Collaborative Working Research Report

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improvement service

Contents

Section 1 - Background and Process

This report presents the findings on research commissioned by the Improvement Service to review the experience and incidence of collaborative working and shared service approaches across Scottish local government.

The work sits within a wider context, some of which is long standing and other aspects that are more recent. Historically, the findings and recommendations of the Christie Commission, calling for an urgent and fundamental review of public services to increase efficiency and integration, remain relevant. These triggered an ongoing programme of public sector reform and transformation. In addition, cumulative pressures on local authority budgets remain a continual challenge for Councils - allied to new service demands from demographic factors and new legislative and policy developments. More recently, a range of strategy and policy developments have indicated an increasing trend towards increased regional level co-operation and activity, potentially further changing the collaborative working and shared service dynamic.

No comprehensive mapping work had been undertaken on these issues in Scotland for some time. The research process sought to address this, detail a more up to date picture, and test whether the ever-changing context was reflected in new approaches and priorities across Scotland's Councils.

The research was not approached from any particular stand-point on the value or otherwise of collaborative working or shared services. It does not seek to force 'shared services' or suggest these are de facto a 'good thing'— but rather to consider them as one option which may be applicable in certain circumstances. The key focus must first and foremost be on the outcomes and evidence against clearly stated objectives.

Consequently, research has sought to support a conversation based on a better and updated understanding of:

• What is happening across Scotland;

• Whether this had changed significantly over the past decade;

• The current views of some key stakeholders on:

  ◊ perceived opportunities in moving forward;

  ◊ concerns in practically applying these approaches;

  ◊ where the future developmental focus should be;

  ◊ the relative priority of future collaborative working and shared services within the wider challenges facing local authorities in Scotland.

A key issue from the outset was the definition of what we mean by 'collaborative working' and 'shared services'. The research process strongly reinforced the importance of clarity in terminology, and how (or if) these two approaches connected to each other. This is discussed in more detail later in the report; but is important to note immediately that this terminology matters - it is very apparent that how potential developments of this nature are described and introduced, effects practice.

Initially the definition used by the Improvement Service to support the mapping study suggested relevant services in scope were:

Any situations where a Council is collaborating/sharing service delivery with at least one other Council, partner or agency. In addition, we believe a shared or collaborative approach should reflect one or all of the following:

- Sharing capacity across services and/or agencies;
- Joint delivery of services across services and/or agencies;
- Joint investment decisions across services and/or agencies'.

The research has included:

- Qualitative 1:1 and group discussions across key stakeholders – within and associated with local government (listed in full as appendix 2);
- A mapping study covering all 32 local authorities seeking details of all relevant approaches, and how this has evolved since previous survey work in 2009;
- A comparative and international review of literature on related experience in a number of other countries, both within the UK and beyond (this is available as a stand-alone report);
- Developing case studies across a number of councils and subject areas.

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

Section 2 – provides headline summary details of the process and findings of the service mapping research;

Section 3 – presents the key messages of the mapping findings alongside the qualitative discussions for this review, and the review of related practice elsewhere. Headings include: the importance of definitions and understanding the relationship

of 'collaborative working' and 'shared services'; the primary motivations and drivers of current activities; concerns and challenges; and the suggested pre-conditions for positive progress.

Section 4 – suggests potential future options to support further developments through subsequent Improvement Service research work, and the next steps in the process.

Appendix 1 - provides further details of the mapping return.

Appendix 2 – lists the people consulted in the first phase of Improvement Service research.

Appendix 3 - presents five case studies based on the survey returns and additional research.

The research process sought to gather all current examples of collaborative working and shared service activities currently operating across Scotland's 32 local authorities. This was requested on the basis of the definition presented in section 1.

Information was sought in 2 formats:

- A spreadsheet pre-populated with information from previous survey work in 2009 and 2016 to check if activities identified then were still operational, alongside details on benefits, challenges, and opportunities;
- A more detailed survey on other known activities, augmenting this as required with new information.

In practice, some information was also supplied in stand-alone form.

Section 2 - Mapping of Current Activities

At this stage, information has been received from 26 Councils. Headline analysis indicates:

- The spreadsheets report 373 activities (including 30 national examples);
- 242 of these activities are identified as 'operational' – 40 more than the figure from the previous survey;
- The level of detail in the returns is variable – most provide some information on benefits, challenges or opportunities. Just over half provided all of this information.

Full returns are available in Appendix 1.

By activity/category theme, responses break down as follows:

Activity/Category	Number	% of total
Joint provision	56	32%
Specialist services	23	13%
Co-location	9	5%
Emergency/out of hours	14	8%
Training	12	7%
Simplification/standardisation	24	14%
Cross public-sector provision	39	22%

Appendix 1 details the geographic spread of where this work is taking place. The largest incidence is within a single local authority area where other local agencies/partners are involved (32% of all examples), with the second most significant grouping national activity (19%). By category of service a wide range of activities are recorded, with the most prevalent: health and social care; environmental protection; waste and regulatory; business support, employment, economic growth and regeneration; education and learning; and property, facilities, and utilities.

The survey findings are not comprehensive, and other relevant activities will be operating. Nonetheless, based on the definition on which the survey was based, it is clear that a significant, varied, and growing set of activities are operating. As we return to later, more narrowly defined 'shared services' is only a subset of these, but these are still numerous.

As a broad comparison, recent Local Government Association (LGA) research across English authorities identified a total of 493 activities – on a pro rata basis, the Scottish level of activity consequently appears greater.

