

Rossendale Borough Council In Partnership

Policy Statement

1. Introduction

Rossendale Borough Council is a small Council with big ambitions. We recognise we do not have the capacity to deliver these ambitions on our own. Local councils have traditionally been the direct provider of a wide range of services but there are now opportunities to bring greater investment or capacity into the borough by providing these services in different ways.

Alongside this, we remain committed to the continuous improvement of those services and functions we provide directly – and we work in a range of ways to ensure learning, development and doing things better.

To capture and manage our diversity of provision we are developing our Capacity Building Model of Local Government. This is represented in figure 1 below, which reflects the range of ways in which we are increasing our operational capacity beyond that of the Council's own direct capacity.

Figure 1:

Central to this approach is working in partnership.

2. Partnerships

We recognise that the word 'partnership' can cover a broad range of activity and relationships. The Audit Commission defines partnership as

'an agreement between two or more independent bodies to work together to achieve an outcome.'¹

Partnerships vary in size, service area, membership and function. They include:

- voluntary and statutory partnerships;
- executive and non-executive partnerships;
- strategic service delivery partnerships; and
- strategic partnering for private sector procurement

Rossendale Borough Council is engaged in many different types of partnership which vary in size, scope and impact. This Policy Statement sets out the process of ensuring we have the appropriate governance arrangements in place for the

¹ Audit Commission (2005) Governing Partnerships: Bridging the Accountability Gap

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partnerships we are involved in, that they are contributing a valuable outcome and that they are effective.

- **Seven Steps to Positive Partnerships**

Step One:

What Partnerships Are We Involved In?

An audit of partnerships has been undertaken and a Corporate Partnership Register is being developed. This Register will document:

- Name of the Partnership
- Partnership Category
- Stated Aim(s) of the Partnership
- Accountable Body (if appropriate)
- Lead Contact

Step Two:

Review of Partnership Activity

Once the audit has been completed a review of Partnership Activity will take place. This will take place at corporate and service levels. The review will be based on the Checklist set out in Appendix 2 to this Policy Statement.

The options for the review process will be:

- Withdraw from the Partnership
- allow another body to represent the Council's interest
- set a time limit for involvement
- remain involved
- remain involved, but at a different level (e.g. a watching brief or attendance when the agenda is relevant)

Step 3:

Good Partnership Governance

Governance arrangements for different forms of partnership working are determined by their legal form. Examples include:

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Charity Commission approves the trust deeds of registered charities.

Companies limited by guarantee have their memoranda and articles of association.

A report by INLOGOV (2004) concluded that 'governance systems should be proportional to the responsibility and risks of the partnership.'

The majority of partnerships, including the Rossendale Partnership (LSP) are unincorporated associations; they often adopt a constitution and memorandum of understanding or terms of reference as a governing document.

Appendix 3 to this Policy statement details the main elements of the Charity Commission's model constitution which can be adapted for local use.

Step 4: Value for Money

There is a cost, as well as a benefit, to partnership working. Rossendale Borough Council has introduced a strong challenge process to service delivery to ensure that delivery mechanisms are the most appropriate for delivering cost-effective, efficient and sustainable services that meet the needs of service users. This same culture is being introduced to working in partnership.

Partnerships will be expected to regularly review the way in which they work to ensure that the outcomes and outputs merit continued involvement. The initial assessment will take place during the programmed review of partnership working on a service by service basis. Costs profiles can include direct expenditure and staff/Elected Member time. Opportunity costs could also be identified i.e. what else has not been achieved because of time engaged in the partnership.

Step 5: Systems and Processes

Partnerships need to have appropriate systems in place for:

- performance management
- financial management
- risk management
- protocols for sharing of information and knowledge

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Procedures are also needed for resolving conflicts of interest. Again, these will need to be reviewed on a regular basis as part of ensuring the Partnership continues to be fit for purpose.

**Step 6:
Strong Corporate Governance**

The Audit Commission publication 'Governing Partnerships' makes it clear that, where partnerships are not corporate entities (e.g. companies limited by guarantee) their separate governance arrangements cannot mirror the detail found in corporate bodies. In the absence of formal governance arrangements, responsibility for supporting the governance of partnerships falls to the partner's own corporate governance arrangements.

The Council therefore requires a scheme of delegation that makes clear who can take decisions on its behalf, the extent of their authority and how decisions will be reported back. The report suggests there should be formal links between an organisation's scrutiny and internal audit functions.

A development programme is required for those Elected Members and Officers who are formally placed on partnerships on behalf of the Council in order that they understand their role and responsibilities.

