Informal Partnerships – a quick guide

February 2016

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The term "partnership" is often used to describe any relationship between two or more organisations. In this sense East Herts Council has many different partnerships with different organisations – reflecting the complexity of delivery arrangements in the modern world. However these partnerships range in form and function, have different objectives and are often underpinned by different governance arrangements. Examples include:

- Shared Services (eg. between East Herts and Stevenage Borough Council to deliver Information and Technology Services). This is a formal, legal arrangement, with delegated authority to a joint governance board to make resourcing decisions on behalf of both councils
- Contractual arrangements (eg. between East Herts Council and Veolia to deliver waste services). This is underpinned by a legal agreement (the contract), outlining what East Herts council can expect to be delivered by the contractor for the fee paid
- Formal partnerships (eg. between East Herts Council, other local authorities and the Refugee Council to provide support services for the resettlement of Syrian Refugees) . This will be underpinned by a Service Level Agreement (SLA) outlining what support East Herts will provide in exchange for a fee. Unlike a contract, the SLA is not a legal document
- Informal partnerships (eg. between East Herts Council and the Herts Chamber of Commerce). The Council makes a small financial contribution to the Chamber through a subscription and also contributes officer time at meetings, networking events etc. There are no agreements in place (legal or otherwise) and both partners will work together to share resources and expertise when required on issues around engaging with the business community.

1.2 With regards to all of the types of partnerships listed above except informal, the council adopts proportionate controls, checks and balances to ensure good governance and robust financial management arrangements are in place. These include such activities as regular budget and risk reporting, contract meetings, external audit assurance and adherence to financial regulations to name but a few.

1.3 However, whilst the council can assure itself controls are sufficient for all the other types of partnerships listed in (1.1) this is not necessarily the case for informal partnerships.

1.4 This document is designed to provide a quick guide and checklist for ensuring sufficient arrangements are in place where the council is considering starting its own, or entering a new informal partnership.

2.0   Partnerships in East Herts

2.1   Appendix A illustrates all the major types of partnership working that East Herts Council is currently involved with. It is clear that most partnership activity is now underpinned by formal mechanisms and agreements to ensure value for money and tangible benefits (eg. shared services delivery, contracted or commissioned services). There is still however a substantial amount of informal partnership working taking place.

2.2   Although such working comes with less risk given there is usually little or no financial implications, they can often take up a lot of officer time which needs to be considered in terms of value for money and as an investment of resource. A large, bureaucratic framework to test what measurable value is derived from informal partnerships is not required however the following provides a light touch set of questions and issues of relevance. These form a helpful aide memoire and can be used when considering a new partnership or to review existing involvement. Where the answer is 'no' to any of these questions, an informal partnership may not be appropriate.

1. Is the Council clear about the purpose and expected outcomes of the partnership, and will Council objectives and priorities be met?
2. Will there be a duplication of the work of other groups or can the Council work with an existing partner instead?
3. Are the council expected to make a non-financial resource contribution? (eg. officer time at meetings). If so can we quantify how much?
4. Is there a governance framework in place? Is the partnership's legal status understood?
5. Does the partnership have terms of reference?
6. Are all partners clear about outcomes, their roles and responsibilities?
7. Are there clear lines of communication / reporting to senior managers or Members?
8. Does the partnership make any decisions? If so how are split decisions resolved?
9. Does the partnership have a project or action plan?
10. Is performance monitored and measured? Does the partnership review its effectiveness against agreed aims, objectives or targets?
11. Are meeting agendas and minutes produced, with clear action points?
12. Are there any external review and monitoring mechanisms?
13. Have risks been discussed / identified with partners, recorded, and mitigation measures planned where required?
14. Have insurance cover and indemnities been reviewed by the Risk Assurance Officer?
15. Does the partnership have an 'end date' or a recognisable point at which it will no longer need to exist?
16. Do we have an exit strategy if we need to leave the partnership?

Appendix A – East Herts Partnership Working Map

							IN HOUSE (delivered by council officers)
COMMUNICATIONS, STRATEGY AND POLICY	HR AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT	OPERATIONS	DEMOCRATIC AND LEGAL SERVICES	STRATEGIC FINANCE AND PROPERTY	HOUSING AND HEALTH	PLANNING AND BUILDING CONTROL	

SHARED SERVICE
(delivered in conjunction with another organisation through formal agreement/ delegated responsibilities)

- **REVENUES AND BENEFITS** (Shared service with Stevenage)
- **ICT** (Shared service with Stevenage)
- **Clinical waste and street washing** (agency agreement with N Herts)
- **Public Law Partnership** (legal support for 31 authorities across East of England)
- **Shared Internal Audit Service** (shared service with 6 other authorities)
- **Shared Anti-fraud Service** (shared service with 6 other authorities)
- **CCTV Partnership** (shared service with North Herts, Stevenage and Broxbourne)

CONTRACTED/ COMMISSIONED SERVICE
(delivered by a third party through a contract and/ or SLA)

- Various SLAs with different companies for **Debt enforcement**
- SLA with Citizens Advice Bureau to deliver **debt advice**
- Multiple contracts to undertake **grounds maintenance** (John O'Connor the largest contractor)
- Contract with SLM Ltd to run 2 **Leisure Centres** and 3 joint use pools
- Contract with Redcom (jointly with St. Albans DC) for **Abandoned vehicles**
- Contracts for **waste collection and cleansing** (Veolia main contractor)
- Contract with NSL to deliver on street **Parking Enforcement**
- Contract with WENTA to deliver **Business Advice** and support
- Contract with BSTC to deliver **Bishops Stortford market**
- **Visit Herts** (to support visitor economy)
- Contract with Affinity Water to risk assess **private water supplies**
- Ad hoc contract with Osboure Richardson to undertake some **food inspection**
- Multiple contracts with Housing Associations to **provide access to affordable homes**
- Stock Transfer Agreement with **Riversmead Housing Association** and **Circle Housing Trust**
- **Land drainage** contract
- SLA with East Herts **Citizens Advice Bureau**
- SLA with **Council for Voluntary Services**

PARTNERSHIP/ COLLABORATION
(informal agreement to deliver, sometimes underpinned by SLA)

- **Herts Waste Partnership** (pooled monies with HCC and other districts)
- **Herts Sustainability Forum** (pooled monies with HCC and other districts)
- **London Stansted Cambridge Corridor Consortium** (East Herts represented)
- SLA with BSTC to deliver **town centre improvement**
- **Chambers of Commerce** (to support business engagement)
- **Local Enterprise Partnership** (East Herts represented)
- **Papworth Trust** (commissioned to deliver home improvements and energy efficiency Agency)
- SLA between multiple councils and Refugee Council to **provide support for Syrian refugees**
- **Crossroads** (partnership for dementia friendly homes)
- SLA with Central Beds to support **Public Protection** (contaminated land, air quality, noise)
- **Public Health and District Offer** (pooled monies with HCC)
- Various agreements to deliver **Community Transport**