

**REPORT OF THE  
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY  
PERFORMANCE PANEL**

**DRAFT REVIEW OF  
PARTNERSHIPS**

**AUGUST 2008**



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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

In August 2007 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to review the Council's key partnerships in relation to value for money. It was agreed that all the key partnerships identified in 2006/07, when the Council developed a Corporate Partnership Strategy, should be looked at, although the initial focus would be on ensuring the Council's partnerships are worthwhile, add value and have clear goals and objectives.

Between August and December 2007 Panel members interviewed the Council's officers and representatives in relation to Teesdale Conservation Volunteers (TCV) Rotters, the Home Improvement Agency and the Durham e-govt Partnership.

In September 2007, Councillor Newton Wood, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, submitted an initial investigation report in respect of the review. The report outlined a requirement under the Local Government Act 1999 to ensure Best Value and outlined options to progress the review. It was noted that best value is about delivering partnership/services of excellence, within available resources, which respond to both local and national priorities.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed that the review should be undertaken by the Performance Panel. A preliminary report was submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in January 2008. The report outlined the Panels involvement in interviewing sponsors and representatives from key partnerships and the Panel's conclusion was that the key partners referred to above were felt to be well organised and efficient.

The following sections are taken from that preliminary report (updated to take account of developments). The Panel agreed to use a questionnaire for the final stage of the review, which was designed to ascertain whether or not our Partners do add value.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

The Audit Commission's Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) of Teesdale District Council in 2004 categorised the authority as 'poor' and more recently the Council's CPA reassessment had recategorised the Council as 'fair'. This means that the Council is performing adequately in all aspects covered in the assessment.

A review of the authority's partnerships was originally agreed by Council as part of the New Ways of Working project. The review was supported by the Overview & Scrutiny Development Panel who undertook 25 interviews with sponsors and officers. The review was facilitated by the purchase of a toolkit for managing partnerships.

The review formed the basis for the Council to develop a Corporate Strategy for Partnerships. A register of partnerships has been developed which identifies the

key governance processes required for each partnership and whether or not those partnerships have them in place.

Following the restructure of the Council's management during 2007, a post of Engagement Manager was created within the Assistant Chief Executive's Department. This officer is responsible for taking the review of partnerships forward and enhancing the day to day management of partnerships.

### **3. AIM**

Members identified that the outcome of the review should focus on ensuring the Council's partnerships are worthwhile, add value and have clear goals and objectives.

The initial phase of the review involved the Panel interviewing Council officers and representatives involved with specific partners, namely TCV (Rotters), the Home Improvement Agency and County Durham e-Government Partnership. It must also be noted that Members requested and undertook a site visit to TCV Rotters in December 2007, when they were taken on a tour and given information on the organisation's future plans.

A questionnaire designed to ascertain the value of the Partnerships was sent to all of the Council's partners included in the Register of Partnerships. It was agreed that the questionnaire would assist the Panel in assessing the value of the Council's partnerships and it was agreed that consideration should be given to a number of issues when undertaking this review, for example resource allocation and audit trails as public money is involved.

The Overview and Scrutiny Performance Panel's Membership:

Councillor Ken Coates (Chair)  
Councillor Arnold Smith (Vice Chair)  
Councillor Martin Clark  
Councillor David Reed

The Panel was supported by:  
Anne Lambert (Scrutiny and Member Support Officer)

## 4. **METHODOLOGY**

Following the initial phase of the review, each partner was sent a questionnaire designed to assist the Panel in evaluating the partnership. The questionnaire covered the following areas:

- Consultation with partners
- How Partners are assessed
- Has the Partnership been subject to a review or audit?
- Are users of the Partnership satisfied?
- How many clients or users use the Partnership?

The Panel indicated that measuring value for money was complicated and noted that whilst Partnerships do add value they also use a significant amount of officer and member time as well as funding. However, the Panel noted that Teesdale District Council gets value for money in terms of being able to deliver projects which it would not have had the capacity to achieve on its own. Partners contribute more money than the Council in some instances.

### **Consultation with Partners**

Responses to the first part of the questionnaire were very positive and indicate that the Council's Partners know who their users are - directly and indirectly. All Partnership representatives (not sponsors) clearly know their own outcomes and objectives.

With the exception of County Durham Waste Partnership, Teesdale LSP Environment/Thematic Group and the Health Partnership Group all Partnerships identified in the register receive money from the Council and the majority of our Partners receive some form of officer and member support.

### **Assessment of Partners**

Nearly all of our Partners are assessed by an outside body and reasons why they are assessed depends on the type of business, for example, reasons range from Best Value Performance Indicators, Audits and Quality Standards. Most of our Partners produce an annual or forward plan as well as undertake an audit.

