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# Evaluation of Regional Collaborative Working

Final Report Part 2: Case Study Reports

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# Evaluation of Regional Collaborative Working Part 2: Case Study Reports

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# North Wales Legal Services Collaboration Project

## 1. Project scope and ambition

### 1.1. Background

The North Wales Legal Services Collaboration Project (the project) has built on a history of collaborative working across legal services in the six local authorities: Anglesey, Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Gwynedd and Wrexham. Prior to the project's ESF bid in 2012, there was a Heads of Legal Services Group, which had taken a collaborative approach to sharing information and service planning across the six authorities but hadn't delivered services jointly. The group wanted to move in this direction but felt that this would mean 'stepping up to another level' and would require resources for both project management and for developing joint working capacity across the six councils. Specifically, the group considered that a dedicated project manager was essential.

*"We had a business case [for the legal services project] before ESF funding but it was on the back burner as we [sic] could not afford a Project Manager"*

### 1.2. Objectives

The opportunity to bid to the ESF fund, with support from WLGA, enabled the Group to develop a more ambitious plan for collaboration across legal services in North Wales.

The successful bid was based on the following objectives for the project:

- Reduce the total Legal Services net costs across the six North Wales Local Authorities by at least 5% (£300,000) and sustain this reduction. (Base figure is the 2010/11 outturn)
- Improve client satisfaction levels to 95% rating the services good or excellent through providing a more comprehensive service at reduced costs.
- Increase staff satisfaction levels through increasing their skills, offering them more varied and more specialist work and enhancing their job security.

These objectives reflect the dual ambition of the project to improve the efficiency of legal services by reducing total net costs and improving the quality of legal services across the region.

The grant award of £214,700 (from ESF and WLGA) was made available in September 2012. However due to a delay in appointing a Project Manager, who subsequently needed a period of sick leave, the project didn't start in practice until March 2013.

The project closed in December 2014 when funding ceased and the Project Manager's post was terminated. The Project Board had hoped that it would have

been able to continue until March 2015 to compensate for the earlier delays but this was not possible under ESF regulations and so the project had to return an underspend of £35,244 to Welsh Government/ESF in December 2014.

### **1.3. Activities**

From this time the project developed a number of specific work streams which would contribute to meeting the agreed objectives. A few of these – such as rationalising library subscriptions across the six authorities – were designed to have a direct effect on reducing costs but most of the initiatives were designed to increase capacity for joint working through: more staff networking (especially through setting up Special Interest Groups (SIGs) across the region); enhanced skills (with a more customised approach to joint training); new working practices (piloted through virtual teams), and IT support (through the introduction of an Intranet and single Case Management System (CMS)).

### **1.4. Project governance**

Soon after the project started, it became clear that governance structures were needed to provide both strategic direction and operational management of the project. The original 'Heads of Legal Services Group', which made the bid, was in effect a mixture of Heads of Legal Services and Legal Services Managers and couldn't make strategic decisions for the six authorities. So by May 2012, a Project Board was set up comprising the six Heads of Legal Services who meet 'face-to face' each month.

The Board is supported by a Project Team made up of Legal Services Managers (one from each authority), who also have monthly meetings. Both the Board and Project Team are continuing beyond the end of the funded project for at least a year. The Project Manager serviced both bodies while in post. Now, whichever council is hosting the Board meeting (which rotates around all six) is also responsible for sending out agendas and taking and distributing minutes.

### **1.5. Staff collaboration**

All six authorities have been actively engaged in the North Wales Legal Services Project. Indeed, one of the striking features of the collaborative project is the engagement of staff at all levels.

Special Interest Groups (SIGs) were set up to bring together legal services staff from different specialisms e.g. procurement, property etc. These have been very popular, with some 120 staff involved in the SIGs. Notably, the SIGs have reconfigured legal services training by arranging customised training in specialised areas for staff across the six councils.

*"The SIGs work well. Feedback from staff is that networking through SIGs has been very important and the SIG-led training events have helped to bring people together within professional areas".*

SIG Chairs rotate between individuals and authorities and a SIG Chairs Group reports to the Project Team so there is accountability to the wider project on collaboration.

Establishing two pilot 'virtual teams' of legal services staff working in Adult Social Care (ASC) and Prosecution enabled the project to test out joint delivery in specific service areas. The two pilots were very different as the ASC staff already knew each other and the client side was quite integrated but there was very little sharing of files, whereas although there was not the same level of personal relationships between Prosecution staff, it was easier for them to appreciate the benefits of sharing files. Ultimately both pilots were seen as very successful and the approach is being rolled out to other service areas, which will be facilitated through the development of a common Case Management System (CMS).

*"Staff are working together at all levels. The pilots [virtual teams in ASC and prosecution] started building a system for collaboration – not just between managers but staff as well – the lowest level professionals are now working together. And this networking has had spin offs like joint training".*

## **1.6. Case Management System (CMS)**

The internal evaluation report commissioned for the virtual team pilots highlighted the limitations of the current ICT environment across the region. This supported the Board's decision on the need for a single case management system (CMS) to facilitate and enhance joint working between authorities. The business case for the CMS was to ensure efficiencies through the reduction of printing and administrative costs, and the risks involved in sending sensitive files through internal, external post and DX system. In addition, the CMS would increase the ability to share files electronically and without delay.

A number of delays around options appraisal and procurement has meant that the Project Board has only recently selected a preferred bidder for the CMS, which will be hosted by Conwy. Gwynedd and Anglesey both have fully implemented (but different) CMS systems but other authorities have various 'time recording plus document attachments' systems so there will be significant work required to implement the CMS across the region.

There is clearly widespread support for the CMS from all six authorities, which are contributing several thousand pounds each to cover the cost of a project manager to oversee and co-ordinate its implementation. The commonly held view is that the CMS will both underpin and extend collaboration between legal services across the region.

*"CMS is the anchor for collaboration".*

*"Having a single CMS for all participating processes will itself require a level of integration so we'll have to make the changes".*

## 2. Outcomes

The project's original objectives and desired outcomes have been achieved. Most of the planned outputs had been delivered by December 2014, with the exception of the case management system (CMS), which will continue into early 2015.

### 2.1. Planned outcomes

Key outcomes that have been achieved include:

- **Increased staff capacity and regional delivery of work** in Prosecution and Adult Social Care (ASC) following the piloting of Virtual Teams in these two client service areas. This has enabled staff to work more flexibly across authorities, which is particularly useful when each authority may only have two or three professionals working in a specialist area (e.g. prosecution). Working as a virtual team makes it easier to cover annual leave and sickness absences and reduces the costs of using external solicitors.
- **Increased collaboration between staff at all levels**, particularly through the eight or more Special Interest Groups (SIGs), which meet quarterly and provide all staff with the opportunity to meet with colleagues across the region in the same areas of legal practice. The groups have enabled staff to discuss changes in the law, share good practice, raise any current issues or discuss workloads, and action any tasks sent through by the Board to support the project, such as the development of harmonised documentation
- **Joint procurement of training** events through SIGs. This has already shown to be cost –effective and resulted in positive staff feedback about the quality and usefulness of training in comparison to the previous system of councils providing generic training for their own staff or sending individuals on (often expensive) external courses, sometimes with little Welsh legislative relevance
- **Progress with standardising documentation** across authorities , also through SIGs and the two virtual pilots
- **New common framework for hiring external solicitors** with a common fee structure in place
- **Library services are being rationalised**, through joint procurement and sharing e-subscriptions, which is reducing costs
- **A regional Legal Services Intranet** has been developed and is up and running – populated with project news and information and a forum for each SIG group to upload information and each SIG group Chair has received training to enable them to do so. It is a dedicated site for use only by the staff in the region so has allowed confident sharing of ideas, knowledge and precedents relevant to the region.
- **Shared case management system (CMS)** agreed – with implementation in progress

## 2.2. Process outcomes

All interviewees stressed the importance of **‘increased collaborative capacity’** among staff at all levels as a key outcome from the project. In line with the Theory of Change (ToC) this increased capacity and more collaborative culture is seen as being essential for delivering service outcomes above (for example, through virtual teams) and implementing some of the more challenging aspects of the project, such as the shared CMS, across all councils.

*“The Legal Services project has created a framework for people to get to know those in other authorities who do the same work – through the SIGs and joint training”.*

*“We have the soft end of collaboration – staff know each other’s e-mail addresses. Now we are tackling the hard end – getting files moving around [between authorities], which has only happened in the prosecution pilot so far”.*

This increase in collaborative capacity includes the **Project Manager gaining skills and experience in managing collaborative working**. These skills include: building and maintaining relationships at all levels; negotiating, influencing and motivating (to ‘make things happen’ without line management authority); project management (of the project overall and the individual work streams). This outcome is of particular interest to WLGA who invested in the regional ESF funded projects for two main reasons: to include non-convergence authorities (rather than limit the projects to artificial boundaries); and to develop a set of skills for local authority project managers working on collaboration.

## 2.3. Meeting objectives

Through achieving the outcomes and outputs above, the North Wales Legal Services project has been able to meet its original objectives, which were to:

- **Reduce the total Legal Services net costs** across the six North Wales Local Authorities by at least 5 per cent (£300,000) and sustain this reduction. (Base figure is the 2010/11 outturn)
- **Improve client satisfaction levels** to 95 per cent rating the services good or excellent through providing a more comprehensive service at reduced costs.
- **Increase staff satisfaction levels** through increasing their skills, offering them more varied and more specialist work and enhancing their job security.

Project Board members are confident that the project has contributed to a reduction in the total Legal Services net costs across the six North Wales local authorities but explained that these savings are very difficult to quantify because of the overall cost reductions that have had to be made to achieve savings targets. These include staff reductions as well as efficiencies achieved through the project.

Board members also pointed out that while collaboration does need to lead to tangible outcomes it will not always generate cashable savings.



*“But collaboration will not always generate savings – sometimes it will result in better services at the same cost or more resilience”.*

Internal evaluation of the Virtual Team pilots found that **staff satisfaction had increased** due to:

- Better application of good practice from other councils
- Providing consistent expert advice across the region, particularly where the Social Services client was demanding a regional approach for Charging for Residential Accommodation Guide (CRAG), Aftercare services and the Protection of Vulnerable Adults (POVA)
- Enabling better cover for sickness absence or holiday; particularly for urgent work and in emergencies
- Quicker and timely advice in respect of the few cases shared; and
- Feeling part of a supported team.

The evaluation of the virtual teams also found that client satisfaction had increased and that clients valued:

- The extra facility of a regional approach, which led to a more timely response to instructions; and
- Better access to particular legal expertise or experience.

### **3. Learning**

Learning from case studies enables us to identify key enablers or success factors for achieving outcomes through collaboration. These include the enablers for building collaborative capacity as well as how this way of working has achieved outcomes. It is equally important to identify the barriers or challenges to effective collaboration and how these can be successfully addressed and overcome. Although some enablers and barriers will be context specific, the majority of them should be transferable into a range of geographical and organisational contexts so they can be used for replicating good practice.

#### **3.1. Enablers for effective collaboration**

The case study research has shown the following enablers as important for effective collaboration and achieving outcomes in the North Wales Legal Services project.

##### **3.1.1. Leadership**

The strategic leadership from the Project Board – made up of the six Heads of legal Services - has given the project clear objectives and direction and ensured buy-in from legal services staff in all six authorities. This leadership has been through the Board, as an example of collaboration itself, and also through the individual Heads of Legal Services promoting and endorsing collaboration in their own authorities.

There has been little active involvement from elected members in the project, which reflects the relatively low importance of legal services to either policy priorities or areas for significant savings, which means that the Project Board has had to assume

full leadership of the project. Although there are some disadvantages to this low level of political leadership (as discussed under ‘challenges’ below) it has also given a degree of freedom and flexibility for the Project Board to ‘just get on with it’.

*“We can do a lot without getting on anyone’s [policy] agenda...we’re under the radar”.*

The Project Board has been supported by the Project Team, comprised of Legal Services Managers. These also provide leadership in their authorities, both by example and through encouraging staff to move towards working in a collaborative way through, for instance, the virtual teams and SIGs.

*“The Project Board has been important to give endorsement for ‘getting on’ to the Project Team”.*

*“The Board and Project Team have been essential. Before the project there was collaborative planning but we were not delivering jointly”.*

### **3.1.2. Previous collaboration and a collaborative culture**

Senior legal services staff in North Wales were already collaborating through the Legal Officers Group before the ESF/WLGA project started. This reflects a culture of collaboration in North Wales, especially within legal services, where individual departments are small with maybe only one or two staff working in a particular specialism.

*“All six authorities have been on board from the beginning. Sometimes there is a difference of emphasis along the journey between the authorities – but it’s the same journey, same aims”.*

*“Joint working depends on individuals but we all understand we have to work together”.*

North Wales authorities also collaborate on other services such as ICT, which has helped to reinforce collaboration as a ‘way of working’ and has supported the implementation of the CMS. The North Wales ICT project was also a WLGA /ESF project (as was the South West Wales ICT and Legal Service Project) so the WLGA brought the project managers together, which was helpful in sharing learning and embedding collaboration as a legacy from the original project.

*The [North Wales] authorities have previously collaborated on ICT. There is still a North Wales Heads of IT group. We took the Legal Services project’s CMS to this group and got ‘buy in’ which helps from a protocol point of view – we can agree who hosts what through joint discussion”*

### **3.1.3. Role of the Project Manager**

Interviewees were in agreement about the importance of having a Project Manager to ensure good project management – one of the main aims of applying for ESF funding. It is clear that the role of Project Manager has been an active one as, although the Project Manager has reported to the Board, she has had to use her own initiative to drive collaboration through the development and monitoring of a project plan and has taken responsibility for following up agreed actions with the individuals responsible.

*“The main enabler? A Project Manager to drive and facilitate collaboration. We are reliant on her for reports, chasing people, pulling things together for the six [authorities]”*

*“[The Project Manager] has been essential – there’s not the capacity in Legal Services”*

The importance of a dedicated Project Manager for collaboration across the region has been reinforced by the current predicament facing the project – implementing the CMS after funding for the Project Manager’s post has ended. The six authorities are each rotating the support for the monthly Board meetings and each contributing to the cost of some external project management for this specific task but there are widespread concerns about whether either of these arrangements will be adequate, as discussed below under ‘sustainability’.

### **3.1.4. Involvement from staff at all levels**

One of the strongest messages to come out of the North Wales legal services project is the importance of having engagement in the project from staff at all levels – from the Heads of Legal Services – through solicitors and other professionals across different specialisms – to administrative and other support staff.

*“120 staff are involved [in the project] including through SIGs”.*

*“Legal services in all councils have been really up for this [the single CMS]”.*

The leadership discussed above was vital to this staff involvement and then, as the different work strands got going, staff took advantages of opportunities to get involved, such as through the SIGs, which reinforced the benefits of collaboration as well as normalising it as a way of working. Several interviewees mentioned the importance of face-to-face contact to help people get to know one another for building the confidence and trust that are essential for effective collaborative working. This applied equally to Project Board and Team members and staff involved in the virtual teams.

*“Getting [legal services] staff together through SIGs and training, which breaks down barriers. Staff have to gain a level of confidence with counterparts”.*

*“Lawyers are old fashioned – they need face to face, to see the whites of the eyes – people need to get to know one another to share information”.*

### **3.1.5. Motivation and incentives**

One of the reasons that staff at all levels have been engaged is that there are clear benefits to individuals. Legal services staff work in small teams of professionals across a number of specialisms in each authority. Collaboration can reduce isolation, provide cover for sickness and annual leave, enhance access to professional knowledge and advice, and improve the quality of service to the client department.

*“We needed a framework to promote and facilitate sharing of expertise and ‘shift work around [between authorities] if needed for flexibility as each legal services unit is small”.*

### **3.1.6. Willingness to pool resources**

Pooling or aligning resources is sometimes experienced as the straw that breaks the collaboration camel’s back. Although finding resources for the North Wales Legal Services project has not been easy in the current financial climate, there has been a willingness to share staff (e.g. through the virtual teams) as a pooled resource rather than calculating inter-authority payments. Similarly, the six authorities have contributed on a pro-rata basis to the capital costs of purchasing the CMS (only the options appraisal was funded through the project) and are now contributing on the same basis to the revenue costs of a part time project manager to co-ordinate the CMS implementation.

The collaboration over pooling and aligning resources to date may become more difficult in the future. This is discussed under ‘challenges’ below.

## **3.2. Challenges to effective collaboration**

During the period of ESF and WLGA funding, enablers to collaboration outweighed challenges, although different IT systems caused delays to the procurement and implementation of the single case management system (CMS). The greater challenges are to how collaboration continues into the future because of external changes in the policy and financial climate for local government.

### **3.2.1. Different IT systems**

Only Anglesey uses the same CMS to the single one that is to be implemented across legal services in North Wales. Gwynedd has a different CMS system and the other four authorities use a combination of various time and document recording systems. The authorities also have different IT contracts with two using Lotus systems rather than Microsoft Exchange.

These differences meant there had to be discussions with IT staff and legal services personnel in each authority to negotiate the changes that would be required to move towards the single CMS.

