

How can ICT enable more joined-up, efficient and citizen-focused public services?



Q&A: Local Government



Naomi Clayton - February 2008



Executive summary

This report summarises the findings from a workshop on Information Communication Technology (ICT) and partnership working across local authority boundaries on 14th November 2007, with contributions from Siobhan Coughlan, Head of Transformational Government, IDeA and Paul Naylor, Deputy Chief Executive, Ashford Borough Council.

The workshop and our literature review and research highlighted that partnership working is of growing importance across a wide range of government agendas. From increasing efficiency through shared services to devising shared economic development strategies in response to the Sub National Review of Economic Development and Regeneration, partnership is seen as the key to improving public service outcomes. Integral to achieving many of these goals is information and communication technology as an enabler of shared information, changing working practices and making change happen. Yet too often the government agendas are not sufficiently joined up to enable lessons to be learned from very similar experiences across different policy areas. This needs to change.

This report contains a small number of examples of practical partnership working making good use of ICT, with more available in the IDeA Front Office Shared Services report. Our analysis of these and other ICT-enabled partnership projects in local government shows that **benefits** of effective partnership working include:

Efficiency savings: For example, through reducing duplication, sharing costs, achieving economies of scale and combining buying or procurement power.

Access to resources: Improving local authorities' access to funds and their bidding power.

Targeted services: Increased economic impact and reach to the most disadvantaged communities, as well as improved intelligence about the needs of customers.

Local Innovation: Providing new perspectives and challenges to previous ways of working and spreading the risks and costs of projects not working.

Sharing knowledge and increasing capacity: Sharing expertise, knowledge and best practice to achieve shared goals.

Challenges of partnership working enabled by ICT include:

Resources are scarce: It may be difficult to spare them for the extra work created by partnership working.

Managing culture changes within the organisation: – *‘the technology is perhaps the easiest part – the cultural barriers are more difficult to overcome. It is a macro business case issue – have to look very carefully at it’*.¹

Customer Relations Management information is ‘shallow’: Not enough information is available about what customers need and want.

Organising complex activity across all partners: Each partner has its own objectives that need to be reconciled with a number of other organisations.

Working effectively with the voluntary sector: Ensuring partnership working does not drain scarce resources from the voluntary sector for meetings.

Supply market: Where local authorities are procuring the same thing, they should review opportunities to jointly approach suppliers.

Successful delivery of ICT-enabled partnership projects would be more likely if the following were available:

Regional Support: More advice, support and brokering at the regional level, for example, through agencies such as London Connects and Kent Connects.

Clear Leadership: Clear leadership, both political and managerial, and vision are fundamental to the success of collaborative projects and partnership working.

Effective governance: Effective governance arrangements and project management processes are also vital.

¹ Workshop participant

Shared vision and clear objectives: Having an agreed vision across all partners with the outcomes focused on customers is crucial. The benefits of partnership working should be established from the outset and each of the partners should be able to see that the outcomes will be mutually beneficial.

Clear definition of collaborative relationship: Each partner should have a clear definition and be accountable for agreed roles and responsibilities and milestones.

Engaging and training staff: Effective communication with staff needs to take place at all levels, both within and between authorities.

Customer driven transformation: The way local authorities shape service delivery must take account of the customers' needs and should be based on evidence.

For more information on the experiences of other sectors, please see [here](#) for more details.

Foreword

Information Communication Technology (ICT) can enable public services to be easier to use, more efficient, 'joined-up' and ultimately better able to meet the demands of 21st century citizens. Managing government ICT programmes is a challenging and important task: the potential gains are huge, but the risks of failure all too evident.

Over the past two years The Work Foundation's research has looked into the *why, what* and *how* of ICT and public services. These reports explored the purpose of ICT-enabled public services and addressed the expectations of ICT users – both the public and frontline staff – that must be taken into account at each stage of planning and delivery of projects. Following these reports, a review of the Transformational Government strategy published in 2006 outlines the challenges that the government needs to address to complete the transition from e-government to an approach that puts ICT at the heart of business planning and service delivery.

