Scrutiny Committee – 29th June 2010

10. SSDC Partnerships

Executive Portfolio Holder: Tim Carroll, Leader of the Council

Strategic Director: Rina Singh, Place & Performance
Assistant Director: Martin Woods, Assistant Director, Communities
Service Manager: Alice Knight, Third Sector & Partnerships Manager
Lead Officer: Alice Knight, Third Sector & Partnerships Manager
Contact Details: aliceknight@southsomerset.gov.uk or (01963 435061)

Purpose of the Report

To respond to a request from the Scrutiny Committee to identify if and how SSDC is getting value for money from its partnerships, and to consider a proposed system for reviewing and rationalising existing and potential new partnerships.

Action Required

To agree to establish the Task and Finish Group, and comment on and endorse the proposed Partnership Assessment tool at Appendix 1.

Background

Scrutiny Committee has been wanting assurance on this matter for sometime. Up until now it has not been considered timely. A Third Sector and Partnerships Manager has been appointed as part of the revised structure who has been tasked with reviewing SSDC Partnerships.

The Current Position

SSDC has a framework for recording and categorising all partnerships, which has been working well for the past 2 years. Details of all partnerships are recorded on the SSDC Partnerships Register, and each partnership is categorised into *key, substantial and minor*. This categorisation then dictates the level of reporting required by each Partnership. There are currently 37 partnerships recorded on the register (10 key, 11 substantial and 16 minor). See Appendix 2. The register itself records detail on each partnership, including objectives, governance arrangements, funding, risk, monitoring/review arrangements and director sign-off. The register is updated each year, in accordance with Audit Commission requirements.

This system is integrated into Service Planning and has been well recognised by the Audit Commission.

However, SSDC recognises that while partnerships are vitally important to ensure a joined up response to issues, there remains the danger of too many partnerships, which could tie up resources. Our Corporate Plan commits us to:

"review our partnerships on at least an annual basis to ensure they are relevant and action based."

And our Medium Term Financial Plan commits us to:

"Smarter and better targeted partnerships to reduce the overall level of corporate financial partnership support with little or no reduction in outcomes"

As a result we have drafted a template for assessing and rationalising our partnerships, and are recommending that a Scrutiny Task and Finish Group is established to review all SSDC Partnerships, and report back to Scrutiny Committee.

What is defined as a Partnership at SSDC?

SSDC Service Planning guidance uses the following definitions:

- "The term partnership can encompass a wide range of collaborative arrangements. We define partnership as an agreement between two or more independent bodies to work collectively to achieve an objective" *(Audit Commission 2005,Governing Partnerships)*
- "co-operation or collaboration, on a formal or informal level between any number of individuals or organisations" (IDeA)

The above definitions are fairly broad and if applied literally can result in a never- ending list of partnerships. Therefore, for the purpose of Service Planning, "key partnerships" are those which generally meet one or more of the following:

- critical to the delivery of the Council's corporate aims
- cross cutting across service areas
- strategic in nature
- require significant resource input from the Council
- deliver direct outcomes for the community
- are statutory
- have constitution and governance arrangements in place
- have multi-agency membership

The next step - reviewing and rationalising partnerships

Once entered on the Partnerships Register and categorised as key, substantial or minor, each partnership should undergo an annual review, to see if a) it is performing according to the original objectives and b) so the Council can decide whether or not to stay in the partnership. Currently we do not have a consistent, Council-wide system for carrying out these reviews, hence the need for the Scrutiny Task & Finish group.

When reviewing or setting up a new partnership, we should consider the purpose, which may be:

- No single body can achieve or afford the desired outcome on its own
- Without the partnership no funding will be attracted
- Without the partnership, services will be uncoordinated, wasteful, or awkward to the user
- The problems to solve are too big, complex, or changeable for one organisation to contemplate or influence alone
- It is a statutory requirement
- A range of perspectives and skills are necessary to the process unavailable from one organisation
- Major changes in customer service can be achieved rather than small incremental change

- The responsibility and control of an outcome cannot or should not be achieved by one organisation alone

We should only remain in partnerships or join new partnerships if they are statutory, or they:

- Deliver against their original purpose and goals
- Overcomes constraints
- Meet SSDC Corporate Aims
- Have clear, measurable outcomes
- Are accountable and have appropriate governance arrangements

The draft template for reviewing and rationalizing partnerships is attached at Appendix 1. This has been drafted using ample guidance from the Audit Commission, Cipfa and good practice from other Councils including East Devon. Service Managers will complete the template and present to the Task & Finish Group so that each can be assessed individually. This exercise will be led by the Scrutiny Manager.

Financial Implications

None at this stage

Corporate Priority Implications

Theme 5 – Deliver well managed cost effective services managed by our customers
5.4 Deliver additional savings through partnership working within and without South Somerset - 0.5% each year.

Background Papers: *Scrutiny request report 22nd July 2009*
Audit Commission - Governing Partnerships 2005