

# **Newcastle Children's Services**

## **Partnership Handbook**



**March 2008**

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# Foreword to the Newcastle Children's Partnership Handbook

What holds us together is our shared commitment to make sure that children and young people in Newcastle have the best start possible in their lives. The statutory duty to co-operate underpins this – but it is our passion which drives us.

We will learn and develop over time but we think that this handbook captures some of what matters to us so far.



Catherine Fitt

Executive Director of Children's Services

# 1. What is a partnership?

Newcastle has a strong history of working in partnership. Not only have we found that it works but also it is in line with government legislation. The drive and commitment of staff and the support of agencies allow us to deliver more and better outcomes for children and young people in Newcastle.

There are many benefits stemming from partnership working. Where managed effectively partnerships can:

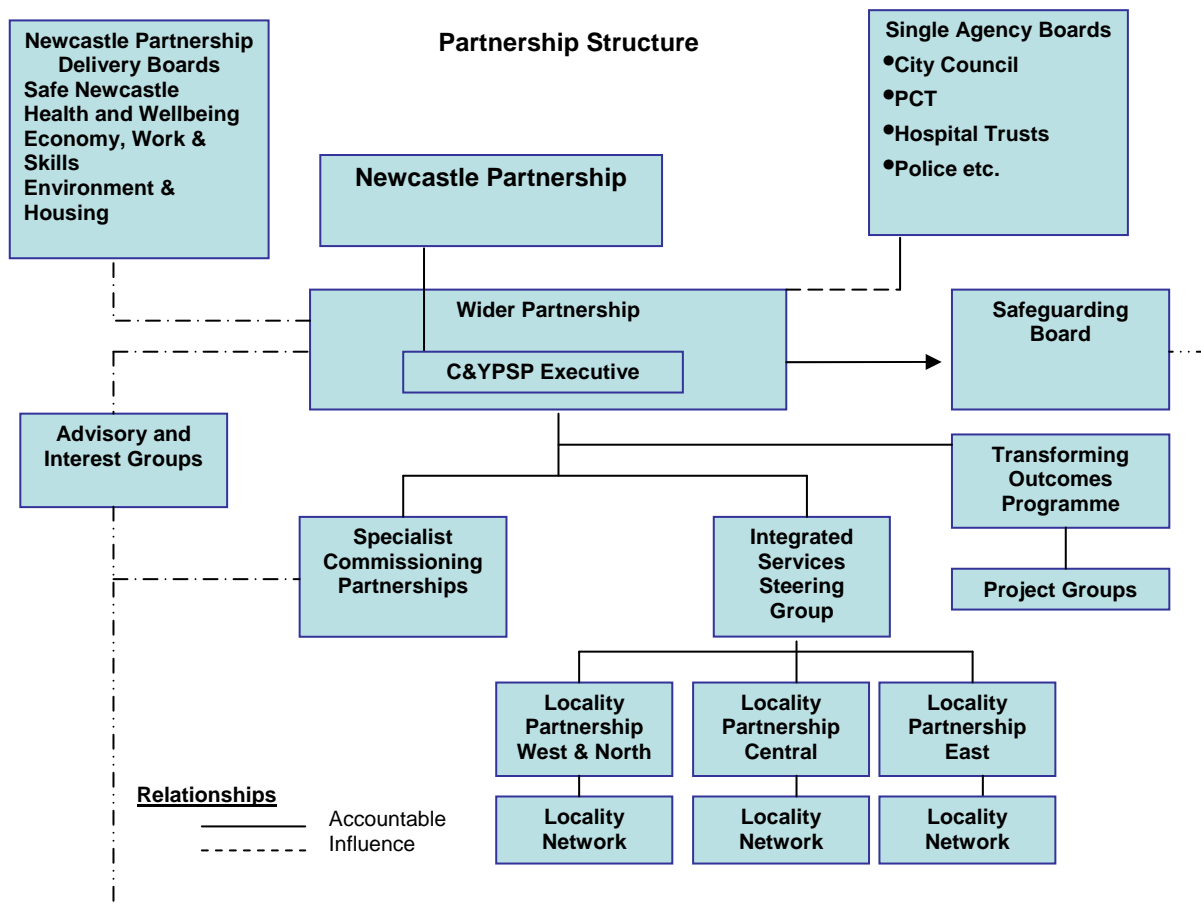
- Improve the relationship between key agencies in an area
- Improve public services by generating solutions to problems that single agencies cannot solve
- Improve the co-ordination of services across organisational boundaries and make better use of existing partner resources
- Exert greater influence nationally than their members could achieve individually
- Better structure with services focused more logically around children and families
- Identify additional opportunities for further joint working where it will benefit all or some partners

## 1.1 Definition of Partnerships and other groups

A relationship between two or more independent organisations which is based on trust, openness and honesty and where the parties are working together in a mutually agreed way to achieve agreed outcomes based on their key objectives, which they believe they cannot reasonably achieve alone.

