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Should they Stay or Should they Go: Urban Partnerships as Formations
of Organisational Innovation for Public Service Delivery

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1. INTRODUCTION

Urban partnerships have emerged (as well as advertised) as a weighty vehicle for policy delivery in Britain in recent years. Despite the continuous ambiguity on what defines a partnership they have been perceived as schemes that can bring a new 'dynamism' to old problems and have often been effective in forging new links between existing participating sides. Based on this, they can create synergy between programme and policy areas in such a way as the potential achievements to be beyond the reach of any individual participants' (Carter, 2000). It could be argued then that these unique constitutional elements have provided urban partnerships with a kind of innovative character that 'partnerships can do better' compared to single public or private organisations. This has been, according to their advocates, essential for their role as policy delivery agencies.

However, there have been certain difficulties vis-à-vis the establishment and operation of urban partnerships as vehicles that promote delivery of public services. For example, critics have suggested that those partnerships played the role of a mechanism that has helped the local authorities to keep a tight reign on the regeneration process (Hughes & Carmichael, 1998). At a purely organisational level the question of efficiency has drawn the attention of many contributors to the partnership debate because of the very difficulty in measuring it. But efficiency has generally been recognised as the ratio of benefits to cost; that means that increasing efficiency involves increasing relative benefits to cost. The problem has been that costs are far easier to measure than benefits (in particular less tangible benefits like quality of life) (Glendinning, 2002).

This innovative character of urban partnerships is being explored in this paper vis-à-vis their operational capacity that would transform them into efficient public service delivery agencies. In particular, their modus operandi can take the form of a conceptual innovative approach regarding introduction of new mission and objectives, and a kind of planning, which can lead to new organisational structures. Hence, the principal aim of this paper that is to contribute to this area of public policy. In so doing, the paper examines partnership organisational attributes that promote collaboration and networking between participating members via the pursuit of well-being for the parties involved and their local community. The paper draws on empirical research of particular urban partnerships as they have been formulated in Bournemouth, South West of England. Using a mixture of interviews, observations and documentary data it shows that developing conditions of trust and improving common purpose become crucial elements necessary to raise the degree of unification amongst participants. However, it is difficult to identify added value regarding the establishment of long-term commitment by the case partnerships towards their aims. Consequently, this has a prominent impact in assessing achievements in service delivery, as it heavily depends on a series of external

political, social, environmental and economic factors that cannot in any case be undermined. Notwithstanding, opportunities for identifying the capacity of urban for service delivery partnerships appear plentifully available via evaluation approaches that can foster conceptual innovation as it can be seen in the next sections of this paper.

2. SHOULD THE STAY OR SHOULD THEY GO: URBAN PARTNERSHIPS FOR INNOVATING PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY IN BRITAIN

2.1. Urban partnerships and the Collaborative Strategy framework

2.1.1. The Development of Urban Partnerships

Urban Partnerships (UP) have been considered as the type of partnership designed to tackle the so-called '*wicked issues*' in urban regeneration in Britain (Southern, 2002). However the ambiguity on defining partnerships accurately expands into the area of urban partnerships as well. According to one approach urban partnerships could be considered as a type of multi-organisational collaborative arrangements operating at the urban level. In this respect, by altering slightly the explanation given by Westall and Foley (2001) on the role of local regeneration partnerships it could be pointed out that UP:

> …are examples of attempts to create true 'partnerships' between different organisations and people, which maximise the effects of combining their skills, resources and expertise in order to tackle complex multi-faceted …issues [at the urban level]
>
> (Westall & Foley, 2001: 7).

What can also be said is that these partnerships in the current urban landscape normally include participants from the public, business, community and voluntary sectors that act together by having clearly defined goals and objectives (Southern, 2002). Taking into account the difficulties in their construction and the multi-complex character of the regeneration issues some of the challenges facing UP are as follows:

- The need to achieve sustainability or a long stream of benefits in regeneration set against a series of inconsistent urban, particularly social, regeneration initiatives.
- The need to derive social and economic renewal from the easier task of physical regeneration.
- The need to harness mainstream policy to urban regeneration requirements (Carley et al, 2000).

The policy initiatives that required the construction of UP in order to promote urban regeneration since the early 1990s have been numerous. At this time a transformation in relation to how urban regeneration could be viewed started taking place. By 1991 the almost exclusively focus on economical issues approach to

regeneration, although significantly popular during the 1980s, was perceived to be failing. There was increasing evidence that government policies failed to prevent further decline within British cities (Nevin and Shiner, 1995). The removal of Margaret Thatcher from office and the appointment of Michael Heseltine to the Department of Environment signalled a change towards this direction (Davies, 2001).

A further step was taken when the Labour government came in office as partnerships were perceived as an essential tool for developing and implementing policies (Powel and Glendinning, 2002; Snape and Taylor, 2003). To this extent, frameworks of collaboration have been suggested that could foster and encourage partnerships between the broad ranges of actors involved in raising the standards of life quality. This collaboration could emphasise: a genuine working of urban multi-organisational partnerships; the coordination and integration of initiatives; a long-term commitment; and the development of urban regeneration strategies. However, doubts have been expressed about the scale of effectiveness and accountability of the regeneration programmes implemented. For example, Campbell expresses concerns on how much figures on particular aspects e.g. unemployment in certain localities have been improved (Carter, 2000). Despite the concerns expressed the Labour government has initiated and supported a rather high number of policy initiatives in order to boost urban regeneration. Within this plethora of in many cases overlapping initiatives someone could mention the Employment Zones, Health and Education Action Zones, the Best Value programme, the New Deal for Communities (Foley and Martin, 2000; Balloch and Taylor, 2001; Powel and Glendinning, 2002). An overview of these initiatives and their links to specific type of urban partnerships can be seen in Table 1.

