



Birmingham Strategic Partnership

13 September 2005

Report to the City Council

Scrutiny Review of the Birmingham Strategic Partnership



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Preface

Councillor James Hutchings
Chairman, BSP Task and Finish
Overview and Scrutiny Committee



The City Strategic Partnership (CSP) was set up at the instigation of the Government to bring together representatives from the City Council and the major public and private sector agencies to work together in a coordinated way. The establishment of the CSP was also an essential condition to access Neighbourhood Renewal Funding.

The CSP was subsequently modified and renamed the Birmingham Strategic Partnership (BSP). The BSP is now an important player in the governance of the city.

In a city the size of Birmingham the BSP could not adequately reflect the full range and diversity of interests. Following the Devolution agenda District Strategic Partnerships (DSP) were set up to take account of local interests.

Last year Cllr Les Lawrence led a scrutiny of progress of the DSPs. This scrutiny reviews the BSP. The structure of the BSP and the whole family of partnerships proved to be unexpectedly complex.

The review was set up in response to councillors' concerns that they knew little about what appeared to be an unelected faceless Quango. Many councillors were also concerned that democratically taken decisions appeared to be questioned, delayed or frustrated.

The report answers some of these concerns as well as considering the future role of the BSP and issues of accountability and scrutiny. We concluded that the BSP should make a significant contribution to benefit our city.

I would like to thank my colleagues for their enthusiastic support of the review. All meetings were well attended stimulating and interesting.

The Committee is extremely grateful to those senior people who came to give evidence. We found all the evidence taking sessions to be informative and pleasant.

The Committee would also wish to thank Jill Short, Senior Scrutiny Officer, Sarah Mears, Committee Manager, and Jason Lowther, Head of Policy and Performance, who offered expert advice and support to the committee.

We invite you to approve our recommendations.



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1 Summary

- 1.1.1 Partnership working and concepts of multi-agency provision and collaboration have been gathering popularity over the last 20 years, particularly in government circles, as the preferred way of working to address a wide range of social, economic and environmental issues.
- 1.1.2 Partnerships can offer greater involvement of a wider range of interests in decision making processes and as a consequence are seen as an inherently more efficient way of allocating public funds and the most effective way of addressing the multidimensional problems faced by society.
- 1.1.3 Partnerships can offer the promise of many benefits including improved services and better cooperative working between different agencies but there can also be a downside. Partnership working can add to complexity, in that it is not always clear to the public who is responsible for what. They may also result in a loss of local democratic accountability especially, if local elected representatives find that they have less of a direct role to play in the partnership decision making process.
- 1.1.4 This review focuses on the Birmingham Strategic Partnership (BSP) which was established in May 2001 in line with Government guidance on the establishment of Local Strategic Partnerships. It explores the development of the partnership to date and starts to consider how it may further evolve in the future. The review was conducted during a time in which the partnership was undergoing a period of rapid change in terms of membership, structures and role. The task of the Scrutiny Committee was therefore quite difficult as it was often trying to get a snapshot of a continually moving target.
- 1.1.5 There is no doubt that Partnership working is complex. In order to understand this, the report sets out the national and local framework within which the Birmingham Strategic Partnership operates. It also compares the operation of the Birmingham model with those of similar partnerships in the Core Cities. In addition it relates the views shared with the Committee of a wide range of witnesses who have a direct involvement in the Birmingham Strategic Partnership.
- 1.1.6 A key question for the Committee in conducting the review was to consider to what degree the Birmingham Strategic Partnership represents a strategic development of services for Birmingham and whether or not it results in a democratic deficit.



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- 1.1.7 The Committee found that the Birmingham Strategic Partnership is playing an increasingly useful and important role in promoting cross agency working and cooperation in the city. However the Committee identified some areas of operation where the partnership needs to sharpen up. These are:
- Developing a more strategic role;
 - Regularly reviewing core membership;
 - Promoting greater transparency through the development of a communications strategy and a partnership protocol;
 - Enhancing accountability and opportunities for scrutiny.
- 1.1.8 As stated earlier, the BSP was at the time of this scrutiny exercise undergoing a range of key structural and membership changes to rationalise and build better links with the wider partnership framework at both a strategic and local level. The Committee welcomes these developments and would very much in particular, like to see a stronger and more fully developed relationship emerging between the BSP and the Districts in the future.
- 1.1.9 With the advent of Local Area Agreements the role importance and influence of the BSP looks set to grow. The challenge for the City Council is to be able to work cooperatively with partners to improve services and to maximise the benefits from the increased flexibilities on offer whilst, ensuring that there is both clear accountability for the decisions made and that the role of democratically elected members is safeguarded.



2 Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation	Responsibility	Completion Date
R1	Chairman of BSP	January 2006
R2	The Leader of the Council	October 2005
R3	Chairman of BSP	January 2006
R4	Chairman of BSP	September 2006



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R5	<p>The BSP should develop a communications strategy to promote greater understanding of the BSP. This should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Producing an annual report;• Considering the provision of question cards for use by the public;• Revising the BSP website;• Holding all meetings in public where appropriate	Chairman of BSP	January 2006
R6	<p>The BSP should develop a formal 'Partnership Protocol' which is made publicly accessible. This should cover:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The roles, rights and responsibilities of the members;• Codes of conduct; and• Declarations of interest.	Chairman of BSP	January 2006
R7	<p>That the Leader of the Council agrees a process whereby there is an annual report back to the Council on the activities and developments of the BSP and the City Council's contribution to them.</p>	Leader of the Council	January 2006
R8	<p>That the Coordinating Overview and Scrutiny Committee sets a framework for identifying how BSP and key partnership activity might be overseen by the scrutiny function.</p>	Chairman of Coordinating O&S Committee	March 2006
R9	<p>Progress towards achievement of these recommendations should be reported to the Coordinating Overview and Scrutiny Committee by March 2006. Subsequent progress reports will be scheduled by the Committee thereafter until all recommendations are implemented.</p>	Chairman of BSP	March 2006



3 Terms of Reference

3.1 Background

- 3.1.1 Partnership working has become an increasing feature of the way we do our business in the public sector. It has been estimated that since 1997 national policy initiatives have created more than five thousand partnerships. Countless others have emerged from the activities of councils and others have committed to joining up their programmes to meet local needs.
- 3.1.2 As a consequence partnerships play a key role in the formulation and delivery of public services to local communities. They inevitably involve the local authority working with other public bodies, voluntary and community organisations and businesses on a range of issues.
- 3.1.3 The key potential benefits of partnership working can be said to be the improvement of service provision by promoting integration across the different agencies and the opportunity to engage a wide set of players in the development of policy.
- 3.1.4 However, although partnership working can offer many benefits it can also have potential downsides. It can add complexity and fragmentation and may result in a loss of local accountability and transparency.
- 3.1.5 In March 2001 the then Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions issued guidance on the establishment of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) aligned with local authority boundaries. The aim of this was to encourage more effective joined up action between partner organisations to allow them to meet their own targets and goals, and to tackle deprivation and regeneration in a more co-ordinated way. The LSPs were charged with implementing a Community Strategy for the area, bringing together plans, partnerships and initiatives, working with Local Authorities to develop Public Service Agreements and developing and delivering local neighbourhood renewal strategies.
- 3.1.6 In May 2001 the first full meeting of the then City Strategic Partnership was held. This was subsequently renamed as the Birmingham Strategic Partnership. (This is the Birmingham equivalent of a Local Strategic Partnership).



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3.2 Reasons for the Review

- 3.2.1 It was this development that has aroused a concern amongst some City Council Members that there is a gradual shift developing in decision making away from democratically elected bodies to non-elected bodies. This can be seen to be resulting in a downgrading of the role of local authorities and local democracy.
- 3.2.2 More particularly the BSP often appeared to Members to challenge or delay decisions of democratically elected Ward or District Committees in the allocation of Neighbourhood Renewal Funds. Some Members were suspicious of an organisation of which they knew little.
- 3.2.3 This review was therefore set up to consider to what degree the Birmingham Strategic Partnership represents a strategic development of services for Birmingham and whether or not it results in a democratic deficit.