*“[The project raises] issues of collaboration within authorities .....between legal services and ICT as each local authority has its own IT system which is the IT manager’s baby”.*

These technical barriers were not major and most were resolved quite quickly. However there is a perception that they contributed to delays in the procurement and implementation of the CMS.

The cultural and organisational challenges posed by moving to a greater use of IT to support collaboration in legal services is in many ways greater than the technical challenges of IT differences. Local authority staff, even within legal services, use computers in different ways. As one manager explained:

*“Administrative and financial staff sit at computers all day and are very quick to take up new IT software. Traditionally field workers haven’t been intensive users of computers so training can need following up. However, more intuitive (and less obtrusive) devices such as tablets are starting to change this”.*

These differences in use of, and possibly attitudes towards, IT mean that getting the Intranet to be used to its full potential has been a challenge.

Organisational differences have also affected the management of the CMS procurement process and contributed to delays in its implementation, which will now take place after the Project Manager has left. Although the authorities are jointly funding a part time CMS project manager there are concerns about whether this will be sufficient for effective implementation across the region. This is likely to be exacerbated by a decrease in resources for training in the current financial climate.

### **3.2.2. Financial climate**

The worsening financial climate has made some aspects of collaboration more difficult, although there is widespread agreement that this context also means that local authorities can’t afford not to collaborate.

As highlighted above in relation to project management and IT training, one effect of fewer resources is that investments to aid the move to single or integrated systems may become a lower priority so that changes are delayed and/or the potential of the changes is not fully realised.

A more fundamental challenge of local authority budget cuts has been a growing tension between legal services officers’ day job and their involvement in collaboration. This operates at both the individual and departmental level. For example, despite the widespread feedback on the success of SIGs, there is also a recognition that they can add to time pressures on some individuals in a time of financial austerity and consequent staffing reductions:

*“Some people end up doing more work on SIGs than others... and people involved may be drawn into several SIGs, which can be onerous for the individual. This can cause a tension between collaborative work and the day job”.*

At an authority or departmental level, the tension often manifests itself through a lack of flexibility for collaboration. This could also lead to tensions between the authorities over the relative inputs to ‘making collaboration work’. Three interviewees expressed these concerns:

*“The need is growing to show efficiency savings but [there is] no facility to recharge or ring fence budgets for regional services. Cuts in legal services staff mean there is less flexibility and less capacity to pool resources, which impacts on virtual teams, although they become even more important”.*

*“The CMS capital is enough of a problem and finding £1,500 [from one authority] for the project manager for this makes it more difficult. There’s no spare money and [this raises issues about] our capacity to service the project.”*

### **3.2.3. Lack of political engagement**

In terms of policy priorities and savings targets, legal services is a relatively low political priority, which explains the lack of political engagement in the project apart from regular briefings to elected members, for example of Cabinet in Gwynedd and to Scrutiny in Anglesey.

*“There’s not much member involvement [in the Legal Services Project] beyond briefings. Other activities are higher up the savings agenda so get more attention from members”.*

In some ways this is helpful in making progress without having to take account of political sensitivities but it may be starting to exacerbate the financial pressures on the project as there are no obvious political champions for investing in regional collaboration.

*“[There are] tensions between ‘the pull of your own authority and working for the region. This might become more of a concern in a climate when members expect cuts and there is no cash [payments or savings] for sharing work. The quid pro quo approach may become more difficult – there is time recording but not all authorities pull their weight.”*

### **3.2.4. Local government reform**

The long term commitment from the Welsh Government in encouraging collaboration to improve service delivery and citizen outcomes had been a helpful context for the Legal Services project. However, the recommendations of the Williams Commission

report in January 2014, and discussion of various options for local authority mergers meant that Chief Executives 'became more wary' and 'slowed down' on promoting collaboration. This was noticeable to senior lawyers involved in the project who thought that:

*"With Williams on the horizon there is confusion about collaboration and reorganisation. Regional collaboration could counter William's proposals of a national back office for local government. We could move to a single regional Legal Services for local authorities but the politicians would have to decide on that. There are lots of issues such as recharging, management etc."*

Overall the feeling is that the experience of collaboration through the project and the outcomes that have been achieved should stand North Wales' authorities in good stead whatever the forthcoming proposals on local government reform.

*"Collaboration would be needed whatever the local authority boundaries – whether there were two or three North Wales councils"*

*"Whatever the structure of local government it shouldn't undermine the [North Wales Legal Services] project. We've created a framework to govern this service so we wouldn't be starting from a blank sheet"*

#### **4. ESF and WLGA support**

Funding for the North Wales Legal Services project comprised £144,933 from ESF (from the ESF LSB Development and Delivery Project) and £69,767 from WLGA to extend the coverage of the project from the four convergence areas to all six North Wales authorities.

There was an opportunity to bid for Regional Collaboration Fund (RCF) monies in April 2013 to finance the full cost of the CMS as this had already been agreed as a key part of the project by the Project Board. However, due to the delayed start of the project and the Project Manager's period of sickness absence, there were not the resources for the complex calculations that were needed in a very tight timescale. Instead the ESF funding was used for the initial option appraisal of a single CMS.

The main use of the ESF/WLGA funding has been for the full time Project Manager post, filled through the secondment of a Legal Services Manager from Denbighshire Council. As discussed above, the Project Manager role was a key enabler for the project; most interviewees felt the project could not have happened without this role.

The Project Board was disappointed with the Welsh Government's decision not to allow an underspend of some £35,000 to be carried over until March 2015 to compensate for earlier, largely unavoidable delays. There were also concerns about the communications from the Welsh Government about this as the project had been given to understand that there was a strong possibility of carrying over the underspend only to be told in November 2014 that WEFO had advised this would be against ESF rules and the funding would cease from 31 December 2014. The main consequence of this decision has been the difficulties of project managing the

implementation of the CMS and, specifically, the training that will be required for staff to use it effectively.

*“The Board said we can’t rush [the CMS procurement process] but the system’s no good without the training”.*

*“There was no flexibility on the underspend. Another couple of months would have made all the difference”.*

The Project Manager has had support from both the Welsh Government and WLGA. The North Wales ESF/LSB regional network, organised by the ESF Project Development and Delivery Manager from the Department for Local Government and Communities in Welsh Government, has been very important, even though the Legal Services project doesn’t link with LSBs. This Welsh Government official has also been the Project Manager’s primary contact and main source of support.

Despite this support, members of the Project Board had concerns that the ESF approval process had been slow and that reporting requirements were unnecessarily arduous. This raised questions about whether the project manager’s time would have been spent most effectively through a better balance of delivery and reporting.

*“Welsh Government approval [for the project] was very slow. Reporting has been burdensome - how much time has the Project Manager spent reporting back to Welsh Government?”*

The Project Manager also received support from the WLGA, especially through useful events on shared services and collaboration run by WLGA. The Project Board has had little involvement with the WLGA since their support during the ESF bidding process, which was beneficial.

The North Wales Regional Partnership Board was a key driver at the beginning of the project but has had little involvement since then apart from requesting a couple of early reports and a presentation following the successful bid, appointment of the Project Manager and agreed project plan.

*“The Legal Services project picked up the baton for the [North Wales] RPB on regional collaboration but is minnows [sic] in terms of regional spend.”*

## **5. Sustainability**

### **5.1. Plans for sustaining collaboration**

Project Board members “can’t see the project not continuing” and are extending the project governance arrangements (i.e. Project Board, Project Team and Chairs of SIGs Group) for at least another year until early 2016. The Board has recently agreed a work programme that reflects the level of resource available without the ESF funded Project Manager and focuses on “outcome based projects to maximise the benefits of joint working”.

These projects include continuing the joint procurement of library services through rationalisation of e-subscriptions, further promotion of and training on using the



Intranet, and the implementation of the CMS. This infrastructure can then be used to underpin the expansion of virtual teams to other areas (beyond the pilots in adult social care and prosecution) and joint training through the SIG approach.

The culture of collaboration that has developed among legal services staff at all levels should help to sustain the collaborative mechanisms, consolidate progress to date and enable further outcomes.

## **5.2. Risks to sustaining collaboration**

These plans for sustaining collaboration are not without risks. As discussed in the 'challenges' section above the loss of ESF funding for a dedicated Project Manager in a context of local government budget reductions mean resources for collaboration will be reduced significantly.

These reductions are likely to have a number of direct and indirect effects. First, the loss of the Project Manager post will affect the overall co-ordination and support for collaboration.

*"The Project Board and Project Team meetings will continue and whichever authority will do the agenda and minutes. 'There are no spare resources [from the six authorities] to pool to fund a project manager so we shall have to see how this goes. It's a challenge".*

*"Overall [I've] concerns about whether the project will have enough project management support and time to enable it to become business as usual".*

Secondly, staffing reductions at all levels in all six authorities means that there is less flexibility for officers to be actively involved in collaborative work. This is likely to affect strategic and operational management of the ongoing project as well as the abilities for staff to be involved in SIGs or for new virtual teams to be established.

*"The Project Board may now be diverted as its members have wider responsibilities, in HR and IT for example although they are all lawyers, but there is a lot to do with getting Intranet going and rationalising library services as well as the CMS as a priority. We need to find the best way of driving these [strands]".*

*"The main challenges for the coming year will be retaining staff engagement and getting the resources for training and newsletters to promote the message of joint working".*

The impact of staff shortages is likely to be exacerbated by less financial resources for the full implementation and promotion of the Intranet and CMS, and for joint training through SIGs. In addition, replicating the virtual team pilots might become more difficult in other areas. A Property virtual team covering Flintshire and Wrexham is being explored but progress has stalled due to staffing changes.

Property also tends to account for a higher number of staff within an authority's legal services team so there may be less incentive to integrate in this area for larger authorities.

## **6. Summary**

North Wales Legal Services project is a very good example of how collaboration has contributed to improved service delivery and outcomes.

Collaboration has benefited from strategic leadership, operational and project management and the involvement of staff at all levels and from all six authorities. There is a clear pathway between the collaborative activities – Special Interest Groups (SIGs), two Virtual Teams pilots, joint procurement and rationalisation of library services, the Intranet and CMS – and outcomes. These include the development of an increase in staff networking and collaborative culture in legal services, which has enabled tangible improvements in service quality.

The project has met its three objectives of reduced net costs of legal services, increased staff satisfaction and increased client satisfaction. Although it is difficult to calculate the savings from collaboration when other savings are being made, there is evidence of reduced payments to external solicitors (e.g. for cover, advice), reduced library subscriptions and more cost-effective staff training.

The Project Board feels that the collaboration that has taken place has also enabled legal services across North Wales to become more flexible and resilient – now and in the future. It is important that the project can be sustained as 'core business' to be able continue reaping the benefits of a collaborative approach but this is likely to depend on a continuing commitment to, and investment in, collaboration from all six authorities.

A major learning point from the North Wales Legal Services project is that effective collaboration needs resources - in staff time, skills in collaborative working and financial investment. This is true not only for the 'project' phase but as an ongoing way of working. The skill set and tasks involved shift from service delivery to change management (encompassing strategic leadership, relationship building and maintenance). In a tight financial climate this shift may require an explicit reallocation of resources to ensure the processes and behaviours are in place to support structural change under local government reform.

## **7. Case study data sources and fieldwork**

Grant approval letter from Welsh Government 4 September 2012

Annual report June 2013

Annual review and financial profile June 2014

Draft project review and closure report 30 November 2014

Case study evaluation of the North Wales Legal Services Collaboration project (draft), Local Government Data Unit ~ Wales, January 2015

## **8. Fieldwork interviewees**

Amanda Brookes, Project Manager (on secondment from Denbighshire County Council)

Sioned Wyn-Davies, Legal Services Manager/Acting Head of Legal Services, Wrexham County Borough Council

Iwan G D Evans, Head of Legal Services, Gwynedd Council

Robyn Jones, Legal Service Manager, Anglesey County Council

Rob Brookes, IT Systems Manager, Conwy County Borough Council

Nathan Gardner, Regional Projects Monitoring and Support Officer, Welsh Local Government Association

**Fieldwork interviews were carried out in January and February 2015. All quotes in the report are from interviewees and are used to illustrate a commonly expressed experience or view but are not referenced so as to preserve anonymity.**

# Western Bay Health and Social Care Programme

## 1. Programme scope and ambition

The Western Bay Health and Social Care Programme (WBHSCP) has brought together Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University (ABMU) Health Board with the local authorities of Bridgend CBC, Neath Port Talbot CBC and City & County of Swansea and third sector partners to provide a strategic mechanism for co-ordinating a programme of change in a suite of health and social care projects to address issues that partners had identified as a common concern.

This ambitious, transformational programme has received £3,797,000 of Regional Collaboration Fund (RCF) monies for a three year programme from April 2013 to March 2016<sup>1</sup>. This built on an earlier ESF-LSB funded project (2012 – 2014) and has since used the RCF funding to attract additional resources from Welsh Government, notably through the Delivering Transformation Grant (DTG) and the Intermediate Care Fund (ICF).

Since 2014 the Western Bay Health and Social Care Programme has been split into two tiers of activity: tier one focusing on the key transformational projects which report directly to the WBHSCP governance arrangements (i.e. the Leadership Group and Partnership Forum; tier two covering 'business as usual' collaborative action, some of which started as ESF-LSB projects. **Tier one** comprises:

- **Community services programme** (older people's services) – implementation and evaluation of the intermediate care service and a second phase of community services intervention which is focused on core community services;
- **Prevention and wellbeing** including: advice and assistance; local area/community coordination; social enterprise and a wellbeing resource under development; and
- **Contracting and procurement**, a cross cutting project concerned with in particular reviewing packages of care across the partnership to ensure that they are set at the right level quality care and also to review their costs.

**Tier two** activities that started through the ESF funded Western Bay project include:

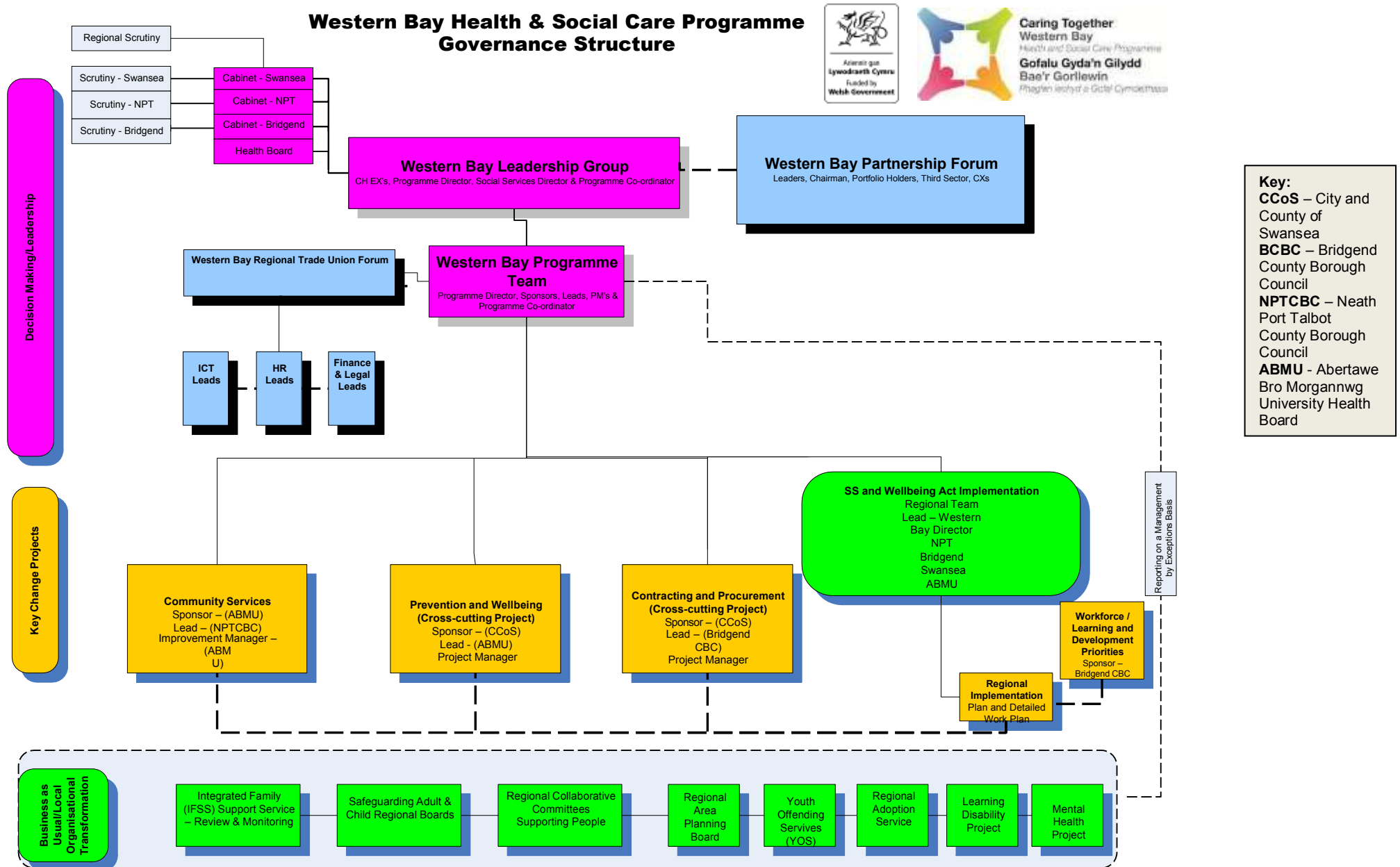
- Mental health project;
- Learning disability project; and
- Regional adoption service.