2.1.2: Collaborative Strategy: A Modus Operandi for Urban Partnerships
The identification of a *strategic modus operandi* for collaborative organisations such as the framework of *Collaborative Strategy* in this paper is a formidable challenge because of its very nature as a task linked with complex structures of numerous organisations and individuals. Despite this, participants in various collaborative groups see strategy as a good thing and something to be involved in although they cannot find enough time to spend on it (Huxham, 1991). In addition to this Mintzberg (1998a; 2000) portrays strategy as a plan, a direction or a course of action into the future. Moreover, he identifies it as a pattern that can offer consistency in organisational behaviour overtime in such a way that it can provide continuity and not change as a primary aspect of strategy.

Type	Area Covered	Remit	Funding Base	Example
Umbrella or strategic	Usually citywide	To set the strategic agenda of the city and to co-ordinate the work of other local partnerships	Varies (governmental for the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund)	New Commitment to Regeneration; Citywide; Local Strategic Partnerships
EU Programme	Varies	Varies, depending on the initiative	EU with match funding	Poverty 3; Urban
Central Government Multi Purpose	Varies	To 'holistically' regenerate their designated area	Central government, sometimes with match funding	Single Regeneration Budget (SRB); New Deal for Communities (NDC)
Central Government Single Purpose	Varies but in areas of high deprivation, as identified by central government	To develop new and improved ways of working on particular issues	Central government, sometimes with match funding	Sure Start; Education and Health Action Zones
Development Trust	Neighbourhood or community	Largely concerned with social issues (single or multiple)	Multiple sources	Various
Locally Instigated Single Purpose	Varies	To address a particular issue or provide a specific service as identified by the founding partners	Multiple sources	Various

Table 1: Types of urban partnerships
Source: Adapted from Southern, R., (2002: 20)

The innovative character of Collaborative Strategy could be identified within the context of why an organisational strategy of collaborative nature is more preferable to the traditional competitive one. An assumption about this is that strategists take normally the view in which a collaborative organisation perspective is fundamentally at odds with competition, conventionally the primary factor of interaction between organisations especially within the business sector (Wit and Meyer, 1998). Despite the fact that relations between organisations can be characterised by a dynamic mix of collaboration and competition, collaboration creates a web of durable and sustainable relationships (ibid.). This creates the basis for a continuum of organisational efforts that produce and command value for the organisations involved (Cropper, 1996). In this respect, continuity becomes the main characteristic of sustainability thus according to Mintzberg the essential 'ingredient' for a strategic framework. Consequently, a strategy that is enacted in a collaborative way can be more beneficial for organisations willing to trust an approach characterised by continuity and long-term perspective compared to one characterised by competition forces.

The properties of Collaborative Strategy as they are outlined against the elements of added value of collaborative advantage can be seen in Table 2. The framework identifies the strategic dimensions of five proposed aspects of collaborative work taking into account the values of collaborative advantage. In essence, the framework expresses some of the strategic steps a collaborative organisation could follow towards designing, planning and implementing particular actions. Moreover, by indicating also potentially false steps the framework attempts to establish balance between a successful and a non-successful course of collaborative action. Obviously the aspects of *operation* and consequently of *plan delivery* of the collaborative organisation are the ones that mostly interest this paper, as they are closely linked to its question about how far innovative partnerships can be of use in delivering public services. The explanation for utilising such a framework for the case of urban partnerships relies on previous work by the author that perceives multi-organisational partnerships (hence urban partnerships) as collaborative entities. In this context, collaboration can be considered as an important mechanism for strategy development in multi-organisational partnerships (hence urban partnerships) as it can be used to build confidence in long-term planning, to streamline decision-making and to maintain strategies beyond normal or budgetary horizons (Apostolakis, 2004).

Aspect of Collaborative Strategy	Added Value of Collaborative Advantage	Indicators	Contra-indicators
Selection of Members	The importance of collaborating expressed in patterns of involvement, trust, commitment and probity (Collaborating action as an expression of purpose)	Strategy for recruiting well motivated in terms of trust and probity as well as prepared participants in terms of allocation of time and resources	Collaborative groups representing different sectors face extraordinary difficulties in overcoming differences
Vision of Collaborative Organisation	Integration of a collaborative organisation into the whole under a shared vision and integration of the whole with the broader environment (Collaborative action as an institutional framework)	Strategic vision that reflects the participation and expectations of all members – Shared feeling that collaborating will solve common problems	Involving members from different sectors is often critical to a collaborative organisation's success and frequently problematic
Operation of Collaborative Organisation	The ability of a collaborative organisation to act responsibly towards and within a collaborative relationship (Collaborating action as a model of conduct)	Strategy is realised as a plan that has an objective viewpoint of the reality and aims to provide context for decisive acts of implementation	Examples of abuse of power, unfair allocation of resources, and appearance of conflicts cannot permit smooth operation of the collaborative organisation
Plan Delivery of Collaborative	The ability of a collaborative organisation to acquire and organise	Implementation of the strategic plan according	Insufficient implementation of the strategic plan because of existence

Organisation	resources to deliver activity against purpose or task (Collaborative action as capacity)	to allocation of roles and responsibilities – Adaptation to need demands	of disharmony and conflict between the members of collaborative organisation
Review and Change of Collaborative Action	(No appearance of added value because of its mechanistic repetitive character)	Strategy in looking at reviewing policies and processes by feeding back into policy making and producing appropriate changes to programmes and structures	Lack of coordination in what aspects of the collaborative organisation's operation should be reviewed can be in particular cases problematic

Table 2: The framework of Collaborative Strategy

Therefore, participating to and operating within a partnership arrangement involves acceptance of the argument that the very notion of collaboration is preferable to competition as a strategic thought for designing and implementing policies. This implies a way of thinking and operating that can be characterised as innovative. Bearing this in mind, the innovative character of the Collaborative Strategy framework and its potential application for public service delivery is being given in section 2.2.

2.2. How Innovation does emerge – Innovation and Collaborative Strategy, and how do they Affect Delivery of Public Services

The way someone could define innovation should be let to the usage of the term in particular circumstances. In this light, the definition that is given in the context of this paper is that:

> An innovation is an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption…The perceived newness of the idea for the individual determines his or her reaction to it. If the idea seems new to the individual, it is an innovation (Rogers, 1996; cited by Smale, 1998).

