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partnering and
multi-agency working

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why collaborate?

By working together, public service organisations can deliver value and outcomes that would be difficult or impossible to deliver working individually. The basis of collaborative advantage is the synergy generated by combining resources, expertise and ideas from different agencies and authorities.

The objectives of this paper are:

- to explore the changing environment in which local authorities collaborate and form partnerships – at local, regional and national level
- to feature some successful partnerships in depth, with examples of benefits for residents and citizens
- to promote learning from recent examples of partnership working – including challenges and best practices

national context

Collaborative and multi-agency working is a growing element of central government and central body thinking. Public policy has moved from the initial emphasis on the 'modernisation agenda' (service improvement and building corporate capacity in individual organisations) to joint working to deliver efficiency and a more holistic view of outcomes for citizens. The potential of collaborative working to achieve these aims is increasingly key.

'Greater collaborative working is a vital step to transforming local services. A literature review and case study analysis by OPM found that '...cross sector working is a critical lever in the efficiency agenda. It can enable organisations to reduce financial burdens, produce more efficient methods of working, and share costs across cost centres...The general view is that accruing efficiencies out of partnerships is the next phase of the agenda'

CLG, Delivering Value for Money in Local Government: Meeting the challenge of CSR07, 2007

Encouraging local partnership working is a longstanding aim of government policy, from the introduction of Local Strategic Partnerships to the development of Local Area Agreements. The implementation of 'second-generation' LAAs, backed by the Duty to Cooperate, aims to intensify joint working in local areas.

The introduction of Multi-Area Agreements (MAAs) is also a step towards promoting collaboration beyond the local level. These bring together relevant partners in a recognised area, such as multiple local authorities at a sub-regional level, to focus on particular priorities. An example of the collaborative joint working that is happening at a sub-regional level is the Joint Borough Central Unit for the 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games, set up by the London Boroughs of Greenwich, Hackney, Newham, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest. The Joint Unit has been established to help ensure that London meets its commitments in hosting the Olympic

Games, but also to ensure that the London Boroughs collaborate effectively to maximise the opportunities that arise from the games and achieve a lasting legacy for the East London region.

Meanwhile, the development of regional institutions looks set to support greater collaboration and partnership. The National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy, published jointly by CLG and the LGA, establishes collaboration as the future of local public service delivery. Its first principle states the case:

‘Addressing the challenges of improving the quality of life in places and delivering better value for money and public services under CSR07 will require a new approach to... delivery, that sees councils continuing to lead their communities by effective partnership working, increasingly working across boundaries in collaboration with other councils and partnerships to deliver better, more efficient services’

CLG/LGA, National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy, 2008

So the drivers for collaborative working are clear but evolving. Central direction – through e-government targets or sponsorship for pilot projects, for example – has lessened, in line with the government and LGA’s aim of greater local responsibility and accountability. As examples below demonstrate, this has proven a challenge to many partnerships, who find themselves needing to redevelop a sense of ownership and purpose, and establish future funding streams.

In parallel with the government’s aim of increasing localism, expectations of authorities are also increasing. The Comprehensive Area Assessment (although still in development) is likely to increase the pressure on authorities to improve services – albeit based on outcomes of public services, rather than the outputs challenged by CPA. The other key pressure is on resources.

The Comprehensive Spending Review for 2008 to 2011 increases the pressure on public services to achieve more from the resources available. CAA will reflect this... It will also look at how well organisations are working with their partners to share resources where that improves efficiency and effectiveness.

Audit Commission and partners, Comprehensive Area Assessment joint consultation, 2007

Potential catalysts of collaboration are emerging – particularly the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships, growing out of the Regional Improvement Partnerships and Regional Centres of Excellence. Beyond disseminating improvement support and funding, the RIEPs and Chief Executives’ Task Force may give authorities better opportunities to develop regional and sub-regional solutions to improvement or efficiency challenges, and even actively challenge local underperformance:

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'RIEPs will need to play a critical role in supporting authorities in difficulty. Where authorities are facing improvement challenges, the RIEP will be actively involved, both at the officer and member level, in providing, brokering and coordinating support to meet LAA targets and tackle any areas of underperformance.'