More detailed analysis of the survey returns highlight a number of other key messages which compliment, reinforce, and sometimes challenge messages from the qualitative discussions and desk research.

Shared services - areas of most common collaboration

The returns suggest that shared service type approaches are most common in the following:

- Roads, transportation and street lighting

- Emergency services/civil contingencies – including 'out of hours' cover services, flood prevention, and environmental protection

- Regional economic development – including inward investment

- Trading standards

- Waste management and recycling activities

- Criminal justice services

- Staff training and development

- Information and research services

- Procurement

Very significant activity is also apparent across a range of health and social care services. These perhaps need to be separately recognised given the legislative driver to establish Integrated Joint Boards. This does not mean, however, that lessons from these experiences are not valuable in other settings.

Geographic focus

The activities reported fall into a number of clear categories in terms of geographic focus:

- Services which operate within a local authority area – often more focused on co-location, collaborative working, and partnership based work;

- Services which include arrangements between a number of (mainly) contiguous

authorities – these commonly involve joint work across 2 or 3 Council areas;

- More formal regional developments linked to recent initiatives such as City Region Growth Deals and Regional Education Collaboratives;

- National developments including all or a large number of authorities, and in some cases other public sector partners. These are mainly 'unambiguous' shared services.

Reported benefits

The survey returns are perhaps notable for the limited degree that budget savings are directly reported as a key benefit of shared services and collaboration, and there are very few examples of measured savings presented. This may in part be reflective of terminology, with other terms such as 'increased efficiencies', 'economies of scale', and 'service resilience' implying some links to savings. But it is notable that many other non-financial benefits are presented, with the most prevalent being:

- Outcome improvements such as: reductions in carbon emissions; reduced waiting times for services; reported crimes, reduced hospital admissions etc;

- Improved and easier access to services – most commonly in terms of 'out of hours' or emergency cover;

- Increased responsiveness to new service demands and legislative requirements – notably in areas such as waste disposal and trading standards;

- Increased or protected access/use of specialist resources – staff and equipment;

- Improved service standardisation and consistency;

- Improved risk management;

- Better access to shared information and intelligence.

Challenges and lessons learned

Unsurprisingly, a range of challenges and learning is apparent from the returns. These largely reflect the messages from desk research elsewhere, and the qualitative discussions (as summarised in later sections).

- The need for very strong and clearly defined leadership, based on clear objectives and anticipated outcomes – articulating the anticipated 'gain' from developments is critical;

- Well defined governance arrangements;

- The importance of quantifying anticipated benefits by clearly establishing a baseline from which to measure improvements;

- The need to accept that some initial resources are often required – with 'pathfinder' type funding helpful or essential in some cases;

- The importance and benefits of co-location of services – which can be a platform for further integration over time;

- The need to accept that developing more ambitious service integration such as shared services can often be a time consuming and lengthy process, and the need to acknowledge this at the outset;

- Technical issues and processes can be challenging, most notably - staffing and TUPE challenges, aligning IT systems, and procurement;

- Staff engagement and buy in can be problematical – maximising the engagement of a wide range of people at an early stage, and ensuring good ongoing communications is important;

- Concerns are apparent in some examples of smaller Councils/partners feeling marginalised and with limited traction in the processes. Shared leadership roles can help;

- Uneven partner commitment, enthusiasm and inputs can be problematical – this can often be linked to real or perceived political difficulties.

Future opportunities

Specific survey responses outlining potential opportunities or developing, improving, or expanding the scope of these activities were more limited, but a number of themes were apparent.

- The scope to extend the geographic reach of some initiatives – mainly from an initiative currently involving a small cluster of Councils extending into contiguous areas;

- The development of new and compatible supports and services based on extending current activities – this is most apparent in national shared services;

- In particular, further integration of IT services;

- The option in some circumstances to offer authorities differing levels of engagement e.g. core and associate membership etc;

- Future service charging to generate income.

Finally, the responses to future opportunities again often returned to the key and recurrent point that improved quantitative measurement and evidencing of the gains of shared services and collaboration will be critical to any future developments.

This section reflects on the findings of the mapping study alongside the key messages from the phase 1 research qualitative consultations, and the wider literature review of experiences beyond Scotland. These highlighted a range of varying messages on the relative priority of moving forward further collaborative working and shared services. Overall, the review of practice elsewhere confirmed some very common opportunities, experiences, and challenges in other countries and settings.

Section 3 - Interim Research Observations

General observations

The research process included discussions with 14 key people in: local authorities; wider stakeholders; some current shared services; and other public-sector agencies. These inform all the issues summarised in this section, but some general observations are also important to note:

- Different views are apparent of the likely gains of 'shared services', and it is clear that the history and legacy of some previous shared services work is still informing current thinking;

- But within this, there is a shared recognition of ever increasing pressures and opportunities for 'collaborative working', most commonly – ongoing and cumulative year on year budget pressures, the growing regional agenda; and the recent evolution of the Integrated Joint Board experiences in health and social care;

- It is critical not to force 'shared services' or suggest these are de facto a 'good thing'– rather they should be presented as one option which may be applicable in certain circumstances. The key focus must first and foremost on outcomes and evidence against clearly stated objectives;

- More is happening on collaborative working and shared services than may be widely appreciated – local government should be more on the 'front foot' in communicating this;

- The changed political culture where minority administrations now dominate in Scottish local authorities presents potential challenges and opportunities on this agenda. Automatically attaining majorities may be harder, but equally minority administrations may also encourage a cultural change to more 'collaborative mind-sets';

- 'Asymmetric' service approaches should be further recognised in future – some developments may be more appropriate at greater scale (such as economic development) whilst in others the trend may be to move to a more localised, community based approach. Collaborative working has a potential but different type of role in these varied circumstances;

- 'Greenfield' opportunities (i.e. where new rather than revised service approaches are required) may be easier territory for shared services and collaborative working. Over time, these experiences may inform wider changes to established service delivery approaches;

- There is a growing sense that the status quo will no longer be capable of sustaining some key non-statutory services – and that the cumulative impact of budget reductions is now at a critical phase;

- The theoretical case for more work on these agendas is important to restate, but the bigger future prize may now be more 'how to' support for authorities in terms of capacity and practice.

