

Purpose of Paper

This is the first in a series of publications arising from the Improvement Service (IS) / Scottish Centre for Regeneration (SCR) collaborative project, which focuses on 'Embedding an Outcomes Approach in Community Regeneration & Tackling Poverty'.

The paper is concerned with what is meant by an 'outcomes approach' and with how the concept of 'collaborative gain' can be drawn upon to help shape the way that partnerships approach the task of delivering enhanced outcomes within communities.

Whilst the IS / SCR project is focused upon partnerships involved in the area of community regeneration / tackling poverty, much of this paper covers generic partnership / outcomes issues and is, therefore, likely to be of wider interest across the public sector.

Context: The Shift to an 'Outcomes Approach'

The 2007 Concordat¹ agreement between the Scottish Government and local government heralded a major new policy initiative, built upon an 'outcomes-based approach'². In terms of solid examples of this approach, the second phase Single Outcome Agreements (SOAs) between the Scottish Government and the statutory Community Planning partners³ were signed-off in mid- 2009.

The SOA Guidance⁴ indicates that the SOA is:

“the means by which Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) agree their strategic priorities for their local area and express those priorities as outcomes to be delivered by the partners, either individually or jointly, while showing how those outcomes should contribute to the Scottish Government’s relevant National Outcomes.”

Whilst there are legitimate differences in detail across Scotland’s 32 SOAs, there are also similarities in many of the key features. Typical characteristics inherent within an 'outcomes approach' are set out in *Fig. 1*.

¹ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/11/13092240/concordat>

² <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Government/public-bodies/OutcomesBasedApproach>

³ The statutory Community Planning partners specified in the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 are the Local Authorities (*lead partner*), the Health Boards, the Police Boards, the Chief Constables, the Fire Boards, the Regional Transport Partnerships and Scottish Enterprise / Highlands & Islands Enterprise. In addition, other non-statutory CP partners, such as voluntary sector representatives, were also signatories to many of Scotland’s 32 SOAs.

⁴ <http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/single-outcome-agreements/>

Fig.1 Key Characteristics of an ‘Outcomes Approach’

- Results focused – Concerned with the impact achieved or ‘difference made’ (*with less overt concern about ‘process issues’*)
- Evidence-based – Identifying and addressing key priorities and interventions by drawing upon research, evaluation, data trends, etc
- Client centred – Focusing on the needs of the individual or the community rather than what might best suit service delivery organisations
- Joined-up - Encouraging holistic, joined-up approaches that deal with the ‘whole system’, rather than individual elements in isolation. This typically entails streamlining service delivery around the needs of communities or individuals and improving the co-ordination and integration of public services in order to achieve shared outcomes
- Early intervention / prevention - Encouraging a shift to early intervention and preventative measures in order to avoid deeper and more complex problems developing downstream. This typically includes a longer-term focus, based upon effectively tackling root causes rather than simply dealing with symptoms

Context: Tightening Public Expenditure

In addition to an increased focus on outcomes, the public sector in Scotland has increasingly had to deal with the implications of the worldwide economic recession, coupled with ever-tightening public sector finances. The challenging situation is further exacerbated when consideration is taken of various areas of increased demand, brought about by factors such as Scotland’s ageing population and the backlog of repairs and maintenance required on various assets such as roads and public buildings.⁵

In short, the challenge for the public sector effectively is to ‘deliver more, with less.’ In practice, this will require hard prioritisation, a re-assessment of many traditional ‘entitlements’, more innovative and cost effective service delivery mechanisms and more effective approaches to partnership working.

Context: The Challenge of Effective Partnership Working

In the past few decades, the received wisdom concerning approaches to addressing complex and multi-faceted challenges, such as poverty / community regeneration, have centred upon partnership working. Indeed, it might be said that ‘a partnership approach’ has typically become the default ‘solution’. In practice, however, partnerships have often failed to deliver the benefits anticipated or the changes desired in an efficient and effective

⁵ http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/docs/central/2009/nr_091105_scottish_public_finances.pdf

way⁶. In many instances, the sheer volume and complexity of partnership structures is often of itself a major barrier to effective working⁷.

