MELTON BOROUGH COUNCIL - PARTNERSHIP PROTOCOL

1 Background

The Audit Commission has previously identified a number of shortcomings in How councils approach partnership working. For example;

• Councils are not always clear why some partnerships have been entered into and what the mutual benefits are.
• Partnerships are not always aligned to corporate priorities.
• Councils do not always have clear exit strategies.

This protocol seeks to address these and other issues and set a more formalised approach to partnership working, whilst at the same time not introducing too much bureaucracy.

2 Defining Partnerships

A partnership is defined as "a group of stakeholders brought together from a range of organisations, to be responsible for tackling mainly long-term challenges and opportunities in which they have a shared interest". The Audit Commission describes partnerships as a joint working arrangement where the partners:-

• Are otherwise independent bodies
• Agree to co-operate to achieve a common goal(s)
• Create a new organisational structure or process to achieve this goal(s) separate from their own organisations
• Plan and implement a jointly agreed programme, often with joint staff or resources
• Share relevant information
• Pool risks and rewards

This definition also makes a distinction between:-

• Partnerships and 'external bodies' which may be defined as those bodies that are single (rather than multi-agency) entities, but in which other local authorities may be invited to participate (e.g. nominations to governing bodies).
• Partnerships and networks that consist of personal or professional relationships, which do not have to involve organisational commitment or support. They will usually be more fluid and smaller in scale than partnerships.

- Shared Services – a number of services are run through a public sector: public sector arrangement which is arranged through delegation and managed by a Joint Committee or agreement. Services provided in this way to be included.
- Partnerships and Strategic Partnering – over the last few years an increasing number of local authorities have entered into long-term contracts with private companies to provide a broad range of their services. The scale and size of some of these new partnerships are unprecedented in the local government sector and they have understandably attracted a lot of attention. The largest can be for ten years or more, can be worth between £20m and £30m per year and can involve substantial staff transfers or secondments.

The three above mentioned arrangements do not come under the remit of this protocol.

3 The Basic Features of Partnerships

Although partnerships vary widely in the exact form they take, they all share a number of basic features:-

- A constitution, but partnerships will vary in the way that they are constituted. while some have very detailed constitutions, others are much less formal expressions of the rules governing their operation (e.g. terms of reference).
- Common purpose with the bodies that make up their membership coming together. However, they will vary in the way that they work. Some will meet on a regular basis and have formal meetings held on a regular basis, and others will involve less formal relationships, such as largely operating through e-mail contact with less regular meetings.
- Defined roles and relationships of those involved, but those roles and relationships will vary significantly. While some partnerships will involve partners in taking decisions and acting on them, in others partners will simply exchange information and develop new thinking.
- A variety of agencies working together, but they will vary significantly in exactly whom they involve (e.g. in terms of the agencies represented on the partnerships and also whether officers or members from a Council participate).
- A lead agency. Some will be established by an authority, some will be established by other agencies, some will be statutory, others will be locally generated.
- Good understanding of the work of other bodies in the partnership and other partnerships. However, they will vary in how they work with other agencies and partnerships. Some are single partnerships, while others will see themselves as nesting in a network of interconnected partnerships.
- Be resourced in some way, but they will vary in the way that they are resourced. Some will have their own staff and budgets, while others will operate with minimal resourcing (e.g. the provision of meeting space).

4 What does Good Partnership Working Look Like

Successful organisations will be involved in a range of partnerships. They will do so because they have a real commitment to the greater good and understand the value of collective goals over individual ones. Some they will lead and these will be vital to the delivery of outcomes for communities. In others they will play a more supportive role. They will know which

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partnerships they need to be in and will be able to build partnerships that are:-

- Well -led: There is good leadership of partnerships, and partnerships provide good leadership in the local community.
- Inclusive: All relevant stakeholders and all sections of the community have a voice in the partnerships and their involvement is proportionate and equitable.
- Accountable: The way in which partnerships operate represents good practice in representative and participative democracy and there is clarity on where responsibility and accountability lie.
- Transparent: There is clarity on how partnerships operate and on what and how decisions are made. They are open to scrutiny.
- Focused on delivery: Partnerships produce tangible and relevant outcomes for local people and improve the quality of life.
- Economic and efficient: Partnerships go about their business in an orderly manner and organisational arrangements are 'fit for purpose'.
- Sustainable: Where relevant, partnerships have the capacity to deliver successfully over a period of time and to bring about changes that take several years to achieve.
- Innovative: Partnerships that are open to learning and new ways of doing things.

