

Outcomes of Audit Commission Review and the Councils Approach to Partnership Working

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. To provide Members with the report and recommendations of the Audit Commission review of Service Level Agreements with Partners, and details of a proposed way forward to improve partnership working.

2. Recommendations

It is **RECOMMENDED** that Members;

- 2.1. **Note the Audit Commission report 'Review of Service Level Agreements with Partners' and the proposed matrix for evaluating partnership working.**
- 2.2. **Note the NWDC position against the key recommendations in the Governing Partnerships report.**
- 2.3. **Agree to the development of an evaluation tool for improving partnership working using the proposed matrix and the position against the key recommendations in Governing Partnerships as the basis for this tool.**
- 2.4. **To note that is proposed that this tool be used to evaluate Wiltshire Wildlife Trust as a key partner, the outcome to be reported to the Executive in January 2006.**

3. Links to the Corporate Business Plan

- 3.1. The Council's priority of Partnerships also highlights the development and delivery of community based projects arising from the community planning process that could support the delivery of other Council Priorities including Housing, Equalities and Diversity and Healthy Lifestyles.

4. General Background Information

- 4.1. In 2004 the Council's CPA report highlighted a number of areas surrounding the Council's approach to and organisation of partnership working. More specifically the report detailed the Council's lack of strategic mechanisms for reviewing the work of the partnerships and the lack of clarity over the roles and responsibilities of the Council in its various partnerships.
- 4.2. A significant amount of funding is committed from the Council budget through service level and partnership agreements. The Council is a committed partner on the Wiltshire Compact Board. The Compact codes of practice were adopted in September 2005. The Compact codes of practice clearly set out an agreed and transparent way of working with the Community and Voluntary Sector.
- 4.3. The Council is involved in many partnerships and sees many benefits from partnership working. In response to the CPA report and the level of importance that the Council places on partnership working it was agreed that the Audit Commission would support a review of the way in which the council develops, manages, reviews and evaluates partnership working. In parallel with this work specific resource was

committed to championing a more structured and effective approach by placing this responsibility with a post in the Community Partnership Team.

- 4.4. The Audit Commission recently published a national report called Governing Partnerships. This is the Audit Commission's view on how to ensure partnership working is successful in the outcomes it aims to deliver. There are 5 key recommendations for the public sector.

5. Discussion

- 5.1. The outcomes and findings of the Audit Commission Review were provided in October 2005. The report is attached at Appendix One.

- 5.2. The scope of the review was discussed by Audit Commission and Officers of the Council. It was agreed that the main aim of the review was to help the Council. This help would be for the Council to learn how it could improve not only on the areas identified in the CPA report but in the area of partnership working overall. To facilitate this it was agreed that a number of existing partnerships would be examined and that the Audit Commission would consider these alongside identified good practice in local authority and partnership settings.

- 5.3. The review focused on two existing partnerships with Service Level Agreements, these were Wiltshire Wildlife Trust and the Citizens Advice Bureau. These two particular partnerships were chosen due to the fact that they encompass a range of diverse services.

- 5.4. The report highlights areas where the Council needs to improve in order to maximise the outcomes of the partnerships. The report is balanced highlighting both areas where the council is developing good practice and also raising questions where attention is needed.

- 5.5. The review identified the following key findings:

- In general the council is seen as being a good partner to work with which is based on effective relationships and a willingness to learn best practice from other organisations.
- The council is making positive progress on working to develop a more effective mechanism for managing SLA's and is aware of current performance and where improvement is required.
- There are robust arrangements in place, which include the use of written agreements when funding partners and an effective approach to monitoring and evaluating grant applications.
- The Council does not use SLAs to maximum effect to deliver its corporate aims.
- The council does not ensure that the delivery of SLA's are co-ordinated across the organisation.
- Not enough promotion of the councils grants are promoted to all sectors of the local community.
- The council needs to better outline what it expects in return for its investment in SLAs and how it will measure what has been delivered.

