
Faith Representation On Public Bodies

A feasibility study

Andrew Letby - November 2007



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Introduction

In February 2007 an event hosted by Churches Regional Commission in the North East (CRC), Durham County Council and Regeneration Exchange gathered interested people to discuss the implications of recent reports about the experiences of faith community representatives on Local Strategic Partnerships¹. An action plan resulted from the day, suggesting four key needs.

- Create a regional network bringing Faith representatives together for information sharing relating to their involvement on LSPs and other partnerships.
- Explore and develop resources to equip Faith representatives for effective involvement on LSPs.
- Disseminate information about LSPs in the faith communities to raise their awareness about systems of community governance and the important role that the faith communities can play.
- Continue the dialogue and partnership working with high level bodies, such as GONE to emphasise the contribution of faith communities in relation to community policy development and regeneration.

This feasibility study sought to suggest ways in which these actions can be progressed, and the following methods were used.

Conversations were held with representatives and officers from ten LSPs across County Durham and Northumberland. Training material was gathered from a wide variety of sources, some with specific reference to LSPs and Faith Representation, and some from organisations with similar aims.

An event was held in September 2007 at County Hall, Durham to which faith reps on LSPs known to CRC were invited. All of this led to the identification of a series of issues that need to be addressed. To begin this it is important to understand the distinctive place of faith and faith representatives and then address the practical issues that arise from such an understanding.

¹ Church Urban Fund, Faithful Representation and Churches Regional Network. Faith in LSPs?

Summary of recommendations under the four identified needs

(See reference to main text for detail):

1. Create a regional network bringing Faith representatives together for information sharing relating to their involvement on LSPs and other partnerships.
 - Facilitate network of faith representatives to meet on a regular basis for themed learning and support (2.1)
 - Establish and moderate a virtual network or email list for on-line discussion and support (2.2)
 - Consider development of peer mentoring scheme for new faith representatives (3.2)
 - Produce series of printed or web based resources to address the common needs of faith representatives (3.1 and 6.3)
 - Seek to identify the current faith representatives that are 'hidden' or not known to Churches Regional Commission in the North East (5.1 and 5.2)

2. Explore and develop resources to equip Faith representatives for effective involvement on LSPs.
 - Produce series of printed or web based resources to address the common needs of faith representatives (3.1 and 6.3)
 - Facilitate network of faith representatives to meet on a regular basis for themed learning and support (2.1)
 - Establish and moderate a virtual network or email list for on-line discussion and support (2.2)
 - Consider development of peer mentoring scheme for new faith representatives (3.2)
 - Identify the resources already available that can provide relevant induction, support and training for faith representatives (6.5)
 - Produce a leaflet for bodies who could sponsor faith representatives (1.1)
 - Use CRC mailings and publicity to share 'good news' stories (4.2 and 6.4)
 - Use established faith representatives to produce a resource encouraging wider involvement in light of imminent changes in political structures (6.2 and 6.4)

3. Disseminate information about LSPs in the faith communities to raise their awareness about systems of community governance and the important role that the faith communities can play.
 - Highlight the potential of faith representation in the on-going advocacy work of the Churches Regional Commission in the North East (4.1)
 - Use CRC mailings and publicity to share 'good news' stories (4.2 and 6.4)
 - Facilitate network of faith representatives to meet on a regular basis for themed learning and support (2.1)
 - Establish and moderate a virtual network or email list for on-line discussion and support (2.2)
 - Use established faith representatives to produce a resource encouraging wider involvement in light of imminent changes in political structures (6.2 and 6.4)
 - Discuss with regional theological training institutions the possibility of addressing issues of civic engagement in their training programmes and using CRC as a placement opportunity for students (4.3)
 - Produce a leaflet for bodies who could sponsor faith representatives (1.1)

4. Continue the dialogue and partnership working with high level bodies, such as GONE to emphasise the contribution of faith communities in relation to community policy development and regeneration.
 - Identify the potential of working in the new structures as a key element in the work plan of CRC (6.1)
 - Identify the resources already available that can provide relevant induction, support and training for faith representatives (6.5)
 - Use established faith representatives to produce a resource encouraging wider involvement in light of imminent changes in political structures (6.2)
 - Highlight the potential of faith representation in the on-going advocacy work of the Churches Regional Commission in the North East (4.1)
 - Use CRC mailings and publicity to share 'good news' stories (4.2)
 - Discuss with regional theological training institutions the possibility of addressing issues of civic engagement in their training programmes and using CRC as a placement opportunity for students (4.3)

What are the theological principles that underpin faith representation?

