partnerships. We contribute leadership to 12 partnerships, funding to 21, project management to 16 and administrative support to 13. Some partnerships, such as the Droitwich Canal Restoration, Lifelong Learning and two Market Town partnerships, have been extremely successful at attracting external funding. For others, like the Cotswold and Malvern Transport Partnership, lack of funding is a barrier to success.

We see **our involvement in 16 partnerships as critical, desirable for ten and marginal for just one**. This suggests that overall we are focusing our attention on the right partnerships.

We used the partnership life cycle to identify the maturity of each partnership. We found that in general, **younger partnerships are at the forming stage of the life cycle, with older partnerships at the functioning or flying stages**. Notable exceptions include the Riverside Tourism Consortium and Worcestershire Partnership, which despite being over four years old, are still at the forming stage. The relatively young Droitwich Canals Restoration Partnership is already flying. **Two thirds of the partnerships describe their work as 'ongoing' and do not have an exit strategy**

About **half of our partnerships are effectively managing their performance**, whilst nearly a third are weak in this area. The Community Plan Core Group is a good example of a performance managed partnership. It regularly monitors progress on community plan actions and produces progress updates telling people how we are getting on.

We found that generally **the membership of our partnerships reflects the issues being addressed**. The Droitwich Spa Area LSP is a good example of a partnership that became more inclusive following a review of its membership.

Most of our partnerships have links to other relevant partnerships. Although there is room for some, like the Youth Strategy Group, to build stronger links with the three LSPs. Our LSPs use theme groups to engage a wide range of individuals and organisations. We found that **most of our partnerships could do more to raise their community profile**.

The review has shown there are clear benefits from working in partnership, including attracting external funding and delivering real improvements for the community which we couldn't achieve on our own. It has also highlighted a number of less effective partnerships where we need to make decisions about our future levels of involvement.

Based on the review findings **we have made eight recommendations for improving our partnership working**. In summary these are to:

- keep our levels of involvement low in seven partnerships
- reduce our involvement in, or withdraw from, two partnerships
- increase our input and influence in two
- maintain a high profile in six
- explore opportunities for joining up some partnerships
- share the review findings with our partners
- improve the way we share information and communicate with partnerships
- review our key business partnerships not covered by this review.

1. Introduction

1.1 Why partnership matters

'Government expectations are high and there needs to be a continuing drive for efficiency and effectiveness in partnership working.'

[IDeA & CEDOS, *A Tool for Evaluating Economic Development and Regeneration Partnerships.*]

Partnerships are essential to improving the quality of life for people in any local authority area. Wychavon is no different. In fact nearly everything we do involves some degree of partnership working. For instance, we work with our contractors to provide waste collection and street cleaning services and with local housing associations to build affordable homes. We help schools and sports clubs to run activities for young people and we are tackling things like vehicle crime and drug abuse through our Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership. Many of our documents, such as the community plan, are partnership ones.

Partnerships can be time and resource intensive. It is easy to become involved in a plethora of well intentioned, but under achieving partnerships. It's much harder to take the decision to pull out of them if they aren't making a difference or to inject more resources to help increase their impact.

Effective partnerships **can** make all the difference to quality of life, but without a clear focus, the right partners and sufficient people and financial resources, their impact can be insignificant. The real test of a partnership's effectiveness is whether its outputs and outcomes are greater than the sum of those of the individual partners.

1.2 Why this review matters

Our partnership activity has significantly increased over the last five years or so. We are now involved in nearly 30 formal partnerships and many more informal ones. Although we put a lot of energy and resources into these, we have never carried out a full review of our partnership activity to make sure that we are getting the most out of them.

In our initial Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) pathfinding self assessment in 2002, we recognised we needed to do more work on evaluating our partnerships. The Audit Commission reflected this in our interim CPA report, which said, 'partnerships are not always used to maximum effect or formally evaluated.' And future CPA activity will include a greater focus on partnerships.

So we decided it was time to take a closer look at our partnerships and assess how effective they are and whether they are making a real difference to people – not just talking about it.

1.3 Aims of the review

The main aims of this review were to find out:

- more about the partnerships we are involved in
- how effective they are – our perceptions and our partners
- partners' views of our contribution
- most importantly, what the outcomes are for local people.

We want the findings of the review to help us manage our partnership involvement better and to make sure **all** the partnerships we are involved in are effective, efficient and making life better for people in Wychavon.

2. What we did

2.1 First steps

In 2002 we carried out an initial partnership mapping exercise. A summary of the results is provided in Appendix 7.1. This desktop exercise identified the 31 formal partnerships we were involved in at the time and the contribution each made to social, environmental and economic well being. We used this as the starting point for this partnership review.

In January 2003, our Overview and Scrutiny Committee carried out a review of councillor representation on 56 outside bodies. This looked at the number of councillors on each body, the number of meetings held and the areas covered. A summary of the findings is included in Appendix 7.2. As a result, we have reduced the number of representatives on some bodies and made other changes, including producing guidance for representatives and reviewing the way councillors report back.

There is little overlap between the Overview and Scrutiny exercise and this review because our involvement in the majority of the outside bodies covered by the scrutiny exercise is not a true partnership one. The only exceptions are the Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Partnership, Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, Droitwich Spa LSP and the Evesham and Pershore Market Town Partnerships.

2.2 Scope of the review

We are involved in partnership relationships at many different levels. To keep this review manageable we focused on partnerships that:

- are formal and structured
- involve external organisations
- have a definite purpose.

Our partnership definition (see Box 2.1) encompasses these characteristics. We used this to identify those bodies that constitute a formal partnership. Any that did not comply with the definition were not covered by the review. The following types of 'partnerships' were therefore excluded:

- cross-Council working groups, for example the Equalities Working Group
- professional liaison groups, such as the County and District Planning Officers Group
- working or business relationships, such as those with South Worcestershire Primary Care Trust, registered social landlords and Wychavon Leisure
- contractual relationships, for example with FOSCA and Fountain Landscapes
- partnerships focusing on small projects at a very local level, such as the rural arts projects.

Several partnerships identified by our initial mapping exercise, including Worcestershire Careline, Worcestershire Tourism and the West Midlands Regional Cycling Officers, did not fit with the definition and were excluded.

2.3 Our approach

We carried out most of our research through structured interviews with people involved in each partnership. We used two similar questionnaires (see Appendix 7.3). One aimed at Wychavon representatives on partnerships and one for other partners. The questions focused on the key issues

Box 2.1: Our partnership definition

'A group of **two or more organisations**, where at least one is not a local authority, **acting together** and using diverse resources **to achieve a common purpose with clear goals and aims.**'

we wanted to examine and also drew on examples of best practice from other local authorities such as Suffolk and Wycombe Councils.

Neil Bearcroft, a second year university student on a work placement with us, carried out the interviews between May and August 2003. He brought a strong degree of independence to the review. In all, he carried out 80 interviews with Wychavon officers, councillors and over 30 different partner organisations. He also attended a number of partnership meetings and his observations of these have contributed to the review findings.

A list of the people we interviewed is included in Appendix 7.4. We tried to use a consistent approach when identifying who to interview from each partnership. Inevitably, there were some exceptions and we were unable to speak to everyone we wanted to. As far as possible we applied the following principles and interviewed:

- **at least two people per partnership**, preferably three
- **more people for the larger or more strategic partnerships**, such as the LSPs and Worcestershire Partnership
- **the lead Wychavon officer** for each partnership
- **at least one non local authority representative** per partnership.

