



Lessons from Total Place - Maximising a whole area approach to public services

This briefing is one in a series of briefing papers being issued by APSE around efficiencies and how local authorities can deal with budget constraints and maximise their opportunities such as income generation. As councils face tougher times and unprecedented financial constraints, APSE have brought together some examples of where efficiency savings have been made and some examples of best practice. Whilst many ideas are transferrable between councils, APSE recognises that local circumstances will vary and what works for one local authority may not work for another. This briefing paper relates to asset management, how organisations can come together to make the most of the assets, the issues they will face when doing so as well as a number of examples of how savings have been made.

Key issues:

- Savings of six figure sums made to date, potential savings of many millions and better outcomes
- Range of factors driving change
- Further information and support is available from APSE by contacting pbrennan@apse.org.uk

1. Introduction

Total Place management remains high on the agenda for public services as the pilots have generated savings with potential for far greater future savings and the principles promote more effective working and better outcomes. Although there are many examples of good practice in resource and asset management, avoiding overlap and duplication is fundamental to efficiency in public services and is often an easy target for critics. Total Place pilots have addressed this and shown improvements can be made. However there are entrenched cultural approaches which need to be addressed if further progress is to be made in how the best use is made of assets and resources.

2. Total Place

As Total Place has brought together a range of public service providers, it has also provided each partner with access to a range of resources and assets. Using assets and resources efficiently is vital for any and all organisations and Total Place has focussed on ensuring this is built into the programme. Delivering public services requires a combination of assets including physical assets such as buildings and property as well as vehicles, tools and plant, ICT equipment and play and leisure equipment. Assets also include

highways, footpaths, street lights, trees and vegetation as well as intellectual property, staff, information, software and more.

The Total Place scheme was a logical progression from other area based programmes which promoted work outside the silos of public services providers organisational arrangements, a focus on the service user and partnership working. It also incorporated the main messages from papers such as 'Building on Strong Foundations – A Framework for Local Authority Asset Management' (CLG, February 2008) and 'The National Procurement Strategy for Local Government – Towards public service transformation' (April 2008) which emerged from the Labour government.

It was designed as an initiative to look at a 'whole area' approach to public services focussing on the service recipient rather than the delivery body. General aims included better services, reduced costs, avoidance of overlap and duplication between organisations and better joint working as well as a step change in both service improvement and efficiency at the local level. There were 13 diverse pilot areas participating in the scheme with new approaches for the planning, design and delivery of services being encouraged. The impact of the economic downturn means all of the public sector needs to find radical new solutions to not only deliver better value for money, but also better local services more tailored to local needs. No formal announcements have been made on the future of the Total Place programme but GLG Minister Bob Neill is reported to have encouraged councils to continue to 'pursue Total Place principles'.

Asset management has been a constant theme in the efficiency agenda promoted by central government and taken on by local government. Related issues such as community ownership, shared services and improvements in ICT have ensured different perspectives have been brought to the topic. The public spending cuts introduced by the coalition government, have put further pressure on public services to manage their assets better and work closer together whilst the economic downturn will also have an impact on asset management both in terms of financial resources available to councils for maintenance as well as income from the sale of assets and rent from tenants.

3. Factors impacting on Total Place

It is interesting to look at lessons from the numerous programmes designed to improve public sector performance such as Best Value, LSPs, CAA, Sustainable Community Strategies and Total Place and see how the lessons can be applied to the wider local government and public service context. The evaluation of studies looking at what drives change have found a number of factors which are necessary to achieve success and make best use of resources.

Workforce - Managers need to think in terms of a single public service workforce operating across organisations without identifiable boundaries. These organisations need to look at how they can configure themselves to respond to the needs and priorities of the areas and communities they serve. There will be major implications that emerge for the people delivering services but these need to be addressed as part of the solution rather than used as an excuse for inaction.

Culture - The Total Place initiative has highlighted the different cultures and approaches to work that are found within different organisations even though all are public sector bodies. Although there will be differences there is a need to look at common approaches to working and dealing with service users. As an example, a number of councils have appointed, or are considering appointing, one chief executive covering two local authorities. This represents a real culture change as it has long been accepted that the chief executive/council leader relationship within a single local authority was vital to the success performance of the council.

