

# Breckland Council

## Partnership Policy 2015



*a better place, a brighter future*  
**Breckland**  
COUNCIL

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## **Introduction**

Working in partnership is now common place and it allows local authorities to work together with other Councils, organisations, businesses, third sector and community groups in order to share knowledge and deliver joint working and/or services to achieve a common goal.

The purpose of this policy is to set out Breckland Council's (BC) approach to partnership working, and to outline its processes for entering, managing, and reviewing partnerships to ensure our resources are focussed on delivering our Corporate Priorities.

The guiding principles for partnership working shall be to work together in partnership for the benefit of the residents of the district, provided that the partnership's aims and objectives accord with those of the Council.

We will do this by:

- developing strong, sustainable, productive and effective partnerships;
- ensuring that all partnerships, with which the Council are involved, operate in a climate of openness and transparency and represent best value;
- monitoring the performance of partnership working;
- evaluating the effectiveness of all partnerships with which the Council is involved on a regular basis;
- empowering and encouraging local communities to develop new partnerships to maximise their potential for improvement and change;
- maintaining a database of all partnerships with which the Council is involved

## **Defining a Partnership**

For the purpose of this Partnership Policy the following definition of a partnership will be used:

*'A partnership is where two or more independent organisations agree to co-operate in order to work towards common objectives and in doing so incorporate each others views. Generally this involves sharing risk and reward, joint decision making and the pooling and/or alignment of resources.'*

Within this policy, partnerships are not the same as: -

- Officer networks, forums or consultation (e.g. Norfolk Finance Officers) which meet to support best practice
- Contractual arrangements where BC has delegated/outsourced a function
- An External Body which the Council may be invited to take part in

## **Benefits of Partnership Working**

Working in partnership can bring a number of benefits. The aim of this strategy is to set out how these are delivered effectively. Examples of the benefits partnerships can bring include:

- delivering more in partnership than we would working in isolation
- ensuring that we are not duplicating work of other organisations
- improving value for money to the customer by making sure work is both joined-up and complimentary to that of our partners
- aligning strategic agendas so that we can make sure all partners are working to the same goals
- attracting additional sources of funding that will be available by working in partnership

- supporting us to deliver our priorities and a better service to our customers

These may be hard benefits, i.e. those that can be measured (for example, financial benefits) and/or softer benefits (e.g. early intervention – investing now to save later). Partnerships should deliver one or more of the benefits listed below:

- increased expertise through sharing information and working with highly skilled teams
- greater funding successes by applying as a whole entity instead of as a singular body
- enable us to do more than we could alone through gaining extra resources
- generate savings in terms of Officer resources, time allowances and financial costs

It is important that the benefits of partnership working are identified for each individual partnership.

### **Risks Involved in Partnership Working**

There are a complex set of risks involved with working in partnership:

- performance management arrangements could be challenges and might not identify issues in time
- the agendas of participating organisations may be out of line and cannot be reconciled
- personalities change and previously effective partnerships could become more difficult
- trust could break down
- resources may not be committed
- priorities may change
- they may fail to deliver their objectives
- agreement may not be reached by partners on any range of issues
- it may not be demonstrated that the partnership is adding value

One of the aims of implementing a more formal partnership strategy is to try and mitigate the range of risks, and to assign a risk value (high, medium or low) to each partnership in the Partnership Register.

### **Context of Partnership Working at BC**

At BC we recognise the value of partnership working with other organisations where we feel this is the most effective way of achieving the Corporate Priorities. Therefore, the Council will not engage in all partnerships it is presented with; through assessing the partnership it may decide its resources would be better utilised elsewhere, or that another party would be best placed to take a lead role.

The importance of partnership working is also set out in the Corporate Plan and Medium Term Financial Strategy.

This approach is supported by national and local policy, which encourages collaboration and partnership working of the public sector, third sector organisations, businesses and communities in order to access and make best use of resources, incentives and opportunities.

### **Partnership Register**

All partnerships that BC is involved with will be captured in the Partnership Register. This will be a working document that outlines key information about each partnership, including the:

- function of the partnership
- frequency of meetings
- Corporate Priorities the partnership is helping to work towards

- value / risk involved with participating in the partnership
- BC representative(s) (Member and/or Officer)
- comments and recommendations on future actions for the partnership

This document will be refreshed on an annual basis by the CI&P Team, in line with the Business Planning process to ensure that the Council continues to align its involvement in partnerships with changing priorities and outcomes, and where appropriate allocate budgets or provide “in principle” budget allocations.

Appendix A to this policy sets out the information that is captured relating to each partnership in the Partnership Register. Appendix B sets out the criteria used to determine value and risk assessments and Appendix C contains the relevant questions for assessing both new and existing Partnerships.