This definition does not include any contractual relationship between organisations, the principal purpose or effect of which is the employment or engagement by the organisation of another party to provide it with goods, works or services.

Please refer to our Partnership structure below.



## 1.2 Terms of reference

Each Partnership will develop their own Terms of Reference. These should include:

- Who is involved and how will they be elected?
- How often will the partnership meet?
- Partners' roles and responsibilities
- How the partnership fits with existing arrangements
- What resources are required?
- Who will provide them?
- How the partnership will make decisions
- How will the partnership manage its finances, including who is the accountable body.

If a partnership is responsible for managing money it must adhere to the rules of the host budget holder. Any finances will be governed by the accountable body.

- How the partnership will deal with complaints and disputes – partnerships must comply with the governance agreement and sign up to the agreed complaints procedure.
- What would happen to the service and assets if the partnership was to end

For an example of a Terms of Reference please see Appendix B

It is vital for individuals working in partnership to be clear who they represent at the partnership and how they are accountable to the people they represent. This brings clarity to the organisation about who is making decisions.

If you are concerned or unhappy about any aspect of partnership working please in the first instance discuss with your partnership lead or chair. If an issue between parties cannot be resolved it can be referred formally through the governance arrangements. Please see section 5.2 of this document relating to complaints.

## **2. The Partnership’s responsibility to you (how we will work)**

Partnerships don’t work without commitment from their partners. The partnership should provide:

- The opportunity to express views and be heard
- The relevant paperwork in advance of any meetings
- The venue and arrangements for meetings are responsibilities of the partnership
- A clear description of the roles and responsibilities expected of you as a partnership member. If you are a representative from a voluntary organisation, a parent, carer or young person a copy of these documents are available at [www.newcastle.gov.uk](http://www.newcastle.gov.uk)
- A clear schedule of meetings and a forward plan of items for discussion

### **2.1 Access to training and support**

Each partnership will be different in its expectations and requirements for training and support. We expect the chair or lead of each partnership to ensure that every

partner has been given the information they require to contribute fully to the partnership.

This may include:

- A personal briefing
- Access to previous minutes and papers
- Opportunities to contribute to the partnership's development.
- Each Partnership needs identify a suitable person who will promote training within their group

If you think you may be a future leader of a partnership take the time to look at the Leadership and Management information on the Children's Services Practitioners site at the following link:

[http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/core.nsf/a/mcs\\_leadership\\_management](http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/core.nsf/a/mcs_leadership_management)

## **2.2 Where to find vision of partnerships**

The Vision of the CYPSP is in the Newcastle Plan for Children and Young People; this should be adopted by partnerships within the Children's Trust arrangements. The vision and values of the partnership will be given to partners along with their Terms of Reference on joining the partnership.

If you have access to the internet you will find further useful information on our website. [http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/core.nsf/a/mcs\\_cypsp](http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/core.nsf/a/mcs_cypsp)

## **3. You as a chair**

### **3.1 The Role of a Chair**

A chairperson must be willing and able to give time to undertaking the role. The chairperson needs to be someone with a very good understanding of the context which the partnership is working in.

#### **Key Tasks of Chair**

- Construct and agree the agenda for meetings
- Plan and keep good order in meetings

- Encourage partners' participation in, and between, meetings.
- Ensure all decisions are understood, and that necessary action is taken.
- Ensure partners receive relevant information and materials
- Ensure with the support of the Vice Chair (s) that groups reporting to the partnerships are working effectively and to terms of reference.
- Check that decisions taken by the partnership are enacted.
- Partners know the ground rules
- Ensure that partnership decisions are reported to the accountable partnership.
- Ensure the views of parents, carers, children and young people are considered by the partnership.
- Monitor the work of the partnership
- Represent the partnership for example in public meetings,

### **3.2 Checklist for chairs**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| □ Vision and Values   | □ Circulation list for minutes and papers        |
| □ Terms of Reference  | □ Reporting relationship with other partnerships |
| □ Partner Responsibilities – Job descriptions (see section 4.1) | □ Access to training support                     |
| □ Exit Strategy   |  |
| □ Minute taker in place for all meetings                        |  |

### **3.3 The Role of a Vice Chair**

#### Key Tasks:

- Support the chair in the conduct of meetings
- Check that decisions taken by the partnership are enacted
- Welcome and induct new members
- Supports the chair in ensuring groups reporting to the partnership are operating effectively.
- Be available to stand in for the chair in his/her absence.
- Listen, and be a critical friend, to the chair.

