

STAFFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL - PARTNERSHIP PROTOCOL

1 Background

The Best Value Review of Partnerships identified a number of shortcomings in our approach to partnership working. For example;

- We are not clear why some partnerships have been entered into and what the mutual benefits are.
- Partnerships are not always aligned to our corporate priorities.
- We do not always have clear exit strategies.

This protocol seeks to address these and other issues and set a more formalised approach to partnership working.

2 Defining Partnerships

A partnership is defined as “a group of stakeholders brought together from a range of organisations, to be responsible for tackling mainly long-term challenges and opportunities in which they have a shared interest”. The Audit Commission describes partnerships as a joint working arrangement where the partners:-

- Are otherwise independent bodies
- Agree to co-operate to achieve a common goal(s)
- Create a new organisational structure or process to achieve this goal(s) separate from their own organisations
- Plan and implement a jointly agreed programme, often with joint staff or resources
- Share relevant information
- Pool risks and rewards

This definition also makes a distinction between:-

- Partnerships and ‘**external bodies**’ which may be defined as those bodies that are single (rather than multi-agency) entities, but in which other local authorities may be invited to participate (e.g. nominations to governing bodies).
- Partnerships and **networks** that consist of personal or professional relationships, which do not have to involve organisational commitment or support. They will usually be more fluid and smaller in scale than partnerships.

- Partnerships and **Strategic Partnering** – over the last few years an increasing number of local authorities have entered into long-term contracts with private companies to provide a broad range of their services. The scale and size of some of these new partnerships are unprecedented in the local government sector and they have understandably attracted a lot of attention. The largest can be for ten years or more, can be worth between £20m and £30m per year and can involve substantial staff transfers or secondments.

The three above mentioned arrangements do not come under the remit of this protocol.

3 **The Basic Features of Partnerships**

Although partnerships vary widely in the exact form they take, they all share a number of basic features:-

- A **constitution**, but partnerships will vary in the way that they are constituted. While some have very detailed constitutions, others are much less formal expressions of the rules governing their operation (e.g. terms of reference).
- Common purpose with the bodies that make up their membership **coming together**. However, they will vary in the way that they work. Some will meet on a regular basis and have formal meetings held on a regular basis, and others will involve less formal relationships, such as largely operating through e-mail contact with less regular meetings.
- **Defined roles and relationships** of those involved, but those roles and relationships will vary significantly. While some partnerships will involve partners in taking decisions and acting on them, in others partners will simply exchange information and develop new thinking.
- A **variety of agencies** working together, but they will vary significantly in exactly whom they involve (e.g. in terms of the agencies represented on the partnerships and also whether officers or members from a Council participate).
- A **lead agency**. Some will be established by an authority, some will be established by other agencies, some will be statutory, others will be locally generated.
- Good **understanding of the work of other bodies** in the partnership and other partnerships. However, they will vary in how they work with other agencies and partnerships. Some are single partnerships, while others will see themselves as nesting in a network of interconnected partnerships.

- Be **resourced in some way**, but they will vary in the way that they are resourced. Some will have their own staff and budgets, while others will operate with minimal resourcing (e.g. the provision of meeting space).

4 **What does Good Partnership Working Look Like**

Successful organisations will be involved in a range of partnerships. They will do so because they have a real commitment to the greater good and understand the value of collective goals over individual ones. Some they will lead and these will be vital to the delivery of outcomes for communities. In others they will play a more supportive role. They will know which partnerships they need to be in and will be able to build partnerships that are:-

- **Well -led:** There is good leadership of partnerships, and partnerships provide good leadership in the local community.
- **Inclusive:** All relevant stakeholders and all sections of the community have a voice in the partnerships and their involvement is proportionate and equitable.
- **Accountable:** The way in which partnerships operate represents good practice in representatives and participative democracy and there is clarity on where responsibility and accountability lie.
- **Transparent:** There is clarity on how partnerships operate and on what and how decisions are made. They are open to scrutiny.
- **Focused on delivery:** Partnerships produce tangible and relevant outcomes for local people and improve the quality of life.
- **Economic and efficient:** Partnerships go about their business in an orderly manner and organisational arrangements are 'fit for purpose'.
- **Sustainable:** Where relevant, partnerships have the capacity to deliver successfully over a period of time and to bring about changes that take several years to achieve.
- **Innovative:** Partnerships that are open to learning and new ways of doing things.

