

Partnership Toolkit



Forward

Working in partnership is a key area for local authorities and other public bodies. It is a productive way of achieving more efficient and effective use of scarce resources to achieve desired outcomes.

Since local councils have been charged with the duty to promote the economic, social and environmental well being of their area, the scope for partnership working has increased enormously. An example of this kind of partnership working in the District can be found in the Joint Castle Point and Rochford Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). The LSP is a non-statutory multi-agency partnership which brings together, at a local level, the different parts of the private, public, community and voluntary sectors.

Partnership working can be difficult to do well; it can be costly if not properly managed, and it may not deliver the desired outcomes if the aims and objectives are not clear.

The principal purpose of this toolkit is therefore to provide a framework against which every partnership that the Council is involved in is one which contributes positively to delivery of its Business Plan priorities.

A Partnership Toolkit – Why do we need one?

Partnership arrangements are only appropriate when they have the potential to deliver:

- value for money – when available resources are used effectively, efficiently and achieve economy;
- added value – partners achieving more than they would if they were working on their own.

We need to ensure that in the particular context of each partnership, that Council officers:

- are clear about its purpose and expected outcomes for its residents;
- are confident that the Council's agreed priorities and objectives are being met;
- take note of accountability and responsibility for outcomes;
- monitor, review and evaluate activity and outcomes so that best use is made of resources;
- assess agreed risks;
- agree an effective exit strategy;
- ensure that the partnership is properly empowered and their legal status understood.

Why work in Partnership?

Working in partnership can be a more productive way of delivering an outcome and utilising resources. From a District Council perspective, the key reasons for entering into partnership arrangements are as follows:

- **To support the Council's overall vision and priorities**

The Council's vision is:

'Our residents will be at the heart of everything we do.'

The Council's Business Plan 2016-2020 has four overarching priorities:

- Become financially self-sufficient.
- Early intervention.
- Maximise our assets.
- Enable communities.

Developing Skills for Partnership Working

Any partnership will contain a range of knowledge and skills, which should be recognised and used. Partners can learn from each other but sometimes skills will need to be learnt or brought in from outside the partnership. Some of the specific skills and knowledge required for partnership working include:

- Effective leadership skills.

- Assertiveness.
- Managing expectation.
- Creative thinking.
- Facilitation techniques.
- Project Planning.

Line Managers should ensure individual and team learning plans, will include appropriate provision and opportunities for officers, to develop their skills needed for partnership working.

Defining a Partnership

The word *partnership* is used frequently and can mean different things to different people. For the purpose of this toolkit the following simple definition will be used:

“When two or more people or organisations work together towards a common aim”

The Partnership Life Cycle

It can be helpful to understand partnerships as going through a series of stages, during which particular tactics are most appropriate, to ensuring progress and success. Diagram 1 identifies the partnership stages in the life cycle.

Partnerships need to work through these stages of the life cycle, in order to function with greatest effectiveness.

