

## To the Chair and Members of the AUDIT COMMITTEE

### PARTNERSHIPS GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report provides an update to the Audit Committee on the Council's arrangements for improving the oversight of partnerships' activities and, by doing so, strengthen the governance arrangements relating to its partnership working.
2. A partnership has been defined as:  
*An entity involving the Council and one or more other bodies working together to achieve an objective relevant to the Council's own priorities, objectives or responsibilities.*
3. Local Government and communities' objectives are increasingly met through partnership working. It is not possible for local authorities to deliver services on their own; they must work with others to ensure services meet the needs of those who use or need them, efficiently and effectively. Doncaster Council recognises this and puts partnership working at the heart of its approach.
4. The Council formally makes appointments to a wide range of partnerships including the Combined City Region Authority, various joint committees, various commercial arrangements and even a number of small, local, charities.
5. Attached at **Appendix 1** is a report that was presented to the full Council on 19 May 2017 mainly about its partnership arrangements, including how the Council should seek information and assurance about its partnerships' working. Rather than repeat the key issues from the report, the whole of the document has been appended for Members to review in its entirety.
6. However, the key points arising from the report for the Audit Committee in view of its role in relation to the Council's governance arrangements, including relating to partnerships, are:
  - a) The exercise carried out leading to the production of the Council report identified 74 'significant' partnerships. This is not all partnership activity, rather it includes those partnerships meeting both the definition above and other criteria set out in the Council report.
  - b) The report highlighted 27 out of the 74 partnerships where reviews will be carried out to determine whether the Council should continue (or not)

its participation. This ensures historic arrangements do not continue in perpetuity if their value no longer justifies the consumption of finite Council resources (mainly in this context in the form of Members' and/or officers' time). These reviews are currently ongoing.

- c) Prior to the approval of the report, information relating to only 9 of the partnerships was fed back formally to any part of the Council (eg Council, Cabinet etc). This makes it difficult for the Council corporately to confirm and demonstrate best value is being achieved through these arrangements. It also leaves the Council potentially exposed to the implications of any poor decisions or actions taken by the partnerships.
- d) Consequent to the above, the Council report identified new proposed (and approved at the 19 May Council meeting) reporting lines for all 74 partnerships. In the future, either minutes or summary briefing reports will be presented somewhere in the Council, where there will be a responsibility for overseeing the activities and decisions of the partnerships. When implemented, this will significantly strengthen the Council's oversight of partnerships activities and manage partnership risks much better.
- e) The reporting structures are based on a logical relationships between the partnerships and the bodies proposed to receive information about the partnerships. So, for example, details relating to statutory joint authorities should be given to full Council, regional overview and scrutiny bodies' activities should be referred to scrutiny and any partnerships where executive powers have been delegated would report to Cabinet. The overview of smaller partnerships, many of which are charitable in nature, is delegated to relevant officer management teams; this is proportionate to their level of significance and allows a fair allocation of the overall level of work involved.
- f) In terms of the details to be reported, in most cases it is proposed minutes will be used. However, where formal minutes do not exist or are not useful in providing information, short reports will be produced summarising the partnerships' activities, including any forward plans where these are held.
- g) The frequency of reports (where these are used instead of minutes) will be either half-yearly or yearly, and will be determined for each partnership based upon its inherent significance.
- h) Lead officers are being nominated for each partnership and it will be the lead officers' roles to ensure appropriate flows of information are made into the Council, either through minutes or reports. Lead officers will also be asked to confirm each year, as part of the Council's preparation of its Annual Governance Statement, that there have been no significant governance issues arising from the partnership activity during the year. Or, where there have been any issues, how these have

been reported and addressed. Again, this will significantly strengthen arrangements and will provide good evidence of the effectiveness of the governance arrangements in place

7. Overall, the new arrangements will ensure there is structured consideration of partnerships' activities, and effective and formal reporting into an appropriate group within the Council, enabling action to be taken if/when anything untoward happens. The arrangements will also provide for much better transparency about the value of partnership working and, where this might indicate limited value, facilitate challenge over the arrangements and thereby ensure or improve value for money. The arrangements represent a sizeable step forward over the arrangements that existed prior to the completion of the work.
8. Within the Council report, it recognises that persons appointed to represent the Council on external partnerships will need ongoing support and training to fulfil their roles and the Council's expectations. Provision has been made for this through additional training sessions that are currently being held for appointed persons. Appointed persons are also offered ongoing support either from their lead officer or the Democratic Services Team. This should help appointed persons carry out their roles effectively, make a solid contribution to the partnerships, and ensure the Council's interests are adequately preserved and promoted.
9. The Council currently has 10 internal management boards and steering groups covering key strategic activities, namely:
  - Doncaster Growing Together Board
  - DN17 Implementation Boards
  - Children's Trust Management Board
  - Adults Improvement Board
  - Corporate Governance Group
  - Senior Information Risk Officer (SIRO) Group
  - Corporate IT Governance Board
  - Investment Modernisation Fund Board
  - Property Investment Board
  - Major Projects and Investment Board.