3.3 Terms of Reference

- 3.3.1 This Review seeks to:
- Understand how the Birmingham Strategic Partnership is structured, how it is currently operating, and how it will develop in the future.
 - To explore the relationship between the emerging District Strategic Partnerships and the Birmingham Strategic Partnership.
 - To consider what arrangements are in place to promote accountability and to enable scrutiny of the wider strategic partnership arrangements.
 - To investigate how the strategic partnership arrangements adopted in Birmingham compare with those elsewhere in the Country, with a view to identifying best practice.
- 3.3.2 The review was conducted by a Task and Finish Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Membership was:
- Councillor James Hutchings (Chairman)
 - Councillor Gurdial Singh Atwal
 - Councillor Emily Cox
 - Councillor Alistair Dow
 - Councillor Mahmood Hussain
 - Councillor Susanna McCorry
 - Councillor Timothy Huxtable



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3.4 Methodology

- 3.4.1 The Committee received verbal and written evidence from a range of individual members of the Birmingham Strategic Partnership.
- 3.4.2 A questionnaire (Appendix 2) was sent to all City Councillors to ascertain their level of knowledge of and their involvement with the Birmingham Strategic Partnership.
- 3.4.3 The evidence sessions were attended as follows:
- December 2004 – Jason Lowther Head of Policy and Performance presented the context and described how the Birmingham Strategic Partnership operates.
 - January 2005 – Councillor John Hemming MP, (the then) Deputy Leader of the Council and Chairman of the BSP.
 - February 2005 – Professor Michael Clarke, member of the BSP Board representing Further and Higher Education, Councillor Sue Anderson Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health and member of BSP Board, David Maxted Strategic Director of Local Services and member of BSP Board.
 - March 2005 – Councillor Les Lawrence, Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning and member of BSP Board. Mohammed Shafique Birmingham Community Empowerment Network (BCEN) and member of BSP Board. Guy Hordern, Voluntary, Charitable and Faith based representative on the Edgbaston and District Strategic Partnership.
 - April 2005 – Sue Battle, Chief Executive of the Chamber of Commerce and business representative on the BSP Board. Gazan Awan, Birmingham Association of Neighbourhood Forums (BANF) and community representative member of the BSP Board.
 - May 2005 – Brian Carr Acting Chief Executive Birmingham Voluntary Service Council (BVSC) voluntary sector representative on BSP Board.
- 3.4.4 In addition the Committee received written evidence from the Government Office for the West Midlands (GOWM) and Joy Warmington Director of the Birmingham Race Action Partnership, who is also a member of the BSP Board.
- 3.4.5 Finally, Officers conducted a desk based search of relevant literature regarding Local Strategic Partnerships and also carried out a telephone survey to establish information about the strategic partnerships in the Core Cities.
- 3.4.6 During the period which this review was being undertaken there were many changes happening to the BSP at the same time. Such changes include the increase in Board membership, proposed structural changes and the introduction of Local Area Agreements. We therefore had the difficulty of assessing what was a dynamic and constantly changing situation.



4 The National Context

4.1 The move towards Partnership working

“To tackle our most challenging problems - on health, crime, education, transport, housing and the environment - we need to marshal the contributions of the public, private and voluntary sectors, and of communities themselves. We will not achieve genuinely citizen-centred services unless service deliverers work well together”

*Strong Local Leadership, Quality Local Services,
Department of Transport Local Government and the Regions (DTLR), December 2001)*

- 4.1.1 The Government set out its view on partnership working in its White Paper in 2001. This stated that there had been an increasing recognition, in both central and local government, of the importance of successful partnership working. It adds that the Government has done a great deal to encourage such partnerships in policy and service delivery at both national and local level:

“We are committed to building on the successful track record of Partnerships like the New Commitment to Regeneration and Health Action Zones. In particular, we will complete our drive to establish effective local strategic partnerships (LSPs). These partnerships are the key element in developing integrated approaches to local service delivery, and to tackling policy priorities in an integrated way”.

4.2 What are Local Strategic Partnerships?

- 4.2.1 According to the Government Guidelines issued in March 2001 a Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) is a single body that:

- Brings together at a local level different parts of the of the Public Sector as well as the Private, Business, Community and Voluntary sectors so that the different initiatives and services support each other and work together.
- Is a non statutory, non executive organisation.
- Operates at a local level which enables strategic decisions to be taken and is close enough to individual communities to allow actions to be determined at community level.
- Should be aligned with local authority boundaries.



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4.3 What do they do?

4.3.1 The original, defined tasks of Local Strategic Partnerships were to:

- Prepare and implement a Community Strategy;
- Bring together local plans, partnerships and initiatives to provide a forum through which mainstream public service providers work effectively together to meet local needs and priorities;
- Work with Local Authorities that are developing a local Public Service Agreement (PSA) to help devise and meet suitable targets; and
- Develop and deliver local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategies to secure more jobs, better education, improved health, reduced crime and better housing, thereby closing the gap between deprived and more affluent neighbourhoods, contributing to national targets on tackling deprivation.

4.3.2 In addition the Government required that Authorities in receipt of Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) allocations, including Birmingham must demonstrate that they have in place an effective Local Strategic Partnership in order to access NRF funds. Furthermore Government grant instructions for 2004-5 clearly specify that:

"... each recipient authority must work with their fellow LSP members to agree exactly how the NRF is to be used in support of the local priorities that have been identified and agreed with the LSP."

4.3.3 Since then, the government continues to expect LSPs to take a leading and growing role in localities and more recent developments (from 2005) include:

- All funding from government for Crime and Disorder Partnerships and Community Empowerment will be channelled into a single pot (The Safer and Stronger Communities Fund) through the LSP. The LSP will need to agree the use of these monies.
- Local Area Agreements (LAAs) will be piloted in 21 Local Authorities. These are designed to put area based funding into a single pot for allocation by the LSP. Birmingham is now part of the phase two rollout (April 2006) and all top tier authorities will have LAAs from April 2007.



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4.4 How are Local Strategic Partnerships Monitored?

- 4.4.1 In order to be 'an accredited LSP' (and therefore qualified to receive Neighbourhood Renewal Funds) the Government required that LSPs demonstrate that:
- They are **effective, representative and capable of playing a key strategic role**;
 - They **actively involve all the key players**, including the public, private, community and voluntary sectors;
 - They have **established genuine common local priorities** and targets and agreed actions and milestones leading to demonstrable improvements against measurable baselines;
 - Members have **aligned their performance management systems, criteria and processes** to that of the LSP;
 - They **reduce, not add to, the bureaucratic burden**; and
 - They **build upon best practice** from successful partnerships by drawing on experiences of regional structures and national agencies.
- 4.4.2 LSP accreditation was based upon self assessment with annual external review by Government Office. All LSPs are also now required by the Government to have in place a Performance Management Framework (PMF) in line with core criteria. The Audit Commission was asked to carry out a validation of these.
- 4.4.3 This process effectively moves the partnerships on from the accreditation stage (which was concerned with developing inclusive and effective partnership structures), towards implementing and performance managing their strategies and plans. However the requirement to review the health of the partnership remains as part of the PMF.

4.5 Councils' Role on Local Strategic Partnerships

- 4.5.1 The DLTR White paper, *Strong Local Leadership, Quality Public Services* states:

"Councils have a particular responsibility towards LSPs. We look to councils to be the prime movers in instigating LSPs where they do not already exist and in guiding them in their early stages. Once they have been set up the partnerships themselves should decide who leads..."



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... This does not mean that once an LSP has been established that the local authority's leadership role has ceased. Irrespective who chairs the LSP someone has to take responsibility and be accountable for ensuring that:

- The membership and methods of consultation and engagement are balanced and inclusive;*
- Difficult decisions are addressed and resolved, not just the easy ones. Those decisions should not simply represent the common denominator; and*
- The partners properly resource and support the LSP."*

4.5.2 In one sense these responsibilities are shared by all partners. But someone needs to step forward and take a lead on these issues if others are failing to do so. This is a key part of every council's responsibility as 'the community leader'.

4.5.3 The community leadership role of Councils is clearly set out in, Part 1 of the Local Government Act 2000, which provides powers for local authorities to promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of their community. It also confers a duty on local authorities to draw up a Community Strategy. The Government intends that this will enable the local authority to work more effectively with partner organisations for the benefit of the local authority as a whole.

4.5.4 As a consequence of the above it is clear to us that Local Authorities have a clear and significant lead role to play in partnership activity and Local Strategic Partnerships in particular.

4.6 Members' Roles

4.6.1 Elected Members should play a substantial role on LSPs. Participation in LSPs is, in many ways voluntary. However, their origin is certainly in the statutory responsibility placed on local authorities to develop and deliver Community Strategies. The role that Elected Members play – particularly in setting Council policy, delivering services and scrutinising performance on behalf of local government - is therefore essential.

4.6.2 However, because this is not the only role that Members play, and also because they (critically) represent the interests of the electorate, there is potential for overlap and confusion of role. This raises some further questions:

- Does a vibrant and locally active LSP in any way undermine how local politicians carry out their representative role?
- How should Community Empowerment Networks (important delivery arms of LSPs in receipt of funding from the NRF) and Elected Members work together on behalf of local communities?



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- Do these not cover much of the same ground?

4.7 Relevant Research

4.7.1 Alongside the national policy context we wanted to examine what other research or reviews had been carried out to explore the reality of partnership working and LSPs in particular. This is detailed in Appendix 1 but in summary the key issues identified are as follows:

- The lack of clarity of role for Elected Members within Partnerships and concern about democratic deficit.
- The managerialist culture, complex structures and increased bureaucracy adopted in partnership working.
- The lack of clarity and cohesion regarding priorities and goals.
- Tensions in the relationships between different sectors involved in the partnership.
- Difficulties in engaging the private sector and involving all communities in the partnership.
- Poor accountability and transparency.
- A preoccupation with the detail of NRF funding.