A diagram of the Western Bay governance structure and projects is shown below. This includes related workstreams (e.g. Supporting People, Youth Offending Services) that neither receive RCF nor report regularly into the governance structure, though can report on a management by exception basis.

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<sup>1</sup> The original notification from Welsh Government was for £4,665,000 RCF over three years from 2013/14 to 2015/16. Subsequently the 2015/16 RCF budget was reduced from £1.705m to £837k following cuts to this funding stream

# Western Bay Health & Social Care Programme Governance Structure



## **2. Context for Western Bay**

There were a number of drivers for establishing the Western Bay programme in 2011. Although the Regional Partnership Board (RPB) had been operating since 2006 with Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) support, only social care had been included as a regional priority (for South-west and Mid-Wales), with some collaboration between Assistant Directors of Social Services on specific services but with no involvement of health services. Demographic change, budgetary pressures and new chief executives at both the ABMU Health Board and the City and County of Swansea by 2011 combined to raise the importance of collaboration not only between the three local authorities but with the Health Board that covered their combined areas.

At a similar time the Welsh Government had been encouraging collaboration including through the 'Making the Connections' and 'ESF-LSB programmes', which had been reinforced by the then Minister for Local Government and Communities who had been showing concern about the pace of regional collaboration. The introduction of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Bill<sup>2</sup> in early 2012 provided further reasons for regional collaboration on health and social care and helped identify the priorities for Western Bay. The inclusion of a regional adoption service as one of these followed the WLGA arguments that this should be a regional rather than a national service as had been proposed by a Minister around this time. The Western Bay approach also chimed with the Health Board's priorities outlined in their five year plan 'Changing for the Better' launched in January 2012.

Shortly after the appointment of a new chief executive in Swansea in 2011, the chief executives of the three local authorities and the Health Board came together to establish. This process led to a series of 'joint commitment documents' for learning disability, mental health and community services to determine priorities for each of these priority projects.

The programme was successful in securing ESF – WLGA funding of £254,551 over two years in 2012, which funded two project managers for specific projects although those interviewees who were involved at the time stressed that "we were going to do it anyway".

## **3. Leadership, project management and the role of the LSBs**

### **3.1. Leadership**

Interviewees with different roles and levels of responsibility all pointed to the vital function played by the four chief executives in setting up and leading 'Western Bay', a name that was specifically coined for this programme.

*"The chief executives coming together...that was important for Western Bay so it was driven from the top."* (Senior local authority manager)

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<sup>2</sup> The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act was passed in 2014 and will be implemented from April 2016.

*“When the leaders [chief executives] came together with energy and focus to set up Western Bay it was the dawn of a new era.”* (Senior ABMU manager)

The Leadership Group has been chaired since its inception in 2012 by the Chief Executive of City and County of Swansea who tells of how, when he arrived in 2011, found that ‘there were no links between social services and health’ and so ‘got together the other two local authority chief executives and the Health Board in a room to share knowledge and agree priorities’.

The composition of the Leadership Group has remained the same since it begun – meeting monthly with the chief executives showing considerable personal commitment to attending regularly. Since a governance review in 2013, Directors of Social Services as well as the Western Bay Regional Director and Programme Co-ordinator have been invited to attend meetings for specific items. Whilst this arrangement has received some criticism for being elitist and exclusive, the overwhelming view now seems to be that this small, very senior group “needs the space to take difficult decisions”.

The internal Governance Review in 2013 established a dedicated regional Programme Director post to further support the Western Bay Programme infrastructure. This comprises the Programme Director and Co-ordinator as well as the Sponsors, Leads and project managers of the three tier one projects. In turn, the Programme Team reports to the Leadership Group and is responsible for operationalising its decisions. This group receives reports from the three tier one projects and ensures there is co-ordination between them within the overall Western Bay programme as well as making links to the Social Services and Well-being Act Implementation Regional Team, which also covers the Western Bay area.

The review also responded to elected member desires for more involvement in Western Bay by establishing the Western Bay Partnership Forum. This is attended by the three council Leaders and portfolio holders for social care and/or health, the Chair of the Health Board, and voluntary and independent sector representatives. While welcoming this addition to the governance structure, interviewees had mixed views about the effectiveness of this forum and the role that the third sector was playing.

*“For the first couple of years I wasn’t sure what was going on [with Western Bay]. Now I feel it’s a model that works. I’m more involved on the Partnership Forum – we’re interactive with the Leadership Group.”* (Elected member)

*“Some chief execs were cautious about opening up the Partnership Forum to the third sector as they were already represented on the LSB.”* (Senior local authority manager)

Specifically, elected members seem to want to have more of a scrutiny role – and there are moves to set up regional scrutiny arrangements alongside those that are already in place at the three councils, although this is progressing slowly. This appears to indicate that a regional collaboration like Western Bay may need scrutiny of its work as part of its governance as well as the constituent councils being able to scrutinise the regional arrangements and service outcomes.

*“We need more scrutiny [of Western Bay] in the three local authorities. We only get reports [to the Partnership Forum] and Cabinet briefings – we’re asking questions and we need the next level of scrutiny”. (Elected member)*

*“Some [elected] members think regional arrangements undermine their role and can create a democratic deficit. So we need to democratise regionally. We’re setting up joint scrutiny for Western Bay which will hold one to three events a year in addition to local authority scrutiny as some local authority members don’t trust the Health Board [as it’s not democratically elected]”. (Senior local authority manager)*

### **3.2. Project Management**

Western Bay Programme is managed by the Regional Programme Director (who is funded through the Delivering Transformation Grant<sup>3</sup>), supported by the Programme Co-ordinator who is funded through RCF. Each of the three tier one projects has a ‘Sponsor’ (at Director level from one of the three local authorities or ABMU), a ‘Lead’ (at Assistant Director level or equivalent) and a project manager (sometimes called project co-ordinator or implementation manager). Only the project managers are full time posts funded through RCF.

Although this structure ensures senior involvement from each partner organisation, several interviewees expressed concerns about how well this ‘lower leadership tier’ was working in practice given the competing demands on senior managers in all organisations.

*“Having project representatives from all four organisations at all levels – strategic and operational – has helped provide a hook for the programme but fitting Western Bay in with the day job is still an issue. And we’ve lost a couple of [management] posts recently”. (Senior local authority manager)*

*“As a local authority director and project sponsor I have competing agendas – Western Bay, challenges to local services, corporate priorities, new initiatives from other directorates – it’s difficult to look after all of them at the same time”. (Senior local authority manager)*

The overall Programme Director and Programme Co-ordinator roles are seen as crucial by those involved in Western Bay because of the degree of interdependencies between the different projects in the programme and, more recently to make links between the programme and the implementation of the Social Services and Well-being Act. Likewise, interviewees commented on the importance of having a dedicated Western Bay team to ensure effective project management systems and communications across this complex programme.

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<sup>3</sup> Delivering Transformation Grant has been awarded to Western Bay to support the regional implementation of the Sustainable Social Services for Wales programme and, in particular, implementation of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act. More details of how RCF has been combined with other funding are given in the chapter on the role of the Welsh Government and RCF.



#### 4. Collaborative capacity and capability

Bringing together four organisations to develop integrated health and social care services has required significant development in collaborative capacity and capability. As the Chair of the Western Bay Leadership Group put it:

*“When we started we had different priorities and policies, with some at crisis point; different personalities – some more principled, some more pragmatic; different pressures including the Health Board’s growing deficit; different starting points so it would take us different times to get to a standard model; and different performance criteria and regimes”.*

The governance structure has enabled collaboration at a senior, decision-making level and these arrangements, although still developing such as for scrutiny, seem to have been embedded as a regional collaborative structure for Western Bay. Interviewees saw the senior leadership and joint commitment documents as essential to drive collaborative working at all levels.

*“Collaborative working is really tough so collective leadership is important”.* (Senior ABMU manager)

One interviewee who had been responsible for workforce development earlier in the programme explained that leadership and training has been necessary to support staff to move to more collaborative working and management. This training has included mentoring, modelling and coaching as part of Western Bay’s Learning and Development Plan for implementing the Social Services and Well-being Act.

*“Directors drive but people make change happen .....personalities can get in the way.....and you have to give up your own kudos for the greater good of the whole”.* (Senior local authority manager)

Those senior managers responsible for sponsoring and leading projects recognised the degree of cultural change needed to implement the Western Bay programme effectively and the need for investing time and resources in developing collaborative capacity at all levels. This investment is now starting to pay off as interviewees all spoke of how working with staff across four organisations has become much easier – and sometimes the norm.

*“We’re wearing two hats but don’t need to take the regional one off to do the local [work]. Relationships [between staff from the three local authorities and ABMU] are good so we can have discussions and cope with difference”.* (Senior local authority manager)

*“Some staff felt ‘taken over’ ... integration affects their identity. In particular we were divided by a common language – as each organisation used the same words to mean different things. Now we have agreed a glossary of terms and it’s much better”.* (Operational manager)

Collaborative capacity has risen in the three tier one project areas due to staff having more contact with peers in the other partner organisations through co-location in

Community Access Points (Community Services) and the Regional Adoption Service), by developing and using standard/common protocols and procedures (such as the optimum model for intermediate care (Community Services) and the 'Right size, right price' approach in Contracting and Procurement) and working in multi-disciplinary teams on cross-cutting projects (Area Co-ordination as part of Prevention and Wellbeing).

*"A single line manager is very important [for a multi-disciplinary team] – you can still have professional management from the relevant departments - so you can develop a single team feeling and use joint resources so the user can't tell whether someone's from health or social care".* (Operational manager)

The Regional Adoption Service (a tier has been in place as 'one service' with staff co-located in Port Talbot Civic Centre and responsible to one manager since February 2015). Staff from the three local authority adoption teams came together and were reorganised into three functional teams. Monitoring data shows that the service has placed and matched more children more quickly since having an integrated service, has increased the number of adopters and avoided duplication e.g. through region-wide support groups. But although the team is now "working well together on delivery", it has had to overcome cultural, HR and IT issues.

*"In the early days [of the Regional Adoption Service] it was difficult as there were differences like 'we don't do it this way'. It was a mind-set problem that you have to deal with through relationships".* (Operational manager)

*"HR still works within the confines of individual organisations".* (Senior local authority manager)

The Regional Adoption Service – like the Community Resource Teams (discussed in more detail in the next section) has also had to cope with "IT systems that don't talk to each other" and staff who have been used to working with paper files. These IT systems issues seem to be symptomatic of the need to get a collaborative infrastructure in place to support the increasing collaborative capability evident in staff relationships and front line delivery.

*"We can share information [in Community Resource Teams] but we have had to work around the IT systems to sort it".* (Operational manager)

### **3.3. Organisational and service change**

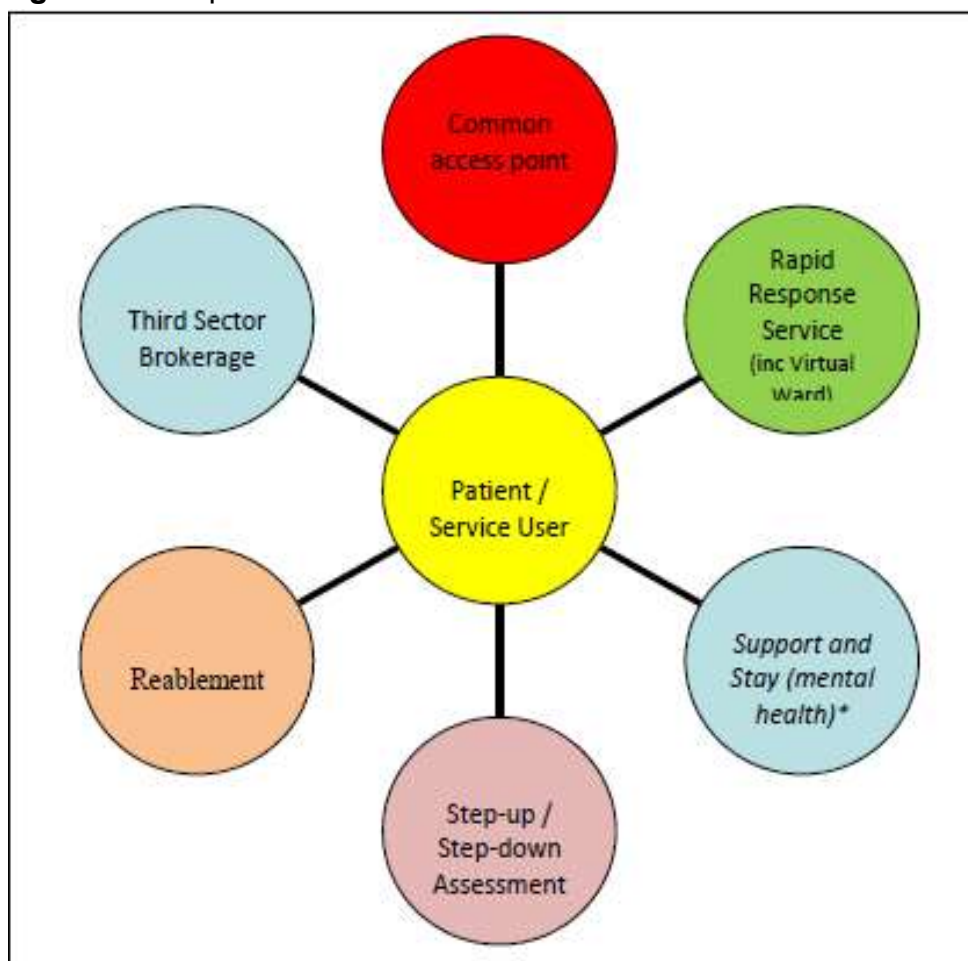
The Western Bay programme has resulted in a considerable number of changes to service delivery and organisational structures at a regional level and in each of the four partner organisations.

To provide sufficient detail from which to draw learning, this section focuses on the changes that have occurred within the Community Services programme (which itself comprises several interrelated projects). Examples from the other tier one projects are used to illustrate the various types of changes.

The Community Services programme is the most extensive of the three Western Bay tier one projects. To date it has been focused on establishing integrated intermediate care services for older people, taking a 'team around the person' approach. (The next stage includes anticipatory care planning, full integration of older people's mental health, and approaches to tackle social isolation and loneliness). This is shown in diagrammatic form below.

## 5. Optimal model for Intermediate Care services

**Figure 2:** An optimal model for intermediate care services



Following the Health Board and Cabinets agreeing intermediate care as the first priority for the Community Services project in September 2013 as "if you can't integrate at the Intermediate care tier then where can you?", the 'optimal service model' and business case was signed off by the same four bodies in March 2014. The optimal service model enabled the three local authority services, which were at different starting points, to move towards a standard approach comprising Common Access Points; Planned response through reablement teams; Rapid response through coordinated clinical teams; and infrastructure to support intermediate care.

The Common Access Points were set up in spring 2014 and provide a multi-disciplinary triage, staffed by health and social care staff as well as third sector

brokers provided through The Red Cross. This stage establishes the priority or 'presenting need', which is addressed through the Community Resource Teams (one in each local authority), which can provide and/or call upon reablement and rapid response services as well as intermediate care and more preventative support through Benefits advice, older people's mental health services, Care and Repair etc.

The strength of this Community Services model is twofold. The 'optimal model' means that older people can expect the same level of service wherever they live and the integrated Community Response Teams mean the individual (and their carer(s)) receive a package of services that is customised to their needs wherever and however they first make contact with any health, care or community services.

The model has proved popular with services users as well as with health professionals such as GPs who, through a recent survey, reported that they felt very positive about the Common Access Points. Their comments described how these made it much easier for them to refer patients without having to assess their specific needs (particularly if not clinical) or know exactly where they should refer them to.

This change in how services are delivered to older people has required a considerable amount of organisational change affecting structures, processes and staff behaviours in the three local authorities, ABMU and third sector organisations.

Approximately 150 health and social care staff (including physiotherapists) now work in each local authority's Community Resource Team under a single line manager, who is also able to access other relevant health services directly (e.g. rapid response teams). The cultural changes took some 'selling' initially but after the benefits of being 'person – centred' were explained and staff actually started working alongside each other, the changes have been generally appreciated.

*"There are lots of benefits [from the optimum model]. For the staff [in CRTs] there is the advice and support from other professionals, for colleagues working in primary care, they know that the whole person will be looked at. For family and friends who are carers, it's easier to pick up issues and a better understanding of each other's roles. And it's given organisations the confidence to do different things. For example, there's been an investment in nine residential reablement beds - jointly funded [LA/ABMU] – that wouldn't have happened before". (Operational manager)*

The Contracting and Procurement project was set up to see whether Western Bay could "deliver more efficiencies as a region by being smarter at delivering the 'right size care packages at the right price'. This key activity along with providing a Mental Health Brokerage Service underpins the programme as a whole.