Definitions

How collaborative working and 'shared services' are defined, and the relationship between these terms, was a central starting point of most discussions: it is clear this debate resonates beyond the Scottish context. They are both generally recognised as a part of a suite or spectrum of approaches linked to wider public-sector reform.

Two concepts recur, which may assist future approaches:

1. The concept of a 'spectrum of collaboration' – with 'shared services' seen as a more radical, challenging, and gradual end point of a process. This posits that less integrated initial activities can be the test bed for further developments that can build the capacity for, and interest in, more radical and ambitious options based on ongoing review and learning. A number of models to present this have been produced, a simple one suggests increasing levels of collaboration as follows:

Communicate	Co-operate	Co-ordinate	Collaborate	Integrate
Inter-agency information sharing (e.g. networking)	As needed, often informal interaction on discrete activities or projects	Organisations systematically adjust and align work with each other for greater outcomes	Longer term interaction based on shared mission, goals, shared decision making and resources	Fully integrated programmes, delivery, planning and funding

Risk and complexity increase with movement across the spectrum – with the integrate column closest to what would be termed a fully 'shared service'.

2. 'Shared services' as a subset of wider 'collaborative working' – this is slightly different as it does not imply developments necessarily need to work towards

'shared services' through a series of steps. Rather, it suggests sometimes this approach is the logical option to progress immediately from collaborative discussions.

On balance, the review suggests the key starting point in either scenario is to focus on collaboration, which is closely linked to (and sometimes interchangeable with) the advancement of partnership working, and then consider whether in certain circumstances (based on a clear understanding of agreed outcomes) this creates the pre-conditions to subsequently advance shared service options.

Getting these understandings right matters in practice. Failing to distinguish the terms, and apply the correct terminology has the potential to hamper developments. In general, collaborative working is not challenged as a logical way to improve public services; shared services can be much more problematical. As considered further below, the potential barriers and concerns from the research almost entirely relate to the narrower concept of 'shared services'. But the link is also important in understanding the potential of a process which tests appetites and provides robust evidence for future ambition on an incremental basis. Research from New Zealand[1] articulates this as follows:

'Strategy or policy alignment across a region may result from collaboration or joint working, but does not necessarily result in shared services. Hence the approach of including wider collaboration across local government is used here as a starting point that may ultimately lead to shared services and more formal arrangements'.

The international nature of this debate is also reflected in research from Ireland[2] that '… understanding shared services as a network of collaborative working offers a relatively more fluid, flexible and outcome focused interpretation of the shared services agenda'.

Common drivers and motivations

Perceptions from Scottish stakeholders, and the review of other experiences in the UK and beyond, highlight a fairly consistent set of drivers to considering further collaboration, and within this shared service options. However, the balance of these can vary.

In most cases, financial savings linked to the dual pressures of growing/changing service demands and budget cuts was central to developments. But equally strong were consistent messages, that other and more positive factors should be and were in play. Solely focusing on financial savings was repeatedly criticised as not being the way to 'win hearts and

1   Shared Services for Local Government: Development Solutions for Local Government in New Zealand (June 2011)

2   Shared Services: propositions for local government collaboration – ICLRD (March 2012)

minds'. Moreover, it could be a narrow and short-sighted approach that potentially detracted from a more ambitious long-term vision. A Local Government Guide from England[3] notes '... few of us would suggest that it is about processes or managerial structures. Many would agree that local government is about providing community leadership, shaping places, protecting the vulnerable and enabling individuals, communities and businesses to achieve their potential'.

A recent House of Commons briefing paper reinforces the need to consider the key longer-term and wider benefits:

'Simply 'bolting together' management structures to achieve short-term cost savings is a tactical solution, not a recipe for long-term success, and may leave the bigger strategic prizes of partnering on the table'[4].

Irish research also reflects the potential limitations of a short term exclusively cost cutting focus:

'Simple cost-cutting can be effective in hitting near-term deficit reduction targets, but it does not encourage longer-run fiscal stability or allow for reform that will generate more value for money spent.'[5]

The mix of other drivers varies by individual situations, with the most common motivations identified as:

- Service improvements leading to better outcomes – this service user focus was often seen as the central motivation, and was more likely to lead to stakeholder enthusiasm to support developments;

- The opportunity to consider longer-term, fundamental and imaginative service redesign;

- Better use of specialists in key areas by operating at a greater scale;

- Increased service consistency;

- An opportunity to protect vulnerable services at a time of significant wider pressures – in particular non-core and discretionary activity;

- An opportunity to increase research and development capacity, including better information and intelligence;

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3   Shared Services and management: a guide for Councils – Local Government Group (March 2011)

4   Local Government: alternative models of service delivery – House of Commons Briefing Paper (May 2019)

5   Shared Services: propositions for local government collaboration – ICLRD (March 2012)

- The opportunity for local authorities to be more pro-active and to reduce dependency on central government – leading change rather than responding in times of financial challenges.

