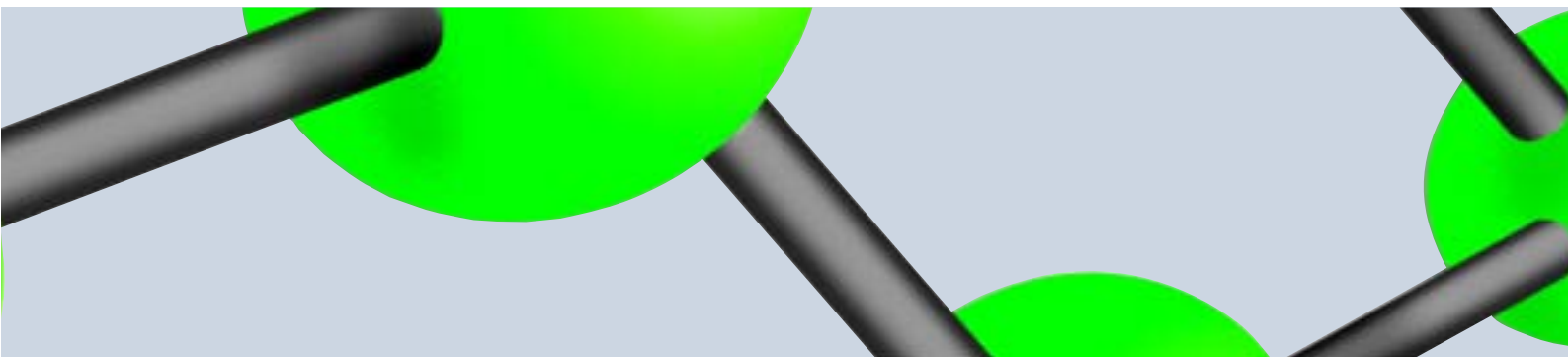


Joining Up to Improve Public Services



REPORT BY THE COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL
HC 383 Session 2001-2002: 7 December 2001

executive summary

- 1 Many organisations are involved in delivering public services - for example, support and advice for the elderly is provided by the NHS, the Department for Work and Pensions, local authority social services departments, private sector providers of residential care and the voluntary sector. How well such organisations work together and co-ordinate their activities can have a significant impact on the quality of public services.
- 2 In the past departments have often been concerned exclusively with achieving their own specific objectives reflecting responsibilities and funding which they can directly control. While this can be effective in delivering many of the Government's priorities, it can result in departments adopting a too narrow "silo" approach and not considering the wider contribution which they can make to cross-cutting programmes for groups such as children, the elderly and the long term unemployed. As Sue Richards, Professor of Public Management, University of Birmingham highlights in her research paper¹ which sets out an analysis of the public policy problems that joined up government is seeking to address, many of the most difficult issues faced by society - drug abuse, social deprivation, juvenile crime and inner city decline cut across traditional departmental responsibilities. They require a co-ordinated and combined response by departments, local authorities and other bodies in delivering public services.
- 3 The Government requires public, private and voluntary organisations involved in delivering public services to work together much more to design programmes that are better interconnected and mutually supportive thus increasing their chances of success and their overall quality (**Figure 2**). The Modernising Government White Paper (Cm 4310) published in March 1999 called for public sector staff to work in partnership across organisational boundaries to deliver integrated or seamless services. The Modernising Government Action Plan, published July 1999, along with subsequent progress reports, set out a range of initiatives and activities for departments to support the objective of joint working.

1 Joint working or "joined up" government

Joint working or "joined up" government is the bringing together of a number of public, private and voluntary sector bodies to work across organisational boundaries towards a common goal.

Joint working can take different forms:

