

Review of Strategic Partnerships

PURPOSE

1. To provide an update and seek Partnership Council's views on the Review of Strategic Partnerships.

BACKGROUND

2. Reducing complexity in the governance of public services has long been an aim of the Welsh Government, local government and other public service partners.
3. The complexity of the partnership landscape is an issue which is raised frequently and has been consistently highlighted in independent reviews of the public service landscape in Wales, including the Williams Review. Many public service and third sector partners are engaged in several partnerships covering a range of issues, priorities or themes.
4. The Working Group on Local Government considered the partnership picture at its meeting in January and some challenges were identified with regards the overlapping membership and remits of some partnerships.
5. Subsequently, the Welsh Government and WLGA agreed to undertake a review of strategic partnerships, reporting to the Partnership Council for Wales. A letter to public service leaders and chairs of partnerships seeking their initial views on partnership working in Wales was circulated in June with responses requested by 5 July. Responses were received over the summer.
6. As noted by the Partnership Council in June, the review is being undertaken as a proportionate and pragmatic task and finish piece of work, building on existing evidence and reviews and taking stock of public service leaders' views. The aim is to either identify actions which can be taken by the relevant groups or by Welsh Government to rationalise partnerships, or to identify whether legislative change would be required.

The review's objectives are to:

- Identify key partnership arrangements where there are felt to be overlapping remits.
- Consider whether the mechanisms for achieving these purposes, if suitable, might be achieved in a more efficient / effective way

And to make recommendations on:

- Practical action by the relevant partnerships or by Welsh Government to rationalise these arrangements
- Any aspects which would require legislative change

The review was originally envisaged to report to the Partnership Council for Wales on 2 October with recommendations relating to any legislative changes. Given the ongoing gathering of evidence and wider partnership reviews which are yet to report, it is proposed that this report is an Interim update to Partnership Council, with a view to concluding in early 2020.

SUMMARY

Annex A provides a detailed analysis of responses, segmented by sector. A summary of overall findings is provided below:

- Although the scope of the review covered a broad partnership landscape, a number of responses focused specifically on the interaction between Public Services Boards (PSBs) and Regional Partnership Boards (RPBs). There are number of views on resolving this interaction, but no legislative solutions were supported.
- A number of responses commented on funding. They generally noted that the principle of pooled budgets is not generally happening in practice. More generally, funding policies in silos is seen as promoting the proliferation of partnerships. There was a particular interest in funding for PSBs and whether they could be more effective if they had its own funding as other partnerships do.
- Many of the current partnerships exists either through legislation (e.g. Area Planning Boards and Community Safety Partnerships) or to support a key policy area (e.g. City Deals, Older Persons Partnerships and Regional Skills Partnerships). These tend to be managed as separate, independent partnership groups which can lead to additional bureaucracy.
- Possible solutions to rationalising the burden of these partnerships, e.g. around pooling funding and determining footprint, are within the ambit of the current partnerships. Based on the submissions so far there is little appetite for nationally imposed structural change through legislation.

Annex B provides some insight into related work into partnership working, namely Professor Keith Moultrie's report into collaboration between PSBs and RPBs and the work to simplify arrangements in the North Wales and Gwent regions.

DISCUSSION & ACTION

7. The views of Partnership Council members are sought in response to the analysis. In particular, with respect to the next steps noted in Annex A, i.e.

- Note that there is not significant evidence or support for legislative change as the solution to rationalising partnerships, rather that improvements and rationalisation should be ‘bottom-up’;
- To expand the review team to cover broader sectoral interests;
- Carry out further questioning with stakeholders to test hypotheses, develop solutions and agree recommendations;
- Note and report issues which are out of scope for this review, but may warrant further work e.g. the number of specific grant funding streams.
- Report on final recommendations at turn of the year.

WLGA/Welsh Government
2 October 2019

Annex A – Responses to call for evidence letter from WLGA Leader to Minister

Summary

There have been just over 30 responses to the review's call for evidence: -

- 11 LAs
- 1 LHB and 1 NHS Trust
- The FG Commissioner
- 1 RPB
- 1 PSB
- Letters from regulators, e.g. WAO
- Academic and others

The Review team has also met separately with members of the Welsh NHS Confederation, the Police and Crime Commissioner for South Wales, the Children's Commissioner for Wales and Community Housing Cymru to seek their views.

The following sections outline the key responses by sector to the call for evidence. They reflect a summary of the views of the respondents, *not* the views of the review team.

It should also be noted that beyond the local government responses (where the sample size is reasonable for drawing consensus), there have been limited opportunities to test whether these responses are supported across each sector.

Local Government

Local government responses are underpinned by views that: -

- They do not have the capacity for the current system
- The current system is driven by the policy priorities of individual Welsh Government departments and that the Welsh Government does not corporately consider the impact of its many initiatives on the capacity of public bodies and partners.
- Reform and change (simplification) should be locally led (bottom up).

Local authority key responses are described below:

- ***Capacity***
The scale of resources taken up in supporting partnership work, which includes travel and officer and member time spent in meetings to discuss issues that are not always seen as core to the functions of the Principal Council.
- ***PSB/RPB Interface***
The relationship between the PSB and the RPB needs to be better defined with clear, complementary roles defined for each.