5 **Why the Borough Council enters Partnerships**

The Council can be drawn into partnership working for a number of reasons:

- Of its own free will to respond to an identified strategic or operational issue which might be too big, multi-faceted or unaffordable to achieve in isolation.

- By virtue of an effective obligation e.g. to access funding.
- As a statutory requirement e.g. Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, Local Strategic Partnerships.
- Meeting a community need for which no one agency is responsible.

6 Potential Problems

The types of problems that can occur by having too many unfocussed partnerships are as follows:

- The greater the number of partnerships in a particular service area, the more thinly the right types of people will be spread.
- Senior officer and Members cannot commit to all partnerships which have a call on their time and be an effective player in each.
- Some partnerships may not be necessarily assisting the Council to achieve its corporate priorities.
- Financial limitations restrict the ability to contribute to all partnerships where funding is required.
- The consequences of failed partnership working can lead to a loss of respect and damages trust between partners, compromising future prospects of partnership working.

7 Developing a Partnership Protocol

In view of the issues highlighted there is a need to have a more strategic approach to partnership working by developing; for those types of partnerships mentioned earlier:

- A policy statement about the Council's approach to and involvement in partnerships (Appendix A)
- A partnership checklist – a set of prompts to be considered before setting up or entering into a new partnership (Appendix B) where no other is provided.
- An evaluation framework – a formal means for reviewing the effectiveness of the partnerships in which we are involved (Appendix C) where no other means exists

The development of a policy statement and checklist will enable there to be an assessment of the merits of becoming involved in a partnership and the appropriate level of representation and resource to be dedicated (if required). For other organisations establishing a partnership, it will provide a clear indication of the circumstances in which the Council will or will not seek to be involved. In simple terms, it provides the rational behind saying “yes” or “no”.

Similarly, use of an evaluation framework (only where no framework already exists) will provide a means of examining the performance of a partnership according to a number of set criteria and can assist in identifying ways of improving effectiveness.

To ensure consistency in application of the framework, it is recommended that a Senior Officer approves the evaluation of the Council's membership of a partnership (appendix B). It is suggested that this is the appropriate Executive Director. The completed evaluation form should be taken to CMG. Where a representative needs authority beyond the existing Council Constitution/ Scheme of Delegation to take part in partnership decision-making, a report will need to be submitted to the Cabinet. The Council representative(s) should report on partnership outcomes and feed these into the Borough Council's Annual Report.

8 Risk Assessment

Application of the checklist will help to reduce the risk of being involved in partnerships; which contribute insufficiently towards the Council's priorities or fail to add value commensurate with the resources invested. Conversely failure to become involved in appropriate partnerships can result in loss of external funding potential, specialist knowledge or skills or opportunities to learn from others.

Appendix A – Policy Statement

Stafford Borough Council recognises the strength and value of effective partnerships in contributing to the improvement of the well-being of the Borough's communities and meeting its strategic priorities.

The Council encourages partnership working whenever appropriate. We believe partnerships are necessary when:

- Government requires them (e.g. crime and disorder partnerships)
- External funders require them in order to deliver funding streams
- Communities identify priorities for the improvement of well-being and no one organisation on its own has responsibility for delivery
- The Council does not possess the capacity, the knowledge or expertise on its own to deliver new services or service improvements
- Better value would be derived from delivering services in conjunction with others

We believe that partnerships can:

- Give critical mass through strength in negotiation, greater influence and better access to funding
- Achieve outputs greater than the sum of the individual partners by sharing knowledge, finding new ways of working and pooling resources
- Enhance local democracy by actively involving communities, businesses and the voluntary sector

When considering whether to get involved in a partnership, the Council will make a conscious decision having examined the issues set out in the checklist in Appendix B. The Council will only join a partnership if it can resource the investment (of time, assets, knowledge and money) required to effectively do so.