Some key principles that are at the heart of faith are hope, well-being, acceptance and inclusion, caring and service, a moral or ethical compass and long termism. The value of these has been recognised by those outside faith communities.

*"In offering society the resources of its language of 'love', 'hope', judgment', 'forgiveness', 'remembrance' and 'hospitality', faith communities provide society with another way of narrating the urban story of regeneration beyond the account given by public policy"*²

Often overlooked in this context is the 'prophetic' nature of faith. People who align themselves with faith are often able to offer a constructive challenge and act as a critical friend when others might be constrained by their employment or office. The annual report of one NE partnership includes this comment;

*"The representatives who are from faith communities have a unique role. We have not got a political axe to grind. We are in contact with residents from all sorts of backgrounds, and we ourselves come from a variety of settings. Our role is not to press our own faith, or way of life, within an LSP, but it is to remind the service providers of the human face of those whose futures they are deciding"*³

*"It is essential that the Faith reps are the conscience of the LSP, at certain times. We can, and will speak out when others are speechless"*⁴

Alongside this is the concept of love in action which is a key element in most faiths. Practical examples of this across the faith communities are highlighted by National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO)⁵. Once again the annual report of a NE partnership highlights how this becomes a significant influence on the way the body as a whole deals with the issues with which it is faced.

² <http://www.heythrop.ac.uk/rapid-response/rapid-response---26th-may-2006.html>

³ Annual Report for the Churches' Agency for Regeneration in Wear Valley

⁴ Annual Report for the Churches' Agency for Regeneration in Wear Valley

⁵ Faith and Voluntary Action NCVO, 2007 pp7-16

*"It is easy to examine statistics, and to forget that these refer to individuals, who can be hurt, or undervalued. There is a need to steer the authorities towards the values within communities which money cannot affect, rather than assuming that an injection of cash, administered by outsiders who are not part of the community. The cash poultice, or the street enhancement will not cure the disillusion of poor employment opportunities. These are the factors which lead to vandalism and poor educational attainment. A sense of worth within a community can improve attitudes and lead to self control, and these are not bought by money."*⁶

There are many other respects in which the significance of faith communities is demonstrated in the daily outworking of their theological principles. These would often not be regarded as significant by individuals, but even the largely sceptical report from NCVO makes some positive statements about the value of faith communities in civic society.

Faith communities gain strength from their communal nature. *"The acceptance, support, purpose and identity that are developed through the bonds of a worshipping community can also motivate and equip people to cross boundaries and to develop bridging and linking social capital. Many 'public lives' can be traced to early years in a faith community."*⁷

Faith communities can be accused of being dogmatic and dictatorial – but in reality they are often places of great debate. This provides a good training ground. *"Many faith organisations are internally diverse, not always homogenous and straightforwardly 'bonded'. As such they can be places where the demands of deliberation, negotiation, campaigning and democracy can be absorbed."*⁸ At their best, faith communities are places where real discernment takes place.

An excellent example from history is found in the way in which Methodism was a dominant influence on the growth of Trade Unionism.

It is also true that faith communities have a certain degree of independence, not least in financial terms. Their position within the local community offers instead a real means of grass roots contact, and the offering of pastoral care often leads to a real understanding of the key issues in the lives of people who perhaps feel that they do not have a voice. Importantly faith communities are around for the long term, often providing some of the longest established institutions in a community. Using the Christian tradition as an example, it is important to remember that Jesus changed lives on a long term basis. With this in mind faith communities should be seen to offer a sense of sustainability.