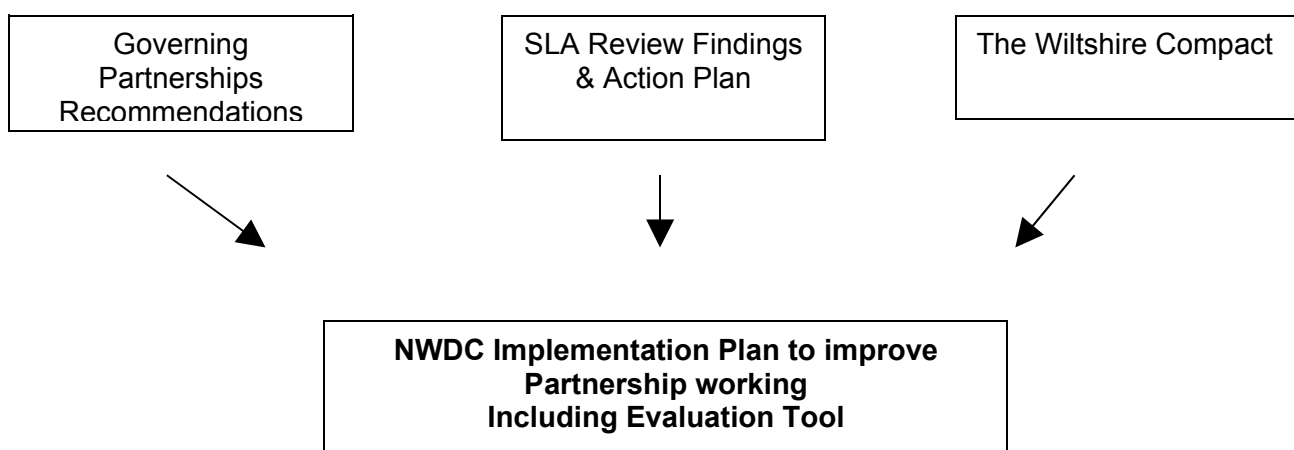
- Better use of SLAs to influence the service provider to deliver wider corporate ambitions.
- The council should better demonstrate what end users think of the services being delivered through SLAs.

5.6. One of the most positive aspects of the report is that the Council is seen as a “good” partner both through the robust relationships that have been developed as well as the willingness to learn from partners past experiences. Being recognised, as a good partner will enable the Council to address the issues of concern outlined in the report, which can be categorised in three areas:

1. Getting the most from all Service Level Agreements.
2. Improving co-ordination and management of SLAs.
3. Identifying and recognising the impact SLAs have made to the Councils corporate objectives & community need.

6. Moving Forward from the Review

- 6.1. There are three core elements to how we can improve the Council’s approach to partnership working. This consists of the findings from the review of “Service Level Agreements with Partners” undertaken by the Audit Commission, the national recommendations outlined in the report “Governing Partnerships” and the emergence of the Wiltshire Compact.
- 6.2. The Council has the opportunity to treat each of the 5 key recommendations from the Governing Partnerships report as a driver to support the implementation of the council’s approach to partnership working. Appendix two details the Council’s current position against those key areas and initial suggestions for what steps the Council could take next.
- 6.3. The findings from the Audit Commission review have been helpful and can be used as the framework to put the “Governing Partnerships“ drivers into context. This alongside the work with Wiltshire Compact will provide a clear framework and realistic way forward for the Council. It would therefore be logical to take these three aspects of work and use them to inform a workplan setting out how we will improve our approach to partnership working including an evaluation tool.



7. Community and Environmental Implications

- 7.1. Partnership working offers opportunities for the Council to strengthen communities and service delivery. This in turn can help to ensure that community needs and priorities are addressed in a way that maximises the use of available resources for local people. The Compact and associated codes of practice will foster more effective ways of working, alongside greater transparency and openness.

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1. There are no financial implications arising from this report.

9. Equal Opportunities Implications

- 9.1. The Council's approach to partnership working and consultation aims to be as inclusive as possible; The Compact and the associated codes of practice will consolidate and reinforce this approach.

10. Human Resources Implications

- 10.1. Support for the development of improving partnership working and evaluating the Council's approach to SLAs is currently provided for within the Corporate Business Plan and the Community and Environment Business Plan. The contents and recommendations of this report do not result in any direct Human Resource Implications.

**REPORT OF THE COMMUNITY & ENVIRONMENT STRATEGIC MANAGER
TO THE EXECUTIVE – 1st DECEMBER 2005**

Documents used in the Preparation of Report

- Review of Service Level Agreements with Partners NWDC, Audit Commission 2004/2005
- Governing Partnerships, Audit Commission 2005
- Wiltshire Compact

Report prepared by: Joanne Cogswell
Community Partnership Team Leader
Telephone: 01249 706455
email: jcogswell@northwilts.gov.uk

and

James Moody
Partnership Development Officer
Telephone: 01249 706458
email: jmoody@northwilts.gov.uk