With some groups it can be difficult to assess how the Council can contribute or how the group's work supports any of the Council priorities. Sometimes we may have been invited out of courtesy, to bring credibility to the group or to get immediate feedback should any relevant matter ever be raised. In such cases, we should avoid regularly attending meetings and invite the group to liaise with us when necessary in a more efficient manner (e.g. by send us the minutes). Where the issues are purely relevant to a local area and do not largely relate to the Council's responsibilities or services, it is anticipated that the appropriate town or parish council be involved in the group.

The Council will also seek to evaluate the effectiveness of existing partnerships through application of a performance management framework (see Appendix C).

Appendix B - Partnership Checklist

The checklist will allow the Council to judge whether a partnership is appropriate and to provide guidance on ensuring the partnership has a good foundation for success.

The checklist should be completed before setting up or entering into a new partnership arrangement.

Partnership			
Other potential members			
Officer		Date completed	
Assessed by		Date assessed	
What is the issue of service improvement to be addressed through the partnership?			
How does this assist the Council to achieve one or more of its corporate priorities?			
Why does this require a partnership approach?			
What would be the Council's role in the partnership? (e.g. Lead organisation, major/minor partner, observer)			
Is the Council to be the accountable body? If yes, do we have the financial capacity, cash flow and audit capabilities?			
If the Council is not the lead organisation who will be?			
What will be the Council's contribution in terms of costs (money and in kind)?			
	Yes	No	Don't know
Have you identified the added value partnership working brings?			
Is there already a partnership in place with a similar remit, which can take on this work?			
Will the partnership contribute to streamlining existing partnerships?			
Have partners critical to the success of the partnership been identified?			
Are all identified partners willing to participate?			
Does the partnership have a vision/mission statement?			
Does the prospective partnership have clear measurable objectives?			
Does the partnership have agreed terms of reference?			
Does the partnership have a clear action			

plan and does this link to your service plan?			
Is the action plan resourced and agreed by all partners?			
Are there SMART targets and way to measure progress/ achievement of objectives?			
Is there a process for reporting progress?			
Are there clear procedures for making decisions and resolving conflict?			
Is there a protocol for reporting and sharing of information?			
Have risks been identified and managed?			
Is there a signed agreement?			
Is the partnership time limited or set up on a task & finish basis?			
Are there appropriate measures in place for financial control?			
Is there a process in place to provide an exit strategy to consider on-going council liabilities?			

Head of Service	
Executive Director sign off	
Date	
Date to CMG	

Appendix C - Partnership Evaluation Toolkit

The toolkit is split into 4 sections and is to be used where there is no existing performance framework.

Partnership details asks you to provide details of the partnership. Where possible this has been kept to “Yes/No” answers.

Self-assessment inventory has 28 questions to complete, based on the following principles:

- Action focus
- Efficiency
- Inclusivity
- Learning and development
- Performance management

Action plan arising from partnership assessment is a template which allows you to transfer action identified in the self assessment to an action plan for short term “quick wins” and medium to longer term improvements.

Summary assessment sheet for completion by Stafford Borough Council to assess our role.

Partnership details

Partnership name			
Main functions of partnership – please rank			
Set policy		Service delivery	
Networking		Other (please state)	
Is the partnership statutory?		Yes/no	
Resources available to the partnership			
Dedicated partnership budget (enter amount)		Number of dedicated staff	
Influence over resources (enter amount)	I	Other (e.g. in kind) – please state	
Name of reviewer		Organisation	
Role of organisation in partnership			
Lead		Member	
Other (please specify)		Date of assessment	

Self-assessment inventory (1) – Action Focus

How the partnership establishes common priorities and targets and agreed actions and milestones, leading to demonstrable improvements against measurable targets.

