

Partnership Governance Framework

Introduction

Partnership working is an increasingly important way for the Council to achieve its priorities. However, as with any Council-funded activity, there is a need to ensure that publicly funded resources are used appropriately, safeguarded, accounted for and deliver value for money. It is also important to regularly review and assess partnerships to make sure they continue to offer value for money and the intended outcomes are achieved. If partnerships are not set up and managed in the right way then they may be a drain on resources rather than increasing efficiency and effectiveness.

This document provides guidance on best practice; how a register of significant partnerships should be maintained and promotes a one-council approach to partnership arrangements.

Directors are responsible for ensuring compliance with these requirements.

The Governance Framework for Significant Partnerships

The updated guidance from CIPFA on Delivering Good Governance in Local Government suggests that public bodies should recognise the benefits of partnership working, but should also monitor these arrangements to ensure that they are contributing to the achievement of corporate priorities. Included within this guidance, and on which the Council's Code of Corporate Governance is based, are seven principles of good governance:

- Principle 1:** Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values and respecting the rule of law.
- Principle 2:** Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement.
- Principle 3:** Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits.
- Principle 4:** Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes.
- Principle 5:** Developing the Council's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it.
- Principle 6:** Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management.
- Principle 7:** Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and audit to deliver effective accountability.

These principles should also support the Council's work with partners. Therefore it is important that there are clearly defined and effective arrangements governing all partnerships to ensure compliance with the principles of good governance above and to protect the Council. Although this guidance is focused on arrangements for those that are identified as significant the good governance principles outlined in this framework should be applied to all partnerships.

It is important that the Council:

- knows the details of partnerships it is involved in and how much money and other resources it invests in them.
- reviews each partnership periodically to strengthen accountability and manage risks.
- agrees and regularly reviews protocols and governing documents with all partners.
- establishes clear criteria against which partnerships can be evaluated to determine and demonstrate that they help to achieve Council and partners' corporate objectives cost effectively.

What is a significant partnership?

Definition of 'partnership'

For the purposes of the framework, a partnership is:

'an agreement between two or more independent bodies to work collectively to achieve a shared objective'

A partnership is a joint working arrangement where the partners:

- are otherwise independent bodies;
- agree to co-operate to achieve common goals and outcomes for the community;
- share accountability, risks, and resources;
- share relevant information; and
- agree processes and programmes to achieve common goals.

Certain arrangements are excluded under the significant partnership definitions although they may be important. These are:

- contractual arrangements where there is a client/contractor relationship;
- agreements where the Council provides the recipient with grant aid (unless these arrangements create a separate decision making structure);
- the Council's strategic delivery companies.

Definition of 'significant'

For the purpose of the framework, a 'significant' partnership is defined as one where one of the following statements can be applied:

- the Council contributes significant funding or other resource to the value of £500,000 or more;
- the partnership is a statutory requirement or is needed to discharge a statutory duty;
- it represents a high risk to the delivery of Council priorities and/or reputation of the Council should it fail.

Directors' responsibilities

Directors are responsible for partnerships in relation to:

- appointing a Lead Officer(s) for each partnership;
- maintaining a register of significant partnerships (See Appendix 1);
- ensuring appropriate governance arrangements are in place (See Appendix 2);
- undertaking an annual review of the register of significant partnerships.

Further detail and guidance is provided in the paragraphs below and at the referenced appendices:

Register of significant partnerships (Appendix 1)

The Council Constitution provides that 'the Council will maintain a register of significant partnerships....' It is also noted as good practice within the CIPFA guidance referred to above. In practice, a register will be maintained by each Director which will be brought together annually for consideration and review by Management Board.

The Council has entered into many partnerships and a list of significant partnerships attempts to clarify the context within which the partnerships operate and ascertain whether appropriate governance arrangements are in place in terms of creation, monitoring, evaluation and improvement of partnering arrangements.

Each Director is responsible for maintaining a register of significant partnerships. It is for Directors to identify the significant partnerships in which they or their staff are involved. They will need to consider whether each agreement to work collectively falls within the definition of a significant partnership set out above.