### **Partnership Audit**

The majority of the Council's partners undertake some form of audit and they know who the company is who are employed to do this. Mostly the reasons given for audits are to carry out risk based assessments thus ensuring that financial probity and financial use of public funds is open and transparent. The majority of organisations undertaking an audit say that it is a legal requirement. It is agreed that internal audits are undertaken to ensure that correct processes and procedures are followed when carrying out related tasks.

### **Partnership Satisfaction**

The survey sent to representatives/sponsors asked Partnerships to identify how satisfied they thought the majority of users of the partnership were with the service. The analysis confirms that 75% of partners say they are receiving value for money as they had answered good (the highest score) to this question. Less than half had responded to the question regarding what indirect users feel about

the partnership indicating that it is perceived that this would be difficult to measure unless some form of survey is carried out. Although one partnership indicated that as they had not received a complaint then it must be perceived as good. When asked about all of the associates in the partnership and if they are pursuing the same objectives nearly all agreed they were.

### **Partnership Usage**

Half of those who responded to the question regarding the number of people who use the partnership and how the service would be rated answered they knew approximately how many users of the partnership there were and a similar amount indicated that they thought users perceived those services as good.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

During the course of the Review the Panel felt that the questionnaires and interviews provided base line information on the value of partnerships. In light of the implications of the Local Government White Paper, partnerships would become more important in the future. As the Council's partnerships had not been comprehensively reviewed in the past, the review provided baseline information on the Council's partnerships which would be passed to the new authority following the demise of the County and District Councils and the creation of a new unitary authority by April 2009. It should be noted that finance and officer time contributed to each partnership is recorded on the Council's partnership strategy.

Not all of the Council's partnerships receive funding but there is a protocol whereby a partnership can apply for money. Each application is assessed against agreed criteria as follows; it must benefit the residents of the district; support the Council's corporate priorities, help the Council meet its statutory duties; help meet the statutory duty of another body or bodies; ask is there an overlap with what other public bodies provide; is there more than one organisation providing this service; does the balance sheet or other supporting financial information provide evidence of the need for the financial support and finally without this support, would the service exist.

From the questionnaires and interviews it has been identified that a great deal of resources are put into partnerships by the Council and some bring great rewards. It is generally felt that if we enter into a partnership it should only be where we can achieve more together than we can alone and there is added value.

It was evident during the course of the review that the Council is involved in many successful partnerships which are having a positive impact on the community, however the successes are not publicised. Perhaps there should be a mechanism for officers and members to report on what their involvement has achieved.

We are working to ensure a smooth exit from partnerships and preparing our community-based partners to work effectively under the new regime. The Assistant Chief Executive has produced reports to Council which updates the Council on 10 key partnerships identified in 2007 as being critical to the Council in the delivery of our Vision and Priorities and a further update will be submitted to Council in December. These were:

- Teesdale Partnership
- Rotters
- CDeGov
- 2D CVS
- Enterprise Agency
- Barnard Castle Vision
- Groundwork West Durham
- Housing Benefits Shared Services
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Teesdale Housing Association

## **6. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Panel have found that all of the Partnerships identified within the Corporate Partnership Strategy provide the Council with value for money

The new unitary authority is requested to continue to work with and contribute to the District Council's partners.

## **Interviews**

24 August 2007, Interviews with:  
Joanne Kellett, Chief Finance Officer

18 October 2007, Interviews with:  
Gary Hutchinson, Assistant Director Environmental Services

8 November 2007, Interviews with:  
Trevor Watson, Director of Regeneration

6 December 2007, Interviews with:  
Helen Finnimore, Assistant Director of Customer Services  
Graham Pilkington, Housing Strategy Manager  
Alison Bradley, Manager Home Improvement Agency

12 December 2007, Site Visit and discussion with:  
Martin Bacon, Co-ordinator, TCV Rotters

20 December 2007, Interviews with:  
Councillor John Salter, Sponsor and Council representative, County Durham e-Government Partnership (CDeGP)

3 April 2008, Interview with  
Councillor Pauline Charlton, Lead Member for Housing

## **Questionnaire**

Responses have been received from the following Partners:

County Durham Waste Partnership  
Teesdale LSP Environment/Transport Thematic Group  
TCV Rotter, Green Waste Collection  
Durham Equalities Partnership  
County Durham e-Government Partnership (CDeGP)  
Young Persons Focus Group  
Durham Dales PCT Cardiac Rehabilitation Programme  
Teesdale and Wear Valley Enterprise Agency  
2D CVS and Volunteer Centre  
North Pennines AONB Partnership  
County Durham Area Tourism Partnership  
Teesdale Housing Association  
Teesdale Marketing Limited  
Teesdale Village Halls Consortium  
Health Partnership Group  
Home Improvement Agency  
Durham Sport Partnership  
Teesdale Development Company  
Durham Fly Tipping Forum  
Other Contributors:  
Citizens Advice Bureau  
Witham Hall  
Etherley Parish Council  
Cockfield Parish Council