

PARTNERSHIPS – POINTS TO LOOK OUT FOR

The points below have been devised to reduce the risks associated specifically with working in partnership. They are based largely on practical experiences. The list can be used by internal auditors but is recommended to managers responsible for partnership working on behalf of the County Council.

Clearly not all points relate to every partnership but especially where large formal partnerships are being established many of the points are relevant and managers need to be confident that the issues highlighted have been addressed.

1. Has the case for partnership working been established against other alternatives available.
2. What rules does the partnership work to.
3. What rules do seconded staff to the partnership work to
4. Have key declarations made to the employing authority been repeated to the partnership
5. What is the legal status of the partnership and what are its tax obligations
6. What is the legal status of your partners and does this impact on your agreement with them.
7. Are the decision making processes of the partnership clearly laid down, does it have a clearly defined management board and management structure
8. Are these processes in line with the legal status of the partnership and are there any built in conflict of interest implications that need resolving
9. Who is the "financier of last resort" if an overspending occurs
10. Who will be liable if the partnership folds with insufficient funds to cover debts
11. Have the key risks to the successful working of the partnership been set out and how are these being monitored/managed
12. If the partnership fails to complete its intended purpose and grant funds have to be paid back who has liability to do this
13. Are the administrative responsibilities of the partnership clearly assigned and paid for
14. Have adequate controls been set up by or on behalf the partnership to safeguard the resources and assets allocated to it or purchased by it
15. If the partnership's board or staff can commit either material levels of matched funding or expenditure that must be paid directly by the County Council has confirmation before the commitment is made been incorporated into the agreed arrangements
16. Who has responsibility to ensure all contributions from outside contributors are received within an agreed time scale

17. Who has responsibility for bidding for additional outside funding and finding alternative sources of income e.g. sponsorship. Do they have the necessary skills
18. Are the contributions required from each partner clearly laid down and cover the life of the partnership (including financial, staff and assets), are there procedures laid down to ensure these are met on time
19. Are partners allowed to vary their contributions, if so what agreement is required from the other partners and does the timetable match the requirements of the County Council's budget process
20. Are the disputes and termination arrangements for the partnership clearly set down. In particular for termination, how the partnership's assets will be divided up between partners and staff liabilities will be shared out
21. Are the banking arrangements clearly laid down. If one partner is undertaking this on behalf of the other partners how are the other partners' interests protected and cash flow issues allowed for
22. Are the financial management arrangements to be used by the partnership laid down and agreed by the partners, especially those relating to budgetary control (up to management board level)
23. Is the accountability of the County Council for its role in the partnership properly reflected in its plans and financial accounts
24. Is the County Council properly represented on the management board
25. Are the County Council's key objectives and interests sufficiently protected in the partnership agreement
26. Do the County Council's representatives have right of access to the partnerships records to give assurance about financial probity
27. Is sufficient information required from the partnership to ensure senior officers, the executive and elected members can be properly informed and where necessary be involved in key decisions (e.g.s business plans, performance reports and financial accounts of partnerships)
28. Are the boundaries of responsibility between the partnership's management board and the County Council's executive clearly mapped out and in line with the ultimate responsibilities of the two bodies. Have those involved, and especially elected members, been told what these are
29. Are the lines of communication between the partnership and its constituent bodies clearly mapped out, with timetables and named posts taking ultimate responsibility for communication and co-ordination
30. Have staff seconded to the partnership been instructed on what their responsibilities are to the partnership and to their employing body. Do the instructions cover the transfer to other partnership members of sensitive information held by the County Council
31. If staff or clients have cause for concern is there an agreed procedure for these to be raised and are there arrangements to ensure this is readily available

32. Are the responsibilities for insurance and recovery planning (especially in relation to key IT systems) in relation to the partnership's activities laid down
33. Have legal and financial advisors within the County Council been consulted over the initial agreement and significant changes or events relating to the partnership
34. Is there a written agreement with the partnership (or other partners) setting down these key points where applicable and has it been signed by all the relevant parties