



# Scrutiny Commission for Community & Resources

Review of  
Partnership  
Working

December 2006



Telford & Wrekin  
COUNCIL

## **FURTHER INFORMATION**

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## **FOREWORD**

Members of the Scrutiny Commission for Community and Resources chose to undertake an in-depth review of the Council's partnership working as although we were aware that the Council undertakes partnership working, we felt that we did not know a great deal about what is involved in the various partnerships, and how they link to each other.

We began this review with a very wide remit, but it soon became apparent that partnerships is a huge issue. Professor Steven Griggs, a leading academic in this field, told us that our original remit provided "seven year's worth of work". As there were only 2 members on this review group, we took the decision to focus the review on two main issues – accountability and communication. Other issues have been discussed over the course of the review, and it may be that scrutiny needs to revisit other aspects of partnership working in the future.

Partnership working in Telford & Wrekin is well established and in the main works very effectively. There is strong commitment between the various local organisations to work together and there is a jointly developed and owned Community Strategy in place. Partnership working brings many benefits including sharing knowledge and information, sharing and securing resources, developing new initiatives and policy, and providing services in a more unified and holistic way to the people who live in Telford & Wrekin.

While we recognise the many strengths of partnership working, we have identified through our research some areas which could be improved. We have made a number of recommendations to this end, although we recognise that some of these may have to be revisited in light of the publication of the Local Government White Paper.

We would like to express our thanks to those who took the time to contribute to this study which has been very interesting and rewarding. We hope that our recommendations will be taken on board to the benefits of the partnerships, individual partners, and ultimately, the people of Telford & Wrekin who receive the many services that are developed and improved through partnership working.

**Councillor Bob Groom**  
**Vice Chair of the Scrutiny Commission for Community & Resources**

**Councillor Louise Lomax**  
**Member of the Scrutiny Commission for Community & Resources**

# **1 – METHOD OF REVIEW**

- 1.1 The original scope of this review was very wide. After some preliminary work, we focussed the terms of reference for the review on accountability and communication. The main objectives were:
1. To identify how Members and Officers are held accountable for any decisions made by the partnership outside the Council's decision making arrangements (if applicable)
  2. To identify how the performance and activities of partnerships are reported and monitored by the Council
  3. To identify how partnerships communicate with Council members, service users and the wider public, and whether this communication is adequate
  4. To identify how Members and Officers sitting on partnerships are selected.

- 1.2 We were provided with a range of background information from the Council's Partnership Manager who, at the time we began this review, was the only officer whose role solely related to partnerships. We are pleased to note that capacity to facilitate and support partnership working has now been strengthened by the appointment of a Partnership Support Officer.

- 1.3 As the Council is involved in many partnerships, we decided to choose three case study partnerships to study in some detail to inform some general conclusions and recommendations about partnership working. These were:
1. the Local Strategic Partnership as this is a strategic partnership with a wide remit, which many of the other partnerships stem from
  2. the Lifelong Learning Partnership which is operational in focus and is one of the few partnerships to have a budget
  3. the Strategic Housing Partnership which involves partners from the private sector.

We reviewed a range of information relating to these partnerships including terms of reference, membership lists and minutes of recent meetings. We also sent a survey to the members of these partnerships. A number of the respondents also sit on other partnerships and so were able to give comments based on a wider experience than just the case study partnerships.

- 1.4 We held meetings with some Councillors who chair partnerships, and sent a survey to all Councillors asking for their views on the Local Strategic Partnership. We also met with some Council officers who are involved in partnerships and with the Chief Executive of the Wrekin Housing Trust who sits on both the Local Strategic Partnership and the Strategic Housing Partnership. We surveyed the views of all members of the case study partnerships, many of whom are from organisations outside of the Council. The response to these surveys was

reasonable. 3 members (16%) of the Lifelong Learning Partnership, 9 members (53%) of the Strategic Housing Partnership and 13 members (42%) of the Local Strategic Partnership responded. A list of those that contributed their views to this review can be found at Appendix 1 at the end of this report.

- 1.4 As partnership working has increased nationally, so has the academic interest in this area, and the attention given to scrutinising partnerships by Council Scrutiny Committees across England. Our research has therefore benefitted from being able to draw on the work of academics and scrutiny colleagues elsewhere to inform our own conclusions and recommendations. We have also attended two seminars which have given us a further insight into the approach to partnerships in other local authorities.
- 1.5 Throughout this report, we have used the word Councillor rather than member to try to avoid confusion. The word member will refer to members of partnerships.

