

PARTNERSHIP WORKING: KEY ISSUES AROUND EVALUATION

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PARTNERSHIP AND EVALUATION

INTRODUCTION:

This work was carried out by the Office of the Chief Researcher in the Scottish Executive to inform thinking on Social and Economic Partnership in Scotland. Its remit emerged from an earlier paper, which concluded that evaluation was a key issue within partnership working and partnership projects.¹ This and two other related papers on partnership working² are available on the Scottish Executive website: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/publications/>

For this reason, it was thought useful to look at the definition of evaluation in detail, with particular reference to partnership. It was also decided to look at various models of partnership and evaluation frameworks used in a Scottish and UK context.

OBJECTIVES:

The objectives of the paper are two-fold:

Firstly, the paper will look at the concept of partnership and how evaluation is essential to effective partnership working.

Secondly, it explores what evaluation is, and seeks examples of good practice in evaluating partnership working and the programmes endorsed by partnerships.

Please note that while specific examples of evaluation methods and frameworks are given, it has been difficult to consult a full range of partnerships. This paper tends to concentrate on the larger evaluations or models that are used across main departments in the Scottish Executive and UK government. Further work may reflect a wider number of models, and it may be worth looking at work currently underway by research companies to look at large numbers of local partnerships and approaches to issues such as evaluation. (See the second footnote).

EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP:

Over recent years, there has been recognition of partnership as a tool by which to address and challenge social inclusion and economic issues. However, partnership is a complex concept and many partnerships have to respond to problems and barriers that result from this way of working. Such barriers can include a lack of understanding between partners, or a lack of focus on the objectives or results of the partnership.

Toolkits have been developed to encourage appropriate models of working among partners. Many such toolkits offer suggestions for assessing effectiveness of partnerships. Forthcoming

¹'Partnership Working: Models and Experiences of Social Partnership in Devolved Regions of Europe'. Office of the Chief Researcher (2003)

² Partnership Working: European Social Partnership Models Stephen Boyd/ STUC (2003); Partnership Working Research Report: Social and Economic Partnership Project, Strategy Unit/Office of the Chief Researcher (2003).

research on existing Community Planning Partnership toolkits may provide a broad understanding of such models, and good practice. Furthermore, there will be another project published in the near future, which focuses on the role of rationalisation among the vast numbers of partnership and how they fit in to the larger scheme of partnership working.³

Although the findings from the above projects are not published, there is a general understanding that successful partnerships have the following criteria:

- Principles and Purpose
- Effective Planning and Understanding of Specific Objectives
- Communication between partners
- Resources and Partnership
- Evaluation and Monitoring (in both evaluating its mechanisms and the programmes it runs)⁴

Work was commissioned by the Department for Employment and Education (DfEE) to look at '5 Vital Lessons' for successful partnership. The Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Department (ELLD) was also interested in this work whilst looking at the role of partnership working in Local Economic Forums. From analysis of partnership and toolkits, the following advice was given to encourage effective working. The partnerships should seek to have:

- Purpose and Leadership
- Outcomes and Customer Focus
- Culture and Communication
- Managing for Performance
- Learning and Innovation⁵

Taken together these examples stress the import of learning and evaluation within a partnership context.

WHAT IS EVALUATION?

In many ways, it might be easier to explain what evaluation is not. The problem lies in the fact that not only are there various schools of thought and methodology on evaluation, the definition of evaluation has been confused with the term 'monitoring' and performance indicators or targets.

Monitoring and evaluation are not the same thing. Monitoring is a purely quantitative measurement of targets or attainment, gained through implementation of a policy, authorised by an appropriate authority or body. Evaluation is an analysis of the objectives, inputs, (process), outputs and outcomes of such a policy initiative. This being said, monitoring can act as a forerunner to evaluation, providing a quantitative baseline from which to start looking at evaluation.

³ These two projects are currently being undertaken by Rocket Science Ltd. Publication is expected to be in early 2003.

⁴ Findings taken from earlier in-house research 'Partnership Working: Models and Experiences of Social Partnership in Devolved Regions of Europe', and background information from Scotland and the UK.

