OFFICE OF THE
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

ASSESSING STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP
THE PARTNERSHIP ASSESSMENT TOOL

STRATEGIC
PARTNERING
TASKFORCE

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Nuffield Institute
FOR HEALTH

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preface

The Strategic Partnership Taskforce in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister was established in September 2001 to help find innovative ways in which local government could improve public service delivery by working in partnership. Such partnerships may be with other local authorities, other public service organisations such as the NHS, with the private sector or with the voluntary sector.

The Taskforce selected 24 Pathfinders to work with and to study and mentor to help develop their partnerships and to share with the wider local government community the lessons learned.

It was clear from the outset that understanding the many complex issues and relationships between partners would be critical to how well a partnership develops and moves forward. Yet the benefits to the end users of services, the citizens, are significant if partnerships deliver the joined-up services and economies of scale that we know they can.

As part of its developmental work, the Taskforce commissioned the Nuffield Institute at the University of Leeds to provide a Tool that local authorities can use to assess partnership relationships and aid the achievement of successful partnership working. The tool draws heavily on the research carried out by the Institute that had been successful for health and social care partnerships. With input from Strategic Partnering Pathfinders, the Tool has been adapted for the wider local government service areas and with a particular focus on strategic partnerships. It is quick and simple to use and provides a practical way for senior officers, project managers and others to implement meaningful partnerships that will make a difference to the lives of the citizens in their area.

The Taskforce commends the Partnership Assessment Tool to local government and the many public and private organisations who are developing partnerships to improve public services.

We look forward to hearing from you if you have any comments about the Tool.

Strategic Partnering Taskforce
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introduction

Working with others in partnership to deliver both individual and jointly agreed outcomes is now a core requirement in delivering effective public services. Whilst partners may spend significant amounts of time developing their business plans, agreeing and reviewing objectives, they often spend little or no time assessing the effectiveness of the partnership process they have entered into to deliver those objectives.

Partnership working is frequently complex, time-consuming and difficult. Sometimes the difficulties will reflect little more than the 'discomfort' inherent in most partnerships and, once identified, can readily be ameliorated, solved or simply accepted and managed. Occasionally the difficulties – which may be associated with only one partner – will be so serious as to disable the partnership and require its re-constitution. Whatever the perceived strengths or weaknesses of partnership working, it makes sense to ensure that the resources that have been committed to it are being used effectively.

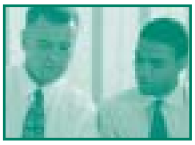
The purpose of this tool is to provide a simple, quick and cost-effective way of assessing the effectiveness of partnership working. It enables a rapid appraisal (a quick 'health check') which graphically identifies problem areas. This allows partners to focus remedial action and resources commensurate with the seriousness and urgency of the problems. Using the Tool thus avoids exhaustive, lengthy and costly investigations of partnership working in general. And for those just setting up partnerships the Tool provides a checklist of what to ensure and what to avoid.

It has been designed explicitly as a developmental tool rather than as a means for centrally assessing local partnership performance.

For ease of use the rapid partnership profile pages are reproduced as seperate sheets in the pocket in the back cover.

how can the assessment tool help you?

It does provide material to conduct an assessment of the current effectiveness of your partnership working.
It does, with repeated use, allow you to chart changes in partnership working over time.
It does, when used at different organisational levels, highlight a range, and possible diversity, of perspectives.
It will not on its own tell you how all the problems associated with partnership working should be addressed.
It does, however, provide a common framework (and vocabulary) for partners to develop a jointly owned approach to tackling some of the barriers to effective partnership working.



The tool provides a practical way of:

- Helping newly formed partnerships to explore the views or aspirations of those embarking on a new venture. It provides a **developmental framework** for establishing a healthy and effective partnership by, amongst other things, highlighting what to avoid.

- Helping established partnerships take stock on a routine basis of how effective their process of partnership working is: i.e. it provides an opportunity for **routine audit or 'health check'**.

- Helping partnerships which are experiencing difficulties to identify systematically areas of conflict (and consensus) and to move towards a remedial action plan. In such instances the value of the tool is **diagnostic.**

The tool can be used to assess partnership working at different levels; e.g. with those at the highest level (elected member or board level), at senior/middle management level and amongst front-line staff (those who need to make the partnership work in practice).

Repeating the exercise at different levels within the partnership provides the opportunity to compare and contrast views and to target remedial action where it is most needed. Also, repeating the exercise over time allows partnerships to chart their progress in addressing problems and achieving their goals.

The principles upon which the Tool is based are generic: it is, therefore, applicable in a wide range of contexts, not only between authorities but within them.

what is the assessment tool?

The Strategic Partnering Taskforce at the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister commissioned the Nuffield Institute for Health to develop this Assessment Tool. It draws heavily upon an extensive programme of research carried out by the Institute and also upon work undertaken with the former NHS Executive (Trent Region) which resulted in the production of a Partnership Assessment Tool (PAT)[1 2]. This has been used successfully in the field of health and social care partnerships. This current assessment tool has been revised and adapted in the context of Strategic Partnering arrangements for public/public, public/private, public/voluntary and public/private/voluntary partnerships.

The Assessment Tool is based on six Partnership Principles which our research and fieldwork has shown form the building blocks for successful partnership. The purpose of the tool is to ascertain from partners how far they feel that these building blocks are in place. The assessment exercise is based on individual partners identifying and sharing their views of the partnership. It therefore highlights areas of conflict and consensus to be explored, but it also allows partners to discuss the meaning and relative importance of their responses.

The results of the assessment exercise can be produced graphically with accompanying text and offer a common language for partners to discuss both the opportunities for developing more effective working and the perceived barriers to this happening.

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1 Hudson, B., Hardy. B., Henwood, M. and Wistow G. (1999) In Pursuit of Inter-Agency Collaboration in The Public Sector: What is the contribution of theory and research? *Public Management* 1(2) 235-260.

2 Hardy, B., Hudson, B. and Waddington E. (2000) *What makes a Good Partnership? A Partnership Assessment Tool*. Leeds: Nuffield Institute for Health.

using the tool

1st stage

It is important at the start of the process that partners agree the reasons for using the tool. Is the process to be mainly developmental, more of a routine audit or part of a more extensive remedial programme? Experience in using the original Partnership Assessment Tool has shown that opening up this initial debate is often an important step in individual partners becoming more honest in their views about the workings of the partnership.

2nd stage

Partners will need to become familiar with the material. Experience suggests that independent, although not necessarily external, facilitation is helpful in managing the process and encouraging openness in partners. Similarly, it has proved useful to bring partners together to discuss the material and to complete the assessment exercise. Partners can read the material and carry out the exercise individually if they prefer or if it is difficult to bring partners together. In completing the assessment exercise each partner will complete the six rapid assessment profile sheets, indicating their responses to a set of statements grouped under each of the six partnership principles. It is important that these responses bear in mind what lies behind the statements. An explanation of each of the latter is set out on the pages after each profile sheet.

3rd stage

The next step in the process is the analysis of these responses (see 'scoring system') and the generation of a partnership profile.

4th stage

The results of the analysis can then be shared and discussed with partners in a workshop. This gives partners the chance to look in more detail at their assessments and their particular judgements about individual statements.
At this stage action planning can be undertaken to identify and agree any remedial action.

Stage 1 : Preparation

- Agree the purpose of the Assessment Exercise
- Negotiate individual contributions
- Decide how the exercise will be facilitated
- Decide how it will be actioned.

Stage 2 : Undertaking the Assessment

- Circulate briefing material
- Arrange meeting to:
  - familiarise partners with material
  - get partners to complete rapid partnership appraisal sheets.

Stage 3 : Analysis and Feedback

- Analyse individual responses
- Arrange feedback meeting to:
  - share, discuss and interpret findings
  - agree next steps.

Stage 4 : Action Planning for Alternative Findings

A	B	C
Assessment suggests partnership working well. Partners need to consider how often to build in a regular review.	Assessment suggests partnership is working well in some parts but there are concerns about others. Partners need to decide how to address these areas of concern.	Assessment highlights significant areas of concern which require urgent attention and a detailed plan of action.

stage 1: preparation

For this Tool to work properly there needs to be clear agreement amongst the partners about the purpose of using the Tool to assess partnership working. The purpose may be to undertake a series of regular 'health checks' as part of a wider programme of service monitoring and review. It may be seen as freestanding or as one of several component parts of a broad framework of performance assessment. It may be intended to explore and expose problems or to confirm apparent success. It may be a prospective exercise undertaken by partners just embarking on partnership or a retrospective exercise by partners renewing or revising partnership arrangements.