Q no	Question	No or don't know	Yes, sometimes but not consistently	Yes, but there is room to improve	Yes and we can demonstrate real benefits	We are excellent at this – improvement is not a priority
1.1	Does the Partnership have a clear, agreed long-term vision of what it wants to achieve?					
1.2	Does the Partnership have a shared set of values to which all members subscribe?					
1.3	Does the Partnership add value to the sphere of work it is contributing to and ensure that it is not working in isolation?					
1.4	Does the Partnership use feedback from the local community to identify need?					
1.5	Does the Partnership encourage innovation and improve processes?					
1.6	Does the Partnership have a positive impact on the way services are delivered?					

Things we do well		What things we could do better	
Recent improvements we have made		What things should we start doing	
Our innovative approaches		What things we should stop doing	

Self-assessment inventory (2) – Efficiency

How the partnership helps to rationalised arrangements and ensures that resources are used as productively as possible.

Q no	Question	No or don't know	Yes, sometimes but not consistently	Yes, but there is room to improve	Yes and we can demonstrate real benefits	We are excellent at this – improvement is not a priority
2.1	Have available resources been matched against the Partnership's plans?					
2.2	Given its objective, does the Partnership have the right balance between strategic and operational activities?					
2.3	Do Partnership members reflect the views of the membership of the organisations they represent?					
2.4	Does the Partnership have effective support and administrative arrangements?					
2.5	Are meetings effective, timetabled and arrangements in place for communications between meetings?					
2.6	Has consideration been given to the lifetime of the Partnership and whether it should continue? Is this regularly reviewed?					

Things we do well		What things we could do better	
Recent improvements we have made		What things should we start doing	
Our innovative approaches		What things we should stop doing	

Self-assessment inventory (3) – Inclusivity

How the partnership actively involves all key players, including the public, private, community and voluntary sectors and service users.

Q no	Question	No or don't know	Yes, sometimes but not consistently	Yes, but there is room to improve	Yes and we can demonstrate real benefits	We are excellent at this – improvement is not a priority
3.1	Does the Partnership ensure that its membership reflects the purpose of the Partnership?					
3.2	Does the Partnership ensure that all the partners have the capacity to be fully engaged in the Partnership?					
3.3	Is the management and chairing of the Partnership able to provide an inclusive and impartial overview?					
3.4	Does the Partnership work democratically and is it accountable to stakeholders?					
3.5	Are the Partnership's decisions open to scrutiny? E.g. open meetings, minutes recorded and publicly available?					

Things we do well		What things we could do better	
Recent improvements we have made		What things should we start doing	
Our innovative approaches		What things we should stop doing	

Self-assessment inventory (4) – Learning and Development

How the Partnership builds on best practice from other partnerships and encourages learning and development across all sectors and partners.

Q no	Question	No or don't know	Yes, sometimes but not consistently	Yes, but there is room to improve	Yes and we can demonstrate real benefits	We are excellent at this – improvement is not a priority
4.1	Does the Partnership learn from and disseminate best practice?					
4.2	Is appropriate use made of the wide range of skills and expertise of Partnership members?					
4.3	Does the Partnership learn from stakeholders and apply this to service improvement?					
4.4	Does the Partnership find out why members leave or fail to engage with the Partnership and learn lessons for the future?					
4.5	Is the Partnership able to adapt to a changing environment?					

Things we do well		What things we could do better	
Recent improvements we have made		What things should we start doing	
Our innovative approaches		What things we should stop doing	

Self-assessment inventory (5) – Performance Management

How the Partnership manages its performance in relation to its aims and objectives.

Q no	Question	No or don't know	Yes, sometimes but not consistently	Yes, but there is room to improve	Yes and we can demonstrate real benefits	We are excellent at this – improvement is not a priority
5.1	Does the performance management process include clear milestones, outcomes, indicators and delivery dates?					
5.2	Is the financial position monitored and reported regularly to the partnership?					
5.3	Do partners deliver what they've signed up to do?					
5.4	Are partners' resources (including buildings and staff) effectively used to meet the aims of the partnership?					
5.5	Do partners share information to support planning and management?					