In many ways this 'back room' project complements the move to integrated front line delivery through the Community Services programme. To date the project has been focusing on reducing the high costs of complex cases in learning disabilities and mental health placements by establishing a regional contracting and procurement resource.

The regional approach to contracting and procurement that has been developed is client-led and fits the 'practice model of social work'. The model of a Project Manager, Change Agents (who review existing care packages) and Regional Contracts Officers (who check the comparative cost of contracts) has delivered some savings (summarised under 'outcomes' in the next section). However, there are some concerns about a lack of embedding of the model and social work teams not starting the process on entry. (There would not be the need for such a heavy review by the regional team if the cases had already been through the process, as the individuals would have been placed "correctly" with the appropriate level of care.) The next phase of the project will ensure that all packages of care in this arena are reviewed on referral to social workers.

The most recent Western Bay project is 'Prevention and Wellbeing', which is overseen by a Board established in autumn 2014 in response to some of the duties in the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act. Its main area of activity has been to establish Local Area Co-ordination/Local Community Co-ordination in the three local authorities, which are at different stages of implementing a common (while locally flexible) approach to jointly agreed objectives.

The approach is aimed at supporting 'people and communities to develop skills and ideas that help them avoid crises, find practical solutions to everyday issues and problems, stay strong and build a good life'. Local Area Co-ordinators (3 in Swansea and due to be appointed in NPT) and a local Community Co-ordinator in Bridgend work alongside council officers - and with voluntary and other statutory agencies - as a single point of contact in the community for vulnerable, isolated and older people, their families and carers to help them achieve their personal wellbeing outcomes including through co-production.

## **6. Outcomes**

The Western Bay Programme tracks outcomes for all projects. It is clear that collaboration is starting to result in tangible outcomes for service users as well as through efficiency savings. Outcomes from all three tier one projects are summarised below to give an overview of the impact that Western Bay has had to date.

**Table 1:** Summary of outcomes of the Western Bay Programme

TIER 1 PROJECT	SERVICE USER AND EFFICIENCY OUTCOMES
<b>Community Services</b>	<p>Intermediate care tier has led to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– reduction in care home admissions (Swansea, NPT)</li> <li>– reduction in acute admissions (NPT)</li> </ul> <p>reduction in domiciliary care packages (Bridgend, NPT) For 2014/15 compared to 2013/14, using RCF and ICF resources, there have been:</p> <p><b>In NPT:-</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 78 fewer care home placements</li> <li>• 18 fewer Homecare Starts</li> <li>• 175 more Rapid Response interventions</li> <li>• 107 more Reablement interventions</li> </ul> <p><b>In Bridgend:-</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 39 fewer people living in care homes (as at 31/3/14 &amp; 15)</li> <li>• 51 fewer homecare starts</li> <li>• 74 more Rapid response interventions</li> <li>• 255 more 'better@home' interventions (expediting hospital discharges)</li> </ul> <p><b>In Swansea: -</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 24 fewer care home admissions (7% decrease)</li> <li>• 102 more Reablement interventions (12% increase)</li> <li>• 60 more residential reablement interventions(38% increase)</li> <li>• 50% of those using residential reablement return to their own homes (avoiding a care home admission)</li> </ul>
<b>Prevention and Wellbeing</b>	<p>(from Report to Partnership Board May 2015)</p> <p>Bridgend LCC - 40 people supported to Oct 15 Swansea LAC – 10 people supported to Oct 15</p>
<b>Contracting and procurement</b>	<p>£1.5 m savings by May 2015 mostly from a high cost case review originally rolled out in NPT (£753,967 savings = 23% of the original placement costs) By October 2015 approach had resulted in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• £535,000 annual cashable savings from Right Sizing/Right Pricing (£1.3 m over 18 months) with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 26 care packages having been through the whole process and</li> <li>○ 63 care packages on the first step of the process</li> </ul> </li> <li>• £349,447 annual avoidance savings via Mental Health Brokering Service</li> </ul>

Most of the projects within Western Bay are developing short case studies of outcomes from service users' perspectives to illustrate and complement the quantitative evidence on outcomes. The case studies are produced in text, available on the Western Bay website and in the quarterly newsletters) and as YouTube videos available through Western Bay TV. Three short examples are given below.

### **Neath Port Talbot Right Sizing: Right Pricing (Contracting and Procurement Project)**

Mr B (a gentleman with learning disabilities) had been in residential care for around 5 years and was receiving very little in the way of support to increase his independence. He attended a day centre on a regular basis but had no other means of social participation.

A 'Pathways to Independence' (PTI) assessment undertaken in January 2015 found him to be capable of living more autonomously in a supported living environment. With advocacy involvement a careful plan was devised to help Mr B familiarise himself with the new home and become comfortable with the prospect of change.

He now lives with another gentleman in a supported living arrangement and enjoys socialising at the local Workingmen's Club. He attends a disco for people with learning disabilities and enjoys doing the gardening, which has enhanced his personal wellbeing. He receives support to do a weekly food shop and has enjoyed having the freedom to choose furnishings and other items for his new home.

*Cashable saving of £600 per week*  
**£31,284**

*Projected forward for 52.14 weeks:*

### **Bridgend Community Resource Team (CRT) (Community Services Programme)**

Mrs P is a 91 year old former Red Cross nurse who lives with her son in Bridgend. She was managing well until she suffered a flare up of her arthritis which caused her legs to become swollen. During this time she also developed an infection which meant she was in danger of suffering from acute pressure area damage.

When the District Nurses became aware of her situation Mrs P was referred to the Bridgend CRT. Working together with her son, the Team came up with a comprehensive care plan which allowed Mrs P to be treated in her own home rather than be admitted to hospital. Arrangements were made for a bed to be brought into the living room and for specialist equipment to be installed in the home to enable Mrs P to get in and out of bed safely.

The CRT Nurses, Therapists and Carers all joined forces to support Mrs P and within 2 weeks she showed real signs of improvement. Mrs P can now move around the ground floor of her home using a walking frame, use the bathroom by herself, and carry out some household tasks that she previously found difficult to manage.

*"I wouldn't have wanted to go into hospital. I would rather stay at home". (Mrs P)*

## **Swansea Local Area Co-ordination (Prevention and Wellbeing Project)**

Emma is a young mother with three young children. She is recently bereaved, isolated and struggling to cope. Emma and her partner signed a new tenancy agreement just before he unexpectedly passed away and she is concerned about how she will manage alone with the property. Emma wants to help her children with their grief, resolve her housing issues and gain control once again.

The manager of the local corner shop suggested Emma would benefit from a visit from the Local Area Coordinator as Emma would be reluctant to be approached by a 'service type' person saying *"I don't want to talk to anyone, they'll take my kids away"*.

The Coordinator took the time to explain their role and they agreed to meet at her home. Emma explained her situation, her worries that Social Services will remove the children, and that people will see she cannot cope. She went to the local library to borrow some books on grief but someone asked her how she was and she burst into tears and left. She also is worried about her new tenancy and the property, which has no heating, flooring and is unfurnished so feels empty and cold.

The Coordinator went to the library and collected three books for Emma. The library was able to offer support through a 'Mums and Toddler' Group held there which Emma signed up for. The books have helped her children start to talk through their toys about their feelings and ask questions. The Coordinator put her in touch with her local housing officer to get the remedial work done on the house and found information on benefits and entitlements. Emma was encouraged to visit her GP to talk about her and her children's situation.

## **7. Role of Welsh Government and RCF funding**

Western Bay Health and Social Care Programme received £3,797,000 of Regional Collaboration Fund (RCF) monies for a three year programme from April 2013 to March 2016<sup>4</sup>. This built on two years of ESF and WLGA funding which lasted until December 2014. Since then the RCF funding has been used to attract additional resources from Welsh Government, notably the Intermediate Care Fund (ICF), which has been important to deliver the Community Services programme. Western Bay has also received Delivering Transformation Grant (DTG) to support the regional implementation of the Sustainable Social Services for Wales programme and, in particular, implementation of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act.

*"Without RCF we wouldn't have got ICF. [Through RCF] we already had a plan and route map and long term commitment from the three councils and ABMU".*  
(Operational manager)

These combined resources resulted in £3,919,000 of revenue funding and £5,203,000 capital funding for Western Bay in 2015/16 broken down as follows:

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<sup>4</sup> The 2015/16 RCF budget was reduced from £1.705m to £837k following Welsh Government cuts to this funding stream



**Table 2:** External funding for Western Bay in 2015/16

<b>Revenue Funding streams</b>	<b>£</b>
Regional Collaboration Fund	837,000
Delivering Transformation Grant	481,000
Intermediate Care Fund	2,601,000
<b>Capital Funding Stream:</b>	
Intermediate Care Fund	5,203,000

Interviewees explained that the three benefits of RCF were that it had funded dedicated posts at programme and project levels; had leveraged other external funding and internal (mainstream) resources; and had enabled risk. Two different examples of reducing risk while moving to new pathways and systems were raised by several interviewees. First, within the Community Services programme, the ICF funding had supported a pilot where Care and Repair Cymru staff could carry out low level home safety assessments directly (rather than having to go through Occupational Therapy) and make referrals to what has now become a more streamlined service.

*“We had to look at the whole system [in intermediate care]. The [external] funding has helped us trial specific projects...helped us get over risk-averseness”.*  
(Operational manager)

Secondly, the Contracting and Procurement Project has been able to use RCF to review the quality and costs of care for individuals thus minimising any potential risks. Through employing a Project Manager (subsequently an Implementation Manager), Social Workers acting as ‘Change Agents’ and Regional Integrated Contracting Officers who together review the quality and level of care provided to individuals. The final stage involves working with providers in partnership to review the costs associated with each individual placement.

Although the interest that the Welsh Government has been showing in Western Bay through visits and promotion of its approach is appreciated, several politicians and senior officers expressed frustration about a perceived lack of understanding within Welsh Government about regional collaboration. There was a strong feeling that Western Bay has had to “work it out for itself” and that local government reorganisation might undermine the progress that has been made. The position of Bridgend is seen as especially precarious as although the local authority area is covered by the ABMU Health Board, the council ‘looks east’ (to Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan) in relation to transport, education and economic regeneration.

*“The Regional Partnership Board covering Mid and West Wales was too wide and too much of a talking shop. You need the right focus as well as the right region for effective regional working”.* (Senior local authority manager)

## 8. Third Sector involvement

The level of third sector involvement in Western Bay has been increasing as the programme has developed. The sector has been integral to service delivery from the beginning with the Third Sector Brokers now seen as a key part of the intermediate care optimal model (Community Services project). Other organisations such as the British Red Cross Swansea Morgannwg, Bridgend Care and Repair, Swansea Care and Repair, and Age Cymru Swansea Bay are also involved in the delivery of various aspects of intermediate care and have been able to increase their support to older people as a result of RCF and ICF funding. This has resulted in positive service user feedback with, for example, British Red Cross Swansea Morgannwg, which covers the whole of Western Bay region, reporting that of 265 clients surveyed in 2014, 98 per cent agreed with the statement ‘this service has made it less likely that I will be readmitted into hospital’.

The third sector has a lead role in the Local Area/Community Co-ordination and the Information, Advice and Assistance strands of the Prevention and Wellbeing project. The three Councils for Voluntary Services have mapped the wellbeing and prevention resources in their areas in a form which can be migrated to the ‘Infoengine platform’ to provide a web-based information tool across Western Bay.

The third sector has also been involved in learning from and developing the Mental Health services project, specifically through involvement in ‘Recovery Learning Sets’ which have helped to develop confidence amongst service users involved in the process. In addition the Mental Health Programme Board is being extended to include members representing third sector agencies and service users.

To start with, the relatively low engagement of the third sector in the governance of Western Bay was of concern to programme staff as well as those from the third sector. However, following the 2013 review, the third sector has had a representative (a CVC Director) on the Partnership Forum. The Community Services Board now includes representatives from the three CVCs. The Prevention and Wellbeing Board, when set up in October 2014, comprised the Directors of three Councils for Voluntary Services in the region and a representative from the ABMU Carers Partnership as well as senior representatives of the four statutory partner organisations.

*“At the beginning [of Western Bay] the statutory partners didn’t recognise how flexible the third sector could be. They had a traditional view of the third sector – that it had to be regulated [as a health and social care provider] – but it can bring the service users’ view. Western Bay is now open to this, the AMBU first and then the local authorities – gradually we have built a relationship and rapport. The Programme Director has really helped”. (Operational Manager)*

To broaden engagement with the third sector as well as with residents, the Western Bay Communications and Engagement Officer has recently set up a Regional Citizens Panel to mirror the arrangements of the National Social Services Citizens Panel and enable wider consultation on the implementation of the Social Services and Well-being Act.

## 9. Enablers and barriers to collaboration and achieving outcomes

All interviewees were asked to reflect on the enablers or drivers to achieving outcomes and on the challenges and barriers they had faced as well as whether and how they had overcome these.

### 9.1. Enablers

There was a considerable degree of consensus among interviewees on the main enablers for the outcomes that Western Bay has achieved. Top of everyone's list was the vital **senior leadership** role provided by the four chief executives through the Leadership Group. This was seen as crucial in "giving health and social care a corporate profile" and "sending out messages about the importance of Western Bay". As discussed above, the allocation of **RCF funding** together with the ICF and DTG funding that this had leveraged was also seen as crucial. Although the plans for Western Bay were already in place when RCF resources were bid for, the external funding has minimised the risks of putting new, often untried, systems in place during a time of shrinking mainstream resources.

The recognised **need to 'join up' health and social care and move to a commissioning approach** to address the needs of an increasing older population also acted as a driver for change (as well as a challenge) which has highlighted the need to invest in prevention to save costs on in-patient and acute services. At a practical level the co-terminosity of ABMU with the three local authorities has enabled this to be organised more easily than might otherwise have been the case.

This approach is evident in the **Social Services and Well-being Act**, which has also acted as an enabler to developing Western Bay. The synergy between the two agendas has meant it has been possible to combine many of the underpinning infrastructures necessary for both, such as a staff learning and development plan and communications strategy. This is not only an efficient use of resources but also sends out a consistent message to staff, partners and the public about the need for and nature of the transformational change that is taking place.

Lastly, interviewees stressed the importance of having a **full time Programme Director** (since early 2014) **and Programme Co-ordinator**. These dedicated posts mean that the interconnections within this complex programme can be made, learning can take place and the overall programme can continue to be developed without having to 'compete with the day job' (although this can still be a problem in specific projects).

### 9.2. Challenges

The main challenge that was mentioned by most interviewees was trying to embed transformational change in a **context of financial constraints**, which are likely to get worse. Even though there was widespread understanding that, in the long run, the only way to make savings was through integration between health and social care at a regional level, there was also recognition that such savings would take time to materialise and that the change process itself needed financial resources.

*“It’s difficult to be radical at the moment – although we need to!”* (Senior manager)

Added to this ‘big picture’ challenge, the financial situation also presents more immediate challenges around **keeping and/or attracting suitably skilled staff** when retention is becoming a problem (as individuals are feeling vulnerable about their employment) and there is a recruitment freeze in place. Although RCF has been available for three years it is only confirmed year on year which means staff can only be appointed on year-long contracts and are more likely to ‘move on’ as a result.

Most interviewees mentioned challenges to the process of achieving organisational and service change. These were primarily around staff skills and attitudes being tested by having to work in more integrated, multi-disciplinary teams and issues arising from different HR and incompatible IT systems between partners. The positive changes in Community Services were only possible because of the effort put into setting up ‘duplicate databases’ to get round the difficulties of sharing ABMU data.

Despite the synergy with the aims of the Social Services and Well-being Act as well as external resources from RCF and other grant funding, there are still some concerns that “Western Bay is competing with ‘the day job’”. This is exacerbated by the level of cuts that need to be made and seems to reflect that staff are being asked to develop new ways of working while still providing essential core services.

Related to this challenge is one of being realistic about the timescale and staff capacity needed to embed change throughout four organisations. There are worries that the programme will not have developed far enough to be embedded by the end of the RCF and other external funding.

*“We have had to do testing, get people on board which needs relationship building and project support, get standardisation [in Community Services]. People are not resistant but it’s time consuming – it’s a different way of working and that’s more difficult with staff turnover”.* (Operational Manager)

There are a number of ‘parallel systems’ in place as Western Bay moves from local to regional working. For example: scrutiny within the programme’s governance; HR arrangements in the Regional Adoption service and staff roles in Contracting and Procurement’ represent potentially costly duplication. However they are also symptomatic of the time and effort needed to build trust and reflect the in-depth negotiations that are required for full regional integration.

*“We need to challenge managers – we have to have integrated systems but that needs a trust relationship to make a difference”* (Member of Partnership Forum)

Interviewees voiced concerns about the perceived lack of collaboration between different parts of the Welsh Government – notably Social Services (Health and Social Care) and Local Government – which sends out mixed messages to regional partners. Lastly, the Western Bay partners find securing long term commitment to the programme a challenge in the context of uncertainty about local government reform and, in particular, the uncertainty about where Bridgend will ‘sit’.

