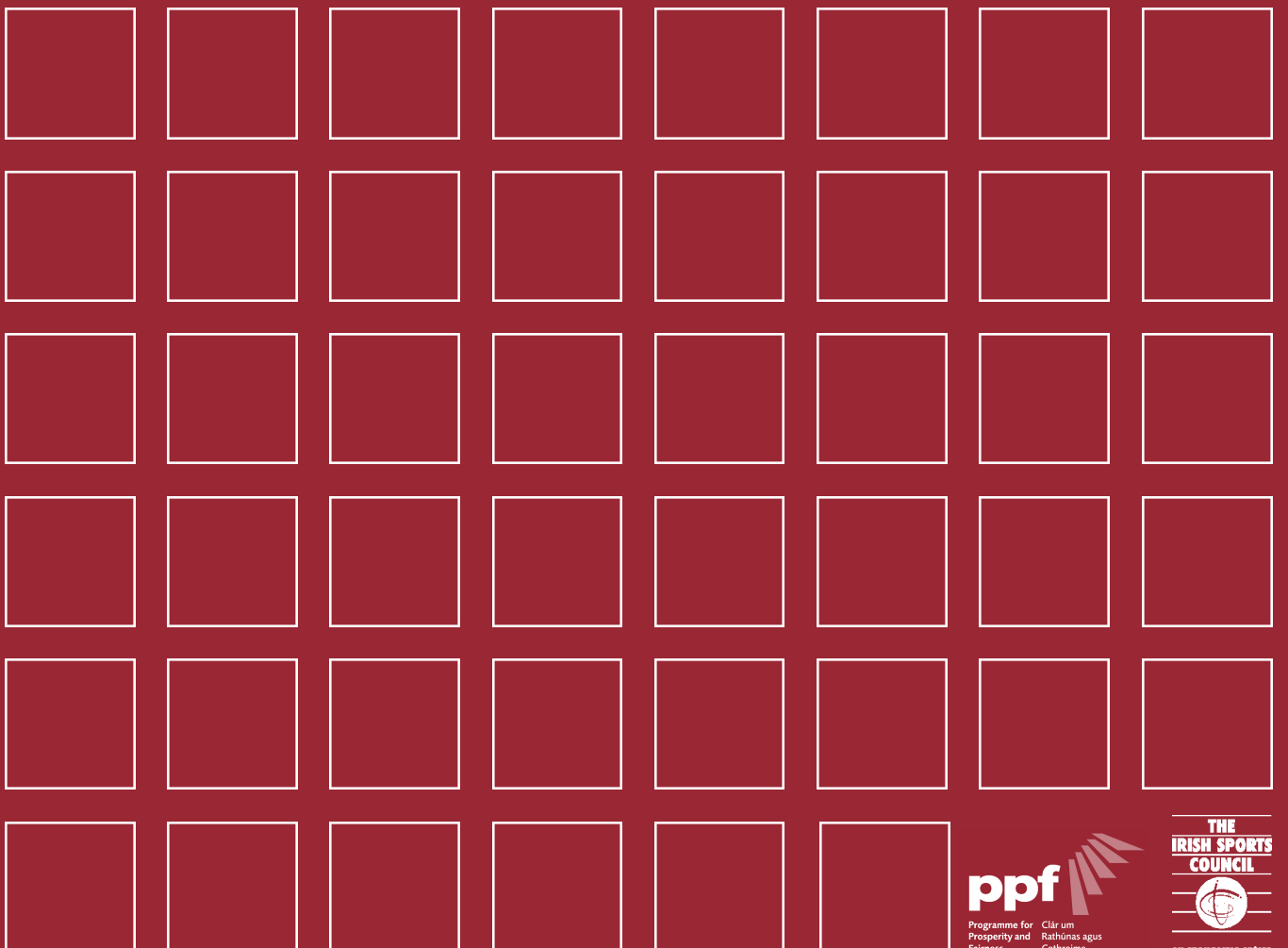
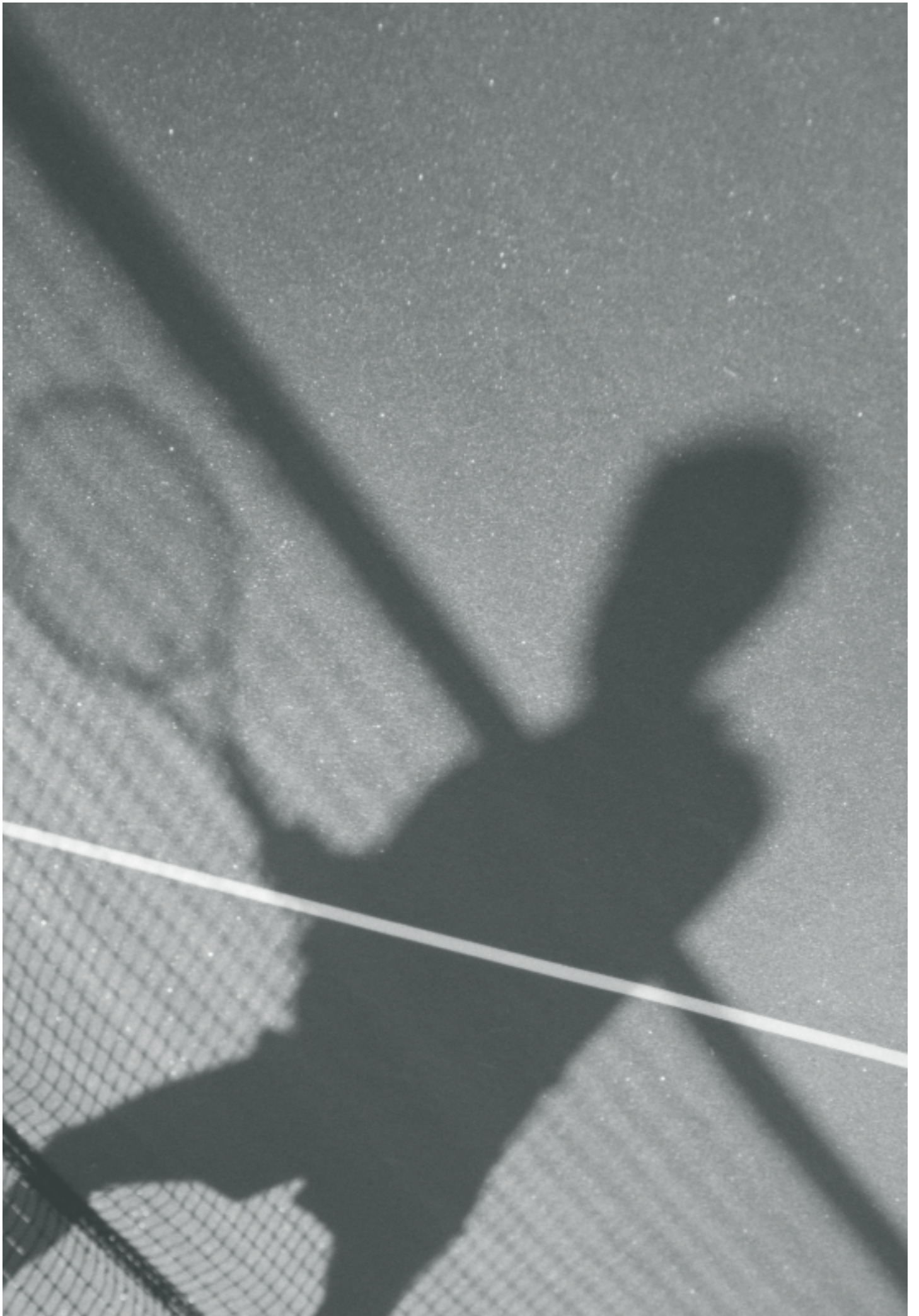


Local Sports Partnerships

STRATEGIC PLANNING GUIDELINES



**STRATEGIC PLANNING
GUIDELINES FOR LOCAL SPORTS
PARTNERSHIPS**



STRATEGIC PLANNING GUIDELINES FOR LOCAL SPORTS PARTNERSHIPS

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FOREWORD

Everyone involved in sport in Ireland has welcomed the recognition given to sport by the appointment of Dr James McDaid TD as the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation with a seat at the Cabinet table. At last sport is represented at the heart of government.

The creation of the executive Irish Sports Council on a statutory basis is further recognition by the government of the potential importance of sport in Ireland. It is now up to those of us involved in sports development and administration to show that sport is worth its place at the "top table".

Within the Irish Sports Council, one of our key goals – fully endorsed by the Minister and his Department – is to foster and support innovative Local Sports Partnerships, designed to co-ordinate and promote the development of sport. It is in this context that the Irish Sports Council is proposing to establish a delivery mechanism through which the work currently ongoing at local level can be enhanced and the work that needs to be done can be effectively tackled. The Programme for Prosperity & Fairness gives a commitment to support and fund the establishment of local sports partnerships. It recognises that these partnerships will promote the development of sport and will provide leadership, co-ordination and direction, particularly in disadvantaged areas.

It is at the local level that there is the greatest potential to bring all the organisations involved in sport together to promote and develop local sport. The Council is asking each Local Sports Partnership to develop a local sports strategy to create sustainable long-term development in sport. Local areas have already been involved in a consultative planning process through the City & County Development Board process and this experience will prove invaluable in developing a sports strategy. The experience of the VECs in dealing with local sport for over 20 years will also prove very beneficial to the partnerships in their establishment phase.

The Guidelines are designed to be flexible and can be adapted by different LSPs to their particular needs. The guidelines are based on a common sense approach to planning, which after all is the essence of a strategic approach to organisation and management in any context.

The main strength of the strategic planning process proposed is that there is a strong emphasis on decision-making at local level to create a real sense of ownership at grass-roots level. The Irish Sports Council is committed to ensuring that the creation of Local Sports Partnerships will increase participation in sport and to ensure that local resources are used to best effect. It is our strong belief that if these aims are achieved the quality of life for all Irish people will improve in relation to health, well-being and enjoyment.