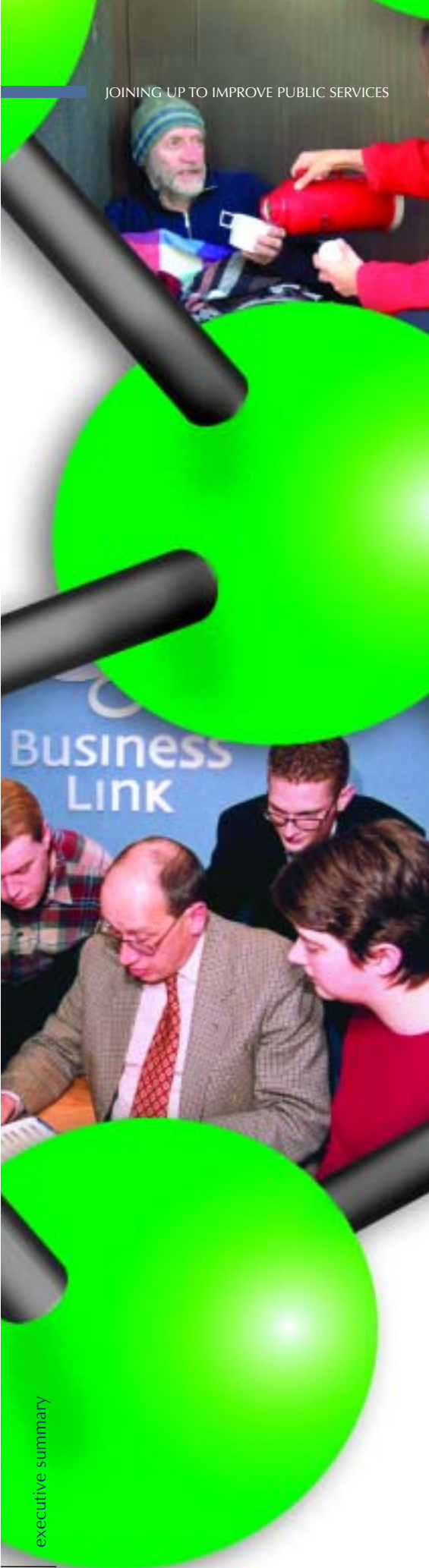
Realigning organisational boundaries- bringing together the whole or parts of two or more organisations to create a new organisation.

Formal partnerships - working together by contract, protocol or framework agreement.

Informal partnerships - working together by liaison, consultation or unwritten mutual agreement.

Source: National Audit Office examination of joint working initiatives

¹ *Four types of joined up government and the problem of accountability, Sue Richards Professor of Public Management, University of Birmingham - Appendix 2 to this report.*



2 How joint working can help improve public services

Benefits

Joint working between:

- departments
- agencies
- voluntary organisations
- private sector



Taking a wider view so that departments' activities make a contribution to cross-cutting programmes for client groups such as the elderly and children.

Tackling intractable social issues such as drug abuse, rough sleeping, juvenile crime and inner city regeneration by promoting the design of programmes which are better interconnected and mutually supportive thus increasing their chances of success.

Improving delivery for example, by delivering services through "one stop shops", integrated with websites accessible 24 hours a day, and by citizens only having to provide information on a range of issues once and to one location.

Promoting innovation by bringing people together from different backgrounds and experiences.

Improving cost effectiveness of public services by removing overlaps and realising economies of scale.

Source: National Audit Office

- 4 Departments and their agencies are responsible for achieving more joint working when appropriate in the policies for which they are responsible. The Cabinet Office and the Treasury are responsible for promoting joint working and monitoring its achievement. They are doing this through funding new innovative joint working approaches, training, and disseminating good practice, particularly on refocusing services to meet customers' needs. The Office of Public Services Reform, established in 2001 and based in the Cabinet Office, will have a key role to play in improving joint working, through the scrutiny of structures, systems, incentives and skills currently in use across the public sector.
- 5 This report assesses the impact of five joint working initiatives in achieving improvements in public services for three client groups - rough sleepers, pre-school children and small and medium sized businesses (**Part 2**). Drawing on our fieldwork and research we also highlight a range of good practice likely to support successful joint working (**Part 3**). This good practice is intended to help departments which are considering establishing joint working arrangements.

3 Five initiatives

- Rough Sleepers
- Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships
- Sure Start
- Business Link partnerships
- British Trade International

Achievements so far (Part 2)

- 6 Each of the five initiatives which we examined has in place joint working arrangements. These range from - establishing a completely new organisation such as British Trade International bringing together the responsibilities of two departments, the Department of Trade and Industry and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for international trade promotion and development - to formal contractual partnerships between local authorities, NHS Community Trusts and voluntary organisations such as those funded by the Sure Start Unit to improve the health and well-being of children particularly those most in need, and local business service partnerships established as non-profit companies (Figure 4).
- 7 Some of the initiatives are already achieving tangible benefits (Figure 5). The number of people counted as sleeping rough has reduced by 62 per cent from 1850 in June 1998 to 700 in June 2001. At 31 March 2001 the target to provide a free part-time nursery place for 4 year olds had been achieved as planned; free part-time places were available for over 50 per cent of 3 year olds; and 140,000 new childcare² places had been created exceeding the target of 82,000 by 70 per cent. The productivity and profitability of businesses assisted by Business Link partnerships is higher than those of non-assisted businesses. For the other initiatives - Sure Start and British Trade International - it is too early for there to be any measurable long term benefit although systems are in place or being established to assess their impact.
- 8 These early achievements demonstrate good progress in establishing joint working to improve public services. But getting a wide range of diverse organisations with different responsibilities to work together is a complex process. It requires a willingness on the part of service providers to adopt new ways of delivering public services and new management approaches. Not surprisingly there are a number of risks which require careful management:-
- 9 **Removing barriers to joint working.** Not all organisations are sufficiently committed to joint working. For example, the Rough Sleepers Unit has found in some instances when it is not providing direct funding that it can be difficult to influence local authorities and NHS Trusts to treat rough sleepers as a priority. Organisations need incentives to work together because their established practices and procedures can reinforce the primacy of achieving their own objectives rather than joining up. A change in culture is also needed so that those involved in joint working recognise that they may have to compromise and negotiate to ensure that the partnership achieves its goals.
- 10 **Better joint working by departments.** Some of the organisations involved in local partnerships told us that while joint working was now much better locally, they considered that departments needed to work together more centrally. This was particularly so where there was no dedicated central unit such as Sure Start giving strategic direction. Cross-cutting Public Service Agreements³ which include joint objectives and targets which several departments share responsibility for achieving should promote better co-ordination. To be effective these agreements will, however, require implementation plans designed and delivered by departments working together.