## **2 – NATIONAL RESEARCH AND REPORTS**

- 2.1 There is a range of academic research on partnership working, and a number of scrutiny reviews have been undertaken at other Councils across England. There follows a brief summary of the reports we have drawn from to inform our own review. These reports highlighted accountability and communication as two key issues for partnerships.
- 2.2 In the 2002 report *New Roles for Old*, Gary Craig and Mick Wilkinson of Hull University, supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, explored the issue of elected member representation in partnerships. This included how local authorities decide on the mix of member and officer representation, the factors influencing these choices, the support needs of members and how this support might be provided. The report recommends that local Councils should review feedback and accountability mechanisms to ensure that structures are in place for officers and elected members to raise key issues arising from partnerships, and be held to account for decisions taken on behalf of the authority. It also recommended that particular consideration should be given to the need to engage backbenchers in partnerships, and for scrutiny functions to review them.
- 2.3 A 2003 report of the North East Lincolnshire Scrutiny Commission looked at the role of the Council in partnerships, the benefits to the Authority and the community, the cost to the Authority and methods of communication. The report contained a number of recommendations, including that Councillors representing the Council on partnerships be required to periodically report back to the Council on the work and progress of the partnership and that officers who attend meetings of partnerships periodically report progress to scrutiny.
- 2.4 The General Scrutiny Committee at Essex County Council conducted a review in 2003 of the key issues and implications of the increasing levels of partnership activity of the Council. This Committee compiled a set of partnership assessment criteria that they recommended the Council use to assess performance of partnerships, and it was recommended that the criteria be used when setting up a new partnership, as well as for regular reviews of existing partnerships.
- 2.5 Chris Skelcher, Navdeep Mathur and Mike Smith from the Institute of Local Government Studies (INLOGOV) at Birmingham University undertook research into the governance of partnerships and produced the 2004 report *Effective Partnerships and Good Governance: Lessons for Policy and Practice*. They developed a tool for assessing partnerships which asks questions around four elements of accountability – public accessibility, internal governance, member conduct and external accountability.

- 2.6 The Audit Commission produced a detailed report in 2005 called *Governing Partnerships: Bridging the accountability gap*. This report recommends that public bodies should: -
- Review the partnerships they are involved in to strengthen accountability
  - Establish clear criteria to use for evaluating partnerships
  - Scale down involvement in partnerships where necessary
  - Agree and regularly review protocols and governing documents with all partners
  - Tell service users and the public how key partnerships work, and where responsibility and accountability for them lies.
- 2.7 The Regeneration Overview Commission at the City of Stoke on Trent undertook a scrutiny review of Councillor involvement with organisations and partnerships. They published a report in March 2005. The overall conclusion of this report was that although the Councillor representative role on partnerships can add value to the Council's work, more value could be added by concentrating representation on fewer partnerships and ensuring that the Councillor representative role is clear.
- 2.8 In January 2006, Chesterfield Borough Council and North East Derbyshire District Council scrutiny committees published a report on their joint review of their partnership arrangements. This review had been supported by Steven Griggs and Mike Smith from the Institute of Local Government. Their report recommended that both Councils conduct a thorough evaluation of the partnerships with which they are involved to ensure efficiency, effectiveness, appropriateness, added value and accountability. They developed a Partnership Development and Evaluation Handbook which they recommended these Councils adopt, and which has also been made available for others to purchase to help review their own partnerships.

## **3 – INFORMATION**

### **3.1 Partnership structure**

- 3.1.1 There are many reasons to work in partnership, including:
1. the desire to achieve a common purpose,
  2. to meet the needs of the local community in a way that cannot be reached by one organisation acting alone,
  3. to work across organisational boundaries and tackle cross-cutting issues, and
  4. to meet the government's modernisation and efficiency agendas.

In our survey to members of the case study partnerships, we asked which of a number of potential benefits of working in partnership members of the partnerships felt they achieved through their partnership. The most positive response was given to "improves the co-ordination and delivery of services by reducing barriers between partner organisations". Of the 25 individuals across all 3 case studies who responded to the surveys, 3 members (12%) strongly agreed, 19 (76%) agreed and 3 (12%) neither agreed nor disagreed.

- 3.1.2 There are different types of partnerships and the working arrangements for each partnership will be different to suit the needs and purpose of the individual partnerships. In some cases, partnership working is an explicit requirement, but for others it is simply recognised as the best way of working to achieve the desired outcomes.

- 3.1.3 The Partnership Development Unit (PDU), comprising of 1 officer from the Council and one each from the Police and the Primary Care Trust, helps to develop, guide and support the various partnerships, as well as identifying any gaps and duplication. It now operates as a 'virtual unit', and its future role and operation is under review. The activities of the PDU are funded by the Agenda Group of the Local Strategic Partnership, each member of which makes a small contribution, relative to the size of their budget.

- 3.1.4 The diagram in Figure 1 is the organogram of the partnership structure that the Council has helped develop and currently works within. This structure is fluid and does not determine the partnerships that exist, but changes as the partnerships evolve and change in response to both national and local drivers. It does, however, show that the partnerships operate at different levels, with the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) having a broad remit (as the 'partnership of partnerships') and the sub-partnerships of the LSP relating to specific themes. It also shows where partnerships link to each other, and some of the sub-structure of inter-agency groups that in turn feeds into them.