## **Entering into a Partnership**

### **When is a partnership appropriate?**

If the partnership requires direct financial contribution which has not been outlined in existing budgets, a proposal should be submitted to the Cabinet for approval.

A partnership may be appropriate when there is:

- synergy between the aims and objectives of the partnership with the Council’s aims and strategic objectives
- no doubt that the Council will benefit from its involvement
- a statutory duty to do so
- common purpose between the parties involved
- an opportunity to achieve co-ordinated and cohesive outcomes
- the potential to deliver more than the sum of individual contributions
- an acceptable level of risk
- agreement of all the parties involved to the need for the partnership in these terms

### **Criteria for entering into a new partnership**

New partnerships will be entered into if the Council deems there to be clear benefits to doing so. All new potential partnerships should be assessed using the questions outlined in Appendix C and the Value and Risk Assessment criteria outlined in Appendix B.

The most important criteria to think about are whether:

- the work of the partnership supports and contributes to the Council’s Corporate Policies
- the work of the partnership benefits residents, businesses and visitors to the district
- the partnership is able to carry out or support functions the Council needs efficiently, or enable better performance than we could achieve on our own
- arrangements are in place to regularly monitor and report on the effectiveness of the partnership

Once this information has been gathered it should then be assessed by the Corporate Management Team (CMT) and the relevant Portfolio Holder to determine whether the partnership should be joined or not.

## **Partnership Governance**

It is important to have clear partnership governance in place. This governance should be discussed and agreed by the relevant CMT member, the Portfolio Holder or the Cabinet as appropriate, in relation to the value and/or risk of the partnership. This could include:

- a statutory requirement
- a formal legal relationship with clearly defined roles, responsibilities and obligations imposed on each of the partners
- a non-legal relationship where the partners have agreed to work together to benefit the residents of the district
- an informal joint working arrangement, based on an agreed commitment of resources to a particular project or programme

Any issues of concern regarding the Council's involvement in a partnership should be reported by the Lead Officer to the relevant member of CMT as they arise, for advice on the appropriate course of action and escalation if required.

Partnership governance arrangements must comply with audit requirements.

### **Reviewing and Evaluating Partnerships**

Partnerships should be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that they are still working towards their aims and objectives, maintaining effective working and are still in line with the Councils Corporate Priorities.

This evaluation should look at measuring the impacts the partnership is having on each of these. This regular reviewing and evaluating of partnerships will ensure that the partnership remains accountable to the Council and their stakeholders, who are the intended beneficiaries' of their actions.

Due to the diverse nature of partnership working, the performance, risk management and monitoring may be undertaken in a variety of ways. These may include:

- capturing partnership work through the Business Planning process with the Key Activities, performance indicators and key risks in the Corporate Plan. These are reported on through the Performance Management System and Quarterly Performance Reports
- a regular item for partnership progress and issues at Corporate Management Team meetings and the Cabinet
- partnership performance monitoring reports to Scrutiny / Cabinet

The annual review of the Partnership Register will ensure that partnerships remain relevant to delivering the Council's Priorities.

Where partnership or third party data is reported through the Council's Corporate Plan and Quarterly Performance Reports, assurance that this information is accurate is required from the partnership or providing organisation. If this information has not been verified or is an estimate, a caveat should be included in the report.

The Councils key partners and partnerships have mechanisms in place to ensure data quality, including regular scrutiny of their own performance.

To inform the decision making process to enter a partnership, an assessment of risk should be undertaken as part of the information required in the Partnership Register. This is reviewed at a minimum of every year in line with the annual refresh of the Partnership Register.

Risks of exiting a partnership are also held in the Partnership Register. If the Council wishes to exit a partnership, the risks should be explained in detail as part of the exit strategy and controls put in place to minimise the impact of exit as appropriate.

## **Council Representation**

Council representation on a partnership will vary, depending on the nature, significance and status of the partnership.

In cases where Member representation on partnerships is required, a list of outside bodies will be provided to Group Leaders who are then required to supply nominations. The list of annual appointments is then agreed at Annual Council. In some cases appointments are for four years, in which case they will be agreed at the first Council meeting after an election and continue for the life of that Council.

Annual Council also agrees that any places on outside bodies that remain unfilled, or any changes during the course of the year/four year period, may be filled later by the Executive in discussion with the Group Leaders.

Officer representation on partnerships will be reviewed as part of the annual review of the Partnership Register and during the year as required.

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

There are a range of general roles and responsibilities which Members and Officers may be required to undertake when representing the Council on partnerships and other external organisations.

These roles will not always be relevant in all cases. It is essential that the specific role expected of a Member or Officer is clarified at the time of their appointment to the partnership or outside body. This role could require them to:

- act as a communication channel
- act as a community leader
- report to Council
- work together
- promote cohesion
- monitor performance
- provide management and administrative support
- contribute to strategic planning.