2 *Childcare is the provision of a safe environment for children while parents are at work. It does not normally involve any element of teaching. Childcare can be provided by public, private and voluntary organisations.*

3 *Public Service Agreements set out each department's objectives for public services with measurable targets for the delivery of the objectives. There are currently four cross-cutting Public Service Agreements covering the Criminal Justice System, Action against Illegal Drugs, Sure Start and Welfare to Work.*

4 Client groups and joint working initiatives covered by this report

Client group	Initiative	Expenditure	Partners	Key features of joint working
<p>Rough Sleepers An estimated 10,000 people slept rough at some time during 1998 in England, a smaller number sleep rough for prolonged periods of time</p>	<p>Rough Sleepers Unit to reduce the numbers sleeping rough</p>	<p>£200 million over the three years April 1999 - March 2002</p>	<p>Voluntary organisations Local authorities Health services Police</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ dedicated central government unit with a pooled budget to co-ordinate activity ■ outside London, partners agree a strategy to tackle rough sleeping ■ in London, voluntary agencies work together to provide support to individuals
<p>Pre-school children There are around 4 million children aged 0-4 years in the UK</p>	<p>Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships to improve the co-ordination and delivery of childcare and early education services</p>	<p>£300 million in 2000-01 rising to £650 million in 2003-04</p>	<p>Local authorities Private nursery and childcare providers Voluntary nursery and childcare providers Schools Parents</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ broad partnership of providers and other stakeholders ■ work together to assess need in a geographic area and plan how to meet it
	<p>Sure Start to improve the health and well being of children and their families so that children are sufficiently well developed to flourish when they start school</p>	<p>£81 million in 1999-2000 rising to £499 million in 2003-04</p>	<p>Community groups Voluntary organisations Local authorities Health services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ dedicated central government unit with a single budget to co-ordinate activity ■ multi-agency partnership to plan and deliver services to families in a neighbourhood ■ emphasis on co-ordinated action and community involvement
<p>Small and medium sized businesses There are 3.7 million businesses in the UK of which almost all have fewer than 250 employees</p>	<p>Business Link partnerships to provide support for small businesses</p>	<p>£160 million a year</p>	<p>Learning and Skills Councils Local authorities Chambers of Commerce Enterprise Agencies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ partnership of local business support services ■ single point of access for businesses ■ supported by a new central government agency, the Small Business Service
	<p>British Trade International help all businesses to develop new business overseas and improve existing service</p>	<p>£220 million a year</p>	<p>Foreign and Commonwealth Office Department of Trade and Industry</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ unique government partnership bringing staff from two departments together under unified management ■ single point of contact to integrated support services for exporters

5 Impact of joint working initiatives and how performance is measured

How performance is measured

Impact

Initiative

Rough Sleepers

By a single measure - to reduce the number of people sleeping rough in England by at least two thirds from 1850 to around 600 by April 2002.

The number of people counted sleeping rough in England was 700 in June 2001, a reduction of 62 per cent from 1850 in June 1998.



Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership

By measuring the number of nursery places for 3 and 4 year olds and the number of childcare places against the targets, for example to provide a free part time nursery place for two thirds of 3 year olds by March 2002.

At March 2001 all 4 year olds and over half of 3 year olds had a free part-time nursery education place and 140,000 new childcare places had been created (against a target of 82,000).



Sure Start

By a national evaluation and local evaluations of achievement by 2004 against four objectives and linked targets, for example to improve the health of young children by reducing the number of mothers who smoke during pregnancy by 10 per cent.

It is too soon to measure the impact of the initiative.



Business Link partnerships

By using a range of information to assess Business Link partnership performance including market penetration, customer satisfaction and impact on customer productivity and profitability.

Customer satisfaction with services was 75 per cent in 1997. Survey work in 2001, using different methodology, suggests satisfaction levels among the wider small and medium sized business community may now be lower, but more work is needed to provide firm data.