- ***Overregulation***

The legislative framework for partnerships place requirements on Principal Councils which are not always consistent with the basic statutory decision-making processes of Councils with regard to budgets, service delivery and scrutiny. Over-regulation also manifests itself in grants with an operational focus and stringent grant conditions that detract from RPBs being able to address the key strategic issue of devising integrated services and managing a “whole system approach” to health and social care.

- ***The variable ‘status’ of partnerships***

Unequal financing of partnerships, where the locally focussed partnership body, the PSB, has core funding for support processes only, whereas the RPB has cash for re-aligning services and functions. It is felt that PSBs are not supported financially on an equal basis by Welsh Government – namely in terms of having its own funding to improve well-being.

- ***Footprints and co-terminosity***

Some footprints are felt not be appropriate. Powys and Ceredigion in Mid Wales wish to have more freedom and flexibility to work within their region. Their current arrangements place them within South West Wales and The Swansea Bay City Region area for most government sponsored partnership working.

Footprints vary for each type of activity – social care, criminal justice, planning etc. and this can be confusing or burdensome for partners who work across several sectors.

- ***More Freedom and flexibility for local priorities***

More scope for local priorities in contrast with national priorities driven by centrally determined regulations and grant conditions.

- ***Bottom-up, not top-down, reform***

Enable localities to better define the relationships and synergies between the different groups, suggesting that reform should be driven bottom-up rather than top-down.

- ***Political Oversight and Governance***

Councils are political bodies led by elected members who want greater oversight of partnership working. There are a number of partnerships, involving professionals and third sector partners, driven by Welsh Government grant streams where there are concerns that there is a lack of local democratic accountability and political governance. This has led to suggestions that such partnerships should report to bodies with member participation, e.g. one proposal from some responses was that RCCs and APBs could report to RPBs.

- ***Membership and manageability***

Some hold the view that PSBs and RPBs in particular are difficult to lead and manage with very large memberships (in some cases) and

participants who do not have any resources to contribute to the activity of the group (e.g. third sector).

- ***Performance***

There are concerns that PSBs are not being seen to be consistently delivering clear outcomes commensurate with the efforts and time going into them.

Inspection and audit bodies

These bodies (namely Estyn and the WAO) regulators reflected concerns on the: -

- The clarity of performance outcomes being sought by the partnerships
- The use of data and the sharing of data. Deficiencies in the use and sharing of data are reducing the effectiveness of performance.
- Accountability, challenge and scrutiny (effective governance) of partnerships

Overall, these concerns suggest that the partnerships lack clear performance objectives and therefore their productivity and effectiveness is difficult to assess.

Estyn have found that that, where they work well, strategic partnerships enable partners to identify opportunities, reduce duplication, and ensure value for money across the services they provide. However they expressed concerns on:

- The role of PSB learning sub-groups on education or learning and the lack of clarity of their link with the work of education consortia; and
- The complexity of arrangements covering vulnerability and safeguarding which could impact adversely on the protection of vulnerable children.

The complexity and rapid pace of change around vulnerability and safeguarding is a challenge which requires urgent resolution also featured in responses from the Local Authority and the Criminal Justice (policing) sectors.

The WAO reported that strategic partnerships should be managing demand and seeking to reduce it. However, they reported that use of data analysis is poor – focusing on the symptoms rather than the cause - and therefore the partnerships are often not able to focus on root causes of demand.

The WAO also noted that the level of co-operation and sharing of sovereignty was insufficient and organisational behaviour was not changing sufficiently to meet the objectives set partnerships by legislation. This comment was supported by comments in a meeting with the Welsh NHS Confederation who felt that neither Councils nor LHBs had succeeded in sharing sovereignty (in RPBs) over the resources needed to create a “whole-system” approach to health and social care.

Other key issues identified were:

- PSBs are key to driving the changes needed to address these problems but are not sufficiently resourced, organised or supported to deliver the transformation needed.
- There are missed opportunities through a lack of clear linkage between the well-being plan and the Local Development Plan.
- Attendance of statutory bodies at RPBs is variable
- Delegation by RPBs to sub-groups often excludes non-statutory partners e.g. the third sector.

The WAO is currently reviewing PSBs and will report in October.

Regional Partners

There are several services which participate in partnerships either as a national service, participating via regional offices like NRW and Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust (WAST) or regional services like Police and Fire & Rescue.

Particular concerns were raised about capacity issues (at the regional level) in supporting all PSBs. There were comments that: -

- The conversations in PSBs tend to be very similar across a given region and there is a case for reducing the number of PSBs.
- The main concern for a partnership review should be the relationship between the PSBs and the RPBs
- Both RPBs and PSBs are supposed to break down silos and share people, budgets and assets to improve services, reduce demand and address well-being with greater efficacy than they would separately.
- Funding for PSBs would help them address the big ideas in WFG Act.

NRW notes that the burden of attending the 19 PSBs is, in their view, too many for the organisation to support. NRW plans on the basis of six plus one (six regions plus marine) area plans, raising an issue of co-terminosity with other partnerships.