From an evolution point of view innovation is a key 'milestone' in the process that begins with the invention of a new product or system and concludes with its diffusion within a given population of 'users' (McLoughlin, 1999). With regard to involvement of more-than-one organisations, it could be argued that innovative capacity is dependent upon building linkages through collaborative relationships. Amongst other aspects this could enable learning, which adds to one organisation's existing knowledge base. A further form of innovations' occurrence in collaboration is what has been called *innovation networks*. These have been seen as possessing many of the advantages in order to enable learning and innovation, whilst avoiding the conventional problems of collaboration such as concerns over quality and culture issues between the collaborating parties (ibid.).

A further step forward regarding application of innovation within the context of collaboration could perhaps be the occurrence of a kind of holistic perspective in the way organisational structures operate. This could be explained via the *configuration theory*. According to Whittington and Pettigrew configurations 'consist of multidimensional constellations of organisational characteristics that commonly occur together – these characteristics might range from strategy, through structure to culture and technology' (2003: 127). It could be suggested then that collaborative arrangements hence urban partnerships fit within this context of innovation as they consist of structures and strategic dimensions that need mutual dependence in order to achieve positive performance. On this basis, it could be argued that perhaps Collaborative Strategy fulfils the criteria of an innovative framework, whose innovation lies on its ability to consolidate the design, preparation and

organisational operation of partnerships (thus urban partnerships) in order to achieve positive outcomes, in the case of this paper fruitful public service delivery.
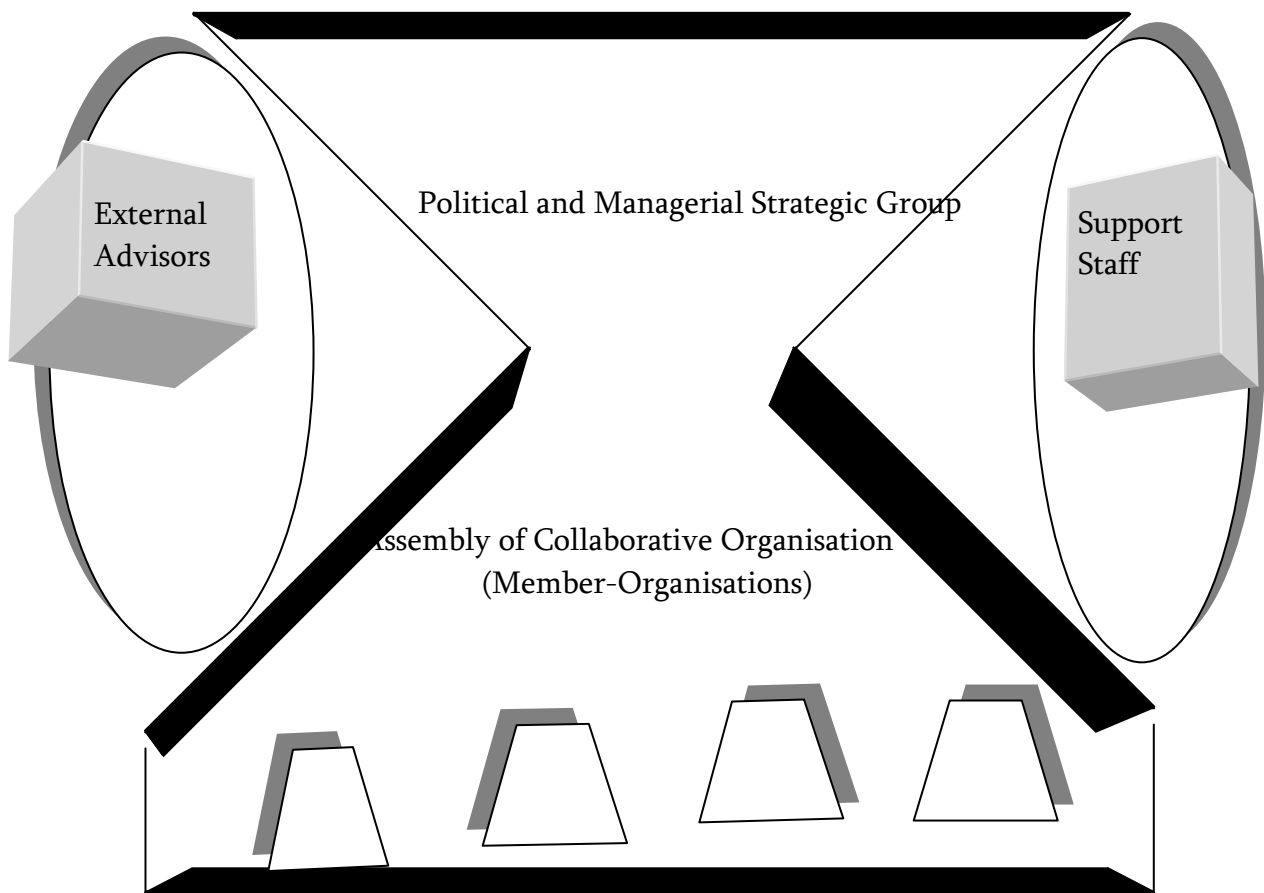
Figure 1: Structure of collaborative organisation that could apply to urban partnerships

Source: Adjusting the model produced by Mintzberg, Five Basic Parts of the Organisation, (1983: 11)

Consequently, the ability by urban partnerships to succeed on operational and delivery aspects relies on their capacity to consolidate operation in order to achieve the best public services possible. In so doing, rather than pursuing the partnership's management by examining tasks, functions or techniques it seems more important to examine its social character in organisational ideology and as a nexus of social and operational power (Charlesworth et al, 1996). In this light, managing urban partnerships takes the form of not using any specific technique or technology of organisational control but a rather inclusive assembly-orientated operational structure, as it is presented in Figure 1. Conceptualising for example strategic decision-making such an approach allows for a sense of decision-making in parallel (Hendry, 2000). Applying this to urban partnership operation it could imply a kind of decision-making, which can address a wide range of issues that effectively escape

narrow, partial perspectives and allow for decisions of a broader scope with respect to participant's aspirations and needs.