Whatever the purpose, it is important that all partners have the chance to discuss the reasons for using the tool and what is expected/hoped/intended to achieve, and what will be done following analysis of the findings in terms of feedback and action planning.

As well as discussing and agreeing purposes, it is an important part of the preparation to agree individual partners' contributions to the assessment process – whether setting-up and hosting, facilitating, analysing findings or action planning.

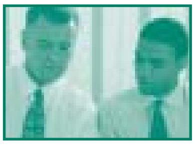
Facilitation of the process is important at two stages in particular:

- in introducing partners to the wider partnership context and the assessment process; and in helping them become familiar with the Tool.

- in analysis of findings across the partners, examination of issues arising and action planning.

Often this facilitation will be conducted internally. Sometimes, and especially where it is expected to be difficult or sensitive, it may be better conducted externally. Another important preliminary step is to be clear about – and to communicate – what will conclude the process in terms of feedback and action planning. Those participating need to be assured not only that taking the trouble to undertake the assessment is worthwhile but that they can be, and should be, frank and honest in their responses.

Finally, it is a vital part of the preparation that those involved are well acquainted with the wider policy and organisational context within which their partnership operates. It is here that a tailored context section may need to be written. The specific partnership context written here is that of Strategic Service – Delivery Partnerships: see Annex.



Stage 1 : Preparation

- Agree the purpose of the Assessment Exercise
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Assessment suggests partnership working well. Partners need to consider how often to build in a regular review.	Assessment suggests partnership is working well in some parts but there are concerns about others. Partners need to decide how to address these areas of concern.	Assessment highlights significant areas of concern which require urgent attention and a detailed plan of action.

stage 2: undertaking the partnership assessment

In the following pages individuals are asked to consider a series of statements about the Partnership – as a whole – which is the subject of this assessment. Indicate the extent which you agree or disagree with each of these statements by ticking the appropriate boxes.

The two pages that follow each profile sheet give brief explanations of what lies behind each of the Partnership Principles and Elements and the related statements.

After you have addressed the statements for each of the six Principles, score your responses as follows:

Strongly agree : 4 Agree : 3 Disagree : 2 Strongly disagree : 1

You may wish to add additional comments or observations in the final column.

The following is an illustration of this scoring, using as an example possible responses to Principle 1.

rapid partnership profile

To what extent do you agree with each of the following six statements in respect of the Partnership which is the subject of this assessment exercise as a whole?	strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree	Comments
• There have been substantial past achievements within the partnership.	✔				
• The factors associated with successful working are known and understood.			✔		
• The principal barriers to successful partnership working are known and understood.		✔			
• The extent to which partners engage in partnership working voluntarily or under pressure/mandation is recognised and understood.		✔			
• There is a clear understanding of partners' interdependence in achieving some of their goals.		✔			
• There is mutual understanding of those areas of activity where partners can achieve some goals by working independently of each other.				✔	
Scores	4	9	2	1	Total: 16:

Scoring Key: Strongly Agree 4; Agree 3; Disagree 2; Strongly Disagree 1

the six partnership principles

- **Principle 1 – Recognise and Accept the Need for Partnership**
- Principle 2 – Develop Clarity and Realism of Purpose
- Principle 3 – Ensure Commitment and Ownership
- Principle 4 – Develop and Maintain Trust
- Principle 5 – Create Clear and Robust Partnership Arrangements
- Principle 6 – Monitor, Measure and Learn

For a detailed explanation of each of the Principles and Elements – and therefore what lies behind the questions in the rapid partnership profile – please read the pages that follow each profile sheet.

principle 1: recognise and accept the need for partnership

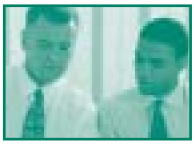
Elements of the principle

A. Identify principal partnership achievements.
B. Identify the factors associated with successful partnership working.
C. Identify the principal barriers to partnership working.
D. Acknowledge whether the policy context creates voluntary, coerced or mandatory partnership working
E. Acknowledge the extent of partners' interdependence to achieve some of their goals.
F. Acknowledge areas in which you are not dependent upon others to achieve your goals.

rapid partnership profile

To what extent do you agree with each of the following six statements in respect of the Partnership which is the subject of this assessment exercise as a whole?	strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree	Comments
• There have been substantial past achievements within the partnership.					
• The factors associated with successful working are known and understood.					
• The principal barriers to successful partnership working are known and understood.					
• The extent to which partners engage in partnership working voluntarily or under pressure/mandation is recognised and understood.					
• There is a clear understanding of partners' interdependence in achieving some of their goals.					
• There is mutual understanding of those areas of activity where partners can achieve some goals by working independently of each other.					
Scores					Total:

Scoring Key: Strongly Agree 4; Agree 3; Disagree 2; Strongly Disagree 1



principle 1 – recognise and accept the need for partnership

This principle is concerned with two main factors: the extent to which there is a *partnership history* and the extent to which there is *a recognition of the need* to work in partnership. These factors are obviously related in that a strong local history of partnership working should reflect an understanding of the need to work in this manner, whilst a weak history of partnership working may reflect an insufficient appreciation of the extent to which agencies depend upon one another to achieve organisational goals. Without such an appreciation, genuine partnership working will be very unlikely to develop.

Element A: Identify principal partnership achievements.

The extent to which local agencies have a prior record of successful partnership working is crucial in determining the scale and pace of their future achievements – in short, 'success breeds success'. This does not mean that areas with a limited history of working together cannot reach the levels attained by more mature partnership networks, but to begin to do so there needs to be a mutual awareness of what *has* been achieved jointly. Those areas with more substantial joint achievements will also need to be confident that these have been of demonstrable benefit and worthy of further development. What you would therefore be considering here is a clear and agreed account of what has *already* been achieved through partnership working. This may cover both formal arrangements, probably at a strategic level, or less formal arrangements, often at operational level.

Element B: Identify the factors associated with successful partnership working.

Much of this assessment tool is asking you to identify in detail the factors associated with partnership working. Here we want you to reflect upon the reasons *why* the principal partnership achievements which you have just identified have been possible. In part you may wish to identify factors *external* to the locality, such as the requirements of central government or regional bodies. However, it is also likely that you will identify some specific *local* conditions or individuals. You may be returning to examine the importance of some of these factors later but here you should consider whether what you regard as the most significant *general* factors associated with your previous partnership achievements are known and understood.

Element C: Identify the principal barriers to partnership working.

Partnership working is rarely straightforward. Sometimes the barriers to working effectively together turn out to be too formidable, and even where some measure of success *is* achieved, some barriers to partnership are more difficult to overcome than others. To move forward in a more sustainable relationship it is important to be clear about the nature and extent of any such barriers so that steps might be taken to minimise their influence. As with the principal factors associated with success, these barriers might be both external to the locality or internal to it. Several types of barrier can be distinguished: structural, procedural, financial, professional, cultural and matters of status and legitimacy. Other parts of the framework will return to some of these in more depth, but for now you should simply consider whether the main types of barrier are known and understood.

Element D: Acknowledge whether the policy context creates voluntary, coerced or mandatory partnership working.

It is important that partners understand the policy context within which partnership working is taking place or proposed. There needs to be a clear recognition of the pressure upon individual partners. In particular, partners must acknowledge that whereas some will enter the partnership entirely voluntarily others may be coerced or even required to do so. It is vital to the success of partnership working that such degrees of pressure – whether local or national – are mutually recognised and understood.

Element E: Acknowledge the extent of partners' interdependence to achieve some of their goals.

Potential partners need to have an appreciation of their interdependence, without which collaborative problem-solving makes no sense. If there is objectively *no* such interdependence then there is *no* need to work together. If there *is* some interdependence, but this is insufficiently acknowledged or inadequately understood, then further understanding needs to be acquired before any further partnership development can take place.

Element F: Acknowledge areas in which you are not dependent upon others to achieve your goals.

