



CABINET REPORT

Report Title	Consultation on Northamptonshire County Council's Partnership Protocol
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AGENDA STATUS: PUBLIC

Cabinet Meeting Date:	14 October 2009
Key Decision:	No
Listed on Forward Plan:	No
Within Policy:	Yes
Policy Document:	No
Directorate:	Chief Executive's Office
Accountable Cabinet Member:	Councillor A Woods
Ward(s)	No specific ward

1. Purpose

1.1 In July 2009 Northamptonshire County Council launched a consultation on a Partnership Protocol which will form the basis for the County Council's approach to partnership working in the future. The consultation closes on 19th October 2009 and Cabinet are requested to endorse the proposed response on behalf of Northampton Borough Council.

2. Recommendations

2.1 That Cabinet endorse the response to the Northamptonshire County Council consultation on the Partnership Protocol as detailed in Section 3.3 in the report.

2.2 That the Leader of the Council respond to the consultation on behalf of the Council by the 19th October 2009 putting forward proposals for a common protocol.

3. Issues and Choices

3.1 Report Background

3.1.1 The draft Partnership Protocol, attached as Appendix 3 to the report, was agreed by the NCC Cabinet for consultation at its meeting on 14th July 2009. The purpose of the protocol is

1. To convey to partners what they can expect of the County Council when working in partnership, as a starting position from which to strengthen partnership working.
2. To act as a tool for councillors and officers to assess whether a partnership approach to working is the most effective way of working or whether an alternative arrangement is required.

3.1.2 There are three key documents which form the County Council's protocol.

1. A Policy Statement that summarises the County Council intentions in relation to partnership working. (Attached as Appendix 2)
2. The Partnership Protocol itself that sets out a definition of partnerships, what this Council expects from good partnering and critically sets out the parameters for when the Council will enter a partnership arrangement. (Attached as Appendix 3)
3. The partnership checklist enables officers and Councillors to ask a set of questions to gain information that will help establish what sort of working arrangement is required. (Attached as Appendix 4)

3.2 Issues

3.2.1 Local authorities are expected to hold a register of key partnerships and establish governance arrangements which include monitoring, evaluating and reporting on partnership activity. This expectation is within the Governance Section of the Use of Resources part of the Comprehensive Area Assessment. The County Council sees this toolkit as being key to collecting and assessing that information.

3.2.2 It is not intended that the protocol will replace the Compact arrangements that the County Council have in place with the Voluntary Sector; it is designed to compliment those arrangements.

3.3 Choices (Options)

3.3.1 The Cabinet has the option to reply only to the questions asked within the consultation.

3.3.2 The Cabinet has the option to reply to the questions asked within the consultation and make proposals for a common protocol, based on the following key points:

1. It is acknowledged that the general principles outlined in the protocol would be helpful as a tool for all agencies which may be involved in partnership working.
2. The consultation seeks views from partners with regard to whether it would be of use for the documents, or parts thereof, to be adopted by a wider body of organisations (Question 5, Appendix 1).
3. Northampton Borough Council is supportive of the need for more effective partnership working and recognises that there will be clear economic drivers towards greater partnership working in future years. It is therefore acknowledged that a common protocol on partnership working, adopted by all agencies that may either lead or contribute to partnerships, would facilitate a common approach and understanding to partnership working in Northamptonshire.
4. However, the current document is internally focussed towards the perspective of the County Council and the role it may assume in partnership working. The documents identify that NCC could be either the lead partner in a partnership arrangement or a loosely engaged partner, but does not adequately address the potential expectation of other partners of the County Council where it is a member, not the lead, in partnership arrangements.
5. It is recognised that not all partnerships will necessarily operate on a county-wide basis and that there will be partnerships which are more appropriately lead by borough and district authorities, as well as other statutory partners. In such circumstances generic protocols which outline the broad role and expectation of partners in the various roles they may assume within partnership arrangements would be a valuable framework for the organisations across the county to adopt.
6. It is proposed that the principle of adopting a generic protocol should be supported but that it should be considered at a Public Service Board level to ensure that it is reflective of and relevant to all partners and that there is common understanding from inception about the roles and expectations of partners within partnership arrangements. A common protocol, once adopted, could then be reflected within the internal procedures of each agency as appropriate.
7. The proposal that the NCC protocol could be adapted and amended individually by each partner organisation would likely result in a greater lack of clarity between organisations. It is therefore proposed that support is given for the principle of partnership protocols but that consideration should be given to developing generic arrangements which meet the needs of all partners rather than individual adapted arrangements.

4. Implications (including financial implications)

4.1 Policy

There are no implications of policy associated with this report

4.2 Resources and Risk

There are no resource or risk implications associated with this report

4.3 Legal

There are no legal issues associated with this report

4.4 Equality

There are no equality and diversity issues associated with this report

4.5 Consultees (Internal and External)

Northampton Borough Council is a consultee of the County Council and internal consultation on the response has been carried out with the Leader of the Council, the Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement, the Portfolio Holder for Finance, the Partnership Director, the Chief Executive, the Assistant Chief Executive and the Head of Policy and Community Engagement.

4.6 How the Proposals deliver Priority Outcomes

The Partnership Protocol itself that sets out a definition of partnerships, what this Council expects from good partnering and critically sets out the parameters for when the County Council will enter a partnership arrangement.

4.7 Other Implications

None

5. Background Papers

5.1 None

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