

**Report to the Community, Cultural, and Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee**

Meeting to be held on Wednesday, 12 February 2025

**Report of the Director of Strategy and Innovation  
Strengthening our approach to partnership working**

<b>Part I</b>	<b>Corporate Priorities:</b> Better lives for all; Economic ambition, Stronger communities and Thinking differently.
<b>Electoral Division(s):</b> (All Divisions);	
<b>Contact:</b> Kieran Curran, Head of Corporate Strategy and Policy, Tel: 01772 536068, kieran.curran@lancashire.gov.uk	

**Summary**

**Purpose of the Report**

Following the formal adoption by the Community, Cultural and Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee of a work programme to examine enhanced partnership working at the county council, officers were tasked with finalising recommendations and reporting back to the Committee.

**Recommendation**

The Community, Cultural, and Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee is asked to agree the establishment of:

1. a registry of our current partnership landscape
2. an evaluation toolkit to assess partnership activity
3. a partnership protocol
4. Production of a summary Annual Report on Key Partnerships

**Background**

1. Following the formal adoption by the Community, Cultural and Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee of a work programme to examine enhanced partnership working at the county council, officers were tasked with finalising recommendations and reporting back to the Committee. This report identifies several proportionate actions intended to assess and improve how the county council works with partners.



2. This work builds on an initial report discussed by the Committee at its 18 April 2024 meeting (*Partnership Working: Proposals to Review, Co-ordinate and Improve Collaboration*), which defined the initial scope of this review.
3. The Committee accepted the report's recommendation to adopt a specific work programme on partnerships, as part of the Committee's annual schedule of actions. The Committee also agreed to work with officers to propose a more detailed, proportionate workplan and asked officers to report back to the Committee within 12 months, at which time the full Committee would review the proposals.
4. Following discussions with the Chair and Deputy Chair, several feasible, deliverable ideas for enhancing partnership working were assessed and a subsequent list of recommendations is submitted to the Committee.

### **Partnership working in the Council Plan 2025-30**

5. The Council Plan is a strategic document outlining the county council's vision, ambitions, and priorities for the next five years. It serves as a blueprint for decision-making and service delivery, ensuring that the council's efforts align with the needs and aspirations of the community. During its development, the county council sought views from partners on the plan's proposed priorities and considered a wide range of previous feedback from partners on other, related plans.
6. The Council Plan details several actions the county council will take to deliver high-quality public services in partnership with others. The Plan states ("Working in partnership", p. 51): "Much of what we do is delivered alongside other organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors. We will strengthen this collaboration and align our priorities and plans with our partners wherever possible, so that we're working together towards our common goals."
7. This emphasis on collaboration aligns with the Committee's ambitions to support a general improvement in partnership working and reflects a shared sense that the county council is committed to enhancing its capabilities in this area.

### **Progress to date**

8. The county council is actively engaged in partnership working and has arrangements in place which allow for the outcomes from partnership working to be reported timely and accurately. In 2023/24 the council identified its key partners as:
9. Lancashire Community Safety Partnership Board, focused on reducing crime and disorder
10. Lancashire SEND Partnership which unites all the organisations in Lancashire that offer special educational needs and disability services for children, young people, their parents and caregivers.



11. The City Deal, a joint initiative between the county council, Preston City Council and South Ribble Borough Council, the Homes and Communities Agency, and central government. The extended City Deal Agreement between the parties was signed in September 2024.
12. The Lancashire South Cumbria Integrated Care Board (ICB) established to replace the eight Clinical Commissioning Groups in the area. Progress made on partnership working is regularly reported through the Health and Adult Services Scrutiny Committee. The council also collaborates with our health partners through the Lancashire Place Partnership and the Adult Social Care & Health Partnership, to seize the opportunities offered by health and social care integration.
13. The formation of the new Lancashire County Combined Authority (CCA), with the council in partnership with Blackpool Council and Blackburn with Darwen Council, followed extensive stakeholder consultation, demonstrating the council's willingness to embed regional partnership working and collaboration. The CCA's governance structures (including the business board and advisory boards), resulted from close partnership working with unitary and district councils across Lancashire. As the council looks to the opportunities afforded by the government's Devolution White Paper, and the potential for an evolving partnership landscape in the future, the county council will continue to engage and consult with important stakeholders.
14. In addition, the council's constitution provides more details on the council's important joint arrangements (section 7) and describes the governance arrangements for managing the council's company interests through the Company Member Cabinet Committee (section 5.25).
15. The council has conducted a companies review and regularly reviews its appointments to Outside Bodies. This focus is ongoing for 2025 including reviewing training and support for members and officers involved in partnership activity.
16. The county council now looks to build on these governance arrangements for strategic partnerships in the spirit of continued improvement. A fuller analysis of our activity, looking at how we are managing and evaluating partnerships, can embed this good practice and improve service delivery and assure delivery of the Council Plan.

### **Options and Proposals**

17. The Committee has asked officers to prepare "recommendations on how partnership working could be improved and best practice shared, to come back to the committee as part of the committee's work plan in 2024/25."
18. It is intended that any final recommendations taken forward by the Committee will be shared with the Executive Leadership Team.



19. Any outputs from these recommendations will be reported back to the Committee by the end of 2025.

## Scoping and Mapping

- ***Development of a registry of our current partnership landscape***

Methodology: Online survey of senior officers and follow-up engagement with senior managers.