Not all of an organisation's activities require a contribution from a partner in order to be undertaken effectively. Organisations will normally have some 'core business' which they would expect to undertake with little or no reference to other partners. They would also expect others to acknowledge their legitimacy to operate in a certain field of activity and to define appropriate practice within this field. Without such an understanding there is a danger of partners overstepping the limits of agreed areas of partnership working.

the six partnership principles

- Principle 1 – Recognise and Accept the Need for Partnership
- **Principle 2 – Develop Clarity and Realism of Purpose**
- Principle 3 – Ensure Commitment and Ownership
- Principle 4 – Develop and Maintain Trust
- Principle 5 – Create Clear and Robust Partnership Arrangements
- Principle 6 – Monitor, Measure and Learn

principle 2: develop clarity and realism of purpose

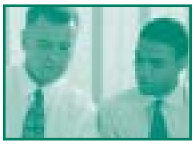
Elements of the principle

A. Ensure that the partnership is built on shared vision, shared values and agreed service principles.
B. Define clear joint aims and objectives.
C. Ensure joint aims and objectives are realistic.
D. Ensure that the partnership has defined clear service outcomes.
E. Partners' reasons for engaging in the partnership are understood and accepted.
F. Focus partnership effort on areas of likely success.

rapid partnership profile

To what extent do you agree with each of the following six statements in respect of the Partnership which is the subject of this assessment exercise as a whole?	strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree	Comments
• Our partnership has a clear vision, shared values and agreed service principles.					
• We have clearly defined joint aims and objectives.					
• These joint aims and objectives are realistic.					
• The partnership has defined clear service outcomes.					
• The reason why each partner is engaged in the partnership is understood and accepted.					
• We have identified where early partnership success is most likely.					
Scores					Total:

Scoring Key: Strongly Agree 4; Agree 3; Disagree 2; Strongly Disagree 1



principle 2 – develop clarity and realism of purpose

This stage of the assessment assumes that there is a consensus amongst partners on the desirability and importance of joint working. This second principle is concerned with two broad initial areas of ‘scoping’. First, considering whether the partners have sufficient common ground to work together, both in terms of a broad set of shared understandings as well as more specific aims and objectives. Second, ensuring that the aims and objectives of the partnership are realistic.

Element A: Ensure that the partnership is built on shared vision, shared values and agreed service principles.

Most approaches to partnership working take it for granted that an explicit statement of shared vision based upon jointly held values is a prerequisite to success. There may be some scope for deciding whether these conditions need to be in place at the outset of a partnership, or if they can be developed and refined as work proceeds. It has been normal practice for several years to identify the values and principles upon which service developments are based. Even though these are often couched at a very general level, they give some initial indication of the extent to which separate agencies have sufficient in common to sustain a long-term relationship. Values and principles may not need to be too explicit – they can express direction without necessarily declaring the intent to follow it. Indeed, it may be that for a starting point, a broad vision may be more likely to generate movement than a detailed blueprint. Where there are clear differences of perspective, these will need to be resolved if further partnership development is to flourish.

Element B: Define clear joint aims and objectives.

Once there is sufficient consensus over values and principles, parties need to define more specific aims and objectives. Although some ambiguity may initially help to generate commitment where clarity may be too threatening, these aims need to be clear enough for all of the partners to be confident of their meaning – goals which lack such clarity will diminish enthusiasm and commitment. Working together on this task should serve several purposes: provide a focus around which agencies can cohere; help to clarify boundaries and commitments; define more clearly the scale and scope of joint work; and provide a framework for the regulation of joint arrangements.

Element C: Ensure joint aims and objectives are realistic.

Aims and objectives which are not realistically capable of attainment will soon diminish enthusiasm for partnership. The notion of collaborative capacity is relevant here, and refers to the level and degree of activity a partnership arrangement is able to sustain without any partner losing commitment. This is related not only to the tangible resources (such as funding) which are central to collaboration, but also to such less tangible resources as status or autonomy. Demands can both exceed and fall short of thresholds of capacity. An underestimate can mean that a committed collaborative effort is confined to marginal tasks, while an overestimate can lead to unrealistic expectations of what can be achieved and within what timescale.

Element D: Ensure that the partnership has defined clear service outcomes.

In service delivery partnerships, aims and objectives traditionally have been expressed in terms of service inputs or outputs. It is important that such aims and objectives are also expressed as outcomes for service recipients. There needs to be a clear indication of how it is intended that partnership working will lead to these improved outcomes.

Element E: Partners' reasons for engaging in the partnership are understood and accepted.

It is vital to the success of partnership working that, amongst the partners, there is an understanding and acceptance of why each partner is engaged in the partnership. This may be blunt self-interest or narrow organisational pressure. It may, on the other hand, be an acknowledgement of a shared interest and collective purpose. Whatever the reason, partnership working can flounder if based on partner motivations and purposes that are misunderstood.

Element F: Focus partnership effort on areas of likely success.

Partnership is likely to be particularly fragile in the early stages, if only because it may imply a threat to existing boundaries and practices. It may therefore be necessary for partnership ventures to be alert to threats to their progress, and to acknowledge that change will not be accomplished quickly or simply. In the face of this long-term task, it is useful to look for 'quick wins' and 'small wins'. However, it is also important to relate any such 'small wins' to 'big wins'. A big win is a major gain that may reflect the scale of the task or the scope of planning activity but may also be one accomplished in the face of substantial opposition. A small win, on the other hand, rarely involves substantial risk, but can be informed by a sense of strategic direction which can add up to a big win over time through a series of 'small wins'. This is the notion of 'think big and act small'.

the six partnership principles

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principle 3: ensure commitment and ownership

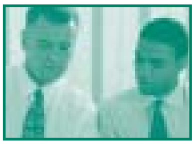
Elements of the principle

A. Ensure appropriate seniority of commitment.
B. Secure widespread ownership within and outside partner organisations.
C. Ensure sufficient consistency of commitment.
D. Recognise and encourage individuals with networking skills.
E. Ensure that partnership working is not dependent for success solely upon these individuals.
F. Reward partnership working and discourage and deal with those not working in partnership.

rapid partnership profile

To what extent do you agree with each of the following six statements in respect of the Partnership which is the subject of this assessment exercise as a whole?	strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree	Comments
• There is a clear commitment to partnership working from the most senior levels of each partnership organisation.					
• There is widespread ownership of the partnership across and within all partners.					
• Commitment to partnership working is sufficiently robust to withstand most threats to its working.					
• The partnership recognises and encourages networking skills.					
• The partnership is not dependent for its success solely upon individuals with these skills.					
• Not working in partnership is discouraged and dealt with.					
Scores					Total:

Scoring Key: Strongly Agree 4; Agree 3; Disagree 2; Strongly Disagree 1



principle 3 – ensure commitment and ownership

Partnership working cannot be guaranteed to be characterised by either spontaneous growth or self-perpetuation, therefore the understandings and agreements developed through the first two principles will need to be supported and reinforced. This Principle is concerned with the ways in which this can be done. It is concerned with ensuring that across the partners there is a widespread commitment to, and ownership of, partnership working; and, especially, a sufficiently senior commitment.

Element A: Ensure appropriate seniority of commitment.

Organisational commitment to partnership working is more likely to be sustained where there is individual commitment to the venture from the most senior levels of the respective organisations. Without this, it is possible that the efforts of partnership enthusiasts holding middle and lower level positions will become marginalised and perceived as unrelated to the 'real' core business of each separate agency. Ideally, this senior inter-agency commitment will reflect, or develop into, personal connections between key decision-makers, therefore helping to cement a culture of trust.

Element B: Secure widespread ownership within and outside partner organisations.

The above emphasis on the need for seniority of commitment does not imply that wider ownership is any less significant. A well developed strategy on partnership will count for little unless links are made between macro and micro levels of activity. In particular, operational staff often possess the capacity to 'make or break' shared arrangements in that they have considerable contact with outside bodies and often enjoy discretionary powers and considerable day-to-day autonomy from their managers. Inter-professional work implies a willingness to share, and even give up, exclusive claims to specialised knowledge and authority, and to integrate procedures.

Element C: Ensure sufficient consistency of commitment.

