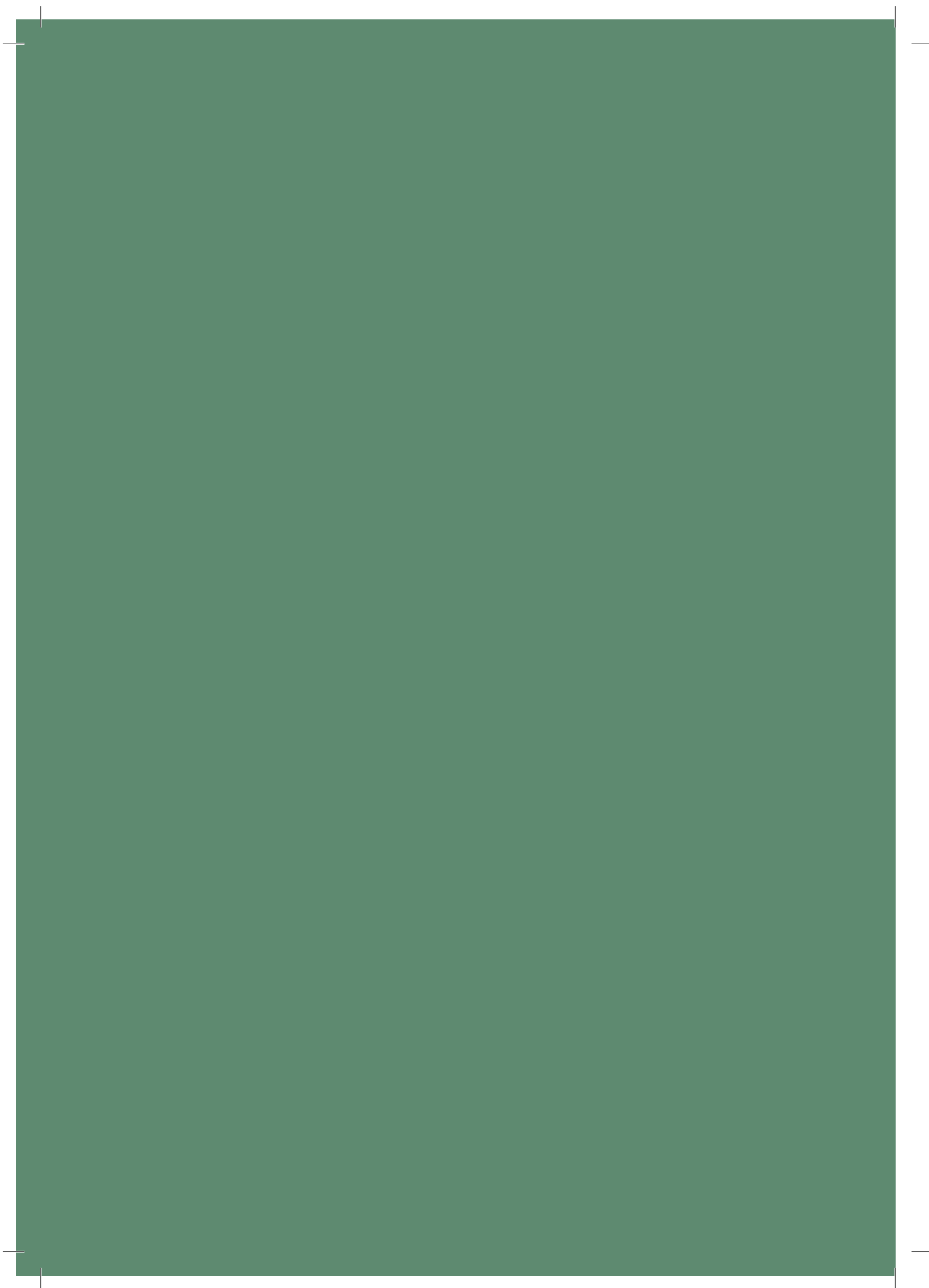




EVALUATION OF PARTNERSHIP

By Prof. Peter Lazes, Cornell University, New York

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Deepening Partnership Strategies – Creating Greater Opportunities for Innovation, Sharing Across Regions and Deepening Participation of Employees

The Next Generation of Workplace Partnerships in local authorities

This report reflects my observations and thinking about the Local Authority National Partnership process as it has matured and deepened over the last 5 years. I spent the week of January 22, 2007 meeting with and listening to groups of joint chairs, facilitators, attending a LANPAG work session, meeting with two partnership committees, union staff and management leaders and the Assistant Secretary General staff in the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government. I have read most of the critical documents and reports developed within the last two years.