4.7.2 In conclusion, it would appear from our overview of this external research, that a range of concerns have been raised by other Local Authorities and other bodies, which are relevant to this scrutiny review. These are explored in later sections of this report.



5 Arrangements in Birmingham

5.1 How is the Birmingham Strategic Partnership Structured?

- 5.1.1 Initially, the Birmingham Strategic Partnership (BSP) (formerly the City Strategic Partnership) was established with a core group of representatives from 14 key agencies / sectors bringing together the public, private, voluntary and community sectors. However this was always seen as only part of the equation. In addition, it had always seen the need to build links with the wider family of partnerships in the city such as the Lifelong Learning and Community Safety Partnerships. In summary the BSP at the start of our review comprised of the following:
- The BSP Board.
 - Thematic Partnerships for Health, Community Safety, Employment, Children and Young People, Environment and Housing.
 - NRF Theme panels for six themes (Health, Community Safety, Housing, Education, Worklessness and Environment) some are coterminous with the thematic partnerships.
 - 11 District Partnerships in various stages of development.
- 5.1.2 In addition the Community Safety Partnership is developing a local delivery group in each district.
- 5.1.3 The Partnership recognised from very early on, that given the size of Birmingham and because of a desire to engage with local communities, that it would be necessary to link with a network of locally area based partnerships. These ultimately emerged as the District Strategic Partnerships.
- 5.1.4 The partnership has its own independent secretariat. This consists of 3 staff (the equivalent of 2.5 full time people). There are also posts funded for NRF administration. As of May 2005, the BSP Board has agreed that the team will be managed by the City Council's Corporate Policy and Performance section.
- 5.1.5 The BSP has evolved and developed considerably since its inception, that is greatly to its credit, but it has been a difficult task to scrutinise a continually moving target.



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5.2 Who is a Member?

5.2.1 The BSP has been undergoing a range of incremental adjustments to the Board membership largely to increase community representation. The Board has (at the time of this review) increased to a total of 28 members with one observer. This is made up as follows:

- 7 Community and Voluntary Sector representatives including 3 from the Birmingham Community Empowerment Network (BCEN) and one from each of following, Birmingham Association of Neighbourhood Forums (BANF), Birmingham Voluntary Services Council (BVSC), Council of Faiths and Faith Leaders Group;
- 14 Statutory representatives (Birmingham City Council with 9 representatives - 6 Councillors and 3 Officers) Universities and Higher Education, Learning and Skills Council, Health, Police and Job Centre Plus;
- 1 Private Sector representative (Chamber of Commerce);
- 6 Regional representatives (Centro, Advantage West Midlands (AWM), Birmingham Cultural Consortium, Groundwork, Strategic Housing Partnership, Birmingham Race Action Partnership (BRAP).
- 1 Observer (Government Office of the West Midlands)

5.2.2 As stated earlier, during the course of this review the BSP has been reviewing its structure and operation. As a result it is now establishing a Neighbourhood Renewal Programme Board and a Programme Information and Analysis Group. We think that these adjustments would seem sensible and should enable the Partnership Board to focus more on its key strategic agenda in future. This point is covered in more depth later in the report.

5.3 What Does the BSP Do?

5.3.1 Section four of this report sets out the role and function of the BSP in line with national guidelines. Its more specific tasks have been:

- Preparing a Community Strategy.
- Developing a Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy.
- Agreeing how Neighbourhood Renewal Funds (NRF) are used to support local priorities.



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5.3.2 NRF funding in 2005/06 is divided up as follows:

Infrastructure – Top Slicing	£1.0m
Corporate Initiatives Fund	£0.5m
Citywide themes	£4.5m
Locally focussed themes:	
NRF for most deprived areas	£16m
Total	£22m

5.4 Recent Developments on Local Area Agreements in Birmingham

Introduction

5.4.1 On 22nd June, the Government accepted the City Council Leader's expression of interest and invited Birmingham (together with 65 other local authority areas) to negotiate a Local Area Agreement (LAA) to run from April 2006. The agreements will be rolled out to all top tier Local Authorities from April 2007.

5.4.2 The Government also announced that Neighbourhood Renewal Fund money will form part of the Local Area Agreements in future. In total the agreements could cover over 100 current funding streams and perhaps £100m of funding for the city. These could be merged into just four streams, potentially generating efficiency savings and making cross-cutting and partnership working more cost-effective.

Birmingham's expression of interest

5.4.3 Birmingham's expression of interest was built around the newly agreed Community Strategy ("Taking Birmingham Forward") and its overarching aims:

5.4.4 "Our shared vision is that Birmingham will become:

- "a thriving national and international city", and
- "a city whose local neighbourhoods and 'vibrant urban villages' are flourishing and whose people benefit from its prosperity."

5.4.5 It was noted that the LAA priorities already reflect some of Birmingham's key priorities and areas where significant progress has been made already:

- Children and young people
- Healthier communities
- Older people



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- Safer and stronger communities
 - Local enterprise and growth
- 5.4.6 It was stressed that the city would want any LAA to fit our corporate direction around:
- Localisation and devolution
 - Neighbourhood renewal
 - Civil renewal
- 5.4.7 It was suggested that the LAA will enable us more quickly to:
- Develop partnership working - in particular, focussing on delivery and working more effectively with business and third sector partners.
 - Develop effective performance management (with partners) of the community strategy outcomes.
 - Develop a robust framework and strategic relationship between strategic and localised partnerships.
 - Strategically align spending and planning.
 - Work with Government (nationally and regionally) more effectively, including agreeing appropriate freedoms and flexibilities to aid delivery.
- 5.4.8 The specific objectives include:
- Reduced experience of and fear of crime and anti-social behaviour.
 - Cohesive local communities where people want to live and can influence decisions.
 - Young people who are healthy, safe and achieving.
 - Older people who are more independent and safe.
 - Healthier communities in all parts of the city.
 - Successful enterprise and growth in all communities.
- 5.4.9 It was noted that all of the LAA themes interact and inter-relate. For example, a safer community will be safer for young people, safer for older people and safer for businesses. A health community begins with a healthy start and extends into old age, and is likely to be stronger and more economically successful.
- 5.4.10 Finally, the Leader noted that our Local Public Service Agreement targets were in line with the proposed LAA – It is hoped that the City can conclude negotiations on this before the summer, so that we can start to earn performance reward grant for 2005-6 (rather than waiting for the start of the LAA in 2006-7) and GOWM has supported this approach.



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- 5.4.11 LAAs are led by the Council in partnership with the other local organisations. The Council is the accountable body and responsible for driving delivery of the agreement. They therefore offer a good opportunity to develop more effective partnership delivery and enhance community leadership by the Council.

5.5 How is it Monitored?

- 5.5.1 When the BSP was first set up, City Pride identified a role as a critical friend to the BSP. This included an element of scrutiny and an element of providing a voice to otherwise excluded interests in the City through a standing conference.
- 5.5.2 City Pride made a formal, costed offer to the BSP (which was accepted) and consequently restructured its management board to fulfil this (including a place for the Council's Scrutiny function). The agreed remit was for it to act as a complementary, non executive and arm's-length body to the BSP. Its role was to:
- Remain an independent advocate and guardian of the collective vision for the City;
 - Challenge the BSP and the partner agencies in the implementation of their role;
 - Develop its intelligence role assisting the City in monitoring the implementation of the Community Strategy and Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy;
 - Encourage effective working across sectors.
- 5.5.3 However City Pride ceased to exist in March 2004 and it no longer carries out this function. We were concerned about whether these roles were appropriate in the first place, particularly the scrutiny function, given that City Pride was directly funded by the partnership.
- 5.5.4 In addition BRAP has a continuing role in facilitating and advising the partnership on engagement with Black and Minority Ethnic communities in the City.
- 5.5.5 The City Council is subject to external audit each year. Part of the audit plan is determined nationally and part is determined by local negotiation. Over recent years the audit has included the BSP. Indeed in 2004/5 the BSP Performance Management Framework was accredited by the Audit Commission.



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- 5.5.6 One of the main documents to which the BSP contributes, the Community Strategy, is subject to scrutiny by virtue of the fact that it is part of the City Council's policy framework. However, the position is less formal with regard to the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy. This is not to say that scrutiny committees may not scrutinise the plan but that they are not formally required to do so. We believe that this role in relation to the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy should be carried out by the Local Services and Community Safety O&S Committee.
- 5.5.7 In order to qualify for NRF Local Authorities have to show that they are part of an accredited LSP, as well as complying with the relevant grant conditions. Accreditation was granted by the Secretary of State on the advice of the Local Government Office. The accreditation process has now been superseded by the requirements of the Performance Management Framework.
- 5.5.8 All of the above, seems to indicate that the BSP is subject to a significant amount of monitoring, particularly of process and particularly by Central Government but is that sufficient to make it accountable to the citizens of Birmingham?

