

# South Gloucestershire Partnership Review

SUMMARY AND SUGGESTED PROPOSAL FOR THE WAY FORWARD

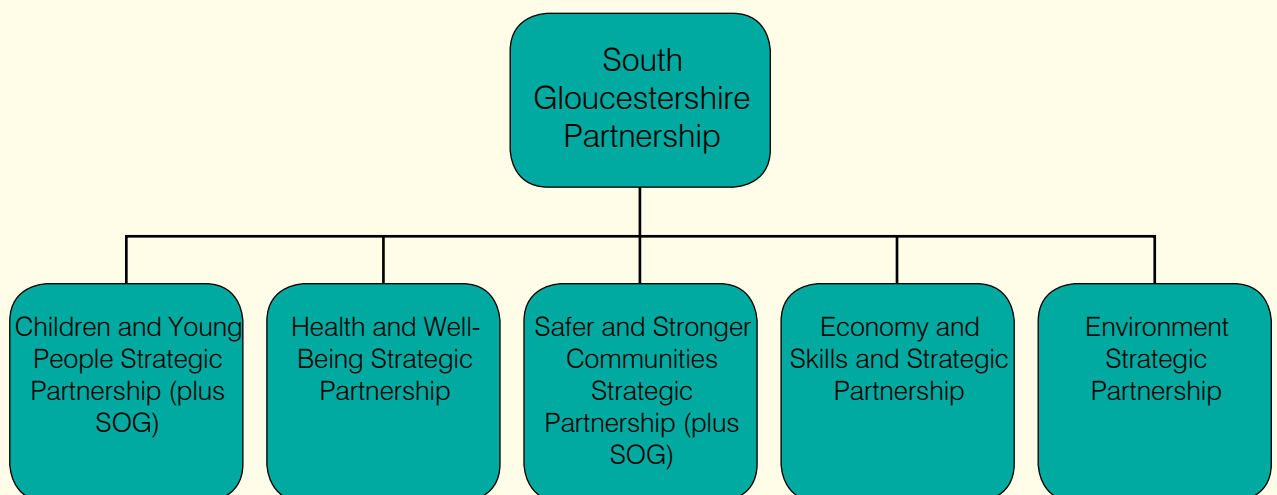


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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The South Gloucestershire Partnership and its associated thematic strategic partnerships were established in 2002 to enable partners to work in a more co-ordinated way on key issues facing local communities.
- 1.2 The present structure consists of the South Gloucestershire Partnership supported by five theme based partnerships related to each block of the 2006 Local Area Agreement. Two of the themed partnerships also have a senior officer group (SOG).



- 1.3 Partnership working in South Gloucestershire was judged as a major strength in the recent Corporate Assessment (a key part of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment). The agreement of a new Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement in 2007 together with the forthcoming introduction of the Comprehensive Area Assessment regulatory regime (2009), caused the South Gloucestershire Partnership to commission a light touch stock take of the effectiveness of current partnership arrangements.
- 1.4 South West Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership funding was obtained to undertake the review of the partnership’s architecture and capacity and Public Management Solutions Ltd (PMS Ltd), an independent consultant, was commissioned to carry this out. The review took place between January and March 2009 and in April 2009 PMS Ltd produced a final report covering the main findings, options for structural changes and recommendations for improvements to enhance partnership arrangements, processes and practices.
- 1.5 The above report has been summarised here by the Task and Finish Review Group who were remitted by the South Gloucestershire Partnership to manage the review process. The Task and Finish Review Group is made up of the following partners:
  - Avon Fire and Rescue Service
  - CVS South Gloucestershire
  - Centre for Sustainable Energy
  - Government Office for the South West
  - NHS South Gloucestershireand is chaired by Chair of the South Gloucestershire Partnership.
- 1.6 This summary also includes a suggested way forward identified and supported by the Task and Finish Review Group and seeks to invite the South Gloucestershire Partnership to agree improvements to its governance structure and implement a number of recommendations which will enhance its already strong partnership arrangements.