Building on this evidence base, this third phase of work examines in greater detail how public managers deal with the day-to-day management of ICT programmes in the Criminal Justice System, the National Health Service and local government. Based on three sector-specific workshops, it focuses on how to enable organisations across all sectors to work together more effectively.

Adobe is delighted to be supporting these events, which will investigate what the major issues are for public managers, how these differ between sectors, and what cross-departmental learning can be shared. This report draws on the outcomes of the third sector-specific workshop. The event stimulated an interesting discussion on the challenges and opportunities of ICT-enabled public services, and drew out constructive examples from Local Government on how to make best use of ICT to enable partnership working.

With this report we hope to show what can be done to make ICT serve citizens better and to encourage the sharing of ideas between departments and partner organisations. We hope you find the report useful.



Ian Cockerill, Government Practice Manager, Adobe Systems Europe

1. Introduction

The next few months are an important time to be considering how partnership working across local government can work in practice. Despite a lack of a single overarching agenda encouraging partnership working, there are a range of government initiatives and policies driving forward 'collaboration' across organisational and administrative boundaries at the local level, many of them making use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to do so.

This is not a new agenda: the 2004 Gershon review of public service efficiency, for example, emphasised the benefits of partnership working in local government and the potential to make efficiency gains as well as to improve the quality of public services, with ICT a core element of this. Local authorities are already 'collaborating' across boundaries in a number of ways to deliver public services, from one-stop shops and contact centres to public procurement. This also speaks to the 'Transformational Government' agenda, which represents a move away from applying IT solutions to business problems and towards making ICT an integral part of public services that are 'joined up' and more personalised to the needs of citizens and businesses. Partnership working has led to the establishment of shared services between many local authorities and whilst initially these have been 'back office' functions, increasingly authorities have sought to share front line and customer facing services too – a key policy emphasis in the Transformational Government Strategy.

Over the next few months, however, the incentives for partnership working at local government level are picking up pace. Not only is the government considering how to implement the Sub National Review of Economic Development and Regeneration, which encourages cross-boundary working through the introduction of Multi-Area Agreements. It is also creating further demands for local authorities to share services following the Comprehensive Spending Review in order to generate the efficiencies required by a tight local government funding settlement.

Whilst many authorities are realising efficiency gains as well as improving their services to the public through collaboratively and making use of ICT, partnership working is not without its challenges. It requires local authorities to work across both organisational and often professional boundaries, demanding significant cultural and organisational change. It is a challenge that requires clear and concise leadership from the top, with a vision and strategy and a strong business case put forward for change. Staff engagement is also crucial and managers need to ensure that they communicate with their employees about what needs to change and why it matters. For partnership working to make a real difference to public services, it is also vital that it is about more than shared administration and shared ICT and that it focuses on the needs and

wants of the communities the public sector serves, meaning that local authorities need to understand what their communities and 'customers' actually need and want.

Research that The Work Foundation has conducted over the past two years has identified several key challenges that need to be addressed before organisations can make use of ICT in a successful and transformational way as an enabler of achieving other objectives, including partnership working and better service delivery. Enablers of successful ICT-supported projects include:

More risk effective management: Managers need to be clear about what ICT projects aim to do and ensure that the scope of projects is not stretched too far.

Learning from pilots: Ensuring that rigorous piloting and evaluation is in place, and that the lessons from these processes are heeded.

Making best use of tried and tested methods: Projects are more likely to succeed if the technologies and business benefits have been proved.

Segmenting customers is key: Different groups use technology and interact with government in different ways. Recognising that ICT is not a one-size-fits all solution, engaging with people and tailoring services to meet their needs and (refined) preferences is the only way to ensure that the public get the most from ICT-enabled services.

Leadership: High-level recognition of the value of ICT is essential. ICT is a crucial organisational tool and investment needs to be made in the professionalisation of ICT services and solutions.

The importance of engaging stakeholders early on: Engagement is crucial if citizens and staff are to realise the benefits of working with or using ICT-enabled services.

Bridging the chasm between policy and delivery: Ensuring that there is clarity about the feasibility of delivering different ICT-enabled projects and that any changes to policy during a project are informed by an understanding of the impact the changes will have on the chances of delivery.