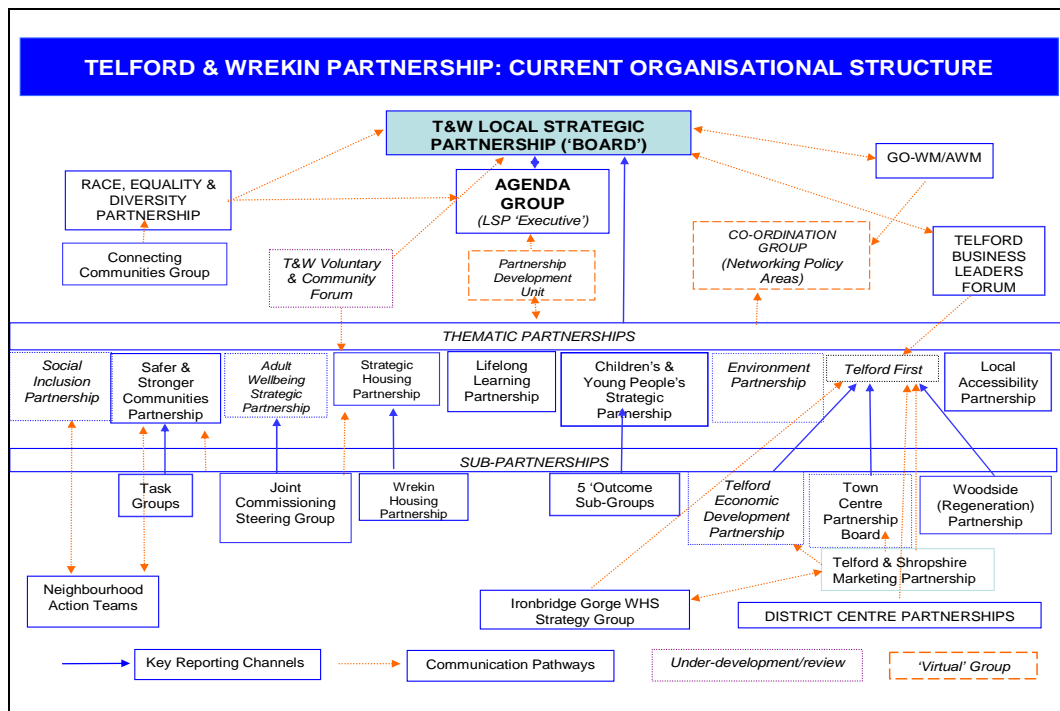


Figure 1 – Telford & Wrekin Partnership organogram

3.1.5 The Partnerships organogram is not restrictive or set in stone, and partnerships will continue to be formed where there is a perceived need and ended where there is no longer a need. There can be value in networking through a partnership, but if a partnership turns into a talking shop with no outcomes, it is likely that members will stop attending. It is important that partnerships add value. Where a partnership has achieved its purpose or is perceived to no longer add value, the partnership should be reviewed, as are the Social Inclusion and Health & Care Partnerships at present, and ended if necessary. The need to take decisions to end partnerships where appropriate is also recommended in the Audit Commission report.

3.1.6 Many of the scrutiny reviews on partnership working in other authorities have designed or suggested using a set of criteria to regularly review existing partnerships and to use before entering into new partnerships. One of the key recommendations of the Audit Commission report was that public bodies should review their partnerships using a checklist including questions such as why does the partnership exist, what are the agreed aims of the partnership, how does the partnership add value, how decisions are made and acted on, and how they are scrutinised. Currently there is no established mechanism in Telford & Wrekin for the review of partnerships. Instead, partnership development and review is an evolving process of change without any structured or time-limited formal review process.