⁵ CD Rom. *Five Vital Lessons: Successful Partnership with Business* (Educe Ltd/ GFA Consulting, produced for DfEE)

Often people have the impression that evaluation equals a satisfaction survey handed out and completed at the end of an event. Whilst not trying to claim this activity isn't useful, it might be wise to stress that evaluation is much more than this.

In basic terms an evaluation seeks to address the following questions:

- What is trying to be achieved?
- How is this being achieved?
- What outputs result from this process?
- What effects do these outputs have?
- What implications does this have for other programmes and/or activities?

Research Methodology and Research Perspective

The following will introduce different research methods and schools of thought (or perspectives). The method is the means by which to tackle research according to the relevant perspective.

There are different methods by which researchers try to find answers to the questions listed above. The research perspective you adhere to could influence which methodology is perceived most appropriate. It may now be helpful to look at three main approaches.

Controlled Experiments

This methodology tends to focus on the first, third and fourth questions listed above. Sometimes called 'experimental' or 'randomised trial' research, this method tends to look at the very precise objectives, inputs, outputs and outcomes of an initiative. These methods often attempt to measure and 'score' changes occurring as a result of a programme or intervention. The tools used are often predetermined and structured to gather quantitative information.

It usually incorporates a 'control' group within the research. For instance, if an initiative was in place in town 'A' to improve employment rates in that town, another town 'B' would be sought (with similar demographics, but no initiative) to compare and contrast findings on employment rates. This would be held to confirm cause and effect of the initiative.

Realist Research

This methodology whilst looking at what is being achieved, will focus on how and why this is being achieved. (Thus looking at the second of the questions given above). The use of a control group would not be seen as appropriate in this approach, as no two towns (in example given above) are identical to the point that they can be used in such a manner. This is not to say that this school of thought would automatically reject other similar initiatives or subjects of evaluation. However, it would query the extent to which such research findings could be transferred from one to the other.

This method will often answer the reason for the success or failure of a programme or intervention. The meaning and experience of participants in an initiative may be assessed. The tools used may be less structured and may be qualitative in nature.

This approach would recognise that the subject of the evaluation is open to wide ranging influences and outside factors, which it would argue is not sufficiently acknowledged in the

‘controlled’ research. Contextual issues are very much taken in to consideration, and unexpected outcomes are also looked at in the findings.

Mixed Method

As the heading might suggest, the mixed methods approach recognises the strength in both models. It accepts the strengths in trying to be precise in its way of looking and ‘what is happening’ and trying to establish a relationship. (This will look at inputs, outputs and outcomes).

However, it is also very much an advocate of recognising contextual and ‘process’ issues and thus addressing the ‘how and why’ question.

PURPOSE OF EVALUATION:

Regardless of which school of thought is followed in evaluating any partnership or initiative, there are important questions to address in terms of developing the evaluation. When and how (to what purpose) the evaluation is commissioned will determine its effect.

The Effective Interventions Unit (EIU) of the Scottish Executive describes the timing and purposes of evaluation as follows:

Formative

‘This is a type of ‘developmental’ evaluation that feeds information and guidance back into an intervention so that improvements can be made’.

Process

‘The aim of this type of evaluation is to find out exactly how an intervention works’.

Outcome

‘This type of evaluation focuses on the final results of the intervention. A typical question for an outcome evaluation to address would be whether the intervention has made significant improvements in a client’s life’.⁶

Not one of these definitions is exclusive and the different types of evaluation can be merged to produce appropriate findings in its context. It is important to know what you want to know from such evaluations before you begin. Appropriate questions need to be asked to address these issues and to ensure that the correct form of evaluation is conducted.

It is also important to determine whether evaluation should be conducted internally (self-evaluation) or externally (independent evaluation). There are advantages and disadvantages to both approaches. While external evaluation may be seen as more objective, the costs would be higher. Internal evaluation could be criticised for being less objective, but would be significantly cheaper. Validity and resources available would need to be considered, as well as the relations between the various partners involved and how this could be effected, or effect the evaluation itself.

⁶ EIU, Evaluation Guides: Evaluation Guide 1- Definitions and Common Concepts

EVALUATION AND PARTNERSHIP:

Whichever type of evaluation is chosen (formative, process or outcome), it is important that planning and evaluation is encouraged right from the outset of an initiative. Evaluation of partnership may include:

- Evaluation of partnership activities or programmes, and
- Evaluation of partnership working

SQW Ltd (Economic & Management Consultants) has been involved in several evaluations of partnership working, and emphasises the role of evaluation as enabling the partnerships to develop and become more effective.

