



Building Schools for the Future

A Toolkit for Effective Local
Education Partnerships

Practitioner Note 6:
Effective Partnering Behaviours

June 2009

partnerships **for schools**

building schools for the future

Effective Partnering Behaviours

Introduction and purpose

This Practitioner Note is one of nine that make up a Toolkit to support the successful set-up and operation of a Local Education Partnership (LEP). This note covers Effective Partnering Behaviours.

It includes the following sections:

Executive summary	3
What are effective partnering behaviours, and why are they important?	4
Mutual understanding of the risks to each of the stakeholders	4
When should we think about partnering behaviours?	5
Practical steps to consider	6
What contributes to effective partnering behaviours?	7
Attitudes of organisations and individuals	7
Roles and processes to deliver the programme	8
What do effective partnering behaviours look and feel like?	9
How do we tell if our partnering is working as well as it should be?	9

Partnerships for Schools (PFS) and Building Schools for the Future Investments (BSFI) continue to gather examples of good emerging practice from across the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme and we encourage and welcome conversations with local projects about how to make their BSF programme as effective as possible.



Effective Partnering Behaviours

Executive summary

Each LEP comprises a partnership between three organisations that have not worked together before and, being both public and private sector, may well have differing approaches to fulfilling their role in the LEP. The relationships between these partners and the behaviours that they demonstrate are, therefore, an integral component of high-performing LEPs.

Although relationships between the partners will develop during the early parts of the BSF process, particularly Selected Bidder, the interactions required in a functioning partnership may be viewed as more sophisticated and so more thought needs to be given to having the culture and processes in place to manage them.

In this Note, we look at some of the key actions that partners can take to ensure that from the outset, all those involved in the LEP understand and demonstrate the types of behaviour required to achieve success. The recommendations are based on the requirement that these behaviours need to be exemplified by senior officers and cascade through the organisation. Senior Management

should put in place a plan to ensure effective partnering behaviours, rather than assume these will develop naturally.

Many of the facts that result in successful partnering behaviours are also influential in effectively mobilising the LEP. You may find it useful also to read Practitioner Note 5 – Mobilising the LEP.

Key steps to creating effective partnering behaviours in operational LEPs include:

1. Setting out clearly the strategic value that the partner organisations place on an effective partnership and communicating this clearly to the teams involved.
2. Making sure that directors and senior managers involved in the partnership exemplify the values and behaviours required. If they do not, consider how to deploy better role models.
3. Encouraging individuals throughout the partnership structure to 'take the temperature' of the LEP partnership with their peers and discuss how things are going.
4. Ensuring that individuals' performance objectives include an element of assessment of their contribution to effective partnership working. Feedback could be drawn from partner organisations.
5. Marking the transition from the procurement phase to the operational phase in a formal, tangible way so that people recognise a change in behaviour and mindset is required.
6. Socialising the partnership and its relationships in a way which supports the development of a new culture rather than imposes one organisation's culture on another.
7. Making the practicalities of setting up the partnership a priority, through actions such as co-location or developing a brand and identity.
8. Using external expertise to facilitate partnership working if there is a need to foster partnering behaviours.

Effective partnering is reliant upon trust and open communication between partners. When an issue arises, it is common for organisations to focus on its origin - in other words, to apportion blame - rather than accept that there is an issue and collectively seek a solution. If left unchallenged, such ineffective partnering behaviours can become the norm very quickly and result in reciprocal behaviours. Therefore, partners may need to have explicit discussions about their collective approach as the LEP becomes fully operational and gets to grips with the scale of the local BSF programme.

However, it is important to recognise that instilling appropriate partnership behaviours is a natural evolutionary part of any new organisation. It requires a degree of consensus and development of new ways of working, which may take time, so partners should not expect a perfect relationship at all levels from day one.

What are effective partnering behaviours, and why are they important?