New approaches – the type of issues addressed by those organisations that do come together in partnerships are not straightforward. Trying to achieve complex social objectives through a step by step formalised approach with the expectation of success if the steps are followed, is mistaken. Such issues are often not about processes but behaviours (such as the health of looked after children, drugs and alcohol or cutting crime) and although there can be a benefit in changing arrangements with regard to

physical assets, there is a greater need for innovation with regard to, for example, knowledge and expertise between organisations or data and information. These are not straight forward process problems but messy human problems and new approaches to dealing with them will be welcomed.

Effective leadership at corporate level – both from central and local levels and across organisations; not just in terms of individuals, which is vital, but also in terms of central programmes as centrally designed programmes with no flexibility to enable local interpretation are unlikely to succeed.

Accurate data – if the aim is to improve services and save money then there is a need to describe what has been achieved in numbers where appropriate; it provides a base line and a method of tracking progress; there is a need to avoid data overload and to ensure effective use of the data collected

Duration – many programmes have had a short life when change, especially cultural change, requires a much longer time frame. The approaches from programmes such as Total Place need to be adopted long term, a fact which public spending cuts will demand.

Relationships – success will not be achieved without working on relationships; to build support by explaining and listening to other organisations about their role and understanding the benefits that can be achieved by working together.

Knowledge – the services that councils deliver and the problems they face are similar although local circumstances mean they are never exactly the same. Nonetheless there are skills which individuals have which are needed and can be shared between councils. It is often the case that councils pay for consultants rather than employ individuals to address issues which maybe seasonal or irregular. These can include expertise in areas such as dangerous buildings, arboreal skills, engineer specialists and legal experts. For example, it can be that one council does not have sufficient workload for a building surveyor with specific dangerous building skills and ends up employing an expensive consultant at short notice when needed. The alternative is building control sections from a number of councils getting together and employing single officer between them – a much more efficient and effective approach.

Funding cuts – funding cuts will force the pace of change. Although much work has been done in a period when public spending was increasing, the likelihood of radical ideas being introduced is less than in periods of greatly reduced budgets.

4. Opportunities for front line services

Set out below are a number of examples from local authority and other public service providers throughout the UK which show financial and organisational benefits. Further details are available to APSE member authorities by contacting the APSE office on 0161 772 1810.

Case study 1: Co location of services. A Scottish Council, NHS and Job Centre Plus have come together to deliver a series of services from a single newly built facility. Services include information desk, cashiers, Money Matters advice, benefits and revenues, a library, a registrar, housing repair centre, youth support service, NHS services, GP, Job Centre Plus and Pathways to work. One of the outcomes has been a 40% increase in library lending by youths.

The same council alongside the NHS and the Police established a service centre in another new building providing an information desk, leisure Facilities, a youth wing, a crèche and after school care, a library, an IT suite, employment training, NHS services and a Police service.

Case study 2: Organisational Transformation. A council from West Yorkshire is undertaking an organisational transformation programme designed to modernise the way in which the council delivers its services. The three-year initiative (which started in 2007) aims to rationalise the authority's property portfolio, improve staff productivity and enhance citizens' access to services.

- reducing the number of administrative buildings from 34 to 6
- flexible working – hot-desking, home working home, mobile working, 9-day fortnights

- 1st phase – office space reduced by 32%; 127,000 commuting miles saved; 15% productivity gains in e-services alone with cashable savings of £81,000pa.
- capital receipts gained so far with aim of £18m from all sales; sickness levels fallen year on year.

Case study 3: Combined management teams. A Care Trust and council in the north west are to become one the first in the country to merge their management teams and will be led by one chief executive. The aim of the integrated management team is to save money and help commission NHS, public health and social services together. The collaboration is expected to save up to £2m annually with the feeling being that it is the next obvious step. Last year, under the care trust plus, the council transferred its powers for commissioning social care for children and adults to the local primary care trust. A southern county council and its PCT have already formed a single management team under one chief executive while a London borough is also considering such a move.

Case study 4: Public Service Centre. A council in Northern Ireland has opened the first public services centre in the region with the aim of bringing services closer to the customer. The primary purpose of the centre is to receive and process requests for all services provided by the council. In addition it is a contact point for other public services locally including the Roads Service, Water Service, Housing Executive, Rate Collection Agency and the Education and Library Board among others.