2. About this report

Building on this research and the increased emphasis on partnership working, as well as recognition that ICT can be a significant enabler of successful partnership working if deployed in the right way, Adobe supported The Work Foundation to run a workshop with senior local government managers engaged in this agenda. The workshop in November 2007, *Working in Partnership using ICT: Local Government and the Comprehensive Spending Review 2007*, provided a forum for participants to share practical solutions for using ICT to understand citizens' needs and to make public services more integrated, efficient and user focused; to share their experiences surrounding partnership working, discussing the advantages and disadvantages and the role of ICT; and to discuss how to manage the organisational, cultural and workforce issues involved in partnership working.

This report summarises the key issues raised in the workshop and highlights the key themes and insights from the discussion.

3. Question and answer discussion

1. What are the key policy drivers that have affected partnership working enabled by ICT across local government?

There is no single overarching agenda for partnership working or for use of ICT ('transformational government') at the local level. Both are evolving processes and practitioners at the local level need to interpret and implement a wide range of policies and service agreements when using partnership working and ICT. All these policies tend to share, however, the common goal of trying to deliver a better result for local communities.

There are several key policy drivers for transformational government and partnership working at the local level:

a. Local Government White Paper – '*Efficiency – Transforming Local Services*'.

In 2006 government published the Local Government White Paper. The paper emphasises the importance of consulting with and involving local citizens and communities in the design and delivery of local services. There will be greater need for local authorities to have in place processes and systems to enable them to gather information and understand the complex needs of their customers, making effective use of ICT.

The paper also signals a move towards more collaborative working between local authorities as a means of improving effectiveness and efficiency '*ensuring that administrative boundaries do not act as a barrier to service transformation and efficiency*'.² The paper states '*we want all local authorities to unlock these potential benefits by delivering more services in collaboration with each other, with other local public service providers and with the private or the third sector*'.³

Local services are expected to be delivered through a range of new and existing partnerships, including Local Area Agreements, Multi Area Agreements and Local Strategic Partnerships. Specifically, two tier authorities are expected to achieve '*unified service delivery models, with service users having no need to understand whether the county, district, or other service provider is responsible*'.⁴

The Comprehensive Area Assessment, the new proposed performance management framework for local authorities, will focus on outcomes for the local area as a whole and its

² Local Government White Paper p.135

³ Ibid p.137

⁴ Local Government White Paper p.64

citizens, whether it is secured by the local authority alone or in partnership, taking into account their views and experiences. This represents a significant shift away from the Comprehensive Performance Assessment, which reviews the local authority's performance rather than its performance working in partnership with others. It puts Local Area Agreements and Local Strategic Partnerships at the heart of how local authorities and their areas are held to account. This means that partnership working and effective use of ICT to enable sharing of data and information will be even more vital to achieving local authority targets in the future.

b. The Varney Review

Sir David Varney was commissioned by the Chancellor to review public service delivery. The report, published in 2006, identified opportunities to make public services more efficient, accessible, convenient and responsive to the needs of citizens and businesses. Varney stated that there were *'opportunities to deliver better public services through joining up service provision across the public sector and by engaging more directly with users in the design and delivery of services'*.

Key recommendations surrounded improving information and transaction channels for citizens; building on proposals to enable greater personalisation of services and reduce duplication; increasing skills and capability to respond to needs of citizens and businesses; and establishing service transformation as a top priority outcome. Varney also cited a number of key challenges: understanding customer need, joining up services provided by different organisations and surrounding different customer group, leveraging assets, managing and sharing data, exploiting technology and removing duplication and wastage.

This report has fed into central and local government thinking around realising efficiencies – see the Comprehensive Spending Review below – and reinforces again the importance of partnership working and effective use of ICT.

c. Comprehensive Spending Review 2007 and Service Transformational Agreement

The recent Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR), which signalled an end to high levels of growth in public spending, will have a direct impact on local authorities and the way that services are delivered. Following an increase of 39 per cent in local government funding over the last ten years, the CSR announced a tight settlement over the next three years. The Local Government Association described the 1 per cent real term increase in funding

as ‘the worst settlement for local government in a decade’.⁵ Local authorities will be tasked with improving public services within increasingly tighter budgets.

