

**Standards Committee : 7 December 2010**

**Title of report: Partnership Behaviour Protocol**

<b>Is it likely to result in spending or saving £250k or more, or to have a significant effect on two or more electoral wards?</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>Is it in the Council's Forward Plan?</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>Is it eligible for "call in" by Scrutiny?</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>Cabinet member portfolio</b>	<b>Corporate</b>

**Electoral wards affected and ward councillors consulted: All**

**Public or private: Public**

## **1. Purpose of Report**

To brief Standards Committee on guidance produced by Standards for England on partnership arrangements and to recommend that Standards Committee refer the protocol referred to in the guidance to Corporate Governance and Audit Committee.

## **2. Key Points**

The Standard for England Partnership Behaviour Protocol forms the Annex to this report. The background to the protocol is the increasing importance of partnership working between local authorities and other agencies in the public, private and voluntary sectors. The protocol focuses on governance issues with a view to promoting more effective working and managing risk. One difficulty which can arise is that not all individuals involved in partnership working will be councillors or co-opted members with voting rights and only councillors and voting co-optees are subject to the Code of Conduct and the associated standards regime. This means that there may be a lack of common standards of conduct across the various agencies and individuals involved in partnership working.

The approach taken in the protocol is to develop a shared set of values and behaviours between the various agencies involved in partnership working

which covers both standards issues and good governance. The protocol is intended to promote high quality leadership, good decision making, clarity in relation to roles, responsibilities and activities and successful working relationships.

Standards for England is seeking to achieve the following by encouraging local authorities to adopt the protocol:

- embed high ethical standards in partnership working
- address the disparity of rules and scrutiny governing those involved in local decision making
- enable partners to agree what behaviour they can expect from each other
- help partners hold each other to account and encourage constructive challenge between partners
- help partners to exercise leadership by demonstrating their own high standards of behaviour to other partners and to the public
- promote trust amongst the general public, demonstrating the partners' commitment to behaviour of a certain standard
- improve performance management

The intention behind the protocol is that it could be used when partnerships are being formed, to hold partners to account, but it must be noted that the protocol or any modified version of it has no statutory backing. This means that any mechanisms for enforcing the protocol, or dealing with disputes related to the protocol, would be informal and any oversight of the application of any adopted protocol by Standards Committee would not include any power to impose sanctions on agencies or individuals.

Given that the protocol is concerned with good governance the recommendation is that the protocol be referred to Corporate Governance and Audit Committee with a recommendation from Standards Committee that it be adopted by the Council.

The focus on good governance in the protocol means that the pending abolition of the standards regime would not necessarily undermine the relevance of the protocol. The future absence of a standards regime would arguably strengthen the case for the protocol.

### **3. Implications for the Council**

The adoption of a protocol could help the Council to promote and maintain higher standards of conduct and governance in its partnership arrangements.

### **4. Consultees and their opinions**

N/a

## **5. Officer recommendations and reasons**

It is recommended that the protocol be referred to Corporate Governance and Audit Committee with a recommendation that it be adopted by the Council.

## **6. Cabinet portfolio holder recommendation**

N/a

## **7. Next steps**

If the recommendation is approved, to refer the matter to Corporate Governance and Audit Committee.

## **8. Contact officer and relevant papers**

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### Background Papers:

Protocol for Local Authority Partnership Working on the Standards for England website at:

<http://www.standardsforengland.gov.uk/Resources/Resourcelibrary/Toolkits/wp/>

## **ANNEX**

### **Standards for England Recommended Partnership Behaviour Protocol**

#### **Achieve intended outcomes**

Our priorities are evidence based and our decision making is transparent.

We will:

- Share resources to achieve joint outcomes
- Monitor how well we have used our resources
- Actively encourage ideas and innovation
- Ensure that decision making is transparent
- Be committed to continuous improvement
- Ensure that claims of improved performance are based on clear evidence
- Establish accountability both across the partnership (horizontally) and within each organisation (vertically)

#### **Public interest**

We act in the interest of the public and demonstrate value.

We will:

- Focus on long term as well as short term issues
- Act in the interests of the public good over individual interests
- Demonstrate to the community how we are achieving publicly valued outcomes
- Agree a protocol for the handling of complaints that relates to our joint work

#### **Building partners' capacity**

We build capacity in our partnership.

We will:

- Be committed to developing individual partners' skills to achieve our aims
- Encourage partners to be confident working outside of their organisational culture
- Be open to partners' suggestions and help

#### **Value and respect each other**

We respect and value everyone's contribution.

We will:

- Ensure that all partners contribute appropriately and openly

- Acknowledge the capabilities of all members
- Recognise and embrace the role of voluntary and community sector partners
- Avoid dominance by one or two individuals
- Respect each other's roles and needs
- Actively encourage the participation of all partnership members
- Build effective working relationships with each other
- Recognise the value of all partners' contributions

### **Act ethically**

We act ethically. We are open and objective and encourage constructive challenge.

We will:

- Agree a mechanism for whistleblowing and dealing with complaints
- Ensure whistleblowers are supported
- Actively promote a 'no-blame' culture
- Support partners to both understand and constructively challenge any poor behaviour
- Use appropriate, unambiguous and simple language
- Agree how we will achieve democratic accountability
- Ensure that our dialogue is open and transparent
- Declare conflicts of interest and address them
- Make sure that the purpose of all meetings is made clear
- Be honest and objective

### **Aligning strategies and networks**

We harness our collective efforts through joint planning, delivery and governance arrangements.

We will:

- Ensure that partners can influence the decision making of member organisations
- Allow sufficient time and capacity to be given to understand an issue and to reflect on its impact
- Make sure that actions taken by the partnership are clear, time-limited and task-orientated
- Encourage all partners to actively shape the strategy
- Ensure that agreed actions are carried out