

## **Local Area Agreement – Pilot Submission – Oldham Partnership**

### **Executive Summary**

Oldham is in the process of being transformed following the low point of the Civil Disturbances in 2001. The Oldham Partnership and Oldham Council have been at the heart of this change and see the Local Area Agreement (LAA) as an excellent opportunity to accelerate this process and deliver significantly improved outcomes for local people.

Central to our approach within the LAA will be Community Cohesion. We believe that a further “step-change” can be delivered in this area, by using the LAA to focus on key outcomes that deliver Community Cohesion across the four blocks. This will assist in narrowing the gap between different groups and areas within Oldham. We will utilise the LAA to better target the individuals, neighbourhoods and specific interventions required to achieve key outcomes which will enable Oldham to continue to narrow the gap on Government deprivation floor targets.

The ability to make strategic linkages within the Oldham Context to other Government Flagship programmes is also strong. The Housing Market Renewal Programme is beginning to make physical transformation in a number of neighbourhoods and this is set to expand rapidly over the next three years. Marrying-up this change with the wider outcomes that will be delivered through the LAA will make holistic, sustainable regeneration a reality.

Finally, there is no escaping that performance within Oldham Council and Oldham Partnership needed to improve. Much has been done to achieve this over the past three years but there is still much to do. The LAA offers a real opportunity to build on this, streamline partnership bureaucracy, put the emphasis on delivery and improve performance management arrangements. Piloting an LAA in Oldham will not only deliver improvements through the agreement itself but will help anchor change in the Partnership more widely.

### **Clear Objectives**

The Oldham Partnership and the Council are clear about they want to achieve for the borough. A new Community Strategy has just been published. Its content has been informed by the Oldham Beyond initiative jointly sponsored by the Partnership and the Northwest Development Agency. Oldham Beyond considered the future role of Oldham within the sub region and the Northern Way. It presented a vision of a new Oldham in this context, and suggested many ways in which this vision could be realised. Oldham Beyond involved intense and innovative consultation with the people of the borough which has been recognised as best practice. We can be confident that the ambitions for the borough which have emerged genuinely reflect the community's aspirations.

### **Accurate information on which to base decisions on priorities and targeting.**

Our fundamental commitment to Oldham is to achieve regeneration in a way that promotes better community cohesion. That requires that decisions about where to focus investment are made transparently on the basis of clear evidence of need. We have therefore recently enhanced our ability to compile, analyse and disseminate data on a partnership basis.

We have established the oldhaminfo website. This has made a comprehensive set of data easily accessible to decision makers to assist assessment of priorities, issues and targeting of local need. The information is boroughwide in its coverage but disaggregated to enable actions to “narrow the gap” to be accurately directed. We see this as critical, given Oldham’s unique approach to the neighbourhood renewal agenda. We intend to improve our ability to generate high quality management information still further. We are working with, Professor Tim Blackman, a Neighbourhood Renewal Advisor, on this specific issue. We see quality local information as critical to a well-focused LAA.

### **Overall Approach to the LAA**

Oldham Partnership will use the LAA to improve outcomes for local people and to improve the efficiency and performance of the LSP. The partnership is now well placed to do this having recently published a revised Community strategy that has a strong emphasis on achieving changes to outcomes and life-chances for local people. The key evidence to support the Partnership’s ability to do this is as follows:

- Following the Civil Disturbances in 2001, a poor Corporate Governance Inspection and a Weak CPA rating for the Council, which led to formal ODPM engagement with the Council, a rapid recovery process has taken place. Central to this has been the development of a shared Vision for the Borough and much strengthened partnership working. The Council’s Corporate Assessment in 2004 recognised the progress made and the ability of the Oldham Partnership to develop further. The LAA will act as a further catalyst for improvement and support the development of robust performance management arrangements.

Oldham’s recent past although challenging also offers a real opportunity as the work undertaken by the partnership on Community Cohesion offers a potential unique focus for Oldham’s LAA. The way we believe this could work is as follows:

- To look at outcomes within the four blocks from a Community Cohesion perspective. In particular look how we could “narrow the gap” in respect of BME residents, young people, vulnerable groups etc.
- By using the LPSA II to identify stretch targets where it would be possible to “narrow the gap” more quickly or by a greater amount speeding up the process of building a more cohesive community.
- By reducing the bureaucracy associated with key funding streams and sharpening performance management arrangements we will increase on-the-ground delivery.

