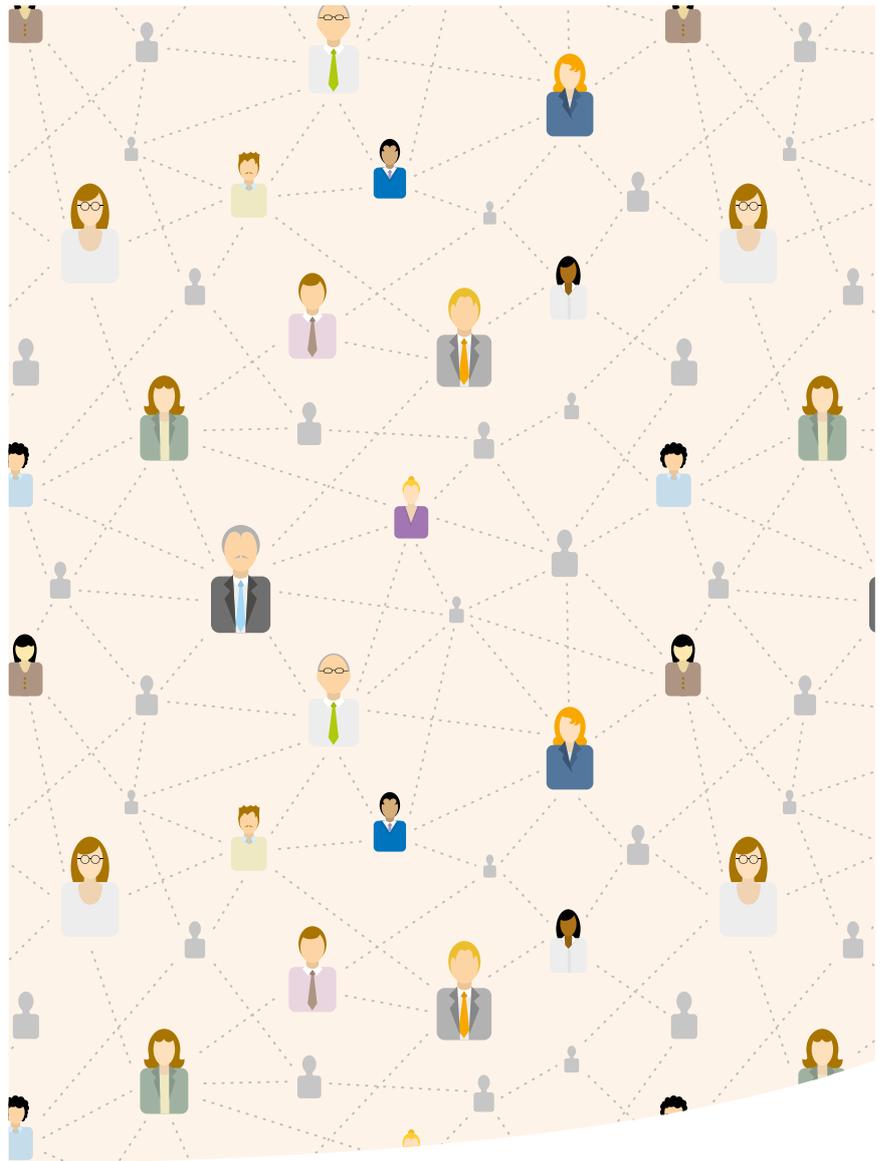


THOUGHT
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Embedding the Multi-Agency approach



In the constant need to drive out cost, respond to heightened citizen demands and create efficiency, collaborative working is already up and running across the UK's local authorities. Now the focus is on embedding Multi-Agency working with local partners, says Steve Knights, Principal Business Consultant, Sopra Steria UK.

A survey undertaken by the Local Government Association in 2014 shows that at least 96% of councils in England are using some form or another of shared services. Whether it's to counter budget cuts in response to the austerity agenda, or to meet the needs of ever more demanding customers with heightened levels of service, shared services between Local Authorities are proving their value. Many authorities and agencies are now seeking different collaboration models with external partners that will give similar advantages of service improvement and potential for efficiency savings: this is the Multi-Agency model.

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A shared service collaboration usually revolves around a single service. It might be the sharing of revenue and benefits service provision. It could be a partnership approach to dealing with waste across council boundaries or administering licence processing under the Licensing Act.

Some authorities are sharing back office support services, HR administration and ICT service delivery. Whatever the requirement, this amalgamation of standard services across organisations is an opportunity to take advantage of common processes, scale economies and streamlined management.

Now, with shared services very much becoming a standard delivery model for driving efficiency within a single service, local authorities are now looking for delivery models that work across more diverse services, with external partners, to give both service quality and efficiency advantages. They are assessing and, in a number of cases adopting, Multi-Agency working as a model for achieving better outcomes.

A focus on improving local services

Multi-Agency arrangements have been with us for many years to debate and agree local policy and strategy through arrangements such as Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP) and Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRP). More recently we have seen arrangements with a focus on specific delivery agendas suggested by Central Government policy. For example, to deliver the Troubled Families programme, in these cases there may be collaborations between a range of governmental and public agencies, the voluntary sector and the private sector. This type of collaboration has proved the case for Multi-Agency working. Now it

is time take the model deeper into local communities. The primary purpose of this would be to coordinate and improve the way that individual organisations interact with their users as cohesive entities. The desired outcome is to deliver joined up services that fully meet the needs of modern citizens within the local area. An excellent example of this type of arrangement is the 'Fall Proof' project in Teignmouth, a local project designed to make homes safer and reduce the number of falls by the elderly. This project has seen collaboration between Teignbridge District Council, health services, social services, voluntary agencies and design agencies to address a serious problem in an area with a higher than average elderly population. This Multi-Agency model not only demonstrates how a major problem can be reduced with a collaborative intervention, but also shows how such an arrangement can reduce the burden on the taxpayer by emphasising prevention over reaction.

