

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL	
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Report of:	Director of Legal and Governance Services
Submitted to:	Audit Committee
Date:	12 December 2024
Title:	Partnership Governance – Annual Assurance Report
Report for:	Information
Status:	Public
Council Plan priority:	Delivering Best Value

Executive summary	
This report sets out the arrangements in place to assess the health of existing key, strategic partnerships where Middlesbrough Council is a member, in some form.	

1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this report is to outline the results of the annual assessment of the key partnerships that Middlesbrough council is a member of, against the Council’s Partnership Governance Policy and supporting minimum standard.

2. Recommendations

2.1 That the Audit Committee:

- Notes the current position of the Council in relation to compliance with the Partnership Governance policy.
- Notes the planned actions to strengthen governance in relation to performance management.
- Considers whether the information provided has given the Committee sufficient assurance that the Council has appropriate arrangements in place in relation to partnership governance.

3. Background and relevant information

3.1 These ongoing actions will support good practice in the Council’s partnership governance arrangements.

4. Other potential alternative(s) and why these have not been recommended

4.1 The Partnership Governance Policy has been in place since it was approved by Executive in February 2020. A revised version is scheduled to be considered by the Mayor in December 2024.

4.2 The policy defines a partnership as ‘an arrangement in which the Council agrees to collaborate with one or more legally independent organisations to achieve shared objectives and outcomes’.

4.3 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 described above to ensure that their contribution to the Council’s strategic aims and priorities are maximised.

4.4 The key elements of the policy are:

- Each partnership will have a lead manager of appropriate seniority.
- The business case for a partnership will be approved by the appropriate body in the Council before the Council formally enters into a partnership agreement.
- All agreed partnerships will meet a minimum standard, with the level of detail required to be determined by the significance of the partnership in strategic and financial terms. This will include, for example, the partnership vision, aims and objectives, KPIs, governance arrangements, resourced action plan, and monitoring, review and dissolution processes. All formal partnership agreements and structures must be approved by Legal Services.
- A partnership register will be maintained that lists and defines all partnerships, setting out how they contribute to the Council’s strategic aims and priorities.
- An annual review of the performance of significant partnerships will be integrated with the Council’s performance management reporting and be informed by an assessment of the lead manager.
- Training and guidance for those employees engaged in collaborative working will be provided.

Partnership Governance Register and Framework

4.5 The Partnership Governance Register assesses the health of existing partnerships across the following principles:

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

Partnership Governance Register and improvement activity update

4.6 Within the last annual assurance report on Partnerships governance, a number of activities were outlined for delivery in the following year to strengthen the governance of four partnerships. The table below provides an update on that activity:

Partnership	Issue	Planned action	Status
South Tees Health and Wellbeing Board	There are currently no Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in place to measure delivery of the current overarching strategy although longer term targets exist and there are detailed metrics to measure delivery of supporting strategies	This is a significant piece of work which commenced in 2022 as a planned action with the target date of December 2023 put in place at that time. Work is ongoing to ensure the planned refresh of the overarching South Tees Strategy in 2023 includes a supporting performance management framework to be developed to measure the effectiveness of actions to address health inequalities.	This has now been completed with the Board agreeing a new Health and Wellbeing Strategy which was presented to Executive in October 2024
North East Migration Partnership	The partnership has had some capacity issues during 2022/23 and is also continuing to improve its governance arrangements.	Code of Conduct will be developed & additional staffing to add capacity around data and governance improvements	Complete
Middlesbrough Children's Trust	KPIs to measure impact have started to be developed	The Partnership are currently in the process of developing a new set of priorities. The previous 3 priorities are operated as Business As Usual (BAU).	Complete
Middlesbrough Children's Improvement Board	KPIs are in place and performance is at 90% which is the target, however the board was assessed as amber because it is in place as a result of OFSTED determining that Children's services in Middlesbrough require improvement issued March 2023.	Continue to deliver activities to further improve practice to move the Council out of intervention.	Complete