Partnering is now a common theme in many areas of public and private sector operations and service delivery. We define effective partnering behaviours as “the specific actions of organisations and individuals that lead to support the long-term partnering outcomes”. It is important to understand that this is more about the day-to-day ways in which the partners work together

towards their shared vision than about the legal obligations that each has as part of the partnership agreement. Although a LEP is underpinned by a suite of legal and commercial agreements, there needs to be more to the partnership than simply fulfilling the contractual provisions for the LEP to be fully effective. The spirit of the partnership calls for three things:

1. **Shared objectives** - ultimately success (and failure) will be shared between organisations and individuals, so organisations need to work together to ensure that there is consensus about what success in relation to the delivery of the BSF programme is.
2. **The capacity to adapt and evolve** - LEPs are long-term partnerships whose scope will to some degree develop over time. As such, they need to be flexible and have the capacity to adapt to new situations. Contracts alone cannot deal with these unknowns;
3. **The combining of resources and experience effectively** - to be effective LEPs need to make best use of the expertise, knowledge and resource of multiple organisations and deploy these in a way which maximises the impact of the combined effort of the organisations. The relationships that will deliver this need to be specifically planned for and will only be established over time.

All organisations involved in the BSF process can work together effectively if they plan carefully to do so from the outset, that is during pre-procurement. The specific conversations to identify and develop effective partnering behaviours need to begin at some level during the Competitive Dialogue stage. However, before the procurement process begins the local authority needs to have developed some preliminary thoughts about suitable types or styles of partners in the context of its programme and its own organisational strengths and weaknesses. This links in particular to the local authority's articulation of its strategic plan and the type of partner that it requires.

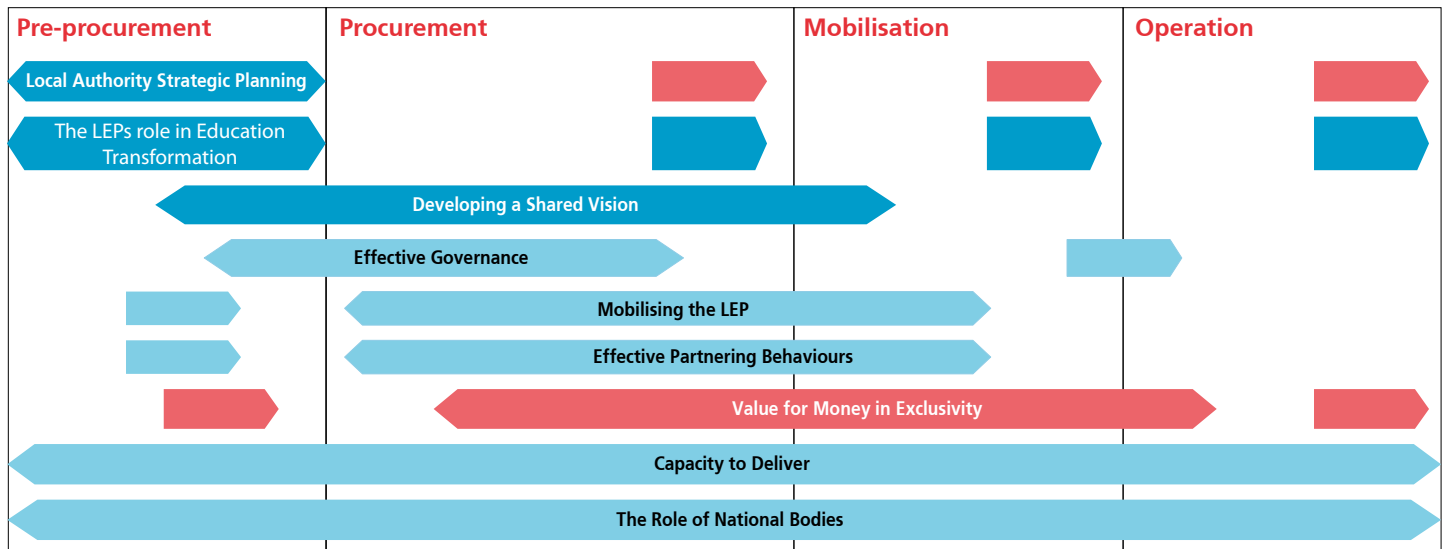
Mutual understanding of the risks to each of the stakeholders

One of the key drivers of commercial partnering relationships is achieving better outcomes. This implies that all the partners will be benefiting in terms of the management of reputational, organisational, programme and project risks.

