

National Assembly for Wales

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

CELG(4) LGC 02

Inquiry into Progress with local government collaboration

Response from : Bridgend County Borough Council

Committee Clerk

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

National Assembly for Wales

Cardiff Bay

CF99 1NA

By email

28th August 2013

Inquiry into the progress with local government collaboration

Thank you for your letter dated the 26th July offering a range of stakeholders the opportunity to submit their views and experiences of local government collaboration.

For ease of reference our response has been structured around the Committee's terms of reference and paragraphs have been numbered as requested.

1.0 Context and extent WG collaboration agenda has been taken forward

- 1.1 Bridgend County Borough Council has a longstanding reputation as one which engages positively with other agencies in the planning and delivery of services. The collaboration agenda has been pro-actively taken forward by the Council with a range of agencies and across a variety of geographies. The Council is clear that successful collaboration is not based on structures and a rigid footprint but identifying the best possible partners in terms of the outcomes being sought.
- 1.2 The Council is very comfortable working across a range of geographies. There are some priorities, for example adult social care, where we have close links with Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board and have been working within its boundaries. There are others, including education and transport, where we have a long history of working with the South East. We have not found this to be an issue. In fact, this flexibility has allowed us to develop collaborative arrangements based on the needs of our citizens, which have led to improved delivery of services locally.
- 1.3 In the context of the national agenda the Council is currently engaged in a range of collaborative activities at a national, regional and local level, including:

- Local Service Board: with our local partners including the LHB, the police and fire and rescue services the voluntary sector and the FE college. An example here includes the creation of a multi-agency co-located service (Connecting Families) to work with high cost and complex families. This continues to receive a lot of positive national press with evidence of improved outcomes and reduced costs for public services.
- National projects: such as the establishment of a National Procurement Service for Wales.
- WLGA Regional Boards: this Council is a member of both the South East (10 councils) and South West boards (6 councils)
- Western Bay Partnership
- South Wales Central Consortium: regional school improvement project
- South East Wales Transport Alliance: an alliance of 10 local authorities which prepares and co-ordinates regional transport policies, plans and programmes on behalf of its constituent councils. This is a very good example of a long standing collaborative arrangement which Bridgend has been actively involved.
- Bilateral collaboration: for example with the Vale of Glamorgan where a 'Memorandum of Understanding' is in place to deliver and commission shared and collaborative services based upon agreed business cases to facilitate improvement, value for money, innovation and better customer services. A shared internal audit service is one example of an outcome from these arrangements which has delivered savings.

1.4 Many of these activities have been underway for a number of years and have often developed within service areas with the desire to improve service outcomes. Others are the consequence of requirements to collaborate built into Welsh Government grant funded activities. In recent years, the focus on realising cashable savings from collaboration has become increasingly important in the context of the economic position and the continued poor outlook for public finances.

2.0 Barriers to successful collaboration

2.1 Inertia can arise when there is a lack of achievement from collaboration or delays in the development of the partnership itself. This is a real risk particularly when developing new collaborative arrangements within the public sector where developing relationships with new partners can be slow. It is undoubtedly easier to build around existing arrangements, where the trust and working arrangements are well established. Where new partnerships are being formed governance arrangements may potentially be more onerous as the partners involved are likely to be cautious, therefore it is important to acknowledge this and balance any potential gains against the lead in time for the partnership to settle.

2.2 There are many barriers that need consideration which may prevent a collaborative arrangement developing; these range from ICT barriers to the culture of the various partnership organisations and a willingness to commit funding. The number of partners involved is a key factor that can influence the speed at which a partnership arrangement progresses. In larger consortia, the

fact that more partners are involved in the decision making process means there are potentially more issues that will need to be considered, which every partner may view with differing levels of importance.

3.0 Governance and accountability

3.1 In the second half of 2012 the Council's Programme Management Board (PMB) which oversees the Council's collaboration agenda at Officer Level (chaired by the Chief Executive and has all Corporate Directors and Assistant Chief Executives in its membership) undertook an exercise to identify and categorise the collaboration work across all Council services. This exercise identified around 100 different joint working initiatives with external partners. The majority of work in these 100 cases is being managed at service level.

3.2 In the development of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), Cabinet and the Corporate Management Board agreed that the Council should focus its future collaborative efforts on projects which have the potential to generate the greatest benefit. Over the course of the MTFS new collaboration activity will only be undertaken if the following principles apply:

- there is a clear service improvement benefit / significant cashable saving or future cost avoidance can be realised for the council / it would improve the resilience of a service / it is a requirement of external funding provider (eg Welsh Government);
- there is a clear contribution to the single integrated partnership plan for the County and/or the council's corporate priorities;
- there is a sound business case; and
- it is in line with the Council's MTFS principles.