### **Delivering Outcomes**

The delivery of real change is the purpose of our LAA. By reducing bureaucracy and using the vehicle of the LAA to improve our performance management we will achieve the step change we require. Examples of this include:

- Reducing Health Inequalities including narrowing the gap between BME residents and the borough average
- Reducing worklessness especially among young people
- Closing the gap between those schools that perform least well and the rest
- Reducing the fear of crime to match the improvements in crime reduction
- Targeting those areas where the gaps between BME residents and other disadvantaged groups and the borough average are most pronounced.
- Ensuring improvements in Housing Market Renewal Areas are complimented by improved outcomes for local people delivering holistic improvements in neighbourhoods that are sustainable.

### **Freedoms, Flexibilities and Efficiency**

Central to our approach to the LAA will be to maximise the opportunity offered by freedoms and flexibilities. In particular we will be looking to negotiate the removal of barriers and bureaucracy that will allow us to achieve in the outcome areas identified above. Our approach will be to look not only at barriers between local partners and government but between ourselves. We also believe that by freeing up our staff from monitoring and managing funding streams that they can concentrate on delivering change on the ground making them much more efficient. In addition we will seek to:

- Move to a 'funding fed not funding led' approach by aligning mainstream budgets and funding programmes (such as Neighbourhood Renewal Fund and Local Public Service Agreements) with strategic outcomes agreed in the LAA.
- Speed up our move to a partnership commissioning model implementing the recommendations of a recent report by Deloitte.
- Reduce the bureaucracy around our partnership working by aligning our structures and work programmes with our strategic priorities. We plan, for example, to reduce the number of Oldham partnership meetings from 19 to 8 per annum by embedding performance management and becoming more outcome focused.
- open a dialogue with Government Departments to rationalise and reduce funding streams, performance management arrangements, reporting requirements, etc.
- Increasing the capacity of the VCF sector to deliver elements of the Community Strategy within our commissioning approach.

In the short term, we would like to be able to begin to remove any barriers, duplications and inefficiencies around joint agency working to achieve shared outcomes agreed in the LAA.

In the medium term, we would like to examine our ancillary partnership structures (which comprise ten Thematic Partnership) to ensure that this structure is both streamlined and effective in terms of outcome delivery.

### **Management arrangements and delivery**

Following its Amber Red assessment by the Government Office LSP Annual Review last year, the partnership has initiated an ambitious work programme to:

- Embed a culture of performance management and evidence based decision making;
- Create an action-focused and outcome based partnership;
- Ensure that funding streams and work programmes align with strategic outcomes;
- Develop stronger, more accountable governance arrangements on the basis of a Local Public Service Board;
- Retain the active engagement of all partners and sectors by developing an inclusive, transparent and accountable partnership structure.

The Oldham Partnership is now well placed to facilitate and co-ordinate a Local Area Agreement. Utilising its new governance arrangements the Partnership is now in a position to accelerate the pace of change within Oldham and demonstrate strategic leadership by negotiating a Local Area Agreement.

We envisage that the Oldham Partnership Executive would be collectively responsible for the negotiation and implementation of the LAA. Operational responsibility for the LAA will be delegated to a LAA Delivery Group of individuals selected and tasked by the LSP Executive. The LAA Delivery Group will be multi-organisational and will include representatives from the voluntary and community sector. Both the Oldham Partnership Executive and Steering Group have collectively agreed to support a bid to join the second phase of Local Area Agreements.

### **Conclusion**

Oldham is well placed to deliver a LAA. Partnership working is strong and on track to improve. The LAA offers a real opportunity to build on the successes that Oldham has had in “narrowing the gap” in a number of key areas and widen this to many others. There is also a clear opportunity to pilot an LAA, which would have as its focus improving outcomes relating to community cohesion. Through the LAA process improvements would also be delivered to the Partnership’s infrastructure making it more efficient and improving performance management arrangements.