20. Moving beyond our strategic partnerships, we want to look at a broader range of partnerships to assess how they are aligned with the Council Plan. The Corporate Strategy & Policy Team is developing an online survey for senior officers (Head of Service and above) to identify their involvement in specific partnerships, the statutory, legislative and/or regulatory basis for that involvement, and any related governance and finance arrangements. The team will promote the survey to senior managers at an upcoming SLT session and engage with individual Directorate Leadership Teams (DLT). This work will lead to the creation of an initial database of existing partnerships, which will be reported to the Executive Leadership Team and to the Committee and serve as the basis for further work.

21. The survey – which could be conducted annually in the future – will initially support a wider review of partnership working arrangements, including any cost implications and the degree to which specific partnerships are aligned to the Council Plan.

22. The Committee has previously expressed an interest in setting up Task and Finish groups to support a review of partnership working and may wish to identify Members to work with officers to finalise and promote the survey.

## Evaluation

- ***Development of an evaluation toolkit to assess partnership activity***

23. The Corporate guidance to support officers and Members in engaging with, evaluating, or reporting on, partnership activity, or assessing partnerships in the light of our corporate objectives requires consolidation and update given the new Council Plan. Officers in Corporate Strategy & Policy and Legal Services are reviewing a draft evaluation toolkit aligned with the "principles of partnership working" detailed in the April 2024 report and based on previous, similar toolkits used by the county council. This toolkit is intended to elicit the data that will enable an informed evaluation of individual partnership activity and may include actions or mitigations agreed to either start, develop, or end a specific partnership as appropriate and following consultation as appropriate.

## Corporate Partnership Framework



- ***Development of a wider partnerships protocol***

24. If approved, an evaluation toolkit could sit within a wider corporate partnership framework or protocol that contains questionnaires and checklists providing guidance and criteria for establishing, monitoring and assessing partnership activity, a revised partnership agreement template, a 'value for money' Partnership Assessment tool, and other guidance for officers in managing partnerships on behalf of the council.
25. Officers have reviewed previous iterations of these types of policy tools, previously adopted by the county council, with a view to revising and updating them in light of current priorities.
26. A protocol would assist members and officers in considering whether or not a proposed partnership is necessary or advantageous in the furtherance of a county council objective, policy or function and, if so, to determine the most appropriate partnership model and detailed arrangements regarding the operation of the partnership.
27. The document is also to be used when reviewing existing partnership arrangements to ascertain whether or not the county council's involvement continues to be an efficient and effective use of resources and also to ensure that the issues identified herein have been and/or continue to be considered and addressed. The new framework will be concise and accessible to ensure consistent best practice across our partnerships.

## **Governance and Oversight**

- ***Production of an Annual Report on Key Partnerships for Members and senior management***

28. The Interim Auditor's Annual Report on Lancashire County Council (December 2024) considered how the county council delivers its role within significant partnerships, in order to assess whether it is meeting its objectives. The report noted the work done by the Committee and stated that "the council has been proactive and have set out a programme of work to review and enhance partnership working".
29. The report made an improvement recommendation on how arrangements can be enhanced: "The county council could consider establishing suitable arrangements to ensure oversight of council-wide partnership working is provided to Members. This could include an annual report on key Council partnerships." The report was reviewed by the Audit, Risk and Governance committee in January 2025.

It is recommended to the Committee that officers take up this suggestion as part of its support for the Committee's review of partnership working. If adopted, any work undertaken by officers as part of this review (e.g. findings



from a partnership survey, development of a partnership framework and associated evaluation tools, etc.) will be collated into an annual report for Compliance and Assurance Board to inform the Council Annual Governance Statement.

## **Consultations**

30. N/A

## **Context and Implications**

### **Legal (including Human Rights)**

31. There are a number of legal forms which a partnership may take. Incorporated bodies are legal entities in their own right and must be established and operate in accordance with statutory requirements. Unincorporated partnerships do not need to adhere to any prescribed legal framework. It is essential that both incorporated and unincorporated partnerships have in place, from the outset, robust governance arrangements, where each partner's objectives, roles and responsibilities, financial and in-kind contributions are clearly defined. Decision making, monitoring and audit arrangements must be set out along with other mechanisms, designed to manage risk.

32. The legal team will continue to provide advice in respect of the proposals and the creation of legal documentation to support partnership working. The legal team has previously produced a partnership working questionnaire which formed part of a previous partnership working toolkit. This can be updated and integrated as appropriate within a revised partnership framework. The questionnaire provides a useful starting point to evaluate an existing partnership or to focus minds on the material considerations to take into account in the formation of new partnership arrangements.

## **Financial**

33. The financial obligations undertaken by the county council for any of the partnerships identified as part of these proposals will be reviewed as part of this proposed piece of work.

## **Equality and Diversity**

34. The Council Plan includes several commitments to delivering inclusive services to all, building community cohesion, and safeguarding individual rights. Our partnerships should be assessed in light of those commitments, and others in the plan, and the proposed evaluation toolkit specifically detailed above includes approaches to testing how partnership activity address our commitments to equality and diversity.

## **Risk Management**

35. Risks associated with our involvement with specific partnerships will be identified and assessed as part of the proposals detailed in this report. Currently, the



county council carries a risk of potentially failing to manage its partnership activity effectively.

## Appendices

Appendix	Title
n/a	

## List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
<i>Partnership Working: Proposals to Review, Co-ordinate and Improve Collaboration</i>	18 April 2024	Kieran Curran (01772) 536068
<i>Interim Auditor's Annual Report on Lancashire County Council</i>	December 2024	

## Part II Reason

36. N/A