5.6 How Does it Work?

- 5.6.1 We heard that the research commissioned by ODPM and published in May 2004 distinguished four different types of LSP, each requiring different governance arrangements. The research recognises that these are 'ideal types' and that few of the Partnerships operate entirely in any one form. However, they are useful tools in establishing how the work and organisation of the partnership may operate. The types are as follows:
- **Advisory:** The LSP acts as a consultation and discussion forum and often forms the basis for consensus building, but has no independent power to act. It draws its accountability and legitimacy entirely from its member organisations, particularly the local authorities.
 - **Commissioning:** The LSP has its own staff and authorities, is able to implement decisions and commission projects and therefore has to create its own forms of accountability and legitimacy.
 - **Laboratory:** The prime focus is on generating new ideas and new ways of designing local services drawing on the combined thinking of senior managers and community leaders.
 - **Community empowerment:** Attention is focussed on creating strong networks within the community rather than the key public agencies.



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- 5.6.2 On the basis of this model we were of the view that the BSP currently operates largely in the 'Advisory' mode. This would appear to us to be the most suitable mode for the Birmingham Local Strategic Partnership at this time. However we recognise that this may have to change as the role of the Partnership develops over time and especially in light of the developments around Local Area Agreements.



6 Findings

6.1 What did the Witnesses Tell us?

6.1.1 We sought the views of a number of organisations that are members of the Birmingham Strategic Partnership Board. In addition we conducted a survey of all Birmingham City Councillors to assess their knowledge, understanding and involvement with the BSP. The key themes that emerged from these exercises were:

- The role of the BSP and its achievements;
- Composition and size of the Board;
- Focus on Neighbourhood Renewal Funding;
- Business involvement;
- Links with the Districts and the wider family of partnerships;
- Voluntary and Community Sector representation;
- Accountability and transparency.

Each of these is discussed more fully in the following sections.

6.2 The Role of the BSP and its Achievements

6.2.1 All of our witnesses felt that the primary purpose of the BSP was to provide formal channels of communication to aid partnership working. It was also widely recognised that to access NRF funds a partnership had to be in place.

6.2.2 Some witnesses stressed that a key role in the future for the partnership should be to link up organisations and service providers in the city. It was felt that BSP membership should take a bottom up approach with for instance District Chairman and Directors meeting to appoint a single representative each.

6.2.3 It was pointed out that the achievements of the BSP included the production of the Community Strategy, the NRF agenda, including work on floor targets and the engagement of partner agencies.

6.2.4 One witness felt that the role of the BSP as an advisory body, setting the framework for the delivery of services / improvements was often misunderstood.



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- 6.2.5 Another stated that the key benefit of the BSP was the provision of the only forum which brings together the key policy makers in the city. It enables collaboration to take place which otherwise would not happen.
- 6.2.6 The view was also expressed that the BSP should provide a framework to consolidate and make best use of the budgets held by the various partner organisations (approximately £5bn). However, it was felt that it had become preoccupied with NRF (£22m).
- 6.2.7 It was pointed out to us that the BSP should be the place where the difficult issues across the city can be discussed and more importantly acted upon. It was felt that there had been little reflection by the BSP on how our services can be transformed to narrow the gap between different communities and areas across Birmingham. This is a priority for the future of the city and bigger than just the accountability for the NRF.
- 6.2.8 The Councillors who responded to this question in our survey generally had an understanding of the reasons for which the partnership exists. They saw these as being to bring together the key agencies in the city and to coordinate partnership activities. One Councillor (who had a more active role on the BSP) recognised its role in delivering the Community Strategy and Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy. At one level these activities seem to be recognised as positive. There was, however, some concern or confusion about the BSP role in over viewing requests for NRF funding. Some Councillors questioned why we have the BSP at all and felt that it resulted in meetings overload. To them it is an unnecessary quango which could be disbanded if the Government would organise NRF funding in a different way.

6.3 Composition and Size of the Board

- 6.3.1 It was generally agreed by witnesses that the undoubted strength of the BSP lay in bringing the major agencies operating in the City alongside the City Council. However, in a city the size of Birmingham, there are problems of size and scale and a debate needed to be had about whether all of the relevant agencies were represented. While it might seem an obvious solution to increase the size it was important that it remained manageable.



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6.4 Focus on Neighbourhood Renewal Funding

- 6.4.1 We heard that GOWM had indicated to the BSP that the Government had expressed concerns that the NRF has not to date been used strategically to target priority deprivation issues and Local and National targets. The work of the Neighbourhood Renewal Advisor (who has recently reported to the BSP) would therefore include exploring how to strengthen accountability for determination of neighbourhood renewal policies and spending.
- 6.4.2 Indeed, the Head of Implementation for the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit wrote to the Chairs of LSPs that receive Neighbourhood Renewal Funds in December 2004, outlining the developments that will impact on them from 2005 onwards. In particular, he stressed that LSPs should:
- Place emphasis on achieving outcomes.
 - Provide a greater focus on priority neighbourhoods.
 - Apply a plausibility test to their plans.
 - Consider the impact of activities on disadvantaged and BME communities.
- 6.4.3 In addition, the list of floor targets was refined and strengthened. All LSPs are expected to contribute to the achievement of these. LSPs are therefore being encouraged to consider the quality and application of their data management processes as part of an effective Performance Management Framework. The Government Office has commissioned Mott MacDonald to support LSPs in the West Midlands with this exercise.
- 6.4.4 All of the above shows the degree to which the Government sees LSPs as the key driver for delivery of the Neighbourhood Renewal and the demands that are made upon the partnerships to deliver this. However, we heard evidence to suggest that in many ways this pressure leads to a preoccupation with NRF which can drive more strategic and long term issues off the agenda.
- 6.4.5 Indeed, we heard from one witness who shared with us his experience of being on the Worcestershire Strategic Partnership. He felt that the fact that Worcestershire was not in receipt of NRF funding meant that it had developed a very different dynamic to that of the BSP. This had ultimately resulted in closer working between the partners around the table because there were no additional resources to vie over.
- 6.4.6 However, we also heard the opposing view from another witness, who said that while the role of the BSP was advisory, there was a danger of NRF being viewed as synonymous with the BSP and this raised the question of whether, if the monitoring of NRF was removed, the impetus to meet with as wide a range of organisations to discuss areas of common interest and to target spend in the interests of citizens would be as great.



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- 6.4.7 The arrangements for allocating NRF are obviously a matter of concern to City Councillors and are currently subject to review. The BSP bulletin No 33 January / February 2005 states that District Strategic Partnerships (DSPs) will in future have a greater role in the coordination of renewal activities focussed on the city's most deprived neighbourhoods.
- 6.4.8 We also heard with regard to NRF, that the GOWM had suggested that all commissioning should be undertaken by the DSPs but that the City Council considered that to be inappropriate in all Districts – the arrangements need to evolve in a way appropriate to each District.
- 6.4.9 We were also made aware that the Council has invested a considerable amount of time and effort improving information systems that will support performance management in future.

6.5 Business Involvement

- 6.5.1 We heard that the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce and Industry is the only representative from the private sector on the BSP board. Given the scale of interests that the private sector covers, ranging from the large manufacturing concerns, through the service sector to the small business or one man bands it has been difficult for one organisation to fully represent these.
- 6.5.2 The role of the Chamber of Commerce on the BSP is to provide an interface with the business community. However we heard that this is difficult as the BSP looks feels and behaves like a public sector body. One witness said that they did not think that individual business representatives "would last more than 20 minutes" in a BSP meeting as it had no relevance to them.
- 6.5.3 It was pointed out that the Chamber feeds back relevant information to local businesses on the BSP in its 'Chamber Link' magazine.
- 6.5.4 Witnesses did not feel that the business sector's views were adequately heard by the BSP. We believe that this is a major concern. According to the Local Economic Forecasting Model and BEIC public administration, education and health account for an 18.5% share of financial output in Birmingham. If we take this as a proxy for the public sector, then the private sector accounts for 81.5% of financial output. It is therefore essential to the well being and future prosperity of the city that the partnership can hear what the wealth creating sector has to say and that it listens to and is influenced by this.
- 6.5.5 We welcomed the fact that, to support the Chamber the BSP has now funded (through NRF) the Business Empowerment Project. Among the aims of this project are to:
- Establish or formalise the link between local business groups and the Chamber.



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- Encourage the engagement with local business groups in the localisation agenda;
- Define the needs and priorities of the business community as a whole, in shaping the partnership agenda.