Individuals from partner organisations were only interviewed for a maximum of two partnerships, despite the fact that some, such as representatives from Community First and South Worcestershire Primary Care Trust (PCT), sit on four or more partnerships.

2.4 Advantages and limitations of our approach

As with any research, the method we used had both advantages and limitations. Despite the limitations outlined below, we feel the review is a rigorous and robust piece of research and that the findings provide a fair picture of the partnerships we are involved in.

The questionnaires contained a good mix of open and closed questions and gave the interviews a clear and consistent structure. However, a couple of the questions were ambiguous and therefore open to interpretation by the person being interviewed. With hindsight, we missed the opportunity to ask about some issues, such as performance management and inclusivity, in more depth.

Using an independent person to do the interviews was a definite advantage. It lessened the likelihood of bias and helped put those being interviewed at their ease. We found people had varying levels of knowledge about some partnerships. This was particularly affected by how long they had been involved in a partnership and the level of their involvement. By interviewing more than one person from each partnership we got a range of views and were able to build up a good picture of each partnership.

We found people were generally reluctant to be critical about the partnerships they were involved in, even when the evidence suggested that a particular partnership was not very effective. During the review, we found a number of partnerships that are performing fairly poorly. However, the people we interviewed gave some of these an effectiveness score of 3 or 4 out of 5!

Partnerships are dynamic. They change all the time to respond to shifting circumstances, such as new legislation, funding opportunities or political direction. So it is important to remember that our findings represent a snapshot in time. Inevitably some partnerships will have moved forward since we carried out the interviews, whilst others may have slipped backwards. The other point to have in mind when reading this report, is that we have looked at partnerships from a Wychavon perspective and the benefits to our district. Whilst a partnership may be making a real difference in a neighbouring district or county, our findings won't reflect this if it isn't having a positive impact in Wychavon.

3. Our findings – what are our partnerships like?

Our main findings are presented in this section. We have also produced summaries about each partnership. These are included in Appendix 7.5.

This section starts with an overview of our partnership involvement and how the partnerships contribute to our community plan. **The key features of a successful partnership are a focus on action, evidence that they are making a difference to people, efficient organisation, effective performance management and an inclusive approach.** We consider how our partnerships measure up to each of these characteristics in turn, using examples and case studies to support our findings. The section concludes with a synopsis about each partnership.

3.1 An overview of our partnership landscape

The 27 partnerships we are currently involved in that fit with our partnership definition are listed in Box 3.1. The numbers are referred to later in the report where information is presented in a graphical format. More details about each partnership are included in the summaries (Appendix 7.5).

Through these partnerships we work with well over 80 different organisations, including other councils, voluntary bodies, businesses and statutory agencies like the police and primary care trusts (PCTs).

Partnership working is not new for us. **Two thirds of the partnerships have existed for more than two years.** The oldest is the Business Start-Up Partnership, which has been running for nine years. The Mental Health Liaison Group is seven years old. At the time of the interviews, several of the partnerships, including the Droitwich Spa Area LSP and Wychavon Youth Strategy Group, were less than a year old.

Most of the partnerships meet at least three or four times a year, with over a third meeting more than six times a year.

The majority of the partnerships are viewed as operating at a strategic level as Figure 3.1 shows.

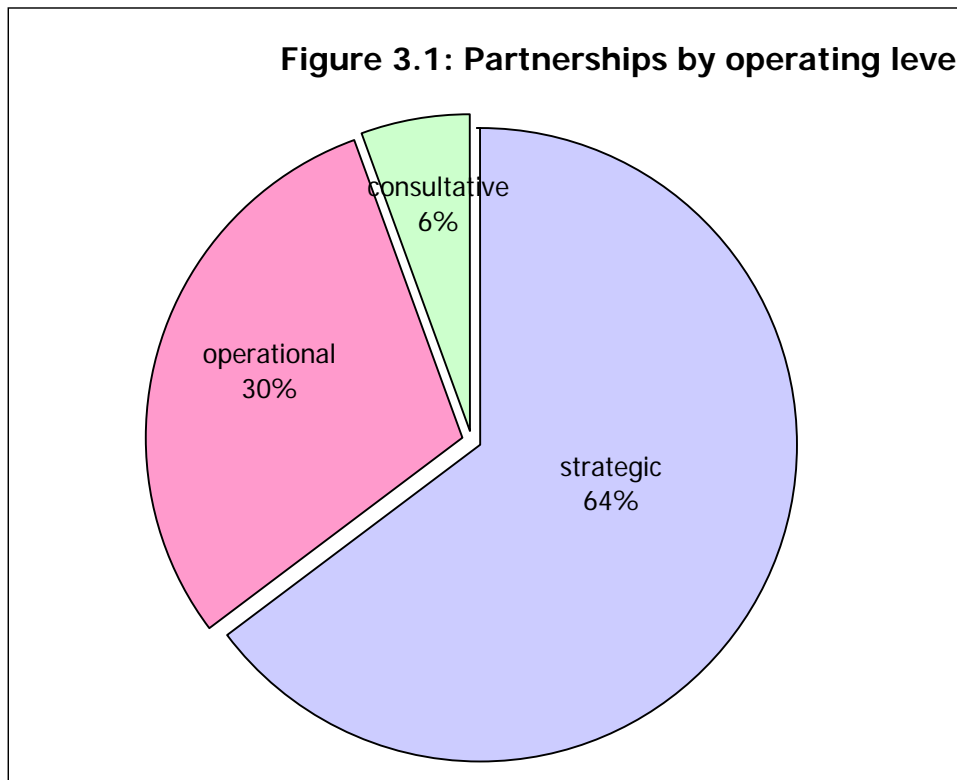
Only six partnerships are statutory, these are highlighted in bold in Box 3.1. 17 are non statutory. Some people were unclear about the statutory basis of the three LSPs and the Cotswold AONB Partnership. We are statutorily required to set up an LSP for Wychavon. However, we have taken a more flexible approach and set up a co-ordinating Core Group and three area based LSPs. At the moment the

Cotswold AONB Partnership is a non statutory partnership, but when it gains Conservation Board

Box 3.1: Our partnerships

1. **Better Care Higher Standards**
2. Business Start-Up Partnership Herefordshire & Worcestershire
3. **Community Plan Core Group**
4. Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Partnership
5. Cotswold & Malvern Transport Partnership
6. Droitwich Canal Restoration Partnership
7. Droitwich Spa Area Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)
8. Evesham Community Contact Centre
9. Evesham Market Town Partnership (LSP)
10. Heartbeat Partnership
11. Mental Health Liaison Group
12. Pershore Market Town Partnership (LSP)
13. Riverside Tourism Consortium
14. **South Worcestershire Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnership**
15. **Supporting People Strategy Group**
16. Vital Villages Warwickshire & Worcestershire
17. West Midlands Market Towns Task Group
18. Worcester Norton Parkway
19. **Worcestershire Community Legal Service**
20. Worcestershire Economic Partnership
21. Worcestershire Farmers' Market Group
22. **Worcestershire Partnership**
23. Worcestershire Youth Homelessness Partnership
24. Worcestershire All Sports Partnership
25. Wychavon & Redditch Rural Transport Partnership
26. Wychavon Lifelong Learning Partnership
27. Wychavon Youth Strategy Group

status our involvement in it is likely to become statutory and the Management Plan we produce through the partnership is a statutory requirement.