John Treacy

Chief Executive
September 2001

RATIONALE

In the Irish Sports Council's Statement of Strategy, *A New Era for Sport*, we have defined our mission as planning, leading and co-ordinating the sustainable development of sport in Ireland. One of our priorities is the *fostering and supporting of innovative Local Sports Partnerships at County or City level, designed to co-ordinate and promote the development of sport*. It is in this context that the Irish Sports Council has fostered the establishment of a delivery mechanism through which the work currently ongoing at local level can be enhanced and the work that needs to be done can be effectively tackled.

Sport is often under resourced at the local level, yet it is in their home areas that the vast majority of children are introduced to sport and where most people take part in sport. There are many thousands of dedicated volunteers in local clubs and communities supporting and administering sport. Without them sport could not exist.

There are also many local publicly funded organisations promoting sport in some way, although doing so is not their prime objective. For example, local authorities provide and operate swimming pools, leisure centres, playing fields and other facilities. Vocational Education Committees support local sports clubs and activity programmes, often in disadvantaged areas. Health Boards educate and inform people about the benefits of healthy lifestyles and regular physical activity at all ages. Universities and Institutes of Technology provide sports facilities for their students and local communities. Schools introduce their pupils to sport and provide opportunities for co-curricular sport.

The **Programme for Prosperity and Fairness** gives a commitment to support and fund the establishment of local sports partnerships. It recognises that these partnerships will promote the development of sport and will provide leadership, co-ordination and direction, particularly in disadvantaged areas.

The Irish Sports Council sees these partnerships as the best mechanism for delivering recreational sport to the greatest number of people. Key tasks of the partnerships will be:

- ▶ To build on work already being carried out to date, including the work of statutory agencies, National Governing Bodies of Sport and community/voluntary groups;
- ▶ To establish a sustainable structure to assist all those involved to meet the challenges facing local sports development (e.g. recruiting/managing volunteers, quality training, etc.);
- ▶ To increase usage of facilities and
- ▶ To create and implement plans for long-term local sports development.

The priority of the Local Sports Partnerships is to increase access to opportunities for participation in sport for all and to ensure that the resources invested in sport at a local level are used to best effect. A primary focus for the initial work of each partnership will be the development of a plan for sport in its own area – the creation of a local sports strategy. Each partnership will have a full-time Local Sports Co-ordinator whose initial task will be to facilitate the creation of this strategy and the action plans based upon it.

This manual has been produced by the Irish Sports Council to assist the Local Sports Partnerships to undertake the strategic planning process. It is based on practical advice for facilitating the process as well as providing a template of how the strategy should be drawn together.

Anon's Law of Strategy:

Strategy is when you keep right on firing even though you're out of ammunition, in the hope nobody will notice

Igor Ansoff, *Corporate Strategy*

GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

We have tried to write these guidelines in simple English and avoid unnecessary jargon. However, there are some useful terms that need definition. They are:

Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs): Dedicated companies set up at local level to promote and develop sport. The partnerships are made up of Local Authorities, VECs, Health Boards, FÁS, third level institutions, sports clubs/organisations and community groups. The partnership is informed in its operation by consultation with the **Local Sports Forum**. The Forum is the arena in which clubs/organisations can raise particular issues that they feel require the involvement/attention of the LSPs. A **Board of Directors**, made up from representatives of the partners and nominees of the forum, will oversee the operation of the partnership.

Local Sports Co-ordinator (LSC): An employee of the LSP who is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the partnership company. His/her main role will be to co-ordinate the activities of the partnership at local level.

Strategic Planning: The process whereby the interested parties in the partnership discuss, agree and describe what is best for their area and what steps they will take to progress its development.

Vision: It represents the ultimate aim. The partners need a vision of what their partnership should be like at some point in the future. However, visions must also be realistic. A vision should therefore be challenging but ultimately achievable and reflect the particular nature of the organisation. A Local Sports Partnership should seek to “sell” its vision to its internal and external stakeholders so that they can help to achieve it.

Mission: The mission of a partnership sets out simply what it will do to achieve its vision. Everything the LSP does, or wants to do, should be tested against its agreed mission and anything that does not fit the mission should not be progressed.

Core values: The “things we believe in” are our core values. Many people believe in honesty, for example, while others are happy to do dishonest things in order to make money. Typical examples of LSP core values include equality of opportunity; social inclusion; fair play; quality training; excellence in standards and that sport should be valued for its own sake rather for some other reason.

Goals are a key foundation for the LSP’s strategic plan. They are long term aspirations, which will lead to the achievement of the vision and are compatible with the mission. Goals are difficult to quantify so it can be difficult to say if they have been fully achieved; alternatively, it is always possible to do better against them. Typical goals might be “to promote more participation” or “to develop a more efficient training structure at local level”.

Objectives are things the LSP will set out to achieve which, if successful, will contribute to the achievement of goals. There may be several objectives related to one goal. For example, a goal of promoting more participation might lead to a series of objectives such as:

- ▶ To run a club development programme
- ▶ To promote the “sport for all” ethos
- ▶ To run local sports days showcasing different sports and activities

Performance indicators are used to measure whether the LSP is being successful in relation to its objectives. A performance indicator relating to an objective of encouraging existing clubs to participate in a club development programme will be the number of clubs participating this year, next year and so on.

Targets relate directly to performance indicators. They are measurable, realisable, specific and cover a set time period. A target might be to have ten clubs participate in the development programme in the next year and another ten to do so the year after.

Stakeholders are people or organisations who will be affected by the LSP and what it does and may be interested in working with it. Stakeholders can be **internal** or **external**.

Internal stakeholders are people, groups and agencies who are part of the LSP with an interest in how it goes about its work and what it does. For LSPs, the main internal stakeholders are usually local statutory agencies, local sporting clubs/organisations, local community and voluntary groups and the local people. These groups and individuals can also be described as the members of the LSP.

External stakeholders are people who are not members of the LSP but interested in what it does or affected by it. They may include National Governing Bodies of sport, facility owners and providers, the media, sponsors, the Irish Sports Council and Government Departments/agencies.

SWOT Analysis is used to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing the organisation. Looking at the local area and partners in this way helps to create a picture of the current state of play and is often useful in deciding a plan of action.

1. SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

Strategic Planning and LSPs

Everyone who has ever taken part in sport is already familiar with the basic concepts:

Decide what you want to achieve – your *mission* and related goals

Agree the rules of the game – your *principles* or core values

Set measurable *objectives* which will contribute to the achievement of your mission and goals

Decide how to go about delivering the objectives - your tactics or *action plan*

Communicate the proposed mission, goals, objectives and action plan to everyone who needs to know them

Review and change the action plan as necessary to ensure it delivers the aims and objectives as effectively as possible

The main reasons LSPs need a strategic plan include:

- ▶ To concentrate on the long term interests of their area of operation
- ▶ To identify those things which will deliver desirable long term results most effectively
- ▶ To build effective partnerships
- ▶ To take maximum advantage of the various support services available to them

The LSP's strategic plan should deliver:

- ▶ Clarity of purpose
- ▶ An action plan with clear targets
- ▶ An effective structure
- ▶ Long term sustainability

Managing Change

The process must be an inclusive one. The Local Sports Forum should be utilised fully to ascertain the needs and opinions of the local area and groups. At regular intervals the Forum should receive updates on the planning process.

The Board of Directors of the LSP has to be committed to the planning process.

The process of producing the plan is more important than the plan itself but what really matters are the results achieved as a result of implementing the plan.

The process takes considerable time and effort and there is no single correct way to produce a strategic plan.

A dedicated planning team should undertake the task of preparing the plan with the assistance of the Local Sports Co-ordinator. An external facilitator may be called in to assist this team.

Strategic planning is not infallible but having a plan reduces the risk of future problems.

LSPs must “own” their problems if they are to determine effective solutions to them.

The Strategic Planning Process

We suggest you follow a seven step process:

- ▶ **Step 1:** Plan the plan
- ▶ **Step 2:** Analysis
- ▶ **Step 3:** Planning workshop
- ▶ **Step 4:** Synthesis
- ▶ **Step 5:** Consultation and adoption
- ▶ **Step 6:** Implementation
- ▶ **Step 7:** Review

2. STRATEGIC PLANNING AND LOCAL SPORTS PARTNERSHIPS

Introduction

The basic concepts of strategic planning are:

Decide what you want to achieve - your mission and related goals

Agree the rules of the game – your principles or core values

Set measurable objectives which will contribute to the achievement of your mission and goals

Decide how to go about delivering the objectives – your tactics or action plan

Communicate the proposed mission, goals, objectives and action plan to everyone who needs to know them

Review and change the action plan as necessary to ensure it delivers the aims and objectives as effectively as possible

Strategic planning for all LSPs will follow the same broad approach. It's a process based on relevant information and common sense, and does not require specialist expertise.

At the outset, approaching the preparation of a strategic plan can seem a pretty daunting task. It's easy to gather a mass of information – but difficult to use that information in a constructive way to produce a clear and simple plan. It's easy to think that many of the problems faced by LSPs are outside their control – but difficult to find ways of taking greater charge of their own destiny.

These guidelines are designed to help LSPs through the process to produce a viable programme of work that is supported by all involved in the partnership. Put simply, the purpose of this guide is to help. However, as each LSP will operate in a different area and with a different set of partners there is a need to adapt them to each LSP's own circumstances.

Each LSP should seek to find a method, format and outcomes, which suit its own particular needs and stage of development. The LSPs should also take the opportunity to discuss the development of their planning process with the Irish Sports Council at regular intervals.

Why Do LSPs Need a Strategic Plan?

The extensive consultations, which led up to A New Era for Sport, the Irish Sports Council's strategy, identified a general need to develop a local delivery mechanism to ensure greater opportunities for participation in sport. The Local Sports Partnerships are that delivery mechanism and a key task for the partnerships is to create a local sports strategy for each area. These guidelines have been developed to assist partnerships in this task. The main reason LSPs need a strategic plan, therefore, is to help them become **effective** so they can provide real leadership and co-ordination for sport in their area.