*“Local government reform works against new joint structures for joint delivery. They won’t be set up if we don’t know what’s happening”. (Senior manager, ABMU)*

## **10. Learning**

There has been considerable commitment to learning throughout the development of Western Bay programme. Initially the Leadership Group drew on joint work on health and social care that had been going on in some of the English city-regions. The Mental Health Services project learnt from Tyne and Wear’s approach to providing easily accessible self-help information and subsequently bought this and rebranded it to use in Western Bay. More recently this project has also been in contact with Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust to learn from their experience on ‘engagement’ following a positive CQC report. Similarly the Contracting and Procurement project looked to the Greater Manchester authorities for previous experience of this approach.

There has also been a commitment to learning from and development of the Western Bay programme as it has progressed. For example, the Mental Health project has established a multi-agency group of approximately 30 people including service users and carers, police, third sector organisations, NHS staff (community and in-patient), which has met regularly on an action learning cycle. This approach has facilitated agreement on the development of potential solutions to provision of community care and accommodation services that allow progression to greater independence in response to future demand. Interviewees stressed the opportunities for learning across the programme:

*“It [the Contracting and Procurement project] is a learning experience – there must be a benefit if we can deliver efficiencies as a region – but can we turn theory into reality?” (Senior local authority manager)*

*“Local Area Co-ordination has given us an opportunity to pilot and test – each area is trying in a different way – we can learn about what works”. (Senior local authority manager)*

At a strategic level, a Western Bay Governance Review reflected on the strengths and the weaknesses of the governance of the programme and made recommendations for improvements. This resulted in the creation of the Regional Director’s post, the establishment of the Partnership Forum with representation from elected members and reprioritisation of the workstreams into two tiers of projects. The Western Bay Partnership Forum now receives regular reports from across the programme including reflections on learning and proposals for development.

The Governance Review also raised the need for awareness of and learning from Western Bay to be communicated to staff working in the four partner organisations and more widely to other organisations and residents within the three local authority areas. This led to investment in a new communications strategy with a RCF funded, full time Communications and Engagement Officer appointed in autumn 2014.

Prior to this investment there was no obvious vehicle for communicating news or encouraging learning about Western Bay. Now there is a quarterly newsletter for all staff and partners, which includes a round- up of the tier one and tier two projects, news of forthcoming events and short case studies to show how service users have benefited from Western Bay's approach. This would have been very difficult to produce without a dedicated officer as:

*"The project managers are good at getting together information [for the newsletter] but you have to be persistent – it's time consuming". (Western Bay officer)*

The regular newsletter is supplemented with ad-hoc press releases and internal emails as necessary. A publicly available television channel, Western Bay TV has been set up and a website<sup>5</sup>, hosted by City and County of Swansea, went live in November 2015. The TV channel<sup>6</sup> contains YouTube videos of events and service user experiences to reach a wider audience by "bringing Western Bay to life". It also includes a series of online self-help guides on, for example, anxiety, dealing with bereavement and domestic abuse as part of the Prevention and Wellbeing project. This increase in communications was commented on favourably by several interviewees.

A major contribution to communicating, learning about and developing Western Bay's approach to better health and care for older people took place through a 'Focus on Frailty' conference in March 2015<sup>7</sup>. This was a collaborative event attended by more than 200 people from the health and social care sector. Third sector speakers explained that "partnership working is the key to making a difference to the lives of older people", which was illustrated by video clips of service users' real life experiences. As a result of debates at the conference, the Community Services project has started to use a new title 'What Matters to Me' to reflect the person – centred approach to the development of the model.

Western Bay has received a number of visits from Welsh Government, which has used the learning about its approach to illustrate the potential of the Social Services and Well-being Act.

## **11. Sustainability**

Western Bay's projects are starting to be embedded as a new way of working – more collaborative, integrated and user-centred - which links to the Social Services and Well-being Act and ABMU's 'Changing for the Better' Programme.

The Community Services programme which has established Community Resource Teams and Common Access Points to transform intermediate care (and has the advantages of ICF resources) is arguably best placed to be embedded as 'business as usual'. The Regional Adoption Service is fully integrated and co-located (apart from still relying on three local authority HR and IT systems).

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<sup>5</sup> [www.westernbay.org.uk](http://www.westernbay.org.uk)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCsOWHVBy63xWHXHfNLXDxg>

<sup>7</sup> A photo slideshow of the event is available on YouTube/Western Bay TV

The Local Area/Community Co-ordination strand of the Prevention and Wellbeing project supports the ethos and aims of the Social Services and Well-being Act, which should help make the case its continuation but it is still at a relatively early stage to be able to show many tangible – and costed - benefits from this approach – a notoriously difficult task for community based early interventions generally.

The Leadership Group have recently supported the Contracting and Procurement project for a further year following a thorough business case being presented. This will allow time for the new processes to be embedded and for it to become self-funding.

Interviewees stressed how all projects were vulnerable to public sector budget cuts. Although these will not necessarily ‘turn back the clock’ in terms of collaboration and integration, they may well affect the coverage and quality of services that can be provided through the new arrangements.

At a programme level interviewees highlighted the risks to sustainability of the Chief Executive of the City and County of Swansea leaving the authority in 2016 and thus his post as Chair of the Leadership Group. This risk could be compounded by further delays – and thus uncertainty – about local government reorganisation as well as the eventual shape of the local government map and where Bridgend ‘fits in’. Both these dependencies make it challenging for Western Bay to move towards further integration through single management arrangements and/or delivery agencies, although these changes will be required in the future to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy and improve cost-effectiveness.

## **12. Conclusions**

The Western Bay Health and Social Care Programme has shown how regional collaboration can drive transformational change in health and social care and deliver positive outcomes for service users and their families, friends and carers – and financial savings through efficiencies and cost avoidance.

There appear to be a number of reasons why Western Bay has achieved this level of success. First, the partnership of three local authorities and the Health Board used Regional Collaboration Fund (RCF) monies to build on the initial collaborative projects funded through the ESF-LSB Priority Development and Delivery Project from 2012 – 2014 and then used the RCF funding to attract additional resources from Welsh Government, notably through the Delivering Transformation Grant (DTG) and the Intermediate Care Fund (ICF). This enabled Western Bay to secure the level of resources necessary over a five to six year timescale to bring about the complex changes envisaged. RCF, although essential to attract in the additional resources, could not have even got close to bringing about transformational change on its own.

Secondly, the leadership from the four chief executives – and particularly the Chief Executive of City and County of Swansea as Chair of the Leadership Group - was crucial to initiate and maintain focus on the Western bay Programme. The appointment of a Regional Programme Director and Programme Co-ordinator, supported by a dedicated Western Bay team, were essential to co-ordinate the

various interrelated parts of the programme as well as make links to the Social services and Wellbeing Act and other relevant, national policies and programmes.

Thirdly, there was a common understanding from politicians to senior and operational managers that 'Western Bay' was something that was needed and the partners would have tried to make happen anyway. Now this understanding underpins a commitment to embed and sustain collaborative working in a way that is user-centred, increases quality and is cost effective.

The potential for sustaining and developing the Western Bay programme is positive. Although there are potential risks and challenges to be negotiated – including changes in leadership, further public sector funding cuts and the uncertainties of local government reform – the track record of testing, reviewing, learning and developing the programme should stand Western Bay in good stead for the future.



### 13. Interviewees

Jack Straw	Chief Executive of City and County of Swansea; Chair of Western Bay Leadership Group
Sara Harvey	Regional Programme Director (Western Bay)
Nicola Trotman	Programme Co-ordinator (Western Bay)
Dave Howes	Chief Social Services Officer, City and County of Swansea; Sponsor for 'Contracting and Procurement' and 'Prevention and Wellbeing'
Kate Kinsman	Implementation Manager: Community Services (Western Bay)
Kirsty Roderick	Communication and Engagement Officer (Western Bay)
Heather Hughes	Project Manager: Prevention and Wellbeing (Western Bay)
Jane Tonks	Local Area Co-ordinator, City and County of Swansea
Professor Andrew Davies	Chair of ABMU; Member of Western Bay Partnership Forum
Val Jones	Manager – Adoption (Western Bay)
Dorothy Edwards	Assistant Director – Primary Care &. Partnerships, ABMU (currently on secondment to NHS, previously Project Lead: Prevention and Wellbeing)
Cllr. John Rogers	Cabinet Member, NPT; Member of Western Bay Partnership Forum
Gareth Bartley	Project Manager: Mental Health Project (ABMU)
Sue Cooper	Corporate Director for Social Services and Wellbeing Bridgend Council; Sponsor for Learning Disabilities Project; Lead Director for SS&W Act for the region
Jackie Davies	Project Lead: Contracting and Procurement (Western Bay)
Michelle Chilcott	Community Resource Team Manager: Bridgend Locality
Andy Griffiths	Community Resource Team Manager:: NPT Locality
Hilary Dover	Director – Primary and Community Services, ABMU; Member of Community Services Project Board
Rhodri Davies	Project Manager: Community Services programme (Western Bay)

# ICT Enabled Schools Transformation Programme

## 1. Project scope and ambition

Both Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) and Merthyr Tydfil (MTCBC) County Borough Councils had identified a common need to raise local education standards following the results of their respective Estyn inspections in 2012<sup>8</sup>. Specifically, Estyn required that attainment (particularly at Key Stage 4) needed to be improved, but attendance levels across both primary and secondary schools within the boroughs also needed to be addressed.

Various measures had been put in place to respond to these objectives which occurred at the same time as the formation of the Central South Consortium Joint Education Service (comprised of 5 local authorities including RCT and MTCBC) which established a revised approach to school scrutiny and support.

Within this context, both RCT and MTCBC had developed a common aim to transform education through the use of ICT. Through the Learning in Digital Wales Fund (LiDW) both authorities had already benefited from a grant which had enabled them to install better, faster broadband throughout their school network, giving them greater capacity to build upon and improve their systems further.

The ICT enabled Schools Transformation Programme comprised multiple separate (but intertwining) strands<sup>9</sup>, but the two key projects within the programme were:

- To create a single, centralised integrated Management Information System (MIS) which would hold real time pupil information across the two councils; and,
- To encourage the widespread use of Microsoft IT Academy (MITA) across Primary and Secondary schools within RCT in order to:
  - Provide teachers with the opportunity to obtain accredited qualifications;
  - Instil teachers with knowledge to inspire innovative learning and facilitate the sharing of ideas between schools (locally and further afield); and,
  - Provide pupils with the opportunity to obtain accredited qualifications to enhance their employment prospects.

The idea of creating an integrated Management Information System (MIS) for schools had been discussed with Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) and MTCBC Tydfil County Borough Councils approximately six months prior to the availability of RCF funding. Furthermore, RCT were already investigating the feasibility of the wide scale implementation of Microsoft IT Academy (MITA) across Primary and Secondary schools within the authority.

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<sup>8</sup> MTCBC's Education Services had been placed in special measures following the results of an Estyn inspection within RCT Education Services were being monitored and were required to demonstrate improvement

<sup>9</sup> These aspects also included the implementation of a central backup system for schools which would negate the need for schools (who had their Management System centralised) to individually manage and rotate 'back up' data. Additional Capita modules have also been purchased which enable the admissions process to be managed online.

Since securing RCF funding to the value of £3.057m in April 2013<sup>10</sup>, throughout the three year programme, the aims of the programme remained faithful to the original objectives. It was considered imperative by both authorities that the programme would “*in no way resemble a feasibility study*” but instead, would result in “real deliverables” that would benefit pupils and teachers within the two boroughs.

## **2. Management Information System (MIS)**

The principal purpose of the MIS component of the programme was to implement a single, centralised system that would enable the collation and analysis of data pupils’ attendance and achievement data across the two authorities.

Prior to the installation of the centralised MIS, local authorities were dependent on gathering pupil information through the paper returns provided by schools at designated intervals during the year and as such, no cohesive MI data existed in either authority.

Not only was it hoped that cost efficiencies would be made (both on the side of schools and the respective authorities) by reducing paper-handling and manual input, but it was also envisaged that access to real-time data would help schools to quickly identify (and offer early intervention) to those pupils seen as requiring support. This was also to be extended to young people who left education after they had reached compulsory age without training or employment prospects (NEETs). Moreover, greater accuracy and accessibility to schools’ data would allow the authorities to ensure that individual schools could be held more accountable for pupil attendance and performance.

## **3. Microsoft IT Academy (MITA)**

The implementation of MITA across schools in RCT was initially focused on encouraging teaching staff to expand their own ICT skills by offering them the opportunity to participate in one (or all) of a selection of accredited programmes which included:

- Microsoft Technology Associate (MTA);
- Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS);
- Microsoft Certified Educator (MCE); and
- 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Design (21CLD)

More recently schools have also increasingly looked to offer pupils the chances to obtain accreditations themselves, serving to enhance their CVs and employment prospects. The MOS certification is also available to students, enabling them to demonstrate their aptitude in common software programmes (and thereby attain skills highly sought after by employers). Additionally, the IT Academy is a means by which students can attain qualifications in more niche areas which extend well beyond the remit of the curriculum (for instance, they can attain qualifications in coding or app design). By extension, it is hoped that the IT Academy will also serve to encourage local entrepreneurship and to attract large employers to the region.

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<sup>10</sup> The programme was originally awarded £3.057m (1.019m per annum) but in the third year, the funding was initially halved. This decision was appealed and an additional £100,000 was granted to enable the continuation of some key elements of the programme. This is discussed in further detail in the section entitled “Role of Welsh Government and RCF funding”

However, lying beyond the remit of the original proposal, RCT has also focused on encouraging schools to ensure that teachers' increased skills and confidence are translated into effective pedagogy; that lessons are creative and children are inspired to learn through the use of ICT. This element of the IT Academy was very much intertwined with encouraging the use of the Welsh education Hub (Hwb)<sup>11</sup> which serves as a nationwide platform for collaborative education working and the sharing of ideas. Ultimately it was hoped that MITA (in combination with the Hwb) would play a key role in enabling RCT to deliver its vision of providing "21<sup>st</sup> century schools for 21<sup>st</sup> century learners". Most aligned with this element of the programme was the opportunity for teachers to benefit from the MCE and 21CLD accreditations.

The local authorities perceived it to be imperative that schools could "cherry pick" from both or either of the pupil or teacher components of the Academy to reflect need and enable flexibility.

#### **4. Collaborative capacity and capability**

In addition to the formation of the Central South Consortium Joint Education Service, prior to the instigation of the ICT enabled school's transformation programme, there was already a history of collaboration between neighbouring authorities within the area. Bridgend County Borough Council for instance already shared their Disaster Recovery System with RCT, but moreover, RCT and MTCBC Tydfil had already worked together on numerous projects including joint education psychology services, emergency planning and civil parking enforcement.

In addition, RCT currently procure on behalf of the Youth Offending Team and Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) which has also helped to ensure a mutual level of trust between the two authorities.

Such examples of ongoing collaboration ensured that helpful relationships were already in existence between the two authorities. Additionally, the similar demographic composition of the areas entailed that schools within both authorities faced comparable challenges which further served to entail that RCT and MTCBC were natural collaborative partners.

RCT, as the larger council (with the additional proposition to implement the IT Academy across the borough) received 80% of the RCF funding with MTCBC receiving the remaining 20%. Despite the imbalance in funding (and differing ambitions for the programme), the two authorities appear to have collaborated effectively throughout the programme; neither representatives from MTCBC or RCT reported issues with partnership working.

The project manager from MTCBC commented that the funding split was fair and accurately reflected the size of the respective authorities and their aims for the funding. Given MTCBC's immediate focus was to respond to the requirements of the Estyn inspection, they were keen to prioritise RCF funding for the implementation of the MIS system (rather than to explore options pertaining to the Academy).

*'In terms of the size of the two local authorities, it was actually a pretty good split and it was also agreed by the two chief executives upfront so it was never going to be an issue for us. And in terms of value for money, we needed*

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<sup>11</sup> <http://hwb.wales.gov.uk/Resources>

*to what we needed to do as an authority and that suited the 20 per cent. So it wasn't as if we were cutting our cloth to suit RCT.'*

Project Manager, MTCBC

As a further example of their effective partnership, it was agreed upfront by the respective Chief Executives that MTCBC would receive a disproportionately high amount of the funding within their first year to enable them to meet the upfront costs of upgrading their systems prior to the centralisation of data.

It was also arranged that RCT as the larger authority (with a pre-existing relationship with the software provider) would host the centralised MIS system and undertake the bulk of negotiations and arrangements with suppliers. The cost of training staff to use the MIS system was shared.

Agreements for collaborative working were formalised and accessible to all; Service Level Agreements (SLAs) regarding RCT supporting MTCBC, joint procurement documents and a Data Processing Agreement were signed off by both authorities' legal teams. The SLA outlined robust escalation processes in the event that any issues relating to the partnership were raised.

Measures were also established to ensure contingency measures were in place should key members of staff leave either project before the end of the programme. As an example, the initial MITA lead from Education returned to his Head teacher role but he continued supporting the roll out relevant staff were satisfied with the handover.

## **5. Leadership and project management**

The Chief Executives of both authorities not only supported the respective projects, but were keen proponents of the programme from the outset. As a result, the programme benefited from a "top-down" approach ensuring that the programme was high on the council's agendas and decisions received quick sign-off. It was reiterated throughout that strong leadership at the most senior level had facilitated rapid progress.