British Trade International

By measuring, for firms receiving assistance, the improvement in business performance of established exporters and new exporters against quantified targets.

Data collection and measurement systems are being developed, first results are not expected until 2002.



- 11 Avoiding exclusion.** All the five joint working initiatives had been designed to ensure that there is equal access to the services for those intended to benefit from them. Often, however, the users of public services have varied needs - for example, Sure Start local programmes have many families on low incomes with low levels of education or who do not speak English fluently. To ensure that these families are not excluded Sure Start workers visit them in their homes to assess their needs and discuss the support available. The parents of pre-school children whom we consulted⁴ welcomed the increase in childcare places. But parents, especially those on low incomes, often work shifts and weekends and said that they also needed high quality, inexpensive childcare outside normal weekday working hours. The Department for Education and Skills has assessed the needs of all parents, including these groups and is developing proposals to meet their requirements. These two examples illustrate that those involved in delivering public services need to assess carefully the requirements of client groups through consultation and research. In so doing departments should also consider the costs and benefits of different ways of meeting people's needs so as to adopt the most cost effective option.
- 12 Informing intended beneficiaries of the services available.** For joined up services to be effective those intended to benefit must be aware of the support available to them and how to access it. For example, parents in our focus groups were less aware that the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships existed and suggested that more should be done to publicise the services which parents could call upon. Publicising and marketing services to maximise take up by those intended to benefit is very important.
- 13 Changing behaviour.** Remedying long term social problems often requires changing people's behaviour particularly in encouraging them to take up services intended to help them. For example, the Rough Sleepers Unit and its partners have often had to devote considerable time persuading those living on the streets to accept the help available. Sustainable changes in behaviour are unlikely to be achieved in the short term; they usually require concentrated effort over a long period and this has to be taken account of in planning joint working initiatives.
- 14 Ensuring benefits are sustainable.** Central specialist units such as those for Sure Start and Rough Sleepers are increasingly being established to give strategic direction in tackling social issues. Such units can promote joint working by bringing together staff from a number of departments and other organisations to integrate policy planning and service delivery both centrally and locally. While these specialist units are playing an important role in achieving more joint working, their long term success will depend on how well the new methods of working which they are promoting are accepted by departments and local agencies and become an integral part of their normal day to day working.
- 15 Measuring performance.** Both those funding joint working initiatives and those involved in carrying them out need reliable and comprehensive information and performance targets to assess whether the initiatives are achieving their intended benefits and to take action to address shortfalls in performance. Each of the five initiatives have appropriate performance targets and systems for measuring their achievement as well as having procedures for assessing satisfaction with the services provided. Some of the targets are easily understood but others are more difficult to measure for example, improvements in the well-being of children and increases in the profitability of small businesses.

HOW JOINT WORKING INITIATIVES ASSESS CLIENT SATISFACTION

- **Customer surveys and consultation exercises**
Business Link partnerships, British Trade Inter-national and Rough Sleepers Unit
- **National and local evaluations**
Sure Start
- **Feedback from outreach workers**
Rough Sleepers Unit

⁴ We held 6 focus groups each consisting of between 7 and 10 parents of pre-school children. Separate groups of parents of pre-school children were held for Sure Start and Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships.

- 16 Many of the initiatives rely on data collected on their behalf by partners or contractors and there is a need to ensure that such information is reliable and not at risk of misinterpretation. If performance targets are too narrowly defined they can have a perverse effect. For example, a school seeking to meet its targets and improve its position on a league table of school performance may decide to expel a difficult pupil who may ultimately become a charge on the social security budget if she or he is ill equipped for employment.⁵
- 17 **Assessing cost effectiveness.** Joint working may result in additional costs. Conversely by working together organisations can improve efficiency by removing overlaps and duplication in service delivery. The costs of joint working have to be considered in terms of sustainable improvements in public services. Evaluating the effectiveness of expenditure is difficult because of the many different organisations involved, who produce a broad range of impacts at different times, and the need to assess whether the impact is lasting. For example, constructing supported housing for rough sleepers takes longer to have an impact than an alcohol detoxification treatment lasting six months or a year.
- 18 Without carrying out a full evaluation, it is possible to make some assessment of the cost effectiveness of joint working. For example with Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships, the average cost of providing a childcare place is £650, which compares with the average cost of £640 for providing an out of school childcare place under the previous arrangements. The Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships ensure there are places for children of all ages rather than solely for those of school age as with the previous initiative. Places for pre-school children and those with special educational needs are more expensive to provide because the children need more support from staff and, in some instances, more specialised equipment. Conversely, before the establishment of the Rough Sleepers Unit the average cost of reducing the number of people counted sleeping rough by one was approximately £120,000 per person. The joint working initiative has decreased costs - the average cost of reducing rough sleeping is now about £70,000 per person (costs are in real terms).⁶ This decrease suggests that the provision of more integrated services including health and social support is more cost effective in helping rough sleepers and preventing rough sleeping than the previous arrangements.
- 19 As yet because many of the joint working initiatives have not been long established there have been very few independent evaluations of their cost effectiveness. There is now a need for more detailed assessments of the cost effectiveness of different forms of joint working including their productivity; the difference which they make in terms of sustainable improvements in the quality of public services; and the contribution made by the different members of the joint working arrangement.