‘...often through the evaluation of projects and programmes, we study the operations and impact of the partnerships leading the work. Understanding the process of joint working, regeneration and service development is important in understanding what makes interventions effective’.⁷

It is therefore important that evaluation assesses what difference partnership working makes.

The Effective Interventions Unit (EIU) and the Education Department (ED) of the Scottish Executive have published material to support the consideration of evaluation at the planning stage of an initiative. The Department for Trade and Industry (DTI) and Department for Education and Skills (DfES) also encourage similar methods. (Examples of which follow).

SMART (cited by EIU)

In planning any intervention, initiative or evaluation, the EIU has encouraged the formulation of aims and objectives, with a deep understanding of what will be achieved, who will be involved in the process, how and when it will be conducted. The SMART model (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timebound) is explained below. Although the guidance suggested by EIU is mostly aimed at practitioners in the fight against drugs and alcohol abuse, there are some wider lessons to be learned.

Specific	Everyone knows exactly what is to be achieved
Measurable	It is possible to quantify in some way what you will achieve
Achievable	You have the resources and capacity to achieve the objective
Realistic	Well matched to the capacity of the target group
Timebound	Everyone knows the timetable and the dates when targets will be met ⁸

In terms of planning any initiative or partnership, the EIU explains that appropriate objectives should be set. Any evaluation should take account of whether these set objectives have been achieved. The SMART model, takes in to consideration the implications from the planning stage of an initiative, and how this can have an effect on the extent to which this is measured or evaluated.

⁷ Taken from SQW web-site- ‘Partnership Development’ Available from: www.sqw.co.uk/services/partnership-development.php

⁸ EIU, *Evaluation Guides: Evaluation Guide 2 – Planning an Evaluation*

ROAMEF (DTI/ DfES/ Scottish Enterprise)

The DTI and the DfES use the ROAMEF model as a planning and evaluation tool. Scottish Enterprise also appears to see this as a tool by which to improve planning and evaluation procedures. Essentially the ROAMEF (Rationale, Objectives, Appraisal, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Feedback) model is a planning framework, which endorses both the monitoring and evaluation element of an initiative as well as the mechanisms by which to develop the initiative. It is interesting to note that a distinction is made between monitoring and evaluation.

Rationale

To express the wider rationale or justification of the initiative, including the expected impact or social objective.

Objectives

To state specifically the intended actions and purposes of the initiative, and what it is intended to achieve.

Appraisal

To determine what options or delivery mechanism will best serve the rationale and objectives. Although appraisal should ideally be a continuous process, it is particularly important to appraise the situation prior to large-scale commitment of resource or contractual obligation.

Monitoring

Plans for monitoring should be implemented early in any initiative, which may aid future evaluation. Monitoring should seek to record attainment through gathering of largely quantitative, financial or management information.

Evaluation

To assess the impact of an initiative, either during its life span, or to offer reflective evaluation. It can look at the achievement of objectives, the inputs, outputs, and outcomes (expected or otherwise). It can also look at cost effectiveness and efficiency.

Feedback

Any findings from evaluation reports should be disseminated widely to all involved in the present initiative or future work, and those with a general interest.⁹

The ROAMEF model is encouraged in all DfES evaluation projects. One example of this framework in practice is the current development of a performance indicator and evaluation programme, which focuses on the Skills for Business Network and Sector Skills Councils within the UK.¹⁰

⁹ Taken from the Scottish Enterprise web-site. Available from: www.scottish-enterprise.com/about/what/research/evalguide/tool/advmeth/roamef

¹⁰ Work currently being developed by SQW Ltd, working on behalf of DfES & the Sector Skills Development Agency.

LEAP (ED)

The LEAP model (Learning Evaluation and Planning) used by ED focuses on the approach to community learning. Nevertheless, some general lessons can be learned.

LEAP suggests that there are four key points to planning and evaluation:

- Understanding what goes in to the activity
- Understanding how work is conducted
- Understanding what the work produces
- Understanding what effects it has¹¹

LEAP claims that both planning and evaluation should consider the inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes of the initiative. It stresses that in trying to plan an initiative, the initial points to consider are the precise outcomes that are to be achieved, and how this can be measured.

