

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL	
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Report of:	Director of Legal and Governance Services, Charlotte Benjamin
Submitted to:	Audit Committee
Date:	11 December 2025
Title:	Partnership Governance – Annual Assurance Report
Report for:	Information
Status:	Public
Council Plan priority:	Delivering Best Value

Proposed decision(s)	
That the Audit Committee:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NOTES the current position of the Council in relation to compliance with the Partnership Governance policy. • CONSIDERS whether the information provided has given the Committee sufficient assurance that the Council has appropriate arrangements in place in relation to partnership governance. 	

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.
- **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 The Partnership Governance Policy has been in place since it was approved by Executive in February 2020. A revised version was agreed in December 2024 following completion of a planned triennial review.
- 3.2 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'.
- 3.3 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.
- 3.4 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

3.5 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 2025 update

3.6 Within the last annual assurance report on Partnerships governance, concerns around the Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) were outlined. In April 2025, TVCA was issued with a Best Value Improvement Notice by Government.

3.7 As of December 2025, that Notice continues to be in place and TVCA has voluntarily established an Independent Advisory Board to oversee its improvement journey. TVCA have implemented a detailed improvement plan and is reporting progress on that to the Board and sharing it publicly. The [detailed improvement plan as of September 2025](#) is available on its website. It clearly articulates the actions being taken to improve the governance and performance of the Combined Authority. Council officers are supporting this improvement journey.

3.8 An annual assessment of the health of partnerships has been completed by the lead officers for those partnerships. The results are set out below:

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)	No	Yes	Green		Green	

Youth Offending Executive Management Board	Yes	Yes	Green		Green	
SHiFT Partnership	No	Yes	Green		Green	
NEW - Place Leadership Partnership	No	Yes	Emerging		Emerging	

3.9 There are no changes to the performance and governance ratings for key partnerships as result of the annual review.

3.10 A new partnership has been recorded in the table this year. It is the Place Leadership Partnership. The partnership which is currently in development, has representation from key public, private and voluntary sector organisations in the town. Once fully operational and adopted, it will support implementation of the following recommendation from the Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge team, which was accepted by Council in March 2025:

‘Develop in coproduction with communities, residents, partners and businesses a long-term vision for the town that is inclusive, practical and deliverable. By looking outwards and harnessing untapped potential to deliver its vision, this will enable everyone to understand and contribute to delivering shared ambitions for the benefit of Middlesbrough and its communities.’

3.11 Outputs from this group will be taken through the Council's decision-making processes as necessary to ensure alignment with decision-making governance requirements of the Council.

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

4.1 Not applicable. This report is for information only.

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 risks within the Strategic Risk Register:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SR-09 – If the Council's Corporate Governance arrangements are not fit for purpose and appropriate action is not taken to rectify this at pace, this could result, censure from the Council's auditors within a public interest report that would damage the Council's

	<p>reputation and/or in government formal intervention including removal of powers from officers and members and direction of council spend</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SR-18 - If the governance arrangements of the Combined Authority (CA) are not fit for purpose, creating barriers to effective collaboration with the Council and adversely impacting the Council's ability to achieve its ambitions for the town. This misalignment could hinder regional development, compromise strategic initiatives, impact financially on the Council and damage stakeholder confidence.
Human Rights, Public Sector Equality Duty and Community Cohesion	There are no concerns that this report could have an adverse impact on these rights.
Reducing poverty	There are no concerns that this report, which is for information only, could have an impact on this.
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. However the report does reference the existence of partnerships whose purpose is to improve outcomes for children. By ensuring that good governance in place, it increases the likelihood of partnerships being able to deliver their ambitions in this area.
Data Protection	There are no concerns that this report, which is for information only, could have an impact on this.

Appendices

Not applicable.

Background papers

Body	Report title	Date
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
Audit Committee	Partnership Governance – annual assurance report	12 December 2024

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