At the purely organisational level collaborative strategy proposes an organisational structure that applies to the operational circumstances an urban partnership. This structure relies on the five basic parts of an organisation suggested by Mintzberg (1983; 1998b). It could be suggested that the particular organisational structure is very similar to the one for *diversified organisation* because it is not as integrated as a single organisation (several independent entities-organisations in a loose structure) (Mintzberg, 1998b). As it can be seen in Figure 1 the core constitutional parts of a collaborative organisation (therefore of an urban partnership) include the *political and managerial strategic group*, which is the executive group responsible for implementing the decisions taken in the partnership's *assembly*. The assembly includes all the members of the partnership and it is responsible for taking decisions about strategic planning and broadly-defined organisational matters. Additionally, the organisation can be supported by *external advisors* e.g. governmental staff who advice on and evaluate the partnership's operational capabilities. Finally, professional help by *support staff* normally on administrative matters is considered as essential. The fact that an urban partnership should treat its members in equal terms can be seen by the position of the political and managerial strategic group in relation to advisors and support staff. They all form a straight line, which reflects the networking character of the partnership. In short, there is no managerial apex in this type of organisation. The assembly constitutes the highest possible decision-making body by having a say on crucial matters e.g. the economic, social and political planning of the partnership.

3. METHODOLOGY ISSUES

The research methodology that was used for this paper is based on the author's previous work. In terms of research evidence the paper relied heavily on data that was collected in 2003/2004 with regard to an examination of the Collaborative Strategy framework. Semi-structured interviewing, non-participant observation of partnership meetings and collection of secondary data were the research methods, which were used for this paper. Complementarily, a small-scale evaluation that was designed to support the generalisation of data supported the generalisations of research findings of the case in Bournemouth.

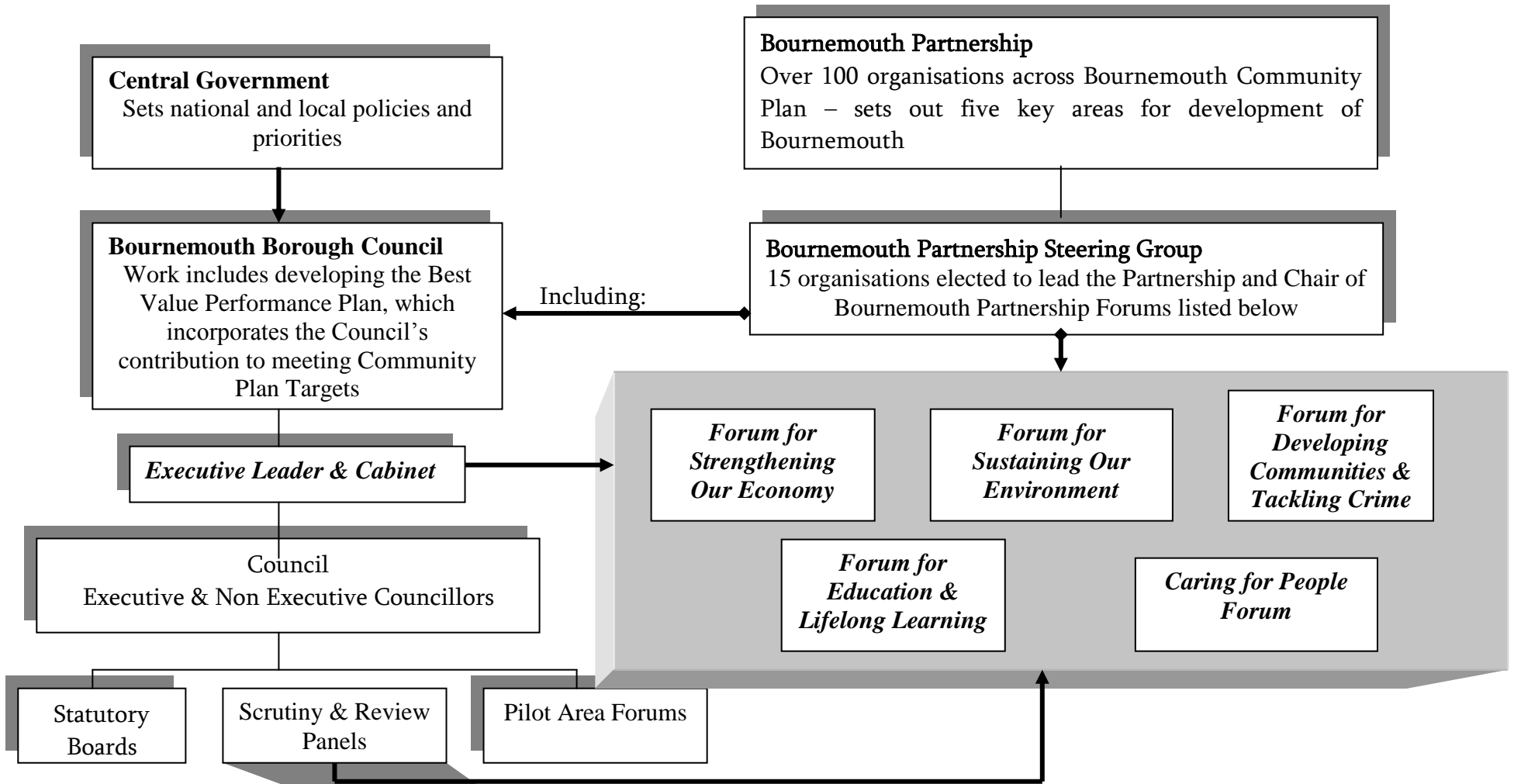## 4. THE CASE-1: URBAN PARTNERSHIPS IN BOURNEMOUTH – OPERATION
4.1. Organisational Structures of Bournemouth Urban Partnerships (Bournemouth Partnership, and Bournemouth Partnership Forums for Education and Lifelong Learning and Strengthening Our Economy)

Organisational operation and structures has been a considerable issue for the Bournemouth Partnership (BP) because of the high number of participants to the

partnership. The partnership counted in 2004 more than 100 members from all sectors (public, business, community and voluntary) constituting reputedly the largest, and in this respect the most 'inclusive' local strategic partnership in the UK (Bournemouth Partnership, 2002). As annual conferences have been taking place consistently every year around September since 2001, the partnership can perhaps be considered as a wide communication network for consulting with partners and sharing information (Bournemouth Partnership, 2003).