6.6 Links with the Districts and Wider Family of Partnerships

- 6.6.1 We heard that the relationship between the BSP and DSPs was a potential strength. However, as the DSPs were still at a developmental stage it was important to get the functions of each and the relationship between them right. Most witnesses suggested that a 'light touch' approach by the BSP would be appropriate.
- 6.6.2 It was stated by one witness that representation by a District Chairman and a District Director on the BSP should assist in the development of links between the BSP and the DSPs.
- 6.6.3 Another witness pointed out that the relationship between the wider family of partnerships and NRF panels could be strengthened and that the links between the NRF panels and the other local delivery plans could be made stronger. Mechanisms and a timeframe for reporting on the work of the theme panels needed to be developed.
- 6.6.4 As part of the survey of City Councillors views we asked Members how they related with the BSP at a local or strategic level. Most of the Councillors who responded to this question did not feel that they had a relationship with the BSP beyond attending the District Strategic Partnerships (DSPs). Concerns were raised about the relationships between the BSP and District Strategic Partnerships which are seen as underdeveloped. In addition, it was pointed out that there is also little relationship between the DSPs and the wider BSP family of partnerships and it is not clear where the theme groups fit in. It is felt the DSP Chairs should play more of a role in shaping the city's Neighbourhood Renewal Programme and Strategy.
- 6.6.5 City Councillors who responded to the survey were not really aware of what the relationship was between the BSP and DSPs. In most cases, it did not seem to Members as though there was one. Some comments made indicate that it was felt that communications and directives were directed downwards from the BSP to the DSPs and that there was little upward flow. There was also a concern that the BSP theme groups seemed to have the power of veto over the locally agreed NRF projects.
- 6.6.6 We believe that for the BSP to be really effective it is essential that the links with the District level are fully developed and utilised as this is the only way that robust links with communities in Birmingham can be made.



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6.7 Voluntary and Community Sector Representation

- 6.7.1 We heard that the role of Birmingham Community Empowerment Network (BCEN) is to provide community representation on the BSP. It was not a grass roots organisation but was created through community empowerment funding from the Government. BCEN had further developed the local community empowerment structure involving BCEN, BRAP, the Birmingham Foundation, Birmingham Association for Youth Groups and BANF (Birmingham Association of Neighbourhood Forums). The BCEN steering group has 30 members. The three members of BCEN on the BSP feed back to the steering group and they in turn feed back to their organisations. In addition a magazine and website are used to disseminate information.
- 6.7.2 We also heard that Birmingham Association of Neighbourhood Forums (BANF) which is also represented on the BSP Board has around 80 forums across the city. BANF uses its monthly newsletter to feed back relevant issues from the BSP.
- 6.7.3 In addition we met with Birmingham Voluntary Service Council (BVSC) which sees its role on the BSP as representing the organised voluntary sector. It was pointed out that this role complements those roles of the other community sector representatives with, BCEN having an overarching role and BANF as operating at the neighbourhood level. This was like a 3 legged stool.
- 6.7.4 It was acknowledged that BVSC has a difficult role and cannot possibly represent all interests from the Voluntary Sector which is very diverse. It can only be a channel for views.
- 6.7.5 Most of the Voluntary and Community Sector representatives we spoke to felt that the role of the voluntary sector as an advocate and campaigner was being undervalued; and that they were more than just service providers.
- 6.7.6 Some of the community representatives felt that their role on the BSP was unclear. We recognise that the BSP Board has recently expanded the community representation on its Board. Perhaps now would be a good time to pause and consider what the roles of these representatives are and how they can develop in the future to assist the BSP in reaching more effectively into the wider community and particularly the black and ethnic minority communities.



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6.8 Accountability and Transparency

6.8.1 We received a number of suggestions as to how the accountability and transparency of the BSP could be improved. These are outlined below:

- One witness felt a code of conduct should be put in place so that when, for example, the Board discussed the allocation of funding, Board members would be required to declare any interest. In addition it was thought it might be helpful to adopt a protocol to regulate members' behaviour at meetings.
- Another felt that the Chairman of the partnership and or the Cabinet Members on the BSP should be in a position to answer questions at City Council meetings in terms of giving account for the BSP back into the City Council.
- It was also suggested that transparency could be improved by the production of an annual report.
- All witnesses agreed that the BSP should hold its meetings in public, with the minutes being publicly available. We understand this is now the case.
- A number of witnesses agreed that BSP decision making should be open to scrutiny by the Council's O&S Committees.
- One witness suggested that the decisions made by theme partnerships and BSP Board on NRF should be ratified by the City Council / Cabinet to ensure that they meet City Council Priorities. We understand that this provision is now in place.
- Generally, City Councillors who responded to our survey did not feel well informed about the BSP activities. However, they did acknowledge that they receive the BSP newsletter and some had seen the BSP Web site. However these were felt to give only minimal information. One area identified for increased levels of information sharing was around the activities of the NRF theme partnerships.
- On the whole Back Bench Councillors generally felt that the Partnership arrangements lack transparency and accountability. There was also a view expressed that the BSP needs to involve and consult DSPs more.



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6.9 Comparison with the Core Cities

- 6.9.1 The following is a summary of the characteristics of LSPs operating within other Core Cities which we have used to compare with the BSP to identify best practice.

Structures

- 6.9.2 Most of the Core Cities' Strategic Partnerships have fairly complicated and multi-layered structures. However, they ultimately tend to have similar elements to the Birmingham model with a core group or board, thematic groups and links into local areas. Some, in addition, have an executive group which manages the operational matters on behalf of the Board. The Leeds Initiative is interesting in that it has two executive boards, The Narrowing the Gap and The Going up a League Executive, which are tasked with providing management support to the board and ensuring that the long term aspirations referred to in the Leeds Initiative Vision are realised.
- 6.9.3 Core Cities' LSPs are all unincorporated bodies and have some role in the allocation of Neighbourhood Renewal Funding.
- 6.9.4 The boards are chaired by Councillors (with the exception of the Nottingham LSP which is currently under review) and in most cases this is the Council Leader.
- 6.9.5 All of the partnerships have teams of paid staff to support their activities. These vary in size.

Composition / Make up

- 6.9.6 The size of the boards varies between eighteen and thirty members. They are all comprised of Public, Private Voluntary and Community sector representatives.
- 6.9.7 The breakdown of sector membership is broadly similar across the Core Cities with the exception of Bristol, which has a significantly higher representation of members from the community, voluntary and faith group sectors. This makes up over 50% of Bristol's board. Leeds has some interesting participants in the partnership groups which inform its board including Leeds Sports, Leeds Architecture and Design Initiative and Leeds Financial Service Initiative.
- 6.9.8 Liverpool, Bristol and Leeds also have trade union representation on their boards. In addition, Liverpool has Senior Citizen and Disability representatives on the Liverpool First Partnership Board.
- 6.9.9 Leeds has a press representative on their board.
- 6.9.10 All of the Partnerships have both Member and officer representation.



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Relationships between City Level and Local Area Structures

6.9.11 There is some variety between the cities, but all of them have either established or are seeking to develop links with the local areas. Sheffield has Area Action Panels which have delegated authority to spend Neighbourhood Renewal Funds. Leeds has five District Partnerships with their own boards and a degree of autonomy where decision making is concerned, although they do not control NRF. It is envisaged that they will inform decisions regarding NRF in the future via their involvement in the Leeds Regeneration Plan. Manchester also seems to be working to develop stronger links between their thematic and area based structures, particularly in the development of local plans.

Frequency of Meetings/Open to the Public

6.9.12 Bristol and Sheffield allow public admittance to their meetings. The other five Core Cities hold their partnership meetings in private. Timing of board meetings varies from monthly to as little as four or five times a year.

6.9.13 In addition, members of the public in Sheffield are able to attend the partnership meetings as observers for the first two hours. They cannot join in but are invited to submit question cards after the meeting.

Transparency

6.9.14 All of the Partnerships have websites where information on the partnership along with documents, papers, minutes or summaries of meetings can be accessed. Liverpool's website has a dedicated promotion and publicity page which contains information about conferences and other events and press articles. It also invites the public to give feedback via a dedicated email address. Sheffield has an online newsletter.

6.9.15 Manchester makes its performance management framework available on its website. Newcastle holds an annual public meeting which is advertised on its website and in the local press. Newcastle and Bristol produce annual reports which are also available via its websites.

Protocols and Codes of Conduct

6.9.16 Newcastle LSP produces a handbook which contains a protocol. This clearly defines the purpose and aims of the partnership, rules of membership, declarations of interest and complaints procedures.

6.9.17 Manchester is currently developing a code of conduct which will be published on its website in the near future.

6.9.18 Sheffield has developed a protocol for the LSP working with its open forum for Economic Regeneration.



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Accountability

- 6.9.19 Manchester LSP has recently become accountable to the city's scrutiny arrangements. Arrangements for this are still being finalised.
- 6.9.20 Nottingham and Sheffield have been subject to scrutiny by the Local Authority's scrutiny committees.
- 6.9.21 As stated earlier, the Newcastle handbook sets out accountabilities, complaints procedures and declarations of interest.
- 6.9.22 All of the partnerships are subject to the Government's Performance Framework requirements and audit arrangements.