⁵ *Measuring the Performance of Government Departments, HC 301, Session 2000-01, 22 March 2001, paragraphs 5 and 11 explain the potential for perverse behaviours in response to targets. Also see the report 'Truancy and Social Exclusion', Social Exclusion Unit, Cm 3957, May 1998'.*

⁶ *Comparing the reduction in rough sleepers between 1998 and 1999 and between 1999 and 2001 with the expenditure on rough sleeping over these years. The difference in the number of people counted sleeping rough between two points in time reflects the change in the balance between those who have left the streets, those who move in and out of accommodation and the number of new people coming onto the streets. It does not measure the number of people housed in the period.*

- 20 Promoting accountability.** There are two aspects to accountability for public expenditure: (i) having reliable mechanisms for reporting expenditure and performance to those funding an initiative and ultimately to Parliament; and (ii) citizens having a means of redress where the quality of public services is poor. Joint working will involve a number of organisations possibly receiving funds from a number of different sources. Some of the organisations may be small and have limited experience of working in the public sector. For each joint working initiative the roles and responsibilities of partners, how their performance is to be measured and reported, and the accounting and audit arrangements to ensure propriety over public expenditure all need to be clearly set out and understood.
- 21** In addition, there should be well publicised ways for those intended to benefit from joint working initiatives to raise concerns if they are not satisfied with the services which they receive and for these concerns to be given serious consideration. For example with Sure Start, local partnerships agree which partner will be responsible for administering funding and producing accounts and agree also who is to be the lead partner to report performance to the Sure Start Unit. Each service provider operates their own complaints procedures as under partnership arrangements legal responsibility for quality of service remains with the organisation which provides the service.
- 22** For small community groups and voluntary organisations keeping the necessary records of expenditure and data on performance which are essential for accountability can be a considerable administrative and costly burden. In designing joint working initiatives departments need to consider how reporting and other associated procedures can be streamlined. In particular they should look for ways to integrate different reporting requirements and share information so that organisations only have to provide information in one format and to one location.

How joint working can be made more successful (Part 3)

Five requirements of joint working

23 Our examination identified five requirements which as a minimum are needed to promote successful joint working.

1

Goals - working towards clearly defined, mutually valued, shared goals

if objectives are unclear or not shared, partners may work towards different, incompatible goals and fail to achieve desired outcomes.

2

Progress measurement - evaluating progress towards achieving the desired goal and taking remedial action when necessary

joined up initiatives are no different from other activities in that their progress must be monitored and remedial action taken when performance is less than satisfactory.

3

Resources - ensuring that sufficient and appropriate resources are available

without sufficient resources including appropriate skills, a joint working initiative will not be capable of being sustained in the longer term; and value for money and propriety may be put at risk.

4

Leadership - directing the team and the initiative towards the goal

joined up initiatives can be difficult to keep on track because of the additional complexity arising from the number of players involved. Good leadership is important as part of the "glue" to hold the initiative together.

5

Working well together - to achieve a shared responsibility

if organisations do not establish good working relationships, based on mutual support and trust, acknowledging their differences and sharing information openly, then joint working will fail and improvements in public services will not be achieved.

Key stages in designing joint working arrangements

- 24 The long term success of joint working initiatives depends ultimately on how well they are designed. Each of the above five requirements needs careful consideration in designing joint working arrangements, particularly in deciding:

Who needs to be involved

This requires determining whether an existing partnership or organisation could take on a new role, and if not which organisations need to be part of the joint working arrangement. Departments need to balance involving all organisations and community groups who have an interest with avoiding the practical difficulties of organising and motivating large numbers of partners. There is no "one size fits" all for joint working. It should reflect the best way of delivering a service. Some Sure Start partnerships are companies limited by guarantee to enable them to contract for services; others have decided not to incorporate to give them greater flexibility. The geographical boundaries of partnerships should be coterminous with existing administrative boundaries whenever possible and new joint working initiatives should link effectively with existing initiatives both locally and within central government.

What incentives are needed to reinforce joint working

Incentives can take different forms, strong leadership can be an important incentive particularly if this convinces participants of the high priority and commitment underpinning the joint working. The better the fit between the objectives of the initiative and those of partner organisations the easier it is to join up. Additional funds can be a powerful incentive to work together as can allowing partnerships greater flexibility in the use or resources. For example, Kent County Council has committed itself to getting all the different agencies in the county to work together to meet national targets to reduce social deprivation. If it achieves the targets the Council will receive a Government Performance Reward Grant of £26 million in addition to having more flexibility over its spending.

