

LEICESTERSHIRE TOGETHER LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT

LAA VISIONING REPORT v2.0

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THIS DOCUMENT

The findings in this short report are drawn from the outputs from the Leicestershire Together Local Area Agreement Visioning Conference held on 8 June 2005. This Conference is seen as the first step in the process of defining a common 'vision' for Leicestershire in 20 years time that will underpin the development of a new Local Area Agreement for the county.

It has been prepared by RSe Consulting, based on the flipcharts completed during the workshop sessions, the 90 workbooks that were handed in and feedback from Leicestershire County Council senior officers and from a handful of delegates in response to the first draft of this report. Those who helped to facilitate the individual workshop sessions on the 8th June have had no special privileges in drawing this document together.

Our clear expectation is that the tentative vision outlined here will evolve and change – perhaps dramatically – as the LAA partners go through the necessary steps to achieve consensus and buy-in to what could be a huge programme of activity to refresh and revitalise what the LAA partners all do together over the coming years.

This document should be read in conjunction with the document “LAA Conference Write up v2.0”

OVERVIEW

It has been possible to identify some common themes and aspirations across the day around communication, exclusion/inclusion and volunteering as well as two specific goals, one around prevention in relation to children's services, the other around enhancing the quality of the built environment.

However, it is also clear that participants found it hard to identify desirable outcomes. It was intended that each group would agree a set of specific, measurable objectives. Examples of such objectives might be “personal crime levels reduced by 20%” and “no increase in congestion above present levels”. All groups found it challenging to articulate objectives in these sorts of terms. Instead, groups tended to articulate objectives that were more focused on the processes of delivering improved outcomes (eg. “improving partnership working” was ranked as the highest priority in the Healthier Communities session). Anecdotal evidence from other LAAs suggest that this is common.

Nor is this necessarily a bad thing: often it is the process, particularly over a 15-20 year timescale, that must be got right if outcomes are to be delivered; furthermore, views about exactly what the outcomes are that should be aimed for will (and should!) inevitably evolve and change over time.

Top level themes emerging from the visioning sessions can be tentatively drawn together under three headings:

1. **Communication**

2. **Exclusion/Inclusion**
3. **Volunteering**

Tentative summary vision:

Overall the tentative vision emerging from the conference on the 8th June could be interpreted to be a Leicestershire in which:

- Members of the public are clear about what local public services are doing at the moment, what they have achieved until now and what they are aiming to do going forward; for example in relation to crime and anti-social behaviour
- They also understand what the opportunities are for them as groups and individuals and what roles they can play, within this bigger picture, for example in relation to healthy eating and community activities
- Public service organisations themselves have tried and tested ways of working together effectively, underpinned by effective, transparent communication, for example between different organisations with an interest in economic development
- Members of the public play an active role in supporting each other, particularly in relation to more vulnerable members of the community, such as visiting otherwise isolated elderly people; young people in particular are supported to be involved in such volunteering and community activity
- As a result of all this, a very wide range of improved public outcomes will be identified and addressed leading to continuously improving quality of life for the Leicestershire public

A key task for the LAA Steering Group of the 5th September will be to reach consensus about a single mission statement (or equivalent) that encapsulates the above bullet points concisely and powerfully. Such a statement will act as a "rallying point" for everyone involved in the LAA. However, finding the 'perfect statement' that satisfies all the stakeholders 100% will almost certainly be impossible – what stakeholders agree will almost certainly be a compromise. The Leicestershire Together LAA sub group identified two possible themes:

'Working together to make Leicestershire a better place to live and work for everyone'

'Everybody working together to reduce inequalities and make a positive difference that people will notice in their local communities'

We now look at each of the three headings in more detail as well as a couple of specific outcomes.

1. Communication – *ensuring LAA partners and service beneficiaries understand each other*

Communication as a key theme can itself be split into two complementary sub-themes:

Communication between organisations and the public to identify appropriate action:

- LAA partners cannot be sure that they are delivering services and using their resources as effectively as they might be if they deliver those services in isolation from the supposed beneficiaries of those services. The LAA partners should work together to create an expectation and a set of mechanisms that will support this sort of communication. An example that emerged from the conference was improved communication with the public/businesses to identify collectively priority areas for the local economy (areas of growth, areas which we aspire to grow) and to then support activities to bring those improved outcomes about
- Improved communication between the partners i.e. an important perceived benefit of LAA is closer partnership working itself – stronger relationships between authorities improve the ability to work together in other situations as and when required.