An interesting point, however, is that in reference to community learning the LEAP model recognises the wider influences on the subject under evaluation, and how a whole range of factors must be taken in to account. This contextual issue will be returned to later in the paper.

The most important argument highlighted by LEAP is the strength of planning evaluation early in any initiative:

‘By making sure that evaluation is not an after thought, it means that all concerned can have a real grasp of what is being done in the community’.¹²

This may be a key statement to keep in mind when considering the role of evaluation in partnership working.

A PRACTICAL APPROACH TO EVALUATION

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIPS – STRUCTURAL FUNDS

European Structural Funds finance socio-economic programmes, which require partnership working to fulfil objectives. Kevin Williams in his paper on the ‘pragmatic approach’ to evaluating Structural Funds and partnerships focuses on the mixed methods idea. Williams looks at the various criteria which would favour either the qualitative or quantitative approach (another debate in the research world), and when it may be appropriate to use both forms of research. He also goes on to explain why he feels that such partnership interventions would be best evaluated using a combination of methodology- focussing on the inputs, outputs and context of the partnership.

The following model (Figure 1) recommends various research methods. The method it recommends is dependent on what type of information is sought. If the evaluation seeks to be exact, quantifiable and large scale, then quantitative methods are recommended.

¹¹ ‘*Learning Evaluation and Planning*’ (Scottish Community Development Centre, 2000) Commissioned by Education Department, Scottish Executive.

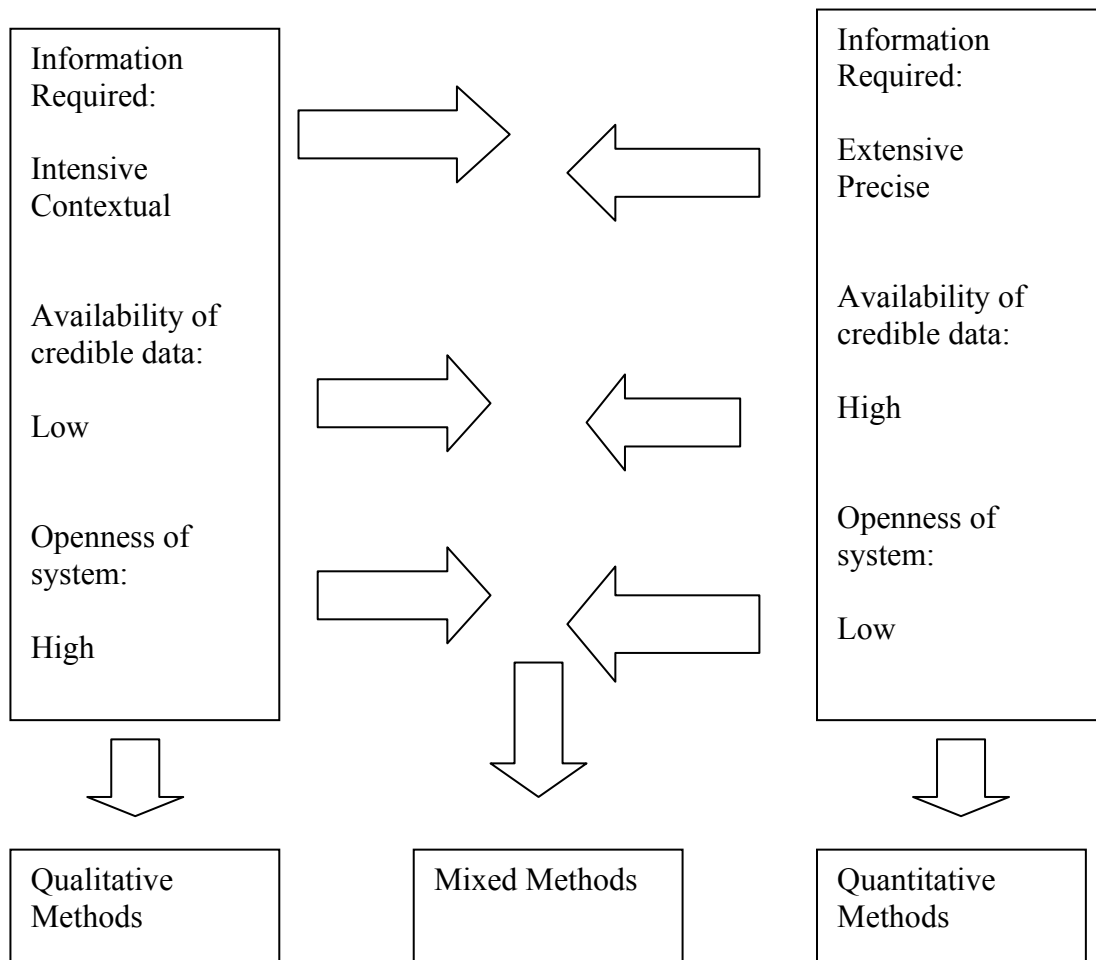
¹² Ibid.

