

AUDIT AND RISK MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE - 30 MARCH 2009

STANDARDS COMMITTEE - 31 MARCH 2009

CABINET - 9 APRIL 2009

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF LAW, HR AND ASSET MANAGEMENT

PARTNERSHIPS FRAMEWORK AND TOOLKIT

1. Background

1.1. The Council like other bodies increasingly provides services through partnerships with other bodies. Partnership working brings great opportunities to enhance the offer to citizens. However, it can also bring risks, particularly in terms of possible lack of clarity over governance arrangements and accountability.

2. PROBITY AND PARTNERSHIPS

2.1. The Audit Commission carried out a review of the Council's governance arrangements for partnerships in 2003/4. As a result an action plan was developed and the following actions were taken;

- The Head of Legal and Member services drew up partnership guidance and a checklist which was approved by COMT and referred to Audit and Risk Management Committee;
- The Head of Legal and Member Services created a partnership register based on information provided by Chief Officers which recorded details of each of the Council's Partnerships;
- A risk review was carried out of the partnerships of which the Council was a member; and
- A partnership risk toolkit was developed.

2.2. The Audit Commission has recently carried out a further review of the Council's arrangements for partnerships. It is anticipated that the outcome of that review will be reported very shortly. It is anticipated that the report will highlight the need for the Council to strengthen its arrangements for ensuring that the council's partnership arrangements are strong.

2.3. The Head of Legal and Member Services has been working for some time on a Partnership Framework and Toolkit aimed at strengthening the Council's partnership arrangements. A draft has now been circulated and is attached to this report as Appendix 1.

2.4 The document provides a framework for ensuring that the Council's partnership arrangements are clear and transparent. It ensures that the Council will only enter in to partnerships or remain in them where there is clear added value and the benefits outweigh any risks or drawback. It recognises that the Council should focus its limited resources on those partnerships which will contribute towards meeting the Council's LAA improvement targets, strategic objectives or statutory responsibilities.

2.5 It is intended that the framework will be submitted to the following bodies:

- Standards Committee – 30 March 2009;
- Audit and Risk Management Committee – 31 March 2009;
- Cabinet - 9 April 2009; and
- Council – 27 April 2009

- 2.6 It is intended that the framework will then be included within the constitution of the council to reinforce the importance of governance within partnerships.
- 2.7 The Framework requires that the Council identify for each partnership a link officer and a responsible Head of Service. There will be a review of all existing partnerships to ensure that there is business case in respect of each. A risk assessment will also need to be carried out in respect of each. It is intended that these reviews will be completed within 6 months. All partnerships will then need to be reviewed at least annually. There will also need to be a business case made out before the Council enters in to any new partnership and the process identified in the framework will need to be followed in each case.
- 2.8 The Council will need to ensure that those officers that are involved in partnership working have sufficient training to operate the framework and toolkit effectively. Therefore, it is proposed that a process of raising awareness of partnership working is undertaken over the 2-3 months after the framework is approved.
- 2.9 Chief Officers will also need to ensure that the existing register (appended to the framework and toolkit) is comprehensive and includes all partnerships. This is being progressed currently.

3. **Financial and Staffing Implications**

- 3.1 There are already a number of staff engaged in partnership work. Whilst the initial review of partnerships will result in increased work it is anticipated that this will not be extensive and can be managed within existing resources. At this stage it is proposed that the costs of implementing the new system are closely monitored, with a view to containing them within existing budgets.

4. **Local Member Support**

There are no implications for individual wards arising directly from this report.

5. **Equal Opportunity Implications**

There are none arising directly from this report.

6. **Human Right Implications**

There are none arising directly from this report.

7. **Local Agenda 21 Implications**

There are none arising directly from this report.

8. **Community Safety Implications**

There are none arising directly from this report.

9. **Planning Implications**

There are none arising directly from this report.

10. **Background Papers**

There are no background papers which are not appended to this report.

11. **Recommendation**

- 11.1 That the Partnership Framework and Toolkit be endorsed and referred to Council for Approval and inclusion within the constitution.

BILL NORMAN
DIRECTOR OF LAW, HR AND ASSET MANAGEMENT

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