Common challenges and concerns

A number of common challenges and concerns are also relatively easy to summarise. These cover cultural, behavioural and technical issues. It is important to re-iterate, however, that these are much more prevalent for the narrower concept of 'shared services' than collaborative working more generally. Key recurrent issues are:

- Concerns that the suggested gains are unproven - evidencing impact against clearly stated initial objectives is often seen as problematical, and a significant sense that clear measurement of gains may often be a weakness. This can be linked to a lack of robust starting point baselines, or defensiveness if initiatives hit problems;

- The challenge of practically welding together different organisational cultures;

- Perceptions of a loss of control over service provision – which can create tensions with the concept of local government;

- Concerns that some approaches – particularly in a lead authority model – represent more of a 'takeover' than a 'partnership';

- Re-location/consolidation of delivery mechanisms which may lead to a sense/reality of local job losses in some participating Council areas;

- Technical challenges – most commonly linked to IT and HR issues;

- Political and public opposition;

- Over ambition in the pace of change;

- Over ambition in projecting the benefits and speed of change – particularly the scale of savings - subsequently resulting in disillusionment;

- Damaged employee relationship – linked to concerns on job losses and reduced conditions of service. For some commentators, shared services are often interpreted as closely linked to privatisation;

- A lack of capacity to drive change – which increasingly is linked to the impact of previous service cuts in key staffing posts;

Two final potential linked barriers to further developments were also cited in some discussions. Firstly, unhelpful and overly simplistic comparisons with the private sector, and secondly unfair external criticism of local authorities that they are not active enough on

these agendas compared to other parts of the public sector.

Emerging patterns on the pre-conditions and key approaches for success

It is apparent that there is a further sense of consensus on the pre-conditions, key approaches, and circumstances that are likely to lead to successful collaborative working and shared service developments. Logically, these often represent the 'flipside' of many of the barriers and challenges identified above and can potentially inform future programmes of work in this field.

- Effective leadership (often 'coalitions' of leaders) throughout organisations – based on clearly defined roles and responsibilities, trust, and ideally long-term relationships;

- Clearly articulated and shared visions, objectives, motivations, and outcomes from the outset – supported by robust business cases;

- Clear anticipated quantitative and qualitative baselines from which to measure progress on agreed improvement indicators; consistent and wide communication mechanisms throughout;

- Early stakeholder engagement;

- Realism on gains, and the timescales that these are likely - where practical including the identification and communication of 'early wins', but alongside a commitment to the 'long term' where necessary;

- Timing, and in certain circumstances 'opportunism'.

The need to adequately invest in developmental and feasibility work is also recognised as important. In this respect, support from national governments is cited as important to resource work and reduce risk. This needs to be balanced by an approach that does not seek to control or mandate the process.

Section 4 - Future Research and Support Options

The Improvement Service's approach to this research has been designed as a series of sequential phases – recognising emerging messages should inform subsequent work based on interest and demand from Councils. A number of options are apparent from the phase 1 messages, but these require to be tested and confirmed.

1. Publication of the full information base of survey findings – in fairly simple format to include: nature of activity; brief summary; primary motivations. The ability to interrogate the information by geographic reach, collaborative type, and subject area may also be useful. This includes identification and confirmation of service areas/thematic groupings that could form the basis of priority future shared services developments.

2. Identification and preparation of a series of detailed case studies of good practice. These should include: examples within and beyond Scottish local authorities; an existing and established national shared service; a newer 'Greenfield' example (probably City Region related); a collaborative working example within a local area/or potentially adjacent authorities based on the development of a wider partnership; a shared back office/digital solution; an example that is more bottom up in origin; and an example that demonstrates a 'journey' from collaborating working to shared services.

3. Officer workshop development sessions – introducing research findings and testing draft support tools, and linked to wider IS Transformation work.

4. Elected member engagement – initially through development of an elected member briefing note.

Next steps

1. Submit a paper based on this report to SOLACE, and use this as a basis for a SOLACE workshop.

2. Agree and action second phase research based on the feedback received.

Appendix 1 - Current Activities, Collaborative Activities and Shared Services in Scottish Local Authorities

The full survey returns are available from the Improvement Service, and subsequent phases of IS work will determine the best way to communicate and update this information to ensure it is of maximum benefit to Scottish local authorities. Some early analysis of findings is presented in the tables below.

Returns by region

Region	Number	%age Total
North East	3	2%
Aberdeen (City and Shire)	5	3%
Forth Valley	11	6%
Stirling-Clacks	4	2%
One Local Authority	57	32%
National	30	17%
No Specific Location	3	2%
South (Borders and DG)	1	1%
West	3	2%
Dundee and Angus	1	1%
Ayrshires	9	5%
Clyde Valley	12	7%
Renfrewshire and Inverclyde	10	6%
Fife and Lothians	1	1%
South East	7	4%
Fife and PKC	1	1%
Mid and East Lothian	2	1%
Lothians	1	1%
North	1	1%
Lanarkshire	3	2%
Glasgow City Region	1	1%
Dunbartonshire	1	1%
Tayside	9	5%

Returns by service/activity area

Category	Number	%age Total
Adult Services	5	3%
Bus Support, Employment, Economic Growth and Regeneration	15	9%
Capital Assets	0	0%
Children & young People	9	5%
Comm. Safety (inc Fire)	8	5%
Culture, Arts, Heritage, Tourism	2	1%
Data Collection, processing, FOI	4	2%
Democracy, Governance, Performance	2	1%
Education & Learning	13	7%
Health & Social Care	18	10%
Housing, Revenues & Benefits, Homelessness, Asylum	7	4%
HR	11	6%
ICT& Digital Services	9	5%
Legal	0	0%
Library	0	0%
Parks & Open Spaces	0	0%
Environmental Protection, Waste, and Regulatory Services	18	10%
Finance	4	2%
Planning & building Control	0	0%
Procurement	6	3%
Public Health	0	0%
Emergency Response	6	3%
Property, Facilities and Utility	13	7%
Shared Leadership & Chief Executives	1	1%
Shared Management	0	0%
Sport & recreation	3	2%
Transport & Highways	22	13%

Appendix 2 - Phase 1 Research Consultees

The following people were consulted in phase 1 of this research. Their co-operation and time is much appreciated, but the findings presented are solely the responsibility of the report's author.