CLG/LGA, National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy, 2008

However, the RIEPs are developing institutions whose capacity to challenge, intervene, or encourage and support collaborative work is not yet clear. With resources, the regional institutions can easily broker extra support and capacity for struggling authorities. But resources are limited, so new opportunities, tools and mechanisms need to be found. The challenge to local government, is to grasp the opportunity of collaborative working at regional and sub-regional level, and deliver on its early promise.

local success and benefits

Across the country collaborative working has delivered service benefits and efficiency savings to many authorities, adding capacity and saving resources. There are few authorities not involved in either shared services, multi-agency projects, or sub-regional partnerships.



Warwickshire Direct Partnership (WDP)

Maturing partnerships have started to deliver in many areas. The Warwickshire Direct Partnership (WDP), has started to add value to service delivery through integrating processes: for example, the maintenance of street lights is now handled end-to-end through the partnership's CRM system for all six partners. Beyond providing a simple system for handling any queries, customers can report an issue from anywhere in Warwickshire, via any access channel.

Warwickshire Direct Partnership (WDP)

Established in 2003, WDP has developed effective joint working in a two-tier county, and made significant savings through joint procurement. Increasing shared service delivery and efficiencies are driven by a small programme office, a transparent governance model, and committed, open relationships.

Stable, 'steady-state' working (and increasingly mature relationships) has allowed partnerships to expand and develop services. Northumbria 101 has 'been a catalyst to shared services among partners – in terms of letting them see what's possible', according to project manager Peter Coates. Successful delivery allowed the partnership to add and extend service functions, providing a full service to fire and rescue authorities and coastguard.

Achievements over the last year have demonstrated the potential for collaboration. For example, through a regular analysis of incoming calls, the partnership has built-up business intelligence on the services customers need. High volumes of calls were signposted on to the region's Environment Agency. Bringing the Agency in as a partner has improved the service to customers.

The service has also improved handling of a range of welfare and protection areas, such as child protection issues, reports of missing persons, and welfare concerns such as domestic violence. Callers were previously merely signposted to the appropriate organisation, subsequently losing contact with public services.

The partnership drew up a business case, laying out the collaborative advantage for partners of changing how calls are handled. Now Northumbria 101 takes full details of any report or service request, and passes on the service request – ensuring the citizen cannot 'fall between the gaps' of service provision. The case is logged and cannot be lost.

The Northumbria 101 single non-emergency line went live in 2006 but in November 2007 the Government announced that funding would stop and

the Northumbria Partnership came to an end on the 31st March 2008.

However, in the light of the benefits of collaborative working, Sunderland and Newcastle city councils have decided to take over its infrastructure and turn it into a council hot-line for residents in both cities. It will be still be a 24 hour line and is planned to go live at the beginning of April. The service, which has yet to officially get a new name or number, will be for problems and issues that need a local authority and not a police response.