However, if the information is to be large scale and precise, but also in-depth and contextual, then it is recommended that the researcher use the mixed methods approach. Other factors that this model looks at include availability of data and ‘openness’ of an initiative or partnership.

The next model (Figure 2) sets out the precise stages, according to Williams, which are undertaken in evaluation research.

Figure 1: Evaluation approaches

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¹³ *Programme configuration and evaluation approaches* (Chen), cited in Williams, *Mixing Quantitative and Qualitative Evaluation Tools: A Pragmatic Approach*

In terms of the ‘stages’ of evaluation, Williams’ paper presents the following model:

Figure 2: Four Key Stages and Eight Steps of Evaluation

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- Structuring Define expected effects and merit criteria
 Set up indicators, scales, typologies
- Observing Focus data collection
 Collect data
- Analysing Understand causes and effects
 Conclude about net effects
- Judging Judge merits according to various criteria
 Make synthetic judgement

In regards to the nature of evaluating social partnerships (in Structural Funds programmes), the following is suggested:

‘... In addition to assessing impacts, these evaluations also look at programme implementation and delivery. Evaluators ... often find themselves faced with data of varying credibility, socio-economic systems that are largely open to outside influences and the need for information of both a contextual and precise nature... Structural Funds are strongly based on a partnership approach that brings infra national, national and supra national administrative tiers. This type of structure requires a participatory or pluralistic approach to evaluation’.¹⁵

It may be appropriate to consider the above points when looking at how to evaluate large scale partnership working on a national level, and how this connects to a regional and sub regional level, as well as other jurisdictions. In terms of methodology a mixed methods approach may yield more appropriate results, especially as partnership is by its own definition contextual. This way the evaluation could focus on the ‘what, how and why’ in relation to the partnership or initiative it is promoting.

¹⁴ ***The Four Key Stages and Eight Steps of an Evaluation*** (Scriven), cited in Williams, ‘*Mixing Quantitative and Qualitative Evaluation Tools: A Pragmatic Approach*’

¹⁵ Williams, *Ibid.* (p.6)

PROBLEMS IN PARTNERSHIP EVALUATION

In 2000, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister published a report that looked at 'Partnership Evaluation'¹⁶ which involved mapping partnerships in local authorities. As a result some good practice 'messages' were promoted through the report for partnership evaluation in both a developmental and operational capacity (please see appendix). As well as good practice advice, a number of potential problems were identified in evaluating partnership. These would be important to foresee and approach in the early stages of any partnership.

The potential challenges were:

- Collaborative working was instigated to address strategic/ local wide issues and it was often difficult to select measures of success that could be attributed to the partnership alone.
- Partnerships in the early stages of development were unlikely to have agreed the terms of reference beyond the broad aims and consequently it was difficult to identify criteria against which success could be measured.
- Acknowledgement that successful evaluation was dependent upon the importance placed on it by the individuals involved in the partnership.
- Level of co-ordination and investment in the time and resource required to effectively evaluate arrangements was considerable.
- It was difficult to define appropriate quantifiable measures of success.¹⁷

It could be that the following points offer a response to the above criticisms. The points below summarise key suggestions from the 'Good Practice Messages' (please see appendix), but also echo points which have been raised within this paper and previous work cited.