A key element of effective partnership is therefore for all parties to be open about disclosing, discussing and managing risks. Focusing on managing and mitigating risks provides a sound basis for the partnership to become effective. It also provides valuable insight into the motivations and organisational behaviours of the partnering organisations.

When should we think about partnering behaviours?

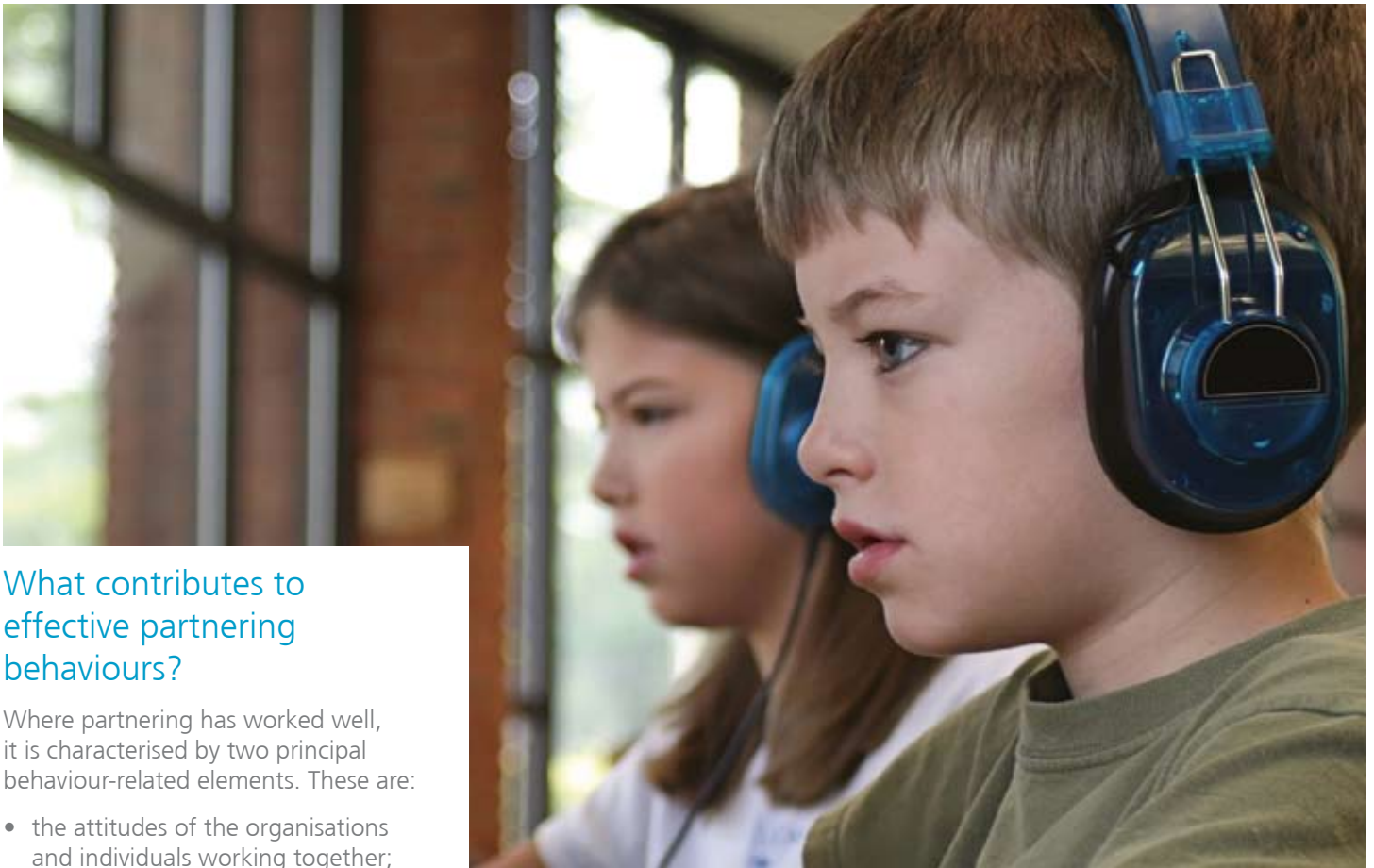
Building the behaviours of an effective partnership is put in the context of the other eight component elements of an effective LEP in the diagram below. While the local authority needs to be thinking about developing partnering working in the pre-procurement stage, it is largely an activity that requires interaction with potential partners. Hence, the procurement phase presents the first opportunity for the planning of effective partnering. It should not be left until the operational phase but, of course, the requisite behaviours remain relevant even once the LEP is fully operational and, indeed, has been for some years.