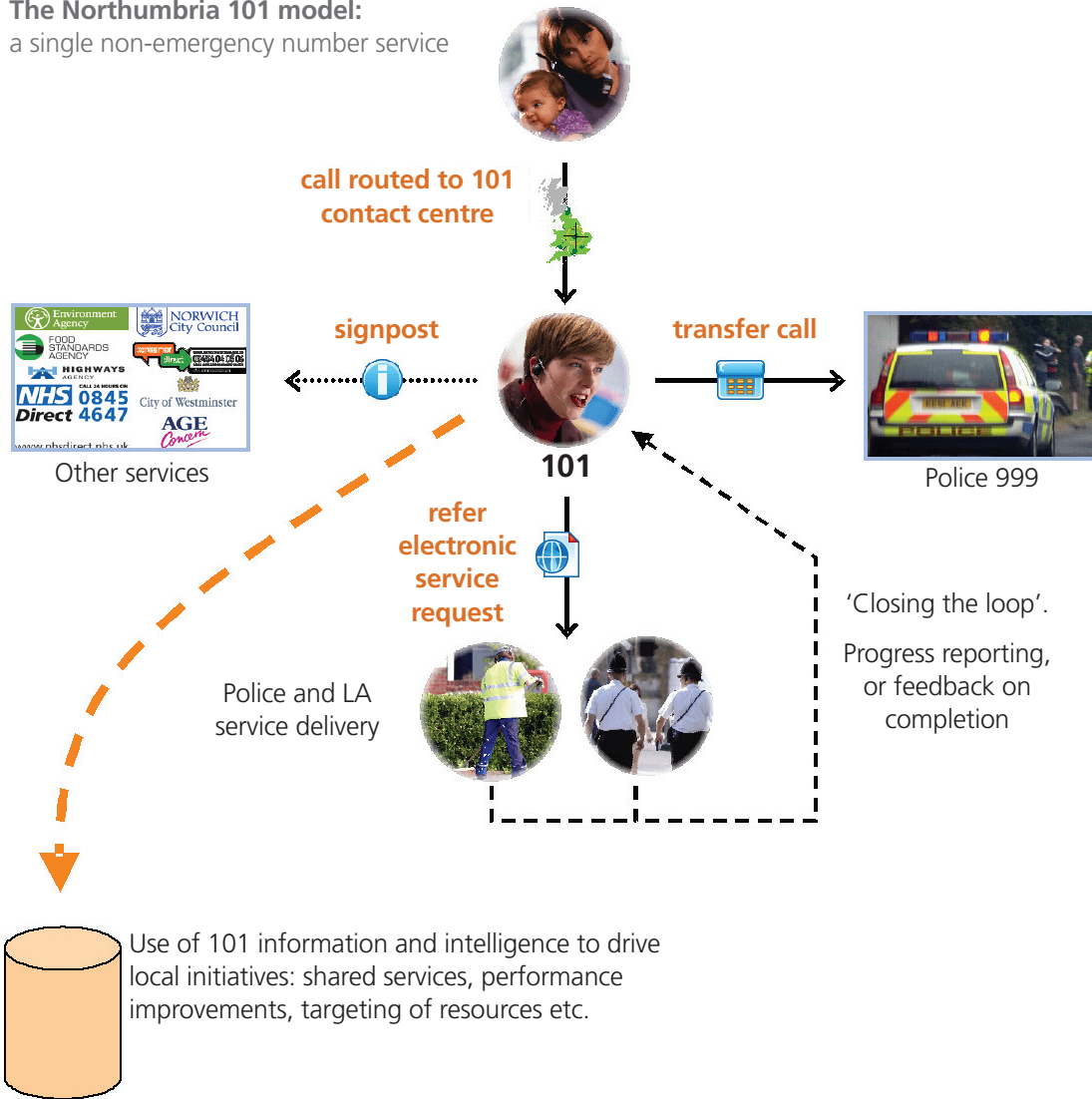
As drivers for collaboration change, partnerships have been challenged to lead and champion shared services and collaboration. London Connects has had real success in cultivating the development of shared services. By issuing an Invitation to Share Services in September 2007, London Connects established which projects authorities in London will prioritise, fund and ensure succeed. The projects are then developed on a 'pay-as-you-go' basis – guaranteeing the commitment of all partners involved.

Collaboration and partnership has delivered efficiency and cost savings in many areas. The Northumbria 101 approach has been to deal more effectively with non-emergencies before they become emergencies.

Collaboration between police and local authorities through the service meant that 350 illegal bonfires were removed before being lit in November 2007. At an average saving of £2,000 per bonfire, the fire and rescue authority saved some £700,000 in a single weekend. Even more importantly, collaborative work, led by business intelligence on upcoming issues, meant public safety was significantly enhanced - the financial measure should

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The Northumbria 101 model:
a single non-emergency number service



not obscure the social value of protecting the community and constituents from the potential effects of 350 illegal bonfires.

barriers and challenges

Despite successes, those leading collaborative projects are clear on the challenges they face. Pulling together disparate organisations, with different cultures, behaviours, processes and performance will never be easy! Over the last year partnerships have faced other specific barriers.

Some traditional behaviours, such as building and protecting empires, impedes collaboration. Instead, councils need to realise that by sharing some resources and giving up some power, they stand to gain rewards which would otherwise be unobtainable working alone. Strong leadership from the top and a commitment to a compelling vision is essential.

Historical local rivalries can also inhibit the instigation of successful partnerships. Reaching out and building a bedrock of rapport and trust between partners is essential, and an open and honest (and time-boxed) appraisal of past successes and failures can be helpful.