Following Varney’s Review, service transformation was an integral part of the latest 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review. The Service Transformation agreement set out a programme of action to change public services to meet the needs of people and businesses. The government will objectively monitor customer satisfaction using two key performance measurements – reducing avoidable contact and building better online services. Every organisation across the public sector is required to ‘*put into practice the principles of service transformation*’.

Six areas of strategic action have been identified: real, evidence based understanding of the behaviours of their customers, grouping services in ways that are meaningful to the customer, presenting a service framework which is simpler and more accessible, making better use of customer information the public sector already holds, joining up public service delivery across local and central government and engaging front line staff.

Key deliverables in the agreement include the strategic initiative ‘Tell Us Once’, the cross-government partnership led by the Department for Work and Pensions that is a pilot to enable citizens to report changes of circumstances (such as bereavement) just once. The Service Transformation Agreement underpins the delivery of the new Public Service Agreement framework setting out the government’s vision for building services around the citizen.

d. New partnership mechanisms

Local authorities have long been working together across administrative boundaries but these partnerships are increasingly becoming more formalised. Local Area Agreements (LAAs) define priorities for a local area and are negotiated by central government and local partners – in practice this means that Local Authorities are delivering national outcomes that also reflect local priorities.

A more recent local government initiative, still at the pilot stage, are Multi Area Agreements (MAAs). They are similar in principle to the LAAs but enable local government to transcend administrative boundaries to work in collaboration together. Thirteen areas are working with

⁵ Local Government Association (2007) *LGA Press Release: CSR is ‘worst in a decade’*, LGA Available at: <http://www.lga.gov.uk/PressRelease.asp?id=-A7848E45> (accessed 12 December 2007)

central government on MAAs and are collaborating on issues such as: transport, skills and labour market development, economic development, investment and tourism.

2. How have local authorities been working together to deliver public services? Examples of best practice

There are many examples of effective partnership working making use of ICT. Some that were highlighted in our workshop include:

- **'Tell Us Once'**

Local government has been working with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) who are leading the programme 'Tell Us Once'. The primary objective behind the programme is to create a more efficient and effective system surrounding the customer journey for death and bereavement, and eventually a change of address. The pilot of the programme is running in 2008 and aims to allow the customer to tell only one government department about a change and then other government departments will be notified. DWP has approached a number of local authorities to help pilot the scheme.

Our discussion highlighted that security and data/information sharing issues may act as a barrier here. Those involved in the scheme are calling on Government experts with a view to providing guidance about removing or working around these potential barriers in the absence of legislative changes.

- **Ashford Gateway**

Ashford Gateway is a pilot for 'Kent Gateway' – a partnership based service delivery and joint access point for Ashford Borough, Jobcentre Plus, local healthcare agencies and voluntary organisations, and Kent County Council. The focus for this initiative is firmly on convenience and ease of access. As the Chief Executive of Kent County states: *'the Ashford Gateway is about creating a better experience for people and improving the quality of life by joining public services and making them more accessible in a friendly and attractive way'*. The transformation of service is customer driven and emphasis is placed on taking account of customer needs in the shaping of service delivery.

Ashford has overcome a number of challenges in establishing the Gateway, beyond ICT issues – *'technology is probably the easiest part – it is now a means to an end'*. Firstly,

for an initiative that is intended to be customer driven and evidence based the Customer Relationship Management information was limited. Ashford needed evidence from the customer, for example, what interactions do they want to have? A challenge was also faced in bringing different people and agencies together, which requires standards to be harmonised, as well as organisational and cultural change. Organisations, particularly the voluntary sector, found it difficult to adapt to these changes.

To overcome some of these challenges partners have established an integrated set of core principles. The initiative was also supported by Kent Connects, which has helped to find technology solutions to deliver services between multiple agencies. A Gateway Strategy advisory board was also established to meet quarterly to review process, resolve issues and to consider strategic matters.

Despite the challenges, a number of benefits were also realised through the project, including increased accessibility and footfall, enhancing the customer experience, reaching new audiences, creating a stronger brand, increasing the number of cross agency referrals and moving away from a silo mentality. The project is also scalable and is being replicated elsewhere in the county. It is proposed that the Gateway initiative is rolled across all 12 districts over the next five years.

