

Standards and partnerships

Standards in partnerships protocol

Standards for England is working to develop a series of tools which can be used locally to assess and improve local government partnership arrangements.

We have developed this protocol (see page 3) in partnership with Manchester City Council for use by local authorities to encourage high standards of behaviour of those that work in their partnerships. In this session we would like your input into the work so far and, in particular, how it can be put into practice.

Background

Good governance enables an authority to pursue its vision effectively as well as underpinning that vision with mechanisms for control and management of risk¹.

Poor governance, on the other hand, can lead to a range of problems including poor quality leadership, poor decision making, lack of clarity in relation to roles, responsibilities and activities and poor working relationships.

It is as important to achieve good governance in partnership arrangements as it is in organisations. Research into the governance of partnerships has shown that partnerships exhibit considerable variation in their governance arrangements (not surprising considering the variety of forms partnership working takes).

High standards are a cornerstone of good governance; these should be part of the culture of organisations. In partnerships potential issues are that different partners work from different cultures particularly with respect to openness and transparency, there is inconsistency in the codes that partners are working to and inconsistency in how codes are enforced (Greasley et al, 2006).

The key aim of this project is to develop a shared set of values and behaviours that will underpin partnership work. It is intended that this will encourage high standards in partnership working by creating a level playing field for partners by agreeing what good behaviour looks like at the outset.

It will enable partners to agree what behaviour they can expect from each other and give them a means by which to hold each other to account.

¹CIPFA SOLACE Good Governance Framework

Development

The values and behaviours in the protocol have been developed in conjunction with Manchester City Council and some of their partners. Those that work in partnership with the City Council have been consulted on what behaviours and values they think should underpin partnership working and their expectations when working with others.

The protocol draws on and is consistent with the CIPFA SOLACE Good Governance Framework which was designed to assist authorities in considering how they might go about reviewing their governance arrangements. The CIPFA SOLACE Framework is made up of 6 core principles and Principle 3 in particular focuses on demonstrating the values of good governance through upholding high standards of conduct and behaviour.

The protocol also draws on the seven principles for the conduct of people in public life that were established by the Committee on Standards in Public Life, known as the Nolan principles. These are: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.

The protocol should not be regarded as a finished product, rather as framework that authorities can adapt to suit specific partnership arrangements.

It should be noted that the values and behaviours outlined here are in addition to compliance with legal requirements on, for example, equal opportunities and antidiscrimination.

Your thoughts

In this session we would like to receive your input into the work done so far and, in particular, how the protocol can be put into practice.

Please consider the following questions when reviewing the protocol, you will be given the opportunity to respond and share your thoughts during this session².

Q How should the protocol be put into practice?

Suggestions so far have been that local authorities use the protocol in the following ways:

- As a tool to assess the values and behaviours of existing partnerships; and/or
- As a protocol that partners sign up to at the outset of working together to act as a means by which they can hold each other to account.

²Technical guidance will be provided to assist in addressing these (and other emerging questions) once the protocol has been finalised.

- Q How can we make sure it does not 'sit on a shelf'?
- Q What role could standards committees have in supporting the protocol?
- Q What, if any, barriers do you think there will be to the effectiveness of the protocol?
- Q What can we do, if anything, to overcome them?
- Q What benefits, if any, do you think the protocol can bring?

The 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 organizational 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