7 Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1 Conclusions

7.1.1 In summary, we believe that that the BSP can and should be a useful body for promoting partnership working and cross agency and cross sector cooperation in the City (or as one witness called it "a Chief Executives Club"). However, it needs to be sharpened up in a number of ways. Our recommendations are set out below in more detail but broadly cover the following themes.

- Developing a more strategic role.
- Regularly reviewing core membership.
- Promoting greater transparency through the development of a communications strategy and the adoption of partnership protocols.
- Enhancing accountability.

7.2 Future Role of the BSP

7.2.1 Questions were asked during the review about whether LSPs are Quangos, talking shops or whether they were actually necessary. There are potentially other ways the activities the BSP has been charged with doing (by the Government) could have been done. For example the NRF could have been allocated to and managed and administered by the City Council. However, in the end it is not simply a matter of choice, as the agenda has been set by Government and 'He who pays the piper calls the tune.'

7.2.2 In many ways it must be concluded that the decision to establish the BSP in the first place was driven by the Government's agenda and especially to access Neighbourhood Renewal Funding. However, for it to be a really useful vehicle in its own right it might now be timely for it to develop a clear role that is driven by a more locally-focused agenda.



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- 7.2.3 We recognise that real partnership working takes time to become embedded and this has been and continues to be a challenge for the BSP and indeed for the City Council. Work is currently underway through the commissioning of a Neighbourhood Renewal Advisor to assist the Partnership to explore how to develop the future operation of the BSP and its relationship with the District Partnerships. We welcome this development and therefore have refrained from making specific recommendations on this matter.
- 7.2.4 The BSP has the potential to be the place where the difficult issues across the city can be discussed and acted upon but from what we heard the administration of the Neighbourhood Renewal Funding has taken up so much time and energy it has pushed the more long term strategic issues down the agenda. We believe it is essential that the BSP is now able to give some time to working towards the development of a more strategic role for the partnership. This is not an easy task and will mean that it has to find other ways of doing some of the work that has previously filled its agenda. We believe that the BSP should help deliver its own shared vision for the future of the City as documented in the Community Strategy.
- 7.2.5 We believe that the best and most successful role for the BSP is largely advisory in nature, not executive. The experience of NRF shows that there is a tendency to get drawn into the detail of the administration of programmes and this is both distracting and very time consuming. In addition, moving the partnership towards a more executive role may have the effect of increasing rather than reducing tensions between the various member organisations and therefore reducing cooperation.
- 7.2.6 We have some concerns that although Local Strategic Partnerships are established as non-executive bodies, the recent additional requirements by Government for channelling the Safer and Stronger Communities Fund through Local Strategic Partnerships and the proposals in relation to Local Area Agreements do give them a more executive role. We believe that it is important therefore that the City Council keeps an overview of these developments to ensure that they do not result in either an erosion of the Council's community leadership role or a dilution of local democratic accountability. In order to prepare for and anticipate these changes we believe it is essential that the BSP establishes a steering group under Council leadership to develop ways of working to develop and deliver the forthcoming Local Area Agreement.

	Recommendation	Responsibility	Completion Date
R1	That a report is produced and considered by the BSP Board that sets out what steps are to be taken to develop a more strategic role for the BSP in the future and how this will be supported.	Chairman of BSP	January 2006
R2	In order to develop and prepare for the forthcoming Local Area Agreement, the BSP should establish an implementation group. The Local Area Agreement	Leader of the Council	October 2005



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Recommendation	Responsibility	Completion Date
should be Council led.		

7.3 Links with the Wider Partnership Structure

- 7.3.1 The core partnership when it was originally set up accepted that it was probably not possible for it to ever be fully representative of all the communities and interests in the City. This was why it attempted to link to the wider family of partnerships and the District Partnerships. We fully accept the case for this and the need for the Partnership Board to keep to a workable size. Clearly, therefore, the way forward is to ensure that the links to the wider Partnerships are strengthened rather than increasing the numbers of people on the overall Partnership Board.
- 7.3.2 Like most of the Core Cities' LSPs, the BSP has adopted a complex structure with a Board, links to a wider family of partnerships, theme panels around NRF and links to the network of District Strategic Partnerships. However this structure and the relationship between the different elements does not seem to be either fully developed by the Partnership or adequately understood by those who sit outside of the formal structures.
- 7.3.3 We believe that to be fully effective the work, function and style of operation of the Partnership need to be supported by a structure that assists it to fulfil its purpose. Currently, the accountability arrangements of the BSP board and its constituent parts (thematic partnerships and panels, sub committees and the DSPs) are still to be agreed. The way the NRF is run is also under review.
- 7.3.4 We believe it is important that the links between the different elements of the BSP are clarified but we would not want to see an increase in bureaucracy and believe that the most appropriate approach would be a 'light touch'.

Recommendation	Responsibility	Completion Date
R3 That a report is shared with the Coordinating Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the results of the BSP review of structures and linkages between the levels of the wider partnership (including the thematic Partnerships and Panels, Sub Committees, Wards and District Partnerships). This report should include the means by which these different elements of the wider partnership will communicate with one another.	Chairman of BSP	January 2006



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7.4 Membership

- 7.4.1 We recognised that the BSP board has been going through a period of evolution during the course of this review and we welcomed the changes that have been made to the Board membership to extend it to include representation from faith communities and the Districts (at officer and Member level). Now that other community representatives have been included we think that BCEN should only have one place on the board and this should be a community representative rather than an officer. We recognised the challenges that are continually faced by the Partnership in attempting to be representative of a city as diverse as Birmingham but felt that for the Board to remain a workable size it must not exceed 30 members. We would therefore recommend that the Board regularly reviews its membership makeup to ensure its relevance and that means of involving other voices within the wider framework of the Partnership structures are explored.
- 7.4.2 We would also strongly support efforts being made to increase the involvement of the business sector in the wider partnership. This lack of private sector involvement in the Partnership (at all levels) is a serious weakness. For the Partnership to be truly effective it must develop the ability to engage with and listen to the wealth creating sector in the city. This dialogue needs to take place at all levels including the Board but particularly at District level.
- 7.4.3 The issue of representation from black and minority ethnic communities on the BSP Board is again another difficult area that the Board has been working through and again, perhaps the answer is in ensuring that involvement and engagement can occur at the most appropriate level within the wider partnership framework. This may be especially relevant at District level so that local grass roots involvement can be possible. However, the strengthened membership of the Board which now includes BRAP, the Faith Leaders Group and the Birmingham Council of Churches also offers ways of increasing access.

Recommendation	Responsibility	Completion Date
R4	Chairman of BSP	September 2006
That the Partnership Board puts in place arrangements to annually review its membership and structure to ensure that:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Its size does not become unwieldy (i.e. no more than 30 members).• That it continues to be fit for purpose (i.e. that the membership is appropriate to support the development of a strategic agenda and that it links up with all interests and communities in the city).		



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7.5 Transparency

- 7.5.1 The definition of transparency we used was based upon the degree to which anyone who has dealings with the BSP can easily determine;
- Who is responsible for decisions and;
 - How representations on decisions can be made.
- 7.5.2 From our survey of City Councillors it appears that the more remote Councillors feel from the BSP and the more underdeveloped their DSPs are, the less they feel the arrangement has any benefit. There is a direct connection between the degree of engagement of Councillors with the BSP / DSPs and their perception of their being of benefit to the city.
- 7.5.3 Where DSPs were developing well, Councillors were more enthusiastic about the benefits of the arrangements and how they can feed into the development of shared community plans. However, concerns remained about what the BSP is doing at a strategic level and how effectively it is doing it. This may be because they do not actually receive much information about what the Partnership is achieving. However, Councillors are concerned about matters concerning the approval processes relating to NRF bids which they do not feel are clear and transparent and there is a feeling that the BSP plays a role in vetoing local decisions about NRF spend which is not understood.
- 7.5.4 We were pleased to hear that as of April 2005 the BSP has opened its monthly Board meetings to the public, although this is not the case for the thematic panels. We think that the Partnership should consider opening up all meetings to the public where appropriate.
- 7.5.5 The BSP website was launched in January 2005 and contains a range of relevant information as well as Board minutes. The Partnership also issues a monthly bulletin which is widely circulated. The website is a useful tool but could benefit by giving a little more detail of the membership of the Board and the various other structures. In Liverpool, the LSP website gives details of the individuals involved along with photos and a short profile.
- 7.5.6 We welcomed the fact that the BSP holds open meetings on specific topics periodically throughout the year as these enable a wider range of people to engage in debates with the Partnership.