## 2. Why have a review

- 2.1 Over the past decade, more emphasis has been placed on partnership working with the onus on local strategic partnerships to drive forward a framework for effective and co-ordinated local service delivery, through and with key partners.
- 2.2 In addition, national policies such as the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, the Sustainable Communities Act 2007 and the ‘Communities in Control: real people, real power’ White Paper of 2008 have placed new requirements on partners and partnerships.

The above shifts the focus of partnership working

<b>From</b>	<b>To</b>
strategic co-ordination	strategic delivery
managing relationships between partners	managing outcomes and performance

and to provide efficiencies through delivering more integrated public services.

- 2.3 Assessment of the effectiveness of public sector partners’ use of resources across an area is a key component of the new Comprehensive Area Assessment.
- 2.4 The review would establish whether the partners need to take any action to further improve partnership working in light of the new Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement and the forthcoming challenges

### 3. How it was done

- 3.1 PMS Ltd was briefed to consider specific areas such as capacity, communication and use of resources. The process involved:
- a desk top review of key documents`
  - interviews with leading partners and stakeholders
  - a series of workshops to ascertain current position and future development
- 3.2 Performance (as part of the effectiveness of the current partnership arrangements) was also briefly reviewed against three key overarching questions which are the basis of the new Comprehensive Area Assessment:
- How well do local priorities express community needs and aspirations?
  - How well are outcomes and improvements needed being delivered?
  - What are the prospects for future improvement?
- 3.3 The Audit Commission’s best practice advice contained in ‘Working better together – managing local strategic partnerships’ released at the end of April was also considered to ensure the review recommendations met its advice.

## 4. Summary of Findings

### 4.1 Vision

- 4.1.1 There is a collective understanding that the Sustainable Community Strategy is South Gloucestershire Partnership’s vision for the area, with wide spread ‘buy in’ to it at strategic level. Further work needs to be undertaken to ensure it is understood and used at the operational level.
- 4.1.2 There is a good evidence base to the Sustainable Community Strategy and there have been some excellent strategic needs analyses to support the development of thematic strategies.
- 4.1.3 There is clear evidence that local community needs and aspirations are captured in the local priorities that have been set in the Sustainable Community Strategy and the Local Area Agreement. There has been widespread consultation but more needs to be done to involve local communities in assessing whether priority outcomes have been delivered. Improvements are also needed to coordinate community engagement and communicating the impact of that engagement on South Gloucestershire Partnership decisions.
- 4.1.4 The current experience of involving users in service design could be built on for the future, and could also be accompanied by work to map customer pathways as an approach to developing more integrated service delivery.

### 4.2 Performance Management

- 4.2.1 Current partnership arrangements have been effective in the main; increased focus on delivery will raise issues about whether current planning and execution arrangements are sufficiently robust.
- 4.2.2 To date partners have been happy to leave individual partner organisations to monitor delivery and to take corrective action where needed. In future, because of the Corporate Area Assessment, emphasis on robust performance management and shared risk assessment partners will need to consider how they can hold each other to account for delivery. Action will need to be evidenced where it has been needed to bring performance against targets back on track. Delivery monitoring will need to be consistent across all partnerships.
- 4.2.3 A clear baseline needs to be established against which to measure progress in achieving outcomes and improvements. The South Gloucestershire Partnership will also have to demonstrate that it is reviewing progress of all the partnerships in delivering the priorities outlined in the Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement.

4.2.4 The current South Gloucestershire Partnership has made good progress and partners have worked well together, sharing information and understanding of the needs of South Gloucestershire. However a few areas have been highlighted which may impact on future improvement -

- limited resources to undertake further service development work
- need to develop stronger links and reporting arrangements between the South Gloucestershire Partnership and the West of England Partnership to ensure effective co-ordination at sub regional level around the growth agenda and the impact of the recession
- some uncertainty around reasons for membership of partnerships resulting in some members not feeling responsible for delivering the Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement
- different interpretations about which levels of the partnership different organisations should be represented at
- feelings that the Partnership may be becoming too big to be effective
- lengthy agendas that are not always conducive to focused in-depth discussions
- scrutiny of the partnerships has been varied; further thinking and development is needed if the scrutiny panels are to hold the partnerships to account on behalf of local people.