The purpose of this report is to provide the Local Authority National Partnership Advisory Group (LANPAG), joint chairs, facilitators, and the Department of the Environment advice in terms of the direction, resources, structures, and learning processes that can help achieve the “next generation” of partnership activities for local authorities.

I need to acknowledge from the beginning, that I tried to understand as much as possible what LANPAG is currently undertaking. It is possible that I have missed some significant activities that are occurring or have misinterpreted what was shared. I want to acknowledge this potential problem before proceeding with my observations and suggestions.

Since there is a wide range of partnership work throughout local governments in Ireland,

I will try to make a few general comments that should apply across the board. Surely, there are specific differences as a result of the size of a local authority, local servicing issues, as well as leadership and demographics that might affect the appropriateness of my suggestions. Please keep this in mind as well.

There have been several recent reports that have identified issues and concerns of the current Local Authority National Partnership process. I will identify the key areas that are consistently pointed out and then suggest for changes.

Basic Findings

Initiatives to create partnership activities in local authorities have increased in volume and have deepened in their terms of impact in the last few years. LANPAG continues to provide important national leadership to encourage the development of local and regional partnership work through their oversight and monitoring responsibilities. They continue to have participation from all social partners. This group provides thoughtful, timely and strategic leadership for local authorities and helps to support special projects.

At the city, county and regional level, there continues to be a wide variety of labor-management partnership practices. These vary in size and focus depending on the leadership of joint chairs, senior management involvement, the involvement of region/local union full-time representatives, and the skills and approach of the facilitators. Over the last 5 years, there has been

an increase in focus and documented outcomes of partnership work.

Most recently, local authorities have been encouraged to tackle more significant and complicated issues rather than just “non-contentious issues” (*Handling Significant Change through Partnership*, November 2005). Interesting to note from a recent report on Handling of Significant Change through Partnership that “none of the initial projects has collapsed due to the difficulty of dealing with significant issues through the partnership” (*Handling Significant Change through Partnership-Report No. 2*, July 2006-the Bloomfield Hotel Conference). In addition, to encourage partnership committees to work on significant issues there is now an agreement for timely information and consultation to labor before “substantial changes in work organization or in contractual relations” (*Agreement on Information and Consultation Arrangements within the Local Authority Sector*, August 2006). Lastly, as a result of the continued economic growth of the country, the need for modernization and creating new services is becoming an important priority for the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

The challenge that now faces the partnership work with local authorities is to develop methods to deepen and spread the work of current practices. In a very basic way the partnership process, as result of very successful activities and projects has created needed trust and respect between labor and management. With this important foundation, city and county partnership committee processes need to be phased into more direct involvement in *operational, servicing, access, and quality* issues while at the same time making sure the IR matters are still resolved in a timely manner. There is also a need for increased involvement of senior management (e.g. county/city managers) in the process, and full-time union representatives, and to

create more workgroups and other relevant project teams in order to respond to expanding areas of work.

Based on the pressure to mobilize and improve the services to the community, the partnership process is now challenged to move to the *next generation of partnership work*.

Recommendations of this report will hopefully help to strengthen current activities so that local government can best serve the community and staff, and provide timely responses to on-going change.

The Next Generation of Partnership Work: Suggestions for Improving Current Work

Based on the challenges that now face local authorities the following suggestions for changes will address ways to improve the direction and current partnership work.

The six areas for improvement are connected to each other. Although presented separately, I view each stream of work as being part of a “system” to improve the processes and outcomes of current activities—each of these areas builds off of the other streams. My suggestions for improvement should be viewed as connected and reinforce each other in order to maximize opportunities for improvement.

I. Direction and Focus (Focusing Work on Important Issues)

The direction and focus of many projects have been on “non-contentious” areas or less complicated work. Many local partnerships need to start focusing on *strategic* and significant issues. In order to focus on strategic work, partnership committees should develop a clear vision and set of goals for their joint work on a three yearly basis. Goals and directions established by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local

Government and LGMSB should be shared with LANPAG and local authorities so that all needed information is available to the local authorities when they assess their needs and develop a strategic plan every three years. In addition, staff should use measurement data to help track and monitor how changes are implemented and whether or not they are sustained.

