

## **Elected Members and Partnerships**

Councillors can contribute a great deal to partnerships, and have an important role to play in the democratic accountability of partnerships made up of public sector bodies or funded by public money. City Councillors also have the responsibility of community leadership, and so they will have an influence on all bodies in the Winchester District working to improve the standard of life here.

As part of a partnership, Councillors can:

- Act as representatives of the community
- Hold responsibility for key local services
- Link to local communities and neighbourhoods
- Provide a voice for the socially excluded in their ward
- Contribute their personal skills, commitment and dedication

In the Winchester District there are three tiers of local government (parish, district and county), and Councillors from each tier can contribute a different focus of interest and set of skills.

Being involved in a partnership is a way to have an impact on services for the Winchester District outside the jurisdiction of the City Council, and to gain access to funding. The 2006 White Paper for Local Government ('Strong and Prosperous Communities') also strongly advises that portfolio holders play a role in thematic partnerships that the City Council is involved in.

More and more, local government is looked to have a wider role in governing its area than simply service delivery alone, and for elected members to exercise community leadership. Local government is expected, as the democratically accountable body in a local area, to have an influence over public service delivery in its entirety in the District. This refers to all three tiers of local government. More information on 'community leadership' and what this means to local Councillors can be found in the IDeA Councillor's Guide 2006/2007, <http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelId=752723>

Some of the doubts and concerns that Councillors may have about involvement in partnerships are shown in the table below, taken from the IDeA's guidance. Whilst partnership is not always easy, steps can be taken to minimise the risk to the City Council and indeed other partners from working in this way, for example:

- Undertaking a risk assessment of the partnership at an early stage, and then continuously throughout the life of the partnership as appropriate
- Having each partner sign a 'partnership agreement' setting out roles, responsibilities and clear expectations of the partnership and individual partners
- Good officer support of elected members sitting on partnerships, and timely communication by the partnership
- The use of overview and scrutiny in reviewing the effectiveness and efficiency of partnerships, in the role of a 'critical friend' (see the section on Overview and Scrutiny in the Performance Management section of the toolkit)
- Regular review of the partnership using the Partnership Evaluation Toolkit
- Disciplined use of straight forward, clear performance management systems (i.e. Results Based Accountability – see the section on Performance

Management) so that performance can be continuously monitored and managed

It should be remembered that for the majority of occasions, a Winchester City Council officer will be working with the partnership, and be able to offer Members advice on the background to the partnership and other partners as well as assist where they can with any other requests for information etc Members might have when sitting on a partnership.

The risks	The benefits
<p><b>Political</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› letting go – loss of power</li> <li>› lack of clarity for members and for the public – increased confusion</li> <li>› identity crisis – what are we responsible for?</li> <li>› difficult to challenge decisions made by ‘partnerships’.</li> </ul> <p><b>Financial</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› costs of servicing partnerships</li> <li>› professional ‘opportunity costs’ (i.e. while they are servicing partnerships they are not doing something else)</li> <li>› skewing of budgets</li> <li>› finding matched funding.</li> </ul> <p><b>Personal</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› loss of personal power</li> <li>› time</li> <li>› stress</li> <li>› yet more meetings, yet more paperwork</li> <li>› learning various new sets of language</li> <li>› culture shock.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Political</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› shared decisions – shared ownership</li> <li>› sharing the risk of innovation</li> <li>› increased awareness of community needs using different perspectives</li> <li>› more community interaction</li> <li>› increased trust and understanding</li> <li>› increased intellectual capital</li> <li>› more inclusivity.</li> </ul> <p><b>Financial</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› savings made by not duplicating effort</li> <li>› more likely to attract third-party or matched funding</li> </ul> <p><b>Personal</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› respect</li> <li>› profile</li> <li>› improving personal knowledge and understanding</li> <li>› satisfaction of doing things right.</li> </ul>

### **Performance Management**

A partnership’s performance management system offers several opportunities for communicating with Councillors.

Winchester City Council has four scrutiny panels and one Principal Scrutiny Committee. The section on Performance Management of this toolkit sets out the roles of these panels, and how they can be used not only to communicate with Councillors, but also how they can be used to help review partnerships and provide a ‘critical friend’ viewpoint.

Annual reports of the partnership’s progress in achieving its aim and specific targets can also be a useful and succinct way of communicating with not just Councillors, but anyone with an interest in the work of a partnership. This should be relevant and to

the point, celebrating areas of success and highlighting areas that are not on target. Local elected Members have the ultimate responsibility for public money in the Winchester District, and only by communicating with them can partnerships hope to influence public expenditure.

### **Points to remember**

- Councillors will have a great deal of committee reports and papers to read, so keep any information on partnerships short and relevant
- If you have longer papers which you feel that Councillors might find useful, put a short note in a publication such as the Members' Briefing Note with contact details where the full report can be obtained from
- Do not hesitate to contact the Corporate Communications Team as to the best way to communicate with elected Members. They will be able to advise you on the most suitable way to reach Members, and whether or not the information would be useful to them
- If partnership meetings are held in public, invite elected Members to attend as observers
- Copies of meeting agendas and notes should be made available to Councillors if suitable.