### **4.3 Support and capacity**

4.3.1 The recent decision to strengthen the officer support arrangements for the South Gloucestershire Partnership through the establishment of a Performance Management Working Group will undoubtedly help the partnership to continue to improve its performance in future. Some further recommendations could, if implemented, also help to ensure continuous improvement of partnership working arrangements.

4.3.2 In future the partners will need to be able to assess the costs and benefits that they obtain from working together in partnership.

4.3.3 The South Gloucestershire Partnership has taken positive action to support voluntary sector members to engage with the partnership architecture by using reward grant to fund the voluntary infrastructure organisations to develop effective linkages with other voluntary and community groups.

4.3.4 The issue of capacity is seen as more important by some partners than others (largely because of Comprehensive Area Assessment).

#### **4.4 Data sharing**

- 4.4.1 The various partnerships have made good progress in how they manage data and carry out performance reporting. Data is robust and underpins strategic planning of the South Gloucestershire Partnership and some partnerships, but further work to develop a robust needs analysis in all areas is required.
- 4.4.2 Some data is available down to ward and locality level, but further break down of data to these spatial levels would assist targeting in the priority neighbourhoods.
- 4.4.3 There is uneven access to analytical capacity. In future there will need to be more joint work around auditing data quality etc to meet the needs of the Comprehensive Area Assessment.

#### **4.5 Commissioning**

- 4.5.1 The experience of strategic commissioning within Children and Young People Strategic Partnership and around Health and Well-being and community care provides examples of good practice. Need to consider whether to develop this approach.

#### **4.6 Recommendations**

- 4.6.1 A comprehensive list of recommendations to improve the above areas is detailed in the full report. Once agreement has been gained on the new structure further planning and implementation work will be done to take these recommendations on board where appropriate.

## 5. Design Principles

5.1 The following principles have been developed to assist the South Gloucestershire Partnership to draw conclusions and to evaluate any proposals to change the structure of the partnerships.

- Any changes to the structure of the partnership should simplify arrangements and not add to overall numbers of meetings/workload
- There should be clarity of purpose about the remit of each part of the partnership structure, with clarity about membership and roles of members flowing from the purpose
- There should be clear planning and execution arrangements delineated for all parts of the partnership structure, so that SGP members can have confidence in the partnership's/partners' ability to deliver what is agreed
- Procedures and systems that support partnership working should be simple, and wherever possible standardised and shared
- Partnership work should be intelligence led, with all activity based on a robust analysis of evidence contributed by all partners
- Partnership Boards should ensure that stakeholders, residents, businesses and service users are effectively engaged when assessing needs, developing strategies, commissioning new services or remodelling existing services
- There should be clear mechanisms for holding partnerships/partners to account for delivery of partnership plans and priorities
- There should be effective oversight and scrutiny of partnership performance and delivery

## 6. Options

- 6.1 Four different options were put forward by PMS Ltd. to improve the current working arrangements, ranging from enhancing what happens at present to a totally different way of working through a commissioning board.
- 6.2 Roles and responsibilities and clarity of purpose about each part of the partnership structure were clearly defined to distinguish between the different elements and allow an easier determination of the membership needed for each part of the structure.
- 6.3 The four options are as follows

### **Option A: Strategic governance vehicle with strengthened delivery arrangements through a Chief Officers' Group**

A high level, strategic board made up of non executive leaders supported by a chief officer group driving the alignment of resources and performances of the theme partnerships to achieve the Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement targets.

Themed partnerships would energise and propel the major priorities of the area forward and Communities of Interest (including those of the Business Community) would be engaged through bi-annual fora.

This model would require a strengthening of the current support arrangements especially around the requirements of more analytical support, more financial and resource monitoring support and further support around performance and risk management.