## 3.2 Case study partnerships

- 3.2.1 The **Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)** is a ‘hands-off’ strategic partnership, setting the vision and priorities for partners to achieve, and taking an advisory and lobbying role. The sub-partnerships of the LSP look at thematic issues, and the LSP looks at cross-cutting issues. Of the 13 LSP members, representing 42% of the partnership, that responded to our survey, 10 (77%) agreed and 1 (8%) strongly agreed that the LSP has clear terms of reference. (2 neither agreed nor disagreed). When asked how effective the LSP is overall, 2 (15%) responded “not very effective,” 7 (54%) “somewhat effective” and 4 (31%) “very effective”.
- 3.2.2 The LSP Executive (Agenda Group) is made up of 11 of the members of the LSP from the key partner agencies: the Council, the Police, the Probation Service, Job Centre Plus, the Wrekin Housing Trust, the Education Sector, the Voluntary Sector and the Business community. The Agenda Group meets every 6 weeks and drives forward the partnership by identifying issues that need to be discussed by the LSP to get a collective steer. The Agenda Group is also responsible for taking on that steer and identifying what each partner will do to meet the vision, as articulated through the jointly owned Community Strategy. The Local Strategic Partnership Board meets three times a year and is made up of the Chairs or Chief Executives of around 30 partner organisations. As well as developing the overall vision for the area and taking this back to action in the partner organisations, the LSP also has a role to oversee the partnership structure, and the work being undertaken by the thematic sub-partnerships. However, some of the individuals that we met with indicated that the methods for thematic sub-partnerships to feed back to the LSP could be strengthened. One of the members of the LSP, who also sits on another of the sub-partnerships not looked at in detail in this review, asked whether the sub-partnerships do link into the LSP in a meaningful way or “do their own thing”. A member of the SHP expressed concern about what they felt was a lack of feedback on the work of the LSP to the SHP, indicating there may also be a need to strengthen downward communication.
- 3.2.3 The **Strategic Housing Partnership (SHP)** brings together the key organisations, both locally and regionally, for issues relating to housing strategy and policy. The partnership previously had a period where it did not meet as there was a lack of leadership, and lack of clarity between members on the purpose of the partnership. It has recently been reinvigorated, including the development of some terms of reference. The Strategic Housing Partnership is chaired by the Council’s Cabinet Member for Housing & Consumer Affairs as the Council has lead responsibility for developing the local Housing Strategy. Of the 9 SHP members that responded to our survey, 7 (78%) agreed and 1 (11%) strongly agreed that the LSP has clear terms of reference. (1 neither agreed nor disagreed). When asked

how effective the SHP is overall, 1 (11% ) responded “not very effective”, but 8 (89%) responded “somewhat effective”. A number of respondents made reference to the fact that the SHP is still establishing its role.

3.2.4 The **Lifelong Learning Partnership** (LLP) is a more operational partnership and as such does not have any elected member representation. However, it does contribute to one of the Council’s community ambitions of “A community that is well educated and skilled”. The partnership looks at the coordination and promotion of post-compulsory education and as such, membership is drawn largely from the education sector. The partnership currently does not have formal terms of reference, although these are being developed following discussion at their meeting in June 2006. With only 3 members, representing just 16% of the members of the partnership, the results of our survey to members of the LLP must be treated cautiously, and there was some divergence between the responses of these 3 members. 1 strongly agreed, 1 agreed and 1 disagreed that the LLP has clear terms of reference, and similarly 1 felt the LLP is “very effective”, 1 “somewhat effective” and 1 “not very effective”.

### 3.3 Membership of partnerships

3.3.1 Partner organisations decide which individuals will represent them on each partnership. The choice of representative is important as progressing the issues discussed in the partnership is dependent on information being fed back to the parent organisation, and vice versa. The survey asked members of the partnerships to state, from a list of possible options, how they report back to their organisation on the partnership they are involved in. The responses are detailed in the table below, showing that there are a range of options used. A number of respondents ticked more than one method of feedback.

	Formal written report	Informal memo / email	Verbal report	Minutes / actions agreed	None
Local Strategic Partnership	6	3	13		
Strategic Housing Partnership	1	3	7	2	1
Lifelong Learning Partnership			3		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>

3.3.2 For Council representatives, members of partnerships tend to be self selecting i.e. the officer or Cabinet member whose role most closely aligns with the topic of the partnership is likely to be the representative chosen. Some, although not all, partnerships are Chaired by the Council representative, depending on the role of the partnership. The Local Strategic Partnership is Chaired by the Leader of the Council, as partners recognise the Council’s community leadership role. However,

this does not mean that the Council agenda dominates the meetings of the partnership, as agendas are agreed by the LSP Executive and items can be suggested by all members.

- 3.3.3 When members of partnerships are being selected, it is important to consider their level of responsibility within their own organisation. Within the Local Strategic Partnership, the members are either Board Chairs, Chief Executives or equivalent, as they have the overview of their organisation, have the authority to speak on its behalf and are able to be influential over decisions to be made within the organisation. Other partnerships are more operational and therefore require membership of officers with a more detailed operational knowledge.
- 3.3.4 The Council's Cabinet approves the nomination of Councillors to outside bodies, including partnerships. Not all partnerships have a Councillor representative. This is dependent on the purpose of the individual partnership, for example as the Lifelong Learning Partnership is operational in focus, it does not have a Councillor representative. While Councillor representation is very important, it must not be tokenistic as Councillors have a number of responsibilities and a finite amount of time available. Councillor representation must also be kept in proportion as other members of the partnership will be put off if it appears to be too heavily dominated by the Council.
- 3.3.5 While there is a Partnership Protocol in place to inform and guide Councillors who are looking to become members of partnerships, there is no guidance on Councillors roles and responsibilities as a member of an individual partnership, other than contained in any terms of reference for the partnership.