Sport in Ireland is changing rapidly and set to change a lot more over the next decade. Future changes cannot always be foreseen and because of this some agencies, groups or individuals might question the sanity of spending time looking for a vision for the LSP in the long term. The LSPs are a new development in Ireland but we can look at examples from other sectors and see that organisations that have not planned who have ended up “fire-fighting” and never getting on with their core business. That is why LSPs should have a strategic plan to help them **concentrate on the long term interest of sport in their area** rather than have to react continually to things over which they have no control. If the LSP does not provide the leadership, which is needed, sport in their area will suffer. After all, no other organisation is concerned primarily with increasing participation at local level and for the future of local sport. Moreover, implementing the plan will direct the work of the LSP and its co-ordinator.

There will always be a limit on the amount of cash and resources available to the LSP to do all the things they would like to be able to do. The LSP should use its strategic plan as a “window display” for the work that it will carry out and so the plan should assist in attracting resources from partners or sponsors at local level. Strategic planning **identifies those things, which will deliver desirable long-term results most effectively**. There’s an old maxim – usually referred to as either the Law of Diminishing Returns or Pareto’s Law – that 20% of the effort generates 80% of the results in any organisation. Conversely, 80% of the effort generates 20% of the results. Effective strategic planning aims to identify and concentrate on the 20% effort and 80% results, not the other way round. This is the very reason that the Irish Sports Council has chosen to spend its funding on creating LSPs to facilitate and co-ordinate the efforts of those involved in sport at local level.

LSPs are not alone in having to make do with inadequate resources. Almost every organisation has a limit on resources available to them, including the Irish Sports Council! To counteract any shortfall, strong partnerships are needed. So the fourth reason for having a strategic plan is to **build effective partnerships**. There are many organisations with which LSPs can work, including their own constituent partners. An effective partnership is one in which each partner achieves more than would have been possible alone. However, partnerships are easiest to form when each partner has clear objectives and short and medium term priorities. It follows that LSPs wishing to work in partnership will have to know exactly what they want to achieve for their own area of operation and the resources they will have available. There may even be instances where different LSPs can work in partnership.

The Irish Sports Council does not so much want as **need** LSPs to have effective strategic plans for the following reasons:

- ▶ To maximise the impact of all the work done by local clubs/organisations over the years in order to build **an effective support infrastructure for Irish sport at local level**.
- ▶ **LSPs are key partners** in the job of breaking down barriers and increasing participation in sport, not only the number of people but also their continued participation throughout their lives. This can only be achieved by the Irish Sports Council working in partnership with LSPs. The Irish Sports Council **needs** LSPs to be strong, dynamic, strategic organisations providing leadership to and enjoying widespread support from within their area.
- ▶ **Irish Sports Council is accountable to government** for the use of state funding allocated to sport. In order to be able to make the case for more funding for sport it will have to be able to demonstrate that both it and its partners are effective. That can only be done when there is clarity in what the Irish Sports Council and LSPs are trying to achieve and how the impact of their work can be measured.
- ▶ It needs to **concentrate its limited resources** on delivering the objectives set for it by government and its own policy priorities. Therefore it needs to know how and what LSPs plan to deliver and the support they will need.

It follows from this that LSPs preparing a strategic plan do not start with a completely blank sheet of paper. Instead, from the start they should seek to develop their partnership with the Irish Sports Council and promote mutual understanding of missions, goals, responsibilities, resources and strengths. Each LSP's strategic plan should respond to the needs of its own area but also take into account Irish Sports Council policies particularly those relating to disadvantaged areas and specific target groups. The Irish Sports Council's role is to work with LSPs in order to make sustainable differences to Irish sport. It is the role of the LSPs to demonstrate that they are delivering results in an effective manner. This means that their strategic plans must set out clearly what they plan to achieve, how, when and at what cost.

What Should LSPs Expect Their Strategic Plan to Deliver?

Ultimately, LSPs' strategic plans should deliver results. Those results must reflect and relate to Government and Irish Sports Council policies and priorities but should not be based only on them. They should also take into account the policies and strategies of other agencies both national and local. A key strategy to be borne in mind will be the 10-year strategy of the City/County Development Board at local level. It will also be necessary to consider, as appropriate, County Development Plans, Regional Health Plans, Community Enterprise Plans, LEADER Plans, Area Development Plans and so on. LSPs should also be aware of central government policies in relation to target groups in their areas. It follows that the LSP's strategic plan must deliver:

- ▶ A vision and mission based on **consensus, shared values and agreed priorities** – a clearly defined purpose, expressed in a way that all those involved in the LSP understand and wholeheartedly support
- ▶ A clear statement of **realistic objectives with achievable outcomes** and how they will be delivered and measured – in other words, an action plan with clear targets
- ▶ **Long term sustainability:** all programmes developed and provided through the LSP should be sustainable and in line with the long-term plans for the area

If the implementation of a strategic plan delivers results there will be a need to review and amend it from time to time to reflect changing circumstances and build on success. If it doesn't, there will be an even more obvious need to review it. This means that strategic planning is:

- ▶ A **dynamic, ongoing and systematic process** which is never "finished"
- ▶ A way of **building consensus** and shared ownership on what constitutes a "desirable future" and how to achieve it, giving real purpose to the partnership
- ▶ A **working tool** to focus on outcomes over a defined period, using hard facts wherever possible
- ▶ A way of building **effective interaction** with other bodies

And **is not:**

- ▶ Needed purely to get funding and therefore determined almost completely by the policies, requirements or assumed expectations of funding bodies
- ▶ An occasional burst of activity
- ▶ An unrealistic wish list for some time in the future

- ▶ Restrictive – it can be changed to suit changing circumstances
- ▶ A panacea for all problems
- ▶ Good in theory but useless in practice
- ▶ Something which takes forever
- ▶ A large book, which sits on a shelf or in a drawer

The best plans are short and simple – most people cannot be bothered to read long, involved documents - and implemented.

When Should LSPs Discuss their Strategic Plan with the Irish Sports Council?

LSPs should keep the Irish Sports Council apprised of progress at each stage of the strategic planning process. The LSPs are a key delivery mechanism identified in the Irish Sports Council Strategy. As a result, it is important that their strategies are informed of new developments at national level. Therefore, the Irish Sports Council and LSPs should be in regular contact at all stages in the planning process.

Each LSP will decide on how it wants to proceed with its strategic planning. However, in terms of progressing in line with Government and Irish Sports Council policy priorities and in the context of the need to create real working partnerships LSPs should contact the Irish Sports Council:

1. Before the start of the process: at this point the Irish Sports Council will ensure that the LSP is fully aware of Government and Irish Sports Council policy. This is the context in which the plan will be set and should be kept in mind throughout the strategic planning process.
2. Each LSP should be aware of the priorities for its constituent partners and should familiarise itself with their plans and objectives and those agreed for the local area as a whole.
3. In the course of development: perhaps after the first draft to discuss “without prejudice” progress made, so that the LSP gets as much advice as possible from an Irish Sports Council perspective. These discussions should provide LSPs with the opportunity to present how it sees itself developing. In turn, this will help to create an effective working relationship between the Irish Sports Council and the LSP as the LSP adopts and works to deliver on targets set out in its plan. It is important for the LSP to engage in on-going consultation and discussion with its partners and the local community. There should also be special dedicated efforts to facilitate the input of marginalized and disadvantaged groups.
4. At the time of submitting its application for core and challenge funding the strategic planning process will have helped LSPs to focus on goals, targets and evaluation systems. Coupled with the work carried out in the planning process, LSPs should have clear expectations of the level of Irish Sports Council support for their plans. They should also include the levels of input required from partners to ensure the plan can be implemented.

There are three types of sports organisation:

- ▶ **Those that wonder what is happening**
- ▶ **Those that watch what is happening**
- ▶ **Those that make things happen**

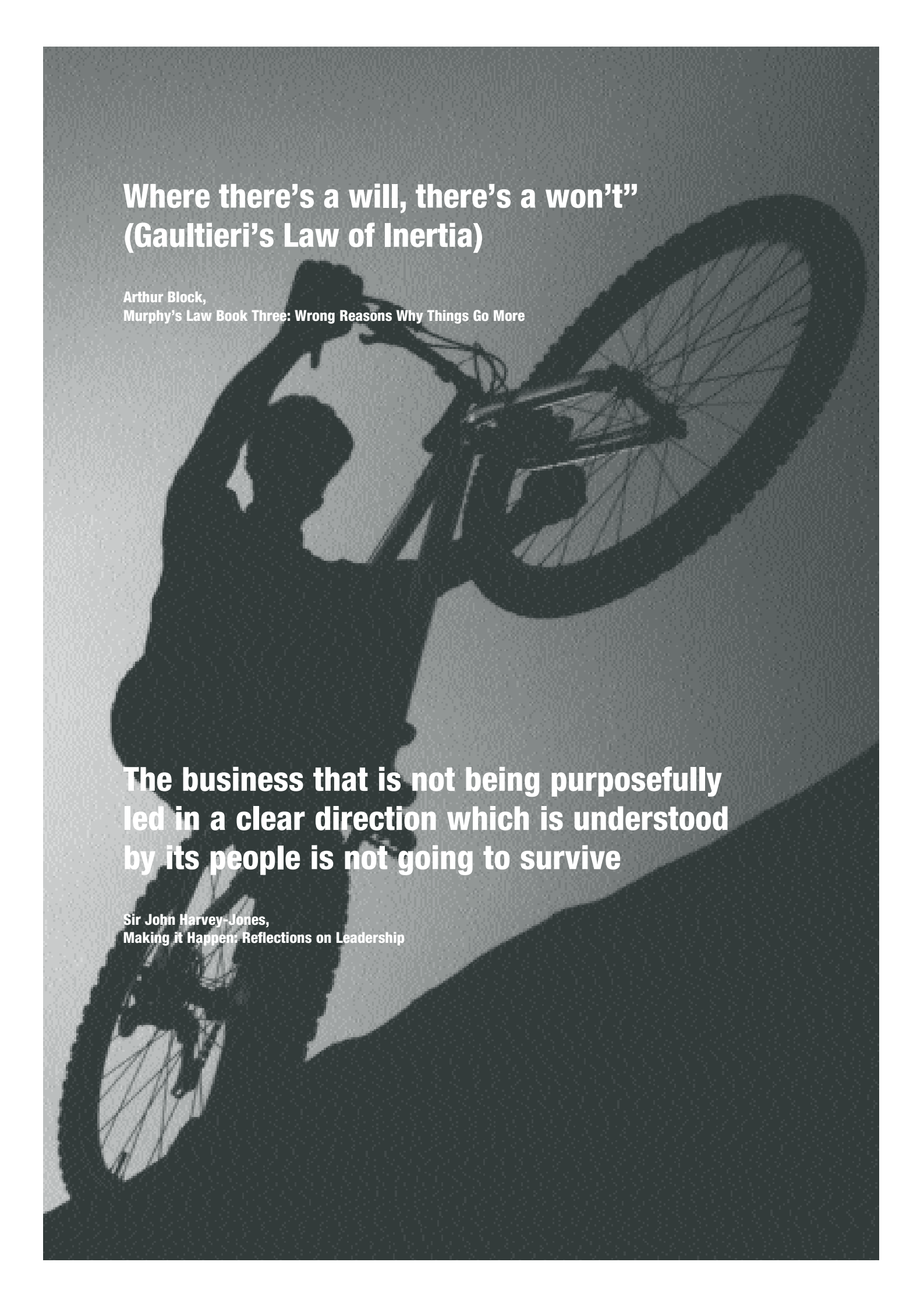
**Australian Sports Commission,
Planning in Sport**