Commitment, at whatever level in the organisation, needs to be consistent. This is part of the process of building up sustainable relationships which will have an enduring presence. Where there is an inconsistent attitude towards partnership working such as taking unilateral action to change, or withdraw from, joint agreements, the [short-term and longer-term] consequences could be considerable. In the short term the specific partnership venture will clearly be at risk, but more significantly there will be a longer-term view that partnership working must be of marginal concern if it appears to attract only limited or sporadic commitment.

Element D: Recognise and encourage individuals with networking skills.

There is widespread evidence of the importance to collaborative working of individuals who are skilled at mapping and developing interpersonal policy networks across agencies. The characteristics which best underpin the skills and legitimacy of such ‘networkers’ include both technical or competency-based factors, as well as social and inter-personal skills. Apart from an essential aptitude for working across organisational, professional and service boundaries, such characteristics include: a perception by others as having sufficient legitimacy to assume the role; being perceived as unbiased and able to manage multiple points of view; a sense of the critical issues and first steps which need to be taken; and political skills which encourage others to take risks.

Element E: Ensure that partnership working is not dependent for success solely upon these individuals.

Problems can arise if partnership working becomes too reliant on the networking skills of such individuals. These problems become most apparent when these individuals leave. Accordingly, it is important that ways are found not only to sustain the partnership-wide relationships developed by these individuals but to develop their cross-boundary working so that it becomes increasingly established organisational behaviour.

Element F: Reward partnership working and discourage and deal with those not working in partnership.

Not all organisations willingly engage in partnership working on a voluntary basis – it has few or no qualities of spontaneous growth. In such situations it may be necessary to devise ways of encouraging reluctant agencies into a partnership, either through the use of sanctions or rewards. Both organisations and individuals need to see that there are incentives for partnership working and disincentives for not working collaboratively.

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principle 4: develop and maintain trust

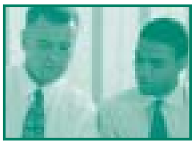
Elements of the principle

A. Ensure each partner's contribution is equally recognised and valued.
B. Ensure fairness in the conduct of the partnership.
C. Ensure fairness in distribution of partnership benefits.
D. Ensure the partnership is able to sustain a sufficient level of trust to survive external problems which create mistrust elsewhere.
E. Trust built up within partnerships needs to be high enough to encourage significant risk taking.
F. Ensure that the right people are in the right place at the right time.

rapid partnership profile

To what extent do you agree with each of the following six statements in respect of the Partnership which is the subject of this assessment exercise as a whole?	strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree	Comments
• The way the partnership is structured recognises and values each partner's contribution.					
• The way the partnership's work is conducted appropriately recognises each partner's contribution.					
• Benefits derived from the partnership are fairly distributed among all partners.					
• There is sufficient trust within the partnership to survive any mistrust that arises elsewhere.					
• Levels of trust within the partnership are high enough to encourage significant risk-taking.					
• The partnership has succeeded in having the right people in the right place at the right time to promote partnership working.					
Scores					Total:

Scoring Key: Strongly Agree 4; Agree 3; Disagree 2; Strongly Disagree 1



principle 4 – develop and maintain trust

This is simultaneously the most self-evident and most elusive of the principles which underpin successful partnership working. Although joint working is possible with little trust amongst those involved, the development and maintenance of trust is the basis for the closest, most enduring and most successful partnerships. At whatever level – organisational, professional, individual – the more trust there is the better will be the chances for healthy partnership. Needless to say, the history of joint working in many areas is characterised by territorial disputes about roles and remits or claims to exclusive professional competence or defensiveness about resources which preclude the development of trust. What each of these six elements spell out is the need to develop an openness in the pursuit of broad, collective interests which foster mutual trust. Trust is, of course, hard won and easily lost.

Element A: Ensure each partner's contribution is equally recognised and valued.

The evidence is that partnerships work best where each partner's contribution is recognised and valued in the way the partnership is structured, irrespective of some having more of some resources than others. The resources which each brings are different and not always readily quantifiable. Voluntary organisations, for example, may bring information (about service need or successful service provision), experience and expertise, or legitimacy, by representing particular groups. Ensuring equal treatment means ensuring, for example, that in its governance arrangements the partnership avoids having 'senior' and 'junior' partners or 'core groups'. If excluded partners feel marginalised from the partnership's core business, suspicion, erosion of trust and lessening of commitment will result.

Element B: Ensure fairness in the conduct of the partnership.

Fairness in the way partnership work is conducted means creating the opportunity for each party to contribute as much as they wish and in a manner which is appropriate. It means avoiding one or two partners always setting the agenda or defining the language for partnership working; or hosting and chairing meetings at times and places of their convenience; or dictating agendas, priorities, timescale etc. Clearly some of this is inevitable where individual partners have particular legal responsibilities or a preponderance of particular resources. However, this should not preclude fairness to all partners irrespective of size.

Element C: Ensure fairness in distribution of partnership benefits.

Although each partner to the partnership 'signs up' to collective aims and objectives they may also aim to secure some benefits of their own. The latter should be transparent (see Principle 2 above), as should the benefits that accrue to individual partners from their collective efforts. Fairness means some sharing of such benefits: those accruing to one partner should neither be disproportionate nor unduly at the expense of another. However, partnerships cannot be uniformly about 'win-win' solutions for all. On the contrary, the health of any partnership can be measured in terms of the 'sacrifice' which one partner is prepared to make for the collective good, i.e. the willingness to subsume self-interest to general interest. The mutual acknowledgement and acceptance of such 'altruism' helps to build trust and cement partnership.

Element D: Ensure the partnership is able to sustain a sufficient level of trust to survive external problems which create mistrust elsewhere.

However enthusiastic and committed the partners there will be occasions when the commitment is threatened by problems ‘outside’ the partnership, i.e. not directly associated with the business of the partnership, but nevertheless affect individual partner’s contribution to it – maybe they cannot invest the same amount of staff time. Simple rules again apply, i.e. openness and honesty: ‘We are still as committed as ever to the goals, aims and objectives of the partnership but we will have, temporarily, to re-direct/re-invest our time, effort and resources to dealing with our current “local” difficulty.’

Element E: Trust built up within partnerships needs to be high enough to encourage significant risk-taking.

One of the truest measures of successful partnership working is that there is sufficient trust amongst the partners for them – and for the partnership as a whole – to take significant risks in pursuit of shared aims and objectives. Such risks most visibly would be in political or financial terms – with one partner, for example, being willing to risk some immediate individual ‘loss’ for the sake of some longer-term collective gain – but also in particular service developments.

Element F: Ensure that the right people are in the right place at the right time.

Although an apparent platitude, this is one of the consistent messages from studies of partnership working. Equally, the obverse is to be avoided: having the wrong people in the wrong place at the wrong time. This element applies at all levels within any organisation. It is as much a commonplace that particular individuals can prevent or hinder partnership development as that they can be important sources of success. There is evidence both of the destructive capacity of the wrong people (i.e. those committed to the pursuit of organisational or professional self-interest) being in the wrong place and the importance to joint working of partnership ‘champions’ working in the collective interest. Having the right people involved in this way is a matter of careful selection, the exercise of peer pressure and strong performance management. It is also, of course, partly a question of luck.

the six partnership principles

- Principle 1 – Recognise and Accept the Need for Partnership
- Principle 2 – Develop Clarity and Realism of Purpose
- Principle 3 – Ensure Commitment and Ownership
- Principle 4 – Develop and Maintain Trust
- **Principle 5 – Create Clear and Robust Partnership Arrangements**
- Principle 6 – Monitor, Measure and Learn

principle 5: create clear and robust partnership arrangements

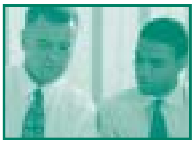
Elements of the principle

A. Transparency in the financial resources each partner brings to the partnership.
B. Awareness and appreciation of the non-financial resources each partner brings to the partnership.
C. Distinguish single from collective responsibilities and ensure they are clear and understood.
D. Ensure clear lines of accountability for partnership performance.
E. Develop operational partnership arrangements which are simple, time-limited and task-oriented.
F. Ensure the prime focus is on process, outcomes and innovation.

rapid partnership profile

To what extent do you agree with each of the following six statements in respect of the Partnership which is the subject of this assessment exercise as a whole?	strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree	Comments
• It is clear what financial resources each partner brings to the partnership.					
• The resources, other than finance, each partner brings to the partnership are understood and appreciated.					
• Each partner's areas of responsibility are clear and understood.					
• There are clear lines of accountability for the performance of the partnership as a whole.					
• Operational partnership arrangements are simple, time-limited and task-oriented.					
• The partnership's principal focus is on process, outcomes and innovation.					
Scores					Total:

Scoring Key: Strongly Agree 4; Agree 3; Disagree 2; Strongly Disagree 1



principle 5: create clear and robust partnership arrangements

This principle refers to the need to ensure that partnership working is not hindered by cumbersome, elaborate and time-consuming working arrangements. The evidence is that unduly complex structures and processes reflect partners' defensiveness about their own interests and uncertainty about degrees of mutual trust. The result of such excess bureaucracy is frustration amongst the partners and a sapping of their enthusiasm for, and commitment to, the partnership. This is doubly the case where – as has often been the case – partnership working is seen as peripheral rather than core business.