⁶ Annual Report of the Churches' Agency for Regeneration in Wear Valley

⁷ Faith and Voluntary Action NCVO, 2007 p 34

⁸ Ibid p 37

“the practical work of the churches and faith communities who have been involved in local areas for many generations provides local communities with a collective sense of memory and rootedness in a particular place.”⁹

Faith communities are also valuable for the value systems that underpin their understanding of issues. The importance of service is highlighted in many faith traditions. Faith communities often contain within themselves people of differing political views and from diverse social ethnic and economic situations.

In a recent article, the Director of the Kirby Laing Institute for Christian Ethics in Cambridge made this valuable assessment:

“There is an enormous potential contribution that can be made, and to some degree is already being made, by Christian and other religious voices, drawing on the wisdom of their own confessional traditions, as they participate in open public debate on the major issues of our times... Here, Christians are able to work within the public sphere of civil society to inform and improve debates, to challenge ideological blind spots, and to imagine workable solutions.”¹⁰

In some senses tangential to all of this, but in other ways at the heart of it all, is the fact that faith communities have a priceless resource of people and buildings at the heart of every community. It is easy to overlook the significance of these, but many community leaders see great value in the networks that faith communities inevitably develop as a result of their position at the heart of ordinary life. A series of conversations with civic leaders in a large NE city clearly identified an awareness and valuing of this.

In trying to find a way of summarising the theological contribution the concept of ‘Faithful Capital’ developed in the Faithful Cities report¹¹ takes us a long way in the right direction. Two summaries of the concept highlight draw together many of the features identified as the theological underpinning of engagement with civic society as expressed in representing the faith communities on public bodies.

“Faithful capital’ is a concept that implies a more sustained and attentive commitment to the needs of impoverished inner city communities. It finds its locus in the work of faith communities, particularly the parish system, which places the church at the heart of the

⁹ <http://www.heythrop.ac.uk/rapid-response/rapid-response---26th-may-2006.html>

¹⁰ Jonathan Chaplin in *The Bible Transmission* - November 2007 - Bible Society

¹¹ Faithful Cities, A Call for celebration, vision and justice. Commission on Urban Life and faith, 2006

*community. Thus, the report argues, faith communities can play a unique and vital role in addressing the malaise of inner city living. It is a call to reduce the gap between rich and poor, to combat racism and intolerance, and to speak to a society that increasingly sees a threat in the 'other', rather than the face of Christ."*¹²

"'Faithful capital' contributes both as a valuable resource for community cohesion and urban regeneration and also as a critique of government policy that can sometimes attempt to reduce everything to benchmarks, quantifiable data and market-driven targets.'Faithful capital' reminds government that there are essential dimensions of civic life which are not quantifiable.

*"Furthermore, 'faithful capital' can expand the civic vocabulary of conventional wisdom beyond its borders of tolerance to a positive embracing of the hospitality of the other: the foreigner, the asylum seeker, the refugee as a guest in our midst. In an increasingly diverse society such resources of hospitality cannot be taken for granted and need to be actively promoted if we are to overcome xenophobia and paternalistic attitudes to social integration."*¹³

Finally it is worth noting that one person with whom I spoke was clear that *"Christians shouldn't need to apologise for being there."* In the particular context the specific faith reference was appropriate, but in another place it would be just as appropriate to use a more inclusive label. However the sentiment is extremely important, drawing out questions of whether faith communities understand why they should be at the table and whether they demonstrate confidence when they are.

¹² <http://www.chbookshop.co.uk/feature.asp?id=2391379>

¹³ <http://www.heythrop.ac.uk/rapid-response/rapid-response---26th-may-2006.html>

The issues identified by the study

1. Where does the accountability lie for faith reps? Many people of faith are involved in the life of public bodies at all levels because of their roles in other organisations or because of particular skills and interests they possess. Wearing these hats they are confident of their roles and responsibilities, but clearly their faith brings with it a distinctive view of the issues and so the question arises as to how we encourage such people to acknowledge what they bring to the table and how this relates to other members of their faith community.