**There ain't no such things as a free lunch
(Crane's Law)**

**Arthur Bloch,
The Complete Murphy's Laws: A Definitive Collection**

**The best way to anticipate the future is to
invent it**

**Rosabeth May Kanter,
When Giants Learn to Dance**



**Where there's a will, there's a won't"
(Gaultieri's Law of Inertia)**

Arthur Block,
Murphy's Law Book Three: Wrong Reasons Why Things Go More

**The business that is not being purposefully
led in a clear direction which is understood
by its people is not going to survive**

Sir John Harvey-Jones,
Making it Happen: Reflections on Leadership

2. MANAGING CHANGE

Key Principles

Whatever approach a particular LSP takes to the preparation of its strategic plan, there are a number of key principles it should bear in mind from the start.

First, **the leadership of the LSP has to be committed** to the planning process and the eventual plan right from the outset. If they sit on the fence until it is finished, and then pick and choose the bits they like, the plan is probably doomed. It's also the case that if there is no commitment to the plan from the start, those in positions of authority may feel they don't have to argue their case fully during the planning process because they can tinker with the final plan later.

Second, **the process must be an inclusive one**, which involves all key stakeholders including the local community. Canvassing the views of partners and the local area and involving them in key decisions can be difficult and people may have difficulty in making constructive suggestions for the future. This is particularly the case when clubs and other groups doubt that real change is about to happen. If all the elements of the LSP can be persuaded that a strategic plan really will deliver the proposed outcomes this suspicion can be overcome.

LSPs have responsibilities relating to the general development of sport amongst current non-participants. These guidelines have already emphasised the importance of working in partnership whenever possible. Potential partner agencies (sponsors, private facility operators, etc) can be regarded as LSP "stakeholders": what they do will affect, or be affected by, the work of the LSP. Therefore it makes sense to bring them into the process, particularly as they can also offer a useful external perspective and different experience. The more that an LSP can base its planning on wide consultation the better.

Third, **the process is more important than the agreed plan document** – which, for some people, can almost be the purpose of the process. It is the process of preparing the plan that generates consensus and shared ownership, not the final printed document, however good it may be. This reinforces the need for an inclusive planning process. A key role for the Local Sports Co-ordinator will be to facilitate this process and ensure that all views are taken on board.

Fourth, **what really matters are the results** achieved as a result of the planning process and implementing the plan. A strategic plan is not prepared for its own sake, but to determine and deliver desired outcomes. Desired outcomes for the LSPs would include improved opportunities for participation and better educational opportunities for volunteers. It is also important to bear in mind that the new developments are sustainable and that the outcomes will benefit the community at large.

Fifth, **the process takes considerable time and effort** but should be based on common sense and not over-complicated or reliant on management jargon. The time spent on the planning process is time well spent if it ensures that the plan produced is truly representative of the interests of the local area.

Sixth, **there is no single, “correct” way to produce a strategic plan;** different LSPs have different needs, face different problems and have different resources and skills. The experience of the City/County Development Boards will prove very beneficial to LSPs in figuring out what method works best for their area.

Lastly, the LSP should be aware of the need for it to proof its strategic plan in relation to poverty & exclusion, rural development, equality, social, economic and cultural policies.

The **proofing process** involves ensuring that key topics and themes are explicitly taken into account in a Strategy. There should be an element of formality in terms of both process and a record of its having occurred. Proofing should occur over the period of preparation and should be built into implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The City/County Development Boards have been involved in the proofing process when developing their own plans and therefore, their experience will inform the work of the planning team of the LSP.

Who Should Prepare the Strategic Plan?

Each LSP has to adapt the methods described in these guidelines to suit its own needs. It is accepted that strategic planning must involve wide-scale consultation to reinforce the partnership's sense of ownership. The plan should not be prepared by one or two office-bearers or specialist “experts” working in isolation; if it is, the plan will almost certainly lack the support required for its successful implementation.

The best approach may be to create a small planning team, with a specific individual given the job of drafting the plan. The role of the planning team is very much an overseeing one, as it should not undertake the work itself. Its job is to be a sounding board; identify individuals or organisations that should be consulted; prevent the plan heading off on irrelevant tangents; monitoring progress; and keeping their membership informed.

The planning team should be a sub-committee of the Board of Directors. The planning team should carry out their work under the general superintendence and control of the Board.

The strategy was prepared over the course of a three month period by a strategy team, representative of various grades and work areas in the Department, set up to oversee and drive the process. Senior management at head of division level met on a number of occasions and discussed mandate, mission, stakeholders, customer/client expectations and environmental issues. Subsequently there was an extensive consultation process with all members of staff. Workshops, with independent facilitators, allowed staff in each division to challenge and build upon the work already initiated by the strategy team and senior management.

Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation,
Statement of Strategy 1998-2001

Any organisation, which has been through an effective planning process can throw away its plan because everyone should know what is in it, why and be keen to implement it.

American management guru
Tom Peters

The Use of External Facilitators

External facilitators can be used in two main ways. The first is to appoint consultants to work for the LSP and prepare a draft plan for it to consider. This will almost never be successful. The consultant will be objective, certainly, but this approach does not lend itself to building the shared ownership of the plan, which is essential to success.

Moreover, however good or bad the plan may be, it will be too easy for those who do not like “the consultant’s plan” for some reason – for example, it may threaten their position – to argue that it will not deliver the required results or does not reflect the LSP’s views adequately and therefore should be ignored. In these circumstances the money spent on the consultant will be wasted.

The second approach is to use an independent facilitator to help the LSP shape its thinking (but not do that thinking) and prepare its plan. This approach is likely to be more successful as an independent outsider will assist the plan preparation but remain under the control of the LSP. This approach was used by the Irish Sports Council to assist in the preparation of its strategy, A New Era for Sport. If the LSP decides to appoint an external facilitator they should consult with the Irish Sports Council before and at the time of the appointment.

The advantages of using an independent facilitator in this way are usually:

- ▶ Outsiders are objective and do not bring with them “past baggage”
- ▶ Outsiders may not know (and may well be uninterested) in fine detail but should be able to identify key issues
- ▶ Outsiders’ involvement is time-limited and so they can open up cans of worms, which will not be popular with some individuals – although others may heave a sigh of relief
- ▶ Outsiders provide a focus for fostering change and may well have relevant experience of how other organisations operate
- ▶ Outsiders are a temporary extra resource for the LSP, not involved in day-to-day administration and therefore able to spend time thinking, talking and facilitating the planning process.

3. THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

Introduction

All strategic plans have three basic elements:

- ▶ Where are we today? – the starting point for the plan
- ▶ Where do we want to be at some time in the future? – the vision, mission, goals and objectives
- ▶ How do we get there? – the action plan

The process of actually producing a plan isn't so easily structured under these three headings; for example, they do not obviously include a means of getting a plan adopted or a regular review of it. One answer is to follow a seven-step process:

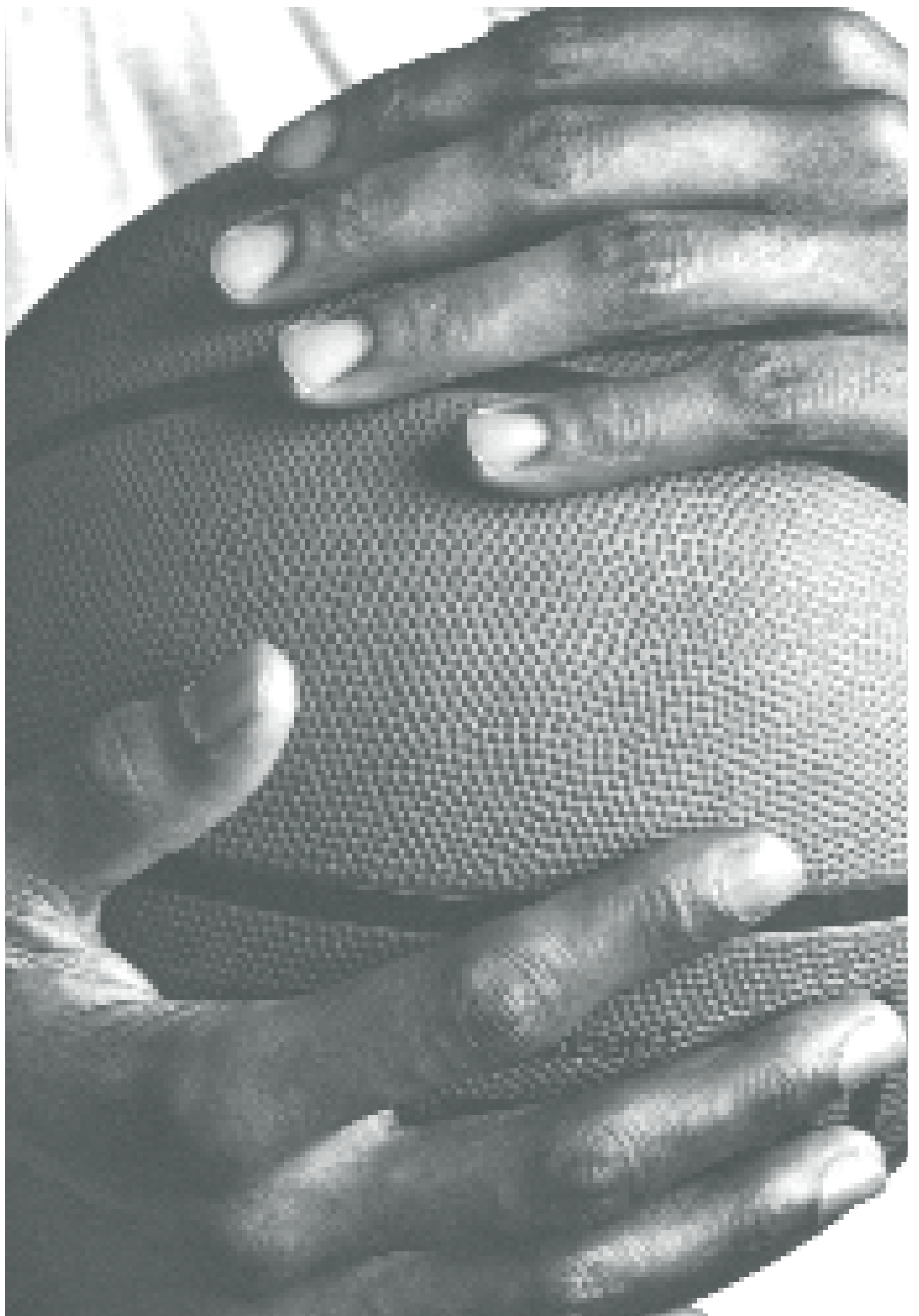
- ▶ **Step 1** Plan the plan
- ▶ **Step 2** Analysis
- ▶ **Step 3** Planning Workshop
- ▶ **Step 4** Synthesis
- ▶ **Step 5** Consultation and adoption
- ▶ **Step 6** Implementation
- ▶ **Step 7** Review

The process, and the role of the various "key players" involved in it, is summarised in the diagram below.

THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

	The role of the LSP Executive	The role of the Planning Team	The role of an external facilitator (if appointed)	Key consultations
1 Plan the Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consult the Irish Sports Council Agree the need for the plan Appoint Planning Team Commit publicity to the plan Inform membership Run the LSP during the planning process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify key stakeholders Draw up plan programme Select and brief external facilitator (if required) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advise the Planning Team as necessary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consult the Irish Sports Council before doing anything else Discuss the 'Plan for the Plan' with the key stakeholders
2 Analysis 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undertake or oversee <ul style="list-style-type: none"> External analysis Internal analysis Preparation of Analysis Report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assist and advise the Planning Team as necessary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss the Analysis Report with the Local Sports Forum
3 Planning Workshop 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan the Planning Workshop Make the necessary administrative arrangements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare for and lead the Planning Workshop 	
4 Synthesis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agree and circulate the summary of the LSP's strategic direction to key stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare or oversee the first draft of the LSP's strategic direction Prepare or oversee drafts of the plan Draw up the consultation plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare a first draft of the LSP's overall strategic direction Write and amend the draft plan as required by the Planning Team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consult stakeholders over the overall strategic direction
5 Consultation and adoption 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Put the plan on the agenda for adoption at the Local Sports Forum Launch the plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consult stakeholders Present the plan to the membership at the Local Sports Forum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assist and advise the Planning Team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Before the Local Sports Forum: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consult the Sports Council for an informal reaction to the plan Consult stakeholders
6 Implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Select and appoint Committees as appropriate Implement the Plan 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Submit the plan with the first year's action plan and grant aid application to the Irish Sports Council Involve stakeholders as appropriate
7 Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare a report on the past year for the membership at the Local Sports Forum Give the plan a 10,000 mile service every year Thoroughly review the plan every four years 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use the local Sports Forum as a "sounding board" each year

Annual review



STEP 1: PLAN THE PLAN

Before the work of actually producing the plan can really start, a number of key decisions have to be taken. These decisions will affect the eventual outcome, so they require careful consideration:

- ▶ **The composition of the “planning team”:** the last section suggested the creation of a team to oversee the planning process. This should be a group of no more than about half a dozen people – more than this and it can be very difficult to arrange meetings – who are committed to the long term good of the LSP. Ideally, they should have no personal axes to grind: they are on the planning team to represent the area as a whole, not a particular interest group/sport.
- ▶ **How the plan is going to be prepared:** at the outset it is important to determine whether the plan preparation is to be done completely “in-house” or will involve an external facilitator and the broad approach to be adopted. This guide is intended as a template, which LSPs can adapt to their own particular needs.
- ▶ **Identify key internal stakeholders:** LSPs have a number of internal stakeholders (partners, local community, etc) who will be affected directly by the planning process and outcomes of the plan. These will include:
 - The LSP’s partners
 - The Local Sports Forum
 - Professional staff: LSP staff is likely to be affected by the preparation of a strategic plan. Staff must be included in the process, otherwise might gain the impression the plan is being prepared behind her/ his back.
 - Others (this dependent on local circumstances)
- ▶ **Decide on the key external stakeholders:** LSPs also have external stakeholders – the organisations with which they interact such as schools, sponsors, the Irish Sports Council and Government Departments. In addition, if there are outside organisations with which the LSP is likely to wish to work in partnership, it will often help to bring them in to the planning process. In many instances external stakeholders will not wish to be involved on an ongoing basis but this does not mean they should be ignored.
- ▶ **Set a broad timetable for the planning process:** preparing a strategic plan nearly always takes longer than expected at the outset, so build some “float” time into any programme for the preparation of a plan. When setting the overall programme, the key dates on which to base the plan timetable are usually:

The end of the financial year: the best time to start implementing a new strategic plan is at the beginning of an ISC funding year. This allows an existing budget to continue while the plan and related new budget are prepared

When the LSP has to submit its plan to the Irish Sports Council. Any deadline set by the Council will obviously be a critical date to take into account when planning the plan. Any LSP will want to ensure that the Irish Sports Council will be willing to support its plan before submitting it. Accordingly it will be imperative to discuss the plan as it evolves with the Irish Sports Council and the Guidelines indicate appropriate stages in the planning process to do this.

The other key elements of Step 1 are:

- ▶ **Give a commitment to implement the plan** before it is started; this will demonstrate to the community and Irish Sports Council that the LSP is taking the planning process seriously. In turn, this should help to bring people into the process because they realise that change is possible.
- ▶ **Let all elements of the LSP know** about the proposal to prepare a strategic plan, the make-up of the planning team, why the plan is needed, the timetable for its production and invite contributions. It is almost inevitable that rumours about the content of the plan will start and the planning team should be open and the process transparent right from the start.
- ▶ Ensure that the existing administrative structure is able to **“keep the show on the road”** during the planning process

STEP 2: ANALYSIS

The first step in the actual plan preparation is to prepare a statement of “where we are today”. As much as possible this should be factual, although conclusions and trends should also be included. The analysis should relate to both the external context within which the LSP operates and its own internal policies and those of its partners. The Irish Sports Council will be in a position to contribute to this work from a national policy perspective. Its overall purpose is to set the scene for the remainder of the planning process. It does this by identifying the context within which the plan will be set; taking stock of what the LSP will do; and summarising the key issues the strategic plan must tackle.

2A: The External Context

No plan exists in isolation; instead, it is set in a particular context and should be part of a “cascade” of plans, which should inter-relate and reinforce each other. This cascade is both “top down” and “bottom up”. In top down terms, for example, the policies and priorities in the Irish Sports Council’s A New Era for Sport (September 2000) set the context for the Council’s policies; these set the context for LSP plans; and they set the context for local groups/clubs plans. However, LSPs will have to obtain the support not only of the Irish Sports Council but also of their partners and forum for their plan and therefore will have to take full account of their wishes when preparing it - the bottom up part of the planning cascade. This may seem very bureaucratic at first, but is actually common sense because ultimately it means everyone should be pulling in the same direction.



There is no need for the external analysis to be long or complex: a bullet point summary of no more than about a dozen key points which the LSP should take on board is usually adequate. One way of structuring them is under four headings in a “PEST” analysis:

- ▶ **Political** factors such as the government’s commitment to increasing participation in sport by those who are disadvantaged for some reason, particularly young people, and its desire for greater accountability in voluntary bodies

- ▶ **Economic** factors such as the potential sport offers to create employment or work with tourism interests
- ▶ **Social** factors such as the changing role of women and changing work patterns
- ▶ **Technological** factors such as competition from computer games for children's time and the impact of the internet and e-mail on LSP administration

It can be useful to follow each bullet point in a PEST analysis by its implication for the LSP: for example, one implication of changing work patterns is that there may be scope to develop coaching courses for adult participants during normal working hours.

2B: Internal Analysis

The internal analysis, perhaps paradoxically, can be a lot more difficult; certainly it should be wide-ranging and cover all the current work of the partners in the LSP. Again, the analysis need not be long-winded and can be prepared in bullet point form. But it must build up to a factually based, wholly objective and, if necessary, brutally frank picture of the LSP. Wherever possible, basic facts and figures should relate to the way in which the LSP is structured. This will also allow the LSP to identify trends over time and benchmark its performance against other LSPs. The main areas to review are described below.

ESTABLISHED MISSION, AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Every LSP should have a statement in its Memorandum and Articles of its "objects" – the reasons why it exists.

BASIC FACTS AND FIGURES

Current data for the local area will have been collated during the planning process of the City/County Development Boards. This information will be useful to the LSP in identifying target groups/areas that should be focussed on in the future through the strategic plan.

