

**JULY 2025  
AUDIT COMMITTEE**

**ITEM NO. ....**

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**ANNUAL REVIEW OF SIGNIFICANT PARTNERSHIPS 2024 - 2025**

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. To present the outcome of the annual review of significant partnerships to enable the Audit Committee to consider the partnerships that the Council is involved with and to ensure that they have adequate governance arrangements in place.

**Summary**

2. Through the principles of the partnership toolkit, Darlington Borough Council (DBC) has established an approach to monitoring the significant partnerships it is involved with. As a result there are good governance arrangements in place for these partnerships. The toolkit has been effective in identifying high level concerns of the significant partnerships.

**Recommendation**

3. It is recommended that the review of significant partnerships be endorsed and the actions being taken to address outstanding issues be noted.

**Reasons**

4. The recommendations are supported:-
  - (a) to enhance corporate governance arrangements in significant partnerships;
  - (b) to enhance the relevance and performance of partnerships in Darlington.

**Seth Pearson  
Partnerships Director**

Seth Pearson: Extension 6090

## Background Papers

- (i) Audit Commission Report – Governing Partnerships – Bridging the Accountability Gap
- (ii) Completed Partnership Toolkit Questionnaires
- (iii) Partnership Working Toolkit Report to Cabinet 20 March 2007
- (iv) Partnership Annual Review Forms – Year Ended 31 March 2025

Council Plan	Partnerships support the delivery of the Council Plan
Addressing Inequalities	The Darlington Partnership have One Darlington as a key priority with an objective of a safe and caring community which supports communities and neighbourhoods to be more cohesive..
Tackling Climate Change	The Darlington Partnership has been key in ensuring the environmental and economic sustainability of Darlington is assured.
Efficient and effective use of resources	Partnerships that the Council is involved in are reviewed annually to consider outcomes delivered and resources expended.
Health and Wellbeing	The Darlington Partnership and the Health and Wellbeing Board have been key partnerships in ensuring that the Health and Wellbeing Strategy is delivered to improve all aspects of the health and well-being of people in Darlington.
S17 Crime and Disorder	The Darlington Partnership and Safe and Cohesive Community Group have been key partnerships in ensuring that Safer Darlington is delivered which includes reduction of crime and disorder as a main priority.
Wards Affected	All wards.
Groups Affected	All groups.
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not recommend a change to the Council's budget or policy framework.
Key Decision	This is not a key decision.
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	None.

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

5. Public bodies have responsibilities in respect of their partnership arrangements in that they should for example:-
  - (a) know the partnership they are involved in and how much money and other resources they invest in them;
  - (b) take hard decisions to scale down their involvement in partnerships if the costs outweigh the benefits, or if the added risks cannot be managed properly and;
  - (c) agree and regularly review protocols and governing documents with all partners.
6. In order to demonstrate fulfilment of these responsibilities, Cabinet adopted a partnership toolkit in March 2007 (Min C174/March/07 refers). The toolkit provides a means to record that the performance of each partnership is monitored and that adequate governance arrangements are in place. The toolkit identifies partnerships currently classed as 'significant' in accordance with the definition reported to Cabinet in March 2007.
7. The methodology adopted in Darlington involves the application of the Partnership Toolkit Questionnaire which then informs an action plan to address areas for improvement in governance arrangements. The results of this process form the basis of this report. The lead officers play a key and continuing role in ensuring the good governance of the partnerships. Outstanding actions from last year's review have been addressed or are in hand.

### Criteria for a Partnership to be classed as 'Significant'

8. A partnership is determined to be significant if:-
  - (a) DBC has a statutory duty or other government requirement to enter into the partnership; or
  - (b) It is a major contributor towards achieving the Council Plan objectives; or
  - (c) It is a major contributor towards improving the lives of children and young people or older people; or
  - (d) Takes a lead on setting the Council's policy framework; or
  - (e) DBC has the role of accountable body/lead agency and the annual expenditure of the partnership is more than £100,000; or
  - (f) DBC funds the partnership by more than £100,000 annually.
9. The partnerships identified as significant in accordance with this definition for 2024/25 are as follows:-

- (a) 11 - 19 Partnership
- (b) Creative Darlington
- (c) Public Sector Executives Group
- (d) Darlington Safeguarding Partnership
- (e) Darlington Young People's Engagement and Justice Service
- (f) Community Safety Partnership
- (g) Education Strategy Group

The Voluntary and Community Sector Engagement Group was identified as a Strategic Partnership last year. The Partnership is actively forming Terms of Reference but wants them to reflect the revised role it is developing. In the interim the group has good governance arrangements in place with an independent chair and good administration procedures.

## **Performance and Governance of Partnerships 2024-25**

10. An Annual Review proforma is completed by the relevant Council officer for each partnership. These are used to assess achievements against objectives, identify any areas for improvement or risk. This report gives a summary of specific remedial actions required by each significant partnership to achieve full compliance with the Council's governance requirements. In addition, the reports identify what Council resources, if any, are being used to support the partnerships. These are readily available and published on the intranet at:-

[Darlington BC - Annual review of significant partnerships](#)

## **Issues raised by Partnerships**

11. All significant partnerships in Darlington have provided evidence that they are performing well in pursuit of the objectives and that adequate governance arrangements are in place.
12. The Community Safety Partnership quotes a range of threats and risks that it monitors carefully. The Partnership has a range of priorities which may conflict with one another.
13. The chair of the Creative Darlington has reported that demand for funding continually exceeds available resources and is often dependent on lottery funding which is hard to predict which requires careful budget management.
14. Concerns about funding is common across the Strategic Partnerships which they report they monitor closely.

## **Outcome of Consultation**

15. Consultation with the Chairs and Lead Officers of the key partnerships was undertaken in the production of this report.