However, the evidence suggests that in many contexts faith reps are working in a sort of vacuum with no real link to a sponsoring body. This means that it is difficult to canvass the opinions of the constituency they are deemed to represent and they have no clear way of reporting back. Indeed even where a group such as Churches Together has put forward a rep there is sometimes a sense that they are not really interested in hearing back from that person. In reality a representative might be able to report back adequately to their own congregation, group or local community, but be less confident in doing so to those who are beyond their normal sphere of contact.

Possible recommendations:

- 1.1 Is it possible to produce some form of leaflet that can be sent to all potential sponsoring bodies (Councils of Faiths/Churches etc)? The text of this would include some justification as to why the contribution of faith is important to public bodies and good practice guidelines on how to select and appoint reps and how to provide meaningful methods of communication. This would have some cost implications, but they would be relatively small and distribution through CRC networks would be possible.
- 1.2 In relation to people of faith representing for other reasons, perhaps the suggestions below regarding an ethos in individual congregations and groups might in part help to inform and equip such people.

2. Whilst there is a clear feeling that some form of network of reps would be a good thing, it is less clear what form this might take. It is clear from conversations and the September event that there at least three distinct groups of people who come under the banner of 'faith rep'.

There are those we might term 'professionals' – individuals who are deeply committed and well integrated into the system. Stephen Taylor (Chair of the Sunderland Partnership) who addressed the event is an example of this. They see the role they play as an activity core to

their paid employment or ministry. These people have lots of experience, confidence and contacts and can navigate the system with confidence.

There are others who might be seen as 'willing volunteers' who have agreed to take on representational roles because they sense the importance of community involvement. They have however received little or no induction and are unsure of their remit, the scope of their influence and most importantly struggle in resources of time and expenses.

The third group raise even more issues; they are at present 'hidden'. It is reasonably easy to establish contact with and between individuals who are representatives at a senior (board) level. However we know that many faith communities have people extremely active at project and theme group level. These people are in many ways the most important as they provide a real link between community and public body, yet currently we do not know who they are. Such individuals might for example serve on a mental health consultative group.

Given this variety of role (and the three categories are in themselves something of a simplification) the idea of a network is difficult to develop. For some the support is already there, for others it is desperately wanted but for many it is not even expected.

Possible recommendations:

2.1 A physical network with regular themed meetings. Such a network might meet every three months in a central location to discuss items of common interest and provide the opportunity for peer support. It would be desirable that each meeting have a focus on one issue of common concern, perhaps with an outside speaker or facilitator. The themes could be drawn from the common concerns of public bodies as highlighted in their theme groups.

This would of course demand a level of commitment from network members, but would provide the best sense of belonging.

Hosting such events would have cost implications, especially if the objective of encouraging wider participation (see section 5) is achieved in any measure. These implications include the cost of venues and catering, expenses for speakers and advertising.

2.2 An alternative or complementary to a physical network is to develop some sort of virtual network. Suggestions have included using a platform such as 'Facebook'. This is presumably free to use but needs a level of confidence in using the site and of being happy with public availability. Conversation would suggest that many people hold misgivings about the way in which such sites operate. Such a network would also need the members to be proactive in engaging with one another. Positively it would allow easy discussion of important topics.

However there is a simpler alternative, a basic email mailing list. Once set up this would allow individuals to post their thoughts easily and messages would reach the rest of the network without them needing to make an active check of what was being discussed. Apart from the

initial set up, neither of these options would necessarily have a cost attached. However there would be a need for some sort of monitoring/moderation and perhaps some way of keeping the conversation 'animated'. How could this be facilitated? Is it a proper role of CRC or could another person be convinced of the value of taking such a role. The feasibility study raises the question of how this would be funded.

3. How can new reps be properly inducted and equipped for their task? It became clear that some people find the whole thought of joining a public body daunting. They don't understand the purpose and etiquette of meetings; are unsure who or what they represent and what the extent of the commitment is.

The provision of some induction materials or even a peer mentoring programme would help those in the 'willing volunteer' category and might encourage the 'hidden' reps to develop their role. In many cases it is important to highlight that experience of living and working in a faith community has led to the development of transferable skills e.g. faith communities are often governed by councils and committees and members are well accustomed to the processes used in such situations. This can be invaluable in becoming a representative.

