



Buckinghamshire County Council

Report

Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Partnership

AGENDA ITEM: 5

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Title	Review of Partnerships - The way forward
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Summary

1. This report sets out to provide guidance for the review of Partnerships that is to be undertaken between now and December. It takes on board the views of members as expressed at the Committee's meeting in July. The report includes a short section on the reasons for partnerships, a number of questions that could be asked when evaluating partnerships and another short section on how the review could be carried out.

Recommendation

2. That the committee agrees to the criteria for creating partnerships in paragraphs 5 and 6 and uses the questions in paragraph 7 and criteria in paragraph 8 to form the basis for their investigation. The initial work in the review should be undertaken in accordance with the parameters set out in paragraphs 10 and 11.

Background

3. The County Council works with, and relies on, a diverse range of partnerships with many partners. From time to time these partnerships change as the County Council's aspirations alter. There are a variety of partnerships. To date there has been no corporate analysis of the added value that these partnerships bring or how decisions should be taken to identify the partnerships that the Council enters into. A start was made on this work in 1997 and an interim report was produced. However the work was not completed due to other tasks taking precedence. These terms of reference draw to some extent on that earlier work.
4. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has included in its programme for this year a review of partnership working across the authority with the intention of

assessing whether there is room to improve performance. Terms of reference for the review were agreed as follows:

- (i) To identify the number and different categories of partnerships with which the County Council is involved
- (ii) To obtain information on the histories of a sample of the partnerships (how they were set up, why, what have been the benefits, have there been any problems etc)
- (iii) To produce evaluation criteria for measuring the success of partnerships and a process for monitoring the progress of partnerships
- (iv) To produce criteria for evaluating new partnerships, to measure the value of one partnership against another and to enable decisions to be taken on whether to retain existing partnerships
- (v) To decide on recommendations to be put before the Cabinet. For example on whether a complete review of all partnerships should be recommended. If it is, to set a timescale for the review

The purpose of a partnership

5. The earlier work in 1997 raised a question about whether the needs of the County Council should drive relationships with partners or vice versa. The report then went on to suggest that in fact the emphasis should be on doing what is good for the County and the people who live in it. A conclusion with which very few people are likely to argue.
6. However, even if something of a truism, that conclusion would seem to be a good starting point for any discussion of the reasons why partnerships should be created. It leads on to a number of other possible reasons for developing partnerships. For example:
 - To maximise potential resources for the people of Buckinghamshire by involving partners in undertaking some of the County Council's responsibilities thus releasing resources to undertake other priorities
 - To extend the range of the County Council's activities by working with a variety of partners
 - To develop the new duty of "well-being" (i.e. to promote the economic, social and environmental well being of the County) by promoting further partnerships to address cross-cutting issues such as community safety (much good work is already being done), social exclusion etc.
 - To develop services in line with Best Value principles and the Council's commitment to "deliver high quality services, affordable to the Council Tax payer"

Evaluating partnerships

7. Assuming that the above do form the criteria driving partnership working, how can success be measured? The Local Government Association (LGA) has undertaken work relating to this issue. They suggested a number of questions to be asked when considering partnerships. Those that seem to be relevant to this exercise are set out below:
 - What key ingredients can be identified that have contributed to successful partnership working?

- What obstacles have been encountered?
 - How have they been overcome?
 - Are there still barriers (cultural, legal, financial etc.)? If so, what needs to be done to remove them?
 - How does the Council decide to work in partnership with others?
 - How is a decision made to terminate existing arrangements?
 - How is the success of a partnership evaluated (costs v achievements)?
 - What new ways of working have been developed?
 - How are the citizens of Buckinghamshire involved with partnerships?
 - How are the partnerships held accountable?
 - Could co-ordination of a number of partnerships provide greater benefits?
 - Are there any new skills, competencies, cultures required by staff and members to make partnership working more effective? If so, how would the needs be addressed?
 - Which partnerships, if any, could be said to be addressing the crosscutting issues relating to the duty of well being?
8. The committee at its last meeting stated that there was a need to recognise that small partnerships could be just as effective as large ones and that those involved in such partnerships often gave their time voluntarily. Criteria for assessing partnerships should encompass whether or not they fitted in to the Council structure, whether or not they could be resourced and whether or not there was a clear need for the partnerships to exist.
9. The questions in paragraph 7, added to the committees views set out in paragraph 8, could form the basis for an Overview and Scrutiny Committee investigation into partnerships and also be used to develop criteria for their regular monitoring and evaluation.

Conduct of the review

10. When agreeing the basis for the review members expressed the view that the work should be broken down into smaller, manageable pieces of work in order for the Committee to keep to the timescales. It was further agreed that:
- Clarity of purpose was required and any conclusions reached should aim to strengthen and improve the partnerships
 - Part of the review could be to examine how the Council interfaces with its partners
 - The initial task could be to define what partnerships exist and outline their objectives
11. In order to achieve these objectives it is proposed that, initially the review should concentrate on partnerships related to Social Services and health and in particular to consider partnerships with voluntary organisations. From this work a greater understanding could be achieved of partnerships generally. In addition principles could be developed that the Committee could then test against partnerships relating to other disciplines.