As their names suggest, our partnerships cover a wide range of activities. Some address single issues or themes such as setting up farmers' markets and tackling youth homelessness. Whilst others, like the Worcestershire Partnership and three LSPs, have a broader quality of life remit.

We mapped the partnerships according to their main area of activity using the five themes of our community plan. A visual picture is presented in Figure 3.2. Partnerships with a broader quality of life remit, like the LSPs and Worcestershire Partnership, are in the middle portion of the map. There is a clear concentration of activity on issues in the quality jobs and opportunities segment. This suggests there may be opportunities to rationalise partnership activity on some of these issues. A focus of activity under the vibrant communities theme is also evident. Only one partnership has a primary focus on crime and community safety issues. And there is a clear gap in partnership activity on some of the key aspects of the environment theme, although the LSPs are addressing some of these.

Figure 3.3 shows that **72% of the partners we interviewed had good levels of awareness of our community plan.** With time, awareness levels should increase further. Figure 3.4 shows that at least 16 partnerships contribute to each of the five community plan themes, with the highest levels of contribution being to the vibrant communities theme. From Figure 3.4 we can infer that our partnerships play a key role in helping us deliver our second and third corporate priorities – 'healthy and safe communities with a good quality environment' and 'reaching out to everyone'.

The map of our partnerships by geographical level, in Figure 3.5, shows that **we are involved in twice the number of partnerships at a county level as at a district or sub-district level.** This is unsurprising given that most of the organisations we work with operate across district boundaries. In fact for some of our partners, like Community First and the PCT, it must be hard to fully engage in all the relevant partnerships at a district and sub district level without spreading resources too thinly. We are also involved in five partnerships at a multi county level, these either deal with issues that cut across county boundaries, such as transport or tourism, or that are of a sub

