

**REPORT TO:** Resources and Governance Overview and Scrutiny Committee

**DATE:** 13<sup>th</sup> November 2008

**SUBJECT:** Partnership Communications

**REPORT OF:** Chief Executive

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**PURPOSE OF REPORT:**

To invite the Committee to comment on proposals by the Manchester Partnership to improve partnership communications.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

That the Committee's views on this matter be passed to the Public Service Board for consideration.

**FINANCIAL CONSEQUENCES FOR THE REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGETS:**

None

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**BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:**

None

**WARDS AFFECTED:**

ALL

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Improving partnerships Communications is one of their priorities for strengthening partnership working identified within the new Local Area Agreement (LAA) The Committee has asked for a report on proposals for this priority.
- 1.2 This paper sets out proposals formulated by the Public Service Board (PSB) and endorsed by the Manchester Board on 21<sup>st</sup> October. The Committee's views will be fed back to the Public Service Board (PSB) for consideration.
- 1.3 The Community Strategy expresses the priorities of the Council. It is agreed by all of the main public services in the City. The better we are at partnership communications the more we will have common understanding and purpose across all partners to enable the delivery of the better outcomes for Manchester people set out in the Committee Strategy.

## **2. Recent progress in improving communications through partnerships**

- 2.1 The city's first Community Strategy led to strong bilateral communications within individual partnerships based on seven themes. Since the new Community Strategy was agreed in 2006, it has been possible to communicate stronger overarching messages based on the spines as an integrated system of improvement for the city. The development of the LAA last year has developed a stronger narrative about Manchester and what we are trying to achieve as a city. The LAA also provides the basis for cross cutting messages about the delivery mechanisms for the Community Strategy.
- 2.2 Also, over the last two years we have restructured the partnership to create stronger accountability within partnerships with an executive/non-executive split between the Manchester Board and the PSB; with more performance focused delivery Boards at thematic partnership level; with each Board including the relevant Executive Member of the Council; and with alignment of the core thematic partnerships to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committees. Finally, the new LAA provides clarity of accountabilities for specific targets to achieve the Community Strategy backed by a statutory duty for partners to have regard to the targets in their mainstream functions. There is therefore a strong basis from which we can improve partnership communications.

## **3. Improving communications with Manchester people and communities**

- 3.1 Joint working on communications can create greater capacity to listen to and communicate with Manchester people and connect the intelligence which public sector organisations have about Manchester residents.
- 3.2 A new annual 'Place Survey' will produce performance results for the perception-based LAA targets. This will be combined with data from the LAA to feed into the State of the City and State of the Wards reports. In future years it should be possible to combine

customer information with demographic information to give a more focussed picture of different types of residents. The Council is developing a Corporate information Strategy to move in this direction and this will be shared with other partners.

- 3.3 Feedback from surveys and other quantitative information needs to be mixed with soft feedback from direct engagement of residents and communities. During the year ahead it is proposed to review the existing Manchester Partnership Community Engagement Strategy.
- 3.4 Whilst the State of the Wards reports provide a spatial dimension, they do not focus on communities of interest. This year, we will attempt to produce State of the City reports, which cover race, disability, gender age, and sexual orientation.

#### **4. Increasing the transparency of partnership working**

- 4.1 By making the business of partnerships as transparent as possible, we can assist members of the Council in holding partnerships to account. Alignment of the core thematic partnerships to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committees is a key to this. The partnership recognises that it could do more to communicate how our partnerships work. Whilst the Manchester Partnership is tackling difficult issues in a complex city and this leads to some complexity in partnerships arrangements, it will still be possible to communicate in simple, straightforward and succinct ways what actions have been taken across the Manchester Partnership. This would further strength transparency and therefore accountability.
- 4.2 It should also be possible to do more to make Members of the Council and, where necessary the public, aware of improvements in the City which result from partnership working. This is not about promoting the Manchester Partnership. The individual accountability of partner agencies should not be obscured by partnerships, but there is room to do more to explain how partnerships contribute to delivery.
- 4.3 A priority going forward is therefore to do more to communicate partnership working at a neighbourhood level to Councillors through Ward Co-ordination. It is proposed to consider ways of doing this and to bring back suggested improvements later in the year.

#### **5. Communication to influence behaviour**

- 5.1 A two way process of clear and consistent communication between the partnership and the communities of Manchester is key to many of the Community Strategy's objectives, those that seek to influence the attitudes and behaviours of residents and to enable communities to communicate back to influence organisational behaviour.
- 5.2 Recent work by the PSB with the Royal Society for the Arts (RSA) on changing norms and behaviour suggests that there are ways of communicating to achieve behaviour change. There is an emerging set of communication skills in relation to behaviour change which seems very relevant to the objectives of the Community Strategy and which we will take further in discussion with the RSA.

#### **6. Strengthening communication and within partnerships**

- 6.1 The increasing fragmentation of delivery arrangements for public services means that consistent and coherent communication through partnerships becomes ever more important. A set of materials has been produced to support communication of the Community Strategy and LAA to staff. These will be submitted to partners so they can be tailored and used within mainstream communication programmes within services.
- 6.2 The Council is in the process of appointing to a new post of Director of Communications. This creates an opportunity to create a stronger framework of common messages and styles of communication within the Council's partnerships and strong coordination across press and communication officers.
- 6.3 Strong communication at strategic, management and frontline/operational levels across the partnership and public services is critical to success in many areas e.g. safeguarding children and, tackling crime and disorder. The recent launch of the revised Crime and Disorder Strategy was an example of how to communicate a powerful sense of shared purpose to both staff from all partners and to the public.

## **7. Proposals**

- 7.1 The Manchester Board have endorsed a proposal to strengthen the partnership's capacity in communications by establishing a Partnership Communications Working Group. This will be led by the Council's Director of Communications (when appointed) and consist of appropriate representation from the organisations that make up the partnership
- 7.2 The priorities to be considered by the Communication's Group will be:-
- Further improving State of the City reporting including reports for communities of interests.
  - Reviewing the Partnership's Community Engagement strategy
  - Improving communication of partnership business to elected Members of the Council, particularly through Ward Coordination.
  - Working with RSA on methods of communication to support behaviour change.
  - Distributing communication materials explaining the Community Strategy and LAA for use in partners' mainstream communication processes.
- 7.3 As part of the development of this communications plan a series of measures to monitor whether we are achieving better communications will be proposed