**Conclusion:** It was felt this model did not wholly address the needs of the Partnership as it excludes chief officers from being involved in discussions around the strategic vision of the area.

### **Option B: Strategic governance vehicle for South Gloucestershire Partnership (but with chief officer level representation), strengthened delivery arrangements through a Chief Officers' Group**

This model is the same structure as option A with the key difference being that the Board is made up of leaders who carry executive responsibilities and who are in a position to implement decisions of the Partnership directly. Because chief officers sit on the main Board, the executive arrangement then becomes the focus for detailed implementation of Board decisions.

**Conclusion:** Although this option includes chief officers at board level, it limits membership at executive level which does not meet the Partnership's desire to strengthen the focus on performance and delivery.

### **Option C: Strengthened existing arrangements to ensure more effective delivery**

The basic structure of the Partnership would not change from the current arrangements which is perhaps, more in keeping with the terms of reference of this ‘light touch’ review. However the opportunity could be taken to clarify accountability arrangements and linkages.

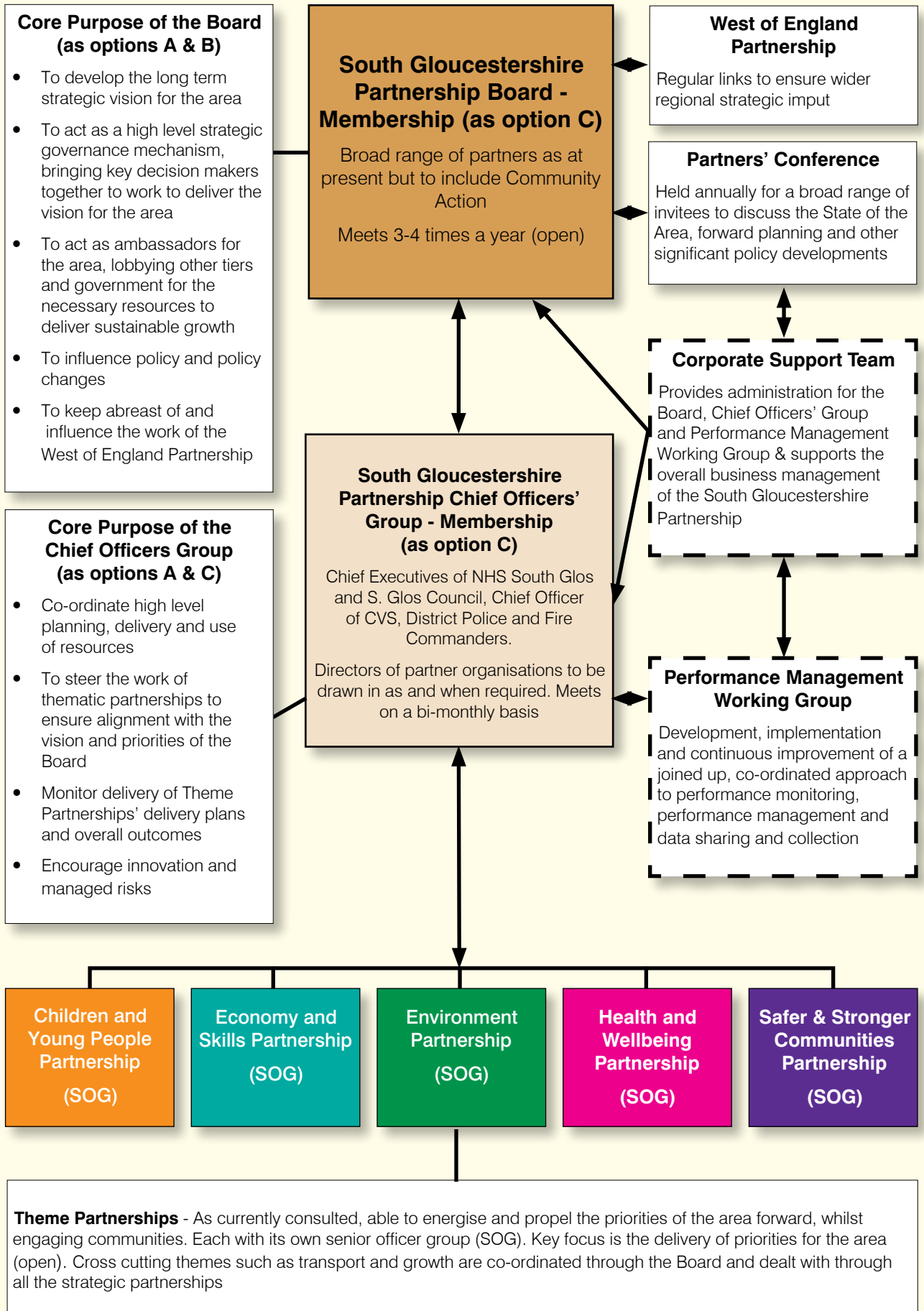
**Conclusion:** It was not felt that this model addressed the Partnership’s concerns about creating a structure that allowed for more efficient and focused strategic planning, whilst enhancing arrangements for performance management and delivery.