Communications to narrow the gap between Perceptions and Reality

- Top priority in the Safer Communities session was 'Confidence in own neighbourhood' with 65 votes. However the group seem to recognise that to address people's feelings of safety, both crime and disorder itself and the perceptions of crime and disorder need to be addressed. The influence of the media on local community perceptions and its ability to communicate the positive messages as well as the negative is instrumental in addressing this priority.
- When focused on tackling the problems as well as the perceptions, it was recognised there is a need to set clear and appropriate targets – both as a means to measure outcomes and to generate messages of success when these targets are met.

2. Exclusion/Inclusion – *Working hard to make sure people don't get left behind*

This top-level theme has at its core the current challenge of drawing minority and excluded groups back into the community, particularly those in the following categories:

- Social
- Geographic (Rural)
- Poverty
- Education
- Housing (affordability)

Furthermore the LAA needs to be forward thinking and be focused on avoiding people falling into these excluded groups in the first place. To focus on making sure people don't get left behind requires emphasis to be placed on preventative measures including education and training to give people the skills they need to gain employment, and make a positive contribution to society.

3. Volunteering – *Enabling people to do their bit*

Creation of volunteering opportunities and encouragement of volunteers, both young and old, was a repeating theme throughout the workshop sessions and was given particular emphasis in the 'Children and Young People' and 'Older People' block area sessions. Increasing levels of volunteering within the community was seen as an opportunity to generate a whole range of benefits:

Benefiting those who volunteer:

- Older people themselves volunteering – re-gaining self-esteem and being able to make a positive contribution to society
- Younger people volunteering in the community – bringing excluded groups back into the mainstream (eg. long-term unemployed gaining skills that help them to return to the workforce)

Benefiting the wider community:

- employee volunteering strengthens social cohesion and allows businesses to become more involved in the communities in which they operate
- volunteering in general involves interaction with people from all walks of life, promoting trust and bringing the community closer together

Specific clear priorities

There were some specific priorities for services on which there seemed to be consensus in addition to those covered by the three themes outlined above. The clearest and strongest of these are:

- there needs to be a switch to preventative activity in the provision of children's services;
- the quality of the built environment, in particular housing and town-scapes, is the priority for the environment.

Two challenges to the LAA

If the above represents at least a part of the vision, then it needs to be acknowledged that this throws up two real and significant challenges to the LAA partners.

1. Truly engaging with citizens

For the vision as outlined above to become a reality – and for that to lead to improved services and therefore improved quality of life for Leicestershire – then the LAA partners need to understand that they must engage in a true two-way process with the citizens (businesses and visitors too!) of Leicestershire. No longer can any of the partners simply “do” things – they absolutely require at least the compliance but more often the active buy-in and engagement of the Leicestershire public.

For example, the provision of healthier meals through schools will only happen if parents understand why it is important and are supportive; fear of crime will only reduce down to actual levels of crime if members of the public reinforce the 'official' message; sensible trade-offs between the needs of the environment and the needs

of the economy can only be made with confidence if the public understand and can contribute to the debate – and so on.

This puts an emphasis on two things that have historically been squeezed from local government planning and operations:

1. Long term planning
2. Communications, persuasion and engagement

The LAA – with its hoped for relaxation of short term, silo based and activity measured reporting regimes – represents a huge opportunity to undertake the long term planning necessary. But each and every LAA partner needs to start thinking much more about how it is going to become much better at the second.

2. Moving to preventative services

In a world of limited resources, extra money that is spent on preventative services has to come from existing services. There are two difficulties that this poses to all LAA partners. The first is that it is very hard to tangibly demonstrate that effective preventative services are working (because by definition there will be no visible negative outcome) – this is in stark contrast to crisis services where the negative outcome is very clear. The second difficulty is how to make the transition from the current situation to a world in which more is spent on preventative services – at some point resources allocated to crisis services will have to be diverted but the benefits from preventative services will not kick in until later.