Practical steps to consider

Behaviours can only be developed fully when the partners come together in the later procurement and mobilisation stages. Set out in the table below are some suggested actions to inform the planning for this.

Stage	Actions	
Pre-procurement	<p>Local Authority</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the local authority's own strengths and weaknesses to deliver the BSF programme and articulate this in writing along with a description of a partner who would complement in partnership. Think about and describe organisational culture – what kinds of partner organisations would work best with the local authority and how might the culture need to change to be part of an effective LEP? Prepare an outline description of partnering behaviours that would work well in the local authority to sit along side the partnering services specification. Identify the key influencing personnel who will be good role models within the LEP or in dealing with the LEP. Are there key posts that need to be recruited to or staff development requirements? Consider how an effective partnership could be measured. Consider how far the partnership needs to cascade into the supply chain. Does the local authority have a preference for an integrator or integrated LEP partner? Prepare a local authority draft LEP Business Plan to share with Bidders as the basis for some of the dialogue sessions. 	<p>Bidders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider the consortium's strengths and weaknesses as organisations and partners. Consider options in terms of how the consortium is structured to complement different local authorities with different styles or objectives. Consider if there are any early indicators that it might be difficult to work effectively in partnership with a particular local authority.
Procurement	<p>Local Authority</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build in the opportunity for some early conversations around the practicalities of partnering – such as co-location or developing a brand and an identity. Provide opportunities for strategic directors from each organisation to meet for a structured discussion which could be evaluated. Throughout competitive dialogue discuss the resources required to deliver the BSF programme to flush out mutual organisational expectations. Consider joint interviews for key roles such as the proposed LEP General Manager and how well individuals would work in the role. Build up cultural profiles of organisations and articulate the 'cultural landmines' that might be a risk along with actions that can be taken in advance to defuse them. Support analysis of the effectiveness of partnering behaviours with evidence from the development of sample schemes or ICT proposals. 	<p>Bidders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bring experience from other projects on the different ways to get behaviours right. Identify the core elements of effective partnering within the consortium and present this to the local authority. To be effective the dialogue needs to be a two-way conversation. Provide evidence of good partnering through behaviours during competitive dialogue, but also through tangible examples of other projects in bid submissions.
	<p>Have interactive discussions around:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual organisational and shared objectives. Collective strengths and weaknesses and how these can complement each other. What the business strategy requires of management. Configuration of the partnership management team. The benefits of the team's mix of styles for implementing the LEP Business Plan. The resources in place and whether roles are clear and appropriate. How effective partnering behaviours will be established. Introducing review processes that ensure maximum effectiveness of the partnership Processes for escalating and resolving issues between partners. 	



What contributes to effective partnering behaviours?

Where partnering has worked well, it is characterised by two principal behaviour-related elements. These are:

- the attitudes of the organisations and individuals working together; and
- the roles and processes put in place to deliver the project or programme.

Attitudes of organisations and individuals

As noted in Practitioner Note 5: Mobilising the LEP, the BSF process has several clear phases and therefore may require the involvement of various individuals at different times. It is important, therefore, to ensure consistency in the behaviours demonstrated and to recognise that the transition between phases can be both a time of celebration and a challenge for those who are handing over or taking on responsibilities. From this, we can identify a number of factors or actions that can influence the attitudes of those involved. These include:

Mark milestones in the process – for example, from Financial Close to operation. It is important to recognise and understand the impact that a difficult Financial Close can have on the individuals involved. There needs to be, therefore, some clear milestone

activities that mark the end of the procurement process and the start of a new phase of the programme.