## 4. You as a partner (how you will work)

### 4.1 Roles of people in the Partnership

#### 4.1.1 Partnership Members

The partnership will only be successful if the right people are involved. This may include agencies with a statutory duty, agencies providing services, people representing parents, children, young people or members of the community.

For a partnership to be effective you need the following aspects:

- All partners must listen to one another
- Ground rules must be agreed

Members have a responsibility to contribute to the efficient working of a partnership.

Members are required to:

- Represent the views of their agency, sector or stakeholder group as appropriate;
- Report back to their agency, sector or stakeholder group as appropriate;
- Provide factual information about the role of their agency or sector and its work, or about the needs of the stakeholder group;
- Work with other partnership members to implement these governance arrangements and the shared vision set out in the Newcastle Plan for Children and Young People;
- Accept that all partners have an equal status and that our main concern is improving outcomes for children, young people and their families;
- Demonstrate commitment to the participation of parents carer, children and young people;
- Demonstrate commitment to joint working, and to act as a champion of it within their agency or sector;
- Work collaboratively to respect diversity;
- Ensure their knowledge of children's services is regularly updated;
- Scrutinise and challenge information received;

- Prepare for meetings by reading papers, attending promptly, regularly and for the full time;
- Where a partner is a member of more than one key partnership he/she will champion the needs of children and young people and act as a strong communication link between the partnerships identifying areas for collaboration and joint working.

It is essential that the members of a partnership have sufficient authority to commit their organisations to a particular course of action in order for partnerships to work. It is most effective if you plan your workloads so that you know well in advance when decisions with significant policy or financial implications will need to be made to ensure the partnership continues to move forward.

#### **4.2 Expenses**

If you work for an agency that is committed to partnership working it can be expected that the agency will cover your expenses.

Expenses for parents and carers and children and young people who are involved in service planning, design and delivery should be paid at an actual rate that reimburses the cost incurred. This includes the cost of childcare which should be provided by Registered Childcare Providers. A full list of registered childcare providers can be found by contacting the Children and Young People's information services on 0191 2774133 or by logging on to the Children and Young People's Service Directory [www.newcastle.cyp-directory.org.uk](http://www.newcastle.cyp-directory.org.uk)

A policy setting out the CYPSP's position on reward and recognition for parents and carers and children and young people who are involved in service planning, design and delivery is currently under development; see the Children's Services website for latest developments [www.newcastlechildrenservices.org.uk](http://www.newcastlechildrenservices.org.uk).

Prior to making any cash payments to parents and carers, partners should ensure that parents and carers are fully informed about the potential impact of any payments made on any benefits in payments that are made. Information to help

them make an informed decision on their level of involvement can be obtained from the Welfare Rights Service on 0191 277 2621.

#### **4.3 Joining and resigning from partnerships**

If you have been asked or elected to join the partnership please contact the lead or chair of the partnership who will discuss the protocols around joining. If you need to leave a partnership please give the chair of the partnership as much notice as possible and discuss who may attend in your place if this is relevant.

#### **4.4 What are your liabilities as a partner?**

As a partner you are bound by the Terms of Reference governing that partnership. It is important that you read these, discuss with your manager or those you are representing to ensure that you are happy with the responsibilities outlined in the agreement.

#### **4.5 Legal Liabilities in Partnership**

There is a strong commitment to partnership working in Newcastle by agencies and individuals. However, as partnerships become more popular and take on a wider role the number of officers from all partner organisations working as part of a partnership naturally increases.

This may be as a result of legislation, because their employer is committed to the partnership or because their employing organisation has some ownership of the partnership.

In all of these cases, as a result of their commitment to working in partnership, the individual may assume legal liabilities for their actions in the partnership. Newcastle City Council has developed guidance for its staff to explain these liabilities and when they can arise both when officially representing the Council and when acting in a private capacity.

This information is available at; <http://194.61.175.66/odsc.nsf/a/partnershipfaq's>

Other partners may wish to consider this document or may choose to seek independent advice from their employing organisation.

## 5. Setting up

Before the first meeting of the Partnership, risks and opportunities should be considered by the agencies proposing to enter the partnership. This will bring a sense of clarity and honesty to the partnership over the expectations and commitments of all members.

