

## **Governance and Accountability of Strategic Partnerships: Enhancing the role of Scrutiny Committees**

### **Report of Assistant Chief Executive, Strategy and Democracy**

#### **1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

To update Scrutiny Committees on a review of existing governance arrangements and the relationship between the Stockport Partnership with associated thematic boards, and Scrutiny Committees.

To propose enhanced reporting arrangements between these partnerships and the associated Scrutiny Committees.

#### **2. IDENTIFIED ISSUES**

Stockport has well established and effective partnerships and Scrutiny Committees. Relationships exist between these groups that have evolved in the past two years. There is however no consistent approach across each thematic board and each Scrutiny Committee regarding how information, plans and progress on issues are shared and Councillors kept informed.

Members of Scrutiny Committees have raised concerns on a number of occasions about the access elected members, and the public, have to agendas, reports and minutes of the Partnership Board and thematic partnership boards.

Democratic accountability of partnerships is increasingly important as the role of partnerships has been enhanced through the *Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007*. In addition we need to take account of the introduction of the Duty to Involve representatives of local people.<sup>1</sup>

More recently the Audit Commission published a best practice guide to partnership working which challenged authorities to assess how well elected members on scrutiny challenge the Local Strategic Partnership arrangements and its partners. Completion of the assessment locally identified a need for Stockport to develop further scrutiny of partnerships.

#### **3. CURRENT ARRANGEMENTS**

Scrutiny Committees currently receive resumes of meetings of the Stockport Partnership Board and the thematic partnerships. These provide information on matters considered by the partnership and officer contact details. They allow the Committees to request reports or obtain more information on items direct from officers as appropriate.

Whilst the resumes are seen to be useful, elected members consider that without access to the agenda and reports for the meetings they do not have sufficient information to enable them to gain any meaningful insight into the issues being

---

<sup>1</sup> Creating Strong, Safe, and Prosperous Communities Statutory Guidance July 2008

<sup>2</sup> Working Better Together, <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/nationalstudies/localgov/workingbettertogether/Pages/workingbettertogether.aspx>

considered and dealt with by the Stockport Partnership, any of the thematic partnership boards or indeed where they could add value.

The engagement of Scrutiny Committees with each thematic partnership also varies across each. For example a formal protocol exists setting out the relationship between the Safer Stockport Partnership and the Adults and Communities Scrutiny Committee, and arrangements are in place for representatives of that partnership board to attend Scrutiny Committee meetings twice yearly. There is however no such formal arrangement in place with regard to any other thematic partnership. This results in planned formal reporting of one thematic board to the relevant Scrutiny Committee but scrutiny of other boards takes place on a more adhoc basis.

It is also noted that as not all thematic boards' agendas and associated papers are circulated via publicly accessible web pages it is difficult for elected members to assess which areas they would suggest for further scrutiny review.

### **3.1 PROPOSED ARRANGEMENTS**

To provide for enhanced transparency, accountability through Scrutiny, and stronger partnership governance arrangements, the following arrangements were agreed by the Stockport Partnership Board at the meeting of 2<sup>nd</sup> February. These will introduce a level of consistency into the availability of information and the engagement between Scrutiny Committees, the Stockport Partnership Board and thematic partnerships.

- Agendas and reports (except those containing exempt information according to an agreed criterion) of the Stockport Partnership Board and thematic partnerships will be made available through the electronic @gendas service. This means all papers will be available for public and all elected member viewing.
- Resumes will continue to be submitted to Scrutiny Committees to provide regular feedback on the work of the Board and thematic partnerships
- Arrangements will be made for representatives of the Partnership Board and thematic partnership boards to attend the relevant Scrutiny Committee on a planned basis to present at the very least an annual report (generally once a year). This would enable Scrutiny Committees to engage with and examine the work of each partnerships. Additional attendance and information could be requested by a Scrutiny Committee on a relevant area of focus of a thematic partnership boards' work should the need arise but should be a considered and agreed request of the Committee. (and not of an individual elected member)

Full terms of reporting are included at appendix 1, with a proposed schedule of reporting at appendix 2.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Scrutiny Committees are asked to:

- Endorse the Scrutiny arrangements proposed in section 3.1 and the supporting appendices, subject to any comments of considerations the committee may have.

## APPENDIX 1

### Strategic Partnership Reporting to Scrutiny Committees Terms of Reporting

#### **Purpose of Reports**

To enhance the democratic accountability of, and public involvement in, partnership working in Stockport.

#### **Reports will provide**

A summary of partnership performance in the previous 12 months including:

PI data  
Summary actions/ initiatives  
Examples of real outcomes (Case Studies)

A summary of and rationale for partnership priorities for the next 12 months  
Summaries of planned actions

#### **Role of Committee Members**

To comment on and challenge areas of under performance  
To comment on and challenge priorities and planned actions  
Identify issues for more detailed scrutiny

#### **Accountability**

Comments of the committee will be reported back to the partnership, and responses sought as appropriate  
More detailed reports on issues identified by the Committee will be programmed into the annual work programme

#### **Exceptions and Decisions**

This regular reporting should not replace reports on specific decisions which would normally go before the committee  
Strategic Plans identified as part of the Partnership's Policy Framework will be brought to the committee prior to endorsement by the Partnership Board for comment

#### **Reporting Frequency**

Annually, to commence in municipal year 2010/11 with reports covering 2009/10

#### **Reporting Format**

A standard report template will be used to ensure the agreed content is included in a clear and concise format  
Reporting will be the responsibility of the lead council officer. Scrutiny committees should work with lead officers to identify and invite relevant partners to be involved in the process

## APPENDIX 2

### Provisional Schedule of Reporting

Dates >>	2010									2011					
	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	Jun
<b>By Scrutiny Committee</b>															
Adults and Communities				SSP		SCP					SSP		AESEP		
Health						HWBP									
Children									CT						
Economy and Environment											EP		EA		
CRMG									SPB						

#### Rationale for timings

SPB	To align with 6 monthly reporting to GONW, renegotiation of LAA and CAA process
SSP	Dates already agreed and in operation
SCP	flexible
HWBP	flexible
CT	Proposed to align with publication of educational attainment results
EP	flexible
EA	flexible but proposed to align with AESEP to allow joint reporting to SPB
AESEP	flexible but proposed to align with EA to allow joint reporting to SPB

#### Glossary

SPB – Stockport Partnership Board  
 SCP – Stronger Communities Partnership  
 CT – Children Trust  
 EA – Economic Alliance Partnership

SSP – Safer Stockport Partnership  
 HWBP – Health and Wellbeing Partnership  
 EP – Environment partnership  
 AESEP – Adult Education, Skills & Employment