Regarding its operation the administrative function of the partnership has been provided and mainly resourced by the borough council. The council's chief executive has been the secretary to the partnership and officers from the strategic development team provided administrative support (Figure 2). For its first two years the partnership as a whole operated without a formal sub-group to guide its activities, although in practice Bournemouth Borough Council played a key role in steering and shaping its development. However the scale of the membership made it difficult to hold regular meetings for discussing and reaching agreement on proposals, and also to provide effective checks and balances on the council's role. This, together with the desire by the council to deliver the community plan, resulted in the creation of a formal steering group in 2001 with a membership limited to 20 (Local Government Association, 2002). As a consequence, membership of the steering group has included some of significantly strong organisations in the town particularly in terms of financial capabilities such as Bournemouth Borough Council; Bournemouth University; Bournemouth International Airport; JP Morgan; Liverpool Victoria; Dorset Police; and the Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch Hospitals NHS Trust (Bournemouth Partnership, 2001)

In addition to the core partnership, five theme partnerships were created, the Bournemouth Partnership forums as they were called, which have been inextricably linked at the organisational level to the Bournemouth Partnership (see Figure 2). Someone would not expect for these forums to have operated in any other manner apart from the one the BP has generated. As a result the organisational structure of the Bournemouth Partnership Forum for Education and Lifelong Learning (BPFELL) and Bournemouth Partnership Forum for Strengthening Our Economy (BPFSOE) has consisted of a group of member organisations whose priorities, attitudes, culture, aims and objectives have been reflected priorities on education (based on a rather public-sector mentality) and economy (based on a mentality for entrepreneurship) respectively. With regard to the role of the borough council in the establishment and growth of the BPFELL and BPFSOE it could be argued that this has been analogous to the one established by the borough council to the Bournemouth Partnership.

Central Government
Sets national and local policies and priorities

Bournemouth Partnership
Over 100 organisations across Bournemouth Community Plan – sets out five key areas for development of Bournemouth

Bournemouth Borough Council
Work includes developing the Best Value Performance Plan, which incorporates the Council's contribution to meeting Community Plan Targets

Bournemouth Partnership Steering Group
15 organisations elected to lead the Partnership and Chair of Bournemouth Partnership Forums listed below

Including:

Executive Leader & Cabinet

Council
Executive & Non Executive Councillors

Forum for Strengthening Our Economy

Forum for Sustaining Our Environment

Forum for Developing Communities & Tackling Crime

Forum for Education & Lifelong Learning

Caring for People Forum

Statutory Boards

Scrutiny & Review Panels

Pilot Area Forums

Figure 2: Key relationships between Bournemouth Borough Council and Bournemouth Partnership
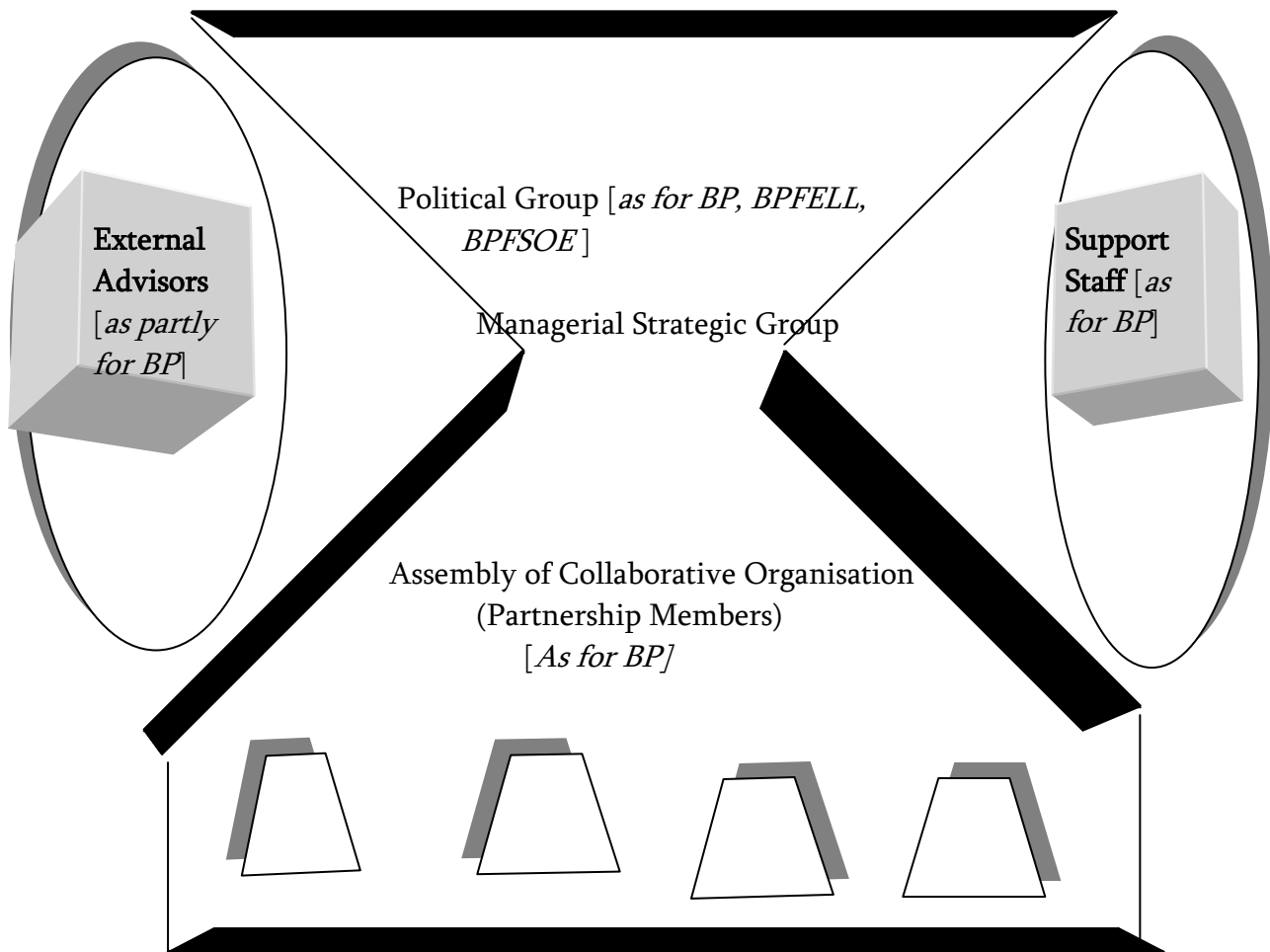**Source:** Bournemouth Partnership (2003) Conference 2003 (Appendix A)