Figure 3.2: Map of partnerships by main activity

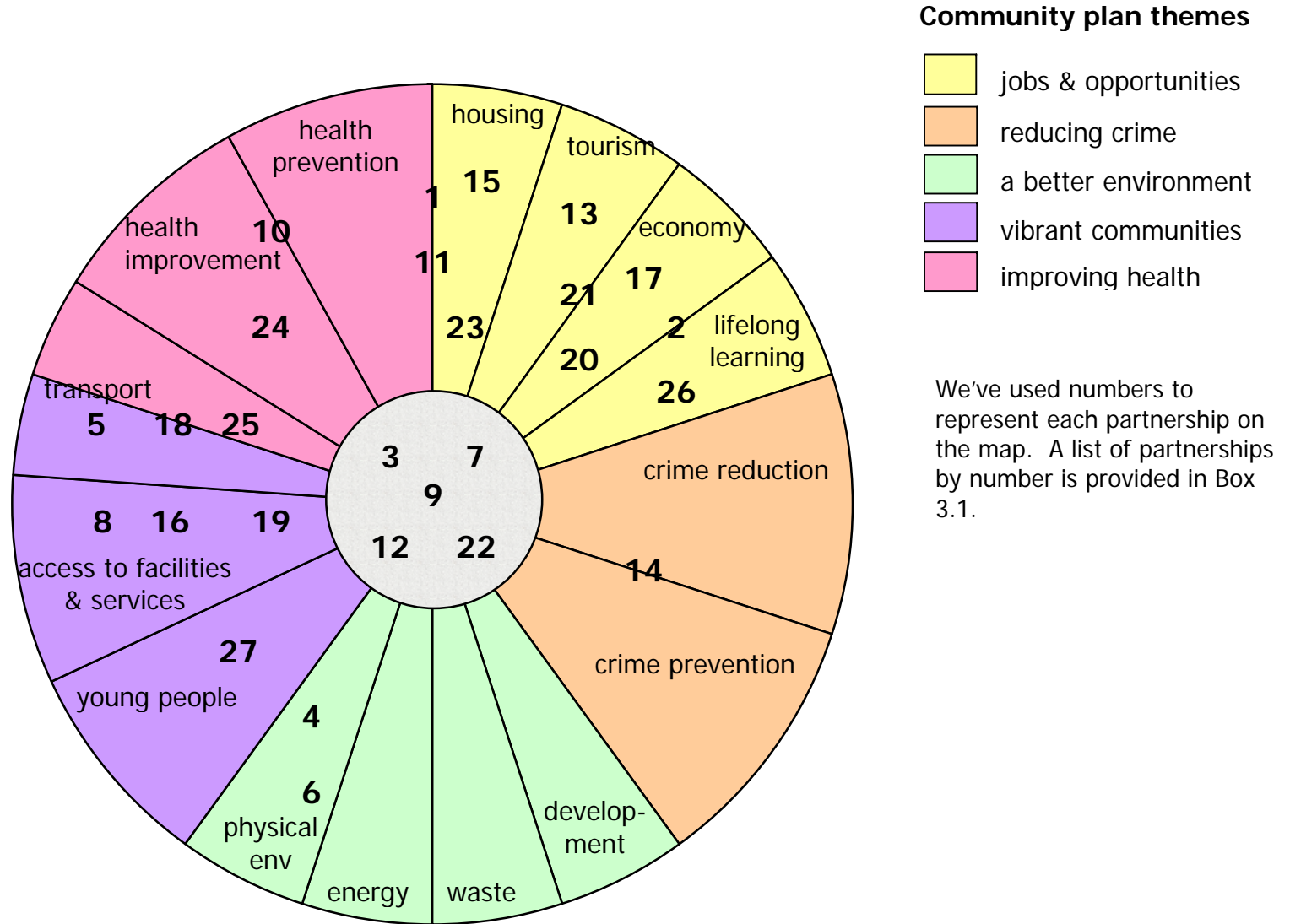


Figure 3.3: Partners' awareness of the community plan

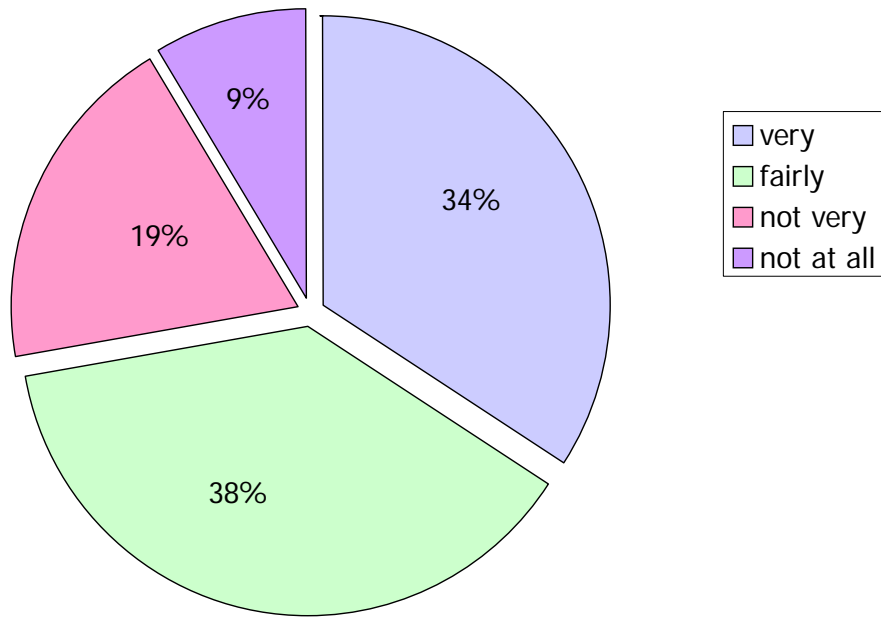
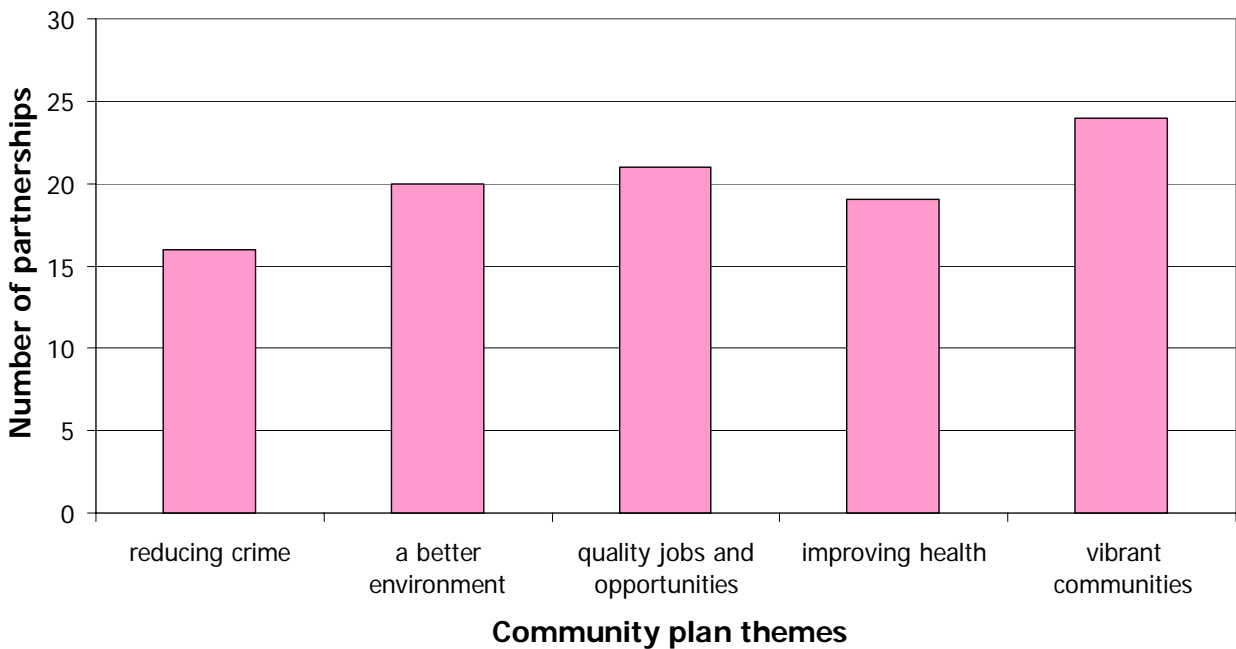


Figure 3.4: How our partnerships contribute to the community plan



regional or regional interest. Generally our degree of influence on a partnership reduces as the geographical area covered widens. We therefore have greatest influence on the district and sub district partnerships, most of which we lead.

Figure 3.5: Map of partnerships by geographical level

Sub district/town	District	Multi district	County	Multi county	Regional
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Droitwich Canal Restoration ▪ Droitwich Spa LSP ▪ Evesham Market Town ▪ Pershore Market Town 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Community Plan Core Group ▪ Mental Health Liaison ▪ Wychavon Life Long Learning ▪ Wychavon Youth Strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • South Worcestershire Crime and Disorder Reduction • Wychavon & Redditch Rural Transport Partnership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Better Care Higher Standards ▪ Heartbeat Partnership ▪ Worcestershire Partnership ▪ Worcestershire Economic Partnership ▪ Worcestershire Youth Homelessness ▪ Supporting People ▪ Worcestershire All Sports ▪ Worcestershire Community Legal Services ▪ Worcestershire Farmers Market ▪ Worcester Norton Parkway 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cotswold AONB ▪ Cotswold & Malvern Transport ▪ Riverside Tourism ▪ Vital Villages ▪ Warwickshire and Worcestershire ▪ Worcestershire Business start up Herefordshire and Worcestershire 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ West Midlands Market Town Task Group

3.2 Action focused?

Box 3.2 summarises the key features of an action focused partnership. Action focused partnerships also make a positive impact, this is covered in section 3.3.

We found that **about two thirds of our partnerships can be described as action focused**. Those with a strong action focus include the Business Start-up Partnership, Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership, Droitwich Canal Restoration Partnership, Vital Villages Warwickshire & Worcestershire and the three LSPs. Evesham Market Town Partnership is featured in Case Study 1 below. These partnerships are clear about their aims, have a written strategy or action plan to guide them and most have set a number of targets. Their work is based on local needs, identified using a number of methods, including our 2001 Residents' Survey, crime audit and the Droitwich, Evesham and Pershore healthchecks.

Box 3.2: Key features of an action focused partnership:

- Agreed a **long term vision & shared values**
- **Clear about what it wants to achieve** and has set out how it will get there
- **Focus on action** - rather than just talking or producing bits of paper
- Work **based on local needs** and input from the community
- **Adds value** to partners' work and does not work in isolation

One of the challenges for the two Market Town Partnerships is to maintain an action focus, now they have expanded their role from delivering the market towns programme to a wider LSP one dealing with broader quality of life issues.

Two other partnerships with a strong action focus are the Mental Health Liaison and Worcestershire Farmers' Market Groups. Interestingly, neither has a written strategy or action plan. However, the members we interviewed were clear about the aims of the partnerships and there was evidence that their work is based on local needs.

The Riverside Tourism Consortium (see Case Study 1), Supporting People Strategy Group, Worcestershire Economic Partnership, Worcestershire Partnership and Wychavon Youth Strategy Group are amongst the third of partnerships without a clear action focus. Although some do have one or more elements of an action focused partnership, they are much less well developed. For example, the Supporting Strategy People Group has not yet identified needs or produced a five year plan. The Worcestershire Economic Partnership is still developing a strategy, although is basing its work on the results of the county economic survey. The Worcestershire Partnership has a plan, the Worcestershire Community Strategy, but it does not set out who is responsible for delivering any of the targets contained in it. The Youth Strategy Group still needs to establish a clear action focus that gives added value to other work on youth issues.

Case Study 1: action focused partnerships?