A particular issue for police services and Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) is to support partnerships on Community Safety Partnerships, Safeguarding Boards and the PSBs in Wales. In addition to the physical burden of attending multiple meetings, there were concerns raised around the potential overlap of responsibilities with regards the well-being of the population. The sector itself has worked on streamlining structures and partnerships in some regions. In North Wales, they are considering merging the adults and children's Safeguarding Boards and encourage this review to do the same. In South Wales, they support local determination as to how to make the structures and architecture as effective as possible.

There is concern that the functions of the Community Safety Partnerships have been lost in the creation of PSBs in some areas.

PCCs seek to work in partnership and have commissioning resources. Submissions implied that other partnerships and organisations need to be more responsive to this and have a greater commitment (of their organisational resources) to achieve change and improved outcomes through partnership working.

Third Sector

Feedback on the third sector was received from the WCVA, Care & Review Wales and the Pembrokeshire Association of Voluntary Services, with some additional contributions via WISERD. Some key points raised were:

- RPBs are welcomed by the third sector but there is confusion over the role the third sector should play in them
- The third sector is too diverse to be represented by the two or three third sector representatives on the RPBs and the County Voluntary Councils are not geared up to cross border, collective working.
- The sector is not able to participate in the “managerial tier” of work below that of the full RPB Board.
- They would welcome pooling of resources by PSBs, with the voluntary sector a more equal partner when the PSB commissions work.

FG Commissioner

The Commissioner recognises the issues of complexity and the desire for local flexibility and notes that, in her view, current funding regimes are driving “business as usual”.

She is concerned by the many reviews being conducted by Welsh Government, the Assembly and regulators of partnership working. The WG and the Partnership Review needs to be able to join up all these different reviews.

In addition, the Commissioner:

- Supports local flexibility on how to collaborate
- Wants funding for the core objectives of PSBs to give incentives for working in the PSBs
- Wants RPB funding to be linked to the preventative goals of the PSBs
- Suggests that the Building a Healthier Wales funding for the preventative agenda is be routed through PSBs

Her response outlined that PSBs need help defining what ‘good’ looks like and should be supported in enabling commissioning as a PSB, with advice that one of the partners can act as banker on behalf of the partnership.

Currently PSBs are felt to be losing out to the partnerships with money attached (grants and allocations) like the RPBs and the City Deal/Growth Deal Boards.

The Commissioner supports the findings of the Moultrie Review of the links between RPBs and PSBs (outlined in Annex B).

Other Suggestions and Opportunities

A number of submissions from across sectors made comments not yet noted. These are:

- Many different meetings were attended by roughly the same people and those people ought to be empowered to reduce their meeting commitments by merging their agendas.
- That PSBs should consider voluntary mergers across local authorities based on current practice in parts of Wales and harmonising with existing regional footprints, where possible.
- That the partnership organisations (specifically RPBs and PSBs) share data and their data analysts to produce single, multi-purpose population needs assessments, including requirements to establish the views and opinions of citizens (in place of each partnership having their own needs assessment)
- That strategic partnerships should only be required in service areas where one organisation cannot address the problem requiring solution or the performance of one organisation is partially dependent of the performance of another.

Annex B – Related evidence

Report from Professor Keith Moultrie – Alignment of PSBs and RPBs

In March 2019, Professor Keith Moultrie considered the relationship between RPBs and PSBs in a workshop of leaders from PSBs and RPBs sponsored by the Welsh Government.

The workshop confirmed: -

- The Government sees the two pieces of legislation as complementary, but distinct
- The way the PSBs and RPBs interact is best considered and determined locally
- RPBs need to move away from the allocation of grants to focus on the core mission of integrating and co-ordinating wider care resources across sectors.

The workshop concluded that:

- The Welsh Government should provide combined priorities and a single, common outcomes framework for the PSBs and RPBs.
- Both RPBs and PSBs should be working towards transforming core services.
- There should be fewer grants which last for longer on three- or five-year planning cycles rather than annual cycles.
- RPBs and PSBs should be supported nationally to share best practice and participate in development events and culture change programmes.

Regional Leadership and Planning, Local Delivery and Implementation

Several submissions described arrangements where partners working together in regions had sought to locally define roles for regional bodies and PSBs.

The Gwent group of public service leaders and chief officers (G10) seeks to lead on “strategic, long term planning” planning while PSBs deliver the local detail.

Similar models were quoted for Community Safety where a regional Community Safety Board defines strategic priorities and gives guidance to local authority CSPs to implement and deliver.

The North Wales RPB described a model where the RPB aims to create a strategic framework and share best practice while sub-regional, integrated service boards with links to PSBs deliver integrated services working through the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board Area Director Structure.

Gwent has also debated the concept of a Regional PSB. This would rely on a model of regional planning and local delivery.

Gwent and North Wales have undertaken work which suggests rationalisation of partnerships by grouping more than one statutory duty in one meeting setting. North Wales is seeking to reduce the bodies operating in the space of vulnerability, safeguarding and community safety in North Wales.