2024 assessment and 2025 planned improvement activity

4.7 In this report, the health of partnerships during 2023/24 was assessed as follows:

Name of partnership or separate legal entity	Statutory	Significant	Governance	Performance
Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA)	Yes	Yes	Red	Red
River Tees Port Health Authority Board	Yes	Yes	Green	Green
South Tees Health and Wellbeing Board	Yes	Yes	Green	Green
North East Migration Partnership	No	Yes	Green	Green
Middlesbrough Community Safety Partnership	Yes	Yes	Green	Green
Middlesbrough Children's Trust	No	Yes	Green	Green
South Tees Safeguarding Children's Partnership	Yes	Yes	Green	Green
Teeswide Safeguarding Adults Board	Yes	Yes	Green	Green
North East Procurement Organisation (NEPO)	No	Yes	Green	Green
Cleveland Local Resilience Forum (LRF)	Yes	Yes	Green	Green
Youth Offending Executive Management Board	Yes	Yes	Green	Green
Shift partnership	No	Yes	Green	Green

4.8 During 2023/2024 a number of changes were made to key partnerships which were reflected in the annual assessment. There were also a number of events and actions which have impacted on the partnership assessments which were completed by the Lead officer responsible for each partnership.

Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA)

4.9 Following the identification of a number of governance issues within a Tees Valley Independent Review commissioned by the former Secretary of State, the assessment of performance and governance for 2023/24 was amended by the interim Chief Executive.

4.10 This reflects the content of that report and the proposed actions that TVCA have set out to address the report findings. A Statutory Officer Working Group has been established and the interim Chief Executive for Middlesbrough Council was appointed as a member. In addition, the organisation has engaged with the Local Government Association (LGA). A peer review by the LGA is also planned to assess progress. The outcome of this will be reflected in the next annual review of partnership governance.

South Tees Health and Wellbeing Board

4.11 The Board score for performance moved from amber to green following the deliver of two key pieces of work in 2023/24. The Board refreshed both the Joint Strategic Needs Analysis (JSNA) and its Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy. The JSNA provides renewed insight into the public health needs of our residents and the new strategy sets out how they will be met.

North East Migration Partnership

4.12 The improved governance score from amber to green reflects the outcome of work during 2023/24 to develop additional governance documents to support the good governance of the partnership.

Middlesbrough Children's Trust and Children's Services Executive Improvement Board

4.13 Following successful delivery of a four-year improvement plan for children's services, the scoring for the trust was amended to move performance from amber to green. This

reflects the end of government intervention in 2024 in children’s services. The improvement board was also ceased during 2024 following the end of intervention.

Middlesbrough Environment City Trust Limited

4.14 The Trust was removed as a key partnership following a decision by Council, as part of the 2024/25 budget setting process, to remove funding for the trust.

SHiFT partnership

4.15 SHiFT was added as a new key partnership, following its creation on 2023. It is a three-year partnership with SHiFT, a youth justice charity that will work intensively with two cohorts of children to improve outcomes for them.

5. Impact(s) of the recommended decision(s)

Topic	Impact
Financial (including procurement and Social Value)	It is anticipated that all activities set out in this report are achievable within existing and planned budgets.
Legal	The proposed activity is consistent with and will promote the achievement of the Council’s legal duty to achieve Best Value.
Risk	<p>This report highlights current compliance with the Partnership Governance policy and planned actions to improve governance by TVCA. If delivered successfully this will have a positive impact on the following risk:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the Council and its partners do not have the collective capacity to deliver system wide change to key issues such as public health, crime and safeguarding, then this could result in the population’s health, wellbeing and safety declining.
Human Rights, Public Sector Equality Duty and Community Cohesion	There are no concerns that this report could have an adverse impact on these rights.
Climate Change / Environmental	There are no concerns that this report, which is for information only, could have an impact on this.
Children and Young People Cared for by the Authority and Care Leavers	There are no concerns that this report, which is for information only, could have an impact on this.
Data Protection	There are no concerns that this report, which is for information only, could have an impact on this.

Body	Report title	Date
Executive	Delivering the Strategic Plan	18 February 2020
Corporate Affairs and Audit Committee	Partnership Governance Annual Assurance report	23 September 2023
Audit Committee	Partnership Governance – annual assurance report	14 December 2023
Executive	Partnership Governance Policy	4 December 2024

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