It is important to agree the purpose and kind of Partnership you intend setting up with the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership Executive (CYPSPE). The contact person for the CYPSPE is Carol Hambling, email: [carol.hambling@newcastle.gov.uk](mailto:carol.hambling@newcastle.gov.uk)

### 5.1 Risks

Risks for individual members/organisations need to be considered before entering the partnership and then discussed when the partnerships meet. If the partnership identifies a risk or a problem it cannot solve, the partnership it reports to should be informed.

Once there is agreement to the purpose of the partnership then membership can be considered. Before a partnership begins work you need to have the following aspects in place:

- Vision
- A Terms of Reference
- Ground rules for meetings in place

These need to be approved and submitted to the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSPE).

### 5.2 Planning the work of the partnership

Experience has shown that partnerships which have a clear vision of what they are trying to achieve and an action plan (written plan) of how they will achieve it are successful. At the first meeting of the partnership an action plan should be agreed which will provide a structure for the work of the partnership.

Partnerships may benefit by agreeing a Communication Plan, specifying who are the key stakeholders, what information they will need to provide and how frequently, (e.g. minutes will be circulated to partnership members within 2 weeks of meeting and placed on partnership website, agenda items must be submitted no later than 2 weeks prior to meeting etc).

A Communication Plan should also be clear who is responsible for keeping all partnership information up to date, how and where it will be stored and who can be contacted to update, amend or add to information.

### **5.3 The Review Process**

Partnerships need to agree how and when they will review the Terms of Reference and any action plans it may hold. A copy of the revised terms of reference should be sent to the C&YPSP co-ordinator for approval by the C&YPSP Executive.

The action plan should be reviewed on a regular basis (frequency decided by the partnership) to ensure that the Partnership is meeting its objectives.

The partnership should also review its performance to allow all partners to understand what has been achieved by working together. Other issues that a partnership may wish to review include:

- key risks relating to the partnership's activities
- the thoughts and feelings of children, young people, parents and carers
- How well the partnership works as one group as opposed to as a group of different agencies.

### **5.4 A calendar of major events**

Planning meetings can often be quite difficult due to people's commitments. A calendar of major events can be found on the Children's Services Website:

[http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/core.nsf/a/mcs\\_calendar](http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/core.nsf/a/mcs_calendar) .

If your Partnership would like to include events or meetings they are organising please send details to the Information and Communications Team at

[childrens.services@newcastle.gov.uk](mailto:childrens.services@newcastle.gov.uk)

## **5.5 Administrative Support**

After membership has been agreed, the chair will be responsible for agreeing and locating administrative support for minutes, circulating agendas etc.

## **6. Running a Partnership**

Every partnership needs at least one body, a board or steering group which all the partners recognise as the partnership's mechanism for making decisions. A properly structured partnership board or similar, is essential to ensure that the partnership delivers its objectives and remains accountable to the partners. It should be large enough to be inclusive, yet small enough to make decisions. If problems are encountered the decision should be referred up the partnership structure. Increasingly agencies are being asked to work in partnership resulting in capacity issues for staff who often represent their organisation on multiple partnerships.

Therefore thought needs to be given to whether an agency needs to be represented and if so what added value they are bringing. Where the added value to the partnership, or the agency they are representing, is unclear or there is none, then it is not sensible for that agency to be involved.

### **6.1 Running a meeting**

Ground rules should be set and adhered to. All members of the partnership should be able to express their opinions and be listened to.

Attendance should be recorded, as well as apologies and the minutes from the previous meeting should be approved. Partnerships should focus on what they are achieving and follow an action plan.

### **6.2 Complaints**

If the partnership receives a complaint about its actions, its people or its future plans they can be dealt with through either:

- The Children's Trust Complaints Procedure (see [Children's Services website](#))
- The partners' own complaints process

It is important that there is clarity between partners over which partner will lead on handling all complaints or specific complaints. Failure to get this right could result in the complaint not being responded to which is likely to make the situation worse. It is recommended that partnerships consider how complaints will be handled and include this process in their Terms of Reference.

The Council's complaints procedure can be accessed here ([Newcastle City Council Complaints Procedure](#)).

The partnership should also consider how it will learn from complaints, particularly if issues occur regularly. It may be appropriate to report regular issues to the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) using the partnership structure or to a level where action can be taken to resolve the problem.

### **6.3 Disputes Between Partners**

In our experience partnership working generally works well. However within partnerships, even where there is a strong sense of shared objectives, partners may still disagree over how best to achieve them. Often conflict is one way that partnerships challenge, innovate and improve their ways of working. However disputes do occur.