There is some experience of providing generic induction materials; in particular 'The LSP Guide' offers an overview of the purpose and basic structure of a LSP. In other places individual LSPs have produced induction material which explains the local context, translates acronyms and introduces key personnel. The material produced by 'Wansbeck Initiative' is a particularly good example of this.

However all of this assumes some understanding of the 'system' and a degree of confidence in the process of engaging with such bodies. Neither does it properly address the unique contribution that can be made by specific groups. A series of leaflets produced by the Diocese of Manchester made some attempt to remedy this, but they can be criticised as still requiring a degree of understanding beyond that of the average lay person and though relatively recent have a very out of date feel to them. This highlights clearly how quickly the situation changes.

Possible recommendations:

3.1 A further series of printed resources or a web based information resource. Examples of the type of material that might be used in either context are appended. It is evident that this must address the various groups identified. So suggestions range from some very basic suggestions of how to interact in meetings through to lists of acronyms, description of structures and

¹⁴ Urban Forum and Community Development Foundation - The LSP Guide (revised 2006) - A handy guide to getting involved for community and voluntary groups

¹⁵ <http://faithnorthwest.org.uk/resources/141373/1FiPSeries-FIP.pdf>

encouragement to see the distinctive purpose of faith representation.

The cost implications vary here. Printed resources would require a fixed up-front cost, but suffer from a potentially short shelf-life. Draft examples are to be found in Appendix 1.

Web resources would incur small but on-going hosting costs, perhaps significant set-up costs and require on-going maintenance. This would however mean that resources could constantly be kept up to date and reflect the changing political climate.

Initial research suggests that a 10 page website with the option of some interactive features would cost in the range £600 - £1000. This does not take into account the need to keep the material up to date, a task which would not be within the skill set of a willing amateur. How could costs be managed after any grant funding expired?

- 3.2 The possibility of developing some sort of peer mentoring system might provide an attractive possibility. As new representatives are identified they would be partnered with an experienced person who would offer practical support and encouragement. Such partnering would need to be brokered in some way and so such a scheme would be dependent on the establishment of some form of network and in particular the way in which such a network was facilitated. Clearly some sort of lead will need to be offered.

- 4. How can an ethos be developed in local congregations that encourages individuals to see taking on representative roles on public bodies as a legitimate and important expression of faith?** Public representation and civil engagement is not often taught as an expression of Christian discipleship though it may be true that in some contexts other faiths are more community minded. How do we help faith leaders to understand the importance of the role and then enable and encourage congregations to consider getting involved? Clearly there are fundamental issues of both theology and resourcing to be addressed. There may also be a two way process here, with church leaders feeling guilty about spending time outside of their own congregational needs.

It can be quite difficult for those who are already committed to this agenda to understand why there is so much local apathy to involvement as they see a natural link between their faith and civic life. However the lack of understanding was commented upon by several of those interviewed. This was particularly the case when representatives tried to find ways of reporting back to sponsoring bodies and local congregations. Here reports were heard with courtesy rather than genuine interest.

The extent to which this understanding is lacking amongst the grass roots of the faith communities was starkly illustrated at a gathering organised by a local Churches Together Group to discuss

the proposals for a Unitary Authority in one part of the North East region. Most of the discussion centred on personal issues and no-one tackled the question of what might be a Christian response or showed evidence of the theological principles described above as key features of a faith response.

This is probably the hardest area in which to identify ways forward.

Possible recommendations:

- 4.1 The need to advocate the work of CRC in local situations has already been identified as an important aim by CRC Council and Board. Such advocacy should include the highlighting of agendas such as faith representation on public bodies. However the various elements of the CRC agenda need equal highlighting and consequently there is potential that the significance of each could be lost.
 - 4.2 It is important to tell stories of good practice. This should be part of the on-going programme of CRC. An opportunity is presently available in the dissemination strategy of the key lessons from Faith in North East Regeneration study. This provides a clear link between strands in the work plan of CRC. Is it possible for this to be linked to some 'ideas' for further involvement document?
 - 4.3 Is it possible to address the issue of how this sort of practical theology can be put on the agendas of theological training establishments, continuing Ministerial development and regular meetings of church leaders? For example is CRC or other stakeholders in this arena used as a placement for theological students?
- 5. How can more of the people of faith who are working in this arena be identified and subsequently supported in their roles?** As identified above, currently it is only those working at Board level who are properly identified. It is clear however that many individuals and the organisations they are associated with are heavily involved in the various supporting structures of LSPs and other bodies. If the networks and resources that result from this work are to be properly valued, attempts could be made to identify more of these people. It might however be questioned as to whether many of these people are working in the same arena as that being discussed in this study. Practical involvement in a community project requires different levels and types of support.

Possible recommendations:

- 5.1 Given the problems regarding feedback and communication identified elsewhere it may be difficult to identify these people. In reality they are working out the practical theological

significance of their faith. Perhaps some form of survey might reveal some information.

- 5.2 A publicity leaflet about the network sent out to a wide audience might reveal some contacts, but inevitably this will rely on a response which is most likely to come from those who have already joined the dots.

6. How do we react to the changing political landscape? At the outset of this study it was not fully appreciated how much the political landscape might change across the North East Region. The moves towards Unitary Authorities mean that the key element of the study, LSPs, may not exist in their current form much longer across much of the region.

This must not be taken as a threat, but an opportunity to reassess how involvement can be increased. Taking seriously the suggestions proposed by this study is therefore even more important than perhaps was anticipated at the outset.

The currently available thinking from Durham County Council suggests the following scenario:

“A key feature of the proposal is the formation of 12 to 14 'area action partnerships' to serve the main natural communities of the County. The precise geography and number of natural communities would be agreed in consultation with local people, local community partnerships and other stakeholders. The area action partnerships would provide more 'local choice and local voice' in the County and would comprise key local representatives such as voluntary and community organisations, unitary and town & parish councillors, faith representatives, business representatives and local people.”

In Northumberland the current proposals point to the establishment of 20+ 'Community Forums'.


Possible recommendations:

- 6.1 The issue here is less about a quantifiable activity than ensuring resource is available to monitor what is going on. This perhaps will rely on the goodwill of CRC staff and partner individuals and organisations.
- 6.2 There is also a resource of those who are described above as 'professional' in this field who have much to offer in this changing environment. These are the real advocates and perhaps in conjunction with the development of a resource under the title 'Why and how you should be involved' they could help to make the concept available to a wider audience. However conversations with some such individuals revealed that they are heavily used in consultation etc. already and so would need to feel that this was a valuable role to perform.
- 6.3 The changing scene offers a unique opportunity to promote the work of public bodies, encourage people of faith already involved but hidden to come forward, and to make a publicity splash on

the back of the changes that might encourage further participation. Such a proposal would almost certainly involve the use of a written resource (the time critical nature of the publication would counter the argument that written resources tend to become dated very quickly).

- 6.4 There might also be an option here for a high profile event aimed at a wide audience of those who might be interested. This would need good publicity. Alternatively a series of presentations to Synods and other bodies explaining the potential of the current situation and offering case studies etc. This could achieve two things – raise profile and so new recruits – and help to identify those working at various levels at present unknown to CRC etc.
- 6.5 There is also a need to find ways of tapping into what is already available. This must include the resources available through other organisations – relating to governance etc. It would also be feasible to take the models available from organisations such as Wansbeck LSP and produce a resource for organisations to use as a model.

Appendix 1 - Draft examples of printed Resources



Help!

I've been appointed to a public body.

What do I need to know?

Guidance for Representatives from Faith Communities

Resources:

The LSP Guide – A handy guide to getting involved for voluntary and community groups. - Urban Forum and Community Development Foundation. (www.cdf.org.uk)

Effective Meetings for Busy People – William Carnes

Committees and Boards: How to be an effective participant – Alice Pohl

Reading Financial Reports for Dummies – Lita Epstein

Leadership skills: Developing Volunteers for Organisational Success – Emily Kittie Morrison

Faith in LSPs – Churches Regional Network

Faithful Representation – Church Urban Fund

What is going on?