The principles applying to external partnerships will also be applied to these important and strategic internal groups, again to ensure there is more formal oversight of their activities and decisions.

10. The report to the Council also covered linked matters about provision with the Council constitution for questions to be asked of Chairs of Committees in full Council meetings. This is not referred to further in this report, except

to say that the Council agreed the provision of ‘question time’ will be extended at Council meetings to now include the Chair of the Audit Committee. This means any Member will now be able to ask questions of the Chair of this Committee without notice. This could help raise the profile of the Audit Committee and the work it does.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

11. **The Audit Committee is asked:**
- **To note the Council report and the actions approved by the Council at its meeting on 19 May 2017**
  - **To note specifically the provisions relating to partnerships**
  - **To note the actions in progress following approval of the recommendations in the Council report.**

## WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE CITIZENS OF DONCASTER?

12. A set of principles and practice for the reporting of partnerships’ decisions and activities ensures the Council adopts a consistent and proportionate approach to managing partnerships’ risks. This ensures there is adequate stewardship of public funds on behalf of citizens, and provides confidence to the Public that effective controls are in place to manage risks.
13. Effective governance also ensures partnerships’ working contributes to the effective and efficient provision of services to the Public and the achievement of value for money.

## OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND RECOMMENDED OPTION

14. Not applicable - for information only

## IMPACT ON THE COUNCIL’S KEY OUTCOMES

15. Good partnerships’ governance has the following impacts on Council priorities

Outcomes	Implications
<p>All people in Doncaster benefit from a thriving and resilient economy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Mayoral Priority: Creating Jobs and Housing</i></li> <li>• <i>Mayoral Priority: Be a strong voice for our veterans</i></li> <li>• <i>Mayoral Priority: Protecting Doncaster’s vital services</i></li> </ul>	
<p>People live safe, healthy, active and independent lives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Mayoral Priority: Safeguarding our Communities</i></li> <li>• <i>Mayoral Priority: Bringing down the</i></li> </ul>	

cost of living	
<p>People in Doncaster benefit from a high quality built and natural environment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Mayoral Priority: Creating Jobs and Housing</i></li> <li>• <i>Mayoral Priority: Safeguarding our Communities</i></li> <li>• <i>Mayoral Priority: Bringing down the cost of living</i></li> </ul>	
<p>All families thrive.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Mayoral Priority: Protecting Doncaster's vital services</i></li> </ul>	
<p>Council services are modern and value for money.</p>	<p>By providing robust partnership guidance ensures the stewardship of public funds.</p>
<p>Working with our partners we will provide strong leadership and governance.</p>	<p>Strengthening partnership working by identifying, managing and reducing risks in order to enable strategic and operational partnerships achieve all our objectives.</p>

## RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

16. Failure to review partnerships' and key internal groups' activities exposes the Council to risks that can impact on a number of levels as follows:
- Failing to ensure an effective *Strategic Fit*
  - Failing to identify and address the gaps and shortfalls in *Relationships*
  - Failing to fully assess and plan for the *Organisational Impact* the changes will have; and
  - Failing to robustly develop and test the *Economic Case* for partnership working
  - Reputational damage to DMBC due to flawed partnerships
  - Conflicts of interest not being managed
  - Damaged relationships with partners.

## LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

17. Various legal arrangements apply to partnerships. Advice is provided as appropriate during the setting up of partnerships and on an ongoing basis.

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

18. There are no financial implications arising specifically from this report.

## HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

19. There are no specific human resources implications arising from this report.

## **TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS**

20. There are no specific technology implications arising from this report.

## **EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

21. The adoption of this strategy ensures a consistent approach to partnerships.

## **CONSULTATION**

22. The production of this report has involved consultation with:

- The Director of Finance and Corporate Services
- The Assistant Director Legal and Democratic Services
- The Strategic Performance Unit
- The Head of Internal Audit
- Data collected from all services.

23. It has also involved data collected from and relating to partnerships.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

24. CIPFA/SOLACE *Delivering Good Governance* Framework and Guidance.

## **REPORT AUTHOR & CONTRIBUTORS**

Colin Earl, Head of Internal Audit, x 62939

**Steve Mawson**  
**Assistant Director Finance and Chief Financial Officer**

## **Appendices Attached**

Appendix 1 - Governance Arrangements, Oversight and Transparency of the Work of External Partnerships and Council Committees, Council Report 19 May 2017