Case study 5: Highway lighting collaboration. Councils in North Wales have started to work collaboratively over recent years starting as informal networking and developing into formalised procurement . By bringing together the management of their street lighting assets they have made savings in a number of areas of the service and are working on a number of future aims.

- savings per council in excess of £60,00 pa for street lighting service connections
- supportive energy pricing due to the collaborative agreement and economies of scale
- significant financial savings and reduced carbon emissions in each authority
- as a result of partnership negotiations between the councils and meter administrators regarding transfer to a more accurate reporting system for unmetered electricity and energy costs, all councils will make savings such as the £55k made by one of the partner councils.
- more cost effective staff training through pooling of resources

Case study 6: Combined action to tackle bad weather. Following the poor weather in 2008/09 a north east county council reviewed its winter service and formulated an action plan alongside the police, fire and rescue service PCT and town and parish councils. The PCT contributed over £1m in 2009/10 and 2010/11 to cover the revenue and capital costs of gritting new routes. The scheme received excellent feedback from residents and it is expected to continue for a number of years to come.

Case study 7: Partnership working on housing and regeneration. North East public service providers came together to work on housing in relation to regeneration because a high quality, improved housing offer is fundamental to their ambition to regenerate parts of the county as well as setting up a new partnership for housing-led regeneration with the aim of a collective approach to accessing funding streams in the public and private sectors and coordinating the investment across the county. Their research found

- 19 funding sources locally for housing into the county
- Over 100 spending programmes in relation to housing and regeneration delivering in localities - half of which have delivered spend in 2008/09
- 48,000 social rented properties in the county managed and/or owned by 32 landlords
- £18 – 30million potential indicative savings identified

Case Study 8: Saving on older people's care. Councils and NHS providers in the south west chose to lead a Total Place pilot focussing on how to deliver better services for older people at less cost with the aim of reducing the need for long-term care by helping individuals build skills and confidence. Initial findings from a pilot site in one area showed it was possible to reduce the weekly amount of care in nearly 75 out of 100 cases.

- A pilot project for telecare provision began in October 2006 and has delivered quantifiable savings for the county council and NHS of around £155,000 through delaying or preventing the need for care home admissions, or enabling early hospital discharges.
- Since April 2008, 58,748 people have benefitted from neighbourhood support networks and preventative services
- Early indications show that this work has helped save more than £1 million through a reduced need for care home placements and home care packages

Case study 9: Rethinking support services. As part of a major focus on health, equality and worklessness, Job Centre Plus staff have been co-located in GP surgeries. There has been considerable success with GPs able to prescribe a job centre referral to be able to get a person into employment as well as prescribing medicines because they sit alongside each other.

4. APSE commentary

APSE promotes excellence in public sector service delivery irrelevant of the delivery arrangements. This will include services delivered by individual councils, groups of councils coming together, councils working with other public sector bodies and with private companies. Public sector budget cuts mean every last ounce of value needs to be squeezed from the assets at the disposal of local authorities and all duplication must be avoided. Councils working with partners is one way of doing this and lessons from previous programmes need to be taken on board if this approach is to be successful.

One of the main elements of Total Place is to map the total public spend in an area. In one smaller county the figure which emerged was £4.02bn. At a crude level, even a small saving or reallocation of spending, say 1%, is a very large amount of money. This reflects the scale of the public sector in the UK – there are opportunities for greater efficiency within such a context.

Evaluation of national programmes has shown that restrictive accountability to central government is damaging to projects which are dependent upon local partnerships and that a flexible basis for local working and the freedom to innovate are vital for the success of a scheme. APSE welcomes local accountability and responsibility and appreciates that it can lead to the type of benefits can emerge from the case studies noted above.

The focus on improvement and efficiency has been ongoing for a number of years, aiming to make services the best, cheapest and most effective they can be. The economic downturn is one prompt for greater efficiency but the agenda for improvement will remain regardless of economic conditions.

Applying the lessons from Total Place is fundamental for local authorities. Further support is available from APSE via obtaining these full case studies, additional support in conducting an options appraisal or service review, performance measurement and process benchmarking, skills development and training, as well as advisory services. Please contact pbrennan@apse.org.uk or more information.

Phil Brennan
Principal Advisor

References

'Total Place; Lessons learnt' – Office for Public Management (August 2009)

'The Public Service Challenge – Implementing the lessons from Total Place' - Local Government Group/MJ (July 2010)