Building better lives

Effective partnership working - self-assessment questions

June 2009
The Audit Commission is an independent watchdog, driving economy, efficiency and effectiveness in local public services to deliver better outcomes for everyone.

Our work across local government, health, housing, community safety and fire and rescue services means that we have a unique perspective. We promote value for money for taxpayers, auditing the £200 billion spent by 11,000 local public bodies.

As a force for improvement, we work in partnership to assess local public services and make practical recommendations for promoting a better quality of life for local people.
Self-assessment questions for improved partnership working in strategic housing

1. These questions are for officers and members in local councils, as well as for local partners – for example, registered social landlords, developers, private landlords, and community groups.

2. They should help councils and your local partners involved in a local housing partnership to understand the strengths and weaknesses of your current arrangements. They should help you and your local partners to improve the way you play your strategic housing role in your local area. You can use these questions with your local housing partnership or housing forum as part of an improvement planning workshop or discussion.

3. The questions draw on Audit Commission work on effective partnership working and on the strategic housing function, and on the principles set out in the Good Governance Standard for Public Services.

How far does your housing partnership focus on a clear vision to improve outcomes for local people?

4. How clear is the housing partnership about how the strategic vision will deliver positive housing outcomes for local people, together with the contribution which housing can make to wider goals, for example better health outcomes, economic development, and social inclusion?

5. How does the strategic vision take account of the housing needs and aspirations of local people, as well as equalities, disabilities and human rights legislation?

6. How well is the strategic vision reflected in housing targets, including those in your local area agreement?

7. In what way does your housing strategy reflect the needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups?

8. How does the housing partnership ensure consistency between the housing strategy and other local strategies, in particular the sustainable community strategy and range of planning policies contained in the local development framework?
Questions for improved partnership working

9 How does the housing partnership know whether it is making progress towards achieving the outcomes for local people set out in the housing strategy?

10 How does the housing partnership use shared performance management frameworks to oversee and deliver better outcomes for local people?

How does your housing partnership oversee the effective use of resources in your local area?

11 Has your housing partnership mapped the public money (and other resources) spent in delivering your housing strategy and local area agreement targets? How has it used this mapping to support the delivery of improved outcomes?

12 How often does your housing partnership review total public spending on strategic housing, to identify opportunities for improving value for money?

13 Does the housing partnership report on the allocation of all budgets and resources in an area to deliver against the housing strategy, sustainable community strategy and local area agreement?

14 Do the members of the housing partnership look for opportunities to pool or align their collective resources to improve the way they deliver their housing strategy?

15 Does the housing partnership use effective commissioning and procurement of services to improve value for money, and better outcomes for local people?

16 Does the housing partnership benchmark its local area against other areas to improve value for money?

What are the roles of partners in the housing partnership in delivering local improvements in outcomes?

17 What levers does the housing partnership use to allocate and assess the responsibilities of individual partners to achieve the desired local area agreement, sustainable community strategy and housing strategy outcomes?
Self-assessment questions

18 How does the housing partnership ensure that there are clear roles, functions and responsibilities for each partner to achieve the desired local outcomes? Are these roles and responsibilities clearly defined, agreed and owned by all partners?

19 How does the housing partnership ensure that all partners (and staff within each organisation) understand their roles and responsibilities to achieve local outcomes?

How does your housing partnership effectively consult, engage with and involve key stakeholders?

20 How does the housing partnership make sure it identifies the key regional, sub-regional and local stakeholders to deliver improved local outcomes?

21 How does the housing partnership ensure that the views of local communities and voluntary community organisations are effectively represented to them?

22 How does the housing partnership build the capacity of voluntary and community organisations to achieve a more meaningful contribution to strategic housing?

23 How does the housing partnership ensure that diverse groups and interests have a voice in shaping and delivering the housing strategy?

24 How does the housing partnership ensure that reluctant stakeholders are engaged in developing and delivering the housing strategy?

25 How does the housing partnership demonstrate its accountability to partners, and to local people?

How does the housing partnership support local capacity building and capability development?

26 How does the housing partnership ensure that partners develop the appropriate skills and knowledge for:

- people with governance and leadership responsibilities for delivering the housing strategy; local development framework, sustainable community strategy and local area agreement targets; and
- operational staff to deliver improved housing outcomes locally?
27 How has the housing partnership helped develop local workforce strategies for staff involved in strategic housing, for example housing staff, planners, and transport planners? How has it worked with partners to equip staff with the relevant skills to deliver improved housing outcomes locally?

28 How does the housing partnership respond to unsatisfactory or inappropriate performance by partner organisations? Are there fair and transparent processes to hold partners to account?

Good governance for housing partnerships

29 Does the housing partnership have a set of governing documents to clarify the roles of partners and encourage goodwill and trust?
  ■ Does this outline the expected values and behaviours of partners?
  ■ Does this outline the appropriate style of leadership to achieve effective partnership working?

30 Have you looked at examples of models of constitutions for partnerships to guide your housing partnership arrangements, and do these include:
  ■ name of the housing partnership;
  ■ aims and objectives;
  ■ terms of reference;
  ■ membership, including status of different members and termination of membership, schemes of delegation;
  ■ powers;
  ■ roles and responsibilities;
  ■ meeting arrangements – notice and frequency of meetings, quorum roles, chairing arrangements, voting arrangements, representation of other members;
  ■ decision-making processes; and
  ■ necessary structures, systems and administrative arrangements in place to work effectively?

31 What are the protocols for managing and resolving conflicts and disagreements between partners about the achievement of the housing strategy?
How does the housing partnership manage risks and exercise proper controls?

32 How does the housing partnership respond to relevant council overview and scrutiny recommendations about strategic housing?

33 How effectively does the housing partnership use data and performance management to support its decisions and recommendations?

34 What risk management procedures does the housing partnership have in place to:
   - identify the key risks to the housing partnership;
   - identify risks facing individual partners that could impact on the effectiveness or reputation of the housing partnership overall;
   - support strategic thinking and forward planning; and
   - assess and manage the opportunities, as well as the risks, of partnership working?

35 How does the housing partnership ensure there are appropriate controls to ensure probity and value for money in the use of the resources it influences?

36 How are the agendas, minutes, papers and decisions of the housing partnership communicated to stakeholders and the wider public?