In many CPP areas, the recent advent of SOAs has had a positive catalytic effect, providing a new focus and serving to reinvigorate partnership working. Focusing upon shared priority outcomes, many CPPs are beginning to assess the 'fitness for purpose' of traditional partnership structures. Increasingly, there is recognition of the requirement to focus on customer needs, the interdependency of organisations, the need for more integrated approaches to achieving outcomes and the requirement for new models of governance, emphasising shared accountabilities for the achievement of outcomes. This shift in partnership culture, partly brought about by the outcomes approach, is summarised in *Fig.2* below.



Collaborative Gain: Achieving 'More than the Sum of the Parts'

The concept of 'collaborative gain' can be drawn upon to help shape the way that partnerships approach the task of delivering enhanced outcomes more effectively. 'Collaborative Gain' describes a situation where partnership working brings about added value benefits, which could not have been achieved by the individual partner organisations operating on their own. In short, it is about achieving 'more than the sum of the parts'.

The type of 'gain' or 'added value' achieved through two or more partners collaborating can take a number of forms, and *Fig.3* outlines some examples.

⁶ Urban Regeneration Through Partnership: A Critical Appraisal, Carley et al, 2000

<http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/urban-regeneration-through-partnership-critical-appraisal>

⁷ [Rocket Science partnership toolkit commissioned by Improvement Service](#)

Fig.3 **Examples of Collaborative Gain**

- Improved access and uptake / market penetration (e.g. an economic development agency partnering with a local nursery to market its services may increase the number of potential returners to the labour market that the agency has contact with)
- Economy of scale / rationalisation. (e.g. agencies co-locating in order to share overhead costs)
- Enhanced customer experience. (e.g. Organisations that share the same client, such as Social Work and Health services can streamline service delivery, making it easier for clients and avoiding feelings of being passed from one agency to another). Enhanced customer experience can also be brought about simply by the pooling of complementary services / expertise.
- Enhanced quantity / quality / sustainability of outcomes. In terms of an 'outcomes approach', this is likely to be the most compelling driver, whereby partners collaborating can achieve more for individuals or communities.

A study commissioned by the Improvement Service in 2008 includes an appendix which outlines a number of specific examples of collaborative gain within partnerships⁸.

Planning for 'Collaborative Gain'

Collaborative gain rarely occurs by chance. Rather, the 'gain' anticipated requires to be clear and specific and planned for in advance. Crucially, the anticipated gain to be achieved through working in collaboration with other organisations, requires to outweigh the inevitable costs and challenges that can arise from partnership working. (i.e. The perceived 'gain' needs to outweigh the likely 'pain' in order to make partnership working a viable option).

In terms of the outcomes approach, this will typically mean designing partnership working around the desired outcome. The starting point for discussion on partnership working will, therefore, typically be 'what outcomes are we seeking to deliver?' Subsequent planning, etc ought to flow from this central focus. A summary of key points concerning planning for 'collaborative gain' is set out in *Fig.4*.

⁸ <http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/collaborative-gain/>

Fig.4 **Planning for Collaborative Gain**

- Collaborative gain needs to be clear and specific – clarity is required on precisely what gain is desired and how it is likely to come about
- Any anticipated ‘Gain’ to be achieved requires to outweigh the costs associated with partnership working
- Gain rarely happens by chance – it requires to be planned for, designed in and monitored to ensure it is actually being achieved

Achieving Collaborative Gain Through Effective Outcome-Focused Partnerships

Taken together, the key features associated with an outcomes approach, coupled with the insights provided by the collaborative gain thesis, have the potential to deliver transformative change, in terms of the outcomes achieved within communities. In seeking to fulfil that potential, key questions for CPPs relate to whether existing partnership mechanisms are actually achieving collaborative gain, whether they represent good value for money and whether they remain ‘fit for purpose’ in light of the new outcomes-focused context.