Partnership working arrangements thus should be as lean as possible, with generally time-limited and task-oriented joint structures. The two other essential requirements are: (a) a prime focus on processes and outcomes rather than structures and inputs; and (b) clarity about partners' areas of responsibility and lines of accountability.

Element A: Transparency in the financial resources each partner brings to the partnership.

Partnerships often founder because partners labour under some misapprehension about what financial resources – both capital and revenue – other partners bring to the table. This needs to be spelt out for a number of reasons. First, there may be uncertainty about how much is devoted by each partner to a specific field of activity. Second, there may be limitations imposed upon partners by their 'parent' organisations as to the use of resources. Finally, there needs to be an understanding of the stability associated with each other's resources, and an appreciation that partnership may have to cope with reductions in previously agreed resource levels. In some respects this mirrors the principles of clarity of purpose and expectation: not just what people or organisations expect to get from the partnership, but also what they are financially able to contribute to it.

Element B: Awareness and appreciation of the non-financial resources each partner brings to the partnership.

Resources should be seen as comprising not just finance, but also a host of other potential partnership assets. Some of these will be tangible, such as human resources, facilities and services such as IT. Others are less tangible, and may comprise knowledge, experience, power and legitimacy. Community groups, for example, may have few tangible resources, but their involvement can confer a local legitimacy which could otherwise be lacking. Appreciation, not just awareness, of each partner's contribution to a partnership is an important element in continued commitment and the willingness to invest resources and take risks.

Element C: Distinguish single from collective responsibilities and ensure they are clear and understood.

Significant difficulties can arise when partnerships begin to implement jointly agreed plans if there is insufficient clarity about the respective responsibilities of individual partners. Each partner needs to be clear about – and accept – such divisions of responsibility, whether for areas of funding, staffing or service delivery. Without clear delineations of responsibility there is potential for confusion and mistrust. Partnership members need to be able, on the one hand, to show other partners that they are doing their fair share; and, on the other hand, they need to be able to show those within their parent organisation that they haven't given away too much or 'sold out' and 'gone native'.

Element D: Ensure clear lines of accountability for partnership performance.

Clarity about lines of accountability is a dual-faceted requirement. First, those involved need to know how they – and each other – are accountable for partnership work, both to their own organisation and to the partnership as a whole. Second, it is vital that there is clear accountability for the performance of the partnership as a whole – across all partners.

Element E: Develop operational partnership arrangements which are simple, time-limited and task-oriented.

Unduly complex or restrictive partnership working arrangements often reflect low levels of trust between partners and caution about 'giving too much away'. Instead arrangements should reflect both urgency and a sharp focus; otherwise there is, all too easily, a sense of drift which saps partners' enthusiasm and commitment.

Such concentration of effort is a maxim that can be applied to single agency working, but is more important in the case of partnership working because: (a) the scope for lack of focus is inherently greater when several partners are involved; and (b) partnership working often exists on the edge of individuals' day-to-day working within their parent organisation.

Element F: Ensure the prime focus is on process, outcomes and innovation.

Closely related to the need for structures to be time-limited and task-oriented is the need for the prime focus of partnership working to be processes and outcomes rather than structure and inputs. The importance of this management principle is magnified in the case of partnership working where initial energy can all too easily be diverted into creating structural arrangements which reflect relative resource strength or perceived status.

the six partnership principles

- Principle 1 – Recognise and Accept the Need for Partnership
- Principle 2 – Develop Clarity and Realism of Purpose
- Principle 3 – Ensure Commitment and Ownership
- Principle 4 – Develop and Maintain Trust
- Principle 5 – Create Clear and Robust Partnership Arrangements
- **Principle 6 – Monitor, Measure and Learn**

principle 6: monitor, measure and learn

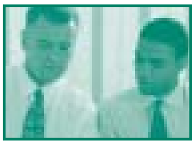
Elements of the principle

A. Agree a range of success criteria.
B. Develop arrangements for monitoring and reviewing how well the partnership's service aims and objectives are being met.
C. Develop arrangements for monitoring and reviewing how effectively the partnership itself is working.
D. Ensure widespread dissemination of monitoring and review findings amongst partners.
E. Celebrate and publicise partnership success and root out continuing barriers.
F. Reconsider/revise partnership aims, objectives and arrangements.

rapid partnership profile

To what extent do you agree with each of the following six statements in respect of the Partnership which is the subject of this assessment exercise as a whole?	strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree	Comments
• The partnership has clear success criteria in terms of both service goals and the partnership itself.					
• The partnership has clear arrangements effectively to monitor and review how successfully its service aims and objectives are being met.					
• There are clear arrangements effectively to monitor and review how the partnership itself is working.					
• There are clear arrangements to ensure that monitoring and review findings are, or will be, widely shared and disseminated amongst the partners.					
• Partnership successes are well communicated outside of the partnership.					
• There are clear arrangements to ensure that partnership aims, objectives and working arrangements are reconsidered and, where necessary, revised in the light of monitoring and review findings.					
Scores					Total:

Scoring Key: Strongly Agree 4; Agree 3; Disagree 2; Strongly Disagree 1



principle 6: monitor, measure and learn

This principle refers to the reflective component of partnership working. Such a review function is, of course, an integral part of any single agency planning and management process. It is even more important, however, in partnership working where there may be doubts about levels of commitment or about the costs and benefits to individual partners. The latter is especially the case if the partnership is seen by some as non-core business. Monitoring, measuring and learning is, therefore, an essential part not just of assessing performance but, in so doing, of cementing commitment and trust.

Element A: Agree a range of success criteria.

Success criteria need to be agreed – and made explicit – both for the service aims and objectives and for the partnership itself. As indicated above, service aims and objectives may be successfully achieved but perhaps ultimately at the cost of a fractured partnership. Conversely it may be commonly agreed that whereas the service aims and objectives have not been achieved, nevertheless there have been significant benefits in terms of joint working between the partners; for example, an improved understanding of individual agency resource constraints, improved knowledge of constitutional/legal obstacles, improved levels of trust.

Element B: Develop arrangements for monitoring and reviewing how well the partnership's service aims and objectives are being met.

There is often scepticism, amongst partnership members and parent organisations, about the extent to which the benefits of collaborative working exceed the costs to individual partners. It is important, therefore, to monitor the extent to which collectively agreed aims and objectives are being met – and, where necessary, to revise those aims. It is not just a straightforward closing of the management and planning cycle, it is an important element of continuous feedback and, thereby, of organisational learning.

Element C: Develop arrangements for monitoring and reviewing how effectively the partnership itself is working.

This monitoring and review function is different in its focus. Here the aim is to examine not whether the service aims and objectives of the partnership are being achieved but how well the partnership itself is working. Indeed, this is precisely the function of the Partnership Assessment Tool. Even if the jointly agreed service aims and objectives are being successfully met it will be important to reflect on how far this is due to a healthy and smoothly functioning partnership or whether by contrast they are being achieved only at some cost to individual partnership members – which in the longer term may be undue and unsustainable. Elaborate review machinery is not required, but it will be insufficient for partnership members simply to think that such a review can be conducted entirely informally and without all members being involved. The consequences of the latter are likely to be divisiveness and mistrust.

Element D: Ensure widespread dissemination of monitoring and review findings amongst partners.