What support is needed to improve the capacity of organisations to work together

Careful consideration needs to be given to how to build and develop the capacity of local community groups, and other organisations with limited experience of working in partnership, to join up and work together effectively. This can be done by providing (i) advice and guidance; (ii) expert assistance available locally - for example British Trade International has regional directors whose role is to support and manage the network of export advisers in Business Link partnerships; and (iii) learning networks including conferences, seminars, training events and local networking meetings - for example, the Sure Start Unit hosts a forum for questions and answers from partnerships on its website to share learning and good practice between programmes.

How to provide funding in ways which promote joint working

Consideration needs to be given to whether it is important for the joint working arrangement to have flexibility in the way money is used or whether tighter control by the central unit or department responsible for the policy is needed to target spending on national priorities. In general it is better for joint working for the partnership to have control over its funds. Pooled budgets allow greater flexibility, make it easier for partnerships to design solutions that fit local circumstances and encourage partnerships to develop a strategic approach. For example, the Rough Sleepers Unit has brought together funding previously administered by several different government departments and agencies. This has enabled the Unit to have greater flexibility in pursuing its strategy to reduce rough sleeping. In this case, the freedom to direct spending is also buttressed by a specific target to reduce rough sleeping by two thirds over three years.

How long should joint working last

Some partnerships are set up to achieve a defined goal within a set period of time and others are established to provide a continuous role and have no finite lifetime. Again there is no single approach which is appropriate for all. When designing an initiative, consideration needs to be given to which form is the most appropriate. For those with a finite lifetime the exit strategy should be designed to ensure that the outcome of the initiative is sustained. Those without finite lives will develop and evolve their ways of working and it is important that the partnerships are monitored to ensure that their work continues to have a purpose and value. The partnerships should be re-evaluated periodically, which may point to new objectives and incentives, to a reorganisation and relaunch, or that the joint working is no longer necessary. For example the Rough Sleepers Unit is planning a succession strategy designed to ensure that the reduction in numbers of rough sleepers is sustained when the Unit is wound up. The Business Link partnerships are an example of where the Small Business Service has taken the opportunity of reorganising and relaunching an existing initiative to improve quality of service.

What accountability and regulatory framework will best support joint working

Accountability arrangements may differ depending on the nature of the joint working but as a minimum they should include:

- Clear definition of roles and responsibilities;
- Unambiguous targets and performance measures;
- Clear statement of those intended to benefit from the initiative;
- Reliable and regular performance information;
- Clear understanding of who is responsible for taking remedial action if needed;
- Audited financial statements; and
- Periodic independent evaluations

At the same time departments should seek to minimise the administrative burden on small organisations. Joined up programmes may also have implications for departmental structures. Programmes designed around client groups often cut across existing policy responsibilities and departments should consider whether their own organisational structures are appropriate to support the initiative at an early stage. For example, policy responsibility for nursery education and childcare in the Department for Education and Skills has been brought together within one unit. The Unit has specialist partnership advisers from local government, located in Government Offices for the Regions.

Recommendations

- 25 The Modernising Government White Paper, together with the successive reports by the Cabinet Office and the Treasury, set out ways in which joint working can improve service delivery. To reinforce these messages and to realise the potential to improve public services by delivering them in a joined up way whilst securing value for money, we recommend:

For the Cabinet Office

- 1 **Improve the dissemination of good practice on joint working.** The Cabinet Office have carried out considerable research into good practice in joint working and issued guidance on refocusing services to meet customers' needs. Many departments have also produced guidance based on their own experience of joint working. Most of this guidance has, however, been prepared by departments independently. To prevent the reinventing and rediscovery of similar lessons the time is now right for the Cabinet Office to evaluate existing guidance, and bring the key lessons together in a concise but comprehensive set of guidance for all those involved, or likely to become involved, in joint working. This could usefully include a self assessment tool to help partnerships evaluate how well their approach to joint working reflects good practice.

The Cabinet Office should also promote their website as a central source of advice and good practice with links to proven exemplar practice elsewhere which organisations can draw upon.

- 2 **Assess the benefits and disadvantages of different forms of joint working and the circumstances when they are most appropriate.** Joint working is taking a variety of different forms - from establishing new organisations such as British Trade International bringing together the responsibilities of two departments to having a dedicated single unit such as the Rough Sleepers Unit to give strategic direction and priority to tackling important social issues. Each of these forms of joint working have associated costs and benefits and their success in improving public services and remedying social and economic issues will depend on how well they are suited to the circumstances they have to deal with. The cost effectiveness of the different forms of joint working, and when they are likely to be most appropriate, needs to be carefully evaluated so that criteria can be produced to help departments decide which model to adopt.

