

PARTNERSHIP GOVERNANCE – ADOPTION OF FRAMEWORK AND TOOLKIT

(Report of the Head of Legal, Democratic & Property Services)

1. Summary of Proposals

To consider the adoption of a Partnership Governance Framework and Toolkit and a definition of the partnerships to which the Framework and Toolkit will apply. The report has been modified as a result of comments made by the Audit and Governance Committee on 26 May 2009. The Audit and Governance Committee has requested that Officers undertake a 'mapping' exercise to identify existing partnerships which will be reported to their meeting on 4 August 2009.

2. Recommendations

The Committee is asked to RECOMMEND that

the draft Partnership Governance Framework and Toolkit at Appendix 1 be adopted.

3. Financial, Legal, Policy, Risk and Sustainability Implications

- 3.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the proposed adoption of the Framework. Failure to adopt procedures for the Council's involvement in and governance of partnerships could leave the Council open to unanticipated or unplanned costs.

Legal

- 3.2 Under Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council has the power to do anything which is conducive or incidental to the discharge of any of its functions. This could include partnership arrangements with other bodies.

Policy

- 3.3 The Council currently has no adopted Policy in relation to partnerships and the adoption of this Framework would put a policy in place.

Risk

- 3.4 There is a risk that, by not having procedures in place for the Council's involvement in partnerships the Council could be exposed to unanticipated financial or reputational risks in the event that a partnership fails. The Framework contains detailed provisions in relation to the management of risks arising from partnerships. There is also a risk that, in not considering or reviewing the Council's resources involved in supporting or attending partnership meetings or events, the Council will not be using its resources effectively.

Sustainability / Environmental

- 3.5 There are no sustainability or environmental issues arising from this report.

Report

4. Background

- 4.1 As part of the Council's assurance framework, there is a need to ensure that the Council applies the principles and values of good governance to its partnerships and that the risks associated with partnerships are identified and managed.
- 4.2 In a national report in October 2005 (Governing partnerships: Bridging the accountability gap), the Audit Commission said that public bodies should:
- a) Know the partnerships they are involved in, and how much money and other resources they invest in them. They should review each partnership to strengthen accountability, manage risks and rationalise working arrangements;
 - b) Establish clear criteria against which partnerships can be evaluated to determine that they help to achieve partners' corporate objectives cost-effectively;
 - c) Take hard decisions to scale down their involvement in partnerships if the costs outweigh the benefits, or if the added risks cannot be managed properly;
 - d) Agree and regularly review protocol and governing documents with all partners;
 - e) Tell service users and the wider public about how key partnerships work, where responsibility and accountability lie and how redress can be obtained through joint complaints procedures.

5. Key Issues

- 5.1 Comprehensive Area Assessment places more emphasis on partnerships and, with greater pressures being placed on local authority resources, partnership working is becoming more significant.
- 5.2 The Council needs to ensure that its assurance framework covers the Council's involvement in partnerships and, in particular, the governance and risk issues associated with partnerships.
- 5.3 The Framework is designed to cover the lifecycle of a partnership, from deciding to become involved with the partnership, reporting on its activities, reviewing its operation and contribution to the Council's objectives and potentially, leaving a partnership.
- 5.4 In addition to the Framework, there is a Toolkit containing various flowcharts and templates to assist Officers in complying with the Framework. This will help to ensure that partnerships are being reviewed on a regular basis and that reporting on the 'service' provided by the partnership is taking place.
- 5.5 The suggestion at this stage is that the Framework should apply to the Council's 'key' partnerships. Defining what a 'key' partnership is has been quite challenging. Officers' suggestion at present is that the Framework should apply to:
- a) Partnerships which are a legal requirement or which are based on statutory guidance;
 - b) Partnerships which co-ordinate, commission or deliver activities at a Borough-wide or local level that substantially contribute towards our Local Area Agreement or Sustainable Community Strategy;
 - c) Any other partnership which the Council deems to be 'key' for the delivery of its objectives.
- 5.6 As a matter of good practice, the Framework principles should also be applied to all other partnerships, collaborative working or networking arrangements, but the level of application of the detail of the Framework should be proportionate to the significance and level of risk presented by those arrangements. For example, an annual report on the activities of an Officer User Group would not be expected at CMT, but feedback from the attending Officer(s) to their Head of Service or Service Manager would be appropriate.

- 5.7 There is a need to ensure that the Council is receiving reports on the activities of its partnerships. A significant amount of Member and Officer time is taken up with the Council's partnership activity and the Council needs to be satisfied that its involvement in its partnerships is assisting in the delivery of its objectives and represents value for money.

6. **Other Implications**

- Asset Management - There are none arising directly from this report.
- Community Safety - There are none arising directly from this report.
- Human Resources - The requirements of the Framework can be accommodated within existing staff resources.
- Social Exclusion - There are none arising directly from this report.

7. **Lessons Learnt**

In the past, the Council has not received reports on the activities of its formal partnerships in a consistent manner and has not had demonstrable arrangements in place for the governance of partnerships, leading to a lower Use of Resources score and identification of a risk to the Council.

8. **Background Papers**

Audit Commission National report – Governing partnerships: Bridging the accountability gap (October 2005)
Audit Commission Use of Resources Assessment: Key Lines of Enquiry
Birmingham City Council: Partnership Governance Framework and Toolkit (February 2008)

9. **Consultation**

This report has been prepared in consultation with relevant Borough Council Officers and, in particular, the Head of Financial, Revenues and Benefits Services and the Head of Strategy & Partnerships.

10. Author of Report

The author of this report is Sue Mullins (Head of Legal, Democratic & Property Services), who can be contacted on extension 3210 (e-mail: sue.mullins@redditchbc.gov.uk) for more information.

11. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Draft Partnership Governance Framework and Toolkit