The Statement of Internal Control has an important role as it requires the Leader and Chief Executive to state that there is a system in place to ensure that key risks are managed – this should always include risks in relation to partnerships.

**Step 7:
Clear Accountability**

Partners can achieve better accountability to the public in three ways:

- be open and transparent in their decisions and activities, and communicate these to the public effectively;
- engage and involve service users in decision-making and operational activities through active involvement in boards and through consultation
- provide service users with a means of redress if things go wrong.

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The Council is currently facilitating the development of a Community Involvement and Engagement Strategy which will set out an agreed approach to community engagement and involvement locally.

- **Action Plan**

Appendix 1 sets out the Action Plan for translating these seven steps into effective partnership working.

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Appendix 1: Partnership Working – Action Plan

| Action | Timescale | Resources | Outcome | Lead |
|--|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|---|---|
| Partnership Working: Policy Statement agreed | December 2007 | Officer and Elected Member time | Clear Policy Framework for Partnerships within Rossendale Borough Council | Leader Chief Executive |
| Partnership Checklist Agreed | December 2007 | Officer time | Clear criteria established for partnership working | Chief Executive |
| Complete Corporate Partnership baselining activity | January 2007 | Officer Time | Establish Partnership Register to provide clear understanding of partnership involvement across the Council | Head of Community and Partnership |
| Annual Review process | January 2008 (first review) | | Ensure Partnership Register kept up to date | Head of Community and Partnerships/ Overview and Scrutiny |
| Service Review of Partnerships completed (based on Partnership checklist): Phase One | | Officer time | Clear picture of service involvement in Partnership activity. | Deputy Chief Executive |

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| Action | Timescale | Resources | Outcome | Lead |
|--|--|---|--|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Strategic Housing Service 2. Spatial Development Service 3. Human Resources Phase 2 agreed for roll out of service review process | January 2007 February 2007 February 2007 March 2007 | | Appropriate activity taking place. | |
| Governance audit to be completed for all partnerships on the Corporate Partnership Register based on Appendix 3. Governance arrangements updated where appropriate/necessary. | December 2007 | Officer and partners time Internal Audit for sample checks | Appropriate governance structures in place for all partnerships in which Rossendale BC engaged | Head of Legal and Democratic services |
| Development Programme for Elected Members and Officers | June 2007 | I&DeA Capacity Building programme | Clear understanding of roles and responsibilities to ensure effective partnership working. | Head of Legal and Democratic Services |
| Statement of Internal Control agreed. | ?? | Member and Officer time | Strong Corporate Governance | Cabinet Member for Financial and Risk |

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| Action | Timescale | Resources | Outcome | Lead |
|---|---------------|---|---|---|
| ??Sections for Heads of Service – do they include signing off partnership structures? | | | | Management |
| Community Involvement and Engagement Strategy completed | December 2007 | Consultant/REAL £30k Elected Member/Partner/Office r time | Clear approach in Rossendale to Community Involvement and Engagement. | Cabinet Member for Community and Partnerships Head of Community and Partnerships |

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Appendix 2: Partnership Checklist (Corporate/Service)

1. Why does the partnership exist?
2. What are its agreed aims?
3. Through these aims how does the partnership contribute to Rossendale Borough Council's Strategic Objectives and Corporate Priorities/ Service Objectives and Priorities?
4. Does the Council/Service need to be involved?
5. Could another partnership provide either the same or a similar function?
6. Does the partnership have clear terms of reference?
7. Is there an engagement and exit strategy?
8. Is it a group with a specific task and a time limit.
9. What is the cost of involvement (e.g. direct budget contribution and Elected Member and staff time in meetings and associated activities)
10. Is the partnership contributing to/in line with the Council's Equalities Strategy?

Appendix 3: Charity Commission Model Constitution – Main Elements

- the name of the partnership;
- aims and objectives;
- membership, including status of different members and termination of membership, schemes of delegation;
- powers;
- roles;
- income;
- meetings, notice and frequency of meetings; quorum rules; chairing arrangements; voting arrangements; and the representation of other members;
- decision-making processes (scope and timescales);
- timescales;
- amendments to the partnership's rules
- minutes; and
- exit strategy/arrangements for dissolution

Governance Audit also to include:

- processes for resolving conflict of interest
- Performance management systems
- financial management systems
- protocols for sharing of information and knowledge
- risk management processes
- complaint management procedures

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Background Documents

Rossendale Borough Council Corporate Improvement Plan 2006-2009

Audit Commission (2005) Governing Partnerships: Bridging the Accountability Gap

INLOGOV Effective Partnership and Good Governance: Lessons for Policy and Practice