5 Why the Borough Council enters Partnerships

The Council can be drawn into partnership working for a number of reasons:

- Of its own free will to respond to an identified strategic or operational issue which might be too big, multi-faceted or unaffordable to achieve in isolation.
- By virtue of an effective obligation e.g. to access funding.
- As a statutory requirement e.g. Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, Local Strategic Partnerships.
- Meeting a community need for which no one agency is responsible.

6 Potential Problems

The types of problems that can occur by having too many unfocussed partnerships are as follows:

- The greater the number of partnerships in a particular service area, the more thinly the right types of people will be spread.
- Senior officer and Members cannot commit to all partnerships which have a call on their time and be an effective player in each.
- Some partnerships may not be necessarily assisting the Council to achieve its corporate priorities.
- Financial limitations restrict the ability to contribute to all partnerships where funding is required.
- The consequences of failed partnership working can lead to a loss of respect and damages trust between partners, compromising future prospects of partnership working.

7 Developing a Partnership Protocol

In view of the issues highlighted there is a need to have a more strategic approach to partnership working by developing; for those types of

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partnerships mentioned earlier:

- A policy statement about the Council's approach to and involvement in partnerships (Appendix A)
- A partnership checklist – a set of prompts to be considered before setting up or entering into a new partnership (Appendix B) where no other is provided.
- An evaluation framework – a formal means for reviewing the effectiveness of the partnerships in which we are involved (Appendix C) where no other means exists. Partnerships are to be evaluated on a 3 year cycle

The development of a policy statement and checklist will enable there to be an assessment of the merits of becoming involved in a partnership and the appropriate level of representation and resource to be dedicated (if required). For other organisations establishing a partnership, it will provide a clear indication of the circumstances in which the Council will or will not seek to be involved. In simple terms, it provides the rational behind saying "yes" or "no".

Similarly, use of an evaluation framework (only where no framework already exists) will provide a means of examining the performance of a partnership according to a number of set criteria and can assist in identifying ways of improving effectiveness.

To ensure consistency in application of the framework, it is recommended that a Senior Officer approves the evaluation of the Council's membership of a partnership (appendix B). It is suggested that this is the appropriate Head of Service. The completed evaluation form should be taken to Management Team. Where a representative needs authority beyond the existing Council Constitution/ Scheme of Delegation to take part in partnership decision-making, a report will need to be submitted to the appropriate Policy Committee. A review of Partnerships will take place following the evaluation and will be reported as appropriate to Policy Finance and Administration Committee. Should a Partnership require an earlier review due to particular circumstances, an evaluation will be completed as required and be part of any specific partnership report.

8 Risk Assessment

Application of the checklist will help to reduce the risk of being involved in partnerships; which contribute insufficiently towards the Council's priorities or fail to add value commensurate with the resources invested. Conversely failure to become involved in appropriate partnerships can result in loss of external funding potential, specialist knowledge or skills or opportunities to learn from others.

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Appendix A – Policy Statement

Melton Borough Council recognises the strength and value of effective partnerships in contributing to the improvement of the well-being of the Borough's communities and meeting its strategic priorities.

The Council encourages partnership working whenever appropriate. We believe partnerships are necessary when:

- Government requires them (e.g. crime and disorder partnerships)
- External funders require them in order to deliver funding streams
- Communities identify priorities for the improvement of well-being and no one organisation on its own has responsibility for delivery
- The Council does not possess the capacity, the knowledge or expertise on its own to deliver new services or service improvements
- Better value would be derived from delivering services in conjunction with others

We believe that partnerships can:

- Give critical mass through strength in negotiation, greater influence and better access to funding
- Achieve outputs greater than the sum of the individual partners by sharing knowledge, finding new ways of working and pooling resources
- Enhance local democracy by actively involving communities, businesses and the voluntary sector

When considering whether to get involved in a partnership, the Council will make a conscious decision having examined the issues set out in the checklist in Appendix B. The Council will only join a partnership if it can resource the investment (of time, assets, knowledge and money) required to effectively do so.

With some groups it can be difficult to assess how the Council can contribute or how the group's work supports any of the Council priorities. Sometimes we may have been invited out of courtesy, to bring credibility to the group or to get immediate feedback should any relevant matter ever be raised. In such cases, we should avoid regularly attending meetings and invite the group to liaise with us when necessary in a more efficient manner (e.g. by send us the minutes). In these circumstances a Lead Officer as a contact will be appointed. Where the issues are purely relevant to a local area and do not largely relate to the Council's responsibilities or services, it is anticipated that the appropriate town or parish council be involved in the group.

The Council will also seek to evaluate the effectiveness of existing partnerships through application of a performance management framework (see Appendix C).

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Appendix B - Partnership Checklist

The checklist will allow the Council to judge whether a partnership is appropriate and to provide guidance on ensuring the partnership has a good foundation for success.