- ▶ Baseline figures on participation in the local area
- ▶ Club membership figures
- ▶ Demographic information relating to gender and age breakdown, socio-economic groups and the prevalence of people with a disability in the local community
- ▶ The number of clubs, coaches and leaders

STAKEHOLDER VIEWS

LSPs may have many stakeholders, each with a view of what it should be doing and how it is currently performing.

This can be gauged by:

- ▶ Undertaking a questionnaire survey of clubs and local groups
- ▶ VECs database/wealth of experience
- ▶ Arranging roadshows or consultation meetings
- ▶ Establishing the views of external stakeholders and the potential for developing partnerships with them

VOLUNTEERING

The Irish Sports Council is aware that it is becoming more and more difficult to attract volunteers and that some LSPs may wish to target this in their strategic plan. As a result, LSPs may need to review trends in volunteering to identify the extent to which new volunteers are coming forward and, if there is a problem, why this should be so.

FACILITIES

Most sports require facilities but Ireland is only beginning to build a good range of facilities. Review the provision of facilities – for example, their quantity, quality, location, who owns them, and how the LSP can use them. Although the Irish Sports Council does not control the funding of sports facilities, the LSPs should be involved in providing advice to local groups making capital grant applications on behalf of the local area to the Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation.

PARTNERSHIPS/SUPPORT SERVICES

The LSP itself will not have the resources to allow it to do everything, which might be desirable to develop local sport and so must actively seek to develop close links with its partners and to make use of available support services. Review:

- ▶ Opportunities for the LSP to work effectively with partners
- ▶ The LSP company's potential in getting and keeping sponsors for its programmes, bearing in mind that a range of tried and tested programmes will be available from the Irish Sports Council

IMAGE AND COMMUNICATIONS

Sport is competing with many other activities for participants and so effective public relations are essential. Review:

- ▶ The image of sport in the local area
- ▶ Marketing and promotion of programmes

ADMINISTRATION AND USE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Information technology should have had a significant impact on the way LSPs operate in ways ranging from the use of simple mailing lists to desktop publishing and e-mail. As many people interested in the work of the LSP will be able to access the internet either at home or work, it may be possible to be more effective by using e-mail. There may also be other ways in which administrative procedures could be streamlined such as availing of shared services provided by the Irish Sports Council.

FINANCE

The easiest, most common and by far the worst way to produce a budget is to take last year's income and expenditure figures and add a percentage for inflation. Such an approach stifles change. As organisations with limited financial resources of their own, LSPs need to use money as effectively as possible. It will help to split expenditure into "pay" (including PRSI contributions) and "non-pay" costs such as training courses, travel and subsistence, postage and telecommunications, printing and office supplies, merchandise costs, office premises, consultancy/legal/audit services, insurance and incidental expenses.

In broad terms, the less LSPs depend on grant aid the more they are their own masters. LSPs should bear in mind that support from the Irish Sports Council is split between core and challenge funding. Financial planning should also take into account the inputs that will be made by the partners to the company particularly in relation to core costs.

OUTCOMES

The ultimate emphasis in any strategic plan must always be on outcomes – what is actually achieved. In order to provide basic information for the plan, compare inputs (for example, of cash and time) with outcomes and try to determine value for money, if necessarily on a subjective basis. It is often the case that large amounts of time and money are expended to achieve relatively little – an example of the 80:20 rule in action.

2C: Summary Report

The outcome of Step 2 should be a “warts and all” summary of the findings of the analysis stage which also sets out the key issues the LSP must tackle and the resources it already has available or could seek to get in the future. It does not need to be particularly long (a bullet point format is usually fine) but must be clear and identify the key issues the LSP must tackle. It can also be useful to include a SWOT analysis, although there is often a tendency to view this as an end in itself, including too much and then taking little notice of it. Useful headings for the analysis report can include:

- ▶ Structure
- ▶ Resources: essentially money and other inputs
- ▶ Performance benchmarking
 - Organisation, co-ordination and communication
 - Training of volunteers
 - Sport for disadvantaged/targeted groups
 - Recreational sport
 - Sport for young people
 - Coach education, development and deployment
 - Facilities
- ▶ Club development
- ▶ Marketing and promotion
- ▶ Key issues for the future

Each section should identify existing objectives and targets if they exist; resources used to try to deliver them; and outcomes.

At this stage it can be useful to get an independent response to the analysis from someone who knows the LSP and the people involved in it but not part of it.

As likely as not, rumours will start as soon as the analysis report is produced and some people will convince themselves, often with no evidence that it has been or will be kept from them. Such rumours and misinformation can seriously harm the strategic planning process because they usually take a disproportionate amount of effort to overcome and divert attention from more important matters. If someone asks for a copy, make sure they get it – another reason for keeping the Analysis Report as short as possible. It will also be sensible to circulate the analysis report to partners and clubs (as appropriate e.g. post on website) to make the point that the whole of the planning process is open and transparent.

STEP 3: PLANNING WORKSHOP

LSPs may find gathering a mass of analytical information comparatively easy but deciding what to do with it is much more difficult. One response is to undertake more analysis, but this can be counter-productive because the problem of deciding what is really important becomes even more difficult. However, Step 3 is the critical one in terms of shaping the eventual plan because it is the stage in which the “big” decisions are taken. These big decisions relate primarily to three things:

- ▶ The LSP's vision of the future
- ▶ The LSP's mission
- ▶ The LSP's key goals

Those involved in this stage of the process must take care not to get bogged down in detail; instead they must concentrate on setting the overall direction and priorities of the LSP for the next few years. This means that they must ignore individual interests or loyalties and seek instead to “invent” the role of the LSP. Furthermore, the process must neither be rushed nor led by any particular interest group within the LSP.

Possible approaches are:

- ▶ The planning team can undertake the task.
- ▶ One or two day intensive, interactive workshop with key people who will be involved in implementing the eventual plan, although not all of them should be Directors.

While the other approach may be appropriate in some instances, in most cases a **planning workshop** offers the best prospect of success. Key characteristics of successful workshops are:

- ▶ They should last a minimum of a day and ideally a weekend from say lunchtime on the Saturday to after lunch on the Sunday.
- ▶ They should involve 12-20 people, carefully selected to include a blend of those already involved and people not directly involved at present, but with their own views on how the LSP should develop in future. Again, it may be worth including some individuals who have been critical of the LSP, provided they can be constructive. If appropriate, workshops may also include one or two key external stakeholders or potential partners.
- ▶ They should be planned and led by someone who is not aligned with any constituent part of the LSP so that all present can see them as neutral with no particular axe to grind. This will often, although not necessarily, require an external facilitator.
- ▶ They should be held at a “neutral” venue, not associated with any specific part of the LSP (such as an hotel or University) so that participants will not be distracted or called away.
- ▶ The venue must be equipped with visual aids (at least a flip chart and whiteboard and possibly an overhead projector and screen) and space for the workshop to split into small groups from time to time.

A well planned and facilitated workshop is both stimulating and exhausting. It will tend to be most effective when all those present already know one another as this will save time on “ice-breaking”. There must also be two ground rules, rigidly enforced by the facilitator:

- ▶ The workshop is concerned with the future, not the past: it should not go over old ground and re-visit old arguments
- ▶ There are no sacred cows: anything can be scrapped or changed

The key outcomes needed from the workshop are usually:

- ▶ A **vision** of what the LSP wishes itself to be like in the future
- ▶ A **mission statement** for the LSP designed to lead to the delivery of the vision
- ▶ The LSP's **core values** or **principles** on which the plan will be based
- ▶ A small number (no more than 5 or 6, the fewer the better) of **broad goals** for the LSP, derived from the mission, each with a limited number of related measurable and time-related objectives
- ▶ Agreement on a limited number of **programme or functional areas** (again, no more than 5 or 6) to which the various aims and objectives can be linked. These programme or functional areas will probably set the future structure of the LSP.

The agenda for the workshop will depend upon the LSP, but is normally likely to include:

- ▶ Introductions – make sure everyone knows one another
- ▶ Analysis report – review to agree key conclusions and key issues the plan must tackle
- ▶ SWOT analysis for the LSP
- ▶ Determine the vision for the future
- ▶ Determine the LSP's mission
- ▶ Identify desirable goals or outcomes, in order of priority
- ▶ Determine objectives to deliver the goals
- ▶ Identify programme areas

The workshop should be planned in such a way that all participants are encouraged by the facilitator to contribute and as a mixture of plenary and small group sessions.

The Vision

The ultimate purpose of a strategic plan is to deliver a desirable future. Accordingly it is essential to decide, right at the outset, what that desirable future will be. This is the vision of a successful LSP. It is most easily determined by imagining the LSP as highly successful in 4-5 years time and then answering nine key questions:

- ▶ Why will the LSP be successful?
- ▶ What will "successful" mean?
- ▶ What will the LSP be doing?
- ▶ Who will be involved in the LSP?
- ▶ How will the LSP be operating?
- ▶ What would happen if the LSP disbanded?
- ▶ What will partners and the local community think or say about the LSP?
- ▶ What will the LSP actually be achieving?
- ▶ What differences will the LSP be making to its local area?

If possible, the vision should be distilled down to one or at most two reasonably short sentences with which everyone at the workshop agrees. The shorter the vision, the better, because then workshop participants – and ultimately everyone involved in the LSP- will remember it. A long-winded vision is easily forgotten and therefore ignored. In addition it must be realistic but also inspire. However, a vision statement that is hopelessly over-ambitious is likely to be laughed out of court. Equally, a turgid and conservative one will fail to generate enthusiasm.

For examples the **Irish Sports Council** vision sees Ireland as a country in which:

- ▶ Everyone is welcomed and valued in sport, irrespective of their ability and background
- ▶ Individuals can develop their sporting abilities and enjoyment, limited only by their talent and commitment
- ▶ Irish sportsmen and women achieve consistent world class performance, fairly

Mission

An organisation's mission statement sets out its fundamental purpose for existing – what it will do itself in order to deliver the vision it has set. Here are some examples:

- ▶ **The Walt Disney Company:** To make people happy
- ▶ **Australian Sports Commission:** To enrich the lives of all Australians through sport
- ▶ **Hillary Commission:** All New Zealanders participating and achieving in sport, fitness and leisure
- ▶ **Irish Sports Council:** To plan, lead and co-ordinate the sustainable development of sport in Ireland

The purpose of having a mission statement is to set out with absolute clarity what an organisation seeks to achieve. It can then be used to test proposals for any new programme or other initiative. If it will help to deliver the mission it can be pursued, subject to the availability of resources; if not, forget it. A mission statement should therefore be very powerful: not only should it set out what an organisation wants to achieve, but by implication it also identifies those things it will not do.

