

Meeting:	Cabinet
Meeting date:	20 October 2016
Title of report:	Partnership governance framework
Report by:	Cabinet member economy and corporate services

Classification

Open

Key decision

This is not a key decision.

Wards affected

Countywide

Purpose

To approve a framework setting out the council's approach to partnership working, helping to strengthen accountability and ensure working arrangements are as efficient as possible.

Recommendation(s)

THAT:

- (a) **the draft framework for partnership governance at appendix 1 be approved.**

Alternative options

- 1 The council could choose not to adopt a framework for partnership governance. This is not recommended as there is then no consistency of approach, or process for ensuring transparency and accountability of partnership activity.

Reasons for recommendations

- 2 To improve the robustness and transparency of governance arrangements when the council is working in partnership.

Key considerations

- 3 The council is currently involved in a number of partnership working arrangements. These operate to a variety of terms of reference, and vary considerably in form and structure from statutory bodies such as the health and wellbeing board and community safety partnership, to formally constituted company or charitable bodies such as Hoople or the new university partnership, or informal voluntary partnerships such as the Herefordshire nature partnership.
- 4 It is often difficult for members and the public to understand these arrangements, or to see whether they are cost effective and still appropriate for the council to engage in given the ever-changing environment within which we work. This lack of transparency can lead to misunderstanding of the level of involvement by the council, which in turn can impact negatively on the council's reputation. In addition, where partnerships are taking decisions about how resources are directed or about future service delivery, there is not always the expected degree of transparency or the ability for members to hold partnerships to account for the decisions that they make.
- 5 Attached at appendix 1 is a draft of a partnership governance framework that aims to explain why the council may consider entering into a partnership, and what should be in place when it does.
- 6 Comments on the draft would be welcomed in terms of whether it is missing anything, but also whether it is helpful and practical to use – the aim is to have a workable framework rather than simply more 'bureaucratic stuff' to be doing which diverts from the business.
- 7 There is currently no centrally held data about the number/significance of existing partnership arrangements and therefore once adopted, it is proposed that the framework be used both not only when entering into new partnership arrangements but also to review existing partnership arrangements to ensure that there are clear and effective governance arrangements in place and that the benefits of working in such an arrangement justify the council's continued involvement.
- 8 The framework proposes that for partnerships which the council view as significant (as defined in the draft framework) a register is maintained and published and which will provide information, based on an annual assessment, about: the type of partnership, date of establishment, terms of reference, council representative(s) on the partnership, review date, risk assessment, and identified link officer. In future the audit and governance committee will receive reports on medium and high risks identified in assessments and the annual governance statement process will include a review of the effectiveness of the framework.

Community impact

- 9 The council's code of corporate governance includes commitments to:
 - Provide the best possible service to the people of Herefordshire
 - Define the roles of Members and Officers, ensure that they work together constructively, and improve their effectiveness
 - Require high standards of conduct
 - Take sound decisions on the basis of good information
 - Be transparent and open: responsive to Herefordshire's needs and accountable to its people.

- 10 The council's communications strategy provides that when engaging with audiences the council aims to:
- Centre on the citizen and operate as a joined-up organisation
 - Encourage two-way dialogue with residents
 - Celebrate success and innovation of our workforce, residents, businesses and organisations
 - Help people feel informed and proud of living in Herefordshire
 - Support employees, members and partner organisations to act as proud local ambassadors for the council's work
 - Be clear, open and honest without creating a negative impact on other people, services or partners
- 11 The draft framework provides a robust and transparent way of demonstrating how the council upholds these principles when working in partnership.

Equality duty

- 12 The draft framework includes a prompt for partnership governance frameworks to set out how the partnership will operate to ensure the duties under the Equality Act are met.

Financial implications

- 13 Staff time will be required to review and assess existing partnership arrangements; this work will be undertaken using existing staff resources.

Legal implications

- 14 There is no legal requirement to adopt a framework for partnership governance. The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 include a requirement for all councils to produce an annual governance statement which assesses governance risks and agrees actions to mitigate those risks. Partnership governance has been identified within that process and the adoption of a framework is included within the 2016/17 annual governance statement action plan approved by audit and governance committee.

Risk management

- 15 The risks and benefits of partnership working are set out within the draft framework. If there is no consistent approach to assuring and reviewing partnership governance arrangements there may be financial and reputational risks to the council which are not visible. Adoption of a framework for partnership governance mitigates that risk by ensuring strategic partnerships have robust and transparent governance arrangements and that the effectiveness of those arrangements are periodically reviewed.

Consultees

- 16 General overview and scrutiny committee members have been provided with a briefing on the proposal, but have not expressed any view on the proposal.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – draft partnership governance framework

Background papers

- None identified.