The evidence is that partnership schemes have often existed on the periphery of organisations – as atypical initiatives at their respective boundaries. One result is that the lessons learnt from such joint working – whether of success or failure – are seldom systematically fed back to the organisational heartland. The messages are not disseminated amongst other services or across other functions and geographical areas. Without such evaluation taking place these same lessons are seldom used to inform other partnership working elsewhere.

Element E: Celebrate and publicise partnership success and root out continuing barriers.

This is closely allied to the previous element and underlines the need for some of the traditional scepticism about joint working – or doubts about the chance of success, other than at undue cost – to be countered. In some sense publicising local success removes the 'fig-leaf' from those who would argue that partnership working is inherently problematic and often impossible. It is a way of demonstrating that the barriers can be overcome. It is also a way of demonstrating what is needed to root out the continuing barriers and to underline that the lessons are frequently generalisable – i.e. the lessons spelt out elsewhere in this Assessment Tool.

Element F: Reconsider/revise partnership aims, objectives and arrangements.

Although described here as the logical 'last step' in this audit/assessment cycle, this element could equally be seen as its starting point. Reconsideration need not lead to revision or refinement of aims, objectives or arrangements but it provides the opportunity for recognising, for example, previous over-ambition or lack of ambition, lack of commitment or structures and process which marginalise rather than involve partners appropriately.

completing the assessment

Having addressed and scored each of the six statements for each of the six Principles there are now two other important issues to consider:

1. How you would weight the six Principles in terms of their current significance for your partnership – given its nature and stage of development.

2. How well you think the partnership is doing in achieving its aims and objectives.

1. The Relative Significance of the 6 Principles

It is clear that many, or even most, people completing this assessment will want to say that one or other of the six Principles is more significant – and maybe much more significant – than others given:

- the nature of the Partnership
- the stage of development of the Partnership
- your place within the Partnership

Let us take, as an example, a Public/Private partnership which is reasonably mature and well–developed. Someone completing this assessment who has been involved in drawing up and implementing a formal, legally binding partnership contract might think Principle 1 has little significance – acceptance of the need for Partnership being self–evident. However, there might not be the same recognition or acceptance at other levels within the partner organisations. Also, it may be worth occasionally checking whether the recognition and acceptance assumed to be reflected in the contract still exists among those responsible for its inception.

Another example would be a proposed or newly formed Partnership in which partners might argue that Principles 1 and 2 especially were much more significant than Principle 6.

Whatever your view please record on the following page what you think is the significance of each of the six Partnership Principles *currently*.

Please put a circle around the point you think most appropriate for each Principle:

The Relative Significance of the 6 Principles

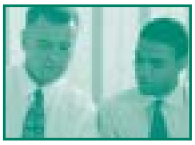
	more significant				less significant
Principle 1.					
Principle 2.					
Principle 3.					
Principle 4.					
Principle 5.					
Principle 6.					

2. Current Partnership Success

To what extent do you agree with the following statement in respect of the Partnership, as a whole, which is the subject of this assessment?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
• The partnership is achieving its aims and objectives				

Please add below any comments on the performance of the Partnership.



Stage 1 : Preparation

- Agree the purpose of the Assessment Exercise
- Negotiate individual contributions
- Decide how the exercise will be facilitated
- Decide how it will be actioned.

Stage 2 : Undertaking the Assessment

- Circulate briefing material
- Arrange meeting to:
  - familiarise partners with material
  - get partners to complete rapid partnership appraisal sheets.

Stage 3 : Analysis and Feedback

- Analyse individual responses
- Arrange feedback meeting to:
  - share, discuss and interpret findings
  - agree next steps.

Stage 4 : Action Planning for Alternative Findings

A	B	C
Assessment suggests partnership working well. Partners need to consider how often to build in a regular review.	Assessment suggests partnership is working well in some parts but there are concerns about others. Partners need to decide how to address these areas of concern.	Assessment highlights significant areas of concern which require urgent attention and a detailed plan of action.

stage 3: analysis of findings and feedback

Each partner will have completed a scoring sheet for each of the 6 Principles. For each of the principles, partners will have indicated their level of agreement/disagreement with the 6 statements related to the individual principles. The individual scores for each principle should then be totalled to give an aggregate score (within the range 144-36) for each partner. The scores should be transferred to the 'dartboard' graphic on page 43 by shading the appropriate segment for each of the six Principles.

1. Understanding the results: in outline

In simple terms you can interpret the results as follows:

Principle 1: recognise and accept the need for partnership

- 19-24: Very high recognition and acceptance of the need for partnership
- 13-18: The need for partnership is recognised and accepted
- 7-12: Recognition and acceptance of the need for partnership is limited
- 6: Recognition and acceptance of the need for partnership is minimal.

Principle 2: develop clarity and realism of purpose

- 19-24: The purpose of the partnership is very clear and realistic
- 13-18: There is some degree of purpose and realism to the partnership
- 7-12: Only limited clarity and realism of purpose exists
- 6: The partnership lacks any clarity or sense of purpose.

Principle 3: ensure commitment and ownership

- 19-24: The partnership is characterised by strong commitment and wide ownership
- 13-18: There is some degree of commitment to, and ownership of, the partnership
- 7-12: Only limited partnership commitment and ownership can be identified
- 6: There is little or no commitment to, or ownership of, the partnership.

Principle 4: develop and maintain trust

- 19-24: There is well developed trust among partners
- 13-18: There is some degree of trust amongst partners
- 7-12: Trust amongst partners is poorly developed
- 6: There is little or no trust among partners.

Principle 5: create clear and robust partnership working arrangements

- 19-24: Partnership working arrangements are very clear and robust
- 13-18: Partnership working arrangements are reasonably clear and robust
- 7-12: Partnership working arrangements are insufficiently clear and robust
- 6: Partnership working arrangements are poor.

Principle 6: monitor, measure and learn

- 19-24: The partnership monitors, measures and learns from its performance very well
- 13-18: The partnership monitors, measures and learns from its performance reasonably well
- 7-12: The partnership monitors, measures and learns from its performance poorly in some respects
- 6: The partnership monitors, measures and learns from its performance poorly in most respects or not at all.

Aggregate scores

- 109–144 The partnership is working well enough in all or most respects to make the need for further detailed work unnecessary.
- 73–108 The partnership is working well enough overall but some aspects may need further exploration and attention.
- 37–72 The partnership may be working well in some respects but these are outweighed by areas of concern sufficient to require remedial action.
- 36 The partnership is working badly enough in all respects for further detailed remedial work to be essential.

See diagram on the opposite page for rapid partnership profiles scores.