A clear project plan (covering both MTCBC and RCT's role in delivery) was owned and managed by the individuals in each authority responsible for leading the day-to-day delivery of the MIS project. The supplier (Capita) also lent support by helping to devise the plan in the first instance.

Efforts were taken to ensure that joint governance processes were established at the beginning of the programme so all parties involved were aware of how, where and when sign-off processes were to be undertaken. Monthly highlight reports were submitted to the Corporate Management Teams (CMT) at both authorities to keep senior parties abreast of progress and challenges.

In RCT, councillors adopted a role in scrutiny with the Director of Customer Care and ICT presenting to them at set intervals across the programme.

Additionally, RCT were required to submit a report on a bi-annual basis to the local Regional Collaboration Board<sup>12</sup> (comprised of various senior public service representatives including those from the Police and Fire services as well as those from neighbouring local authorities). The RCB expressed genuine interest in the project and did not tend to challenge the programme's progress. There was however no involvement of the LSBs (Local Service Boards).

The core project team attended regular meetings chaired by the relevant Directors at each of the respective authorities; initially they were held quarterly during the initial implementation stage then bi-annually as the programme continued. Head teacher representatives have also met quarterly throughout the duration of the programme.

Significantly, as a result of the outcome of their Estyn inspection, MTCBC were held accountable to a separate independent recovery board (comprised of education experts and the Chief Executive of a neighbouring authority) required to challenge and scrutinise any measures implemented to improve educational standards. Managers were required to submit monthly highlight reports and decisions required two levels of sign-off; by the authority's Corporate Management Team (CMT) in the first instance and then separately by the recovery board. Consequently, sign-off processes often took longer at MTCBC than RCT (albeit there is also thought that being held accountable to this board drove the pace of the programme).

## **6. Project Management**

Each authority appointed respective project managers who worked closely and effectively throughout the installation of the Management Information System. The project manager at RCT has a background in ICT, whilst the project manager at Merthyr works in the Business Change Team to ensure that the programme can benefit from a range of different skills and expertise. Both project managers were in post prior to the commencement of the programme, no RCF funding was required to pay for their salaries.

However, in RCT the project manager undertook overseeing the ICT transformation programme in addition to her pre-existing role which created some challenges in terms of increased workload. A project assistant was appointed to provide support and RCF funding was used to pay for 2 days a week of her time (with RCT funding the remaining three days).

Whilst the project manager at RCT was heavily involved in co-ordinating all stages of the programme (and will continue to do so to a lesser degree beyond the end of the third year<sup>13</sup>), in MTCBC, following the successful implementation of the MIS infrastructure, much of the project management was handed over to the education team within the authority.

Particularly at RCT, the project manager played a key role in working with the RCT finance team<sup>14</sup> throughout the programme to ensure that invoicing processes were operating smoothly, budgets were healthy and spend (and predicted spend) was adhering to profiles and proposed timescales. Part of the process also involved

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<sup>12</sup> The Regional Collaboration Board had approved RCT and Merthyr's bid for RCF (which had been selected from a range of other proposals submitted by other local public service organisations)

<sup>13</sup> Beyond the third year, it is envisaged that a greater proportion of the work will be undertaken by the current Project Assistant.

<sup>14</sup> RCT undertook ownership and management of the RCF grant

working with finance colleagues to help to re-profile budgets after the RCF cuts in year 3 and in working closely with the MTCBC Project Manager on the composition of a bid to secure more funding in the wake of the reduced funding (discussed in paras 1.54-1.57).

Project management meetings took place in both RCT and MTCBC's office, meaning that the cost of travel was divided between the two authorities.

## **7. Organisational and service change**

The implementation of the MIS system has been transformative for both authorities and resulted in a range of organisational and service changes. At the start of the project, a joint procurement model was implemented whereby RCT would procure relevant software on behalf of MTCBC to generate further efficiencies (albeit licenses needed to be procured separately by each authority). Beyond the end of the "official" three year programme, RCT will continue to procure as part of the project.

However, other changes have also been effected as a direct result of implementing the central MIS system which has additional features that go beyond the storage and analysis of data. In the midst of a Meningitis scare RCT's communications team were able to circulate a letter to relevant recipients via the MIS system quickly and easily through mailmerge.

Beyond this, at the school's level, the implementation of the new Capita One software (which hosts the MIS system) has also enabled that 80% school admissions are now made online whereby parents and students were previously required to submit paper applications.

Schools are also no longer responsible for manually backing up their systems; records are now stored centrally and securely.

Additionally the function teachers use to take the register is compatible with a range of devices (and not just limited to the classroom's PC or laptop). This enables teachers to take the register in multiple settings (such as the playground or playing fields before PE lessons).

Fewer specific examples of "organisation or service change" are evident in relation to the IT Academy because the benefits and outcomes are less 'functional' and outcomes are associated more with change in culture or vision on a school-by-school basis.

## **8. Outcomes**

Crucially, a key outcome of the RCF funded transformation programme is that MTCBC have been able to satisfy the demands of the Estyn inspection and have successfully established a robust MI system for tracking and monitoring pupils' attendance.

RCT is only the second area in Europe to have implemented the Academy at an authority level (rather than on a school-by-school basis). Within the authority, the vast majority of schools are benefitting from the Academy in at least some capacity (97 out of 117 Primary Schools and 15 out of 17 Secondary Schools are using at least one of MITA's components). Since it was established, 237 teachers have

obtained the MCE qualification, 29 have achieved MTA and 376 teachers and pupils have achieved MOS.

However, the project manager at RCT was keen to stress that the ultimate objective of the MITA project was to instil effective pedagogy across local schools within the borough and to consequently improve the students' learning experience (rather than focusing on the numbers of qualifications).

*'The main outcome, for us anyway, was to utilise the skills from MCE and 21<sup>st</sup> Century CLD to improve teaching and learning – it was never about numbers getting the qualification, rather utilising the skills to enhance the experiences of the pupils.'*  
Project Manager, RCT

As shown in Tables 1.1 and 1.2 below, since the programme began, there has been a notable improvement in pupil's attendance in both RCT and MTCBC. Although levels of absenteeism are still higher in both authorities than the national average, since 2011/12 academic year there has been a year on year decrease in absenteeism at both primary and secondary levels in each area (though this trend is also mirrored at the national level).

**Table 3:** Absenteeism by primary pupils of compulsory school age in all maintained secondary, middle and special schools, by local authority<sup>15</sup>

PRIMARY	Percentage of half day sessions missed due to overall absence			
	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Rhondda Cynon Taf	6.9	6.6	5.5	5.3
MTCBC Tydfil	7.1	6.7	6.1	5.7
<i>Welsh Average</i>	6.2	6.3	5.2	5.1

<sup>15</sup> 'An annual report showing data on authorised and unauthorised absenteeism by pupils of compulsory school age including information on school type, gender, free school meal eligibility and length of absence' <http://gov.wales/docs/statistics/2015/151201-absenteeism-primary-schools-2014-15-en.pdf>



**Table 4:** Absenteeism by secondary pupils of compulsory school age in all maintained secondary, middle and special schools, by local authority<sup>16</sup>

SECONDARY	Percentage of half day sessions missed due to overall absence			
	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Rhondda Cynon Taf	9.4	8.1	6.9	6.4
MTCBC Tydfil	7.6	6.7	7.1	6.9
<i>Welsh Average</i>	<i>7.8</i>	<i>7.4</i>	<i>6.4</i>	<i>6.2</i>

Equally, levels of attainment in RCT and MTCBC have also improved. As an example, Table 1.3 below outlines how exam results in Key Stage 4 have improved year on year in both authorities, most dramatically in Merthyr Tydfil.

**Table 5:** Percentage of pupils aged 15 by who achieved Level 2<sup>17</sup> including English/Welsh and Maths Examination achievements of pupils aged 15 by local authority<sup>18</sup>

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Rhondda Cynon Taf	43.8	46.3	50.5	54.6
MTCBC Tydfil	32.5	38.7	48.9	51.9
<i>Welsh Average</i>	<i>51.1</i>	<i>52.7</i>	<i>55.4</i>	<i>57.9</i>

There is also quantifiable evidence to indicate that the proportion of young people aged 16-24 Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETS) has decreased. In 2012/13 in RCT, NEETs used to represent 5.7 per cent of the population; the latest figures (2014/15) indicate that they now represent 3.7 per cent of the local population.

Yet, it was recognised from the outset that improvements in pupils' attendance and attainment could not be explicitly linked to either the implementation of the MIS (in both authorities) or to the introduction of MITA (in RCT). Currently, the programme can demonstrate outputs but cannot provide evidence on ultimate outcomes.

<sup>16</sup> 'An annual report showing data on authorised and unauthorised absenteeism by pupils of compulsory school age including information on school type, gender, free school meal eligibility and length of absence' <http://gov.wales/docs/statistics/2015/150826-absenteeism-secondary-schools-2014-15-en.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Level 2 represent a volume of qualifications equivalent to 5 GCSEs at grade A\*-C

<sup>18</sup> StatsWales: <https://stats.wales.gov.uk/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Schools-and-Teachers/Examinations-and-Assessments/Key-Stage-4/ExaminationAchievementsOfPupilsAged15-by-LocalAuthority>

The majority of additional measures used to denote success were limited to the fulfilment of technical implementation of software and infrastructure (rather than linking the ICT programme to wider outcomes per se).

It is evident however that teachers and pupils have benefited from a host of improvements and additional resources since the project started. It is therefore probable that some of these outputs have played a role in raising standards, either through more effective monitoring of levels of attainment and absenteeism (MIS) or by fostering a more exciting and effective learning environment (MITA).

The key outputs of each core programme component are outlined separately below:

## **9. Management Information System (MIS)**

### *Supporting and protecting pupils*

- Early identification and intervention of pupils: The MIS system enables schools (and/or education welfare officers) to spot trends in pupil's behaviour (e.g. consistently missing lessons in certain subjects or not turning up on certain days of the week) and take appropriate action to prevent the escalation of a situation (and potentially reducing instances of safeguarding issues). On a daily basis, secretaries and school clerks are able to access the data in real-time (rather than waiting for the paper register) and so parents can be contacted almost immediately if their child has not attended class.
  - Early identification and intervention of NEETs: The MIS system has also enabled those at RCT and MTCBC to identify and monitor those who opt to leave education after they have reached the compulsory age but have not secured employment or enrolled in training. This has enabled early contact with these individuals "with a red flag" to discuss their future plans and discuss career paths open to them (and direct them to the online admissions process if necessary)
  - Safeguarding pupils: the MIS data is also accessed by various other departments outside of education (namely social services). The database ensures that all information pertaining to a single individual is held on one file which enables those in other authority departments to build up a more cohesive picture of children (and the families) that they offer support to.
  - Closer inter-departmental working: As a consequence of the greater co-operation between departments, there is feeling that some council departments have better understanding of each other's functions and it is felt that some areas of business now work more closely together (e.g. MIS and business support, but also Social Services and Education).

### *More advanced ICT systems*

- A pre-requisite of the centralisation of the MIS data was that schools upgraded their software to a uniform provider. Under the RCF funding this was done free of charge but schools have also benefited from better ICT systems and infrastructure.

### *Data quality and security*

- More robust, secure and legally responsible data that enables the authorities to meet their ISO requirements: the consortium has greater confidence in the reliability of the data that is submitted to them; prior to the implementation of the MIS system, some concern had been raised about missing and inaccurate data provided by schools. Data is now backed up centrally and securely.

### *More effective use of data*

- Attainment and achievement can be monitored in real-time by schools and authority at non-statutory points: previously, analysis could only be run on the data provided by schools at designated points in the year.
- Benchmarking of schools' performance: Although for data protection reasons individual schools are unable to view other schools' data, the MIS system is able to provide Head Teachers with an overall indication of how their school fares in terms of attendance and attainment comparative to other schools in the locality.
- Oversight of progress in schools across the two authorities: The MIS enables reports to be run at an individual school, authority or joint-authority level. The two respective data centres at RCT and MTCBC are currently in discussions about how they can work more closely and use the data to strengthen learning in education.
- More detailed analysis: reports can be run at a more granular level (e.g. by gender, free school meal status) enabling schools and authorities to monitor the "gaps" in attainment between different demographics, potentially helping to identify areas of focus.
- Teachers' Learning and Development
- Training of trainers: To date, 7 primary school teachers and 12 secondary school teachers have been 'trained to train' the pedagogy component of the Academy to other teachers. Training takes place at the trainer's school enabling other teachers to witness first-hand how the academy has been implemented within a school environment and this approach has also helped to develop closer working links between schools.
- Training: As already mentioned (para. 1.36) the majority of schools within RCT are utilising some functions of the IT Academy but the respective training of staff within each schools has often been high. Initially a group of classroom teachers (all trained to Expert Level in the MITA and assigned as Digital Leaders in relation to the Hwb hub) worked with schools to share best practice around 21st century learning and teaching concept.
- Local teachers are now considered 'experts' and pioneers of innovative learning. Prior to the transformation programme, teachers in RCT used to refer to schools elsewhere (most commonly Cardiff) to understand best practice, but now RCT is able to demonstrate its knowledge to other schools in Wales and England.
- Teaching qualifications: It is widely acknowledged that teachers benefit from renewed confidence in working towards a qualification and that the accreditation provides formal recognition of their achievements.

Some schools have sought to encourage as many teachers as possible to participate in one of the accredited programmes on offer; in one secondary school for instance 50 per cent of staff had obtained the MCE qualification but the Head Teacher was keen that the rest of staff also completed the programme.

### *Pupil Qualifications*

- Numerous pupils have benefited from the opportunity to obtain qualifications through the IT Academy. Some qualifications relate to aptitude in Microsoft Office 365 package, but the Academy also provides opportunity for students to obtain qualifications in areas such as coding or App design. These achievements provide pupils with recognised awards which can be added to CVs (currently completion of some modules can collectively be translated into a GCSE qualification via City and Guilds). However, it is also hoped that the awards will prompt entrepreneurship within the borough and reduce unemployment. One pupil has already obtained an apprenticeship in NHS as a direct result of obtain a MOS qualification through the Academy.

### *Improved Learning*

- Exciting and innovative learning: is evident across RCT but particularly within primary schools. This can be attributed (to a relatively large extent) to the new skills and confidence that teachers have obtained through participation in accredited programmes run by the academy and their translation into effective pedagogy. School reviews undertaken by Challenge Advisers show that a high number of schools utilise technology to not only enhance teaching but also support learning. There are numerous examples of how teachers have “brought lessons to life” through better use of ICT in the classroom; interactive work involving videos and online discussions has been based around imaginative themes such as ‘James Bond’, ‘Alien landing’ and ‘You’ve been castaway’ which typically run for half a term.

### *Shared learning*

- As a result of the Academy, it is evident that schools are making better use of the Hwb hub which in turn has facilitated closer working between schools. Through use of the hub, students are able to share ideas and discuss collaborative projects, but teachers can also share resources.

### *Formally recognised good practice*

Various local schools have been formally recognised and acknowledged for their work involving ICT:

- The most notable example is Black Gold project<sup>19</sup>, a collaborative piece of work involving 16 schools sharing ideas through the Hwb

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=reVNxS33II0>

hub20. As a result of the project, the school central to the project has become the first primary school in Wales to become a Microsoft Showcase School (as well as a lead digital school recognised by the Central South Consortium) which has drawn national attention. Two local children were invited to a Microsoft conference in Seattle to present the project and 30 others were invited to a tour of the Microsoft offices

- Following their inspections, two schools have had their work related to the IT Academy recognised by Estyn and both case studies will be written up and used as examples of excellent practice
- In 2014, the work of RCT schools was recognised at the National Digital Awards.

### *Pupil confidence*

- Pupils have renewed confidence: closer collaboration with neighbouring schools has entailed that students have been teaching and presenting to each other (both via the hub and in person) and there is common feeling that their confidence has increased as a result of this interaction. One year six student reported that he felt much more at ease talking and meeting new people as a result of showcasing some of his IT work to pupils and teachers from other schools.
- Free software for pupils: All pupils are eligible for vouchers to enable them to download and use Microsoft Office for free at home. Not only have students commented on the benefits of being able to develop their ICT skills at home, but parents have also reported the benefits of being able to access the latest software and an interest in developing their ICT skills<sup>21</sup>. This has been particularly helpful for those from deprived backgrounds who may not have means to access software otherwise.

### *Cost efficiencies*

- Immediate efficiency savings have been made by the transfer of student data to a cohesive, electronic system which has eradicated the need for schools to submit paper returns as well as the costs associated with manually compiling and processing them. Although the exact figure has not been calculated yet, the new system has resulted in savings in administrative costs for both the authorities and schools within the boroughs. This approach also negates much of the use of paper documentation, also resulting in savings.
- Prior to the implementation of the central MIS system, all schools within the localities were required to upgrade their systems to a uniform software provider. In typical circumstances schools would have been

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<sup>20</sup> Each class was allocated a section of the Rhondda Heritage Park to research and build using Minecraft before each component was brought together to recreate the entire site. Children from across all schools shared learning and kept each other abreast of progress using the Hub.

