

Briefing Paper 9

Making the Connections

National Assembly Elections 2007

“Wales has a marvellous opportunity, emanating in part from it’s traditions and in part from it’s scale, to lead the way in what we call ‘small country governance’.”

Sir Jeremy Beecham
Beyond Boundaries 2006



Making the Connections

The approach to extracting value from spending on public services through the model of effective cooperation, collaboration, and coordination of agencies across the children's sector is supported.

What has been achieved since 2003?

The Making the Connections¹ statement published in October 2004 set out a clear vision of excellence in public service based upon the four principles of:

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

The Beecham Review² published in 2006 recognised the strengths in WAG policy and strategy but highlighted the deficits in delivery. It reflected organisational culture in Wales needs to change at a faster pace, with more cross boundary and cross agency working, if improvements in service delivery are to be realised.

In November 2006, the WAG issued "Making the Connections – Delivering Beyond Boundaries"³ which sets out the actions (in the light of the Beecham Report) to "accelerate progress towards our goal of transforming the way in which public services are delivered and the experience of everyone who uses them". In the document, the WAG promotes a welcome and sharp shift from "a public **sector** ethos that is limited to particular professional or service boundaries to a public **service** ethos based on promoting quality and equality". This clearly places the needs of people receiving public services over the needs of the organisations which provide them and is an approach we warmly welcome.

From early 2007/08 WAG wants local service delivery organisations to begin establishing Local Service Boards to lead the delivery of their community strategy and agreed national strategic priorities across sectors. The Local Service Boards are not intended to replace key existing partnerships but are meant to provide "the hub around which these partnerships can function".

In January 2007, the WAG issued for consultation "Empowering Active Citizens to contribute to Wales"⁴ which outlines its interests in, and vision for, the Third Sector in Wales within the context of the Making the Connections agenda.

¹ Making the Connections: Delivering Better Services in Wales (2004) WAG

² Beyond Boundaries – Review of Local Service Delivery (Beecham Review) (2006) WAG

³ Making the Connections – Delivering Beyond Boundaries – Transforming Public Services in Wales (2006) WAG

⁴ Empowering Active Citizens to contribute to Wales: A Strategic Action Plan for the Voluntary Sector Scheme (2007) WAG

What are our current concerns?

Despite the potential for delivery of excellent services, this has not been achieved on the ground. Too many vulnerable and disadvantaged children, young people and their families are still not being served well by their local services. In too many places the prospects for improvement in services are assessed as still being less than promising.

Local approaches to commissioning services for vulnerable disadvantaged children are variable and show an increasing reliance on competitive tendering as the model used for allocating resources for service delivery. The emphasis on this approach may not realise best use of resources, nor enable cross border collaboration and cross sector working together to develop, design, and build sustainable services in partnership with the voluntary sector.

Recommendations

We call on the Welsh Assembly Government to:

- Continue to reinforce the importance of cross boundary and cross sector working at the local level as a key driver in improving specialist services available for vulnerable disadvantaged children, young people and their families.
- Actively encourage and monitor performance of local partnerships to ensure they are outwardly focused on delivering improving outcomes of services for citizens. We believe the setting up of Local Service Boards should be helpful in driving this agenda forward.
- Signalling the pace of improvement in local services needs to quicken by demonstrating more preparedness to intervene where local progress is stalled.
- Supporting intelligent commissioning at the local level by producing clear procurement guidance on adopting approaches which move beyond narrow competitive tendering. The Social Services Improvement Agency's "National Trends for Children in Need Services" paper provides a useful analysis of the need for effective strategic commissioning for children's services.
- Further streamline joint inspection systems and develop processes for scrutiny of delivery that involves stakeholders.
- Champion the importance of a mixed economy of providers for the improvement agenda, and encourage local commissioners to recognise the importance of full cost recovery and the level playing field.

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