### **Option D: Strategic Commissioning Model with a Representative Partnership Board with strengthened delivery arrangements**

A larger Partnership Board consisting of members with a keen understanding of the needs of the area and of different constituencies in the area plus a small Commissioning Board consisting of the Chief Executives of resource holding organisations.

**Conclusion:** Certain elements of this model are pertinent and should not be ruled out for incorporation in the Partnership structure in the near future. However it was felt that this model was not appropriate for the Partnership at this time.

- 6.4 It was clear from preliminary discussions within the Task and Finish Review Group that no one option answered all the needs of the South Gloucestershire Partnership; to provide a robust way to improve its partnership working and its delivery of the Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement.
- 6.5 A fifth option was therefore compiled taking elements from the proposed options and which, it is felt, best fits the context, maturity and future direction of travel of the Partnership.
- 6.6 Suggested Option E (see overleaf for diagram): Following consideration of the proposed options, the diagram below outlines the Review Group’s preferred option which supports the Partnership’s desire to retain broad membership at Board level, but taking a high level strategic approach, whilst strengthening implementation through the introduction of an executive group.



- 6.7 The changes from the existing South Gloucestershire Partnership structure can be summarised as:
- A tightening of the role and responsibilities of the Partnership Board to allow it to consider the long term future of the Area and set strategic direction.
  - A new district-wide streamlined Public and Voluntary and Community Sector Chief Officers' Group who can drive forward delivery of the Partnerships vision, focussing on performance, delivery and resources.
  - Clearer linkages between the Partnership Board and the delivery partnerships.
  - More explicit role for support groups that monitor performance and contribute to the co-ordination and delivery of the Sustainable Community Strategy, Local Area Agreement and Multi Area Agreement.
  - Establishment of senior officer groups across all thematic partnerships to support co-ordination and delivery of priorities and outcomes.
- 6.8 There are benefits from this structure which will:
- Overcome the frustrations from partners on the duality of responsibility on the current Board.
  - Provide greater clarification on the roles and responsibilities of each element of the partnership structure.
  - Encourage more systematic input to all levels of the partnership structure.
  - Enable the South Gloucestershire Partnership to better co-ordinate delivery and management of co-ordination.

## 7. Conclusion

- 7.1 A range of stakeholders within the partnership family is currently being consulted about the preferred option (6.6 pg.11). All comments will be considered at the next South Gloucestershire Partnership meeting.

## Author

The Chair of the South Gloucestershire Partnership on behalf of the Task and Finish Review Group

### For further information contact

Andy Davies, Head of Human Resources & Organisational Development,  
South Gloucestershire Council. Tel: 01454 865425

Yvonne Davis, Strategic Partnerships and Planning Manager,  
South Gloucestershire Council. Tel: 01454 863865

Stephanie Kruse, Strategic Partnership Officer, South Gloucestershire Council.  
Tel: 01454 863868



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