



Partnership Governance Policy

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Summary

1. This policy is part of the corporate governance policy framework underpinning the Council's Strategic Plan, and sets out how the Council will develop and manage partnerships in support of its strategic priorities for the town.
2. The following sections outline:
 - the purpose of this policy;
 - definitions;
 - scope;
 - the legislative and regulatory framework;
 - policy statement;
 - roles and responsibilities;
 - supporting policies, procedures and standards; and
 - monitoring and review arrangements.

Purpose

3. Partnerships are key to the Council achieving its strategic objectives and their importance will inevitably increase in the coming years. It is critical that partnerships are managed with the same diligence as the internal activity to ensure that their contribution to the Council's strategic priorities are maximised.
4. The purpose of this policy is to set out a corporate approach to partnership governance to ensure there is an effective, consistent and joined-up approach across the organisation.
5. This will deliver the following benefits:
 - ensure that proactive partnership governance is embedded within the culture of the Council, and is integral to the business planning and performance management;
 - ensure that the partnership governance cycle is implemented consistently and proportionately across the Council;
 - ensure that partnerships comply with the requirements of the Council's Constitution; and
 - communicate the Council's approach to partnerships to all employees and stakeholders.
6. Effective implementation of this policy will ensure that the Council understands its partnerships, how they contribute to strategic priorities and promotes good governance in their operations and continuous improvement in their performance and risk profile.

Definitions

Corporate governance	The systems, processes and values by which local authorities operate and by which they engage with, and are held accountable to, their communities and stakeholders.
Partnership	An arrangement in which the Council agrees to collaborate with one or more legally independent organisations to achieve shared objectives and outcomes.

Scope

7. This policy applies to all arrangements of the Council meeting the corporate definition of partnership outlined in this policy: an arrangement in which the Council agrees to collaborate with one or more legally independent organisations to achieve shared objectives and outcomes.
8. The policy applies to all elected members, employees (both permanent and temporary), contractors and consultants working for or on behalf of the Council in a partnership environment.
9. Where the Council is not lead partner, lead managers must ensure that arrangements are in line with the key principles of this policy.
10. Client and contractor relationships can be considered partnerships if they are of strategic or reputational importance to the Council, or responsible for significant public funds.
11. The following arrangements are not considered to be partnerships:
 - where the Council has complete control over decisions and funds decision-making;
 - where grants or payments are made to other organisations for services;
 - where subscriptions are made to outside bodies; or
 - procurement agreements governed under contract.

Legislative and regulatory framework

12. Key elements of the legislative and regulatory framework relevant to partnership governance are set out below.

Local Government Act 1999	General requirement to achieve best value for money. The effective governance of partnerships reduces unnecessary expenditure and increases the likelihood of delivering organisational priorities.
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Policy Statement

13. Each existing or prospective partnership will have a lead manager of appropriate seniority. The lead manager will be responsible for ensuring that partnerships are developed, governed and reviewed in line with this policy.
14. Development of partnerships will be considered a project and be managed in line with the Council's Programme and Project Management Policy.
15. If the partnership is discretionary, then the business case for its development must be justified, and approved by the appropriate body in the Council before the Council formally enters into any partnership agreement.
16. The business case must clear how the proposed partnership will contribute to the Council's strategic priorities in a way that cannot be achieved through an existing arrangement. It should also address how any similar partnerships may be amended or discontinued in light of the proposed new arrangement.
17. All formal partnership agreements and structures (incorporated partnerships or other) will be agreed by Legal and Governance Services prior to approval.