Management sets the tone – after Financial Close, directors and senior officers need to set the tone for the partnership that they wish to see. This means maintaining links with programme delivery and supporting words with actions. Good role models are needed in the prominent positions and should be recognised for the way in which their approach contributes to successful outcomes.

Define the expected behaviours – rather than leaving individuals to guess what the appropriate partnering behaviours might be, teams within and between organisations can usefully spend time discussing and agreeing them. For example, appreciating how others plan their working schedules or agreeing ways in which meetings should be conducted can have a huge impact on the effectiveness of teams.

Develop a partnering protocol – one way of developing new relationships is to spend some time during Competitive Dialogue discussing and developing a protocol which sets out how the LEP wants to do business internally and how it will interact with stakeholders. There can be significant value in describing how the LEP would like to be seen by those that it interacts with, not least because the process of doing so encourages discussion between individuals and teams who have not previously worked together.

Co-location of teams – the co-location of teams is one way to encourage new ways of working to support LEP delivery. It fosters new relationships and eases access to key individuals. It can also be a symbolic mark to the end of the procurement process and the establishment of the LEP.

Kick-off events – it is likely to be beneficial to include some time for “away-day” type activities for individuals and organisations at all levels of the organisations involved. These could be a combination of formal and informal events. For example, early on it is useful to hold a session on the development of a partnering protocol that includes the wider delivery teams, but where senior role models lead by example. The success of such events is not formulaic and they need to be carefully planned, taking into account the personnel involved and respective strengths and weaknesses.

Roles and processes to deliver the programme

Although, as noted already, the effective partnership is built on collaboration rather than contracts, the formal governance structure is a key area in which partnering behaviours are established, developed, and observed. Practitioner Note 4: Effective Governance sets out guidance on effective governance structures and processes for a BSF programme.

An interesting aspect of the LEP structure is that stakeholders in each BSF programme often come together with different functions within and around the LEP in the governance structure, wearing different hats at different times. For example, on the LEP Board, the local authority's function is the one of investor in and Director of the LEP. At the SPB, the local authority's role is to monitor LEP performance and approve future LEP business.

Because of this multiplicity of roles, another important feature in effective partnering is maintaining a consistency and quality of communication at all levels between the organisations. Mixed or inconsistent messages create confusion and uncertainty, particularly at the outset of a partnering relationship, and it is therefore important to embed clarity and consistency in what the LEP is going to do, how it is going to do it and the contributions required for each of those involved. Establishing agreed processes

is therefore a useful way to build an effective partnership.

Many of these activities can start during procurement with two or more potential partners. Indeed it is critical that they are considered at a time when the local authority is testing the working relationship with each of the potential private sector partners. Detailed development, however, may only realistically begin once the Selected Bidder decision is made.

There are some identifiable outputs from this work:

The LEP Business Plan – during Competitive Dialogue, the LEP Business Plan is produced in consultation with the local authority, which should have already developed a view of how the LEP's activity might interface with Corporate plans (see Practitioner Note 1: Local Authority Strategic Planning). At Selected Bidder, the Business Plan becomes a practical document that defines the LEP and what it is going to do. It is helpful for a multi-organisational team to work on the finalisation of the Business Plan, for the benefit of all involved in programme delivery.

New project approvals protocol – in advance of the development of non-sample schemes, the local authority and the LEP need to agree the required activities for the new projects approvals process, minimum standards for sign-off, who needs to be involved and when. The successful development of non-sample schemes will require the co-ordinated input of local authority, LEP and supply chain. It helps to establish a development plan in advance.

Shared resourcing model – the LEP and the local authority need to have a clear understanding of who is doing what, in particular around engagement with stakeholders. Developing a shared resource model in advance of the operational phase as part of the partnering approach will reduce delay and encourage a joint approach to project delivery. An early discussion between local authorities and potential partners on the resources

needed deliver the core BSF programme activities and from where these will come (local authority, LEP or supply chain) is invaluable in understanding the programme's demands and agreeing roles.