It will soon become clear that meetings are conducted according to various conventions and codes of conduct. These should be explained to you by the Chair or full-time officer. If they are not, don't be afraid to ask for an induction session. Many acronyms will be used – again don't be afraid to ask for clarification (others might also be wondering but be afraid to ask.) A further leaflet in this pack contains a glossary of some of the most common.

It might seem a daunting environment in which to contribute, but as a representative of a faith community you may well be better prepared than other people. For example you will be used to debate and decision making in committees – use this to your advantage.



Being appointed to a public body such as a Local Strategic Partnership or a Primary Care Trust can be a daunting prospect. Many other members of these organizations will be professionals and full time employees. They may well know each other, they will often have been allocated time by their employer to take on this role as part of their paid employment and they will have access to many resources.

Representatives from faith communities, in common with those representing other community based organizations, may well not have any of these advantages.

On the other hand faith representatives do bring many useful skills and often a great deal of experience that can provide a unique and valuable contribution. This leaflet seeks to help demystify the process and offer advice on how to cope.

Paperwork:

Public bodies generate large quantities of paper in the form of reports, accounts, agendas and minutes. The mountain of paper can seem daunting. It is perhaps worth remembering that the agendas of such bodies are often very diverse and you cannot be expected to be an expert in all areas. Whilst it is always helpful to have an overview of the whole situation – there will be some areas of which you make a detailed study and others where you will need to get hold of the core principles. Reading of Executive summaries and conclusions will enable this.

The general idea is to have a Partnership and a Sustainable Community Strategy that:

- helps improve public services through improved planning between public sector agencies and partners
- improves local quality of life through a long-term vision shared by partners
- involves local people in deciding the sort of community they want now and for future generations
- has an action plan explaining who will be responsible for delivering priorities and when
- sets out how progress will be monitored, reviewed and reported on.

The partnership and Sustainable Community Strategy should take particular care to ensure that equalities law and guidance like the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 are taken into account.

Local authority boundaries can be complex. Some areas have only one local authority, responsible for all council services (a unitary authority). Other areas have a district council for some services and a county council for others, like education and social services ('two-tier authorities'). In these cases most of the resources lie with the county council. Rural areas and some urban areas also have a parish council. Councils at different levels need to talk to each other. Regional bodies may also be involved. The LSP has to take account of local government boundaries, but the rules are flexible enough to allow local authorities to join together in an LSP to provide better services.

LSPs involve people in different ways and at different levels. Involvement might be at a board level, a theme group or through an area forum.

Useful resource:

The LSP Guide – Community Development Foundation – www.cdf.org.uk

What is a LSP?

An introductory guide for representatives from faith communities.

LSPs aim to improve the way that local services are planned and delivered. They help local agencies and others to focus on improving the quality of life and leadership in a locality. They often have no resources of their own but rely on negotiations and pooling of resources between partners. In some areas there were partnerships which existed before LSPs that had been set up to organise and co-ordinate a number of services. These included partnerships for regeneration, health and community safety. It could be that the LSP has developed out of an existing previous partnership. One of the main purposes of LSPs is to try and ensure that the work of all partners fits together in one overall strategy.