Gillian Cameron – Supplier Development Programme
Antony Clark – Audit Scotland
Myra Forsyth – Midlothian Council
James Fowlie – COSLA
Danny Gallacher - SEEMIS
James Lally – East Ayrshire Council
Anne Marie O'Donnell – Glasgow City Council
Kenneth Lawrie – Falkirk Council
Andy McGuire – Improvement Service
Mary Morgan – NHS National Services Scotland
Jim Savege – Aberdeenshire Council
Alison Smith – Angus Council
Vivienne Smith – Angus Council
Roddy Burns – Moray Council

Appendix 3 - Case Studies

The case studies presented here are specifically focused on shared services and shared capacity. This is not to suggest these approaches are more important, but rather reflects that highlighting these add more value to potential future developmental work. Collaborative working shares many characteristics with 'partnership' working, where significant research is already available.

The case studies were identified through the phase 1 research survey returns, qualitative discussions, and desk research. No specific claims are made for these activities other than they all contain some useful, and potentially transferable learning. They are not presented as necessarily 'the best' examples: other examples can be added as identified by local authorities.

Case Study 1: Ayrshire Roads Alliance

Delivery Mechanism	Joint Committee
Start date	2014
Participating partners	East Ayrshire Council, South Ayrshire Council

Origins

In the context of the Christie Commission report on the future delivery of public services, East Ayrshire Council began a general process to address the potential of shared service approaches. This recognised that they may contribute to addressing both budget pressures, and the aspiration to continually improve service provision. The option of co-operating with neighbouring authorities on roads services emerged from this process. South Ayrshire Council also saw the potential of this approach. The Business Case to create a shared service was subsequently agreed in June 2013. The approach has subsequently been extended to incorporate transportation services.

Nature of service

Ayrshire Roads Alliance (ARA) is a partnership that now delivers a shared and integrated Roads and Transportation service across East and South Ayrshire Council areas.

It is governed by the Ayrshire Shared Service Joint Committee. The Shared Services Minute of Agreement describes the functions of the Joint Committee as follows: making decisions within the confines of the service budget; developing and implementing a strategic policy framework; co-ordinating, monitoring and reviewing service performance; monitoring budget spend; considering and approving an annual Service Plan.

The two Councils have each appointed four Elected Members to the Joint Committee. Meetings take place approximately six times per year.

The ARA model has now been adopted in Inverclyde and West Dunbartonshire.

Progress and benefits

Core benefits of the shared services approach are identified as:

- Budget savings through economies of scale and an integrated management structure. These were projected in the initial Business Case to save the participating Councils £8.683 million between 2014/15 and 2023/24. By the end of 2019/20, actual savings are anticipated as £6.313 million;

- The adoption of similar systems across the Alliance to significantly increase dealing with road safety defects;

- The adoption of common performance and quality management processes;

- The ability to concentrate and access specialist engineering expertise within an in-house Council delivery model;

- Increased service resilience through the potential to share resources;

- The development of joint training activities – increasing quality and providing further economies of scale based savings.

Other specific developments advanced through the shared service model include:

- A Single Winter policy is in place;

- Adoption of the Well Managed Highway Infrastructure Code of Practice;

- A single inspection risk based approach across the network;

- LED replacement across the service;

- The development of Active Travel Cycling Hubs;

- 60 Winter Resilience Groups set up across the network supporting volunteers.

The Service has delivered improving road conditions since 2014, and the website and twitter accounts have seen a significant increase in usage since 2014.

Overall, the Roads Conditions Index (RCI) for both Council networks has consistently improved since 2014.

Progress and benefits

- Developing strategies and policies that satisfy communities in both Council areas has presented a number of challenges:

- Keeping communities on-side – this has been addressed by continuous face to face engagement and the use of social media;

- Reduced overall resources - this has been overcome by the use of resilience groups, winter review, and the adoption of a risk based approach to defects;

- The different expectations across two local authority areas, which has required continual engagement with senior officers and elected members in both authority areas;

- Varying road budgets across both authorities.

Future developments

The service is currently undergoing a full review, which is anticipated to lead to further suggested developments.

Further information

Website www.ayrshireroadsalliance.org

The minutes and reports are found on both East Ayrshire and South Ayrshire Council websites. Annual reports are submitted to both Councils.

Case Study 2: Renfewshire Civil Contingencies Service

Delivery Mechanism	Lead authority (Renfrewshire Council)
Start date	2009
Participating partners	Renfrewshire Council, Inverclyde Council, East Renfrewshire Council, and West Dunbartonshire Council

Origins of service development

In response to the statutory requirements on local authorities reinforced by the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, originally 3 Councils identified the opportunity to develop a shared service response to civil contingencies planning.

