Regional Leadership including links with Local Service Boards

Introduction

The Welsh Government is currently reviewing the first phase of local service boards (LSBs). LSBs have been the hub for some of the most innovative cross public service working which has emerged over the last few years, for example, the development of neighbourhood management models, new approaches to tackling domestic abuse and models for supporting young people who are not in education or employment. Their common thread has been a focus on prevention and recognition that effective collective leadership is the key to delivering sustainable and accessible public services.

The innovations emerging from these locally developed projects have driven the spread of best practice and informed a number of successful national programmes including the core of our Effective Services for Vulnerable Groups Programme. LSBs will continue to be at the centre of securing effective learning transfer from these programmes.

Intentionally, the Welsh Government has provided a broad, non prescriptive policy framework and support for LSBs. Substantial resource has been made available through the ESF programme along with support through other funding streams and mechanisms. Where this support has been grasped together with the opportunities offered by for local leadership to drive both collaborative working and innovation, the outcome for services has been a step change in both delivery and pace of change.

While LSBs have focused on the local place, the public service reform agenda has established a regional scale for collaboration. Some of the cross public service success LSBs have enjoyed locally is now beginning to be replicated at a regional level. This is currently developing organically in response to regionally determined priorities and circumstances however there are clear connections between the regional and local.

This paper therefore provides the Group with the opportunity to consider whether; and if so how, a more structured approach to creating and defining links between LSBs and regional leadership models is appropriate at this point.

LSBs and Single Integrated Plans

In recognition of the considerable local innovation and pace of change we have engaged extensively with partners to understand better local drivers and barriers for LSBs to maximise their potential. One approach to increasing and embedding the partnership is through creating common challenges and
planning together to design solutions. Draft guidance on integrated planning was published in early 2012. The aims are:

- to significantly reduce local bureaucracy and process
- to position LSBs as the nexus of the local leadership which is needed to tackle cross public service delivery challenges
- to frame LSBs firmly within the new public service reform agenda.

Within the context of a robust understanding of the strategic context and local need, LSBs will provide local leadership for a small number of local strategic priorities. These will be aligned with the Programme for Government outcomes. However, the guidance recognises the need, as part of their local leadership role, for LSBs to consider how they will build effective links with other partnerships, in particular Communities First, but also with neighbouring LSBs, and regional leadership groups.

**Local leadership**

LSBs were charged with tackling difficult, cross-cutting issues requiring multi-agency interventions and this remains the focus for LSB activity. However, during the first phase, the approach of LSBs to this agenda has varied in terms of commitment, outcomes delivered and effectiveness.

The new draft guidance creates a clear structure for identifying local priorities within the broader framework of priorities set out in the Programme for Government. In particular, there is a focus on understanding the needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and a significant emphasis on establishing sustainable services through early intervention and prevention.

Furthermore, the guidance positions LSBs and their leadership role more strategically in the local context. This means a greater reliance on evidence to drive significant and more focused conversations, and that rather than initiating and managing operational projects of their own, LSBs must drive change in the way mainstream services are commissioned, designed and delivered. This approach reflects effective practice as it has emerged in a number of local areas and the guidance makes the link with the work of the Public Service Leadership Group (PSLG), in particular the programme on Effective Services for Vulnerable Groups. There is a firm expectation that LSBs will actively carry this work forward.

**Local delivery**

At the same time, a number of local areas have shown that neighbourhood management approaches are successful in joining up agencies at the locality.

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1 *Shared Purpose – Shared Delivery*, January 2012

http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/improving/sharreddelivery/?skip=1&lang=en
level, resulting in tangible improvements to outcomes, such as reductions in crime.

Thus, in the context of an emerging regional ‘pull’, the LSB can provide the reassurance of a strong link with local communities and political accountability by focussing on people and place orientated services.

**Local accountability and scrutiny**

Some suggest that the role of the local democratic mandate is being diluted. This is not the case. Scrutiny and political accountability is being reinforced by the Welsh Government’s commitment to strengthening scrutiny of LSBs in the Programme for Government and implementation of the provisions for cross public service scrutiny and joint scrutiny committees provided for in the Local Government Measure (Wales) 2011.

Focusing on elected members’ primary responsibility for the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of their communities, coupled with their local knowledge and representative role, will ensure that LSB priorities resonate with community need. This ‘horizontal’ democratic scrutiny taps into community networks and social partnerships in order to raise levels of public legitimacy, democracy and confidence.

**Bringing together the community, the local, regional and national**

This adds up to a substantial agenda for LSBs to deliver over the next year and into the medium term. The draft guidance is flexible, however, on the form of regional and joint working, leaving this to local determination.

While it would be possible for the Government to take a more deterministic approach to setting out universal structures for governance and scrutiny, the experience of LSBs, together with the variability in cross organisation models of service delivery, suggest that allowing local approaches to develop can provide more sustainable and effective solutions. This reflects the emerging picture across Wales.

**Regional leadership**

The Partnership Council for Wales is being reformed to provide national political leadership in support of the work of the Public Service Leadership Group. The WLGA has committed to putting political representation on the Partnership Council on the same collaboration footprint as the Group. This will provide welcome alignment and support the implementation of the work planned regionally and as part of the Compact.

Different models of regional leadership are emerging, in response to local determination and circumstances. These include the North Wales Regional
Leadership Board and Gwent ‘G7’. In Cwm Taf, the Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil LSBs meet jointly to address a number of common issues. Across mid Wales, Ceredigion and Powys are collaborating on an increasing number of delivery issues.

While the regional agenda for collaboration may be distinct from the agenda of LSBs, there are clear connections between the two. These connections are likely to develop differently, depending on the agreement of partners in each area, in response to the challenges of service delivery.

**For discussion / decision**

1. At the regional level, how should the emerging leadership structures develop and how should their relationship with LSBs be framed?

2. The WLGA has committed to put its political representation on the Partnership Council on the collaboration footprint. Are there any other key developments that are essential for ensuring strong political leadership regionally?