Recommendations:

1. Partnership committees should develop a Strategic Plan every three years based on *intended vision, goals and outcomes* they expect to achieve: moving from project work to “the way we work”.
2. All project work should *be tracked and monitored on a timely basis* and this data should be used to determine the impact of activities that are implemented.

II. Exchanging and Sharing Experiences (Accelerating the Adoption of Best Practices)

There has been an increase in sharing partnership experiences within regions—some local authorities have been meeting on a quarterly basis (i.e. facilitators and sometimes joint chairs), and there has been a recent exchange of experiences related to working on Significant Change work.

Recommendation:

1. Regional meetings need to be established throughout the country.
2. National meetings would be helpful on specific strategic work and areas where changes in services are needed so staff, joint chairs and facilitators learn about best practices and have opportunities to share experiences in areas such as waste water treatment, extending hours, new use of library services, etc. Currently, there is little opportunity for this type of exchange.

3. Make use of the website for providing case studies and best practices of key projects.
4. Make use of video conference technology to share experiences—cutting down on travel to meet.
5. Meet with the National Health Services Partnership and the National Centre for Partnership and Performance on a regular basis to share experiences in developing ways to deepen their process.
6. Promote more frequent meetings/exchanges between local authorities working on similar types of projects.
7. Create a north/south division.

III. Leadership and Resources (building the capacity for change)

Many joint chairs rely too heavily on the facilitators for doing needed work for their committee and follow-up with work groups. Many times top management of the local authority (e.g. county/city manager) and full-time union representatives are not members of partnership committees.

The composition of partnership committees is not consistent between local authorities. Training and educational opportunities were provided in the past for joint chairs and facilitators but further training is required for full-time union representatives and senior managers.

Now that the focus of the partnership work is changing there is a need to provide some just-in-time education and coaching to these key groups.

Recommendations:

1. Top union and senior managers need to take a more active role in local partnership committees. Their involvement is critical in order to deepen partnership activities.

Union representatives and local authority senior leaders need to participate in workshops on the new direction of worker participation and spend time examining ways for them to be more involved in partnership activities.

2. Joint chair education and coaching should include such competency areas as:
 - a. leading and managing change: change management skills.
 - b. goal setting and methods for analyzing projects.
 - c. project planning.
 - d. understanding policies and processes used to evaluate Public/Private Partnerships.
 - e. communication and engagement practices
 - f. career development.
 - g. requirements in relation to the equality and disciplinary agenda.
 - h. basic meeting skills.
3. The role of the partnership facilitators should enable the national Local Authority Partnership to achieve deeper levels of work.
4. New areas for education and coaching areas for the *Partnership Facilitators* should continue to focus on a number of areas including:
 - a. principles of work re-design.
 - b. cost-benefit analysis.
 - c. report writing and presentation skills.
 - d. multi-group mediation skills.
 - e. understanding policies and processes used to evaluate Public/Private partnerships.

- f. documentation and measurement tools.
- g. communication and engagement skills.
- h. develop templates for tracking significant and/or strategic projects.

IV. Structures to Support Change and Innovation

LANPAG has established the overall policies and agreements for establishing appropriate partnership processes in local authorities. They oversee this work and provide funding for special projects and for facilitators. There is no specific process or person to oversee the overall work, the development of facilitators, and the conducting of workshops for key stakeholder groups to learn from each other.

Recommendations:

1. A Partnership Executive and Administrative Assistant should be employed to help ensure that the strategic goals of the Local Authority Partnership process are met. These new appointments would enable LANPAG to be more pro-active at a national and local level. The project manager will work with joint chairs and facilitators to establish a shift to more strategic and significant areas of work; insure that facilitators, joint chairs, union officers and top management get appropriate education and coaching; develop methods so that partnership committees work in a timely manner; and improve documentation and measurement activities.
2. The *Handling Significant Change* protocol should be implemented in all local authorities.
 - Significant funding from the LANPAG's development Budget should be provided in 2008.
 - The creation of a Partnership Innovation Fund supported by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local

Government of €5 million administrated by LANPAG to support re-training programmes arising from the reform process and re-configuration of structures, roles and responsibilities.