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In view of this, the council has actively participated not only by offering its membership but also by offering administrative and when needed financial support to the forums (From the observations of the BPFELL and BPFSOE meetings, March 2003 to January 2004).

4.2. Partnership Operation in Bournemouth: Has it been Innovative and Effective?

Reflections on the operational model, which has been suggested in section 2.2 (see Figure 1) as if it was implemented in the case partnerships could perhaps provide us with a number of indications on how innovative and effective partnership operation in Bournemouth has been. In this light, research evidence has provided the base for these reflections. Based on this evidence then urban partnerships in Bournemouth have been operating as follows (see also Figure 3):

1. *Establishment of a political group*: In other words formation of the partnership board – Irreplaceable element for all partnerships' efficacious operation – Because of their advisory nature and wide remit of responsibilities it was established for all three partnerships – this was possible via the selection of steering groups and appointment of particular local councillors as 'observers' to the partnerships;

2. *Formation of a managerial group:* Indispensable element of operation for partnerships that have been operating for a long time – The partnerships under consideration do not belong to this category – the political groups have taken over in this instance;

3. *Assembly of collaborative organisation:* In other words the whole of the partnership – Applicable to BP because of its extended political and social remit – Not applicable to BPFELL and BPFSOE because of their limited membership.

4. *Existence of external advisors:* Normally embrace the governmental and quasi- governmental regional authorities – The BP has developed such relationship with the Government Office for the South West (GOSW);

5. *Support Staff:* Essential for the BP due to its large membership size, it was provided exclusively by the borough council – The BPFELL and BPFSOE have relied on the administrative support provided by the partner that possessed the chair position at the time.

Based on research evidence, it could be argued that the case partnerships in Bournemouth have developed the capacity to establish an appropriate operational basis that would enable them to formulate and promote service delivery. This has happened despite the fact that they have not obtained a community leadership role independently from the borough council. With regard to the partnerships' ability to co-ordinate and integrate initiatives it was evident that they successfully implemented initiatives introduced by the central authority e.g. Community Plans and Local Public Service Agreements. This type of operation reflects the innovative character of partnership work in the fashion of configuration theory as it has been described in section 2.2.

Political Group [*as for BP, BPFELL, BPFSOE*]

External Advisors [*as partly for BP*]

Managerial Strategic Group

Support Staff [*as for BP*]

Assembly of Collaborative Organisation
(Partnership Members)
[*As for BP]*

Figure 3: Application of structure of collaborative organisation to urban partnerships in Bournemouth

However, it is questionable how successful the case partnerships have been in terms of establishing a long-term commitment regarding their aims. This is evident from their inability - during the period covered by this research - to establish efficient performance assessment programmes. As a result, partnership traditions e.g. fruitful ways for communication have not been established as yet. The reason for this relies perhaps on lack of necessary time, to absorb and develop further collaborative work, as none of these partnerships have been founded until 2000/2001.

5. THE CASE-2: URBAN PARTNERSHIPS IN BOURNEMOUTH – PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY

5.1. *Public Service Delivery by Bournemouth Urban Partnerships – An Overview*

According to research findings, plan delivery has proved to be an important but rather perplexing task of partnership work in Bournemouth. Admittedly, the issue for consideration has been the extent to which the case partnerships can deliver

public services with an emphasis on the role of the Bournemouth Partnership as the major partnership force in this process. To this someone should note that no partnership has had the capacity of becoming an exclusive provider of public services as yet. Instead, the borough council has continued to be the exclusive provider of services in the town. However, by taking the recent governmental guidance on board the council has attempted to promote provision of services through partnership arrangements. This became apparent in the conference of the Bournemouth Partnership 2003 in which the five partnership forums proposed the targets for the revised community plan, which have had to be implemented by the Bournemouth Partnership (Bournemouth Partnership, 2003). This could be considered as the beginning of a new era for partnership work in Bournemouth fulfilling the desire of a number of partners including this senior manager of the borough council who asserted:

> However, my view is that either by government activity or regional activity the agenda would change and the partnerships would be set out of the council. We could find then that the partnership [the Bournemouth Partnership] genuinely becomes separate from all of the agencies. It becomes a quango. Independent chairman, independent bureaucracy, da, da, da, da. And the council then is a big but only one player
>
> (Senior manager of the Bournemouth Borough Council)

Before this historical move the council had already obtained a series of achievements via partnership work. For example, allocation of £1,457,000 was given to the deprived area of Boscombe through the SRB fund or the Bournemouth Libraries' computer system was launched via PFI funding (Bournemouth Borough Council, 2002). In terms of linking public service provision to the betterment of urban regeneration the council, the Bournemouth Partnership and the government have agreed a Public Service Agreement (PSA). Some of the targets the Bournemouth Partnership has to achieve in return for receiving £910,000 for 2004/2005 (£300,000 for each target achieved until 2007) have been:

- To reduce incidents of dwelling burglary in the Bournemouth Division;
- To reduce the level of repeat victimisation in domestic violence;
- To increase the proportion of private housing in decent condition occupied by vulnerable people;
- To reduce the number of pupils leaving school without qualifications;
- To improve the skill and training level amongst local businesses.

