

Executive

Working in Partnership - Annual Report

Executive 16 March 2009

Report of the Chief Executive

PURPOSE OF REPORT

This Annual Partnerships Report:

- reviews the achievements of the Council's significant partnerships in 2008/09
- sets out the progress made improving the governance and performance management of the Council's significant partnerships.
- Sets out the key activities for significant partnerships in 2009/10.

This report is public

Recommendations

The Executive is recommended to:

- (1) Note the key achievements of the Council's significant partnerships in 2008/09 and the contribution they make to delivery of the Council's strategic priorities
- (2) Review the progress made during the year in strengthening the governance of the Council's significant partnerships
- (3) Agree the actions proposed by the significant partnerships for 2009/10
- (4) Agree the proposals to improve partnership working detailed at paragraph 1.5 below
- (5) Refer this Annual Partnerships Report to Overview and Scrutiny as part of their future programme of work on the evaluation of partnerships.

Executive Summary

Introduction

- 1.1 In March 2008, the Council agreed a Partnership Protocol and Working Framework. The Framework requires the production of an annual report of the year's achievements focusing on the significant partnerships. The Council's significant partnerships are those key in helping deliver the Council's strategic priorities and the new Local Area Agreement.
- 1.2 Partnership working is becoming increasingly important. It offers the opportunity to achieve common goals while saving resources. Partnership working enables organisations to be more efficient and effective by working together rather than working on their own. Improving outcomes through partnership working is a key aspect of the new national inspection regime called Comprehensive Area Assessment, which replaces Comprehensive Performance Assessment from April 2009.
- 1.3 The Council's aim is to fully exploit the opportunities for partnership working and strengthen the governance and performance management arrangements. This report sets out the achievements in 2008/09 and the actions proposed for 2009/10, both for service delivery and improving the management of partnerships. In doing so, this report shows the contribution partnership working is making to delivering the Council's strategic priorities and the Local Area Agreements.
- 1.4 This report shows that there is still much more to be done to realise the opportunities available to the Council and sets out a significant work programme for 2009/10 and beyond.

Proposals

- 1.5 It is proposed that partnership working is strengthened across Cherwell. Aiming to exploit opportunities to deliver better services using fewer resources. The following sets out a significant work programme of initiatives for 2009/10 and beyond to help deliver this agenda:
 - Improve the service delivery and value for money from Cherwell's significant partnerships
 - Seek out opportunities for new partnership arrangements to improve service delivery and value for money
 - Continue to strengthen governance and accountability arrangements, especially around information and data sharing arrangements
 - With West Oxfordshire District Council, continue to jointly lead the countywide review of the structure and governance arrangements of countywide partnerships
 - As part of this countywide review, achieve agreement on the significant partnerships common to all the local authorities across Oxfordshire and focus resources accordingly
 - Strengthen the support for elected Members involved in partnerships on the Council's behalf through the Member Training and Development Programme
 - Strengthen the links between the Council's partnerships and Executive Members, to be considered as part of the Council's current review of its Constitution
 - Consider hosting a Cherwell Partnerships Conference to celebrate achievements, consider future partnership opportunities, share knowledge and best practice

- Include significant partnerships in the Council's performance management framework and include in the quarterly performance report to the Executive.

1.6 The above proposals will be incorporated into the Council's Corporate Improvement Plan for 2009/10. In addition, there will be an internal audit of partnership working in Spring 2009 and any recommendations for improvement will be incorporated into this programme for improvement.

1.7 Conclusion

The Council's strong partnership working has been recognised as part of the Council's Comprehensive Performance Assessment undertaken in November, 2008. The inspectors praised the Council's strong partnership working, saying that the Council is an effective leader of partnership working locally.

The Council is well placed to exploit the opportunities that are presented by partnership working, whether with the private sector, other authorities and agencies or with the voluntary and community sector. This is particularly important with the increasing pressure on resources and funding arising from the economic downturn.

This report shows there is added value being gained by working in partnership for the benefit of Cherwell residents and that there is considerable progress being made in improving the governance and performance management arrangements of its significant partnerships.

Finally, the proposals in this report detail a work programme that charts a way forward during 2009/10 and beyond, aiming to further improve the Council's partnership working.

Background Information

2.1 Cherwell's Partnership Framework

In March 2008, the Council adopted a Partnership Protocol and comprehensive Partnership Working Framework. The Framework describes the monitoring and reporting arrangements to the Executive including the production of an annual partnerships report, focusing on the Council's significant partnerships.

2.2 Improved Management of Partnerships

The importance of partnership working to the Council is reflected in the Council's Corporate Plan and Improvement Strategy, which aims to fully exploit the opportunities for partnership working and to have governance and performance regimes in place that ensure partnerships are working effectively. Delivering cost-effective services through well managed partnerships has been a focus for this year and has increasing importance in 2009/10 and beyond with the increasing pressure on resources.

