

# Biddulph Town Council



## PARTNERSHIPS PROTOCOL

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## INTRODUCTION

Biddulph Town Council recognises the strength and value of effective partnerships in contributing to the improvement of communities and meeting its strategic priorities.

As a Council we recognise:

- There are issues to be addressed in Biddulph which require resolution and which we cannot, and should not, undertake on our own. We need, therefore to work positively and constructively in partnership with other organisations;
- That Biddulph Town Council is one of three tiers of local government, with a diversity of partner authorities and other local bodies. We have overlapping roles and responsibilities and we need to establish greater clarity regarding our approach to these roles and responsibilities for the benefit of our communities.

It is important to understand the distinction between what many normally refer to as partnership working and a formally constituted legal partnership. This document talks about the former.

## DEFINITION OF A PARTNERSHIP

The word 'partnership' is used with increasing frequency across all sectors. It can mean different things to different groups.

Biddulph Town Council defines a partnership as:

- An arrangement involving the Council and one or more other organisations, from any sector, who share the responsibility for agreeing and then delivering a set of actions and outcomes which improve the economic and/or social well-being of people living in, working in, or visiting Biddulph.

Biddulph Town Council does not define as a partnership:

- An arrangement made by the Council with a third party to deliver one or more services on its behalf. This is a contract for services. The Council is defined as the procurer/commissioner of the service and the third party as the contracted provider of that service.
- Forums or groups of elected Councillors and/or officers from local authorities and others who come together to discuss forthcoming issues, policy and strategy.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Council encourages partnership working whenever appropriate. We believe partnerships are necessary when:

- Government requires them (e.g. crime and disorder partnerships)
- External funders require them in order to deliver funding streams
- Communities identify priorities for the improvement of well-being and no one organisation on its own has responsibility for delivery
- The Council does not possess the capacity, the knowledge or expertise on its own to deliver new services or service improvements
- Better value would be derived from delivering services in conjunction with others

We believe that partnerships can:

- Give critical mass through strength in negotiation, greater influence and better access to funding
- Achieve outputs greater than the sum of the individual partners by sharing knowledge, finding new ways of working and pooling resources
- Enhance local democracy by actively involving communities, businesses and the voluntary sector

Partnerships should, ultimately, improve the quality of services being provided to Biddulph residents. They should enable organisations to achieve outcomes for communities that individual agencies could not achieve alone. There are a number of ways they can help to do this, including:

- improving service delivery through better coordination especially where services are provided by a range of organisations;
- facilitating and increasing community engagement through improved information, consultation and participation;
- helping to ensure that services are developed in alignment with customers' needs;
- stimulating more creative approaches to problems by bringing together people with different backgrounds, skills and assumptions, and sharing risks and rewards more widely;
- wielding greater influence than individual partners could achieve, thus enhancing the impact on other parties;
- reducing waste and/or duplication, pooling resources (e.g. buildings, information) and improving economies of scale;
- gaining access to new resources;
- meeting statutory or structural requirements;
- providing opportunities for learning from people in different organisations and with different perspectives.

## WHEN IS PARTNERSHIP WORKING APPROPRIATE?

Partnership arrangements are appropriate when they have the potential to deliver:

- Added Value – delivering something that is unlikely to be achieved by another form of working arrangement
- Value for Money – when available resources are used economically
- Good Governance – they are consistent and well-managed.

All partnerships, existing and new, must demonstrate how Council participation will improve outcomes for the communities of Biddulph.

The Council will only join a partnership if it can resource the investment (of time, assets, knowledge and money) required to effectively do so. With some groups it can be difficult to assess how the Council can contribute or how the group's work supports any of the Council priorities. The Council may have been

invited out of courtesy, to bring credibility to the group or to get immediate feedback should any relevant matter ever be raised. Where this is the case, the Council may have limited involvement, but will be keen to receive updates.

## MANAGING PARTNERSHIPS

The status of any partnership should be clear. A partnership “agreement” or “Terms of Reference” is required to define how Partners will work together.

The different roles that the Council can play in partnerships need to be understood. Which role it plays can have a significant impact on the responsibilities and liabilities of the Council.

The responsibilities of all Partners should be clarified and be in the agreement. These can include health and safety, community safety, equality, or other statutory responsibilities. While the partnership may not be bound by statutory duties in these areas, the Council must ensure that it fulfils its statutory duties in its work through the partnership.

Biddulph Town Council will:

- Act in accordance with Biddulph Town Council’s Financial Regulations
- Focus on long term as well as short term issues
- Act in the interests of the public good over individual interests
- Demonstrate to the community how we are achieving publicly valued outcomes
- Agree a protocol for the handling of complaints that relates to our joint work

Before entering into any partnership the Council will give consideration to its ability to contribute effectively to the partnership. The Council will not enter into any new partnership where it considers it cannot fully and effectively contribute to its success.

The Council will be mindful of the resource implications, particularly for staff, finance and operational assets, existing commitments, and its corporate priorities in taking decisions on new partnerships and in extending existing partnerships.

Risks should be understood and evaluated at all stages of partnership development. In considering risks, these could be viewed in two timeframes:

At the point of deciding whether to enter into a partnership, the risks to the Council should be considered. When the decision to enter into a partnership has been made, if the Council is the lead body, the Council will ensure that the governance arrangements of the partnership include effective management of risk. If the Council is not the lead agency, the representatives should seek to ensure that minimum standards of risk management are in place, and that the representatives understand the level of risk attached to the Council's involvement.

To manage partnership effectively, Biddulph Town Council will:

- Ensure that partners can influence the decision making of member organisations
- Allow sufficient time and capacity to be given to understand an issue and to reflect on its impact
- Make sure that actions taken by the partnership are clear, time-limited and task-orientated
- Actively promote a 'no-blame' culture
- Encourage all partners to actively shape the strategy
- Ensure that agreed actions are carried out
- Agree a mechanism for whistleblowing and dealing with complaints
- Ensure whistleblowers are supported
- Support partners to both understand and constructively challenge any poor behaviour
- Use appropriate, unambiguous and simple language
- Ensure that our dialogue is open and transparent
- Declare conflicts of interest and address them
- Make sure that the purpose of all meetings is made clear
- Be honest and objective

## ROLES OF COUNCILLORS AND OFFICERS

The Council will be represented on any agreed partnership by specified Councillors or officers.

Any specified officers or Councillors attending approved partnerships will represent only the Council and no other organisation, unless by specific agreement. They shall abide by their respective Council Codes of Conduct at all times.

Biddulph Town Council makes the following commitments. To:

- share resources to achieve joint outcomes;
- monitor how well we have used our resources;
- actively encourage ideas and innovation;
- ensure that decision making is transparent;
- be committed to continuous improvement;
- ensure that claims of improved performance are based on clear evidence;
- establish accountability both across the partnership (horizontally) and within each organisation (vertically).

Councillors and Officers will:

- Ensure that all partners contribute appropriately and openly
- Acknowledge the capabilities of all members
- Recognise and embrace the role of voluntary and community sector partners
- Avoid dominance by one or two individuals
- Respect each other's roles and needs
- Actively encourage the participation of all partnership members
- Build effective working relationships with each other
- Recognise the value of all partners' contributions

## EQUALITIES AND DATA PROTECTION

The Council must ensure that the partnership has in place arrangements for completing Equalities Impact Assessments on its functions, policies and services.

The Council's Data Protection Policy will apply where Council business is concerned. The Council will seek to secure an Information Sharing Agreement within a partnership and between partnership organisations, where appropriate.