#### **3.4 Decision making and accountability**

- 3.4.1 Accountability is one of the key areas of this study. We have defined accountability as giving account and being answerable for decisions made or actions taken. The Audit Commission report lists four components of accountability which it argues are largely still to be developed for partnerships themselves. These are:
- Giving an account, through annual reports, reports to boards, roadshows etc.
  - Being held to account, perhaps through scrutiny or inspections.
  - Taking account, through research and consultation with service users or the wider public
  - A form of redress, through the ombudsman or a complaints procedure.

This review has largely focussed on the issues of giving an account and being held to account. There are different groups that partnerships are accountable to, including accountability of individual representatives to their parent organisation, partners' responsibilities to

each other, collective responsibility to the wider public and accountability of the partnership to central government.

- 3.4.2 One of the key questions of this study was what partnerships are accountable for, whether this is budgets, decisions taken, performance or other. The partnership Chairs and Council officers that we spoke to were clear that partnerships, in the main, are not decision making bodies. While a partnership will come to a joint vision or a way forward, any decisions on actions that need to be taken to meet this vision are taken by individual organisations, under their own decision-making structures. An example of this would be the Community Strategy. The members of the Local Strategic Partnership discuss and agree a high level vision for Telford & Wrekin. The work to achieve the Strategy is undertaken by individual organisations and/or through the auspices of the thematic partnerships. However, the responses to the surveys showed less clarity among members of the partnerships. 8 (32%) of the survey respondents for all 3 case studies disagreed and 2 strongly disagreed that the partnership they are on is a decision making body. 7 (28%) neither agreed nor disagreed. However, 8 (32%), including at least one member from each case study, actually agreed that their partnership was a decision making body.
- 3.4.3 The vast majority of partnerships do not have a budget. The Council does not put any funding into partnerships, other than officer time to attend. However, over the last 3 years, around £16million has been secured or spent through partnership working. In these instances one of the partner organisations will be chosen as the accountable body for this money. Some work is being done by the Policy, Performance and Partnerships unit which will enable us to see more clearly the financial benefits of partnership working.
- 3.4.4 There should be accountability between the members of each partnerships to ensure that each is doing what has been agreed, and the Audit Commission report recommends this to improve accountability to the public. There must also be appropriate feedback from members of partnerships to their parent organisation. Within the Council, this should include feedback where practicable to all Councillors. Few survey respondents and interviewees indicated that they use a formal method of reporting back on the work of the partnership that they are involved in. It was also a finding in the Skelcher, Mathur and Smith research, see paragraph 2.5, that the onus for reporting back largely rested with individual members, and that this form of accountability is relatively poorly developed.
- 3.4.5 The Council does not monitor the performance of partnerships as such because the partnership is a way of working rather than something to be monitored in itself – it is a means to an end, rather than an end in itself. However, a large number of the Best Value Performance Indicators that are used to monitor the performance of Council services do measure the outcomes of work that has been done through

partnerships. Similarly, performance monitoring at partner organisations will measure outcomes of partnership working indirectly.

- 3.4.6 The Vision of the Local Strategic Partnership is published as part of the Community Strategy which identifies key priorities to focus on over the next 5 years. It incorporates strategies from across the Council's portfolios and those from partner organisations, as well as an analysis of local needs identified through various consultation exercises. The Community Strategy (2006-11) now includes a Performance Framework which will be used to manage and monitor performance against key targets over the next 3-5 years. This will enable better performance monitoring of the LSP, and as the thematic sub-partnerships feed in to this vision, it is also a method of monitoring the performance of these partnerships.
- 3.4.7 Another method of holding partnerships to account could be through Council scrutiny arrangements. The West Midlands Overview and Scrutiny Network ran an event in October 2006 on Scrutiny of Partnership Working. This event acknowledged that due to the sheer volume of partnerships that exist, scrutiny of partnerships can be difficult, but it is important that it takes place in an appropriate way to help ensure accountability.

### **3.5 Communication about partnerships**

- 3.5.1 The second key area of focus for this review was communication. In many ways, this links in with accountability, as effective communication can go some way to improving accountability, particularly the aspect of giving an account.
- 3.5.2 Telford and Wrekin's partnership working is well regarded nationally. However, there is not a great deal of information provided to the public locally about the Local Strategic Partnership or other partnerships, although there has been considerable recent press coverage of the Partnership's Vision 2026 document. In the main, members of the public are likely to be more concerned about the outcomes of partnership working than in the partnerships themselves and may legitimately expect that the key local agencies are working together to deliver services. However, some people will be interested in finding out information and for these people, it is not particularly easy to find information, for example, the information on the Council's website is limited, and the Partnership website is in need of redesign and updating.
- 3.5.3 Skelcher, Mathur and Smith's research covered the issue of public accessibility of partnerships. They asked questions around whether partnership meetings are advertised and held in public, if they have an Annual General Meeting that the public can attend, and whether the minutes of meetings are made public. They found that few

partnerships have considered the rights of the public to attend meetings and to see reports and minutes. In some of our own meetings with representatives of partnerships, this issue did not seem to have been considered, although initially in Telford & Wrekin, minutes from meetings of various partnerships were made public on the Partnerships website.

