



Delivering beyond boundaries

The response by the Welsh Assembly Government to Sir Jeremy Beecham's Review of Local Service Delivery - Making the Connections: Delivering Beyond Boundaries.

Key issues

The Assembly has responded to the Beecham recommendations and 5 areas for action have been identified by March 2008.

Main actions include the creation of Local Services Boards, increasing public engagement, new partnerships on key services such as waste management and improving skills.

The Assembly will allocate £42 million over the next 3 years to support 'Making the Connections'.

1. Introduction

In October 2004, the Welsh Assembly Government published 'Making the Connections', its vision to transform public services (APSE briefing 04-58), which was underpinned by four principles;

- Citizens at the centre
- Equality and social justice
- Working together as the Welsh Public Service
- Value for money

This vision was shortly followed by an action plan called 'Delivering the Connections: From Vision to Action,' which set out the plans for the next 5 years (APSE briefing 05-40). The action plan called for a major review of local service delivery. The aims of the review were to identify improvements in local service delivery arrangements and to examine

how current accountability arrangements can support this. That is, the primary focus was on the management of services.

On 10 July 2006, the review team (chaired by Sir Jeremy Beecham) presented its report to the Assembly Government (APSE briefing 06-40). The review set out recommendations to make local services more citizen-centred, gave support for collaboration and fewer central controls and suggested developing a core set of national minimum standards and piloting Partnership Action Contracts. The approach was to concentrate on behaviour and culture and making existing structures more effective than major re-organisation. The Assembly has responded to this review and released a response, 'Delivering Beyond Boundaries: Transforming Public Services in Wales'. The full report is available by clicking on the following link:

<http://new.wales.gov.uk/about/strategy/makingtheconnections/news/GovmntRespBeecham?lang=en>

2. Action plan

The report lends support to 'Beyond Boundaries' including its focus on enhancing capacity, reducing complexity and creating a more innovative and ambitious culture. The key role for local authorities is to embrace new approaches to engaging with the public plus new forms of partnership and joint working at local, regional and national levels. The report states that the focus on outcomes for citizens will demand openness to a mixed economy in service delivery and to promote improved performance. In terms of the role of the voluntary and community sector, the report stated that they will have an enhanced role as citizens' advocates, providers of policy and service development expertise and as delivery partners. However, the report does reiterate the Assembly's vision of the need to balance the demands of individual citizens and the needs of the whole community.

The report details a five year action-plan with the following top 5 areas for action by March 2008:

a) Putting citizens first

This will include:

- Give citizens a clear statement of national standard for key services
- Deliver the first phase of actions to transform the quality of customer service to citizens and encouraging the development of single points of entry
- Set out a programme to improve public engagement in service design and delivery

Examples of public engagement cited in the report include exploiting the increase in people's use of ICT, measuring and reporting on public satisfaction and strengthening active partnerships between services and citizens (e.g. recycling household waste). There will be a national survey framework for local satisfaction research targeted on local service boards and partnerships will need to report on satisfaction annually from 2009.

b) Working together to deliver – locally

The aim is for the Assembly and local delivery partners to work more closely together to achieve a more effective network of public services in Wales. This will include:

- Establish Local Service Boards (on a local authority area basis) out of the existing Community Strategy Partnerships in all parts of Wales in 2007-08. These will

bring together key contributors to local service delivery, with the aim to improve service delivery and undertake joint action where needed.

- Develop financial and governance arrangements across sectors to make it easier to bring together budgets, staff, facilities and other resources.
- Develop Local Service Agreements through the Assembly Government working with the Local Service Boards, in which all parties commit to an agreed programme of action to deliver against a set of local and national priorities. There will be development projects in a small number of areas in 2007-08 and will be in all areas by 2010. They will engage with citizens, identify shared priorities and evaluate performance across a broad range of local services.
- The Local Service Boards will be non-hierarchical and will essentially be a partnership of equals. However, there will be an enhanced role for local councillors and non-executive members of boards in the performance appraisal of local services (a wider approach to scrutiny).
- Ensure the boards build on the work of existing partnerships.