Evesham Market Town Partnership (LSP)

- Aims are to implement the market town programme and to improve quality of life
- Targets and direction set out in 2001-2005 implementation plan
- Work based on local needs identified through Evesham healthcheck
- Moving towards a wider LSP role and stronger links with the community plan
- Recognised as best practice by AWM & Countryside Agency

Riverside Tourism Consortium

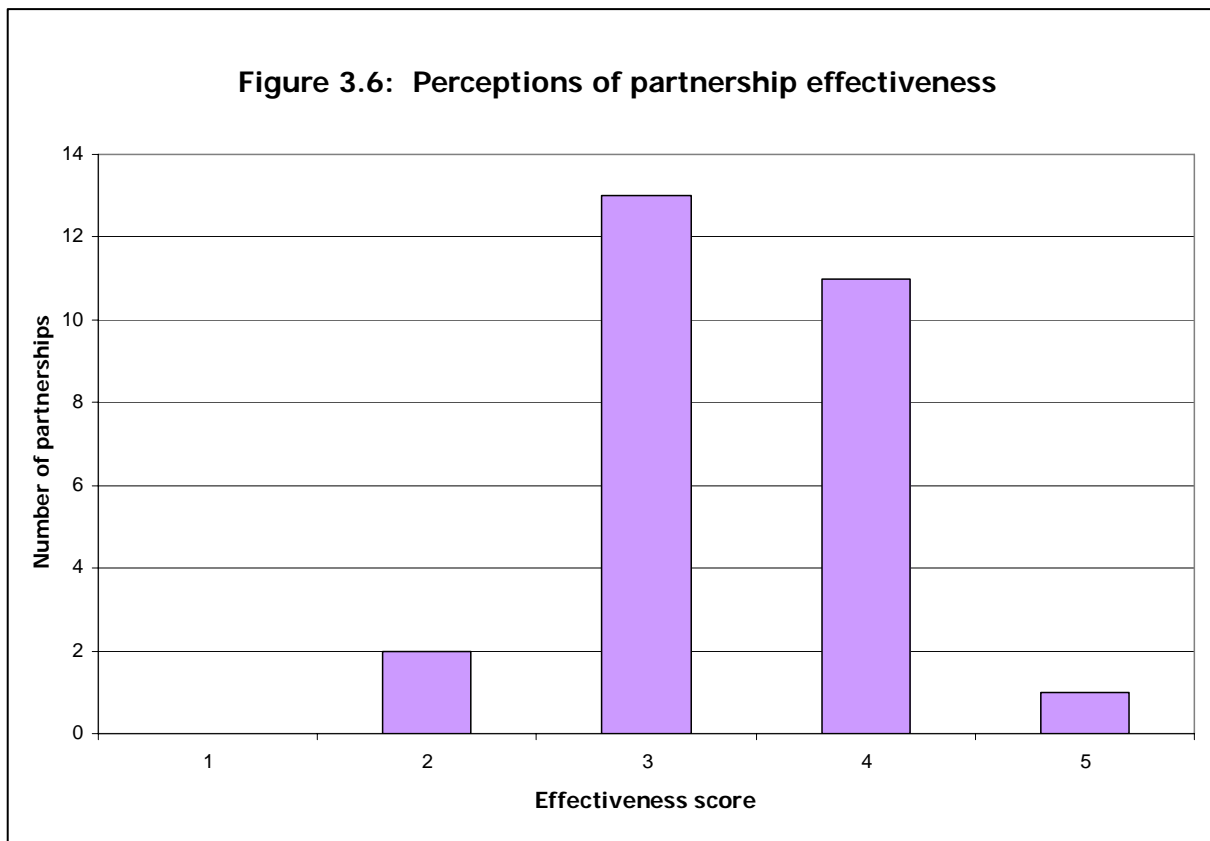
- Aims are to promote Evesham, Pershore and other local riverside towns and to make sure tourism events don't clash
- No strategy or action plan
- No targets set due to lack of funds
- Work does not appear to be based on identified local needs
- Links with the Market Town Partnerships appear weak

3.3 Effective and making a difference?

It is encouraging that the majority of our partnerships are action focused. But the real test is whether this translates into achievements that make a difference to people in Wychavon. This was the key thing we wanted to find out from the review.

We looked at perceptions of partnership effectiveness and for evidence of positive outcomes and achievements that people will notice.

We asked people to rate a partnership's effectiveness on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is the least effective and 5 is the most effective. The results are presented in Figure 3.6. This question was open to interpretation as we didn't define what we meant by effectiveness so the scores given are fairly subjective. It is apparent from the results that people were reluctant to give low scores, even when there was little evidence to back up effectiveness scores of 3 or 4. This suggests that either people are afraid to be critical or that once involved in a partnership, it is difficult to take a step back and be self aware.



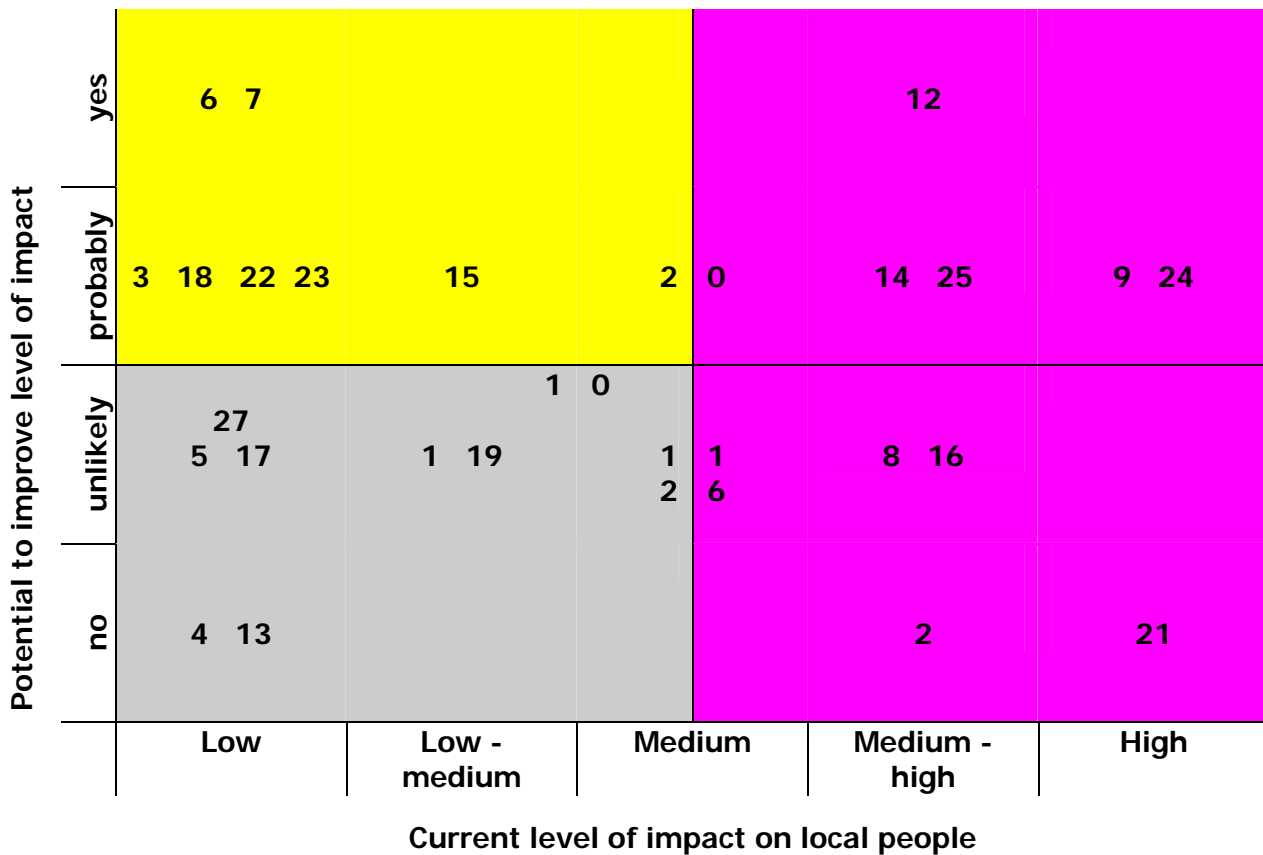
We found that about **a third of our partnerships are making a real difference to local people and delivering tangible benefits**. These partnerships are listed in Box 3.3 along with some examples of what they have achieved. Many of the impacts are physical ones, such as town centre development or creating a new riverside garden. But there are also good examples of social and economic impacts, although relatively few that have significant environmental outcomes.