- 3.5.4 One of the key areas of communication that this review considered was how Councillors are kept informed of the work of partnerships. We were disappointed that only 6 out of 54 Councillors responded to the survey we sent asking about their awareness of the role and activities of the Local Strategic Partnership. The lack of response may indicate a lack of awareness of the partnership, or possibly indifference. The survey responses need to be treated with caution due to the very low return rate. However, 4 of the Councillors that responded stated that they would like more information about the Local Strategic Partnership, and 2 stated that felt they were not informed at all about the activities, achievements and ambitions of the LSP. It is important that Councillors are kept informed of the LSP and its activities and are able to access further information easily if they require it.

## **4 – CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

More information about partnerships should be made available to the public, partners, officers and Councillors. In order to minimise waste and enable anyone who is interested to access the information, this should be done by redeveloping the Partnership website. The website should provide, as a minimum, access to minutes of meetings, membership lists and contact details for each partnerships. A link to this website should also be made through the Members Information Point on the Council intranet. Members suggest that the homepage mirrors the partnerships organogram which clearly shows each partnership and how it links with other partnerships. In the future, a feedback function could be introduced to the website to help ensure that it continues to provide the information that people require. To ensure that people know what information is available to them, and therefore increase the likelihood of people accessing the website, the new website should be publicised.

### **RECOMMENDATION 1a:**

**The partnership website should be redesigned and re-launched as a key point of contact for people wanting to find information about partnerships. The redesigned website should still contain links to partner organisation websites where further information can be accessed, as does the existing Partnership website.**

### **RECOMMENDATION 1b:**

**A small scale publicity campaign should accompany the website re-launch to ensure that people are aware of the information that they can access through the website.**

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While the Local Strategic Partnership is very important to the delivery of many local services, little is done to promote the work that has been undertaken through it. Members suggest that there is more publicity, particularly on progress against the Community Strategy. This will help to address the issues of accountability to the public. To increase the level of public interest, this publicity needs to be creative and interactive, and should involve a number of partners.

### **RECOMMENDATION 2:**

**Consideration should be given to an annual event for the Local Strategic Partnership to demonstrate what progress has been made on the Community Strategy, involving a number of partners.**

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It is crucial that all partnerships are clear about their purpose so that they can monitor their effectiveness and continue to add value to the partnership structure overall. This will also assist the Partnership Development Unit to monitor any gaps or overlap between the partnerships.

Individual members of each partnership also need to be clear on the role of the partnership and their role within it so that there is a shared understanding between all members of what the purpose of the partnership is. The results of our surveys showed that not all members were clear on the terms of reference of the partnership they were on, and one member who was fairly new to a partnership said that they had not been given the terms of reference. By understanding their role within it, they can also ensure that they are adding value to the partnership and also benefiting from attendance and participation.

**RECOMMENDATION 3a:**

**All partnerships should have clear terms of reference so that members of the partnership are clear on the purpose of the partnership. The terms of reference should be regularly reviewed.**

**RECOMMENDATION 3b:**

**Consideration should be given to providing an introductory pack for all new members of partnerships so that they are clear on the role of the partnership and of their role within it. This should contain as a minimum the terms of reference of the partnership but could also contain minutes of the last meeting, a brief summary of the key issues discussed and actions arising from the partnership meetings over the previous year, a list of members of the partnership and contact details, and a summary of the responsibilities of the members of the partnership.**



Each partnership should be regularly reviewed to ensure that they continue to add value, and continue to address the changing needs of the Borough. These reviews should be carried out internally by the members of each partnership and will be a way of holding each other to account.

**RECOMMENDATION 4:**

**Partnerships should be encouraged to annually evaluate their role and to develop robust plans of any key actions or of their purpose over the next year. This will help to ensure that partnerships are fit for purpose and continue to add value. This information should be fed back to the Partnership Development Unit and the Local Strategic Partnership to enable them to more effectively identify gaps and overlap.**



While partnership working should be collaborative and develop close working relationships and support between partner organisations, there should also be some challenge, both between members of individual partnerships, and between partner organisations and the partnership. One member of the LSP in their survey response stated that they were not sure members of the partnership hold each other to account and that the partnership “seems a bit too cosy”. Challenge could be introduced through scrutiny arrangements, although this will not always be appropriate.

