

Lead Member (Communities, Collaboration and Partnerships)
Aelod Arweiniol (Cymunedau, Cydweithrediad a Phartneriaethau)

Hugh Jones



10 September 2013

Christine Chapman AM
Chair of Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff CF99 1NA

Dear Ms Chapman

Re: Inquiry into progress with local government collaboration

Thank you for your letter of 26 July 2013 regarding your short inquiry into local government collaboration.

As Lead Member for Communities, Partnerships and Collaboration at Wrexham County Borough Council I am responding to your terms of reference below.

The extent to which the Welsh Government's Collaboration agenda has been taken forward within local authorities.

In Wrexham our collaboration agenda has various sources:

- The Simpson Review / Compact agreement
- The Regional collaboration agenda
- Local cross partner collaboration across Wrexham
- Elected Member involvement in local collaborative projects

Collaboration encompasses work both within the County Borough, collaborating with partnership on the Single Integrated Plan and collaborating across the 6 Counties of North Wales with other authorities.

This work is wide ranging and comprehensive and can be complex by nature. Some collaboration initiatives have now been in place for several years e.g. the North Wales Adoption Service and the North East Wales Emergency Duty Team (NEWEDT) as well as some joint posts. These are now mainstreamed and are successful and effective ways of working.

Other collaboration is less developed. The regional collaboration agenda and the compact agreement are proving to be slow to progress. For example the Legal Services collaborative project is making progress and will be an excellent collaborative idea but discussions across North Wales have been slow to shape the service.

At a local level we are currently reviewing the partnership landscape across Wrexham to streamline this work into the three priorities our LSB strategic plan "Our Wrexham Plan". This is both time consuming resource demanding and has grown to become complex.

The structural, political and practical barriers to successful collaboration

The compact was agreed by our Executive Board in March 2012 with the following caveats:

- Wrexham County Borough Council Members must remain central to key decisions in relation to collaboration via the existing decision making process of the Executive Board.
- All collaboration must have a sound business case highlighting strong improvement outcomes and/or financial benefits for Wrexham.
- Collaboration supports the Council's vision for Wrexham County Borough.
- Some collaborative work may not maximise short term benefits for Wrexham, but all business cases must evidence the longer-term maximisation of benefits for Wrexham.
- No collaboration should undermine the ability of the democratically elected Council to best represent the interests of Wrexham.

It is with these caveats that all collaborative activities are undertaken across Wrexham and with the six North Wales counties.

From a practical perspective the business language of local authorities across North Wales varies. Where a local authority with the lead has Welsh as its business language we have practical problems of translation of documents.

The geography of North Wales can also prove to be an issue at times. IT is not always available or practical to allow video conferencing etc., so travel to meetings can be time consuming.

The models of governance and accountability adopted when collaboration takes place

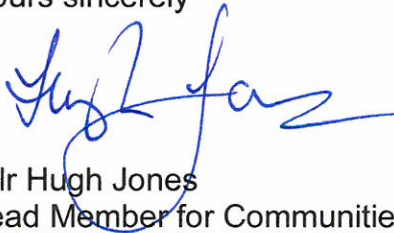
Governance and accountability is variable from project to project. Guidance from Welsh Government to support this area would be helpful. Currently the lead authority tends to take the lead for governance however if other authorities wish to challenge an issue this can be difficult.

The overall costs and benefits of collaborating to deliver local government services

The areas of collaboration that have been mainstreamed have proved to be effective. However as described in paragraph one above progress is slow. Many collaborative projects have not yet reached the stage of delivering on their outcomes so it is too early to evaluate their costs and benefits. For example we are currently working with other local authorities to develop collaboration for library services, planning services and Welsh translation; all of which are strong collaborations but it is too early yet to evaluate. Indeed the Library services collaboration has identified a potential cash saving. We have also established a North Wales Safer Communities Board which has the potential to be an influential group. In a further attempt to reduce duplication the NWSCB has taken responsibility for the Area Planning Board which will seek to drive forward improved effectiveness and increased efficiencies when dealing with substance misuse

I hope that this information is helpful to you and if you require any further information or have any queries relating to this please contact me.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Hugh Jones', written over the typed name below.

Cllr Hugh Jones
Lead Member for Communities, Partnerships and Collaboration