The checklist should be completed before setting up or entering into a new partnership arrangement.

Partnership Other potential members Have they all agreed to participate?　Yes　　　No　　　Don't know	
Officer	Date completed
Assessed by	Date assessed

POLICY ISSUES

What is the issue of service improvement to be addressed through the partnership?

How does this assist the Council to achieve one or more of its corporate priorities?

Why does this require a partnership approach?

What would be the Council's role in the partnership?
(e.g. Lead organisation, major/minor partner, observer)

Is the Council to be the accountable body?

If yes, do we have the financial capacity, cash flow and audit capabilities?

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If the Council is not the lead organisation who will **be?**

What will be the Council's contribution in terms of costs
(Resource employed including monies, capacity, premises and/or equipment)

Have you identified the added value
partnership working brings?

Is there already a partnership in place with a
similar remit, which can take on this work?

PRACTICAL ISSUES

	Yes	No	Don't Know
Will the partnership contribute to streamlining existing partnerships?			
Have partners critical to the success of the partnership been identified? Please attach			
Does the partnership have a vision/mission statement? Please attach			
Does the prospective partnership have clear measurable objectives? Please attach			
Does the partnership have agreed terms of reference? Please attach			
Does the partnership have SMART fully resourced plan and does this link to your service plan? Please attach			
Is there a process for reporting progress?			
Are there clear procedures for making			

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	Yes	No	Don't Know
Decisions and resolving conflict?			
Is there a protocol for reporting and sharing of information?			
Have risks been identified (including financial controls) and managed?			
Is there a signed agreement?			
Is there a process in place to provide an exit strategy to consider on-going council liabilities?			

COMMENTS

Head of Service

Management Team sign off

Date

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Appendix C - Partnership Evaluation Toolkit

The toolkit is split into 4 sections and is to be used where there is no existing performance framework, or in addition to that framework if the Council considers this necessary.

Partnership details asks you to provide details of the partnership. Where possible this has been kept to "Yes/No" answers.

Self-assessment inventory has 28 questions to complete, based on the following principles:

- Action focus
- Efficiency
- Inclusivity
- Learning and development
- Performance management

Action plan arising from partnership assessment is a template which allows you to transfer action identified in the self assessment to an action plan for short term "quick wins" and medium to longer term improvements.

Summary assessment sheet for completion by Melton Borough Council to assess our role.

PARTNERSHIP DETAILS

PARTNERSHIP NAME

Main functions of partnership – please rank (1) – (4) or complete "others"

Set policy

Service delivery

Networking

Other (please state)

Is the partnership statutory?   Yes/No

Resources available to the partnership

	Yes	No	Don't Know
Will the partnership contribute to streamlining existing partnerships?			
Dedicated partnership budget (enter amount)			
Number of dedicated staff			
Influence over resources (enter amount)			
Other (e.g. in kind) – please state			
Name of reviewer			
Date of assessment			

Self-Assessment Inventory

1. Action Focus

Responses please rank below (1) to (5)

1. No or don't know

2. Yes, sometimes but not consistently

3. Yes, but there is room to improve

4. Yes and we can demonstrate real benefits

5. We are excellent at this – improvement is not a priority

Issues

- **How the partnership establishes common priorities and targets and agreed actions and milestones, leading to demonstrable improvements against measurable targets.**
- **How is the Partnership focussed on delivery: Is the Partnership producing tangible and relevant outcomes for local people and improving the quality of lives?**

	Rating 1-5
1.1 Does the Partnership have a clear, agreed long-term vision of what it wants to achieve?	
1.2 Does the Partnership have a shared set of values to which all members subscribe?	
1.3 Does the Partnership add value to the sphere of work it is contributing to and ensure that it is not working in isolation?	
1.4 Does the Partnership use feedback from the local community to identify need?	
1.5 Does the Partnership encourage innovation and improve processes?	
1.6 Does the Partnership have a positive impact on the way services are delivered?	

Qualitative Assessment

Things we do well.
What things **we** could do better.
Recent improvements we have made.
What things **should** we start doing.
Our innovative approaches.
What things **we** should stop doing.