Performance Management processes to test partnering effectiveness – this is not an easy thing to evaluate, but it is important to have a shared concept of good partnering and a means of measuring progress against it. Examples of doing this might be:

- being clear what a successful partnership will look and feel like in 6 months and 12 months, 5 and 10 years time. For example, do the partners aspire to be co-located or for the LEP to have a particular brand and visual identity?
- structuring a process for staff development feedback between partner organisations;
- establishing a dedicated forum for the partners to feed back honestly, and with a degree of self-challenge, their views on the effectiveness of the partnership;
- measuring the effect of the partnership through collective partnering targets. One way this might be achieved would be by setting targets that reflect the aspirations of the partnership, such as: by year 3, 10% of the LEP's business will be generated outside the education sector.

Agree an issue escalation process – partnering relationships undergo the most stress in times of crisis, but this is often a time when individuals find it most difficult to be objective and pursue a measured and reasonable course of action. A useful mobilisation activity in partnering is therefore to agree a route map of how partners wish to escalate and resolve issues between them before they reach crisis proportions. Often this will be through a combination of formal and informal processes, which may or may not be specifically linked to contractual requirements.

This is an important point, because although contracts offer protection, they are not handbooks of project management and an honest and early conversation about issue resolution can be very valuable.

What do effective partnering behaviours look and feel like?

It is difficult to test effective partnering behaviours since it is often the impact of good or bad behaviour that can be measured rather than the behaviour itself. However, we can identify some outcomes that indicate an effective approach to the behavioural elements of partnering, such as:

- the partners have developed a partnering protocol;
- teams are co-located;
- a low-level of staff turnover;
- successful effort has been made to bring organisations together in an informal and social context as well as in the work environment;
- the non-sample scheme projects are progressing well;
- preliminary customer feedback on the LEP is positive in terms of clarity, consistency and quality of interactions with stakeholders;
- senior local authority and private sector partner company officers feel appropriately included in the process;
- parties understand the risks faced by the others if things go wrong; and
- parties able to share issues and concerns openly and without fear that the other party feels that they are being criticised.

While each of the partners in the LEP needs to have a high level of self-awareness of the effectiveness of its own contribution, it may be worth considering facilitated sessions early in the operational life of the LEP to share perspectives on how the partnership is going. Agenda items might include:

- quality of communication;
- understanding of roles and responsibilities within and between organisations; clarity of processes and decision-making;
- evidence that strategic decision-makers value the partnership and want it to be successful;
- effectiveness of working arrangements;
- degree of understanding and trust that is developing; and
- what is working well and what needs greater focus.

Self-evaluation must be specific and as objective as possible, as opposed to generic and personal, and participants need to be prepared to be self-critical and to be challenged. In many cases therefore it may be sensible for such review sessions to be supported by someone who is independent of the LEP

In addition direct feedback between the BSF Programme Director and the LEP General Manager or between the LEP Board and the local authority client representative may be beneficial to ensure that, from the strategic and management perspectives, behaviours are developing as required and expected.

How do we tell if our partnering is working as well as it should be?

A key issue with partnering behaviour is that where it has not been effectively developed, the LEP is likely to be underperforming or not delivering as effectively as it could or should. It is important therefore that LEPs regularly review progress to ensure that behaviours are as effective as they can be. There are some useful approaches that can be taken, for example:

- periodically take stock of the mood of the organisation and individuals either informally or formally;
- use a LEP “health-check” type process to ensure that independent observers think the LEP is high-performing relative to other operational LEPs or partnerships;
- ensure that successes and progress are celebrated together and issues are addressed collectively;
- reinforce required attitude through the governance structure and senior management; and
- act quickly and decisively where issues with partnering behaviours are identified.

As with all aspects of the LEP, openness, transparency and a willingness to be challenged will reinforce desirable partnership behaviours and, ultimately, support the success of the LEP.