**RECOMMENDATION 5:**

**Consideration should be given to the most appropriate method to ensure that there is some challenge within partnerships.**

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The Local Area Agreement (LAA) is a significant achievement of the LSP, and will require close partnership working to deliver. The implications of the LAA are wide-ranging and will require robust governance arrangements. It is important that scrutiny members are kept informed of developments of the LAA, particularly in relation to the Council’s role within it.

**RECOMMENDATION 6:**

**The Scrutiny Commission for Community and Resources should be made aware of progress and future direction of the Local Area Agreement on a regular basis.**

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While the partnerships organogram shows, and some members spoke of, clear links between the LSP and the thematic sub-partnerships, other members were not sure how the sub-partnerships linked in with the LSP. As part of the LSP role is to monitor the sub-partnerships, it is important that there are clear linkages for two-way communication.

**RECOMMENDATION 7:**

**The links between the Local Strategic Partnership and the thematic sub-partnerships should be reviewed and strengthened to ensure that there are clear and appropriate methods of two-way communication.**

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There appears to be some inconsistency in the way the work of partnerships is reported back to partner organisations. A number of the reports referred to in section 2 of this report state that mechanisms for reporting back are vital,

but that they tend to be ad hoc nationally. All members of partnerships should be feeding back to their parent organisation, as this is where issues discussed in the partnership are converted into action. The survey responses indicated that while the majority of members do feed back in some way, it is largely informal. There should be a more formal approach within the Council for feedback on what has happened within partnerships, and partner organisations should also be encouraged to adopt more formal reporting procedures. Although partners should choose the most appropriate way to feed back within their organisation, there should be some consistency in the feedback that is being given to all organisations that are involved in a particular partnership.

**RECOMMENDATION 8:**

**There is a need to improve communication flows between representatives of organisations involved in partnerships and their parent organisations, so that notes of partnership meetings and any action points arising are easily accessible.**

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While in some cases it is important to have Councillor representation on a partnership, it will not always be appropriate or necessary to the work of that partnership. Councillor representatives should add value to any partnership that they sit on. It is also important that Councillor representatives feed back both to officers who may need to action issues arising from partnerships, and also to other Councillors.

**RECOMMENDATION 9a:**

**The role of Councillor representatives on partnerships should be clearly defined.**

**RECOMMENDATION 9b:**

**There is a need to ensure adequate feedback to the Council where there is Councillor representation on partnerships.**

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## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation	Indication of cost	Priority
<p><b>Recommendation 1a:</b> The partnership website should be redesigned and re-launched as a key point of contact for people wanting to find information about partnerships. The redesigned website should still contain links to partner organisation websites where further information can be accessed, as does the existing Partnership website.</p>	Low	High
<p><b>Recommendation 1b:</b> A small scale publicity campaign should accompany the website re-launch to ensure that people are aware of the information that they can access through the website.</p>	Low	Medium
<p><b>Recommendation 2:</b> Consideration should be given to an annual event for the Local Strategic Partnership to demonstrate what progress has been made on the Community Strategy, involving a number of partners.</p>	Medium	Medium
<p><b>Recommendation 3a:</b> All partnerships should have clear terms of reference so that members of the partnership are clear on the purpose of the partnership. The terms of reference should be regularly reviewed.</p>	Low	High
<p><b>Recommendation 3b:</b> Consideration should be given to providing an introductory pack for all new members of partnerships so that they are clear on the role of the partnership and of their role within it. This should contain as a minimum the terms of reference of the partnership but could also contain minutes of the last meeting, a brief summary of the key issues discussed and actions arising from the partnership meetings over the previous year, a list of members of the partnership and contact details, and a summary of the responsibilities of the members of the partnership.</p>	Medium	Low

<p><b>Recommendation 4:</b> Partnerships should be encouraged to annually evaluate their role and to develop robust plans of any key actions or of their purpose over the next year. This will help to ensure that partnerships are fit for purpose and continue to add value. This information should be fed back to the Partnership Development Unit and the Local Strategic Partnership to enable them to more effectively identify gaps and overlap.</p>	Low	High
<p><b>Recommendation 5:</b> Consideration should be given to the most appropriate method to ensure that there is some challenge within partnerships.</p>	Low	Medium
<p><b>Recommendation 6:</b> The Scrutiny Commission for Community and Resources should be made aware of progress and future direction of the Local Area Agreement on a regular basis.</p>	Low	Medium
<p><b>Recommendation 7:</b> The links between the Local Strategic Partnership and the thematic sub-partnerships should be reviewed and strengthened to ensure that there are clear and appropriate methods of two-way communication.</p>	Low	Medium
<p><b>Recommendation 8:</b> There is a need to improve communication flows between representatives of organisations involved in partnerships and their parent organisations, so that notes of partnership meetings and any action points arising are easily accessible.</p>	Low	Low
<p><b>Recommendation 9a:</b> The role of Councillor representatives on partnerships should be clearly defined.</p>	Low	Low
<p><b>Recommendation 9b:</b> There is a need to ensure adequate feedback to the Council where there is Councillor representation on partnerships.</p>	Low	Medium

**\* Explanation of cost categorisations.**

It is not possible to provide detailed costings for the recommendations within this report without a considerable amount of additional work being undertaken by both scrutiny members and finance officers. However, the recommendations have been placed into one of three categories as follows:-

Low cost indicates that the recommendation could be funded from within existing resources, although not necessarily in the current year.