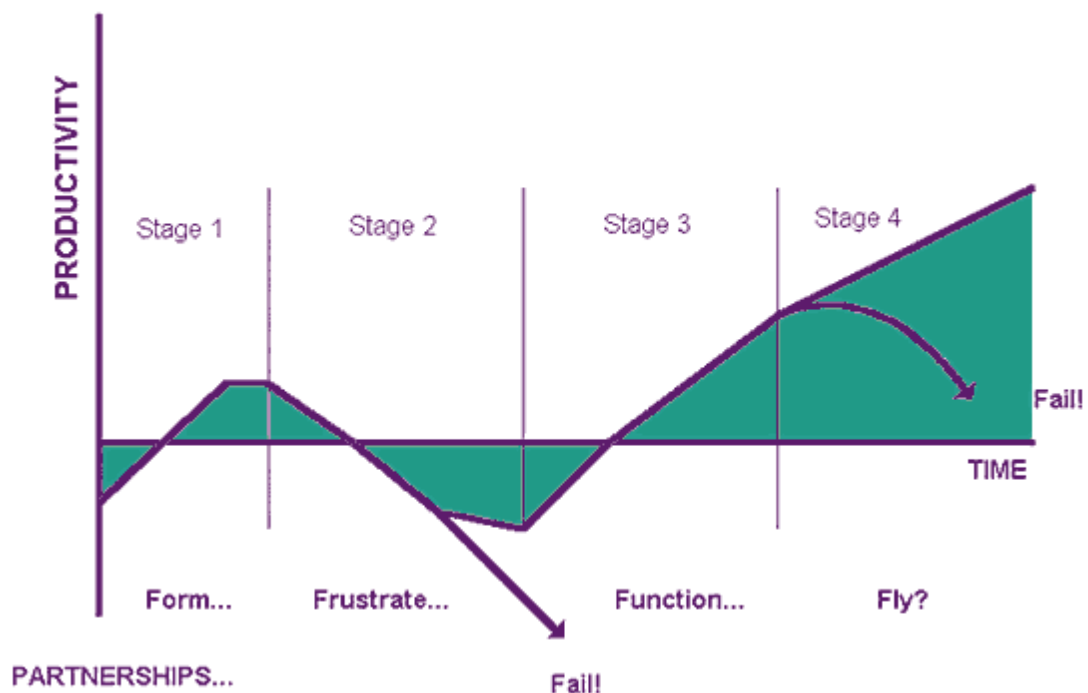


Diagram 1

Typical Characteristics of each stage

Stage 1 – Forming

- getting to know 'who is who' e.g. proactively inviting partners to get to know each other more via service planning or delivery of services;
- early enthusiasm: new challenge, new relationships e.g. consistently invite your contacts to attend events, and to comment on key policy;
- exploring what's needed, what's possible e.g. Learning from others and developing the evidence base;
- nature of commitments unclear at this stage.

Stage 2 – Frustration

- partners feel "in a fog";
- disputes or tension over priorities and methods;
- individuals questioning purpose of the partnership and reasons for being there;
- hidden agendas influencing what partners do;
- doubts about what each other brings to the party partners competing for credit and control.

Stage 3 – Functioning

- clear and focused as to how each partner can practically work together;
- progress through joint project teams;
- partners talk in terms of "we" not "you";
- clear roles and responsibilities;
- full accountability to each other for actions;

Stage 4 – Flying

- successful achievement of partnership goals;
- shared leadership;
- partners changing what they do and how they do it to achieve partnership objectives;
- trust and mutual respect;
- partnership priorities central to partner activities;
- pro-active marketing of the partnership;
- going beyond the boundaries to further improve the partnership.

Stage 5 – Failing

- disengagement;
- lack of commitment;
- recurrent tensions;
- breakdown or frittering away of relationships.

Partnership Good Practice

New Partnerships

Before entering into any new partnerships, the Council needs to satisfy itself around a range of issues. In particular, the Council needs to be clear about the following:

- There is a clear rationale for the partnership linked to delivery of the Council's Business Plan; and
- It will provide added value; and
- Governance arrangements are clear; and
- Performance management, financial management and risk management are accounted for;
- Termination arrangements are understood
- There is an appropriate authorisation process for any financial or other liabilities to be incurred by the partnership and/or the Council.

Key Responsibilities

The relevant Assistant Director(s) should be made aware of new partnership arrangements to ensure that the appropriate and necessary guidance can be given and will be responsible for ensuring the Leadership Team are kept updated.

To assist new partnerships in ensuring that they meet the above issues, a series of questions should be asked and a risk assessment completed.

Questions for New Partnerships are outlined in **Appendix 1**.

Reviewing Partnerships

Maintaining a successful partnership requires a lot of energy. All partnerships large or small, should be regularly reviewed to see how well they are working.

Key Responsibilities

To assist with this process, on an annual basis, the Strategic Partnership Officer will ask each Partnership to complete a self-assessment template, **see Appendix 2**, which covers :

- Foundations
- Partners
- Communication and Involvement
- Measuring and reviewing success

A score will be produced, which means that the exercise can be completed in the future as a review mechanism and the scores compared to show improvement. This process will also assist in making decisions about future involvement. Partnership progress will be reported annually to the relevant Assistant Director(s) and Leadership Team, for further scrutiny and note.

Future Involvement in Partnerships

Any partnership must have some way of measuring the impact of its work. Partners should be involved in setting objectives and targets and be committed to achieving them. Progress should be monitored and regularly reported back to partners.

In addition, the partnership itself should be reviewed to ensure that its structure still fits its purpose. Areas such as terms of reference and membership need to be revisited.

Key Responsibilities

Sometimes it may not be appropriate for a partnership to continue. If for example, the original objectives have been met then this should be celebrated and the partnership brought to an end with recognition of what it has achieved. Similarly if the partnership has not worked as intended lessons should be drawn and recorded from the experience

An exit document is shown in **Appendix 3**, which should be completed if involvement in an existing partnership ceases.

Summary

This toolkit is intended as internal guidance to enable consistency in our approach. It will also give confidence to our partners as to our approach and reinforces the point that partnerships can be both internal and external and form an everyday part of what we do, to make our day to day operations and project work happen.

Appendix 1 – Questions for New Partnerships

Key questions to be considered when entering into new partnership arrangements.

Appendix 2 – Partnership Self-Assessment Template

Template to be completed on an annual basis by all officers involved in specific partnerships.

Appendix 3 – Partnership Exit Document

Main information to be collected when exiting a partnership.