Things we do well		What things we could do better	
Recent improvements we have made		What things should we start doing	
Our innovative approaches		What things we should stop doing	

Action Plan arising from Partnership Assessment

Partnership Name		
Date		
	Short term/ quick wins	Medium/ longer term improvements
Action – key finding of assessment		
Outcome – an improvement		
Resources – what is required to achieve the outcome (e.g. money, time etc)		
Responsibility – person/group		
Target – what will be achieved		
Deadline- when will it be achieved		
Performance measure – how we know its being achieved and where possible baseline information for current performance levels		

Summary Assessment Sheet (for completion by SBC)

SBC representatives			
Number of councillors		Annual time commitment (days)	
Number of officers		Annual time commitment (days)	
Main contact			
SBC resource input (annually)			
Money		Staff	
In kind		Other	
SBC role			
Lead		Member	

How does the Partnership contribute to the SBC priorities?	
<i>Vision – to lead a community and Borough which is Prosperous, Safe, Healthy, Clean and Green</i>	
Prosperity	
P1 – Work with the business community to support the local economy and secure competitive advantage for our Borough?	
P2 – Ensure that development of the Borough as a destination for inward investment is supported by provision and encouragement of services, choice within the housing market, leisure opportunities and an environment that also improves the quality of life for residents.	
P3 – Ensure that the new Local Development Framework (Local Plan) identifies and brings forward new employment sites for the next 10 years.	
P4 – Pursue a “fast track” approach to key planning applications, adopt a more proactive stance to pre-application advice prior to submission of planning applications and ensure that recent improvements in the Planning Service are sustained.	
P5 – Work with the Local Strategic Partnership to support the development of the whole Borough as a destination for visitors for retail, culture and tourism purposes.	
P6 – Support and encourage the Stafford Regeneration Budget Board to provide support for existing businesses to grow and develop, address Youth Employment and include the provision of specialist business support	

services for key sectors including technology, tourism and creative industries.	
P7 – Renew the Stafford Town Centre Forum to create a positive and continuing focus for commercial, retail and leisure businesses.	
P8 – Support the rural economy through the Market Towns Initiatives and other measures.	
P9 – Maintain an active role in the North and Southern Staffordshire Partnerships to ensure that Stafford Borough benefits from sub-regional strategies and encourage Advantage West Midlands to invest in the area.	
P10 – Ensure that people within our community have the appropriate advice and assistance to improve their quality of life.	
Community Safety	
CS1 – Play our role within the Stafford Borough Community Safety Partnership to fully support the Police, Fire Service and Ambulance Service in their community safety role, together with other appropriate agencies in reducing crime and the fear of crime.	
CS2 – Use our planning responsibilities to guide and support physical development; which discourages unlawful activity.	
CS3 – Use our licensing duties to assist the maintenance of an orderly community.	
CS4 – Use our services involved in the cleaning, presentation and maintenance of the street scene to support a quality environment; which encourages pride and respect.	
CS5 – Exercise community leadership, discourage anti social behaviour and promote and encourage a tolerant and harmonious community.	
CS6 – Provide exciting and physically active services that engage young people and ensure that their enjoyment is compatible with the needs of the wider community.	
CS7 – Provide older people with access to activities that increase their confidence, independence and sense of well-being.	
The Management of Public Space	
PS1 – Work with Staffordshire County Council and encourage them to invest in highways, transportation and public space to the advantage of our local communities.	
PS2 – Pay particular attention to our own role in street cleansing, litter, graffiti and fly tipping	

from public spaces.	
PS3 – Continue to provide a high quality service in managing and maintaining an attractive landscape.	
PS4 – Pay particular attention to our role in partnerships with others in maintaining quality town centres.	
PS5 – Ensure our green spaces are protected and enhanced using the local development framework and other strategies.	
Waste Management	
WM1 – Ensure that our community continues to receive a high quality waste collection service.	
WM2 – Bring forward a new Waste Management Plan to meet increasing expectations for waste recycling.	
WM3 – Outline proposals within our Waste Management Plan to increase the support of local people to take part in doorstep recycling initiatives.	
WM4 – Work with the Staffordshire local authorities and others to seek ways of developing waste management in the most cost effective manner.	
WM5 – Remain committed to environmental protection and the pursuit of sustainability, where practical.	