The development of structures that move towards these more integrated operational arrangements, such as Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH), has begun. These inter-agency collaborations have in general been developed in critical areas, such as the protection of vulnerable groups, justice, health and social work. Such specific agendas have encouraged diverse organisations to pool skills, resources, knowledge and information to support improved outcomes. It is hoped that these experiences will continue to encourage more local arrangements such as the Teignmouth example.



Embedded in everyday working

In an ideal world these new ways of working would be the 'norm' for the delivery of more localised services, answering the question of 'what can we do better together?' They are the next step on the journey of collaboration. Such delivery models offer solutions that meet the ambition to improve service and the desire to deliver quality and efficiency that we already see in shared service models and existing Multi-Agency arrangements. However, they come at it from a different perspective, that of customer outcomes. At this local level, the key is to learn from the Multi-Agency projects that have been successfully implemented and are delivering better outcomes to centrally-prescribed agendas.

So with so much to gain, why aren't we seeing more Multi-Agency working tackling local issues with local collaboration? There are a number of challenges putting up barriers at present, not least the differing service agendas across agencies. Other common issues include funding constraints, geographical boundaries, data ownership and the responsibility (and cost) for new ICT solutions supporting data sharing and analysis.

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In a recent white paper, Multi-Agency Collaborations, I noted that the challenges fall predominantly into the following key areas:

- The change process itself;
- The development of new structures based around geography and need;
- The development of data sharing protocols and processes;
- The inclusion of cross sector partners from the public, private and third sectors.

I proposed a set of practical actions to help mitigate these challenges and move successfully to Multi-Agency working. The following Top 7 Steps are drawn from these practical actions and are complemented by further recommendations within the paper.

Top 7 Steps for a best practice Multi-Agency delivery model

Step 1: Challenge the way things are done culturally

Managing the change process and development of new delivery mechanisms demands small steps, not large leaps. Delivering a Multi-Agency solution should be viewed as a cultural and business process change programme that results in an improved method of delivery. Treat it as a change programme to meet an agreed set of aims that are derived from the challenge of improving outcomes.

Step 2: Contain Multi-Agency initiatives within relatively small localities

Develop new structures based around geography and the needs of individuals and the communities that populate these localities. Agree an operational boundary based on common need across the locality rather than on organisational simplicity. Data analysis will assist this decision by understanding hot spots of specific need and giving clarity to generic issues across the wider locality.

Step 3: Build services around the individual

Involve the service user in the design of services, and incorporate user groups into a Multi-Agency arrangement to give real insight into the issues of delivery that require attention. Map customer journeys working back from your proposed outcomes to understand the individual and shared processes that are needed to achieve the outcomes. If this means changing existing processes, then change them.

Step 4: Understand stakeholder needs

This is a key element of making a Multi-Agency service model work in practice. Build a vision that can be shared by all stakeholders and support this with multi-year business cases that articulate the vision and anticipate demands. Consider the best way to manage demand over the period.

Step 5: Think collaboratively as part of your stakeholder awareness

Encourage organisations to review individual operations to develop an organisational matrix that distinguishes between services that are unique, those that could benefit from a shared strategic approach with other agencies, and those that could benefit from a shared operational approach. From this matrix work with potential partners to create a shared development roadmap that considers priorities, risks and investment needs.

Step 6: Develop data sharing protocols

Building services around the individual demands a cultural shift from a predominantly reactive culture to one that develops a proactive approach, drawing on insight from available data sources. It is important to develop data sharing protocols with Multi-Agency partners for specific agendas. IT database solutions can support data sharing whilst maintaining levels of security of specific data when required.

Step 7: Include cross sector partners from the public, private and third sectors

A closer collaborative relationship with the matrix of suppliers and partners that public sector organisations already work with could yield dividends. Consider more innovative contractual arrangements with the private sector that link reward to the achievement of your outcomes, or share the risk of initiatives based on the benefits being achieved.

Develop the power of many

These steps reflect best practice actions that local authorities might investigate in the pursuit of a Multi-Agency agenda. Multi-Agency models can become a fundamental part of how local government works. They tap into the expertise of different agencies to contribute towards a new delivery culture in the public sector. It's a model in which the power of one is developed into the power of many.

About Sopra Steria

Sopra Steria, European leader in digital transformation, provides one of the most comprehensive portfolios of end to end service offerings in the market: Consulting, Systems Integration, Software Development and Business Process Services. Sopra Steria is trusted by leading private and public organisations to deliver successful transformation programmes that address their most complex and critical business challenges. Combining high quality and performance services, added-value and innovation, Sopra Steria enables its clients to make the best use of information technology.



www.soprasteria.co.uk

SOPRA STERIA
Three Cherry Trees Lane, Hemel Hempstead, HP2 7AH
+44 (0)370 600 4466 - info.uk@soprasteria.com

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