This developed from a strong established culture of regional and national collaboration on these issues.

Nature of service

The Civil Contingencies Service (CCS) provides organisational resilience for Local Authorities including incident response (operational) and emergency/contingency planning (non-operational). This includes emergency planning and business continuity/preparedness services across the 4 participating councils.

The CCS is a relatively small team, (1 Senior Civil Contingency Officer (CCO); 2 CCOs, and 1 Assistant CCO) who have individual authority responsibilities within the shared service model. These staff are employed by Renfrewshire Council, based on appropriate resource contributions from each Council.

Day to day management of the service is led by the senior CCO, working with line managers in the constituent authorities.

Strategic management is provided by a Joint Management Board which includes the four local authority Chief Executives - one of whom chairs the group on a rotating basis.

Progress and benefits (including any formal reviews)

The CCS is now a well-developed approach, which has more recently added an additional Council without any reported difficulties. Key benefits of the model are cited as:

• The financial benefits in sharing costs across four Councils – providing a managed service that meets the ever-growing local authority civil contingencies obligations and immediacy of response requirements;

• Enhanced partnership working through a collaborative approach and continuity for emergency situations which often spread beyond council boundaries;

• Sharing, reduced duplication and increased specialisation in the development of emergency response plans – with team members leading identified elements of these and then disseminating outputs across the shared service;

• Shared training activities;

• Consistency in service response across the 4 areas;

• The consolidation of resources to enable strong area representation and benefits from participation in a range of regional and national civil contingencies forums and structures;

• Reduced 24/7 duty cover requirements for CCOs and Council Incident Officers by sharing this across 4 Councils, as opposed to individual Council arrangements.

Challenges and learning

The shared service approach is viewed as an effective response in a specific, and in ways unusual service area, which is by its nature not 'day to day' service delivery. It places common but unpredictable demands on local authorities which require immediate responses. As a consequence, it is an area of work where collaboration is historically well embedded at local, regional and national levels.

Challenges remain in ensuring the appropriate awareness of the CCS role across all related services – but these are beyond any particular issues presented by a shared service response. No tensions are recorded between authorities on the lead authority shared service model, and there is a strong sense that its benefits outweigh any potential drawbacks. The co-ordination of the service through a very senior cross Council officer group is important in reinforcing the shared approach.

In practice, the service when initially established did not require the transference of any staff, as they were all newly recruited in Renfrewshire Council. The addition of West Dunbartonshire Council arose in part from the opportunity presented by the necessity to consider new arrangements due to staff changes. This 'opportunism' may be important in any future service developments.

Future developments

The service is subject to 3 yearly reviews which are monitored by quarterly Joint Management Board meetings made up of 4 Chief Executives. These respond to ever growing/changing demands which are inherent in civil contingencies work.

With appropriate risk assessment work, the CCS could potentially be extended to nearby authorities, and could be replicated dependent on circumstances elsewhere. Other models of collaboration in this service area across Scotland already exist.

Further information

https://www.gov.scot/publications/preparing-scotland-scottish-guidance-resilience/pages/3/

Case Study 3: Ayrshire Area Support Team

Delivery Mechanism	Lead local authority model – North Ayrshire Council
Start date	June 2013
Participating partners	North Ayrshire Council, East Ayrshire Council, South Ayrshire Council, and Children's Hearings Scotland (CHS)

Origins of service development

The Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011 created a new network of 22 Area Support Teams (AST) to work with Children's Hearing Scotland (CHS) to provide a more consistent support service to volunteers within the Children's Hearing Service. The 3 Ayrshire Council areas were grouped together as a single AST, and the authorities agreed to consolidate a single shared support function and resource based in North Ayrshire Council.

Nature of service

This is a very small team of 2 full time staff which includes a Clerk to the Ayrshire Area Support Team & Administrative Support to support volunteers within the Children's Hearing System across Ayrshire. The team ensures consistency across Ayrshire with regard to hearing practice as well as administrative arrangements around panel member recruitment, reappointments, training, and the payment of out of pocket expenses.

The staff are employed by NAC on behalf of the three Councils on the basis of a minute of agreement. The Council's jointly meet the costs based on Scottish Children's Reporter Administration Children's hearing and referral statistical information.

Progress and benefits (including any formal reviews)

The Ayrshire approach is now well respected and described as a 'fabulous model' by the National Convenor of CHS. Its key benefits include:

• Cost efficiencies through resource sharing (including joint training);

• The development of a consistent and high-quality support service across the whole of Ayrshire;

• The ability to apply dedicated, full time resources to support the Hearing System (in

some areas these staff can be allocated to other duties in addition to this role);

- The potential through shared systems to provide emergency volunteer cover across the 3 authority areas;

- The joint resource has facilitated and enabled a joint Ayrshire input to national initiatives, steering groups, and mentoring.

An elected representative or senior officer from each Council inputs to an advisory group, and the 3 Ayrshire Provosts regularly front volunteer events.

A minute of agreement between the three local authorities underpins the service, and this has been positively reviewed and updated. A Partnership Agreement with Children's Hearing Scotland has also been renewed. CHS undertake a volunteer community review every two years, the outcome of which is particularly positive in respect of Ayrshire.

The AST Clerk was awarded North Ayrshire Council's Customer Excellence award in 2018 after being nominated by a number of volunteers. The Administrative Assistant reached the final of 'North Ayrshire Achieves' in 2019 in the 'Behind The Scenes' category, with the AST's Modern Apprentice at the time being awarded the 'best newcomer' award as well as winning the Modern Apprentice of the Year award from the Ayrshire Chamber.