- It is recommended that a percentage of this Partnership Innovation Fund be set aside for trade union staff and management training where the Handling Significant Change Protocol has been formally accepted.
 - A rigorous assessment of the benefits of this initiative for service users, staff and management, including documentation of the changes implemented during 2008 arising directly from the initiative will be undertaken prior to December 2008.
3. Create regular quarterly meetings for joint chairs to examine outcomes and processes of recent partnership work and receive advice about their work.
 - 4 LANPAG's webpage should be updated and used to track all projects and provide access to best practices. The new Partnership Executive should have the responsibility to make sure the website for LANPAG is user friendly and provides easy access to critical information.

V. Education and Coaching Support

There has been a fair amount of training available to the facilitators, but an insufficient amount for joint chairs and basically no education and coaching for senior management and union officers/activists in terms of how to support and encourage Local Authority Partnership work. Currently, there is no one responsible to see that these educational activities take place.

Recommendations:

1. The role of the new *Partnership Executive* will be to oversee and manage the development of educational and coaching for all key groups.

2. All joint chairs and Partnership Facilitators should be provided opportunities to learn about specific approaches to significant and/or strategic areas of work that are needed to mobilize services of the local authority (e.g. water and waste water treatment, non-domestic meters, garbage removal, PPPs, etc).

VI. Public Satisfaction and Quality of Work Life

Overall, the outcomes of the Local Authority Partnership process is to improve the quality and access to county and city services as well as to improve the quality of work life for employees employed. The current agreements in terms of Information and Consultation and Handling and Significant (Strategic) Change through Partnership establish a clear direction for future work—deepening the current work which includes staff in discussions of how work is organized, ways to improve the quality and access to services, and the development of Public Private Partnerships (PPPS), when it is appropriate. The new, deeper focus of the work of local authorities is important and is complicated since it requires greater sharing of critical information; the skills of how to interpret it; the ability to effectively re-design or restructure work and work processes; and an effective IR process to make sure that the rights and agreements between unions and management are dealt with in fair, equitable. The recent Local Authority Partnership committees have created a very positive foundation for this deeper level work but in order for these agreements to be appropriately and effectively implemented it will take new skills and processes in local authorities and more involvement of top management and full-time union officers.

Recommendations:

1. It is recommended that a clear process be established in terms of the practice of the Information and Consultation Agreement—guidelines need to be established so that there is a clear understanding of this process so it does not depend on the experience and interpretation of local trade union and management leaders. It is recommended that the Project Manager consult with LANPAG to develop these guidelines.
2. Access to public opinions about services should be shared with partnership committees to better understand the concerns and needs of the public. In those counties or cities where this information is not available, there should be a process started to get this information.
3. In addition to public opinion, partnership committees should start surveying their staff in terms of their knowledge of their partnership and whether or not they feel that worker participation has increased in their local authority and have these activities help to improve their work life. The new *Partnership Executive* would help Local Authority Partnership committees develop appropriate tools for surveying the public and staff so that each local authority would not have to develop their own tool. In those cities and counties where such information is already available they should use current methods.
4. Staff training particularly in respect to the *Information and Consultation of Employees Agreement of 2006* should be established as stated above with a clear process, procedures and access to critical skills for evaluating and creating needed changes.
5. It is important that joint chairs take a stronger leadership role to help move partnership work operational activities and critical work that is needed for improving customer service and

achieving needed mobilization goals. As joint chairs take on more of this role, the partnership facilitator can be used to help on provide technical assistance to various workgroups.

6. Ensure interaction with the consumer.

Funding

Recent agreement from the Minister of the Department of Environment, Heritage, and Local Government has provided funding for 2007 for general purpose as well as special projects (implementing the PMDS, additional funds for Return to Learning activities, etc.). It is recognised that the cost of facilitators be shared by 1/3 with local authorities starting in 2010.

Summary

I tried to capture the essence of the current Local Authority Partnership work. My recommendations are based on access to various stakeholders, recent reports and an opportunity to meet with two Local Authority Partnership Committees. I have based my recommendations on this information and tried to provide, through my recommendations practical and realistic approaches to improve the processes and outcomes of your current work. I have based many of my suggestions on partnership work both in Ireland and elsewhere in the European community.

You have a tremendous opportunity to improve the services and the quality of them for the citizens of Ireland. Focusing future work, having needed skills to problem solve in terms of current challenges, and expanding the ability to exchange and learn from each will help improve the effective use of resources provided by LANPAG, Department of Environment, Heritage, and Local Government and by local authorities.