In fulfilling their responsibilities to the external organisation the Council Members and Officers must comply with their Council's Codes of Conduct and any relevant code or rules of the organisation concerned.

Member(s) / Officers(s) involved with partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Act in the interests of BC at all times</li><li>• Identify and develop partnership opportunities</li><li>• Report any issues of concern to the relevant Portfolio Holder or member of CMT who will action or escalate as appropriate</li><li>• Communicate information effectively and efficiently within the Council to ensure that information arising from partnership meetings is shared effectively with other Members and Officers</li><li>• Maintenance of the Partnership Register</li></ul>
Corporate Improvement and Performance Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Accountability for the Partnership Register and Policy, and co-ordination of the annual review of the</li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partnership Register</li> <li>• Provide critical challenge on partnership involvement</li> </ul>
Corporate Management Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receive annual review of the Partnership Register</li> <li>• Receive any escalated issues from Member(s) / Officers(s) involved with partnerships as and when they arise and advise on appropriate action</li> <li>• Determine involvement with new partnerships and exit from existing partnerships</li> <li>• Make recommendations to the Executive where appropriate on involvement with or exit from partnerships, and budget allocation</li> <li>• Ensure active engagement where a decision to participate in a partnership has been taken</li> <li>• Ensure the Council has the resources to fulfil its commitments to the partnership</li> </ul>
Scrutiny	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receive performance reports where appropriate</li> </ul>
Executive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decisions on resourcing not included in annual budget</li> <li>• Receive performance reports where appropriate</li> </ul>
Partnerships that the Council is involved with	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deliver the benefits that they have agreed to deliver</li> <li>• Work in an efficient, effective and economical way, providing good value for money</li> <li>• Develop a sense of shared purpose and build relationships between members of the partnership</li> <li>• Have representation from partners at the appropriate level</li> </ul>

Engaging and representing the organisation in the partnership and reporting back in to the organisation is a vital role which must be undertaken by the Member / Officer representative on the partnership or outside body.

The frequency and nature of reporting will differ dependent upon the nature of the partnership / outside body and the level of involvement. A programme will be drawn up by the CI&P Team identifying, for each partnership / outside body, the frequency of reporting, the responsible Member / Officer and where the reports will be submitted.

Members will be fully supported by officers and will be briefed prior to attendance at partnership meetings to identify any issues which may be raised by the partnership or which BC as a partner may wish to raise.

Whilst attending partnership meetings representatives should be made aware of the role BC is taking, this could be one of Control, Influence or Information gathering. If we are taking a Control position we may be chairing the partnership meeting, or are the lead partner. A position of Influence allows us to have a direct effect over decisions that are made, and Information gathering means we are attending in order to gain expertise and advice from the other partners involved.

### **Leaving a Partnership**

The Council may wish to formally withdraw from a partnership at any time for a number of reasons. These could include:

- the partnership is no longer delivering its agreed outcomes, or has achieved the outcomes it set out to
- the partnership is no longer delivering the Corporate Priorities, either through failed delivery or due to the Corporate Priorities changing
- external funding received by the partnership comes to an end, making the partnership no longer effective
- the risk of remaining in the partnership outweighs the benefits received

Where the Council decides to withdraw from a partnership, it must complete an exit strategy in order to review the risks of no longer being involved with the partnership, and outline appropriate control measures that should be put in place to mitigate any impacts.

Once completed, this exit strategy should be submitted to the CMT for consideration and approval in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder. If the partnership is particularly significant, the exit strategy should also be reviewed by the Executive.

### **Related Frameworks, Strategies and Policies**

The Partnership Policy is intrinsically linked to a number of other frameworks, strategies and policies that apply across Breckland Council, including:

- Corporate Plan
- Medium Term Financial Strategy

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## Appendix A – Guidance Notes for Partnership Register