2. Understanding the results: detailed analysis and feedback

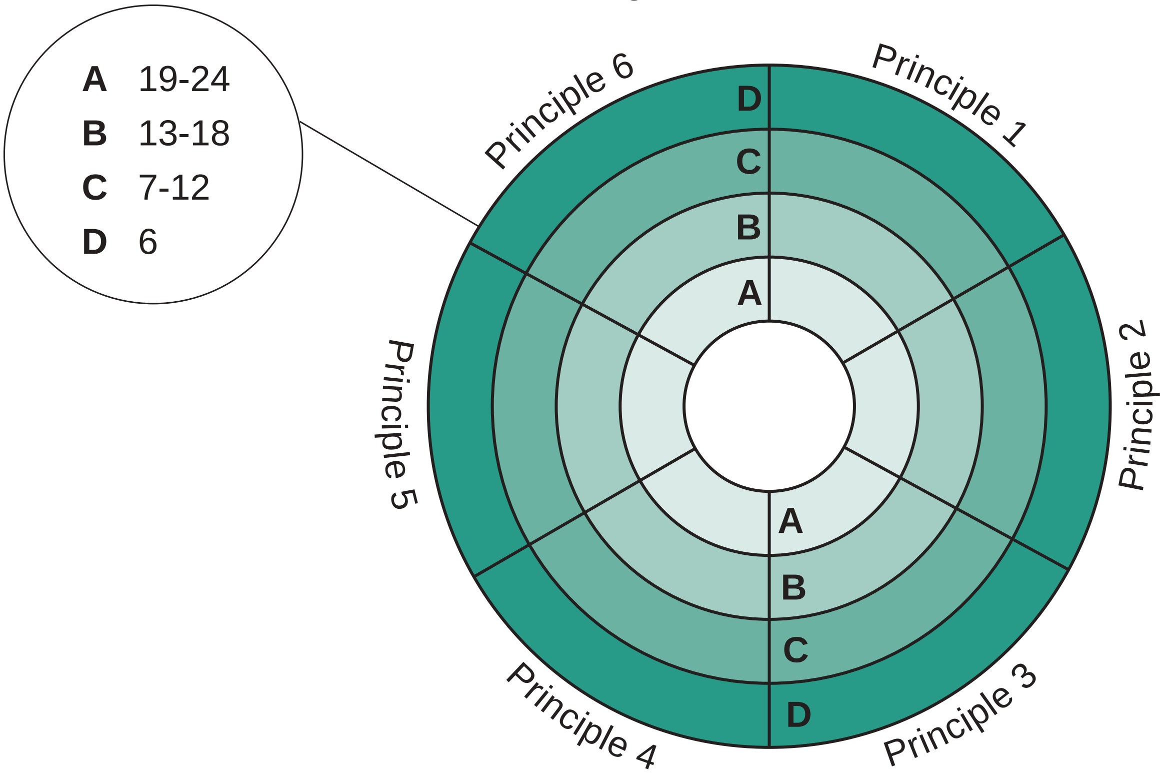
Partners need to share their individual assessments, examining areas of common or differing views about partnership strengths and weaknesses. What becomes readily, and graphically, apparent is where there is broad agreement or disagreement across partners. The depth to which the responses need to be explored – and the way in which they are explored – depends largely upon the degree of consensus, the nature of the findings, and the significance attached to the findings by partners. Thus, if all partners are agreed that the partnership is reasonably healthy across all six Principles, including those generally agreed to be the most significant, there is little need of action planning beyond agreeing when and how to conduct the next ‘health check’.

If, however, some partners have assessed the partnership as ‘unhealthy’ in some respects – and especially if this is in areas generally agreed to be significant – this will require further detailed examination. Depending upon the sensitivity of the issues and the size of the partnerships this examination is often best done in a facilitated feedback workshop. In some cases – for example, over differences of view about the degree of trust and mistrust – it may be necessary to conduct interviews separately with individual partners. It is in the detailed feedback and analysis sessions that partners can look behind their bald scoring and explore comments about individual elements and the weighting of principles.

The essence of this feedback and analysis is to better understand partnership strengths and weaknesses and, if necessary, plan remedial action. What this Tool does is to reveal simply, graphically and quickly areas upon which to concentrate. It allows a focus of effort and resources.

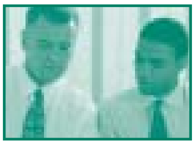
rapid partnership profiles scores

Put total score for each principle in appropriate segment below and shade in that segment



AGGREGATE PROFILE SCORE =
(Total of all six principles)

Date:…………………



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stage 4: action planning

The principal aim of this Tool is to enable generic assessment of partnership working. It cannot offer detailed prescriptions for addressing the problems identified in any particular partnership. How partnership weaknesses or problems are tackled – or how strengths are reinforced and replicated – must depend upon local circumstances and is likely to require specialist organisational development expertise.

What is clear generally, however, is that whatever the findings, the assessment process must be seen to conclude with a plan for action. If we take the three broad alternative scenarios outlined in our diagram we can see what this might comprise.

Taking the first case (4a) if the findings show a broad consensus about the general strength and 'health' of partnership working, the action planning may need to consist of little more than agreeing how and when to undertake the next assessment. This could be a repeat exercise with the same individuals. It could entail assessments at different levels in the partner organisations. There might also be an agreement that no further formal assessment takes place unless there are important changes within the partnership or in the partnership context. Whatever the apparent success of current partnership working, it will be worthwhile acknowledging that even the healthiest should have regular health checks.

In the case of the second broad scenario (4b) where some problems or weaknesses are identified, the action planning will focus on these areas. Where there is little sensitivity about the issues raised – whether individual or organisational – more detailed analysis of what underlies the assessment findings may well be conducted internally and informally. Where there is greater sensitivity external facilitation may be preferable. Below, we outline how this has worked in one illustrative case.

An existing mental health partnership commissioned an externally facilitated assessment of their partnership working at a time when they were about to create a more integrated structure. The partnership comprised: social services, other local authority departments and acute health care, primary care, the voluntary sector and independent sector providers. In order to develop a comprehensive assessment, it was decided that the assessment tool would be used with staff at different levels within these organisations: board level, senior operational managers and front line staff. The last mentioned were brought together in their locality working teams in order that intra–organisational and intra-professional issues could be explored and highlighted.

The assessment exercise took place at a time of significant change: staff from one organisation were to be managed by another of the partners; and services in the acute sector were being reprovided in the community.

At the conclusion of the exercise feedback workshops were held with each of the partnership groups to analyse individual responses. For the front line staff the workshop focussed on changes to working practices and agreeing opportunities for more inter-professional and intra-professional working. The meetings also agreed a list of issues that needed to be addressed at a senior level within the partner organisations. Feedback work with the more senior partners resulted in action planning to address these issues, which, in some cases, was about giving them 'permission' to develop their own solutions. Action plans were developed for the newly created joint operational group and external organisational development support was commissioned to support the process. At board level it became apparent that the organisational changes had resulted in an overemphasis on structures and process with a resulting lack of clarity about what outcomes the new partnership wished to achieve. A facilitated time-out was identified to address this problem.

Feedback on the overall process identified that the assessment exercise had provided:

- structured information about people's perceptions throughout the partnership;
- opportunities to compare and contrast the views of different partners which provided an opportunity to plan remedial action;
- a process which in itself opened up a debate that introduced more openness and transparency about partners' views on partnership working.

In the case of the third scenario (4c) action planning will need to embrace extensive and possibly urgent remedial action. This may involve a thorough re-examination of the partnership from aims and objectives through structures and processes to working practices. Indeed, if the problems are serious enough it may require that the partnership be dissolved and re-formed.

Once again, the benefits of using this assessment tool ought to be a clear indication of the nature and scale of problems, of where action is needed most and where it is required most urgently. And although it is a primarily diagnostic tool, the partnership Principles and their constituent elements provide a general prescriptive account of how partnership working can be strengthened. It is for those involved in particular partnerships to apply these general principles to their local circumstances.

annex setting the partnership context: strategic partnering

Introduction: the quest for partnership

Partnerships are a key feature of New Labour policy. Both Labour governments since 1997 have produced a stream of legislation, policy guidance and moral exhortation, sometimes backed by ring-fenced funding, to develop partnerships. Much of the early attention was upon the NHS-local government relationship and, for the most part, upon public-public partnerships. Alongside this, there has been a plethora of new area-based initiatives, complementing or superseding previous economic regeneration strategies. These new programmes include Sure Start, Action Zones for Employment, Education and Health, New Deal for Communities, Neighbourhood Renewal, Community Safety and other smaller initiatives. All of this has shifted the nature and scale of partnership working, with greater use of public-voluntary, and public-private partnerships. It is within this evolving partnership context that the Strategic Partnering (Taskforce) initiative can be located.

The origin and nature of strategic partnering

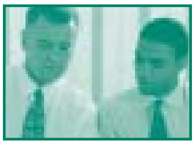
In part, Strategic Partnering is a response to changing conditions, as well as an initiator of them. Over the last few years there has been an increase in the number of local authorities entering into long-term contracts with private companies to provide a broad range of services; some of these have been on a scale previously not known in the local government sector. Many of these relationships were already being described as 'strategic partnerships', and the ODPM uses the term 'Strategic Service-Delivery Partnership' (SSP) to encapsulate such developments. This should not be confused with the Local Strategic Partnerships which are now being developed across all localities in England. The Strategic Service-Delivery Partnership initiative seeks to structure, nurture and support these developments.

It is envisaged that strategic partnering will provide access to new skills, resources and ways of working, and will promote innovation in the pursuit of difficult and long-term goals. The partnership dimension is central to all of this, and is the principal purpose for which this tool has been developed. At its most general, 'partnership' has been defined as 'a way of working with others designed to maximise the benefits of co-operation'[3]. There are three distinctive partnership issues with which SSPs need to engage:

The Partnership Range

While early SSPs utilised public-private partnerships to provide corporate and back-office functions, the approach is now viewed as also viable for public-public and public-voluntary working, as well as for all service areas and all sizes of authorities. Potentially, nothing is precluded from coming under the SSP umbrella. All possible combinations of public, private and voluntary endeavour are included, and these may combine in a variety of different partnership models.