<sup>21</sup> Strictly speaking the vouchers are not a feature of the MITA package but rather an aspect of the licensing agreement between RCT and Microsoft. However, representatives from RCT comment that they would not have been aware of this offer had it not been for the close working with Microsoft in relation to the IT Academy.

responsible for funding these upgrades but the RCF funding also mitigated these upfront costs (approximately £2,500 per school).

- Long term cost-efficiencies will also be generated by the standardisation of schools' MIS software. By using the same system, software can be upgraded systematically and information can be backed up easily.
- Capita (supplier of the MIS infrastructure and software) and Microsoft (supplier of the IT Academy) both offered advice and services free of charge in the initial implementation stages. Both also agreed to supply the authorities at a heavily reduced cost following lengthy negotiations.

## **10. Role of Welsh Government and RCF funding**

The programme was originally scheduled to receive £3.057 over the three year period (£1.019m per annum) although due to funding cuts third year funding was halved before an additional £100,000 was secured following a successful bid (total of £600,000 in year 3). As already mentioned, RCT received 80 per cent of the RCT funding with MTCBC receiving the remaining 20 per cent.

Irrespective of the availability of RCF funding, MTCBC would have been required to respond to the demands of the Estyn report and to take action to improve the collation of analysis of data relating to student attendance and attainment but it was felt the programme would have been "much less streamlined". RCT in turn, would still have taken action to encourage schools to upgrade their MIS software packages and pay for central back-up of their systems, but it is likely that schools would have needed to make some contribution to the cost.

Overall, it is felt that the implementation of the IT academy would have been at most risk had the RCF funding not been available. RCT had been keen to explore the implementation of the academy prior to the availability of the RCF funding but in comparison to the MIS system, MITA was more of a "well-managed risk" that would not necessarily guarantee returns.

As reported already, discussions about the collaborative MIS system were ongoing prior to the availability of RCF funding; but it is widely acknowledged by all parties that the opportunity to bid for funding was timely. It is likely that RCT and MTCBC may not have collaborated if the RCF funding had not been available and greater onus would have fallen to individual schools to fund recommended changes. Should this have happened it was predicted that:

- a) It would have costed MTCBC 40 per cent more to respond to the requirements of the Estyn inspection and implement the MIS system;
- b) Fewer cost efficiencies would have been made - cost of training would not be shared and support and maintenance cost of systems would be higher.

It is also felt that the availability of the RCF funding ensured that the projects progressed much more quickly than would have otherwise been the case; it encouraged the development of key milestones that both authorities were keen to honour. It was suggested that likely timeframes would have more likely resembled 5-6 years (rather than 3) – collaboration between the two authorities helped to provide a "critical mass" that in turn encouraged both uptake and progress. In MTCBC's

case, the authority was able to install the infrastructure across all its schools and use the MIS system for central analysis within 6 months.

In addition, the RCF funding enabled both RCT and MTCBC to create two additional full-time roles and for RCT to employ a number of agency staff to assist local schools make the relevant upgrades to their systems which also facilitated quick progress.

As it stands, the RCF funding has not been used to leverage any further funding but RCT are currently working with suppliers such as Microsoft to see if there are opportunities to exploit any additional funding.

## **11. Funding cuts**

The funding cut in the third year had been unanticipated and required both authorities to re-profile their finances on a much larger scale. MTCBC had been awarded a disproportionately high allocation of their share of the funding in the first year of the programme and this was to be re-balanced in Year 3. Consequently when the funding was cut in Year 3, RCT were most impacted by the shortfall.

To mitigate the impact of the cuts the two authorities had to assess what they could continue to afford to sustain against the programmes objectives. As a key focus, the contractual arrangements in placed Capita (who supported and hosted the MIS system) and the staff employed to work on the programme's delivery were prioritised.

As a result, other proposed elements of the programme (notably the implementation of video conferencing software) were dropped. Fortuitously, many of the schools that were supposed to benefit from video conferencing were not 'ready' (from a technical perspective) to have the software installed. This meant that this intended element of the project could be disbanded with relative ease.

However, following the cut, RCT submitted a follow-up bid requesting that the cut be reduced in order to protect the IT academy's progress. RCT were grateful to receive an additional £100,000 when the proposal was accepted by the Welsh Government.

## **12. Learning**

Overall, stakeholders struggle to report any key challenges or issues regarding the collaborative nature of the study; the success of the programme is largely attributed to the strong senior leadership involved in the programme from the beginning. Equally however, clear reporting systems and project management tools were established from the outset which mitigated any real risk of confrontation between the two authorities.

However, there is some recurring feeling that the MITA component of the programme was rolled out too quickly (and too widely) in the first instance. The Council followed Microsoft's initial roll out plan but, even though a large number of schools signed up to it, it was evident that schools did not understand the benefits of it and how to integrate it within a classroom environment.

Additionally, the pre-requisites of schools being on a certain version of the Microsoft software were not fully understood (i.e. that certain processes needed to be undertaken before schools could utilise the full range of MITA). It is agreed that

these issues should have been addressed by more in-depth planning at an earlier stage.

Following a review of lessons learned, RCT scaled back the project and a renewed focus was placed on the original outcome; to improve teaching and learning by effectively utilising skills obtained through MCE and 21st Century CLD accreditations (rather than focusing on numbers obtaining qualifications).

This approach had more success; once a smaller cohort of schools had been trained and taught the benefits of the MIS then it became easier and more manageable to roll out the programme more widely.

In addition, there is feeling that those involved in programme delivery were not aware at the outset of the scale of the project and the number of different departments that needed to be involved at each stage. For instance, it was not anticipated that RCT's legal team would need to be involved at certain key points of the programme and so they had not been forewarned that they needed to contribute. Fortunately (owing much to the backing of the Chief Executives), these issues were resolved relatively quickly.

At times, it is acknowledged that the speed of growth has been a challenge. The uptake of the MIS means there are very few periods where the software can be taken offline for upgrades and repairs without causing some disruption.

It is also noted that it was highly beneficial that RCT had a pre-existing relationship with Capita (provider of the MIS). This was crucial in persuading them to offer their time and support for free in the early implementation stages of the programme.

Others noted that it was hugely important that the various components of the programme (e.g. upgrade to software, followed by centralisation of data, central back up) were presented to schools as a single cohesive package. To get schools on board it was acknowledged that time-poor Head teachers would not have the time to digest a multitude of technical communications but that simple, jargon-free information highlighting benefits to the school (alongside predicted efficiency savings) would be much more persuasive.

### **13. Shared Learning**

RCT have recently instigated some discussion with North Wales who two years ago established a similar project that involved hosting a MIS system for schools (albeit it not a shared system like the RCT/MTCBC model). The authorities have discussed some shared learning (most notably at a 'Shared Learning Day'), particularly regarding the best approach to the provisional cleansing of data.

However, since the implementation of the MIS, pupil attendance and attainment in North Wales has not improved as quickly as in RCT and MTCBC. Discussions are currently underway to understand the reasons why this might be the case and what learning could be derived from these conclusions.

### **14. Sustainability**

The Chief Executives of both RCT and MTCBC were keen to ensure the sustainability of the programme and so purposely developed a three year plan with clear agreements about what should be achieved across the three years.



It was always anticipated that schools would be required to purchase individual licenses for MITA software after the three year programme had ended. The existing license package expires in June 2016 so it is too early to determine how many of the 112 schools currently using the IT Academy will continue to do so beyond this point. However the early signs are positive; in some schools the training of staff and sharing of learning is now embedded within the curriculum and they have reported that it is very likely that they will renew their licences (with the respective cost varying depending on which components are purchased). One stakeholder suggested that 90 per cent of schools in RCT would continue to utilise the Academy in some capacity.

Furthermore, there is some early discussion about the possibility of extending the reach of the Academy beyond the school environment (which is perceived to be particularly important given that a number of local schools are under threat of closure). It is hoped that by implementing the Academy within libraries or JCP (Jobcentre Plus), adults within the local communities (especially those within deprived areas) will have greater opportunity to develop their learning and enhance their CVs. At the moment however the biggest challenge in instigating this expansion is that current licensing agreements only enable the Academy to be utilised within an education setting; initial talks are underway with Microsoft to see if and how this issue can be resolved.

There is also suggestion that the MIS system could be replicated more widely and implemented in the other three areas within the Consortium. There are early signs that Bridgend may be interested in purchasing the software driving further shared learning, collaboration and efficiencies.

*'Of the five local authorities within the consortium, RCT are now by far the most progressed in respect of management information systems and this gives us the opportunity to potentially deliver and a host a robust data set on behalf of all five authorities. We are looking at those options at the moment and this will give us the opportunity to centralise more education backroom functions to save costs and to improve the services we are providing the schools..'*

Chief Executive, RCT

## **15. Conclusions**

The IT enabled schools transformation programme is an example of effective collaboration between two similar, neighbouring authorities that has resulted in positive changes for education across Rhondda Cynon Taf and MTCBC Tydfil County Borough Councils. Although it is challenging to attribute the improved levels of attainment and attendance within the boroughs directly to the transformation programme, the impact of the programme (if not wholly quantifiable) has been undoubtedly positive.

The ability to access real-time data via the MIS system has enabled the authorities to take early, preventative action to ensure that situations concerning pupils' attendance or attainment do not escalate. This capacity also lends itself to support those working in other council departments (such as Social Services) to help them in their efforts in safeguarding pupils' welfare. Though not strictly verifiable, it is likely

that such interventions have led to year-on-year improvements in attainment and grades across the two councils.

In turn, it is evident that the IT Academy has served to improve learning across RCT. Most schools are utilising at least some components of MITA and teachers and pupils have benefited from attaining additional qualifications. RCT however have been keen to stress that the principle objective of the project was to develop effective pedagogy throughout the borough and this, whilst harder to verify, seems to have been instilled very successfully in schools with good practice being recognised nationally (and even internationally).

It is evident that one of the key reasons for the programme's success has been the backing and support of the two Chief Executives who were keen proponents of the work from the outset. The top-down approach ensured that the initiative was highlighted as a priority, progress was quick and timescales were adhered to.

Moreover (and particularly from MTCBC's perspective) was that the MIS system needed to be successfully implemented in order to respond to the demands of the Estyn report. This placed added onus on the importance of successful delivery and it was felt that the additional scrutiny exercised by the independent recovery board emphasised the need to prioritise the programme and ensure the project was effectively managed (and delivered on time).

Other reasons for the programmes' success were the clear governance processes which facilitated effective collaboration. Decisions regarding the funding split, project management, reporting lines and sign-off processes were established from the start of the programme entailing that stakeholders struggled to report any challenges to pertaining to collaborative working. Additionally, both RCT and MTCBC had worked in a collaborative capacity on previous workstreams which ensured that there was a mutual level of trust between the two authorities.

Although some discussion about the MIS system had taken place between the two authorities prior to the securing RCF, there is agreement that RCT and MTCBC may not have collaborated had the funding not been available. It is likely that progress would have been slower, fewer cost efficiencies would have been made and it would have taken MTCBC 40 per cent longer to respond to the demands of the Estyn inspection.

Positively, it is likely that the programme will continue beyond the three years. Beyond June 2016 (when RCT's current contract with Microsoft ends), it is estimated that vast majority of schools will continue to utilise MITA despite having to pay for upgrades and licenses from their own budgets. There is also the possibility of extending the remit of the Academy beyond the education setting to enable adults in the local community to benefit from the opportunity to learn and attain qualifications.

## 16. Interviewees

- Chris Bradshaw, Chief Executive (Rhondda Cynon Taf)
- Leigh Gripton, Director of Customer Care and ICT (Rhondda Cynon Taf)
- Sue Walker, Head of Achievement (Rhondda Cynon Taf)
- Elaine Pritchard, ICT infrastructure Manager (Rhondda Cynon Taf)
- Andrew Mogford, Business Change Project Manager (MerthyrTydfil CBC)
- Nick Worgan, Service Manager – Hosting and Cloud (Rhondda Cynon Taf)
- Richard Price, ICT Schools Team Leader (Rhondda Cynon Taf)
- Tim Britton, Head of Performance (Rhondda Cynon Taf)
- John Tratnik, Administrator and Data Analyst (Rhondda Cynon Taf)
- Emma Strand, Information Learning Officer (MerthyrTydfil CBC)
- Helen Clark, Business Development Manager (Capita)
- Tina Cox, Project Team Manager (Capita)
- Martyn Silezin, 14-19 Strategy Officer (RCT) and 14-19 Senior Adviser at Central South Consortium Joint Education Service
- Matthew Davies, Deputy Head, Treorchy Comprehensive School (Rhondda Cynon Taf)
- Nathan Wilcox, Deputy Head, Ynyboeth Primary School (Rhondda Cynon Taf)
- James Protheroe, Teacher and ICT Lead, Darran Park Primary School (Rhondda Cynon Taf)
- Susan Jones, Teacher and ICT Co-Coordinator, Brynnau Primary School (Rhondda Cynon Taf)
- Year 6 Pupil, Darran Park Primary School
- Year 6 Pupil, Darran Park Primary School

# Regional Shared School Improvement Service Hub Integration

## 1. Project scope and ambition

The aim of the project is 'To take education collaboration in school improvement to a new level by pooling School Improvement Services at hub levels within the regional education consortium'. Four, out of the six, authorities in the region (Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire acting as one hub, and Ceredigion and Powys as another hub) applied to the RCF to drive school improvement using two joint appointments working across local authorities within hubs. The main focus of the case study is on the arrangements between Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire councils.

The key trigger for the project was the educational performance of Pembrokeshire and Powys. Estyn placed Pembrokeshire in special measures in 2012 because of significant problems with safeguarding. One interviewee explained that,

*'Pembrokeshire had no school improvement system in place and schools were in trouble'.*

Pembrokeshire approached Carmarthenshire looking for support and capacity to help them improve. Estyn concluded that education in Powys was in need of significant improvement. As a result of these inspections, there were significant changes in senior management in both councils. The adverse inspection results induced a realisation that *'something had to be done, so let's work collaboratively'*. Carmarthenshire started to help Pembrokeshire, which was followed by Ceredigion supporting improvement in Powys approximately six months later. The incentive for the project would have been less urgent if the two local councils were not in difficulties at that point.

Whilst one interviewee explained that the six local authorities in the region had been working closely together over the last ten years, the majority suggested that the extent and impact of sharing was minimal. Councils were largely in competition with each other and *'collaboration wasn't there'*. The RCF has provided additional capacity that has helped to enable and facilitate improved partnership working across the region.

There were different cultures of school improvement across the councils and a reported need in some for cultural change. This ranged from hand holding by some to complacency and insufficient challenge to performance in others. The aim of the hub model is to try to promote the schools with greater capacity and capability to work collaboratively and share expertise so there is a self-improvement system. If successfully embedded, there would be less need for external help and direct intervention. Whilst this is the theory, all interviewees recognised that the reality at the beginning of the programme was underdeveloped.

A number of interviewees recognised that the demand on the shared service was unbalanced initially with two councils supporting the other two in Estyn follow up category. It was agreed that key senior officers would spend considerable time in these two councils supporting the schools to improve. School improvement structures and processes were more established in some councils which could be

utilised productively in the others. However, the relationship had ebbed and flowed over time and support had been reciprocated once both councils had recovered and improved from their initial Estyn inspection reports.

*'We have had good support from Pembrokeshire colleagues to support work in Carmarthenshire'.*

*'Powys colleagues are key in supporting the hub arrangements and their contribution is valued and essential'.*

The RCF project is part of a wider programme to improve school performance. The Welsh Government introduced regional education consortia in 2011 and SWAMWAC was one of four consortia set up to drive school improvement. Some interviewees suggested that SWAMWAC was not very effective and councils played lip service to its role. The consortium was re-branded as ERW (Education through Regional Working) and re-launched in 2013. The RCF hub project sits within ERW. Challenge advisors (who are a mix of directly employed council staff, part-time seconded Heads of primaries and Deputy Heads of secondary schools) are employed by their local authorities and have shared responsibility across two councils, rather than just working in one authority.

The project requested £1.6m and started in April 2013. Cuts in funding in the final year of the project meant that they received a total of £1.2m over three years. The money paid for the project manager, the other Heads of hubs, commissioning leaders within schools to work on school improvement and capacity building by officers supporting other authorities in driving improvements. Interviewees were clear that it was not the case of getting the money and thinking about how they were going to use it. The chief executives and directors from the region identified an area of work which was already a priority, and used the resource to accelerate progress and build capacity within the ERW team.

At the time of the bid, the Welsh Government was already funding all regions to build capacity (£1million). The additional resource provided by RCF was a significant incentive to get people around the table and facilitated new interactions amongst staff. However, the RCF resource is very small compared to the increasing grants and funding streams that ERW allocates to schools for improvement projects.

*'There was appreciation that we have started the journey already and the RCF has been useful to pave the way'.*

## **2. Collaborative capacity and capability**

The project involved four out of the six councils in the region, but Neath Port Talbot and Swansea have adopted the hub model, so there are three Hubs in the region covering the six councils. This is embedded in the legal agreement between the six local authorities. Staff now work across the hubs and the region when required to do so.

The RCF money has helped to facilitate the Hub approach by providing additional capacity, but it is only a small part of the equation in attempts to raise the level of

school improvement in the region. There is now a consistent approach across the three Hubs within ERW with the lead officers focused on improving quality and rigour. For example, there is now a more consistent approach on quality assuring the work of challenge advisors. There has been an investment in training and more sharing of good practice across councils.

