

Inquiry into Progress with local government collaboration

Response from : Vale of Glamorgan Council

The extent to which Welsh Government's collaboration agenda has been taken forward within local authorities

1. The 2011 Simpson report attracted keen support across Councils, as did the subsequent Simpson Compact's "Implementation Contracts".
2. Since then considerable effort has been expended to examine the recommendations in detail and then to implement the projects in the service areas outlined. This has applied not only to the Compact projects, but also to other collaboration initiatives initiated by Councils themselves.
3. The formation of the Public Service Leadership Group was a major step forward in the implementation of this agenda. Chaired by the Minister for Local Government and Government Business, foremost among its members are Chief Executives representing Councils from all areas of Wales. Its sub groups - Asset Management, Organisational Development and Simpson Implementation, Effective Services for Vulnerable Groups and Procurement – all include enthusiastic Council membership.
4. Progress on the national and regional initiatives has been steady. The National Procurement Service, the regional Joint Education Services, Prosiect Gwyrdd (waste disposal), regional workstreams from Social Services' Framework for Action – these and other initiatives are now bearing fruit.
5. The Vale of Glamorgan Council is embracing the collaboration agenda whole-heartedly. Even before the publication of Simpson report the Council had entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with Bridgend Council in respect of sharing services, and we are collaborating in a number of service areas including Civil Parking Enforcement, the Youth Service and Internal Audit (the latter is a joint service covering both authorities).
6. In addition to participating in the national projects listed above, the Council is developing a number of initiatives within the "footprint" area of Cardiff and the Vale, with Cardiff Council and the University Health Board. Our Regional Collaboration Fund projects include a joint Local Service Board, the extensive remodelling of Social Care Services, the Alcohol Treatment Centre, the Sexual Assault Referral Centre,

Regulatory Services (also involving Bridgend Council) and collective Energy Purchasing.

7. It is also worth noting the progress made in collaboration through Local Service Boards, a process that is bringing real benefits to local people as organisations work together to achieve shared aims. In the Vale we have had had a Single Integrated Plan in place for some time, have developed effective performance management arrangements, and are now finalising a Unified Needs Assessment which will be the basis for planning for the future.
8. There is no doubt that, overall, more remains to be done in progressing the partnership agenda. However, the past year or more has of necessity been spent in addressing what is a very complex situation, and much work has been required to determine which avenues will bring the most benefits. Our belief is that the groundwork has been accomplished, that much more clarity exists about the way forward, and that the process of collaboration should and must now be accelerated.

The structural, political and practical barriers to successful collaboration

9. Too much can be made of **structural** barriers. Inevitably, a range of different organisations and bodies will exist in the public sector since the needs of society are multifarious. An attempt to create coterminous boundaries between different public sector organisations does not solve anything and would create its own problems. Councils will work with partner organisations in a variety of ways. Sometimes they will work with a number of other Councils on a regional basis, with the aim of saving money through economies of scale (examples of this are Prosiect Gwyrdd and the Joint Education Service). Sometimes it will be on a “footprint” basis (examples in Cardiff and the Vale are the Regional Collaboration Fund projects). At other times it will be with another adjoining Council (in our case our Memorandum of Understanding with Bridgend). And it may also be with other sectoral partners locally within the Vale, such as the Police or the Local Health Board.
10. The keynote is flexibility and a variety of approaches depending on the circumstances.
11. **Political** barriers have not so far been evident. The need to collaborate should transcend politics as long as there is a political consensus, and in our experience this has been the case hitherto. The political complexion of Councils has largely been irrelevant in progressing collaboration projects.
12. The **practical** barriers are those that are to be expected when a large scale radical change is being tackled. Each separate organisation has its own culture and operating practices, developed over the years.

Taking account of those practices while attempting in some cases to create a single new service from several existing services will clearly bring its challenges. And managers and staff will not necessarily be enthusiastic about change if their own future is in jeopardy. Leadership is key. Political leaders and senior managers need to be committed to a certain outcome and be determined to achieve it despite the difficulties. We are confident that we have this attitude in the Vale Council and that it is shared by our partner organisations.

The models of governance and accountability adopted when collaboration takes place

13. Different models of governance and accountability are being developed as more and different types of collaboration take place.
14. When the Memorandum of Understanding between the Vale and Bridgend was agreed, a Joint Programme Board of the two Councils was set up and continues to meet. The Board consists of the Bridgend Chief Executive and the Vale's Managing Director, with officers attending according to the services in question. The Board oversees progress on joint projects and determines what new ones should be developed.
15. With Cardiff Council, a Project Board was set up to agree what Regional Collaboration Projects would be submitted to Welsh Government and then to oversee the projects themselves. In this case the Project Board consists of Cabinet Members of Cardiff and Vale Councils, the Chief Executive and Managing Director, and other officers as appropriate.
16. It has not been general practice to set up specific Council Scrutiny Committees in respect of collaborative projects. The view in the Vale Council has been that, generally speaking, existing Scrutiny Committees can exercise their function as regards the services for which they are responsible, whether those services are delivered singly or jointly .
17. Arrangements are under way to establish a joint Scrutiny Committee for the Central South Consortium Joint Education Service, and given its magnitude that may be inevitable. However, if joint Scrutiny Committees were to be set up in each case, then given the range of collaborations taking place the position would become impossibly complex. There are other models under discussion, such as one Scrutiny Committee to cover all collaborations between participating Councils, or establishing a lead Council for collaboration in respect of a particular service.
18. Nevertheless, there is a strong argument that our main accountability should be to the service user. That being so, we should focus our attention on the needs and wishes of the public and how they are involved in determining what is delivered and to what standard, and not on multiplying formal structures which are likely to confuse, complicate and distract.

The overall costs and benefits of collaborating to deliver local government services

19. Regardless of the time and effort involved, particularly in the early exploratory stages, collaboration will be a fundamental aspect of the future of public services in Wales. Working to develop relationships and to foster a new skill set and outlook is therefore a necessary investment.
20. It is worth noting that not all collaboration activity is for the purpose of saving money. The focus of Local Service Boards, for example, has tended to be on joining up the services of various participating organisations to improve the lives of local citizens, and this is clearly with doing even if no huge savings accrue.
21. Larger-scale collaboration, on the other hand, evidently has saving money as a prime aim. Whatever the motive, however, in the setting-up stages a great deal of effort is necessarily expended by senior officers; and sometimes that effort proves nugatory as it becomes evident that the benefits will not outweigh the costs of a joint project.
22. The costs and benefits of large scale collaboration are set out individually in business cases as projects are progressed. Unless there are large savings these projects are not worth pursuing, and this has sometimes found to be the case. Attention has to focus on those areas where those savings will be achieved, and this is increasingly happening.
23. It is important to mention the benefits of joint working in the planning and delivery of services in the overlapping areas of organisations where they have different services to bring to bear to address matters of common concern. There are a number of areas where this is true. Issues such as smoking and alcohol abuse; the incidence of those not in employment, education or training; disadvantaged communities; community safety - all are amenable to being addressed only through a concerted effort involving Councils and their partner agencies.