Challenges and learning

Three different sets of administrative arrangements had to be combined into the Ayrshire AST. Operationally this involved integrating different approaches to volunteer management into a single model. A further challenge has been around managing volunteer expectations in terms of available staff resources – but this has been helped by the shared service resource.

Overall, the decision to establish a shared resource is viewed as being correct – as evidenced by Council, CHS, and volunteer feedback. It is a replicable model across other areas of Scotland.

Future developments

Working in partnership with CHS, the AST is keen to be involved in the roll out of national initiatives (such as panel member profiles).

CHS were successful in gaining additional funding from the Scottish Government for the creation of Area Support and Improvement Partners (ASIP) in each SCRA locality.

NAC were keen to support the new ASIP by providing office accommodation within Cunninghame House and the Clerk has been heavily involved in helping embed the role

within the system.

The Ayrshire ASIP has been in post for 6 months and the role will be subject to future review.

Further information

For more information on the roles and function of the AST visit CHS website at:

http://www.chscotland.gov.uk/the-childrens-hearings-system/area-support-teams/

For AST map of Scotland click:

http://www.chscotland.gov.uk/media/26160/AST-Map-full-colour-.pdf

Case Study 4: SEEMiS

Delivery Mechanism	Limited Liability Partnership
Start date	1996
Participating partners	32 Councils across Scotland

Origins

SEEMiS has evolved as a national service since its inception in the 1990s following local government reorganisation. Initially involving 12 Councils, it has developed into a national service for Local Government with all 32 Scottish Councils participating as Members of the organisation, in recognition of the benefits of a common, national service response to what are primarily statutory information requirements on Scottish local authorities.

Nature of service

The SEEMiS Group is an Education Management Information System (MIS) provider of education management software and MIS services which are used by all Education Departments and Local Authority schools and nurseries in Scotland. As the standard MIS within Scottish Education, student data is processed and managed by SEEMiS software offering interfaces with external agencies such as ScotXed and SQA.

At the heart of the SEEMiS product set is SEEMiS Click+Go which offers a wide range of modules to support pupil and staff record management, including Attendance, Pastoral Notes, Progress + Achievement, and Reporting. There is also a wider estate of additional applications such as the Nursery Application Management System (NAMS),

Utilising the MIS's functionally rich suite of tools enables SEEMIS to hold and efficiently process large pupil data sets internally and integrate with a wide range of agencies and external applications for the benefit of its Members. The range of products continues to grow, responding to Members demand and need to implement changes in Education policy and legislation at a national level.

SEEMiS is based within the offices of South Lanarkshire Council, and the Council provides support function services, managed through a Service Level Agreement.   Current arrangements are reported as working well, technically the service could be located

anywhere but there are undoubted benefits of being co-located within a Local Government environment. SEEMiS has a current staff complement of c60 staff.

Progress and benefits (including any formal reviews)

SEEMiS is now a well-established service across Scottish local government offering popular and growing technology based solutions. All 32 Councils are long standing members. The service and product offer continues to evolve based on member requests and new information gathering opportunities and requirements.

Key benefits of the SEEMiS model are:

Low cost, high value solutions, SEEMiS does not seek to make profits and/or pay shareholder dividends, at financial year end net assets are attributable to the Members;

A service solution that is owned by Local Government, managed through an inclusive governance arrangement and responds to the needs of its Members who prioritise the organisation's work programme;

SEEMiS operates nationally and so records can be transferred across authorities and between nursery / primary / secondary schools. National statistics are also easily compiled for census purposes;

The opportunity to aggregate dedicated capacity and skills creating a capability that individual local authorities would find hard/ impossible to achieve;

The capacity to ensure continual environmental scanning and so respond to opportunities in a fast-moving information and dynamic external environment. For example, SEEMiS has recently collaborated with the Improvement Service on the development of a new 'Parent's Portal' to help with Local Government digital transformation;

The opportunity to ensure local authorities are fully engaged and represented at the 'top table' with Scottish Govt. in proactively designing system solutions required to respond to national education policy developments;

The ability for local authorities to operate an in-house and sustainable shared service in a major service area, Education.

Challenges and learning

Producing products and services that meet the diverse needs of 32 local authorities is a challenging task, for any type of shared service operation. The key to success is building a deep relationship with all Councils to ensure that they feel valued.

The SEEMiS experience suggests some useful lessons on how to make a shared service of this nature successful, including:

- An independent governance model based on democratic principles, which provides equal access for all Councils through regular, tiered, structured governance groups;

- Operate Account Management (SEEMiS have four Customer Account Managers) - this is particularly important as Councils need to be regularly engaged and feel they have a voice and are being listened to;

- A transparent funding model based on a standard service to all Councils based on pro rata contributions linked to pupil numbers;

- A continual recognition, linked to well established consultation and engagement mechanisms, that individual Councils are customers with key 'market' intelligence;

- Provide transparent accounting information to demonstrate the shared service exists to serve its Members with low cost/ high quality services and not to generate profits or dividends for investors via the application of profit margins on cost of operation.

This learning has some potential transferability to other service settings whilst recognising that this is now a mature shared service. It also does not require at this stage to address the demands of start-up investments.

Future developments

By working closely with its members and the strategic bodies responsible for education developments in Scotland, SEEMiS looks to continually improve its product set and support local authorities and their associated schools to deliver their statutory and discretionary responsibilities. SEEMiS continues to respond to regular new demands from authorities, and uses its democratic and inclusive governance arrangements to prioritise future developments.