18. All partnerships will meet the minimum standard of governance set out in the Partnership Governance Framework underpinning this policy, with governance proportionate to the significance of the partnership in strategic and financial terms. The minimum standard will include the partnership vision and lifespan, aims and objectives, KPIs, governance arrangements (including the Council's role in decision-making), resourced action plan, and monitoring, review and dissolution processes.
19. Annual business planning for partnerships will be integrated with internal arrangements set out in the Council's Performance Management Policy, with key partnership activity set out within the Directorate Plan of the lead manager. Similarly, partnership risks will be incorporated within the Council's risk registers where appropriate, in line with the Council's Risk and Opportunity Management Policy.
20. The Council will maintain a partnership register that lists and defines all partnerships, setting out how they contribute to the Council's strategic aims and priorities. This will identify significant partnerships i.e. those that are fundamental to the delivery of strategic priorities and / or meeting the Council's key decision threshold in terms of financial commitments.
21. The performance of significant partnerships will be reported quarterly to the Executive and Overview and Scrutiny Board within the Council's quarterly results.
22. An annual review of all partnerships will be undertaken, informed by an assessment of lead managers against a standard template, through which the governance and performance of the Council's partnerships will be RAG-rated and any changes recorded. This review will inform the Council's Annual Governance Statement.

Roles and key responsibilities

Executive members	Overall responsibility for partnership governance across the Council, including approving the Partnership Governance Policy and the creation of significant partnerships, and ensuring that partnership performance is managed, monitored and reviewed regularly.
Elected members	Members may be appointed to partnership boards and will scrutinise the performance of partnerships in line with this policy. Members must be aware of their responsibilities under the Local Code of Corporate Governance and Codes of Conduct for members and employees, and ensure that the partnerships that they are involved in comply with this policy, reporting to their Group Leader and the Monitoring Officer if they consider this is not to be the case.
Corporate Affairs and Audit Committee	Review the effectiveness of partnership governance and receive an annual assurance report on progress being made.
Leadership Team	Considers and approves all business cases for partnerships, ensuring that they align with the Council's strategic objectives, and reviewing quarterly performance updates and the annual partnership assessment.
Legal Services	Provides advice on partnership models and governance arrangements where appropriate and signs off all formal arrangements prior to approval.

Strategy, Information and Governance Service	Maintains the partnership register, maintain and communicates the Partnership Governance Framework, coordinates quarterly performance updates and the annual partnership assessment.
Partnership Leads	Project manage the development of the partnership; act as the key point of contact between the Council and the partnership and promote the partnership within the Council; responsible for registering the partnership with Strategy, Information and Governance, providing quarterly performance updates and completing the annual partnership assessment.
Officers working in partnership	Officers working in partnerships must be aware of their responsibilities under the Local Code of Corporate Governance and Codes of Conduct for members and employees, and ensure that the partnerships that they are involved in comply with this policy, reporting to the Partnership Lead if they consider this is not to be the case.

Supporting policies, procedures and standards

23. The following policies, procedures and standards will be implemented across the Council to support effective partnership governance.

Business Change Framework	Sets out a framework for the identification, planning, delivery and evaluation of business change activity within the Council.
Information Governance Framework	Sets out a framework for effective information governance within the Council, meeting all legal obligations and underpinning the achievement of strategic objectives.
Risk and Opportunity Management Policy	Sets out how the Council will ensure that risks are effectively managed and opportunities exploited to maximise delivery of strategic objectives, fully integrated with performance management arrangements.
Performance Management Policy	Sets out how the Council will ensure that performance is effectively managed to deliver strategic priorities for the town.
Programme and Project Management Policy	Sets out how the Council will manage its portfolio of programmes and projects to ensure delivery to scope, cost, time and quality.

Monitoring and Review Arrangements

24. The Council's expectations around partnership working are clearly set out within its corporate values and associated staff performance frameworks.

25. All managers and employees are required to comply with this Partnership Governance Policy to ensure that the Council effectively develops and manages partnerships in support of its strategic priorities for the town. Managers and employees will be provided with a range of resources, and where appropriate, training, to support the effective implementation of this policy.

26. An annual assurance report on the Council's partnerships arrangements will be submitted to Corporate Audit and Affairs Committee. This will be supported by a targeted internal audits as appropriate, which will be listed in the Council's annual audit plan.
27. The implementation and effectiveness of this policy and its supporting procedures will be reviewed on a quarterly basis, using the following metrics:
- availability of data on partnerships as required by the corporate partnerships register;
 - availability of information to support quarterly performance tracking and annual assessments;
 - completion rate of quarterly performance tracking and annual assessments; and
 - proportion of partnerships achieving Green ratings in annual assessments.
28. This policy will be reviewed every three years, unless there is significant development that would require a more urgent review e.g. new legislation.