Governance checklist (Appendix 2)

A governance checklist should be completed for all significant partnerships and relevant documents retained within the Service. This checklist reflects the principles in the Council's Code of Corporate Governance and confirms that good governance arrangements are in place for each partnership. Key documents for each partnership, such as terms of reference / partnership agreement, should be reviewed annually to ensure they are still fit for purpose and the partnership continues to deliver its intended outcomes.

Annual review

Each Director is responsible for reviewing the register of significant partnerships within their Service at least annually to ensure it is kept up to date. The register includes a statement that the governance checklist has been completed/ reviewed for each partnership to confirm that appropriate governance arrangements are in place.

The list of significant partnerships should be signed off annually by each Director to provide assurance on the governance arrangements in place during the year, thereby contributing to the compilation of the Council's Annual Governance Statement.

APPENDIX 1: Register of Significant Partnerships

Partnership (and date of formation)	List of partners (Lead partner in bold type)	Purpose of the partnership & link to Council priorities	Council link officer/ member	Council contribution (finance/ resource)	Reason(s) for significance (Financial/resource; statutory; risk to Council priorities/reputation)	Governance checklist completed/ reviewed and documents in place? If not, comment provided

I declare that the above is a complete list of significant partnerships in place within my Service to the best of my knowledge and that appropriate governance arrangements are in place in accordance with the governance checklist for significant partnerships.

Director's signature:

Title:

Date: / /

APPENDIX 2: Governance Checklist for Significant Partnerships

How to complete the checklist

You need to consider the extent to which each significant partnership identified on Appendix 1 meets each of the requirements of good governance set out below. The checklist provides examples of evidence which can be used as best practice to support good governance arrangements; however, you may wish to use additional or alternative evidence instead. The Council officer named in the register of partnerships should be able to provide supporting documents for the partnership or provide explanations as to why these are not considered necessary.

Internal or External Audit may at any time decide to carry out an audit of the partnership, and may then ask to see evidence of the documents held for the partnership. Therefore it is recommended that you keep all documents in a separate file so that they can be produced when requested.

There may be some requirements which are not applicable to your partnership. Where you feel that a requirement is not applicable you can indicate that this is the case within the checklist and explain why in the “evidence” column.

Governance Checklist for Significant Partnerships

	Requirement	Source documents / good practice / other means that may be used to demonstrate compliance	Evidence/ Comments
1	Each partnership has: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreed and clearly defined shared values and vision. • Clearly defined purpose and outcomes including SMART objectives (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Results focused, Time limited). • Defined roles and responsibilities of each partner (including identified lead officer). • Clear accountability/ lines of reporting. • Documented conflict resolution procedure. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Terms of reference/ partnership agreement. • Council Director and lead officer(s) responsible for partnership delivery are recorded. 	
2	Each partnership has identified contribution(s) to the delivery of Council outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership register records link to Council outcome. • Minutes of meetings. • Review of terms of reference/partnership agreement, objectives, membership, etc. 	
3	Council contribution(s) to each partnership is defined.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial contribution recorded. • Resource contribution recorded. 	
4	There is a documented and effective process for communication between partners and with stakeholders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication strategy • Communication between partners. • Communication with stakeholders. • Meeting minutes (attendance levels, reader friendly format). 	
5	Performance monitoring arrangements are in place.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance indicators agreed. • Performance reports. • Minutes of meetings. • Action plan(s) recorded to address poor performance. 	
6	Risks are managed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk management procedure. • Risks and mitigations documented. 	

	Requirement	Source documents / good practice / other means that may be used to demonstrate compliance	Evidence/ Comments
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Included in partnership and/or Service risk register. • Business continuity plans. 	
7	Protocol for sharing information is in place.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data sharing agreement. • Protocol communicated. 	
8	Exit arrangements are defined.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End date of partnership has been identified, if appropriate. • Terms of reference/ partnership agreement. 	
9	Effective governance and scrutiny arrangements are defined.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Terms of reference/ partnership agreement. • Reports to officers/ members. 	
10	Effective internal control and financial management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal/external audit reports. • Financial reporting. 	