

## **Partnership Governance Framework**

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### **Report of Lorraine O'Donnell, Assistant Chief Executive**

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#### **Purpose of the Report**

1. To inform Audit Committee of the Partnership Governance Framework (PGF) and Durham County Council's (DCC's) involvement with partnerships and which partnerships will be included in the annual audit plan.

#### **Background**

2. In March 2011 a report was presented to Audit Committee which detailed proposals for reviewing the arrangements for the Partnership Governance Framework. This new approach would
  - Simplify the existing system
  - Eliminate duplication between the PGF and other partnership audit arrangements
  - Provide a system which is more fit for purpose
3. Officers from Partnerships and Community Engagement and Internal Audit worked together to develop a new Sharepoint based system to collect and store partnership information. The definition of partnership was clarified, to focus effort on those partnerships with a significant strategic or operational role. A training session was held with nominated officers from service groupings before the system was introduced.

#### **Process**

4. Whilst all partnership registration and self assessments have been completed a number of issues arose during this process. The key ones are listed below.
  - a. Link service officers received Sharepoint training at the start of this process however other individuals were later identified as the most appropriate persons to complete the self assessments. These officers were therefore not familiar with the process which led to a delay in form completion.
  - b. Some information which was input to Sharepoint was not saved due to network issues and therefore had to be completed again
  - c. On closer examination of the completed forms some discrepancies were noted and rectified.

## Key Findings

5. The Partnership landscape is changing with national policy changes meaning the statutory requirement for some partnerships has been removed as has the 'duty to prepare a sustainable community strategy (SCS)'. The County Durham Partnership (CDP) and DCC however remain strongly committed to the SCS and the CDP framework which includes the five thematic partnerships and the 14 Area Action Partnerships. The CDP is currently undergoing a review and recently held an Away Day to reflect on achievements across the partnership since Vesting Day and to discuss how the partnership can remain fit for purpose in an ever changing environment.
6. The key information gathered by the PGF self assessment exercise shows that DCC is currently involved with 47 partnerships (The agreed definition being 'A partnership exists where two or more independent bodies make an agreement to work collectively to achieve a shared objective, and collectively take decisions on significant financial, operational or strategic issues.') a reduction of eight from 2010, 14 of these are the AAPs and six make up the CDP framework. It was decided whilst reviewing the PGF process to look at the thematic partnership level but not their sub group networks at this stage. Each thematic partnership for example has a range of sub groups or task and finish groups that support the work of the parent partnership. If these groups were included in the PGF the number would double as it currently stands. The exception to this is the Safe Durham Partnership as it is statutory as are many of its sub groups. A full list of the 47 Partnerships is at Appendix one.
7. The table below shows which 'altogether' priority theme partnerships consider they make the most significant contribution towards (scoring 1 on a scale of 1-5, where 1 is most significant, please note that for some partnerships more than one priority theme scored 1 therefore the number shown comes to more than 47).

Priority theme	Number of partnerships
Altogether wealthier	3
Altogether better for children & young people	12
Altogether healthier	14
Altogether safer	16
Altogether greener	9
Altogether better council	5

- a. The table below details numbers of partnerships for each service grouping.

Service Grouping	Number of partnerships
Adults, Wellbeing and Health	23
Assistant Chief Executive (inc 14 AAPs)	16
Children and Young People	4
Neighbourhood Services	3
Regeneration and Economic Development	1

8. The financial support given to AAPs and thematic partnerships has reduced this year whilst the most significant financial commitment continues to partnerships under the Adults, Wellbeing and Health Service Grouping, those with Tees, Esk and Wear Valley NHS Foundation Trust which deliver services to people with learning disabilities and with mental health needs. This, along with the reductions in other partnerships, evidences the Council's commitment to protect frontline services and to look to management cost reductions in the first instance.
9. As partnership working is more and more part of everyone's day job it is not possible to quantify this in any meaningful way. 'Partnerships' are also difficult to define as partners across all sectors work together in a range of different ways.
10. Due to the changing landscape in which we work and the fact that the majority of the work we engage in as a Local Authority is done with a partnership approach, it is proposed to reduce the cost to the authority of resource attached to this process and maximise efficiencies by removing the separate PGF annual reporting to Audit Committee. Officers from PACE and Internal Audit will work together to continuously develop and improve the self assessment questions to ensure that the information gathered is robust and meaningful and focuses on governance arrangements; risk assessments and information sharing which will evidence the partnerships' effectiveness. This information will be used to formulate the Partnership element of the Annual Audit Plan and will be included in the Annual Governance Statement.

#### **Audit Plan 2011/12**

11. As previously reported to Audit Committee, the responses from the annual self-assessment exercise were to be analysed to help determine priorities for work to be carried out by Internal Audit as part of a provision made within the ACE service grouping section of the annual programme of work for partnership governance.
12. In preparation of the partnership section of the annual audit plan the responses to the Partnership Self-Assessment were reviewed across the themes of:
  - Rationale for the Partnership
  - Resources of the Partnership
  - Governance Arrangements
  - Serving the Public
13. Particular attention was paid to those responses of 'disagree' and 'don't know', to determine those areas where Internal Audit may be of assistance in the development of processes or current reviews to support the work of the partnerships.
14. Those partnerships where the response of 'agree' was consistently applied were identified to determine those areas where Internal Audit may be of assistance in identifying best practice which can be shared across the partnership base.

15. In consideration of these factors Internal Audit has proposed that the following specific reviews be included in the Internal Audit plan for 2011/12:
- Area Action Partnerships with specific reference to:
    - i. Partnership Risk Register (including specific risks to Durham County Council)
    - ii. Information Governance
  - Local Resilience Forum with specific reference to a current review
  - Safe Durham Partnership with specific reference to identifying areas of best practice

### **Recommendations**

16. Audit Committee is requested to
- a. note the content of this report
  - b. agree the proposed audit reviews to be undertaken as part of the 2011/12 Annual Audit Plan

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