For the Treasury

- 3 **Disseminate the lessons learned from introducing cross-cutting Public Service Agreements to departments.** Cross-cutting Public Service Agreements have considerable potential to improve joint working between departments. They need, however, to be reinforced by carefully thought through and developed implementation plans designed and delivered by departments working together and working with local authorities and other bodies involved in delivering public services. Drawing on the work that was carried out as part of the 1998 and 2000 Spending Reviews the lessons learned from developing and implementing cross-cutting Public Service Agreements need to be evaluated and disseminated. This should cover how to set and secure commitment to shared goals, and how to develop reliable performance measurement systems for shared responsibilities.

For Departments

- 26 Departments should ensure that their procedures and management approaches support joint working by:
 - 4 **Identifying clearly when joint working is needed.** Departments need to consult widely with client groups and other departments and organisations delivering services to identify when there is a need for joint working. For example, joint working may be needed to:
 - address policy objectives or improve services that cut across existing departmental boundaries;
 - provide a single point of service to clients; whether by a case worker as the first point for assessing the need for and securing access to a range of support services such as health, counselling, housing and skills training; call centre; or as web-based services; and
 - improve value for money in delivering services, by reducing duplication, streamlining processes and realising efficiency gains.

- 5 **Determining the most appropriate form of joint working.** Working in partnership has costs as well as benefits and departments should evaluate the different options for joint working, the risks associated with each option and how best to manage them. Criteria for determining the most appropriate form of joint working should include - (i) the extent to which it is likely to meet customers needs and thereby promote maximum take up by those intended to benefit and avoid any groups of people being excluded; (ii) how easy it will be for citizens to access the service in a seamless way and with least inconvenience; (iii) how well the proposed arrangement is likely to achieve sustainable benefits for example, by ensuring that support services are fully integrated within the joint working; and (iv) the relative costs and likely benefits of the joint working initiative. Departments also need to ensure that joint working locally is supported and reinforced by effective co-ordination between departments and their agencies.
- 6 **Providing appropriate support for joint working.** Joint working remains a relatively new concept for many organisations. Smaller bodies particularly those based in communities often need considerable support to help develop their capacity and skills to work effectively with other organisations. Staff in departments and agencies also have to develop their skills to change their style of working. In designing joint working initiatives departments should assess their own capacity for joint working and that of the other organisations that need to come together and allocate sufficient time and resources to develop the skills and joint working capacity of all those involved.
- 7 **Establishing reliable accountability arrangements.** How organisations participating in joint working have to account for how they use public money and report performance achieved should be clearly defined and agreed by all parties involved in the initiative from the outset. Departments should also monitor progress in achieving the intended benefits of joint working and investigate the reasons for variations in achievement so as to raise the performance of partnerships that are less successful. There should also be easy to access and widely understood ways for the users to express their concerns when they are not satisfied with the services provided by the joint working initiative. Where joint working fails to produce an appreciable improvement in public services departments need to consider carefully the justification for continuing with the initiative.
- 27 There is no single model for joint working and departments need to consider the best arrangements depending on circumstances and the specific needs of the client group which the joined up service is intended to help and support. The Annex to this Executive Summary sets out some key questions which departments should consider in designing joint working initiatives.
- 28 In addition, the following National Audit Office reports include a range of other good practice which is also relevant for joint working:
- Supporting innovation: managing risk in government departments (HC 864, 1999-2000) August 2000;
 - Measuring the Performance of Government Departments (HC 301, 2000-01) March 2001;
 - Modern Policy-Making: Ensuring Policies Deliver Value for Money (HC 289, Session 2001-02) November 2001; and
 - Better Regulation: Making Good Use of Regulatory Impact Assessments (HC 329 Session 2001-02) November 2001.

Annex

Key questions which departments need to consider to achieve successful joint working

decide whether joined up working is necessary

Have departments identified how the client group is expected to benefit from joined up working, weighed the costs and benefits of taking a joined up approach and the risks associated with each option for achieving the policy goals?

For example, departments may wish to pursue joined up working because they have identified that this is more likely to achieve policy goals or is necessary to achieve greater efficiency in the delivery of services. In other cases, however, joined up working may not be necessary to achieve the goals and may add to the cost of service delivery.

design the most appropriate form of joint working

Have departments identified the possible range of joint working options and assessed the advantages, disadvantages and risks of each?

For example, departments should consider whether an existing partnership could take on the new policy goal, look at a range of organisational forms drawing on experience from elsewhere and consider how to create a good fit with other initiatives to promote synergies between programmes at a local level.

provide incentives for joint working

Have departments assessed what incentives are needed to secure commitment from partner organisations to the joint working?