3.3 PMB have more recently identified a strategic collaboration programme which meets the above principles. The current programme portfolio is:

- **Joint Vehicle Maintenance** - to develop a joint vehicle maintenance service for Bridgend County Borough Council and South Wales Police.
- **Integrated Public Health Team** - jointly managed by BCBC and Public Health Wales (PHW) to ensure shared priorities are established between the Council and PHW.
- **Legal Services** - shared legal services programme across Central and South West Wales.
- **Regulatory Services** - a single shared service across Bridgend, Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan Councils comprising Environmental Health, Trading Standards and Licensing functions under one management structure.
- **Integrating Health and Social Care** - to develop and deliver new service models in adult social services, and bring together health and social care services so that citizens experience a well-coordinated and planned approach to community health and social care services.
- **Regional Education Service** - a new consortium for education services comprising Bridgend, Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Vale of Glamorgan Councils.

- **Collaborative Procurement** - work is underway to scope the project which will result in the identification of future resource requirements in relation to procurement, commissioning and contract management.
- **Waterton Depot Rationalisation** – this is a component part of the Waterton Masterplan Framework which covers 66 acres of mixed use land. The Framework sets out a long term vision for the area which would see a sustainable mixed use site supported by high quality transport and infrastructure.
- **Youth Offending Service** – amalgamation of the service across the Western Bay footprint.
- **Youth Service** – working towards a shared service with the Vale of Glamorgan Council.

3.4 The purpose of this programme is to brigade significant collaborative projects within a single programme for monitoring and reporting purposes. The programme does not create additional governance or bureaucracy. Where projects already have governance arrangements (local or regional) these will continue, but are required to produce highlight reports for PMB.

3.5 At an elected member level the Council's Cabinet has responsibility for approving the relevant business cases for local or regional collaborations which will result in shared services with other local authorities and partner organisations. In addition, the Council's Community Safety and Governance Overview and Scrutiny Committee is responsible for looking strategically at collaboration and to challenge the 'added value' that each collaboration brings.

4.0 Costs and benefits

4.1 The Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) has identified the need for the Council to find around £24 million of savings over the next four years (2013-2017), although this will be significantly more given the CSR announcement, there is recognition that collaboration will have a role to play in achieving these, but this is subject to compliance with the principles outlined earlier, which in essence means that quantifiable outcomes need to be delivered from collaborating.

4.2 A small number of collaborations are identified below to provide a broad picture of the actual or anticipated costs and benefits associated with these collaborations:

- **Connecting Families** - as indicated earlier, this is a successful Local Service Board led integrated multi-agency service that deals with the whole family and addresses their problems, including their impact on the community, in a single coordinated way. The service has been operational since August 2011 and there is already strong evidence of improved outcomes for families and cost avoidance for those agencies involved in delivering the service. To date it is estimated that (between August 1st 2011 and July 31st 2013) Connecting Families has prevented the public sector agencies involved from spending an additional £700k.

- **Joint Vehicle Maintenance Service Project** – recurring annual revenue savings estimated to be £150k are anticipated from this collaboration of which approximately 50% will be realised by the Council.
- **Western Bay Health and Social Care Programme** - notification from Welsh Government was received in May 2013 that the programme would receive £4,665,000 over three years with a confirmed allocation of £1,330,000 for year 1 (13/14) from their Regional Collaboration Fund. The aim of the Welsh Government’s Regional Collaboration Fund is to provide short term funding to shape, implement and accelerate the pace of transformational change. This allocation provides an opportunity to deliver services differently and more efficiently whilst meeting the demographic and financial changes currently experienced and anticipated in the future.
- **Regionalising Regulatory Services** - the scope of this project includes all three elements of regulatory services - Trading Standards, Environmental Health and Licensing. Although there is potential for other service areas if the proposed model of collaboration proves successful. The current project team with representatives drawn from all three authorities was successful in their bid to the Regional Collaboration Fund, which awarded a sum of £750k split over the financial years 2013/14 to 2015/16. The anticipated benefits of this collaboration include financial efficiencies of at least £1m across the three authorities and increased flexibility and resilience to respond to emergencies and access to a wider range of specialist services.

5.0 Conclusion

- 5.1 Collaboration and partnership working is a priority for Bridgend, where through the Local Service Board and other arrangements the Council is working with a range of bodies including other Local Authorities, Health, and organisations from the third/voluntary sector.
- 5.2 The Council continues to be proactive in developing new collaborative arrangements, and a culture of collaboration is already well developed in most service areas. There is a clear appetite for further collaboration which can be evidenced through recent developments including on-going integration of health and social care services. However, given that resources will reduce the Council will need to balance the advantages of further collaboration very carefully against the collaboration principles set out in Bridgend’s Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Should the Committee want any additional information or wish to clarify any aspects of this paper, then please get in touch with Mark Lewis, Integrated Partnership Manager, on 01656 643235 in the first instance.

Yours sincerely

Darren Mephram

Chief Executive