(Bournemouth Journal, April/May 2004)

The agreement has reflected the policy shift implemented by the Government Office for the South West to create and maintain sustainability in communities in the region 'that are economically prosperous, have decent homes at a price people can afford, safeguard the countryside, enjoy a well-designed, accessible and pleasant living and working environment' (Bournemouth Partnership Steering

Group, 9th Sept 2003). However, it has been questionable to what extent the Bournemouth Partnership has been involved in the agreement. Nevertheless, emphasis has been put on obtaining economic sustainability in Bournemouth after taking into account that it is 'the economy that...can improve its prosperity and regeneration by supporting appropriate economic development initiatives (Bournemouth Partnership, 2002: 6). This aim has also been confirmed by the observations of the meetings of both the BP and BPFSOE during which partners accentuated the role of the business sector in boosting the local economy. In view of this, the business sector could create a model of effectiveness that not only could make them (the business sector) profitable but also *socially responsible* for the town.

5.2. An Example of Public Service Delivery: The Neighbourhood Management in Springbourne and Boscombe West (NMSBW) in Bournemouth – Have Partnerships Delivered the Goods?

5.2.1. Establishment of NMSBW

The Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder was founded in the summer 2001 with the establishment of its steering group. It was the steering group that responded positively to an invitation by the national Neighbourhood Renewal Unit to prepare a delivery plan for implementation of the pathfinder in the Springbourne and Boscombe West area of Bournemouth. It was not until 2003 when the pathfinder and, the Bournemouth Partnership and its forums began to have a keen interest on each other's work. However as it can be seen in Figure 4 there has been a strategic link between the BP as the local strategic partnership of the town and the neighbourhood projects, especially through the forums. The Neighbourhood Management Board has been the main political organisational vehicle for NMSBW. It has incorporated 7 members of key agencies such as the council, the police, the business sector, as well as 8 elected representatives from the local communities of Springbourne and Boscombe West (Neighbourhood Management in Springbourne and Boscombe West, February 2002).

The pathfinder in Springbourne and Boscombe West has been recognised as an area project with a focus on social regeneration that has reflected its nature of working in partnership. This was explicitly indicated by the manager of NMSBW who pointed out that 'really what they are doing is a microcosm of the Bournemouth Partnership'. It should be also noted that the scheme has superseded the one based on the SRB6 Programme including to a certain extent the same participant individuals and organisations. The NMSBW has been awarded 'the Partnership of the Year' status for 2003 at the Neighbourhood Management Awards held in Stratford-upon-Avon (Neighbourhood Management in Springbourne and Boscombe West – NM News, January 2004).

5.2.2. Springbourne and Boscombe West: Baseline Information

Boscombe West is the most deprived area in Bournemouth for health and employment and the second for lowest income and child poverty (Bournemouth Partnership Steering Group, 3rd June 2003). Housing stock is typical of a seaside town's with a very significant 48% of all accommodation being rented with an average of just 17% for Bournemouth. On the contrary, in Springbourne there is a greater mixture of tenure including homeowner, private rented and housing association properties. Additionally, the health domain ranking for Boscombe West is 125 placing it in the top 2% of 'non-healthy' areas of the country. On top of this, Boscombe West's multiple deprivation ranks of 415 falling within the worst 5% of the country. Child poverty is also an alarming issue that would probably have negative consequences for the future mental and physical health of local residents. The 1991 census figures show that 25% of households in Boscombe West moved in the year prior to the survey compared with a national average of just 9%. Moreover, local general practitioners have reported a patient turnover of between 25% and 40% (Neighbourhood Management in Springbourne and Boscombe West, February 2002).
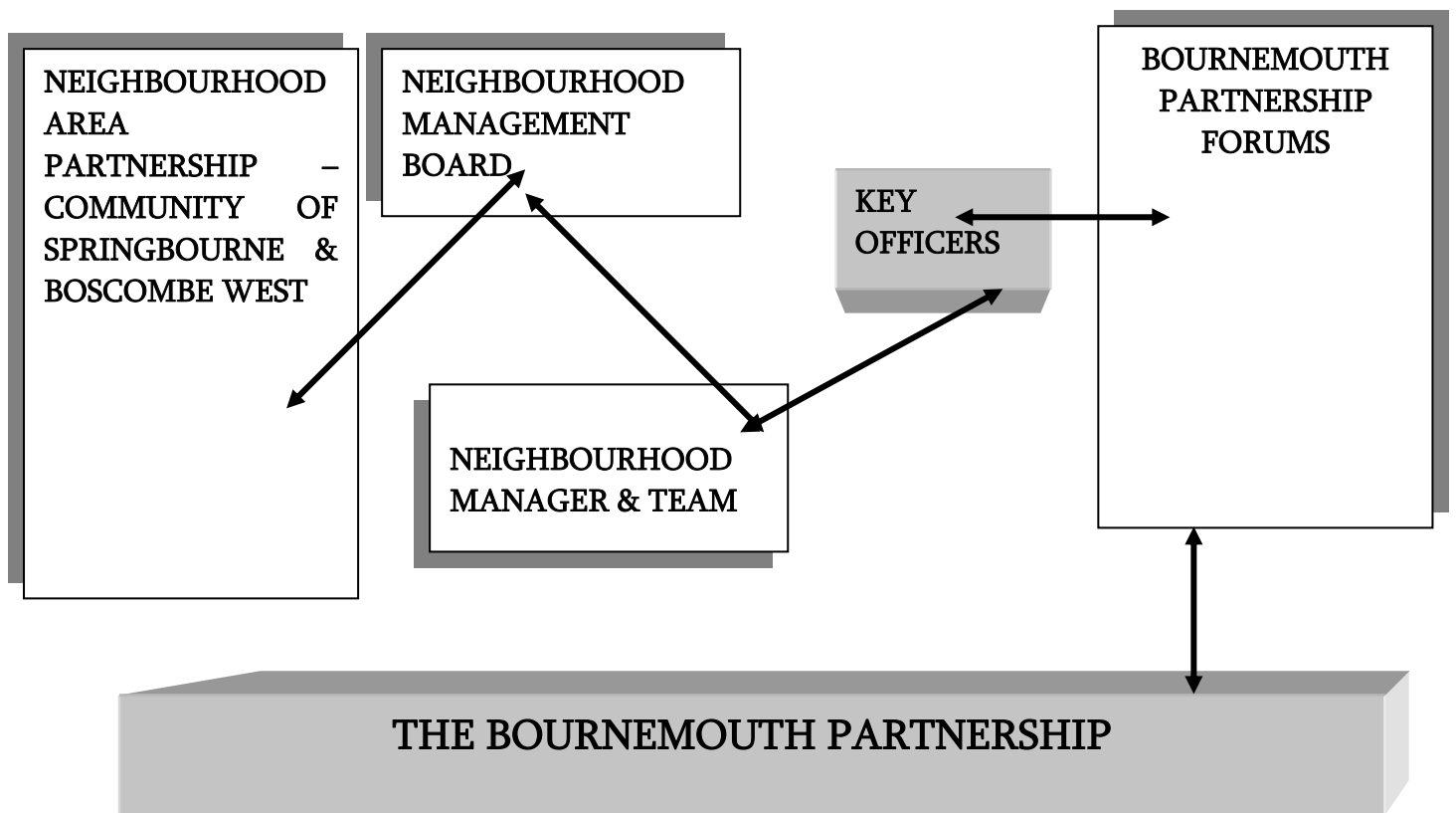
Figure 4: Strategic links between the Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder and Bournemouth Partnership
Source: Neighbourhood Management in Springbourne and Boscombe West (February 2002: 10) – Adaptation