For example, partner organisations may need incentives to commit their limited resources to joined up initiatives, such as financial incentives, flexibility over spending decisions or other means to raise the priority of the initiative.

ensure that partner organisations share the policy objective

Are the goals of the initiative clearly defined and shared by the intended partners?

For example, partner organisations have their own sets of objectives; departments need to ensure that there is overlap between partners' objectives and the policy objectives for joint working initiatives. Departments should ensure that the goals of the initiative are clear and that they can manage any conflict between partners' own objectives and the goals of the joint working.

establish appropriate performance measurement systems

Have departments established systems for measuring performance which reinforce effective joint working towards the objectives?

For example, the performance measures put in place should provide regular feedback to partners, managers and departments on progress towards achieving the goals of the joined up working.

provide funding in ways which support joined up working

Does the way in which the initiative is funded support or impede joined up working?

For example, departments should assess the advantages and disadvantages of pooling funding for the joined up working, try to minimise the number of funding streams partnerships have to deal with and assess whether additional resources are needed to support local partnerships.

minimise the burden of administration on departments and local partnerships

Do departments' administrative systems place unnecessary burdens on local organisations, especially smaller ones; can systems be made simpler and more efficient?

For example, departments should assess the scope for reducing the burden of administration by working with other funders and regulators on joint systems and streamlining their own procedures.

set realistic timescales

Have departments allowed for the time needed to set up a new initiative and for new partnerships to form and start working together effectively?

For example, it may take time for a new partnership to establish itself to the position where it can submit a well-considered bid for funding to the department. It also takes time to employ staff and find premises from which the service can be delivered. Departments need to use their experience from past initiatives to plan realistically, being aware that decision-making in joint working initiatives may be slow because of the need, for example, to consult with the community and secure commitment and agreement from a range of organisations to a course of action.

Joining up with other partners presents those who design, implement and deliver public services with different challenges to working through single organisations. Our work indicates that there is no single method of joining up that is appropriate in all cases, each initiative must take into account a range of factors to maximise the chances of delivering successful joined up services. To improve the likelihood of joined up initiatives achieving what is intended, departments may wish to consider how to:

<p>Have departments recognised the importance of leadership in promoting successful joint working and taken steps to build this requirement into the design of the initiative?</p> <p>For example, good leadership, through a Chairperson or lead manager, can help secure the co-operation of partners and other stakeholders. Leadership is also important to maintain a sense of direction and enthusiasm and to encourage compromise, where necessary, between partners. Departments should promote and support good leadership of joint working arrangements.</p>	<p>encourage good leadership</p>
<p>Have departments considered the skills needed to implement the joint working and whether they need to take steps to increase the pool of talent available?</p> <p>For example, partnerships have found that they need staff who have the ability to think innovatively and flexibly, understand the different cultures and values of the partner organisations and who are able to work collectively and negotiate around difficulties. In addition, many initiatives draw on specialist professional skills which are in short supply. Departments need to consider where the skills are to come from and whether it will be necessary to develop training schemes to increase the skills available and mitigate the possible impact on other services of drawing talent away to joint working initiatives.</p>	<p>enable those implementing the initiative to draw on the right skills</p>
<p>Do new partnerships have the information they need to carry out their functions?</p> <p>For example, individuals involved in joint working arrangements may be inexperienced at working in partnership and need advice and guidance on a number of different aspects of joint working. Departments should consider how to encourage partner organisations and individuals to understand their role, improve their skills, learn how to work together well and share lessons about what works.</p>	<p>provide appropriate guidance and advice</p>
<p>Have departments set out when they will review whether the joint working is still needed, or whether it requires new goals or incentives?</p> <p>For example, a partnership's continuing role may be affected by external pressures such as changes in its client group, or the law of diminishing returns may make its continuing efforts less cost effective. An evaluation of the joint working may point to the need to reorganise or revitalise the joint working or to draw it to a close.</p>	<p>establish an appropriate time in the future to evaluate the continuing need for the joint working</p>
<p>Have departments set out how clients who have a complaint about the services delivered through joint working can seek redress via a complaints procedure or ombudsman?</p> <p>For example, ensuring that partnerships are required to have a local complaints procedure and that the partnerships and initiatives will be covered by an ombudsman, either by the Parliamentary Ombudsman or by the Local Government Ombudsmen.</p>	<p>ensure that there are clear lines of redress for citizens</p>
<p>Have departments set out clearly the roles and responsibilities of partners, how performance is to be measured and reported and the accounting and audit arrangements for public expenditure?</p> <p>For example, those organisations receiving funds to participate in a joint working initiative need to know what their responsibilities are for the stewardship of public funds including propriety. If this is not understood and reliable reporting arrangements in place there is a risk that public money may not be used for its intended purpose and intended benefits may not be achieved.</p>	<p>ensure that there is a clear accountability framework</p>