Medium cost indicates that the recommendation is anticipated to cost up to £10,000 which is not currently budgeted.

High cost indicates that the recommendation is expected to cost more than £10,000 which is not currently budgeted.

## **APPENDIX 1:** **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

We would like to thank all those who contributed their time and their views to this review, including:

- All those members of the Lifelong Learning Partnership, Strategic Housing Partnership and Local Strategic Partnership who responded to our survey
- John Broadhead – Chief Executive, Wrekin Housing Trust
- Steven Griggs – Institute of Local Government
- Richard Webb – Corporate Director: Adult Social Care, Telford & Wrekin Council
- Michael Frater – Former Chief Executive, Telford & Wrekin Council
- Councillor Dave Morgan – Cabinet Member for Housing & Consumer Affairs and Chair of the Strategic Housing Partnership
- Councillor Keith Austin, Leader of the Council and Chair of the Local Strategic Partnership
- John Pay – Partnerships Manager, Telford & Wrekin Council
- Richard Partington – Head of Policy, Performance & Partnerships, Telford & Wrekin Council
- The 6 Councillors who responded to our survey.

The following reports, referred to in Section 2 of this report, were used to inform our review:

*New Roles for Old: Local authority members and partnership working*, Mick Wilkinson and Gary Craig, University of Hull / Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2002.

*Partnership Working – Scrutiny Review*, General Scrutiny Committee Report, Essex County Council, April 2003.

*Partnership Working in North East Lincolnshire*, Scrutiny Commission Report, North East Lincolnshire Council, revised September 2003.

*Effective Partnership and Good Governance: Lessons for policy and practice* Chris Skelcher, Navdeep Mathur and Mike Smith, The University of Birmingham, School of Public Policy, 2004.

*Reviewing Councillor Involvement with Organisations and Partnerships*, Overview and Scrutiny Report, City of Stoke on Trent, March 2005.

*Governing Partnerships: Bridging the accountability gap*, Audit Commission report, October 2005.

Report of the joint scrutiny panel's review of partnership working, Chesterfield Borough Council and North East Derbyshire District Council, January 2006.

## **APPENDIX 2:** **SURVEY FORM**

The form below was sent to all members of the Strategic Housing Partnership, the Lifelong Learning Partnership and the Local Strategic Partnership (excluding question 9 for the LSP).

**Name**.....  
**Organisation**.....  
**Position held**.....

- 1. How strongly do you agree or disagree that the Partnership has clear terms of reference?**

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

- 2. How strongly do you agree or disagree that each of the following are objectives of your organisation's membership of the Partnership?**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Secure additional resources to help my organisation meet its objectives.						
Raise the profile and importance of my organisation's agenda across partner agencies.						
Influence the way policies are developed and priorities are agreed in the Borough.						
Influence the way resources are used in the Borough						
Improve the co-ordination and delivery of services by reducing the barriers between partner organisations.						
Influence the impact and direction of Government policy in the Borough.						

**3. How strongly do you agree or disagree that each of the following are benefits the Partnership brings to the wider community?**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Improves the co-ordination and delivery of services across partner organisations.						
Brings additional resources into the Borough						
Influences Government policy in the Borough						
Helps to improve the overall quality of life in the Borough.						
Helps identify and address the needs of the socially excluded.						

**4a. To what extent would you agree or disagree that the Partnership is a decision making body?**

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

**4b. If you agree, what sort of decisions would you say have been made over the past 2 years? (Please tick all that apply)**

- Policy
- Finance
- Other (please state) .....

**5. How effective do you think the partnership is overall?**

Very effective	Somewhat effective	Not very effective	Not all effective

**6. Is there anything that you feel would make the partnership more effective?**

**7. To whom do you report back within your organisation about the Partnership and its activities?**

- Executive Committee
- Senior Manager
- Board
- Other (Please state)

**8. How do you report back?**

- Formal written report
- Informal memo/email
- Verbal report
- Other (Please state)

**9. How well do you think the Partnership links in with the work of the Local Strategic Partnership?**

Very well	Fairly well	Not very well	Not at all well	Don't know

**If you have any other comments you would like to make about the effectiveness of this Partnership, please do so here, or on another sheet if necessary.**