2.3 Audit Commission Comprehensive Area Assessment

The Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) framework, including the Use of Resources Assessment, was published on 10 February 2009. This will be used to judge the Council's performance in 2008/09. How well organisations work in partnership is central to the inspection regime, particularly in county and district areas. The process of assessing organisations and agencies across Oxfordshire has already begun, with the final assessment being published late November, 2009.

Key Issues for Consideration/Reasons for Decision and Options

3.1 Significant Partnership Achievements in 2008/09

The attached appendices highlight the following achievements from the Council's significant partnerships (Appendices 1 & 2):

- Key achievements in 2008/09 for each of the Council's 17 significant partnerships and the value for money offered by those partnerships
- Key actions proposed for 2009/10 for each of the Council's 17 significant partnerships
- Strengthened governance arrangements
- The clear links between significant partnerships and the delivery of the Council's strategic priorities and associated corporate targets
- Delivery of the outgoing Local Area Agreement 1 targets by April 2009 and the new Local Area Agreement 2 National Indicator targets

3.2 Defining Significant Partnerships

The Council's Partnership Register, totalling over 60 partnerships, has recently been refreshed. In particular, the Council's significant partnerships were reviewed, focusing on those partnerships helping deliver the Council's strategic priorities and the new Local Area Agreement. The significant partnership list (detailed in Appendix 1) divides into two categories: countywide partnerships and those that are Cherwell specific.

The countywide partnerships report direct into the Public Service Board and Oxfordshire Partnership. Under the Local Area Agreement these countywide partnerships are responsible for delivering one or more National Indicator targets. Cherwell is currently working on a countywide basis to establish a common list of countywide significant partnerships. This cross-county partnership working will provide clarity around significant partnerships and enable resources to be focused.

3.3 Strengthening Governance Arrangements

There is currently a review of the structure and governance arrangements for countywide partnerships, led by Mary Harpley (Cherwell's Chief Executive) and David Neudegg (West Oxfordshire's Chief Executive). This review is proposing a number of thematic partnerships and the revised thematic partnerships structure across Oxfordshire was recently agreed by the Public Services Board. There will now be further work undertaken to consider relevant and in many cases, improved governance arrangements for this new county-wide partnership structure. This work will impact upon the Council's most significant partnerships but until it is completed, it cannot be fully taken into account in this report.

In 2008/09, we focused on strengthening governance arrangements. An internal audit concluded that there are fair governance and financial arrangements in place for Cherwell specific partnerships and some of the more established countywide partnerships. The audit also identified areas where improvements could be made. Heads of Service have been addressing the issues and as a result there have been some significant improvements achieved, in particular a number of partnerships have:

- adopted revised Terms of Reference
- improve the clarity of their objectives
- become more outcome focused
- re-considered their risks and mitigation of risks and, where not already in place, jointly record their risks.

A further internal audit is scheduled to take place this Spring, as part of the Council's Internal Audit Plan, adopted in October 2008. This audit will be based around the Use of Resources theme requirements and support the Council's assessment of its strengths and areas for further improvement in 2009/10 to be incorporated in the Council's Corporate Improvement Plan.

3.4 Value for Money

An assessment has been made of the value for money realised from each the Council's significant partnerships. The assessment was based on the Use of Resources inspection criteria. It aimed to establish if the investment in Member or officer time and the level of funding provided was in line with the benefits and savings being derived. The assessment established for each partnership a value for money finding and identified key areas for improvement (see Appendices 1 & 2).

All the Council's significant partnerships were found to be offering some value for money, with Oxfordshire Waste Partnership and Cherwell's Homelessness Strategy Partnership identified as high performers. The most common findings were a lack of clear, outcome focused objectives and limited information gathered on the intangible benefits of a partnership, such as building relationships, intelligence sharing, liaison and innovation.

During 2008/09, Heads of Service have focussed on the value for money improvement plans for each partnership, including assessing intangible benefits. This work has strengthened the value for money assessments for a number of significant partnerships such as the Oxfordshire Economic Partnership and Cherwell Community Planning Partnership. For the Community Planning Partnership this work has helped address the issue raised in the Council's Annual Audit Letter for 2007/08 regarding focusing on outcomes and improvements.

It is proposed that increasing the service delivery and value for money gained from existing partnerships is a key feature of the Corporate Improvement Plan for 2009/10, alongside seeking out opportunities for new partnerships. Gaining greater benefits is a key challenge for the coming year, particularly with increasing pressures on resources and funding, amplified by the economic downturn, where partnership working with the private sector, other authorities, agencies and the voluntary and community sector provides huge potential for Cherwell as it moves forward.