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- 7.5.7 Effective communication is an important means of promoting transparency both internally and externally. Developing a communications strategy which specifies the means by which local people will be informed of the work of the LSP and the mechanisms available for them to input their views into the process is essential to ensure that communication is a two way process between the LSP and the wider community. A communication strategy should also map out the accounting lines of the various sectors to ensure that all partners are clear about the decision making processes of each organisation. Regular briefings about the work of the partnership such as the BSP bulletin can be used by partners as a briefing for the organisations and groups to whom they are accountable.
- 7.5.8 We were interested to hear of some of the efforts that the LSPs in other areas have developed to promote transparency and public engagement:
- Newcastle and Worcestershire: Holding an annual public meeting;
 - Sheffield: Following public meetings people are invited to submit question cards to the board.
- 7.5.9 Other provisions we would suggest for consideration by the BSP to promote transparency would be:
- Producing an annual report (outside of the requirements set by government). This could set out and promote the achievements of the partnership to the citizens of Birmingham; and
 - Promoting its message in the publications produced by the City Council and other partnership organisations.
- 7.5.10 There is, therefore, a need for the BSP to crucially assess its rationale for who it engages with, as well as how and why with a view to developing a communication and engagement strategy.
- 7.5.11 On a more practical level, during the review concerns were focused about lack of formal protocols adopted by the Partnership in conducting its business, such as codes of conduct and declarations of interest. If the business of the Partnership is largely advisory the adoption of such codes may seem excessively formal. However, as there is some element of executive decision making taking place such as the allocation of funding, then these should be adopted.
- 7.5.12 Partnership protocols that explain the operation of the LSP, set out the collective rights, roles and responsibilities and support probity and transparency are a useful way to ensure that all partners have a shared vision and understanding of the nature of the partnership. Some LSPs have extended this to a duty to declare interests in particular issues under discussion to all representatives serving on the LSP.



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- 7.5.13 Transparency and ultimately public accountability can be aided by the provision of a comprehensive and detailed action plan for the LSP being produced which sets out who is responsible for what and when. This allows local people to track progress made in implementing the LSP work programme.



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7.5.14 In addition, written and oral questions can be asked at Council meetings of the BSP Chairman or Council nominees.

Recommendation	Responsibility	Completion Date
R5 The BSP should develop a communications strategy to promote greater understanding of the BSP. This should include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Producing an annual report; Considering the provision of question cards for use by the public; Revising the BSP website; Holding all meetings in public where appropriate. 	Chairman of BSP	January 2006
R6 The BSP should develop a formal 'Partnership Protocol' which is made publicly accessible. This should cover: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The roles rights and responsibilities of the members; Codes of conduct; and Declarations of interest. 	Chairman of BSP	January 2006

7.6 Accountability and Scrutiny

7.6.1 Two key issues Members wished to explore in this review were

- The degree to which the Partnership was accountable and to whom, and
- If there was a role for the Council's Scrutiny function in overseeing the Partnership activities.

7.6.2 Given the way it was originally set up, it is clear that the Partnership as a whole is largely accountable to the Government via the Government Office for the West Midlands and the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit. It is subject to performance monitoring framework through this arrangement. As the BSP is an unincorporated body the City Council acts as the accountable body.

7.6.3 In September 2002 the Local Government Association published a paper on learning from LSPs, *LGA advice note on Accountability and Scrutiny*. This states that LSP accountability is complex because individuals serve on the LSP in different capacities. For example:

- Elected Members represent the local authority and local people through representational democracy;
- Chief Executives represent public sector service delivery organisations;
- Community sector and voluntary sector organisations represent the interests of their own organisations or community and may have also been elected or selected to represent the interests of the wider sector.



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- 7.6.4 The paper states that the challenge for local authorities is to provide the strategic leadership and support to establish and develop an LSP, But to recognise when to let go and share responsibility with other partners. The challenge for Elected Members is to realise the potential of LSPs to strengthen their representational role by providing an effective voice for the local community.
- 7.6.5 During the review witnesses raised concerns about the arrangement for authorising the thematic spend for NRF. In February 2005 the BSP formalised the arrangements for the agreement of the NRF thematic spend. This will ensure that NRF theme panel proposals are now both endorsed by the relevant partnership (e.g. Children and Young People) endorsed by the BSP Board and formally approved by Cabinet. We welcome this change.
- 7.6.6 However we feel that in general terms accountability could perhaps be strengthened, particularly in relation to representatives of the Board feeding back to their parent organisations. Some members of the Board currently do this, as well as feeding back to their constituent member organisations via newsletters. In relation to the City Council we believe that the Leader of the Council, Chairman of the BSP or relevant Council Member on the Board should be required to periodically feedback to the City Council or a relevant O&S Committee on the activities of the Partnership.
- 7.6.7 In relation to the question of Scrutiny The DETR in its New Council Constitutions Guidance Pack Volume 1 Local Leadership, Local Choice (Oct 2000) highlighted that:
- “Increasingly, local authorities do not have sole responsibility for the preparation of many plans and strategies, even though they may have the lead role in coordinating them.”
- 7.6.8 Such plans need to be negotiated and agreed by relevant partners, and it would counter-productive if the full council were at the final stage to overturn elements of a plan or strategy that has already been agreed with other local partners. The Secretary of State recommends that local authorities ensure there is effective and regular consultation and communication between the executive, the relevant overview and scrutiny committees and other members of the local authority during the development of plans and strategies which need the agreement of partner organisations.
- 7.6.9 Local authorities should adopt protocols to ensure that any councillor who is neither a member of the executive nor the partnership responsible for developing the plan or strategy has opportunities to feed their views into the development of any such plan or strategy.”
- 7.6.10 Indeed, by virtue of section 21(2)(e) of the Local Act 2000, Overview and Scrutiny Committees can make reports or recommendations to the local authority or the executive in relation to matters which are not the responsibility of the local authority but nevertheless affect the local authority's area or inhabitants.



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- 7.6.11 This clearly sets out a role for Overview and Scrutiny Committees in relation to both Partnership plans and activity. We believe that to date this role has been underdeveloped and would look to the Council seeking to build this in more formally when Partnership arrangements are set up in the first place.
- 7.6.12 In relation to the BSP, the role of Coordinating Overview and Scrutiny Committee in relation to scrutinising the Community Strategy is established by virtue of it being a policy framework plan. Indeed this plan is currently being finalised after input from scrutiny and is due for consideration by City Council in September.
- 7.6.13 The situation is less clear in relation to the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy. We believe that this strategy should be scrutinised via the Local Services and Community Safety O&S Committee. We think that both plans are key to the operation of the BSP so scrutiny should be involved at an early stage in both of them. This should be a minimum requirement.
- 7.6.14 We note that the Local Services and Community Safety O&S Committee also plans to undertake scrutiny reviews of some key aspects of BSP activity namely the Safer and Stronger Communities Fund and mainstreaming of NRF. We welcome this and believe that this is just the sort of area in which the scrutiny function can assist and support the Partnership.
- 7.6.15 We would also look to the Coordinating Overview and Scrutiny Committee to take a lead in expanding upon this scrutiny activity around the BSP and in setting a framework for exploring how major Partnership activity might be overseen by the scrutiny function and for assessing the City Council involvement with them.

Recommendation	Responsibility	Completion Date
R7	That the Leader of the Council agrees a process whereby there is an annual report back to the Council on the activities and developments of the BSP and the City Council's contribution to them.	Leader of the Council January 2006
R8	That the Coordinating Overview and Scrutiny Committee sets a framework for identifying how BSP and key partnership activity might be overseen by the scrutiny function.	Chairman of Coordinating O&S Committee March 2006
R9	Progress towards achievement of these recommendations should be reported to the Coordinating Overview and Scrutiny Committee by March 2006. Subsequent progress reports will be scheduled by the Committee thereafter until all recommendations are implemented.	Chairman of BSP March 2006



8 Appendix 1 Relevant Research

Introduction

- 8.1.1 Alongside the national policy context we wanted to examine what other research or reviews had been carried out to explore the reality of partnership working and LSPs in particular. This is detailed below.

General Observations

- 8.1.2 Many observers state that the key impact of LSPs can be where they maximise the potential to support service delivery. This can result as a product of improved communication and mutual understanding between partners. It can also result in a better shared understanding of local issues and can offer additional opportunities for shared consultation on local issues and a broadening of perspectives.
- 8.1.3 However, they are also of the view that LSPs are generally better off as loosely formed voluntary convened organisations characterised by cooperation of service providers, not as organisations in their own right, separate or even an arm of its partners.
- 8.1.4 In the 2002 report *New Roles for Old: Local authority members and partnership working*, it was found that members surveyed felt that they had ceded too much power of decision to external bodies. The emphasis on partnership working and the growth of quangos was seen to have down graded the role of local authorities. Members wished to see a reassertion of their essential democratic/political role.
- 8.1.5 There were particular concerns expressed around the lack of accountability of other partners on external bodies that public private partnerships, both local and regional, were weighted in favour of the unelected private sector participants and that voluntary and community sector organisations were setting up alternative democratic processes.
- 8.1.6 It also found that Cabinet structures have also to some degree marginalised non-executive Members, a process exacerbated by the growth of partnership structures. Councils were struggling with the key questions of how to engage backbenchers in partnerships and the scrutiny of partnerships, how best to balance their community leadership role with that of other community representatives, and how to connect that community leadership role to executive leadership.