A look at successful partnership in the past illustrates how often success results from the special efforts of one or two individuals, often acting in response to specific local circumstances. Officers need to advocate and champion change, network and connect with colleagues. Collaboration depends on vision, focus, project management, and communication.

The changing nature of power and governance is a big external challenge. As central government prescription retreats, greater local and regional leadership is necessary. But waiting for the external environment to be completely clear and stable is not an option. As mentioned above, partnerships need to encourage and develop local leadership of shared services and collaborative working to succeed.

Funding is a major issue. Relatively sudden changes to funding arrangements have disrupted a range of projects: for example, funding for Single Non-Emergency Number projects by the Home Office will end in March 2008. However, this was announced in November 2007, when the budget-setting processes of councils and local partners were well underway and therefore too late to address the projected shortfall.

Direct funding by partners can increase ownership, benefiting partnerships – but must be based on a solid business case. Local partners all need their own internal business case for involvement. Winning the argument for collaboration can be slow and arduous, so partnerships need to demonstrate benefits and support champions in partner organisations. ‘Quick wins’ which over time contribute to an overall outcome can help.

Local authorities do not always immediately consider partnering with external bodies as a way of solving problems. Regional and sub-regional institutions will help, supporting local motivators like sharing information and pooling scarce resources. But collaborative working still needs to be driven from the ground up, especially as central prescription and sponsorship retreats.

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good practices

The governance and operation of partnerships should reflect local need and desired outcomes. Participants in collaboration should also recognise that perfectly balanced funding or governance arrangements are not always feasible. Indeed, the relative contributions to partnerships do not need to be equal or proportional to the rewards for the partnership to succeed.

The Warwickshire Direct Partnership (WDP) has applied a transparent governance model, based on the principle of one-member-one-vote. Such parity between partners encourages a sense of shared ownership and participation. That said, partners who invest energy and are actively engaged with the partnership are more likely to shape the outcome.

Thanks to a mature partnership approach, with the benefits of collaboration well understood and shared by partners, WDP take decisions through a straightforward vote. Decisions are normally unanimous, although majority votes have been necessary on occasions. This approach prevents competitiveness or larger partners dominating, and encourages open communications – WDP's Programme Manager, Tony Isaacs, describes the partnership as

'able to talk through issues and compromise in the way successful and effective partners do by focusing on the key aims.'

London Connects' Invitation to Share Services has given partners a clear ownership of all projects going forward. The pay-as-you-go model, with partners within the 33 London boroughs opting in or out, means that projects have the full commitment of all involved. Such a broad base of partners means that separate clusters of authorities emerge, ready to go forward with different projects.

Successful projects can also use their joint business intelligence to expand and develop their services. Northumbria 101 and the regional Environment Agency have joint-funded work on fly-tipping, with access to all relevant service requests – whether to local authorities, police, or other public services.

Northumbria 101 has also exploited the opportunities of collaboration to develop and transform individual partners. Joint training, job swaps, and 'dress rehearsals' (simulating calls for performance development, run by one partner for another) are all part of a culture of exposing organisations to each other, at levels from operational frontline to senior executive level. Challenging perceptions (particularly self-perceptions), behaviours and performance is invaluable.

Partnerships such as Northumbria 101 demonstrate that collaborative working can be quickly established when you have the right individuals engaged, buy-in from all partners, and an effective approach to project management. This is based on PRINCE2 but intelligently applied given local circumstances.

London Connects

London Connects supports London's public services through collaborative use of technology, serving all 33 boroughs and many other public services. With 10 employees, LC agrees projects with partners, sets up work, and hands over to a lead organisation or partnership board.

Successful outcomes are achieved as partnerships mature, through the development of individuals, relationships, and systems. A dedicated programme office has been an essential component of all the partnerships researched for this study – facilitating relationships and ensuring stakeholders are engaged.

Partners within the Warwickshire Direct Partnership fund the Programme Office through equal contributions. No one authority can therefore claim to have more influence over what the Programme Office does. A programme of work is agreed by all partners at the highest level and a lead partner designated for each project. The Programme Office is responsible for co-ordinating the implementation of the whole programme.