Your work is impressive and hopefully deepens as you make adjustments in your approach, structures and support for the process. I hope that my suggestions and the recent reports of the Polaris group are helpful to you as partnership work becomes "the way work is done"

Good luck in improving your work.

Peter Lazes

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Table 1 Local Authority Partnership Process

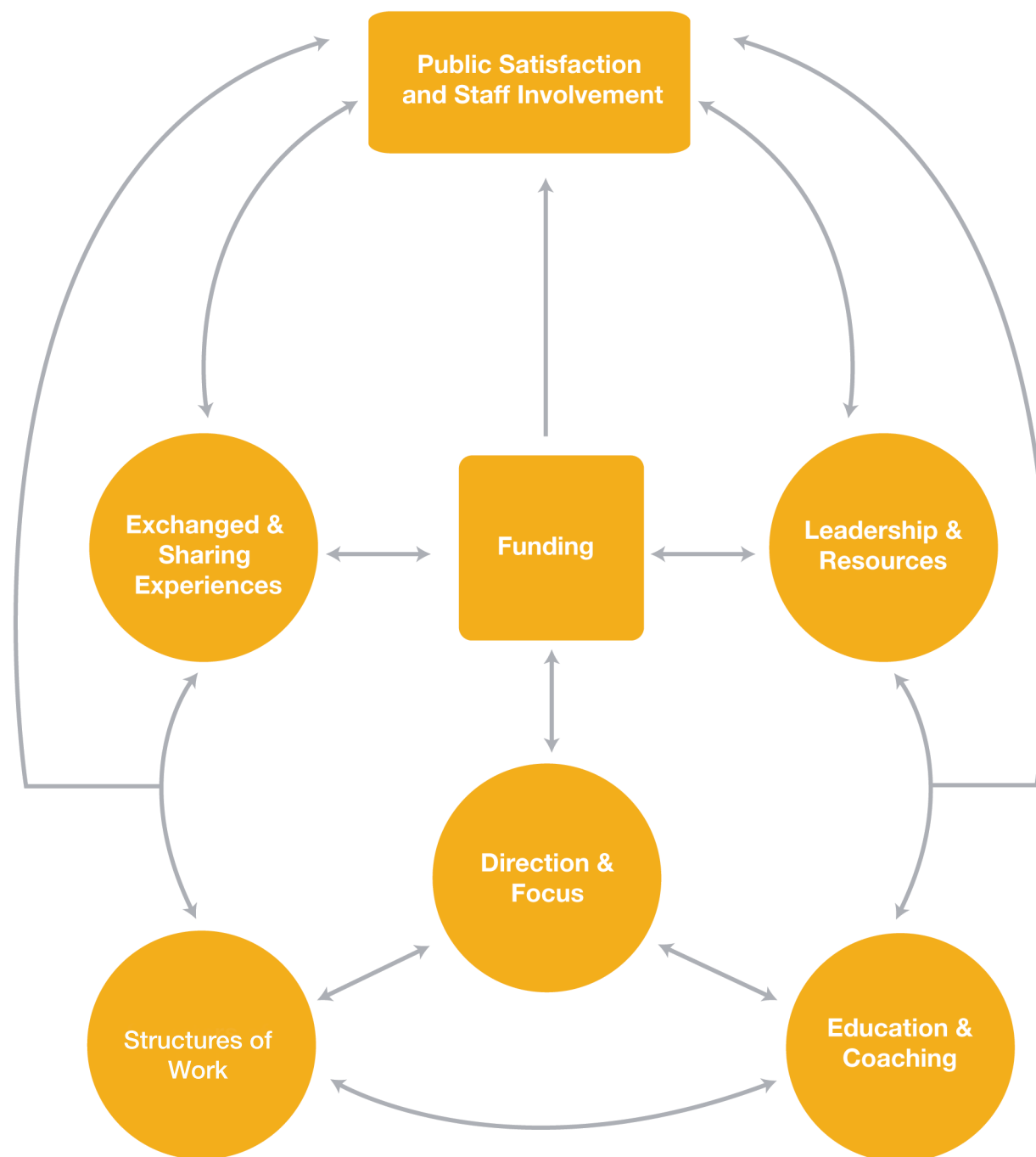
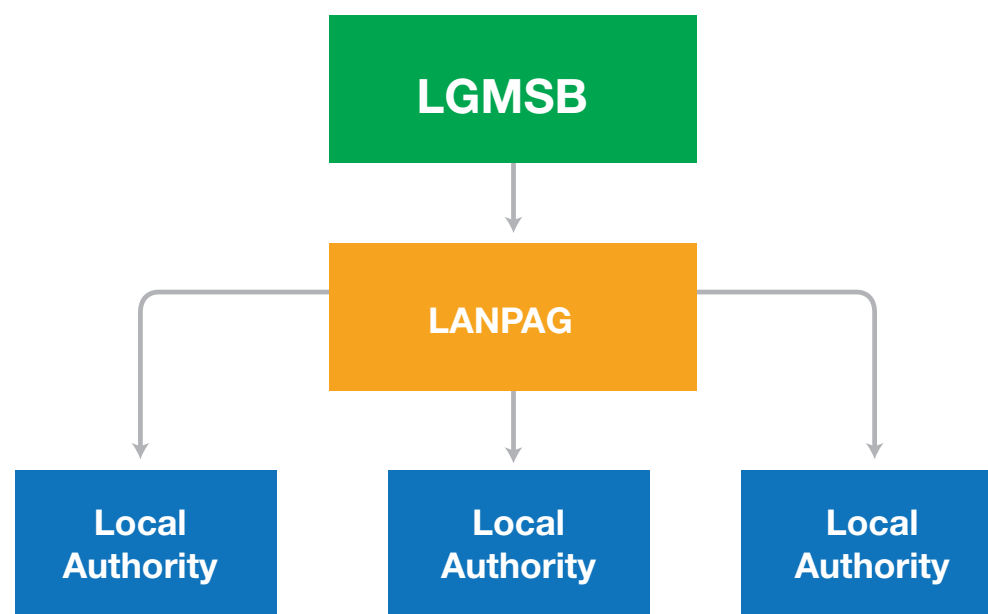
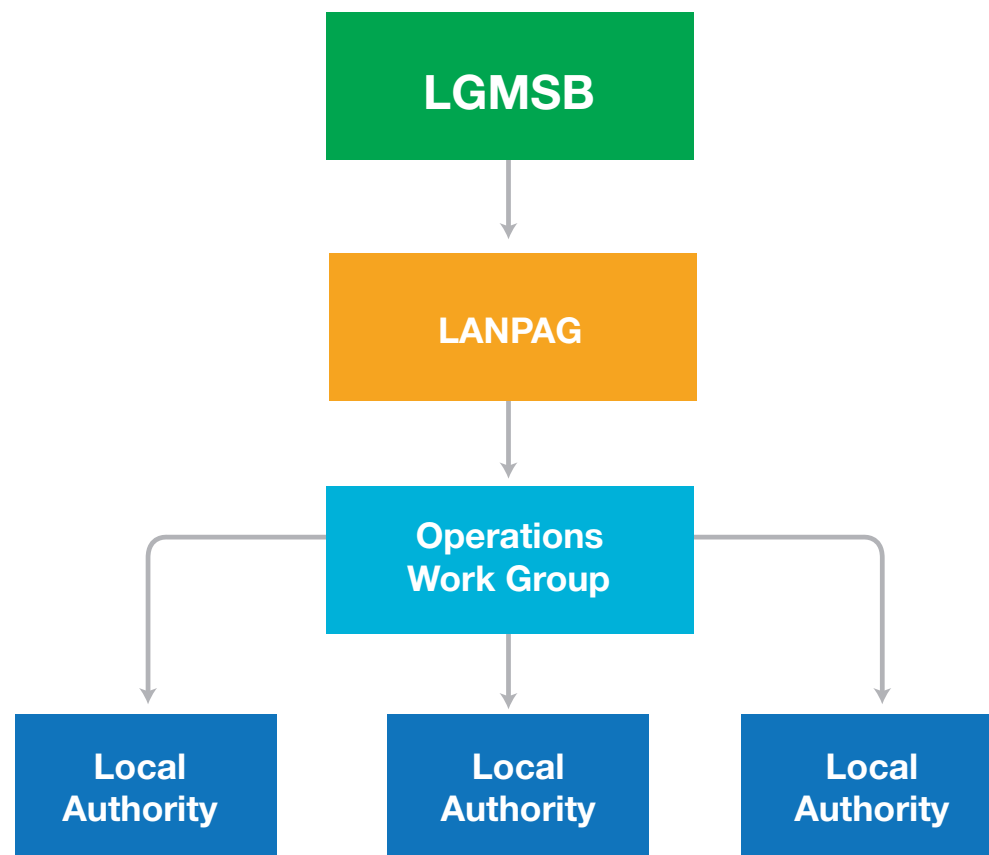