Efficiency

2. Self-assessment inventory

Responses please rank below (1) to (5)

1. No or don't know

2. Yes, sometimes but not consistently

3. Yes, but there is room to improve

4. Yes and we can demonstrate real benefits

5. We are excellent at this – improvement is not a priority

Issues

- **How the partnership helps to rationalised arrangements and ensures that resources are used as productively as possible.**
- **Is the Partnership going about its business in an orderly manner with organisational arrangements which are fit for purpose.**

	Rating 1-5
2.1 Have available resources been matched against the Partnership's plans?	
2.2 Given its objective, does the Partnership have the right balance between strategic and operational activities?	
2.3 Do Partnership members reflect the views of the membership of the organisations they represent?	
2.4 Does the Partnership have effective support and administrative arrangements?	
2.5 Are meetings effective, timetabled and arrangements in place for communications between meetings?	
2.6 Has consideration been given to the lifetime of the Partnership and whether it should continue? Is this regularly reviewed?	

Qualitative Assessment

Things we do well.
What things **we could do better.**
Recent improvements we have made.
What things **should we start doing.**
Our innovative approaches.
What things **we** should stop doing.

Inclusivity

3. Self-Assessment Inventory

Responses please rank below (1) to (5)

1. No or don't know

2. Yes, sometimes but not consistently

3. Yes, but there is room to improve

4. Yes and we can demonstrate real benefits

5. We are excellent at this – improvement is not a priority

Issues

- **How the partnership actively involves all key players, including the public, private, community and voluntary sectors and service users.**
- **Is the Partnership inclusive? Are all relevant stakeholders and all sections of the Community engaged and have a voice in the Partnership. Is their engagement proportionate?**
- **Is the Partnership Transparent and open to scrutiny? Does it reflect participative democracy?**

	Rating 1-5
3.1 Does the Partnership ensure that its membership reflects the purpose of the Partnership?	
3.2 Does the Partnership ensure that all the partners have the capacity to be fully engaged in the Partnership?	
3.3 Is the management and chairing of the Partnership able to provide an inclusive and impartial overview?	
3.4 Does the Partnership work democratically and is it accountable to stakeholders?	
3.5 Are the Partnership's decisions open to scrutiny? e.g. open meetings, minutes recorded and publicly available?	

Qualitative Assessment

Things we do well.
What things **we** could do better.
Recent improvements we have made.
What things **should** we start doing.
Our innovative approaches.
What things **we** should stop doing.

Learning and Development

4. Self-Assessment Inventory

Responses please rank below (1) to (5)

1. No or don't know

2. Yes, sometimes but not consistently

3. Yes, but there is room to improve

4. Yes and we can demonstrate real benefits

5. We are excellent at this – improvement is not a priority

Issues

- **How the Partnership builds on best practice from other partnerships and encourages learning and development across all sectors and partners.**
- **Is the Partnership Innovative? Is it open to learning and new ways of doing things?**
- **Is the Partnership Sustainable? Has the Partnership capacity to deliver and make changes over a period of years?**

	Rating 1-5
4.1 Does the Partnership learn from and disseminate best practice?	
4.2 Is appropriate use made of the wide range of skills and expertise of Partnership members?	
4.3 Does the Partnership learn from stakeholders and apply this to service improvement?	
4.4 Does the Partnership find out why members leave or fail to engage with the Partnership and learn lessons for the future?	
4.5 Is the Partnership able to adapt to a changing environment?	

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Qualitative Assessment

Things we do well.
What things **we** could do better.
Recent improvements we have made.
What things **should** we start doing.
Our innovative approaches.
What things **we** should stop doing.

Performance Management

5. Self-Assessment Inventory

Responses please rank below (1) to (5)

1. No or don't know

2. Yes, sometimes but not consistently

3. Yes, but there is room to improve

4. Yes and we can demonstrate real benefits

5. We are excellent at this – improvement is not a priority

Issues

- **How the Partnership manages its performance in relation to its aims and objectives.**
- **Is the Partnership accountable? Does its operation represent good practice, with clarity on accountability?**

	Rating 1-5
5.1 Does the performance management process include clear milestones, outcomes, indicators and delivery dates?	
5.2 Is the financial position monitored and reported regularly to the partnership?	
5.3 Do partners deliver what they've signed up to do?	
5.4 Are partners' resources (including buildings and staff) effectively used to meet the aims of the partnership?	
5.5 Do partners share information to support planning and management?	

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Qualitative Assessment

Things we do well.
What things **we** could do better.
Recent improvements we have made.
What things **should** we start doing.
Our innovative approaches.
What things **we** should stop doing.

Proposal to Management Team

Action Plan arising from Partnership Assessment

Date

Partnership Name

Short term/ quick wins		
Medium/ longer term improvements		
Action – key finding of assessment		
Actions to deal with emerging nature of Partnership Actions to deal with a languishing Partnership		
Outcome – an improvement		Deadline
Resources – what is required to achieve the outcome (e.g. money, time etc)		
Responsibility – person/group		
Target – what will be achieved	Performance Measures/Milestones	
Lead Officer	Date	

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