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- 8.1.7 Members wished to see an end to the contradiction whereby councils had a statutory duty to promote the social, economic and environmental well-being of their locality under Part 1 of the Local Government Act 2000 but no concomitant power to ensure that other partners effectively engaged with these issues.
- 8.1.8 Members were also tired of what they saw as central direction, a managerialist culture and seemingly endless plans, quality requirements and financial strait jackets. These are felt to be stifling innovation and depoliticising the policy arena. They felt that working in partnership should merit a *quid pro quo* relaxation of central government controls, allowing them the freedom necessary to meet local needs and aspirations.

The Local Government Association

- 8.1.9 Some suggestions from the LGA paper *Local Quangos and Local Governance* for assisting local authorities to engage with local appointed bodies include:
- Considering **preparing local codes of public service** which are intended as a code of ethics, probity, openness and accountability which local appointed bodies can sign up to, in written agreements, as a basis for partnership arrangements.
 - **Preparing handbooks** detailing the remit, activities, governance arrangements, information availability, meetings and contacts of all local bodies and other important organisations and make this widely available.
 - Encouraging local appointed bodies to **consult more widely** on plans and proposals via council publications.
 - **Promoting transparency** by publishing annual accounts, as well as holding meetings in public, publishing annual reports and having registers of interest open to the public. They should also produce a code of governance to promote public accountability. Board members should sign up to this code as well as a code of conduct.
 - Local accountability can also be improved by having **written agreements with local authorities** covering arrangements for consultation on policy matters and nominating representatives.

Association of London Government (ALG) and Greater London Enterprise

- 8.1.10 The Association of London Government (ALG) and the Greater London Enterprise commissioned a research study entitled *Local Strategic Partnerships and Neighbourhood Renewal in London*. Among the findings in this report were:
- There was a distinct lack of clarity about the purpose and role of the LSP among sectors involved.



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- There were tensions between community representatives and the Councils, particularly on the issue of community representation. Councillors, having been elected to represent and deliver services to their communities, see themselves as legitimate and accountable community leaders and representatives. They are concerned that this role is not recognised by the Government in relation to LSPs.
- There was also a concern about the extent to which community representatives were representative of and could make decisions on behalf of their communities. It was felt that there needs to be greater transparency around the constituencies community representatives represent – in relation to both the membership of the LSPs and membership of Community Networks.
- Many ward councillors not directly involved in the LSP felt that they were bypassed by the LSP in particular in relation to NRF
- Accountability is a complex issue for LSPs. Government guidance states that:

“LSPs need to operate within a transparent and robust framework of local accountability. The organisations participating in the Partnership already have established lines of accountability, to their own customers and in some cases to the wider community. LSPs accountability arrangements need to build on these”

8.1.11 The report found that in reality the systems were ill-defined and mechanisms were not transparent to LSP members. It is important to be aware of the distinction between:

- ‘Giving account’ (i.e. reporting back); and
- ‘Being held to account’ (i.e. scrutiny).

It was suggested that there needs to be more honesty about the roles of different partners, more transparency about the roles of different organisations and clarity about the different interests of each partner. This can be assisted by the production of a partnership protocol or code of conduct.

8.1.12 The report found that the debate about the leadership of LSPs exposes tensions between the local authorities and the voluntary sector. London LSPs are generally chaired by local authorities. Most of the partners believe the Council has a legitimate claim to be leading the LSP, given its statutory duty. However there was some concern that the local authority could be ‘too dominant’.

8.1.13 Difficulties were found in engaging the private sector. LSPs have therefore tended to engage with umbrella organisations like the Chamber of Commerce to represent ‘business interests’ as part of their core group. Another issue was the ability of LSPs to engage with black and minority ethnic communities.



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- 8.1.14 LSPs are also charged with being strategic and action focused. Several of the London LSPs saw this as contradictory and therefore a dilemma. This can sometimes be addressed by the structure whereby the board deals with the strategic issues and the sub-groups (either thematic or neighbourhood) the more operational matters.

North East Lincolnshire Council

- 8.1.15 North East Lincolnshire Council conducted a scrutiny review on Partnership working in September 2003. This recommended that the Council produced a formal written policy statement and corporate guidelines which covered the following:

- A statement about the role of the Council in community leadership and its commitment to partnership working;
- An annually updated list of the key partnerships of which the Council is a member;
- Encouraging development in all partnerships of shared written objectives, roles and responsibilities, including equality/cohesion statements
- Councillor and officer, training and briefing and reporting back mechanisms and codes of conduct;
- Requirements around Council financial contributions and information regarding the accountable body;
- Communication and consultation policies.

Nottingham City Council

- 8.1.16 Nottingham City Council's Partnerships Task and Finish Panel conducted a Scrutiny review of the Local Strategic Partnership (One City Partnership Nottingham) in 2004. The panel found that although there were examples of positive working across organisations in the city, there were a number of factors that had impacted on its effectiveness and had resulted in the partnership suspending activity.

- 8.1.17 The panel found that the partnership had struggled to identify key priorities for action. The structure of the partnership was seen to have impacted on this inability to make decisions as it had become too cumbersome and bureaucratic to be workable. It also found that the partnership had focused too much on NRF and that there was a lack of awareness about the partnership activities both within the City Council and amongst wider partners and the community. It felt that the Council's leadership role in the partnership was not fully understood. In addition, members of the partnership did not seem to share a common vision. The panel also felt that there had been no scrutiny of the partnership activity and monitoring of progress as weak. The report recognised that the partnership was as a consequence, undergoing a review to enable a new structure to be put in place for the future.

- 8.1.18 Some of the recommendations contained in the review report were:



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- The City Council should take a lead role in developing an ambitious vision for the city with the partnership which demonstrates the unique community leadership role placed on the authority.
- 8.1.19 The Council's Chief Executive to oversee the development of clear linkages between the partnership and the City Council to enable more effective communication between the two organisations and to establish reporting structures that enable Elected Members to assess, review and monitor the partnership's progress.
- The Council's Chief Executive to provide opportunities for all officers and Members involved in Partnership activity to meet on a regular basis to share their experiences and develop a consistent approach to partnership activities
 - The Chief Executive to develop an internal communications strategy to inform all Members about the partnership
 - The partnership should revisit its communications strategy to ensure that the partnerships vision purpose and role is as widely understood.
- 8.1.20 In conclusion, it would appear from this overview of external research that a range of concerns which are relevant to this scrutiny review have been raised. Many issues raised focus on the challenges and complexities of partnership working and of working with LSPs in particular. Others directly relate to the need for greater transparency and accountability.



9 Appendix 2 Questionnaire sent to City Councillors

- 9.1.1 What do you think is the main role of the Birmingham Strategic Partnership (BSP)?
- 9.1.2 How do you currently relate to the Birmingham Strategic Partnership if at all? E.g. attend partnership meetings, involved with wider family or partnerships, attend District Partnership meetings?
- 9.1.3 How well and in what ways are you informed about the BSP activities both on a Strategic and District basis? E.g. attend meetings, view website, and see minutes or briefings / newsletters.
- 9.1.4 In what ways are you able to engage with or influence it at a District or Strategic level?
- 9.1.5 What is the relationship between the BSP and your District Strategic Partnership?
- 9.1.6 How do the Ward Advisory Boards and Ward Committees link in?
- 9.1.7 Are there ways in which the Partnership could be made more transparent/accountable at both Citywide/District level?
- 9.1.8 Do you have any other comments you would like to share with the Committee?



10 Glossary of Terms

AEG	Access to Employment Groups
ALG	Association of London Government
BANF	Birmingham Association of Neighbourhood Forums
BCEN	Birmingham Community Empowerment Network
BEM	Black Ethnic Minority
BRAP	Birmingham Race Action Partnership
BSP	Birmingham Strategic Partnership
BVSC	Birmingham Voluntary Service Council
CSP	City Strategic Partnership
DETR	Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions
DSP	District Strategic Partnership
DTLR	Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions
GOWM	Government Office of the West Midlands
LAA	Local Area Agreement
LGA	Local Government Association
LSP	Local Strategic Partnership
NRF	Neighbourhood Renewal Fund
NRPB	Neighbourhood Renewal Programme Board
ODPM	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
PFM	Performance Management Framework
PIAG	Programme Information and Analysis Group
PSA	Public Service Agreement



Birmingham Strategic Partnership