- **‘Public Service Village Partnership’**

The Public Service Village Partnership in Suffolk brings together county and district authorities, Suffolk police, West Suffolk College, West Suffolk Primary Care Trust and Suffolk Magistrates Court. It seeks to unify the range of customer services across the organisations – improving customer access to services and creating a one-stop-shop for all of the organisations. It achieves lower costs through rationalising accommodation and administration and taking advantage of joint procurement power.

3. What are the main benefits derived from partnership working across local authority boundaries?

- **Efficiency** – partnership working gives local authorities the opportunity to reduce and share costs between partners, maximising efficiency and returns on investment and sharing information much more effectively. Through economies of scale local authorities are able to share costs of common functions, both front and back office, procuring

products and services in larger volumes and pooling information. This collaborative working offers the potential for local authorities to combine their buying power to procure or commission products and services and savings can be realised from suppliers dealing with one coordinated procurement effort. This is particularly important in light of reduced public spending.

- **Access to resources** – not only can partnership working reduce costs but it can also strengthen local authorities' ability to negotiate and raise funding. Collaborative partnerships potentially enable local authorities to attract funding from partnership bids where there is evidence of partner ability to deliver joint projects and it strengthens the case for that group of partners to receive the funds. For example, more affluent authorities working with lower income authorities both bring resources to bear, working together can better reflect the way their economy works, and the inclusion of more deprived areas strengthens the case for accessing public funds to address social inclusion issues. It also gives more access to information about each others' best practices.
- **Targeted services** – collaborating with other local authorities and other partners creates critical mass which increases local authorities' ability to reach and deliver beyond the capabilities of any one partner. It enables local authorities to increase their economic impact and their reach to disadvantaged communities and target services in a more effective way. It can also lead to improved intelligence about the needs of customers.
- **Local Innovation** – partnerships can create a new dynamic, providing new perspectives and challenges to previous ways of working. Through this partners may find innovative, more effective ways of providing services. Partnership also spread the risks, and associated costs, of a project not working.
- **Share knowledge and increase capacity** – partners may also find it beneficial to share their expertise, knowledge and best practice, as well as pooling resources in order to achieve shared goals.

4. What have the main challenges been?

Whilst the specific detail of challenges will vary according to the issue on which partners are working together and local circumstances, local authorities will all face common themes – they are on a spectrum of development.

- **Making use of scarce resources** – Local authorities need to best utilise the resources available to them, including people and ICT systems that enable them to make best use of people (for example, enabling social care workers to access information when they meet with clients, using a hand-held device, rather than always needing to go back to the office). This is especially important in light of government plans to tighten public expenditure and the latest settlement for local government.
- **Managing culture changes within the organisation** – *‘the technology is perhaps the easiest part – the cultural barriers are more difficult to overcome. It is a macro business case issue – have to look very carefully at it’.*⁶ The partnership and Transformational Government agendas require substantial cultural and organisational change across all levels of the organisation – in the front and back office. Partners need to find tactical solutions to these potential cultural challenges, which may involve working firstly on agreeing desired outcomes and mutual benefits, and then at the more easily operationalised level of sharing data and information.
- **Customer Relations Management information is often ‘shallow’** – Customer Relations Management (CRM) is the process used to learn about the needs and behaviours and customers, and to develop ‘deep’ customer insight to predict future needs. This is particularly important where the need to develop customer-centric services that are based on knowledge and understanding of local residents, businesses and communities. Local authorities have faced a number of challenges associated with integrating CRM across local authority boundaries, including: technology does not support wider customer databases, costs, ‘deeper’ multi-agency data integration not yet justified, CRM information is ‘shallow’, legal barriers to sharing information and change management. Effective use of ICT here is critical.