As of early 2020, SEEMIS is undertaking a complete product line overhaul. This takes account of stakeholder feedback and improvement suggestions as it looks to rationalise and develop a Next Generation of SEEMIS products that are fit for the digital age. SEEMiS is also keen to enable safe and secure integration with its platform to meet Local Authorities quest to digitise service provision, where that will deliver improved service delivery to citizens.

Further information

https://www.seemis.gov.scot

Case Study 5: Supplier Development Programme

Delivery Mechanism	Local authority owned limited company
Start date	2008
Participating partners	32 Scottish Local Authorities, Scottish Government, 14 affiliate public sector organisations, 1 corporate member

Origins

The Supplier Development Programme (SDP) originated from a joint initiative between 2 Councils which quickly grew to a much wider group of Councils, and to now involving all Scottish Councils. This was based on a recognition that provision of a common support service to assist SMEs and social enterprises in public procurement was a consistent and shared challenge. A major transformation of the SDP in 2013-14 aligned this work with Scottish Government commitments to provide a similar service, and extend SDP activities to wider public-sector procurement activities.

Nature of service

SDP's key objectives are to:

• Raise awareness of opportunities arising from public sector spend;

• Provide training and support via traditional classroom style, face-to-face, or via webinar, in all aspects public sector tendering;

• Improve the tender readiness of local suppliers through early intervention and early engagement;

• Support member organisations to meet the Sustainable Procurement Duty; and

• Promote links and integrate with other government business support services.

The SDP is now a partnership of Local Authorities, Scottish Government and other public bodies that works together to bring free support in all aspects of tendering to Scottish-based SMEs, third sector and supported businesses. It is a registered company, of which all local authorities are the members.

SDP helps businesses that have little or no experience of tendering and are often too small to have dedicated bid/tender resources to contemplate bidding for public sector contracts.

SDP aims to help such businesses become 'tender ready' for contracts. This improves their prospects when competing throughout Scotland, where there is an annual public procurement spend of £11 billion. In conjunction with the local authority, SDP delivers this support through a menu of free training and events, including early intervention activities which can be booked via the SDP website.

By assisting businesses to become tender ready for public procurement, SDP seeks to improve all-round efficiency, sustainability, and market potential – and supports local wealth creation. The Programme currently has more than 15,500 SME registered businesses in Scotland.

The SDP has as small core team of 5 staff based in South Lanarkshire Council – which provides premises, pay and provisions support based on a Service Level Agreement.

In addition to the company's Memorandum and Articles of Association, the operation of the SDP is informed by a comprehensive Memorandum of Understanding.

A series of governance based structures lead from the Board, including an Executive Sub Group and 17 Regional Officers Groups.

The SDP is resourced though a combination of: local authority annual membership fees (based on pro rata business base calculations); Scottish Government grant support; and an increasing range of other income generation streams including wider public-sector contributions and events.

Progress and benefits (including any formal reviews)

The process to ensure all 32 local authorities are members of the SDP has taken time, with some authorities less immediately convinced of the benefits of membership as opposed to operating their own individual activities. This has been addressed through articulating a series of added value benefits:

- Value for money through economies of scale;
- The ability to concentrate expertise and developmental activity at a larger, national level – including national branding and promotion;
- The opportunities for participating companies to gain knowledge and network across wider business areas;
- Consistency of messages and advice;
- Strengthening linkages between economic development and procurement functions;
- The capacity to respond to developments at a wider geographic level e.g. the

procurement opportunities from City Region and Regional Growth Deals;

- The development of a collective local authority approach that has enabled a mechanism to engage the Scottish Government as a partner and investor – strengthening the alignment of local and national procurement objectives;

- The establishment of a mechanism to engage the procurement activities of a wide range of other public-sector agencies, improve their supply chain opportunities, and further increase market opportunities for Scottish SMEs.

Challenges and learning

Development of the SDP has faced a number of challenges. These have primarily related to:

- Clearly articulating and evidencing the added value of membership to local authorities and wider public-sector partners;

- Maintaining a viable and sustainable funding model which maintains quality and capacity whist appreciating the ongoing reality of tight Council and wider budgets (particularly as all of this work is a discretionary local authority function);

- Clearly defining the support roles and expectations of the core SDP resource and those of the participating local authorities and other public-sector partners;

- Ensuring that the national shared service support model appropriately understands and respects local variations and sensitivities;

- Ensuring that participating local authorities have clear 'line of sight' information on the participation levels and the wider benefits of SDP activities;

- How to evolve an originally local authority only model into a potential resource for the whole Scottish public sector.

Key learning on how the SDP has addressed these challenges include:

- Clearly articulated governance structures and mechanisms – most significantly the Memorandum of Understanding;

- Developing a relationship with the Scottish Government based on common policy objectives with the local authorities;

- Providing information to local authorities on individual Council level participation levels;

- The establishment of regional development groups to ensure local priorities are fed into future project planning;

- The development of a more varied delivery model – most notably through the establishment of a strong SDP digital capacity which provides additional, remote access options;

- The development of new membership categories such as affiliate membership to enable wider public-sector participation in SDP governance and operation;

- The development of a series of additional commercial activities – generating new income streams to augment membership fees.

Future developments

A third phase of SDP transformation was advanced in 2019. This was based on:

- Continued service growth and reach;

- Gathering increasing supplier intelligence across the public sector;

- Further increasing wider public-sector involvement – beyond local authorities;

- Further development of the digital offer;

- Continued diversification of the SDP funding base to minimise pressures on core membership funding contributions.

Further information

www.sdpscotland.co.uk

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