3.5 Data Quality Arrangements and Data Sharing Protocols

Data sharing is essential between partnerships and agreements clarify the process and need for data security. The Council's Partnership Protocol makes explicit the expectations of robust data quality and information sharing arrangements. The draft Data Quality Framework (on the Executive's agenda for 16 March, 2009) expands on these expectations and sets out the responsibilities and scope of any agreements.

An overarching data sharing agreement is currently being drawn up with other local authorities and partners in Oxfordshire and this expected to be signed by end March 2009. Data sharing arrangements for community safety in Oxfordshire are currently being finalised. As a priority, data sharing issues in Housing are being progressed across Oxfordshire, to involve Registered Social Landlords, and this is anticipated to be in place by 31 October 2009.

Continuing to strengthen governance arrangements around information and data sharing arrangements is a key element of the proposed 2009/10 Corporate Improvement Plan.

3.6 Member involvement on the Council's significant partnerships

Members act as the Council's representative on a wide range of outside bodies, some of which are on the significant partnership list. Membership requirements differ for each of the significant partnerships and some specify elected Member involvement (e.g. Oxfordshire Waste Partnership), some both officers and Members attend (e.g. Cherwell Community Planning Partnership) and some only officers currently attend (e.g. Cherwell Homelessness Strategy Partnership).

Supporting elected Members to ensure they that they are able to maximise their contribution within a partnership is an area for further development in 2009/10. This should be linked with the proposed enhancements in Member Training and Development Programme, and could be a key feature in many Members' Personal Development Plans. Further, the relationship between Executive Members and the Council's significant partnerships needs clarification and this could be addressed as part of the current review of the Constitution.

3.7 Scrutiny of Partnership Working

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has an important role to play in monitoring the performance of Cherwell's partnerships. The Partnership Working Framework describes partnership reviews as being part of the remit of scrutiny committee. In preparation for this role, Resources and Performance Scrutiny Members are to be trained in approaches to the evaluation of partnerships. It is proposed that this Annual Partnerships Report be referred to Scrutiny to assist them in their evaluation of Cherwell's partnership working arrangements and consideration of partnership scrutiny in their future work programme.

3.8 Monitoring and Reporting Arrangements

The Council currently monitors performance through its Performance Management Framework which reports to the Executive on a quarterly basis. It is proposed to

enhance the performance reporting arrangements during 2009/10 by specifically including a quarterly report on progress and issues with significant partnerships.

Option One To agree the proposed way forward in developing partnership working to improve service delivery and value for money, as set out in this report, and incorporate these proposals in to the Council's Corporate Improvement Plan for 2009/10.

Consultations

External Some external members of significant partnerships have been directly involved in the preparation of this report.

Internal Lead officers for significant partnerships

Implications

(Financial, Legal and Risk and other implications e.g. Equalities, Human Resources, Data Quality and Environmental where relevant)

Financial: Some partnerships have significant amounts of money associated with them, such as the Oxfordshire Waste Partnership and those working with allocation of reward money such as within the Local Area Agreement. All financial governance arrangements are subject to audit.

Comments checked by Karen Curtin, Chief Accountant - Service & Management Accounts 01295 221551

Legal: The Council's Partnership Protocol provides the framework within which this Council operates in partnership. This spells out the requirements and pitfalls of partnership working.

Comments checked by Liz Howlett, Head of Legal and Democratic Services 01295 221686

Risk Management: It is important that partnership risks are properly managed as this could impact on delivery of the Council's strategic priorities. By managing partnership risks, opportunities open up may otherwise be overlooked. All significant partnerships are entered onto the Council's risk register and risks are managed and reviewed at least quarterly.

Comments checked by Rosemary Watts, Risk Management and Insurance Officer, 01295 221566

CAA and LAA Partnership delivery is a key element of Comprehensive Area Assessment and the Local Area Agreement. It is important to evaluate the benefits and value for money achieved using partnerships and be clear about the future contribution that partnerships will make to delivering the Council's priorities.

Comments checked by Mike Carroll, Head of Improvement 01295 227959

Data Quality Partnerships rely on sound information and data quality to monitor performance and make informed decisions. There are national expectations for data quality arrangements and this report identifies progress in this area. Additionally the Council

is itself strengthening its data quality arrangements and seeks to gain assurance around data supplied by partners.

Comments checked by Neil Lawrence, Project Manager, Improvement Team 01295 221801.

Wards Affected

All

Corporate Plan Themes

All

Executive Portfolio

Councillor Wood
Portfolio Holder for Policy and Community

Document Information

Appendix No	Title
Appendix 1	Significant Partnerships - Key Achievements in 2008/09 and Actions for 2009/10
Appendix 2	Progress with Governance Arrangements
Background Papers	
Partnership Working Framework Partnership Protocol Internal Audit Report Value for Money Assessment Comprehensive Area Assessment and Use of Resources frameworks	
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