The key questions to consider when preparing a mission statement are usually:

- ▶ Why do we exist?
- ▶ What purpose do we aim to fulfil?
- ▶ Who are our primary targets?
- ▶ How do we intend to deliver our vision?

Like the vision, and for the same reason, short, simple mission statements are far better than long ones: Disney's four-word approach is therefore close to ideal. A good rule of thumb is never to include more than one "and", other than in phrases like "sport and recreation". If the LSP cannot set out its fundamental reason for existence in a single, tight sentence, either it doesn't really have a fundamental purpose or it's trying to do far too much. The more complex an organisation is, and the more diffuse its purpose, the more difficult it is to manage. In addition, its members and customers or clients will also find its purpose unclear. The mission of a shoe shop is to make a profit by selling shoes and as this is normally clear to customers they don't waste their own or assistants' time asking for books, flowers or whatever. A department store, comparatively speaking, is a management and customers' nightmare. This is one reason why many department stores have disappeared: they cannot compete effectively with tightly focused and more efficient speciality shops.

In everything we do, we will promote best practice. More specifically:

- ▶ **As sport has the potential to enrich the lives of everyone, no one should be excluded from it on the grounds of gender, disability, religion, ethnic origin or sexual orientation. In all our work, therefore, we will promote inclusiveness.**
- ▶ **We will be an open, honest and accountable organisation, which seeks to base its decisions on objective evidence in preference to unsubstantiated opinions.**
- ▶ **We will co-operate with and support other agencies and organisations that share our desire to promote sport and through it a better quality of life.**

**"A New Era for Sport",
The Irish Sports Council's Strategy 2000-2002**

Core Values

We all believe in a number of core values or principles – the things we believe in - which guide the way we live our lives. Unfortunately not everyone believes in exactly the same things, which is of course one reason why we have political parties and arguments. The research leading to the production of *Targeting Sporting Change in Ireland* generated widespread agreement that the development of sport should encompass seven core principles:

- ▶ A people centred focus
- ▶ Equality
- ▶ Partnership
- ▶ Quality
- ▶ Accountability
- ▶ Volunteerism
- ▶ Sustainability

To these must be added an ethical approach to sport – condemnation of drug abuse or other forms of cheating and a concern to safeguard the welfare of children. These principles, or core values, underpin the whole development of sport in Ireland. It is desirable for LSPs also to summarise their core values clearly as this will help to define the “organisational culture” within the LSP.

Key Goals and Objectives

There are likely to be a number of ways in which the LSP can set out to pursue its mission in order to achieve its vision. The workshop should try to identify a limited number of key goals, which will do this – five or six are usually ample. With more than this, the LSP’s efforts and resources will have to be spread thinly and may achieve little. Goals do not have to be quantified but they must lead **directly** to the achievement of the vision and be compatible with the mission. The simplest way of identifying suitable goals is usually:

- ▶ Break the vision down into its constituent parts
- ▶ Decide what will have to be done to deliver each component of the vision; and
- ▶ Test each potential initiative or programme against the mission – is it our job to do this?

Once goals are agreed, it should be possible to set out the action, which will be needed to achieve them.

Programme Areas

Finally, if there is time, the workshop should seek to allocate the various objectives to a series of “programme areas”. Most LSPs will be able to identify a small number of programme areas such as:

- ▶ Finance
- ▶ Administration
- ▶ Club development
- ▶ Marketing and promotion
- ▶ Volunteers’ and coaches’ development and deployment
- ▶ Target groups

STEP 4: SYNTHESIS

The outcomes from the planning workshop set the overall direction of the LSP for the future. However, the workshop will almost certainly not have had the time to decide all the tasks, which will have to be undertaken, the resources which will be needed and who will be responsible for progressing each of them. This is done in Step 4, the Synthesis, the outcome of which will be the draft strategic plan.

Preparing the first draft of the plan is not a job for a committee: the result will be a camel rather than a horse. Instead, it is usually better to entrust the job to an individual. The individual will:

- ▶ Take the results of the workshop and put them down on paper in a structured and balanced way
- ▶ Flesh out the various objectives agreed at the workshop into a series of “action plans” based on appropriate tasks

The way in which the plan is structured will significantly affect the way it is used and therefore its effectiveness. It should be based on a hierarchical approach of:

- ▶ The LSP's vision and mission
- ▶ The LSP's core values
- ▶ What the LSP wants to achieve – its goals
- ▶ The LSP's specific objectives related to each of its goals
- ▶ An action plan for achieving each objective

4A: Mission, Vision, Core Values, Goals and Objectives

Immediately after the workshop, with agreement on the overall future direction of the LSP and a head of steam behind its emerging plan, there is perhaps a danger of going too fast for the partnership. The workshop participants may not in fact have been representative of the LSP in general and some key stakeholders will not have had the chance to influence the overall direction of the LSP and its plan. Before doing too much work on the plan, therefore, it will be desirable to check that it is on the right lines by inviting partners and the forum as appropriate, to comment on the proposed vision, mission, core values, goals and objectives. There are two key advantages to doing this before beginning to draft a detailed action plan:

- ▶ Key stakeholders will have the chance to comment on the plan at a time when it has clearly not yet been finalised, making them feel that they really do have a chance to influence it
- ▶ If changes are made, whoever is drafting the plan will not have done a lot of potentially abortive work

4B: The Draft Plan

Once responses have been received from key stakeholders, the Planning Team should either know that the plan is on the right lines or take account of the various comments made and amend the vision, mission, core values, goals and objectives as necessary. It can then get on with fleshing out the various objectives into an action plan.

There are various ways of setting out the appropriate actions to achieve a specific objective. What matters it that everything in the action plan should be SMART:

- ▶ **S**imple – so that everyone can understand it
- ▶ **M**easurable – because “what gets measured, gets done” and so the LSP can know whether a target has been achieved
- ▶ **A**greed - by everyone involved in implementation
- ▶ **R**ealistic – and therefore achievable with the resources and within the time available
- ▶ **T**ime-limited – because setting a timescale and deadlines for something tends to lead to action

The best format to use is a tabular one, with a common format for the action plan under each objective. Suitable headings to use are:

- ▶ Proposed actions or tasks
- ▶ Starting point – the position at the start of the plan or year
- ▶ Performance indicators, or the measures the LSP will use to measure progress, related to each of the proposed actions or tasks. There may be more than one performance indicator for any task
- ▶ Clear, measurable and time-limited targets, setting out what is to be achieved in relation to each performance indicator in each year of the plan
- ▶ Who will be responsible for progressing each of the various tasks
- ▶ The resources to be used or required

Once a first draft is available it should be reviewed by the Planning Team appointed in Step 1, although the membership of the team can of course be changed. This might happen if one or more members have resigned or the planning workshop has identified someone who is very keen to be involved.

The task of the Planning Team is to ensure the draft plan is comprehensive, balanced, realistic, achievable and likely to be acceptable to the LSP. This may require several drafts, although by the time the third or fourth draft is in being any further changes should be very minor. Alternatively, the LSP may need to set up one or more small short life working groups (with no more than 4 members) with a specific remit to oversee particular parts of the plan and then disband. However the revision of the plan is approached, **everything** in it must **always** be tested against the agreed mission.

STEP 5: CONSULTATION AND ADOPTION

A strategic plan which no-one knows about will never be a success. A key part of the strategic planning process is to foster “shared ownership” of the plan by all parts of the LSP. It is clearly impossible for every member of the LSP to be involved in the work of producing the plan, but they should have the opportunity to respond and comment when it is still in draft. There must therefore be a consultation phase before the plan is adopted by the LSP. The LSPs can use the Local Sports Forum to discuss the plan as work on it progresses and also to approve it when it is finalised.

The first, informal consultation should be with the Irish Sports Council, for the simple reason that effective implementation of the plan will almost certainly depend on its support. Also, the Council will be able to give advice on the national policies for sports development and additionally pass on information from other partnerships currently involved in the planning process.

Thereafter, it will be vitally important to consult the full partnership. As the full draft plan is likely to be a fairly lengthy document, circulating a copy to every member could be expensive, particularly as some will not read it. A better approach is to prepare a short summary of no more than say 4 pages, setting out the vision, mission, broad goals and related objectives and an outline of the proposed action plan. This short update could be posted on the LSP’s website. It will then be desirable to provide the opportunity for groups to comment on the plan.

Finally, the plan should be formally adopted by the LSP at a meeting of its forum called for the purpose. This is a vital component of promoting wide ownership of the plan and it also gives a clear mandate to those who will be responsible for implementing it.

**You can't make an omelette
without breaking eggs**

Josef Stalin

**Man is limited not so much
by his tools as by his vision**

Richard Pascale and Anthony Anthos,
The Art of Japanese Management



STEP 6: IMPLEMENTATION

If the plan is not implemented much of the time and effort spent preparing it will have been wasted. Moreover, if Irish Sports Council grant aid is linked to the plan, non-implementation may have implications for grant aid to the LSP from the Council in future years. For obvious reasons, it will usually be sensible to begin implementation of the plan at the start of a financial year.

In the case of LSPs an important part of the implementation process of the strategy will be the marketing and promotion of both it and the LSP itself. It is vital that the local community are both aware of and involved in the work of the LSP in order for it to benefit the greatest number of local people.

Implementation is best organised through annual action plans, prepared and budgeted in advance for each financial year. It is necessary to identify in these plans clear targets and key result areas. Targets set in the action plans should be realisable, specific, measurable and time-limited.