3 Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions (2001), *Supporting Strategic Service-Delivery Partnerships in Local Government. Invitation to join the pathfinder programme*.



The Partnership Nature

Many previous partnerships have been concerned with short-term and piecemeal change – indeed this has, arguably, been the dominant approach. By focusing upon small-scale initiatives which lend themselves to a joint approach, the likelihood of a 'quick win' is maximised, but this may be at the expense of ignoring the broader picture of fragmentation. Where authorities need to take a more corporate view of their long-term objectives, an alternative focus upon strategic partnering is required.

In such relationships:

- the joint task will be broadly rather than narrowly specified;
- performance will be defined more in terms of key deliverables and user satisfaction than in the detailed routines and schedules associated with traditional contracting;
- the emphasis will be on flexibility of service and thinking 'outside of the box' rather than monitoring against tightly specified audit;
- there will be more emphasis upon prevention and less upon 'cure';
- the emphasis is upon continuous improvement rather than static compliance;
- the focus is upon outcomes not outputs.

The Partnership Challenge

SSPs involve relationships which are complex and long-term; setting them up can accordingly be complex, costly and lengthy. While this may bring great future benefit, there are also risks associated with any such large-scale and innovative project. Many potential SSPs will find this challenging, even daunting, and to this end the SSP has a dedicated support unit – the Strategic Partnering Taskforce – to support authorities that go down this route[4].

structures and developments in SSPs

Partnership Structures for SSPs

Structure is important to partnership working, but on its own cannot guarantee effective shared working. The technical notes for SSPs prepared by the Taskforce make this point emphatically:

'Structures are akin to a framework of a building. Having the right building may assist the efficient operation of a business or service, but it does not ensure it does. Conversely, having the wrong building in the wrong place and of the wrong size can ensure you cannot secure the optimum efficiency.' [Strategic Partnering Taskforce, 2002, p7][5]

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4 Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2002), Improving Local Service Delivery Through Strategic Partnering: An Introduction to the Strategic Partnering Taskforce.

5 Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2002) *Structures for Partnerships: Technical Notes*.

Nevertheless, some form of structure is needed to underpin strategic partnerships. Four main models are identified by the Taskforce:

[1] public sector consortium

In this model, local authorities turn to other public sector partners with similar objectives, with a view to generating synergies and economies of scale. Smaller authorities may be unable to formulate a commercially attractive package for the private sector, and in such cases a public-public partnership will be the only option. Simply, in this model the local authority, and one or more other local or public authorities, join together to effect service delivery on selected activities. The partners may be contiguous, occupy different levels of government, and may be from different sectors of government. They will all have chosen to get together for the purposes of commissioning and perhaps also providing a local service, though they may choose to involve the private or voluntary sectors in service delivery. Similarly, governance arrangements might involve the co-opting of members from the private or voluntary sector.

[2] joint ventures with the private sector

Here, the local authority more explicitly engages in a joint arrangement with the private sector. Joint ventures enable parties to work together, utilising the collective pool of assets (which will constitute both tangible and intangible sources) in the pursuit of complementary objectives. The key feature here is the capacity to introduce resources which would not otherwise have been available. If the venture is intended to be profit-making, or if significant private sector funding is involved, then a company limited by shares may be attractive. The shares will be owned by the local authority and the private sector partner in proportion to their respective investment; by the same token, the board of directors will consist of representatives of the shareholders in proportion to the size of their shareholdings, and they will have legal responsibility for managing the joint venture.

[3] joint ventures with non-profit distributing organisations

The use of not-for-profit models has a long history in the delivery of public services, with the voluntary sector only slowly losing its dominance in many aspects of service provision as the twentieth century progressed. This approach is seen as important when there is no profit to be made and the service might otherwise not be provided, or not provided satisfactorily. The non-profit-making sector is not monolithic. The range of potential contributors is wide, including local authorities themselves, other public sector entities, voluntary organisations, charitable trusts, industrial and provident societies, and co-operative societies.

[4] partnering contracts

A partnering contract is a contract entered into between the local authority and a private sector partner which builds on the experience of conventional outsourcing. Rather than a purchaser-provider relationship, it envisages a more collaborative relationship in relation to the discharge of the private sector partner’s contractual obligations. These obligations will inevitably vary from contract to contract. Some may be limited to strategic advice or management; others could be largely operational and resembling traditional outsourcing. Compared with conventional contracts, the partnering contract is seen as less adversarial in approach, although the very existence of a contract implies the need for some distance in the relationship. The relationship might be characterised by a less confrontational approach to contract disputes, a team-oriented approach to contractual delivery, and an ‘open book’ approach to costs and profit.

The Emerging Pathfinder Projects

Pathfinder projects established under the auspices of the Strategic Partnering Taskforce fall into one of three broad 'themes':

- corporate services and e-government
- transport and environmental services
- education, health and social services

Local authorities were limited to one project in their application to become a pathfinder and selections were made on the basis of the partnership model proposed, the potential of the model to achieve far-reaching service improvement, and the commitment and capacity of the authority. In the initial phase, 24 Pathfinder projects were chosen. Not all were attempting full-blown SSPs – they were at very different stages of setting up their partnerships, ranging from initial scoping, to the management of an established relationship. This Partnership Assessment Tool is sufficiently robust to encompass this spread of ambition and achievement.

The spread of project types, aims and objectives is testimony to the richness of what can come under the umbrella of partnership. Illustrations are given below from each of the three categories, though these projects will probably have evolved in the meantime:

[1] corporate and e-government projects

Some of these projects are established partnerships, as in Bedfordshire, where a relationship with the private sector is used to provide support services, as well as a regional business centre and contact centre. Others have formulated a strategy and are in the process of seeking partners. In North Yorkshire, all of the local authorities have come together to develop and share a consistent customer access mechanism for face-to-face, telephone and electronic contact channels to their individual services, and negotiations are under way with private sector partners. And in Surrey, a service provider is being sought to help tackle the difficult problems of recruitment and retention of staff in the public sector by developing a single electronic managed service which allows job candidates to match their applications to several potential roles.

[2] education, health and social services

In this category of projects there is more of a focus upon public-public partnerships. In Barnsley, a partnering arrangement is in place that seeks to make comprehensive and ambitious use of the Health Act flexibilities across health and social care; in Hammersmith and Fulham an arrangement has been developed across six west London authorities to provide a client's new local authority with a summary profile of all the services the client had been receiving before they moved. There is, however, some scope for non-statutory partners. Twelve local authorities across Manchester, for example, have got together for a number of joint procurements, one of which involves placements for adults and children with specialist care or education needs. This project provides the potential for private or voluntary sector investment and partnership working.

[3] transport and environment

Here a mixture of public-public, and public-private partnerships is evident. In Shropshire a Waste Partnership SSP involving all of the Shropshire Authorities is under consideration, with future private sector involvement likely. Durham has established an SSP between the council and private sector partners to deliver all of the council's building and civil engineering design and construction for a minimum of five years. And in Adur and Worthing, there is a public-public SSP initially focusing on combining two district councils' waste management facilities and collection services.

conclusion

The Strategic Service Partnering initiative is taking partnership working into more demanding challenges – a shift from relatively simple to relatively complex issues. 'Old partnerships' tended to deal with issues displaying the following features:

- solutions based on past patterns of working
- partnerships come together with the intention of delivering pre-set common objectives
- confidence that the objectives are the right ones, based upon experience of what works
- focus on the resolution of existing problems rather than the anticipation of future ones
- partnership working is relatively small scale and *ad hoc*, rather than part of a broader partnership design.

Partnerships of this type will continue to have an important role to play, but SSPs will increasingly take on broader and more complex partnership challenges encapsulated by the notion of a shift from *government to governance*. Governance is a broader term than government, with services provided by any permutation of the public, private and voluntary sectors – the very hallmark of SSPs. This requires new understandings and new ways of working. The challenges facing SSPs are considerable, but foremost among them is the development of an effective partnership amongst the key stakeholders. Without this, it is unlikely that the ambitious service delivery goals can be achieved.

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