Box 3.3: Partnerships making an impact

- **Business Start-up** – run business start up and return to work courses
- **Evesham Community Contact Centre** – brought key public services together under one roof, open 7 days a week
- **Evesham Market Town** – regenerated the riverside and got Broadband for Bredon Hill area
- **Mental Health Liaison** - rehoused people with mental health problems
- **Pershore Market Town** – supported development and expansion of No 8 community arts centre and opened new Learn Direct ICT centre
- **South Worcestershire CDRP** – introduced two neighbourhood wardens and run drugs awareness programmes
- **Vital Villages** – supported over 20 village shops and post offices
- **Worcestershire All Sports** – run 16 basketball courses and 4 coaching courses
- **Worcestershire Farmers’ Market** – set up 33 farmers markets
- **Wychavon & Redditch Rural Transport** – new flexi bus scheme, appointed vehicle sharing officer and got cycle racks for station

In Figure 3.7 we have plotted each partnership according to its current level of impact (horizontal axis) and its potential to improve in the future (vertical axis). Our assessment of current levels of impact is primarily based on responses to questions about recent key achievements and impact on local people. Our view of the potential each partnership has to improve is drawn from a range of evidence, particularly the age of a partnership, its track record and next expected achievements.

Figure 3.7: Impact of our partnerships vs their potential to improve



Partnerships in the top right section of the graph, shown in pink, currently have a medium or high impact and show signs that they can get even better. For example, the Pershore Market Town Partnership (12) currently has a medium to high impact, which is likely to increase further as it widens its role to tackle social and environmental issues. Those partnerships in the bottom right quarter, also in pink, have a medium to high impact but are unlikely to improve further. The Worcestershire Farmers' Market Group (21) falls into this category because it is already very successful and has achieved what it set out to do.

Some of the partnerships in the top left, yellow section of the graph are still relatively young so still have a low impact. However, once they get established or can access funding sources, they should shift across to the pink section of the graph. For example, the impact of the Droitwich Canal Restoration Partnership (6) and Droitwich Spa Area LSP (7) will increase when work on the canal project begins and actions in the LSP's action plan are delivered. We need to keep a close watch on partnerships in this section of the graph to make sure they do start to make a difference.

Partnerships in the bottom left, grey quarter of the graph have very little impact on people and show little sign of improving in the near future. The Cotswold AONB Partnership (4) falls into this category. At the moment it is achieving little for people in Wychavon, however we do recognise that only a small part of the AONB falls within the district. Although it does make sense to produce the statutory Management Plan through the partnership rather than on our own.

Other partnerships in this quarter include Better Care Higher Standards (1) which has few achievements beyond producing a charter and annual report and the Cotswold and Malvern Transport Partnership (5) whose progress is hampered by lack of funding from the Strategic Rail Authority.

Figure 3.7 does have some limitations, for example the position of the Mental Health Liaison Group (11) does not do this successful partnership justice, because its impact is limited to a small number of people. However, on the whole the graph gives an excellent overview of the difference our partnerships are making and provides a useful guide as to where we need to focus our efforts in the future.

3.4 Organised efficiently?

Good organisation is key to effective partnership working. Although there is no one size fits all approach to a well-organised partnership, the key features you can expect to see in an efficiently organised partnership are summarised in Box 3.4.

We looked at the contribution we make to each partnership and also what others contribute. Although we didn't look in detail at partnership structures, we did find out who chaired each partnership and at the level at which the majority of decisions are made.

Local authorities chair the majority of our partnerships. Six are chaired by a Wychavon councillor and two by other councillors. This can be a good way to involve elected members in partnerships. Ten are chaired by local authority officers, sometimes on a rotating basis. The remainder are chaired by a range of organisations including the PCT, police, Business Link and a farmer.

Box 3.4: Key features of an efficiently organised partnership:

- **Effective leadership**
- Structure **conducive to decision-making**
- **Members reflecting the views of their organisations**
- **Sufficient** resources to meet aims and deliver plans
- Good **administrative support & communication**
- **Regular monitoring and review** of its activities
- Developed **an exit strategy** if it's a time limited partnership

The **majority of decisions are made within the partnerships**, although some of the bigger decisions, particularly on funding issues have to be agreed by individual partners. The most notable exceptions are the Worcestershire Partnership (see Case Study 2) and the Community Plan Core Group. People interviewed were unclear about the decision making level within the Worcestershire Partnership. Some of those interviewed felt that we dominate the Community Plan Core Group, so it is up to us to make sure all partners are equally involved in the decision making process.

As well as attending partnership meetings, **we contribute leadership to 12 partnerships, funding to 21, project management to 16 and administrative support to 13**. Many of the partnerships draw on funding from several sources. For example, the Lifelong Learning Partnership receives funding from the Learning & Skills Council, Department for Education and European Social Fund. The Countryside Agency and Advantage West Midlands are significant sources of funding for the Market Town Partnerships and the Rural Transport Partnership. Both the Market Town Partnerships have high levels of success at leveraging in external funds, with a ratio of £4 for every £1 of market towns funding.

A lack of funding is a barrier to success for some partnerships. This is demonstrated by the Cotswold & Malvern Transport Partnership which was working quite effectively until a government decision meant that funding from the Strategic Rail Authority ceased. The partnership is therefore unable to achieve its aim of improving the service on the Cotswold Malvern Railway line.

On the other hand, the Mental Health Liaison Group is a great example of a partnership that doesn't rely on funding to be successful. The group pools existing resources from the seven partners who work together to provide housing solutions for people with mental health problems, achieving much more than they could working alone.

We view **our involvement in 16 partnerships as critical, desirable for ten and marginal for one** - the Wychavon Lifelong Learning Partnership. On the whole partners' perceptions on the importance of our involvement matched our own views. This is encouraging and suggests we are largely focusing our involvement on the right partnerships.