Summarised information on the areas' social and economic deprivation includes:
- *Crime*: half of house burglaries that occur in Bournemouth division;

- *Work:* 587 registered unemployed (out of 8,510 inhabitants of Boscombe West and 8,620 inhabitants of Springbourne in 2000);
- *Health:* 50% of Dorset' injecting drug users live in the Neighbourhood Management area (estimate);
- *Housing:* 40% of multiple occupation houses and 50% of private rented houses in Bournemouth – 465 eyesores, 160 in disrepair;
- *Education:* One third gain 5+ A-C (2001).

(Bournemouth Partnership Steering Group, 3rd June 2003).

5.2.3. Social Regeneration in Springbourne and Boscombe West

Despite the short time the NMSBW pathfinder has been in action it has achieved some significant outcomes in terms of promoting social regeneration. Someone could begin with small-scale cases such as one in Springbourne in which a group of residents was presented with £5,000 to help cleaning up socially unacceptable graffiti in the neighbourhood (Neighbourhood Management in Springbourne and Boscombe West, April 2002). According to the manager of NMSBW its effectiveness in responding to specific needs of local residents is inextricably linked to the nature of the pathfinder:

> This project in here [the Neighbourhood Mgmt in Boscombe West & Springbourne] would not exist without being a partnership. The nature of neighbourhood management is that it is mainly about encouraging agencies to work more constructively with each other and working much more closer with local residents so at its heart it has to be a partnership.

During its first year of action the NMSBW pathfinder achieved:
1. The establishment of a Safe and Clean Team responsible for providing extra cleaning in the area every week by e.g. removing bulky household items;
2. Establishment of a network of Street Representatives who are trained to bring people's concerns to the Neighbourhood Management;
3. Establishment of a series of Community Wins, small amounts of money granted to quickly tackle a problem in the area;
4. Completion of a survey of all properties in the area that identified:
   - Properties in disrepair;
   - Properties that are eyesores;
   - Properties that should be registered with the council as multiple occupation houses.

(Neighbourhood Management in Springbourne and Boscombe West – NM News, September 2003)

However, as people from the NMSBW have agreed 'there is a lot more to do bearing in mind the priorities of housing and the local environment' (Neighbourhood Management in Springbourne and Boscombe West, September 2003).

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Based on the aforementioned, urban partnerships in Britain have provided innovative organisational frameworks, which could enrich the process for and outcomes of public service delivery. In this respect, organisational frameworks such as Collaborative Strategy, as it has been presented in this paper, can prove to be useful in explaining and, under certain circumstances, 'guide' for a smooth and effective provision of public services. Vis-à-vis the implementation of the framework to the case of Bournemouth it could be argued that the public and the business sectors have developed a strong sense for collaboration that could count, along with the major driving force for favouring *marketisation,* as critical success factors for improving plan delivery.

Bournemouth partnerships' ability to obtain the best possible service delivery has exhibited both strengths and weaknesses. In terms of strengths:

1. The case partnerships have contributed according to their power and financial capacity to the well-being of local people by promoting economic – to a major extent – and social regeneration;
2. The case partnerships have shown also increasing adaptation in the 'rules of the game' e.g. in complying with governmental requirements for obtaining funding as in the case of Neighbourhood Management in Springbourne and Boscombe West.

Then, weaknesses:

- Collaboration for obtaining quality public services is not an easy task especially when partnerships have not established a way for operating that could take into account all 'voices' within the partnerships;
- The leading role the public and business sectors have played in the organisational operation of the partnerships in Bournemouth has had a significant impact on the delivery of services, as the community and voluntary sectors did not appear to be equally capable for service provision without the support by the borough council. This has been the case so far despite existence of moves for the opposite e.g. the creation of the *Bournemouth Compact* between the statutory bodies and the 'third' sector in the town (Bournemouth Partnership Steering Group, 9th Sept 2003).

'Should they stay or should they go?' If it is for urban partnerships to develop and maintain their strong sense of collaboration as well as their financial synergies in a way that would favour innovation and, therefore, flexibility in future changes then someone could assert that urban partnerships should stay! Within this context provision of quality public services should remain (of course!) a foundation stone for partnership good practice!

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