Approach to regional collaboration: promoting coherence

Background

1. Accelerating progress towards collaborative service delivery is key to the Welsh Government’s approach to public service reform. Currently, collaboration is organised on a number of different footprints – this creates complexity which, without action now, would be likely to get worse as collaborations develop into joint service delivery.

2. Local government and other partners have called for clarity of direction as they move to implementation of the Simpson and Vivian Thomas reviews and Sustainable Social Services for Wales. The Welsh Government has responded by signalling its intent to move to align collaborative arrangements, building on the Local Health Board and police structures.

Current position

3. Wales’ local government model is one of relatively small unitary local authorities, close to their communities. This supports local democracy and responsiveness, but creates challenges in relation to patchy performance, leadership, critical mass, specialist expertise, and efficiency, which partners are seeking to overcome through strategic collaboration, between local authorities, and with other public services.

4. Currently, collaborative activity is organised on a number of different geographical and service footprints, building on groupings that have evolved independently of each other to deal with specific service issues. This has created – and will continue to create - complexity which will get worse as these collaborative groupings take on greater roles and assume stronger organisational forms. Increasing complexity of service delivery models will inevitably mean less clear lines of accountability for service delivery and quality.

5. Effective collaboration that will deliver better service outcomes requires leadership that takes a long term, holistic view. The current variable geometry arrangements tend to encourage a short term, sectoral approach, in which progress can be stalled relatively easily, and leadership can be unstable.

Benefits of alignment

6. Standardising on a common set of geographical boundaries and regional arrangements will facilitate delivery by providing:

- clarity of direction – to facilitate long term planning;
- accountability – clarity of accountability for delivery of shared outcomes in a particular geographical area;
• governance – clarity of political accountability between the Government and local partners, and nationally through the Partnership Council;
• stability – to translate collaboration into long term delivery;
• efficiency and integration – convergence with the arrangements of other key partners facilitates strategic collaboration and is a key enabler of integrated delivery;
• capacity – existing support arrangements for the various consortia could be streamlined; and
• confidence – learning and success in one service area can be transferred to another.

Proposals for alignment

7. The major local government regional collaborative groupings are: the WLGA Regional Boards, the Regional Education Consortia, the Regional Social Services Consortia and the Transport Consortia, which can be considered alongside the formal operational boundaries of the Police Authorities, Fire and Rescue Authorities and the Local Health Boards (LHBs).

8. The boundaries of the LHBs and police are well aligned with the collaborative activity of local authorities in Gwent and in north Wales. However, in other areas there is not such a close alignment. The most sustainable option is to standardise building on the LHB map, which itself fits within the police areas. In mid and west Wales, capacity and scale issues point to alignment across the Hywel Dda and Powys LHBs.

9. This points to a convergence around 6 regions, illustrated in Annex A, as follows:
   • North Wales;
   • Mid and West;
   • Swansea Bay;
   • Cardiff and the Vale;
   • Cwm Taf; and
   • Gwent.

10. This creates an aligned regional structure, and also produces viable collaborative delivery units, with broad demographic coherence and critical mass. These could be combined where effective delivery points to larger scale, for example, joining up Cardiff and the Vale with Cwm Taf. Issues that require a broader strategic focus can be tackled by scaling up for example to the South Wales police area, or across South Wales and Gwent.

11. The Welsh Government has responded to local government partners’ calls for clarity by signalling its intent to move towards regional
alignment as set out in the Minister for Local Government and Communities’ statement to the Assembly on 13 July.

12. These proposals build on the effective regional arrangements already developing in some parts of Wales. They create the clarity and stability required to strengthen regional leadership and streamline partnership working more widely. They will provide a clear framework for taking forward the Simpson agenda, and will support the role of the Partnership Council in linking national leadership with local delivery.

13. The proposals do not mean that existing initiatives and collaborations on different footprints should be unpicked if this will disrupt robust delivery already underway, as clarified in the Minister’s statement. But where work is at a more formative stage, and there are opportunities to move towards this common structure, they should be taken.

Recommendation

14. The Council endorses the proposals to move towards alignment of collaboration as proposed in this paper.
Wales

Proposed alignment of collaborative organisational areas

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