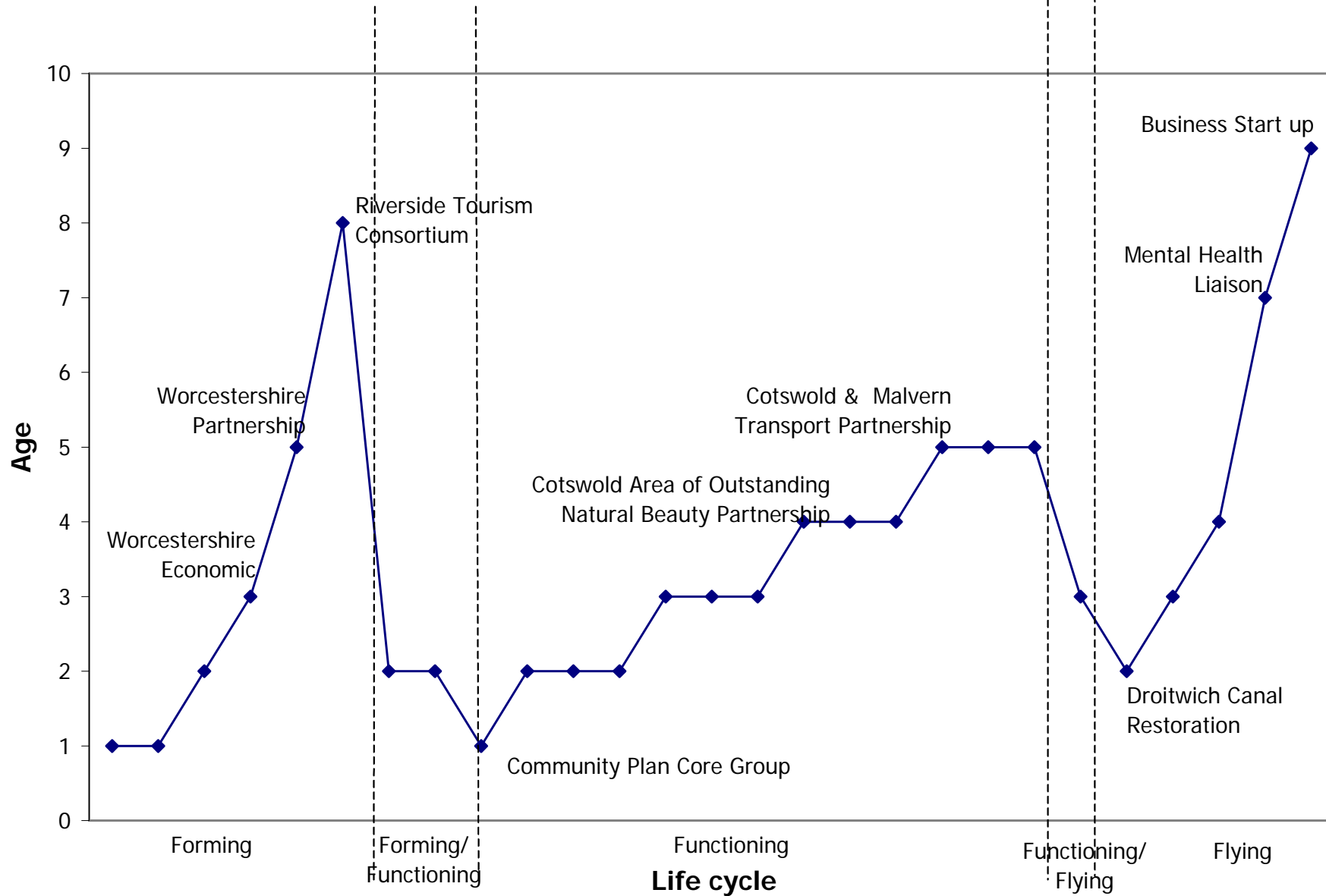
We looked at the stage each partnership is at in the partnership life cycle. This is a useful way of identifying the maturity of a partnership. The stages of the life cycle are explained in Box 3.5. Figure 3.8 plots the age of each partnership against its stage in the life cycle. Where opinions differed amongst those interviewed we took an average. Views on the life cycle stage of the Community Plan Core Group and the Evesham and Pershore Market Town Partnerships ranged from forming, to functioning and flying. And for the Worcestershire Partnership (see Case Study 2) from forming to frustration to functioning.

Box 3.5: The four stages of the partnership life cycle:

- **Forming:** common cause arising from shared interests, opportunities & threats. Early enthusiasm.
- **Frustration:** partners feel in a 'fog'. Doubts about what each partner brings
- **Functioning:** renewed vision and focus. Clear roles and responsibilities
- **Flying:** successful achievement of partnership goals. Trust and respect.

It is reasonable to expect younger partnerships to be at the forming and frustration stages of the life cycle, whilst those that have existed for several years should be functioning or flying. Whilst the plot in Figure 3.8 generally follows this pattern there are several marked exceptions. Despite being over four years old, the Worcestershire Partnership and Riverside Tourism Consortium are still at an early stage in the life cycle. In the case of the Worcestershire Partnership, this may be partly because the partnership has had a change of focus since community planning arrived on the scene. On the other hand, the relatively young Droitwich Canal Restoration Partnership (Case Study 2) is already flying. It is surprising that none of the partnerships were viewed as being at the frustration stage of the life cycle, particularly as the evidence suggests that this is indeed the stage some of them are at.

Figure 3.8: Partnership age vs stage in the partnership life cycle



Two thirds of the partnerships describe their work as ‘ongoing’ and do not have an exit strategy. Three have limited lifetimes and already have exit strategies in place, including the Droitwich Canal Restoration Partnership, highlighted in Case Study 2. We’ve put a funding exit strategy in place to help the Worcestershire Farmers’ Market Partnership become more self sufficient. We discovered that two of the partnerships identified by our initial mapping exercise (Appendix 7.1), the Regional Food Park Steering Group and Vale of Evesham Leader + Partnership, had actually completed their work and come to an end. This is good evidence that some partnerships are able to implement exit strategies once they’ve achieved what they set out to do.

Because of the number of factors involved, it is difficult to give an accurate assessment of the proportion of our partnerships that are efficiently organised. However, **all but three of our partnerships show several elements of an efficiently organised partnership.** The Riverside Tourism Consortium, Worcestershire Partnership and Wychavon Youth Strategy Group have room for improvement.

Case Study 2: efficiently organised partnerships?	
Droitwich Canal Restoration Partnership	Worcestershire Partnership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Many decisions made within the partnership ▪ Secured £7.5 million from Heritage Lottery Fund and Advantage West Midlands ▪ ‘Most deliverable canal restoration project in the country’ ▪ Strong project management provided by British Waterways ▪ Flying stage in partnership life cycle ▪ Exit strategy in place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of clarity amongst partners about level of decision making ▪ Predominantly County Council funded, although looking for external support ▪ Lack of buy in from some members ▪ Over four years old, but still at forming stage of life cycle ▪ Exit strategies in place for individual issues

3.5 Managing performance?

Performance measures and outcome based indicators have an important role in evaluating the effectiveness of a partnership and measuring its impacts. The key characteristics of a performance managed partnership are outlined in Box 3.6.

Whilst we did not explore performance management directly during the review, from the information obtained we estimate that **about half of our partnerships are managing their performance well.** Those that are strongest in this area tend to be partnerships with a clear action focus with a written strategy or action plan and agreed targets. These include the Evesham Community Contact Centre, Vital Villages and Wychavon and Redditch Rural Transport Partnerships.

Box 3.6: Key features of a performance managed partnership:

- Agreed **clear milestones, outcomes, performance indicators and delivery dates**
- **Partners deliver** what they’ve signed up to
- **Partners share information** to support planning and management
- **Resources are used effectively** to meet the partnership’s aims

The Community Plan Core Group is a particularly good example of a performance managed partnership. It monitors progress against the community plan actions three times a year and reports progress to the public through ‘tasting the difference’ updates and twm articles. It will use local quality of life indicators to assess outcomes over time. The partners also share information on key strategic issues, such as approaches to social inclusion.

Nearly 30% of our partnerships are weak on performance management. These tend to be partnerships that lack an action focus and have few identifiable impacts.

3.6 Inclusive?

‘There is no blueprint for deciding the right numbers of partners ... Partnerships that are trying to take a strategic approach to a complex problem may need a large number of members in order to encompass all the key players in a sizeable geographical area.’
[Audit Commission, *Fruitful Partnerships*.]