When structures are established for performance management, governance, communications and training upfront, stakeholders need less 'management' and programme offices can be streamlined.

conclusion and recommendations

Collaboration and partnership working is delivering benefits across the country, with few authorities working in isolation. However, most of the journey is still ahead of us. Examples of real collaboration, enhancing service delivery and performance, and driving efficient working, are readily available, and national, regional and local policies and priorities are responding to these changes as well as challenging how we think. For example, the Local Government Act published in the autumn of 2006 stressed the need for LAs to take a strategic commissioning role in designing local services with their local partners.

Change is not easy, particularly as resources grow tighter. Partnerships can be established rapidly, but true collaboration takes time as relationships develop. Authorities need to be aware of the investment partnership working entails. They may look to 'piggyback' on existing partnerships, and use relationships that currently exist.

Establishing structures and processes that are 'fit-for-purpose' requires attention. Some partnerships establish a programme office which identifies and specifies projects, and then hands day-to-day running over to a lead partner. This builds commitment, provides a 'test' of relationships and practise, and minimises central running costs.

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As belts tighten, articulating the business case for collaboration will become even more important. Partners will need to build an internal case for involvement, which can be complex and challenging. Partner organisations should plan to share this effort, and draw on as much support as possible – from the programme office, RIEP, or other existing partnerships.

When considering the business case, authorities need to take care that short-term concerns do not override long-term benefits. As stated above, collaboration is not instant. Delivering improved or different services will take time – organisations need to build a culture of partnership working to achieve this.

Sharing resources and effort, open communication and ‘visible compromise’, joint training and working will all help develop a collaborative culture. Be prepared to chip in with other partners – for example, feeding into the appraisal processes of partner organisations for employees working across organisational boundaries. Equally, Programme Offices can provide valuable support to individual councils in helping them generate or interpret the business case for partnership within their own organisation.

Partnerships are built on trust. Partners must be prepared to be open, at all levels. Finding opportunities to work together, challenge each others’ practice and performance, and communicate day-by-day, drives collaborative success and can be transformational for individual partners.

Central and regional level working must be built with these considerations in mind. CAA will have a rigorous base in risk management but must not prevent or discourage collaborative work, which inherently carries risk. Partnerships must be

given time to develop – although partners should demonstrate their commitment to the venture from day one.

We envisage that, as collaborative working rises in prominence as a way of delivering efficiency, service quality and community outcomes, credit and status will be gained by those officers most able to work collaboratively, and formal performance appraisal systems need to recognise this (just as CAA will). The ability to network, influence and build relationships across organisational boundaries will become an increasingly important attribute for successful senior managers.

Collaborative service delivery also has implications for the workforce. Authorities need to consider the changing requirements of their staff, and the skills officers and members need to meet these changing demands. New approaches to motivating and rewarding staff will also need to emerge. For further information of this topic, see the paper ‘*Workforce Transformation*’, also published in this series at www.idea.gov.uk/foss

Below is a summary of key points and tips for successful collaborative working:

- be aware of the investment partnership working entails – successful collaboration takes time as relationships develop. Building a joint vision is essential, sharing aspirations and expectations, and agreeing how you will work together are all prerequisites of good partnership working
- look at the partnerships you have – can you build on or develop them further? Can you build new partnerships from existing relationships?
- be clear on the rationale and drivers for collaboration. Articulating the value that a collaboration is seeking to deliver, culminating in a brief outline business case which parties agree on, helps participants to focus
- sharing resources and effort, open communication and **'visible compromise'**, joint training and working will all help develop a collaborative culture
- partnerships are built on trust. Partners must be prepared to be open, at all levels
- reward those managers most adept at building collaborative relationships across organisational boundaries – and make sure they have opportunities to make links and develop networks
- consider the skills and behaviours that staff need to demonstrate in support of collaborative service delivery
- be flexible when specifying and managing projects as a partnership. Keep individual partners onboard sub-projects only when it is necessary or desirable.

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further information

Warwickshire Direct Partnership
www.thewdp.org.uk/

Northumbria 101
[www.northumbria101.gov.uk/
default.asp](http://www.northumbria101.gov.uk/default.asp)

London Connects
www.londonconnects.gov.uk/



The Local Government Association is the national voice for more than 500 local authorities in England and Wales. The LGA group comprises the LGA and four partner organisations which work together to support, promote and improve local government.



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