A robust Terms of Reference is one tool that helps to prevent these disputes arising, or escalating, by setting out in advance the expectations on each partner, the level of resource that they will contribute, and other important issues for the partnership.

The partnership needs to ensure that each partner contributes in an acceptable way, or the way they agreed to contribute. But, depending on the nature of the partnership, there is often no way of enforcing this other than through the relationships that exist between partners.

Tensions may also be caused by changes that local partners have no control over, such as national reorganisation or changing budgetary priorities. These issues should be considered by a partnership when it is considering a dispute.

However, where a dispute arises, the partnership should be clear on the process it will use to resolve the dispute including:

- Will it be left purely to partners in dispute to resolve?
- Will it go to the partnership board? Will their decision be final?
- Will it be referred to an external arbitrator? If so will their decision be binding or advisory?

If the dispute cannot be satisfactorily resolved within the partnership it should be escalated within the Children's Trust Arrangement. Dispute process in Governance Agreement Appendix 8.

#### **6.4 Safeguarding**

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is a shared responsibility and a high priority for Newcastle agencies. It is the process of protecting children from abuse or neglect, preventing impairment of their health and development, and ensuring they grow up with safe and effective care enabling them to have optimum life chances and enter adulthood successfully.

Partnerships should ensure that they are aware of and adhere to safeguarding procedures. In line with this each partnership should consider safeguarding issues in day to day work. If your partnership has an action plan, it should review this on a regular basis and escalate any difficulties within the Children's Trust Arrangement.

For further information regarding Safeguarding log on to the Local Safeguarding Children Board website <http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/lscb> for the most up to date information.

## **7. Dissolving a Partnership**

If you are considering dissolving a partnership you need to get the support of the partnership you are accountable to. CYP SPE need to be made aware of any request to dissolve commissioning partnership.

A partnership must inform the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) if they plan to dissolve the partnership. An exit strategy is essential for all partnerships and should be included in the Terms of Reference. This allows all agencies to consider what actions would be necessary to continue a service or to achieve a set of outcomes if the partnership was unable to do so, in addition to setting out how any partnership assets and finance would be disposed of.

Alternatively where the partnership will last for a specified time period, early consideration of how the partnership's work will be sustained in the future, and how any resources will be shared and used by the partners, can also help to avoid any future confusion and a legacy of problems.

A partnership should be concluded if the partnership has delivered its objectives and if there is no additional work for it to undertake. If there is any additional work to undertake this may constitute a change in the partnership and you should refer to the changing your partnership guidance above.

If the partnership's job is done it should:

- Thank all contributors for their hard work, time, resources and effort
- Undertake a lessons learned workshop and where appropriate celebrate what partners have achieved
- Refer to the Terms of Reference which should establish how any existing assets will be shared or disposed of

## **Appendix A Terms of Reference example**

All partnerships should consider the following headings in their Terms of Reference. They should only include the sections relevant to them.

### **1. Purpose**

To improve the well-being of all the children and young people who are born, raised, educated or find work within the city, by working together to achieve the five outcomes which matter most to children, young people and their families:

- Being healthy
- Staying Safe
- Enjoying and Achieving
- Making a positive contribution
- Economic well-being

### **2. Function**

What the partnership will do.

### **3. Partnership Membership**

List the members, titles and the organisations they represent and how they became members (e.g. Election) and the length of time they will serve.

### **4. Quorum**

How many people need to be present to make decisions?

### **5. Chair**

Who will be the Chair/Vice Chair? How long will they serve in their roles? It would be advantageous to have a chair and vice chair from different organisations.

### **6. Budget**

Because financial management is a key part of good governance, decisions should not be made in the absence of budget information.

## **7. Expectation of chair and board members**

What are the “ground rules” for the partnership?

## **8. Probity and declaration of interest**

The Nolan principles of public life will apply. Do the members need to declare any interests?

## **9. Decision Making**

How will decisions be reached? How will the partnership ensure all stakeholders have had an opportunity to contribute to the debate, particularly Parents, Carers, Children and Young People? How will disputes/complaints be dealt with?

## **10. Key Relationships and Accountabilities**

Who will the partnership report to? Which groups, (if any) will report to the partnership? How will the partnership communicate with other groups?

## **11. Delegation**

If the partnership is going to delegate powers how will this be managed?

## **12. Review**

## **13. Management and Administration**

What arrangements will the partnership make to administer meetings and manage its work?

## **14. Signatures**