Inclusiveness is another important feature of partnership working. Box 3.7 lists the key characteristics of an inclusive partnership. It can be a real challenge to get a balance between a truly inclusive approach and the time and resources available.

Box 3.7: Characteristics of an inclusive partnership:

- **Membership reflects the purpose and locality** of the partnership
- **All partners able to be fully engaged**
- **Works democratically**
- **Decisions open to scrutiny**
- Does not work in isolation - has **strong links to other relevant partnerships**
- Creates **opportunities for wider community engagement** and is **socially inclusive**

We found that generally **the membership of our partnerships does reflect the issues being addressed.** The Droitwich Spa Area LSP, featured in Case Study 3, is a good example of a partnership that became more inclusive following a review of its membership. The most significant gap in membership for some partnerships is from the business sector.

The extent to which members are engaged varies across the partnerships. We have already commented on decision making in section 3.4 of this report.

Most of our partnerships have links to other relevant partnerships. Examples of partnerships that have built good links with others include the Supporting People Strategy Group and the Wychavon and Redditch Rural Transport Partnership. Notable exceptions are the Droitwich Canal Restoration Partnership, Mental Health Liaison Group and the Riverside Tourism Consortium. There is room for these, and other partnerships, to build links with the LSPs.

Our three LSPs use theme groups to engage a wide range of individuals and organisations in developing action plans for the three areas of the district. However, we found that **most of our partnerships could do more to raise their community profile**, particularly through regular communication with the public and where appropriate, creating opportunities for wider engagement in their work.

Tackling social exclusion is the core business of some partnerships, such as the Mental Health Liaison Group, Worcestershire Community Legal Service, Rural Transport Partnership and Youth Homelessness Partnership. Other partnerships need to make sure they take into account the needs of a wide range of groups in their work.

Case Study 3: an inclusive partnership?

Droitwich Spa Area LSP

- Reviewed membership of the partnership after the first 6 months
- Reduced 5 district councillor places to 3
- Asked organisations to nominate non-district councillor representatives
- Invited new members to join – Community First, CALC, – Housing Association, Business organisation
- Uses theme groups to engage a wider selection of community, businesses and voluntary groups

4. Conclusions

This review has shown that we are involved in a mixture of partnerships that are addressing a range of issues that affect quality of life. **Our findings show that partnerships play a key role in helping us deliver our own priorities and those set out in the community plan.**

We are involved in partnerships for a number of reasons. Most of our partnership activity is non-statutory, with only six of our partnerships requiring our involvement. We were instrumental in setting up around a quarter of our partnerships and invited to get involved in the others.

Overall the review findings paint a positive picture of our partnerships. There is clear evidence that a third are delivering tangible benefits for people and in time we expect a number of the younger partnerships to have a positive impact too. However, around a third of our partnerships are not delivering any real benefits for people and show little sign of improving, three of these are statutory ones.

The reviewed demonstrated that our most effective partnerships usually have some, or all, of the following characteristics in common:

- clarity about their purpose
- a focus on action – often set out in a written action plan and agreed targets
- work based on identified local needs
- good levels of organisation - decisions made within the partnership and access to resources to meet aims
- at the functioning or flying stages of the partnership lifecycle
- managing their performance.

It is encouraging that some of our most effective partnerships are those where we have a leadership role or a high level of influence.

Our least effective partnerships typically have several of the following features:

- unclear about their purpose
- lack an action focus – concentrating more on talking and producing bits of paper
- not efficiently organised – lack of commitment from some members and limited or no resources to deliver
- stuck at the forming or frustration stages of the partnership lifecycle
- weak on performance management
- working in isolation.

Most of our least effective partnerships cover a wide geographical area at county or multi county level, where our influence tends to be lower.

The review has shown that there are clear benefits from working in partnership. These include pooling resources, generating more innovative ways of doing things, attracting funding from external sources and crucially, delivering real improvements for the community which we couldn't achieve on our own. It has also highlighted those partnerships where we need to reduce our involvement or exert a greater influence to increase effectiveness.

Our recommendations for increasing the effectiveness of all our partnership involvement are set out in Section 5.

5. Recommendations

These are our recommendations for improving our partnership working based on the review findings. As well as benefiting us, we hope they will benefit our partners too.

5.1 Keep our levels involvement low in:

- **Cotswold AONB Partnership** – and review our current funding commitments to this partnership.
- **Cotswold and Malvern Transport Partnership** – unless funding comes forward.
- **West Midlands Market Towns Task Group** – we do however need to stay involved as there are indirect benefits arising from our involvement, which gives us contact and influence with regional funding bodies such as AWM.
- **Worcester Norton Parkway Partnership** – however we need to be a key player in the parallel development issues.
- **Worcestershire Community Legal Service**
- **Worcestershire Farmers' Market Group**
- **Wychavon Lifelong Learning Partnership**

5.2 Reduce our involvement in or withdraw from:

- **Better Care Higher Standards** – since the review this partnership has agreed to meet just once a year to meet its statutory obligations.
- **Riverside Tourism Consortium** – work could be better carried out at the LSP level and through exchanging information on dates of events rather than through a formal partnership.

5.3 Increase our input and influence in:

- **Worcestershire Partnership** – by more regular attendance at Board meetings, having a greater influence and strengthening communication between the partnership and the Community Plan Core Group.
- **Wychavon Youth Strategy Group** – consider how can we help this partnership make a real difference. Or look at whether there is an alternative mechanism to achieve the aims of this partnership more effectively.

5.4 Maintain a very high profile on:

- **Community Plan Core Group**
- **Droitwich Canal Restoration Partnership**
- **Droitwich Spa Area LSP**
- **Evesham Market Town Partnership**
- **Pershore Market Town Partnership**
- **South Worcestershire Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnership** – now this is a multi-district partnership we need to make sure it continues to deliver outcomes for Wychavon.

5.5 Explore opportunities for joining up partnerships

The review has shown that there are significant overlaps between some partnerships and that the creation of the LSPs has not yet resulted in any partnership rationalisation. The **Better Care Higher Standards** and **Supporting People Strategy** partnerships have already considered the possibility of merging and decided not to.

The review has shown they may be opportunities to join some of our **partnerships with an economic focus** (see Figure 3.2) together.

5.6 Share our findings with our partners

It is important that we share the review findings with our partners so that every partnership can benefit from this piece of work. We suggest the following approach:

- Offer each partnership a summary of the review findings plus any detailed findings about that particular partnership including suggested improvements, and a copy of its partnership summary (Appendix 7.5).
- Ask our representatives on each partnership to discuss the review findings and any suggestions for improvement with the partnership.
- Share our 'stress free guide' to effective partnership working (Appendix 7.6) with our partnership representatives to help them encourage more effective partnership working, where appropriate.

5.7 Improve information sharing and communication

This will help partnerships base their work on identified local needs and priorities, increase awareness of their work amongst other organisations and residents and encourage wider community engagement. Here are a few ways we how we can do this:

- Communicate the results of any new consultation activity, such as the 2003 National Satisfaction Survey or a new Residents' Survey, to the relevant partnerships.
- Share new intelligence, such as Census information or indices of deprivation, with the relevant partnerships.
- Help partnerships communicate their work to residents through our shops and publications, like twm.

5.8 Review our key business partnerships

This review did not look our key business partnerships, such as those with South Worcestershire Primary Care Trust and local Housing Associations. Do we want to do a similar review of these partnerships to make sure we are getting the most out of them?

6. References

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