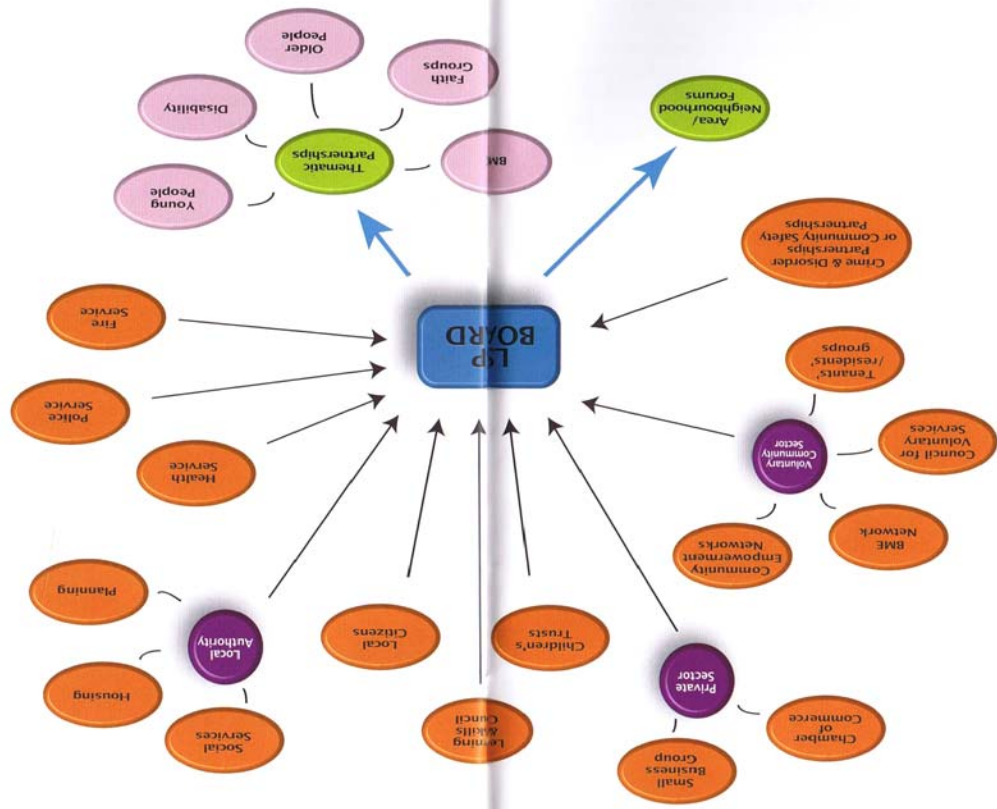
Local authorities often provide most or all of the administration and coordination for the LSP. This is partly due to local authorities having initial responsibility for ensuring LSPs were set up and for delivering the Community Strategy. However leadership does not have to come only from within the local authority but can come from any organisation that is a member.

An LSP can often be structured as a 'network of networks'. This can mean that views and information are sent from a wide range of community groups to a smaller set of groups until they reach a central LSP group. However it is not always as straightforward as this. Some groups may be well-connected to the process while others may not be involved. The diagram on the next page gives a possible LSP structure where all parts of the voluntary and community sector are connected. In many situations, there may only be parts of the diagram and other connections still need to be developed.

The sub-groups of LSPs often focus on particular sections of the community and issues like disability, older people or unemployment. They are usually called theme groups. Groups can also be focused on geographical areas like a few streets or part of a town.

In some LSPs a lot of the decision-making happens at the theme or area group meetings and not the central LSP group. There are also existing partnerships, often with statutory responsibilities for the area (for example Children's Trusts or Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships! Community Safety Partnerships) which need to be fully involved and/or represented on the LSP

An example of a Local Strategic Partnership structure



Appendix 2 - A Developing Guide of Resources

Faith Representation on Public Bodies – some resources

The LSP Guide – A handy guide to getting involved for voluntary and community groups. - Urban Forum and Community Development Foundation. (www.cdf.org.uk)

Faith in LSPs – Churches Regional Network

Faithful Representation – Church Urban Fund www.ncvo.org.uk

Faith and Voluntary Action – National Council for Voluntary Service

Faith in the community – National Council for Voluntary Service

www.ncvo.org.uk

Faith in North East Regeneration – CRCNE www.northeastchurches.org.uk

The Faith in Partnership series – Diocese of Manchester <http://www.manchester.anglican.org/ministry.asp?PageID=32>

Participation and Local Strategic Partnerships – Commission for Racial Equality www.cre.gov.uk

www.unionlearn.org.uk

General material for people new to Committees and Boards:

There is little material available which helps and encourages those who are unsure of the processes and etiquette of working on public committees. Some of the limited resources I have discovered are:

Leadership skills: Developing Volunteers for Organisational Success – Emily Kittie Morrison

Effective Meetings for Busy People – William Carnes

Committees and Boards: How to be an effective participant – Alice Pohl

Reading Financial Reports for Dummies – Lita Epstein