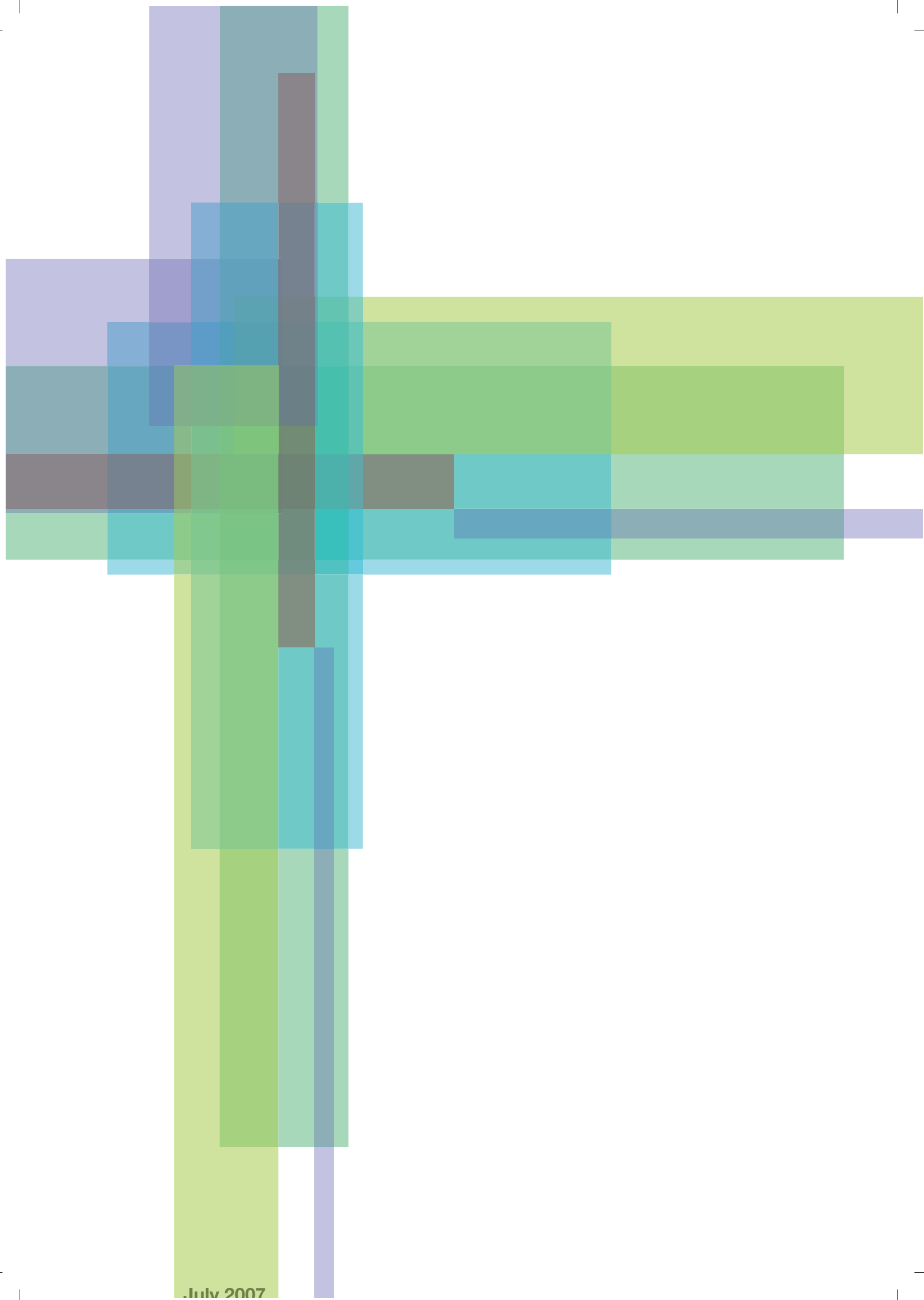
Table 2 Current Structure of Local Authority Partnership Process



New Structure







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