A key point in the collaborative gain analysis is that partnership working is not an end in itself. Engaging in partnership working typically has an array of costs associated with it, ranging from administration and legal expenses to the ‘opportunity cost’ of the time spent attending meetings. Accordingly, an objective assessment requires to be made at the outset concerning whether or not it is likely to be beneficial to enter into a partnership. In short, organisations require to be wary of ‘sleep walking’ into new partnerships that are destined to be ineffectual or of poor value. Similarly, it is useful to review the effectiveness of existing partnerships on a regular basis in order to ensure they maintain and/or refresh their focus (*and, indeed, to ensure they disband once they have outlived their usefulness*). A range of checklists / toolkits exist that can facilitate such partnership reviews and hyperlinks to two of these are set out in the footnote below.⁹

In seeking to achieve collaborative gain, there is a wide variety of design options available concerning the type of partnership structure. This can range from the largely informal to the highly formalised. Examples include programme management arrangements, creation

⁹ a.) [Rocket Science partnership toolkit commissioned by Improvement Service](#)

b.) <http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/aio/8226718>

of Special Purpose Vehicles, Joint Ventures, arms-length companies (*including 'not for profit' operations*). The structure that is likely to be most appropriate will be contingent both upon the context and the intended purpose. Regardless of the type of partnership structure selected, however, a key point of consideration will always relate to ensuring that appropriate accountability mechanisms are built into the partnership governance arrangements.

In addition to the structural considerations, account also needs to be taken of a range of wider issues, including the overall 'culture' of the partnership. Essentially, this relates to the actions and behaviours necessary to make partnerships work and includes a wide range of issues such as leadership and vision, delegation and empowerment; the partnership performance management framework, questions of inter-agency trust, etc. The partnership toolkit commissioned by the Improvement Service and referenced in footnote⁸ sets out more detail on the structural options and these wider issues.

Sitting above all considerations relating to partnership design and culture, much of the academic literature on effective partnership working, places the related factors of leadership and vision at the very centre. Key to this is having the necessary leadership and drive (political and or officer based) to develop and implement a partnership vision, which reflects the shared outcomes prioritised by the various partners, and which provides overall clarity of purpose for the partnership.

A summary of the key factors necessary for achieving collaborative gain through effective outcome-focused partnerships is set out in *Fig.5*.

***Fig.5* Features of successful outcomes-focused partnerships**

- A clear, shared vision concerning the priority outcomes sought by the partnership
- Strong and effective leadership
- A clear understanding of the 'value added' sought through a partnership approach
- The necessary 'architecture' in place that will provide the right structure and culture for effective partnership working
- An agreed and achievable action plan, which clarifies responsibility & accountability for delivering the desired outcomes
- A partnership performance management framework which regularly assesses progress towards the achievement of agreed outcomes

Conclusion

There is a growing consensus that the public sector requires to achieve a greater focus on priority outcomes, delivered in more innovative and cost effective ways. Central to this will be the need to reassess approaches to partnership working. As part of this, the public sector undoubtedly requires to become more 'hard nosed' about partnership working and what it delivers.

The embracing of an 'outcomes approach' has the potential to provide significant leverage for delivering 'step change' in the quantity, quality and sustainability of outcomes achieved within communities. The focus will be on achieving enhanced outcomes in more effective ways through partnerships that are properly designed, empowered and accountable. In conclusion, the 'collaborative gain' analysis is seen to provide a number of useful insights into how the public sector can potentially deliver 'more with less' in order to achieve the priority outcomes that matter for communities.



Scottish Centre for Regeneration

This document is published by the Scottish Centre for Regeneration, which is part of the Scottish Government. We support our public, private and voluntary sector delivery partners to become more effective at:

- regenerating communities and tackling poverty
- developing more successful town centres and local high streets
- creating and managing mixed and sustainable communities
- making housing more energy efficient
- managing housing more efficiently and effectively

We do this through:

- coordinating learning networks which bring people together to identify the challenges they face and to support them to tackle these through events, networking and capacity building programmes
- identifying and sharing innovation and practice through publishing documents detailing examples of projects and programmes and highlighting lessons learned
- developing partnerships with key players in the housing and regeneration sector to ensure that our activities meet their needs and support their work

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