<b>Partnership Name</b>	What is the name of the partnership?
<b>Lead Partner</b>	Within the partnership, who is the lead partner?
<b>Function of partnership</b>	What is the purpose of the partnership and what are the key partnership objectives?
<b>Is the partnership Strategic or Operational? Is this a statutory partnership we are obliged to attend? (Y/N)</b>	Think about whether the partnership has a strategic / steering / oversight function, does it carry out an operational / delivery function? This should determine the level of representation. Is the partnership a statutory partnership? Does the Council have a statutory obligation to attend?
<b>Frequency of Meetings</b>	How often do meetings take place – monthly / quarterly etc.?
<b>BC Representative (s) (Members and/or Officers)</b>	Who attends the partnership to represent BC? Is there just one person or do several people attend? Officers and/or Members
<b>CMT / SMT / Member / Officer</b>	What position/level is the person / people who are attending the meeting?
<b>Which Priority / Critical Outcomes does the partnership help to deliver?</b>	List the priority and numbers of the Critical Outcomes that the partnership contributes towards
<b>Estimation of staff time (inc. preparation, meeting and follow up) (hours per month)</b>	How many hours are spent on the partnership – think in terms of meeting time but also any administration for the partnership, preparation time including time taken to brief Members if necessary, and resulting work from the partnership
<b>Estimation of the Councils budget contribution (£)</b>	How much does the Council put into the partnership in terms of financial contribution? Remember to take into account partnership projects
<b>Impact / risk of exit from partnership</b>	What will the impact if the Council leaves the partnership? Think about implications on service delivery – inconvenience / short term / long term repercussions, lack of service delivery, extent of impact on reputation, financial penalties and risks
<b>Overall Risk Assessment</b>	Use the Partnership Risk Assessment criteria to determine whether the risk assessment is High, Medium or Low
<b>What is our role in the partnership? (control, influence, information)</b>	What role do BC take in the partnership? Do we lead, are we there to influence decisions and policy, are we contributing advice and information etc
<b>Value: Access to additional resources, ability to influence key policy and key decisions, enhancing reputation</b>	Think about what benefits the partnership brings about for the Council; does it provide access to funding pots, grants, pooled resources etc? Does it produce lots of positive press stories and PR?
<b>Overall Value Assessment of the partnership</b>	Use the Partnership Value Assessment criteria to determine whether the partnership is of High, Medium or Low value to the organisation
<b>How is information from the partnership currently shared?</b>	How is information disseminated to the Officers who need it; is there a mechanism for communicating / reporting to individuals or internal groups? How does information flow between partnerships? What are the communication channels to other councils in cases where we are the district

representative – and how are we briefed when other districts take the lead?
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## **Appendix B –Risk and Value Assessment Criteria**

Note that these criteria should be used for guidance only. This is not a prescriptive list to assess risk and value.

### **Partnership Risk Assessment**

<b>HIGH</b>	<b>MEDIUM</b>	<b>LOW</b>
Council resource contribution greater than £100k	Council resource contribution between £50k and £100k	Council resource contribution less than £50k
Considerable time resource commitment from Council	Moderate time resource commitment	Minimal time resource commitment
Medium to long term problems/fallout if partnership fails	Short term problems/fallout if partnership fails	Inconvenience if partnership fails
Partnership has a critical impact on the achievement of Council priorities	Partnership has a moderate impact on the achievement of Council priorities	Partnership does not impact in a material way on the achievement of Council priorities
Serious reputation impact (sub-regional / national)	Moderate reputation impact (local impact)	Minimal reputation impact
Significant importance for the administration	Moderate importance for the administration	Little or no importance to the administration

### **Partnership Value Assessment**

<b>HIGH</b>	<b>MEDIUM</b>	<b>LOW</b>
Significant contribution to delivering the Corporate Plan	Moderate contribution to delivering the Corporate Plan	Little contribution to delivering the Corporate Plan
Significantly reduced costs of service delivery	Some reduction in the cost of service delivery	Does not reduce cost of service delivery
Provides significant opportunity to access external funding	Provides some opportunity to access external funding	Provides little or no opportunity to access external funding
Significantly enhances Councils reputation	Moderately enhances Councils reputation	Little enhancement to Councils reputation
Significantly improves service delivery	Moderately improves service delivery	Minimal improvement to service delivery
Significantly improves service resilience	Moderately improves service resilience	Minimal improvement to service resilience
Key to influencing sub-regional and local decision making and policy development	Key to influencing local decision-making and policy development	Minimal influence on decision-making and policy development
Significantly supports the delivery of a statutory	Moderately supports the delivery of a statutory	Does not support the delivery of a statutory

function	function	function
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<b>Governance</b>	
What is the structure of the partnership/committee?	
Who has decision making power?	
Who represents BC at each level?	
What power does each person have?	
What are the other authorities involved?	
How does the information feed back to the	

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Benefit to the Council exceeds investment of resources (time/money)	Investment of resources (time/money) commensurate with benefit to the Council	Investment of resources (time/money) exceeds benefit to the Council
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**Appendix C – Questions for Assessing Partnerships**

Council?	
How often does the partnership meet?	
<b>Officer resources</b>	
Which Officers from the Council are involved?	
How much time does this partnership take? (hours per week)	
What is their role within the partnership?	
<b>Finance</b>	
Does BC make a financial contribution?	
Which budget is this from?	
Is this a one-off or annual payment?	
Who else contributes?	
Do we receive funding through being in the partnership?	
What is the money spent on?	
<b>Effectiveness</b>	
Is this partnership effective? Why?	
How could we make this partnership more effective?	
What is the partnership trying to achieve?	
Is it achieving this?	
Can BC help to make it better?	
<b>Importance</b>	
Is this partnership important to us? Why?	
How is the partnership linked to the Corporate Priority?	
Does the partnership employ anyone?	
Are there any emerging strategic political agendas that this partnership can help with?	