⁶ Workshop participant

- **Organising complex activity across all partners** – Local government is responsible for delivering a number of complex public service outcomes. Not only do local authorities work across other local authority boundaries but also with a range of local service providers, each with their own targets and ways of working. The number of targets local authorities have to measure themselves against can be a constraint on innovation. Local authorities also have different targets and rates of implementation. This means that even trying to work together to meet similar outcomes can require very complex arrangements and reporting structures to be put in place, as well as dealing with very different ICT systems.
- **Working effectively with the voluntary sector** – the voluntary sector, responsible for delivering a high proportion of public services, tends not to have high levels of spare capacity and resource. This means that thought needs to be given to how partnership working can make effective use of the considerable insights and expertise the voluntary sector has, without placing too great a burden on their scarce resources. ICT compatibility issues and how information can be shared most effectively also needs to be considered.
- **Supply market** – the cost of IT is quite significant and the structure of local government means that local authorities are procuring the same things. This suggests that there is a need to encourage suppliers to think differently about how they sell to organisations seeking to work together, given these new policy incentives to do so. However, it is important not to take a one-size-fits-all approach.

5. What are some of the factors for the successful delivery of partnership projects?

Workshop participants highlighted that successful delivery of ICT-enabled partnership projects would be more likely if the following were available:

- **Regional Support** – participants were keen that there was more advice and support for partnership working and use of ICT at the regional level, for example, through agencies such as London Connects and Kent Connects. These organisations may have a role in brokering relationships, offering advice and solutions, disseminating information and best practice models. They may also provide a mechanism for leveraging good work already undertaken by local authorities.

- **Clear Leadership** – clear leadership, both political and managerial, and vision are fundamental to the success of collaborative projects and partnership working using ICT. It is vital that partners feel they have control over the programme. Effective governance arrangements and project management processes should also be put into place. There will be no single model for this and it is likely to be a complex structure.
- **Shared vision and clear objectives** – having an agreed vision across all partners with the outcomes focused on customers is also crucial to ensure that the partnership and the ICT work well. The benefits of partnership working should be established from the outset and each of the partners should be able to see that the outcomes will be mutually beneficial. It should also be recognised in an outcome based approach that cash savings do not always lead to better value for money. Setting clear objectives and ensuring transparency and accountability between partners should also build a culture of trust, a culture of trust at both the political level and officer level is fundamental if collaborative partnerships are to work effectively.
- **Clear definition of collaborative relationship** – each partner should have a clear definition and be accountable for agreed roles and responsibilities. A clear timeframe with agreed deadlines should also be established and partners need to be realistic about how long it takes to build strong working relationships and to change established ICT systems and ways of sharing information.
- **Engaging and training staff** – effective communication with staff is an essential ingredient for success. Communication needs to take place at all levels, both within and between authorities. Staff also need to possess the relevant skills to deal with both the changing nature of service delivery, collaborative partnerships and changing ICT.
- **Customer driven transformation** – the way local authorities shape service delivery must take account of the customers' needs and need to have an evidence base. For example, what interactions does the public want to have, what types of service delivery best suits their needs? Here it is not only important to develop ICT systems that staff see the benefit of using and that provide CRM information that is easily accessed and inputted, but also to engage customers to better understand customer needs.

6. Wider lessons and conclusions

Our brief overview of the literature and the seminar highlighted the breadth of policy initiatives affecting local government that require partnership working and use of ICT to deliver better outcomes for the public. Too often these initiatives are not sufficiently joined up and so it can be difficult for local authorities to ensure that lessons are learned from partnership working and use of ICT in one area and applied to a different part of the same organisation.

For what is clear is that, whilst the detail of initiatives vary greatly, there are common themes that can be enablers of or barriers to success. Some ideas also emerged about what made the most difference to successful delivery of ICT-enabled partnerships within local government. Participants suggested that more information about best practice that joins up the different policy areas would be particularly useful, with the establishment of the Local Government Delivery Council seen as being an important opportunity to have a voice advising on what is working and what is not working.

It is also important to sound the note of caution that came through in the workshop. There is a danger that partnership working and effective use of ICT to improve information sharing and increase efficiencies becomes seen as a panacea for all challenges facing local government. For all partnership and all ICT-enabled projects, the first and ongoing question has to be: what is this project for and how will it benefit the public? ICT-enabled partnerships have the potential to transform the way that services are delivered for the public, improving quality, choice and efficiency – but only if best practice is shared and lessons continue to be learned from past experience about what works well in these projects.

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