In addition to Local Service Agreements, the Assembly will also explore the potential of multi-area Agreements with several Local Service Boards to work across local authority boundaries.

c) Working together to deliver – regionally and nationally

This will include:

- All Local Health Boards collaborating to form 3 regional consortia to commission specialist hospital services. There will be new arrangements on commissioning primary and community care which will be connected to the Local Service Boards.
- New local authority waste management delivery partnerships. The aim is to have these in place in 2007 with Assembly funding.
- Pushing ahead with the Heads of the Valleys Partnership covering the economy, skills, environment, housing and health.
- Joint commissioning across local authorities and local health boards and a regional approach to services for people with complex communication needs.
- Continued development of the Children's Commissioning Support Resource, to assist local authorities in providing for vulnerable children.
- Encouraging the development of 6 consortia of housing associations to maximise the impact of social housing grant.
- Strengthening regional transport consortia.
- Implementing a new Public Sector Broadband ICT network, connecting all main public sector bodies and enabling joint working. This will be implemented in 2007.
- Supporting the current work of the Welsh Local Government Association's regional partnerships in developing future collaborations.

d) World class workforce

The paper states that the transformation of public services to put the citizen first and the shift in resources to point of delivery will necessitate new skills and redefined roles and responsibilities for the Welsh public service. Planned actions include:

- Engaging 3,000 people per year from across the Welsh public service in national and international development programmes for leaders at all levels in the workforce.

- Grow the capacity in public service organisations to manage change and improve the quality of workforce planning and support networks of excellence for HR professionals.

The report also states that Public Services Management Wales will aim to facilitate more than 500 exchange and secondment opportunities each year to promote skills transference and improved collaboration across the public service.

e) Better value for the Welsh pound

This will include delivering £600 million efficiency gains a year across the Welsh public service by 2010:

- Streamlining corporate functions in public service bodies (e.g. finance and HR). By 2010, the Assembly will expect most public bodies to be sharing at least some aspects of their support services with others.
- Wide-ranging improvements in procurement, including a National Sourcing Plan, a new e-procurement hub and a sustainable procurement programme.
- Establish a collaborative capacity to support improvement in the design, procurement and construction of school buildings and to promote better maintenance and energy utilisation in the school estate.

3. Driving change: Government, resources and performance

In order to drive these changes, the Assembly are proposing a range of enabling factors:

a) Developing the role of the Assembly Government

The Assembly will rely less on conventional bureaucratic systems and engage directly with Local Service Boards in overcoming barriers to joint working, contribute to their performance management role and ensuring more effective communication with the Assembly Departments. They will establish a small Performance Wales team, drawn from within and outside the Assembly Government.

b) Performance information

The Assembly will establish a set of national service standards which can be easily accessed by the public, improve the quality and usefulness of public service performance information, ensure that performance frameworks for different sectors do not act as a barrier to collaboration and publish an annual report on the performance of public services.

c) Improving governance

They will ensure that clear lines of accountability and governance in all sectors to maximise the effectiveness of collaborative working, develop a unified approach to induction, training and awareness-raising for leaders, review arrangements for recruiting board members and develop comprehensive approaches to transferring best practice across public services and an intervention policy if an organisation is at risk of failing.

d) Regulation and inspection

A consultation will be released in 2007 on future policy for regulation and inspection.

The Assembly will allocate £42 million over the next 3 years to support 'Making the Connections'.

4. Comment

The approach by the Assembly in 'Making the Connections' has been broadly welcomed by APSE as a sensible approach to delivering efficient and effective public services. The paper reiterates that this is about services being responsive to the needs of the whole community and promoting equity in terms of race, gender, disability, faith, age and sexual orientation. The focus on making services more responsive to citizens is a welcomed approach – striking the right balance between the demands of individual and the needs of the whole community. It is vital that choice doesn't come at the expense of universal provision.

The proposals for Local Services Boards appear to strengthen the role of the Council by providing a key role for local councillors and non-executive members of boards in the performance appraisal of local services. However, APSE would argue that the report needs to recognize the contribution of local authorities on the Local Services Boards as representing their communities and having a place-shaping role, having an overall strategic responsibility for an area, across the public sector remit rather than treating this as a partnership of equals.

It will be interesting to see the proposals in the new Voluntary Sector Scheme and the role that volunteers have in the proposals. The paper states that there will be an enhanced role for the voluntary and community sector as advocates of citizens, providers of policy and service development expertise and as delivery partners. APSE argues that partnerships with the voluntary and community sector need to be managed via a quality framework and not a transfer in responsibility. There is a danger that services become managed by well-meaning but inexperienced amateurs lacking in expertise or worse by extremists.

The commitment to collaboration to deliver more effective services will be welcomed by APSE members. The public want greater personalisation of services in packages that are coherent, not fragmented and remote. A strong core of directly provided services allows authorities to respond to changes in priorities, both within neighbourhoods and at a national level. The report states that the outcome on citizens will demand openness to a mixed economy in service delivery. However, the Assembly has made a commitment to collaboration as opposed to competition and APSE would agree with this - outsourcing services would go against everything that local authorities are trying to achieve in co-ordinating services effectively towards one common goal.

There are a number of further consultation papers which will be released following on from this report. Some of these consultations will be subject to separate APSE briefings.

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