- To appreciate that context and outside influences have an effect on partnership working.
- To identify specific criteria and objectives of partnership at an early stage
- That all partners understand and are fully aware of the benefits of evaluation and their role within it.
- To look closely at the level of resources and time required for conducting appropriate evaluations. (As well as involvement in partnership in general).

¹⁶ Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, *'Mapping Partnerships in Eleven Local Authorities'* (2000)

¹⁷ Ibid.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, there are various lessons that can be drawn together for evaluation of programmes and partnership. Where the issues are not particularly clear cut, there are serious points to consider. A list of 'suggestions' and a few points to consider are listed below.

- Planning and evaluation are two important aspects of effective working within partnership initiatives. A number of models suggest that evaluation should be taken into consideration at the outset of a partnership plan and setting of objectives. (As well as in the programmes which the partnership sets up).
- Evaluation can be used for various purposes, including:
 - Developing partnership working
 - Looking at what works within the initiative put forward by the partnership
 - Analysis of final outputs and outcomes of a partnership, or project supported by the partnership.
- Evaluation looks at the following:
 - What is being achieved.
 - How this is being achieved.
 - What the outputs are from this process.
 - What the effects or outcomes are of these outputs.
 - Implications for future partnership initiatives.
- Appropriate methodology should be used for any evaluation. Partnerships often benefit from being evaluated by a mixed methods approach. However, each partnership is contextual and ultimately unique. What approach is taken will be determined by what findings are required, what factors are to be taken on board and when evaluation is to be carried out.
- In order to deliver an appropriate and useful evaluation, communication must be well established among the partners. This is a general lesson in partnership, but especially so in evaluation where relevant resources and involvement of all partners is paramount.
- There may be barriers to overcome in reaching effective mechanisms for evaluation purposes. However, if these are acknowledged early on in the partnership, then there may be more scope to work around these issues. (Please see guidelines in appendix and suggestions given in earlier paragraph).

Louise McAspurren

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APPENDIX: GOOD PRACTICE MESSAGES

Both of the examples given below come from the following report:

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, ‘*Mapping Partnerships in Eleven Local Authorities*’ (2000).

Although there is an obvious link to local partnership evaluation, there are also general themes, which may be of interest.

Good Practice Messages for Partnership Evaluation: Development Phase

1. Establish and agree key aims of partnership including the identification of key outputs.
2. A commitment to openness, honesty and information sharing needs to be made early on by all partners, supporting the development of ideas and sharing of experience in an atmosphere of trust.
3. Key representatives from each partner organisations should be identified. It helps if individuals are likely to be committed over a sustained period and hold the degree of seniority required of the decision-making responsibility of the partnership.
4. Define tasks and agree responsibility.
5. Define a timetable for development and delivery against agreed tasks.
6. Agree a schedule of partnership forum that coincides with key milestones.
7. Communicate aims and schedule across partnership organisations and engage key individuals and stakeholders.
8. Agree reporting mechanisms within the partnership forum and within each partner organisation.
9. Systematic review and evaluation of progress against aims to be undertaken by partnership forum.
10. Agree evaluation criteria and measures of success with the partnership forum- at all stages.
11. Establish baseline criteria/ information prior to implementation of new service delivery agreements (if appropriate).
12. Undertake a systematic qualitative review with all partner representatives to establish the usefulness of the partnership forum, opportunities for future development, what works well and less well and potential improvements.
13. Demonstrate progress and share achievements/ successes.

Good Practice Messages for Partnership Evaluation: Operational Phase

1. Establish smaller working groups involving key representatives with particular skills and expertise to work on defined areas to an agreed timetable.
2. Working Groups to be informed of expected contribution and role within the broader work of partnership (including the frequency of reporting).
3. Working Groups to report to co-ordinator or lead representative on partnership forum.
4. Agree evaluation criteria and measures of success for Working Groups/ partners including frameworks for evaluation timetable.

5. Undertake systematic quantitative and qualitative review or partnership arrangements to address delivery against key aims, objectives and timetable and to establish the views and perceptions of key individuals as to what is working well and less well.
6. Systematic feedback and change implementation resulting from qualitative and quantitative review.
7. Qualitative review of views and perceptions of stakeholders including, if appropriate, local community
8. Demonstrate progress and share achievements/successes.