It is becoming more and more difficult to attract volunteers willing to be involved in administration at local level. Fortunately, the greater the clarity there is in the strategic plan relating to the various tasks the LSP wishes to progress, the less there is a need for large committees. Indeed, if an LSP has a comprehensive strategic plan it should be able to be effective with only a few, fairly small committees or short life working groups. As a general rule, there should be as few standing committees as possible, with specific tasks delegated, if necessary, to small short life working groups with a tightly defined remit. It is also more than likely that the strategic planning process will help to bring new people into the heart of the LSP as they come to know more about it and realise what it intends to do.

A key aspect of implementation is the control of money. It is therefore vital to design budgeting and accounting systems, which will ease implementation.

Finally, involving the LSP's members in approving the strategic plan should mean that they would want to be kept informed of progress and approve the broad thrust of each annual action plan. Accordingly the Chairman of the Board of Directors should present a formal report to the forum each year setting out:

- ▶ A reminder of the plan's mission, goals and objectives
- ▶ A summary of the action plan approved the previous year
- ▶ A summary of the progress achieved in implementing the action plan, with an explanation of any changes made during the year
- ▶ A review of overall progress with implementation of their area(s) of the strategic plan to date
- ▶ Proposals for the next year's action plan

STEP 7: REVIEW

A comprehensive and inclusive planning process should result in a vision, mission and broad aims, which will remain valid and guide the work of the LSP for at least 3-5 years. A period of at least this length is required in order to allow the plan and those implementing it time to be effective.

However, this does not mean that it should be set in tablets of stone. If it is, the LSP will not be able to learn from its successes and failures in implementing the plan as it goes along and this would clearly be stupid. All strategic plans should therefore be subject to two forms of review:

- ▶ An annual “health check” to review progress, fine tune the plan and determine the action plan and budgets for the year ahead
- ▶ A complete review from first principles approximately every 5 years. The actual period will depend on the effectiveness of the plan and relate also to appropriate planning cycles for the LSP.

It is through co-operation, rather than conflict, that your greatest successes will be derived.

Ralph Charell

PLANNING TOOLS

Strategic planning is first and foremost common sense.

However, there are some "tools" which can help; but if they are badly used or misunderstood they can sometimes cause more problems than they are worth. This appendix gives brief guidance on using the following tools:

Questionnaire surveys

Focus Groups/Group Discussions

SWOT or PEST analysis

PLANNING TOOLS 1

Questionnaire Surveys

Questionnaire surveys can be a useful means of eliciting information but survey design and interpretation is a skilled affair about which there are many academic textbooks. There are many types of survey, all with their own advantages and disadvantages but the type most likely to be useful to an NGB is the self-completion postal questionnaire. It can be used to determine the broad views, expressed quantitatively (e.g. 20% think this and 40% think that), of organisations, communities or people.

To be statistically valid, the organisation or people surveyed have to be selected at random from the "population" being surveyed. A "population" is not necessarily a group of people: for example, it could be community groups, schools or target groups. The response rate – the proportion of people responding to a postal questionnaire – is usually between about 30% - 40% so don't despair if you get a response rate around this, particularly when you are surveying people who do not immediately see the relevance of their views to your plan. You should get a higher response rate (of 50 – 75% or so) from people or organisations likely to be directly affected by your strategic plan, such as member clubs. It is usually unrealistic to expect to get a 100% response.

Planning the Survey

1. Decide the things you want to find out from the survey. These may be factual (e.g. how many groups have you got) or opinions (e.g. how important is it for the LSP to focus on older people?). Is there some other way you could get this information without undertaking a survey?
2. Decide the "population" you want to survey.
3. Draw up a list of everyone in the "population" you want to survey; this is called the sampling frame.
4. Decide whether to survey everyone in the "population" (called a "census") or only a sample (20%, 40% or whatever, called a "sample survey"). Large samples do not necessarily give a better result, although any LSP surveying its local area would be well advised to survey the majority of clubs, groups and bodies in its area to avoid criticism later.
5. Pick a sample using some random method (e.g. put the groups in alphabetical order, then pick every 4th one or whatever).
6. Think about how you are going to analyse the results before you draw up the questionnaire. If you want only a very simple analysis, most spreadsheets can be used to produce frequencies (the number of respondents answering a question in a particular way, e.g. male or female) but aren't much good for cross-tabulations (linking answers to two questions together e.g. the age and gender of respondents). There are various statistics software packages, which have a greater capacity for analysis but for short questionnaires can tend to over-complicate the matter.
7. Draw up the questionnaire in such a way as to ensure that the questions are completely unambiguous (this needs experience and is best left to someone with survey experience); as much as possible give a range of pre-determined answers to every question as this will make the analysis very much easier. Open-ended questions, where those people filling the questionnaire can put down anything they like, are much more difficult to analyse.
8. Decide on some form of "prize draw" incentive for respondents before sending it out to everyone in the survey and iron out any ambiguities or other problems.

During the Survey

1. Number all the questionnaires before sending them out and make up a list showing who is to get each questionnaire.
2. Send out all the questionnaires at the same time, accompanied by a letter explaining the reason for the survey and setting a deadline for replies – a month is usually right. Include a stamped addressed envelope.
3. Keep a check of the questionnaires returned, using the numbers and send a first reminder to those who haven't responded by the deadline; this can be a letter.
4. About a fortnight later, send a second reminder to those who still haven't responded, this time with a second questionnaire and return envelope. Set a final deadline of about two weeks after this letter.

Presenting the results of the survey

1. Prepare a short report on the results of the survey and circulate it to those who responded and the Board of Directors. Results of this survey could also be presented to the Local Sports Forum.
2. Use the results in the strategic planning process – in the analysis report, at the workshop and in the synthesis stage.

PLANNING TOOLS 2

Focus/Discussion Group

Focus or discussion groups can be a very good way of finding out why people think as they do or sounding them out on possible future policies – which is of course why political parties use them. In market research jargon, questionnaire surveys are used for establishing quantitative information, discussion groups for qualitative. Basically this means the results of discussion groups cannot be expressed in numerical terms. However, they can be every bit as useful as quantitative surveys.

Key Tips

1. Groups should never be more than about a dozen people, although 8 – 10 are probably better.
2. Try to invite people with different opinions or experience.
3. Have two "leaders" for the group – one to chair it and the other to take notes. Ideally the discussion should be recorded, but transcribing it later is a difficult and time-consuming chore.
4. The maximum length should not be more than 3 hours – 2 is better.
5. The job of the chair is to ask open-ended questions (i.e. ones, which cannot be answered "yes", or "no", such as "what do you think about..." Or "why do you think that...?"); to encourage discussion among the members of the group; and encourage everyone to make an input. Therefore, it is important for the chair to have a prepared set of questions before the start of the discussion.
6. The group should sit in a circle or round a table with the chair and note-taker seated apart.
7. If someone hogs the discussion the chair must make efforts to get comments from other people; one way is to ask specific individuals what they think. If necessary, the person who is dominating the group must be asked to let other people have their say.
8. The chair must allow the Group to develop its own discussion around the issues; ideally, different members of the group should argue with each other. The chair should intervene only if the discussion is going off on irrelevant tangents.

PLANNING TOOLS 3

SWOT/PEST Analysis

SWOT Analysis

SWOT analysis is one of the most commonly used planning tools in all sorts of contexts. SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. Strengths and Weaknesses are internal to an organisation and therefore under its control, Opportunities and Threats come from outside and therefore are not.

Ideally, an organisation should try to match up its internal strengths (e.g. a very cohesive partnership) with external opportunities (e.g. the availability of special funding for programmes in disadvantaged areas). However, if its internal weaknesses (e.g. certain target group not part of the partnership) match up with external threats (e.g. decision of statutory agency not to participate in LSP) a potentially serious problem is looming.

PEST Analysis

PEST analysis is a tool for listing and categorising the external factors likely to affect an organisation in the future. PEST stands for Political, Environmental, Social and Technical.

Key Tips

Preparing a SWOT list and PEST analysis both involve "brainstorming" – getting a small group of people to suggest as many relevant points, facts, issues, criteria or whatever as they can think of, based on or around a common theme. These ideas are not discussed as they are produced - no matter how outlandish they may seem – but simply written down. They are then grouped into appropriate categories and the irrelevant suggestions scrapped.

The main weaknesses of both SWOT and PEST analyses is that it is fairly easy to draw up a long list of points but much less easy to decide what to do with them. The following approach can help to overcome this weakness:

1. Make a brief note of all suggestions for the SWOT list, no matter how daft they may seem at the time, but do not discuss them during the brainstorming session. Cover one topic at a time (Strengths or Political factors, for example), although it is of course possible to go back to an earlier topic at any time.
2. Write every suggestion down on a separate "Post-it" note using a black felt tip pen. Try to distil every point down to a maximum of three words – although one is better.
3. Stick all various suggestions up on the wall under each topic heading in a row (or rows) where everyone in the group can see them.
4. Get the group to look for associations between different points and stick them together in groups.
5. Weed out repetition ruthlessly.

6. Try to decide a general description of each group of points by picking the one which is most important or giving a group a new title.
7. Make a new list of the key points under each topic – ideally no more than about three or four.
8. Decide why each of these new points is important for the future of the LSP and its strategic plan. A good way of doing this is to write down the agreed point and then say, "which means that" and then complete the sentence.

PLANNING TOOLS 4

Force Field Analysis

In any organisation there are forces pulling it in different directions; at the simplest, there are forces promoting change and there are also forces resisting it. If they are in equilibrium the organisation remains static and cannot change – for better or worse.

It follows that one way of promoting change is to try to destroy the equilibrium; identify the forces for and against change and either strengthen those in favour of change or remove or weaken some of those against change. In many ways this is a fancy way of saying, "identify the things which are stopping change happening and remove them". With LSPs, the things promoting change are likely to include:

- The policies of government, Irish Sports Council
- Grass roots pressure from clubs and communities
- New developments in local administration e.g. creation of City/County Development Boards
- A move to provide greater opportunities for people to participate in sport
- The need to support and recognise the work of volunteers

Those things opposing change are likely to include:

- Individuals/groups with vested interests in maintaining the status quo
- Myriad of differing view points and agendas at local level
- Poor relationships within the partnership
- Difficulty of involving diverse groups and organisations
- Inertia or fear of the unknown