The role of the core team is to assess the needs from schools and then to arrange expertise to assist. Formally, in the ERW Ladder of Support, this is identified as a brokering arrangement for support. One interviewee described this as:

*'I haven't got the answer, but I may know someone who has'.*

This needs-based approach allows for flexibility and the arrangements mean they can raise capacity quite quickly rather than going out to advert.

*'There is now a way of identifying particular needs quickly and then responding to them'.*

Interviewees reported that at the beginning of the RCF programme some councillors responded to the joint working by thinking that they were being taken over, but the large majority understood the needs of the authority and were easily convinced of the opportunities to improve performance by working together. 'All help welcome' was the view of one. Significantly, the relationship 'was sold as a partnership' with those leading the project suggesting that every school has something to offer and it was important to learn and share from each other across boundaries and in both directions.

*'Nothing happened to make us feel that we were any way inferior'.*

*'The sharing and support happened in a positive way. We were made to feel that we can all learn from each other'.*

*'It's not I'm better than you. It's we're all in this together'.*

The proposed local government reorganisation has encouraged more joint working between authorities. Whilst the insecurity has caused some difficulties, the relationships between individuals and councils are positive and have developed well under the ERW banner.

### **3. Leadership, project management and the role of the LSBs**

The chief executive of Carmarthenshire is the key strategist for this project. He saw that there was no clarity in how councils worked together on education improvement and there was a need for councils to collaborate more closely. He wanted to use the money, which had already been top-sliced from the local government budget, to improve their ways of working. Through his collaborative work with other chief executives and directors, he was able to influence the development of this and other RCF projects. He was described as being highly supportive of the process and helpful in unblocking issues.

The governance arrangements were described as being *'tight'* with only a small number of people involved.

*'Everybody turns up to every meeting and that continuity is important'.*

Chief executives meet quarterly and lead directors/political Leaders meet on a half-termly basis to discuss the performance of the project. There are said to be *'tough discussions'* in this committee. These arrangements help to improve trust and provide reassurance that the project is delivering. Effective governance and legal agreements are also in place for ERW.

There is close liaison between the Head of Hubs and partnership arrangements were described positively.

*'We've done this well in this case compared to arrangements in other partnership arrangements'.*

Scrutiny of the project takes place in each local authority. Members question whether they are getting their fair share, want to be assured that money is being spent locally, that it provides value for money and impacts on outcomes. Questions are also asked about regional working generally. The performance of ERW is also held to account by all six councils using the same template.

### **3.1 The Project Manager**

The project manager was a classroom teacher in a number of different schools, seconded science curriculum adviser, head teacher for 24 years in three differing schools as well as been seconded as an Estyn inspector for two years. He was also the Carmarthenshire lead for school improvement. This experience of delivering 'at the chalk face' provided him with the credibility to lead the project and made him:

*'The ideal person to take on this role'.*

According to one interviewee, his appointment:

*'Helped Estyn to understand that they (the Hubs) could be trusted to lead the improvement journey'.*

Personal skills are also important. Interviewees talked about his vision, character, depth of knowledge and ability to get his hands dirty. He uses different leadership styles by being straight and direct in some instances, but also having the ability to cajole. Importantly, he can influence colleagues to see why things are being done in certain ways.

*'If you are asked by the project manager to go to go down there to a school, you do it. You accept the judgement of the senior management that this needs to happen'.*

*'He has lots of tools in his box and he picks the right one'.*

The project manager has a plan to work to (covering the three years of the post), but has the freedom to operate in delivering this plan.

*'If there is a lever to pull, he'll pull it. I've never seen anyone say no to joint working'.*

He reports formally to the chief executive of Carmarthenshire and is held to account by the joint committee of leaders and chief executives. This committee assesses if the objectives of the RCF project are being delivered and whether the funding is being used effectively. The project manager liaises with schools and service managers and Directors have, to date, agreed his spending plans.

The joint post means he has oversight across councils and a direct line to the management teams in both hubs. Principal challenge advisors in the one hub work to him and they manage the challenge advisors. Interviewees suggested that there are better accountability arrangements in place now alongside improved mechanisms for filtering information down to challenge advisors.

The success of the project relies very heavily upon the performance of the project manager. He has a broad overview of performance across the hubs and plays a brokering role alongside the other hub leads and the managing director, using the directory of challenge advisors, to support schools.

*'He is the hinge across the Hubs working closely with the chief education officers'.*

The project manager was reluctant to propose (or try to impose) his preferred Hub model initially because of the potential political reaction and perceptions of being taken over. Therefore, he suggested two different models with some joint working. Senior Pembrokeshire officers were not happy with this model. They recognised the need to move on and favoured the 'one team' approach. Carmarthenshire were then able to deliver their area team model into Pembrokeshire. Similarly Ceredigion supported Powys using their expertise and capacity in a similar positive manner across that hub.

The project manager position was the first appointment of its kind. Interviewees suggested that the councils were not in a position three years ago to appoint such a post, so the RCF facilitated them testing the position to see how it worked. This allowed Carmarthenshire to second the project manager to the role and then back-fill his position.

#### **4. Organisational and service change**

The RCF has contributed towards the school improvement agenda by providing additional leadership capacity and the hubs are key parts of the wider ERW model. There is a team of officers working across authorities on a needs-based approach, where more resource is provided according to the grading of schools. Those schools categorised as being 'red' and 'amber' receive more significant support packages which are agreed with schools. School leaders in 'yellow' and 'green' schools are used to help and mentor other schools, on occasion on a triad basis.



*'We're not just working for one authority anymore but across the whole region'.*

There are a number of examples where the consistency in the operation of activities has improved. Every school is entitled to have two core visits take place every year - one on data and progress from last year and another which usually looks at teaching and learning (e.g. book scrutiny). The core team evaluate how they are doing through gathering perceptions using surveys and the feedback from schools is positive. This contrasts to the previous approach where one interviewee explained that:

*'There were too many cosy chats with head teachers in the past'.*

As staff are deployed across the Hub rather than being based in one authority, this provides the Hub leads with *'the ability to chop and change staff'* according to specialism and draw upon a wider team of people. There have been occasions where the teams conducting core visits have been made up of staff from two councils, but this was described as being an *'unusual event'* and the exception rather than the rule. One interviewee suggested that a team from a single council occurs about 75 per cent of time, but colleagues from other authorities are pulled in where needed.

*'There is much more of a gelling across the authorities and of being one team'.*

There is room for development in this area. For example, two interviewees raised the possibility of having at least one visit a year to a school from someone from beyond their local authority area. This would continue the close relationship that challenge advisors have built up with their schools, but also potentially provide some additional challenge and a fresh perspective.

The regional ERW approach has led to a clearer focus upon standards and the use of data. The RCF resource has enabled Carmarthenshire to provide software for Pembrokeshire that produces a report for schools to help them track different groups of children. It has stopped them reinventing the wheel. One person supports across the two authorities on pupil-tracking data. Challenge advisors now go into schools with individual pupil data so there is more of a targeted approach to improvement. Ceredigion have also developed tracking software that is used across four authorities and was first trialled in Powys. Ceredigion staff also prepare templates for the region to support challenge advisers to interrogate school data during the ERW core visit during the Autumn Term.

The Hub arrangement means that they can get a critical mass of teachers together for training courses. This has helped to improve consistency, make better use of resources and share experiences. One interviewee explained that joint training has:

*'Opened the eyes of some people who can see that good performance in one authority or hub is possible and that context should not restrict performance'.*

One member of staff has been responsible for the statutory governor training across Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire for the last two years. He also provides training

in Welsh for governors on understanding school data and the induction for chairs. Powys and Ceredigion have also developed productive work in this area and have helped to increase capacity and share good practice. This collaborative work in all authorities and across the hubs has been partly funded by the RCF.

The RCF has helped to facilitate additional opportunities to network, which means that good practice from a wider pool of knowledge can be passed on.

*'It's far more powerful to get schools together across two local authorities and hubs to share information and 'best practice' data than separate'.*

Good practice on teacher assessment and moderation has been transferred from Ceredigion into Powys, and Carmarthenshire have taken 'School on a page' from Pembrokeshire. There is, therefore, some reciprocity in the arrangements between councils.

There is now additional capacity and expertise to provide support to particular areas of the curricula. This is an ERW strategy with expertise being shared around the region. In the area of Additional Learning Needs (ALN), two officers from Pembrokeshire are working on behalf of councils on self-evaluation of ALN. Ceredigion staff have also worked with Powys colleagues over a period to support change in this area. The hub model allows the allocation of resources and expertise to areas which need improvement. There are also joint appointments in place such as an early years' officer working across Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire.

Other outputs include an e-based lesson observation tool for challenge advisors across the ERW region accompanied by a joint training programme. Planning tools have also been shared across the hubs which have enabled a more sophisticated bid for funding from the 21<sup>st</sup> century schools initiative.

Some outputs are harder to quantify. Interviewees talked about there being a change in culture. There are now much closer working relationships between senior officers in local authorities. These relationships have also improved at levels underneath, so that it is '*now natural to work together*'. This has provided the foundations for joint funding bids e.g. a Leadership Programme designed with Trinity Saint David and Welsh for Adults. A few joint appointments have been made across Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire e.g. as Head of ICT and adult social care commissioning and as these posts have been seen as successful, there is potential to do more e.g. a joint head of procurement is next.

## **5. Outcomes**

It is important to reiterate that the RCF pot of money is dwarfed by other resources aimed at school improvement in the region. It is difficult, therefore, to identify a causal link between RCF and school improvement. The work of the Hub is having a direct effect through local delivery of regional strategy.

The project set out to add resilience, deliver better consistency and challenge, offer more rapid access to support, avoid duplication and better align the service across the local authorities involved. These outcomes were taken from the national model

for regional working on school improvement. This section explores the extent to which these various outcomes have been achieved.

Ultimately, the project aimed to take Pembrokeshire and Powys out of Estyn's follow-up categories and to improve school and pupil outcomes. The former has been achieved and quotes from the authority's Estyn reports highlight the impact of collaborative working:

*'The authority has significantly improved the rigour of challenge and support to its schools. It has collaborated well with its regional partners, particularly within the school improvement hub, in order to make improvements at a good pace'.*  
(Pembrokeshire 2014 Estyn report).

*'The involvement of senior officers from Ceredigion has made a significant difference to the progress made by the council, the Schools' Service and the authority's schools. Their involvement has enabled the authority to undertake a complete reconfiguration of the service in order to bring about sustainable improvement'.*  
(Powys 2014 Estyn report).

Interviewees report fewer schools going into Estyn follow up categories especially the more serious formal categories. They also suggested that the hubs and region are good at supporting schools and bringing them out of these categories as soon as possible. However, there continue to be challenges in some schools across some hubs. The region as it has developed is now better placed to support early intervention and preventative actions are now better used.

Generally across the ERW region there has been a consistent improvement in key indicators. ERW outperforms other regional consortia in most key indicators. However there is still some inconsistency between local authorities, across hubs and the region. Interviewees stated that some schools are not making the progress you would expect given the different funding streams available for school improvement. A number of reasons were provided to explain this. For some, it's a cultural and/or historical issue. Lots of effort was spent on improving safeguarding in Pembrokeshire to the detriment of school improvement.

*'The problem with safeguarding meant that the eye was taken off the ball on improvement'.*

Other interviewees reported concerns over leadership in some schools and whether systems were robust enough, but:

*'We are now challenging performance in these schools much better'.*

*'The team have made a contribution towards that through the core visits'.*

If the school improvement model was working perfectly, there would no '*struggling*' schools. The Hub model cannot be credited for improving results in one council, without considering whether it is helping some schools to improve quickly enough in other councils.

One of the intended outcomes of the project was to increase the level of **challenge** to schools. Interviewees felt that this had been delivered in a number of ways such as the development of a consistent ERW core visit reports. These reports challenge the schools to improve areas of weakness and a range of support, challenge and intervention is provided by ERW. There are now clearer expectations from both sides about what schools need to deliver and how the support system will work. Challenge advisors used to learn as they went along and some had been in position too long, but there is now a much better support and training package in place. The system allows the opportunity for challenge advisors to be used for a short period in the hubs and region before they go back into senior positions in schools.

*'There are much more rigorous processes in place now'.*

*'The level of challenge is much higher now than three years ago'.*

In all local authorities and across both hubs, interviewees suggested that there are now more challenging conversations with schools, which leads to effective brokering of support (from both the Hub and from peer schools). There was a realisation that *'we were doing far too much for schools'*, so there is cognisance of schools improving themselves and helping others.

Another area of challenge is where poor performance has occurred. The Directors of Education in all local authorities challenge head teachers in targeted schools why recent results were disappointing and discuss what needs to be done differently. Where formal intervention has taken place, improvement has been secured. There is reported to be significant challenge (and *'straight talking'*) in meetings of school improvement boards.

Improved consistency was another outcome area. A number of examples were provided, which are part of the ERW approach and therefore wider than the RCF project. These include:

- Regional moderation of challenge advisors' work
- Challenging adviser standards and code of conduct
- Common systems of recording and analysing information from core visits
- Improved use of data by all challenge advisors which leads to identifiable steps for future improvement
- A standard model on school development plans across the region
- Regular meetings of the Heads of Hubs and challenge advisors
- Tracking systems adopted
- Annual meetings with head teachers
- Training for challenge advisors
- Evaluation of school improvement model using surveys of head teachers.

The RCF has provided additional strategic capacity. For example, the project manager chairs a number of the school improvement boards across a hub while a chief education officer chairs one. The project manager post allows some capacity to help those schools that are struggling the most. There are efficiencies in leadership roles as the project manager (and other joint positions) covers more than one local

authority. This model of working has also been developed in Powys with the support of Ceredigion colleagues and good sharing of experiences and outcomes across ERW supports a consistent approach.

*'We could not have made the journey without the new school improvement measures in place'.*

The core team is smaller than in the past but is supplemented by a greater number of school based 'system leaders'. The increased use of existing staff to support others is useful for professional development and succession planning also creates efficiencies as there is less need to buy-in external 'consultants'.

## **6. Role of Welsh Government and RCF funding**

The RCF resource was distributed in the first year according to the population of children in each council. It is now shared against need with the project manager deciding upon its distribution within the governance structure. The money acted as an incentive for some people to come on board especially when they could see the Hubs working. It therefore helped to build relationships. Colleagues posed the question: 'Is there any money?' and the reply was often *'You show me what you want to do with it and we might find some'*.

RCF was used to fund the joint appointments, to provide additional capacity and to develop areas (such as ALN) where more joint work could be conducted. There were different views on what would have happened if there was no RCF. For the majority of interviewees, the view was that partnerships would not be in the same position and there would not have been the same access to expertise. We would have *'paddled along'* with the existing parochial system and:

*'That's why we've got the current conversation with local government reorganisation'.*

The way the RCF has been implemented has caused significant difficulties for staff. £10m was initially provided for collaboration across Wales but the grant was cut by half and has now been abolished. The short-term nature of posts to work on projects is not attractive to staff and in another RCF-funded project:

*'We now have to abandon some excellent collaboration and make staff redundant'.*

Nearly all interviews agreed that RCF has allowed the region to accelerate collaboration at a quicker pace than otherwise would have been possible:

*'I'm unsure whether something similar would have been set up. Sometimes you need seed corn funding. There is no doubt about that'.*

*'You can't live on good will alone. It has oiled the cogs'.*

One strategic interviewee was not as positive about the Fund. They argued that school improvement through ERW would have continued along the same path with

no RCF. Given the short time to develop bids, the RCF had to be used to fund projects where collaborations were already in place. This interviewee also raised significant concerns about the Welsh Government's approach to funding regional collaborations through the RCF:

*'The money was top-sliced at the whim of a Minister with no idea of what they wanted to do with it'.*

*'This was not a very good way of doing business'.*

There has been a limited engagement with Welsh Government beyond the formal requirement to provide quarterly reports on progress. There were complaints from one person that the reporting procedure is too bureaucratic and there should be a template on what they report. As no-one from the Welsh Government had ever been in touch about the content of any of the reports; it was unclear *'what value they have'*. An alternative view was that these are short documents and reporting has been much easier than other grants. The project was delayed because the funding came from one Minister's portfolio but the focus of the project spanned another portfolio. This meant that it took time to agree the bid as there were lots of hoops to jump through.

## **7. Third Sector involvement**

There has been no third sector involvement in the project.

## **8. Enablers and barriers to collaboration and achieving outcomes**

There are various enablers of collaboration highlighted so far which include increased capacity, the 'tight' governance arrangements, leadership provided by the project manager and increased opportunities to network and share good practice. The use of 'Leaders for Learning' (secondees in key subjects to work with secondary schools requiring support) are also said to be helping improvement by bringing in a fresh perspective. There have been positive impacts on schools that have received this support, but one interviewee reported that progress can be slow.

When attempting to introduce cultural change and new ways of working, it is important to get mind-sets right and win people over. Interviewees reported that it has been difficult for some people to deal with rapid change, which has meant that it has *'taken them more time to jump on board'*. One interviewee reported the problem of being on a local authority's pay roll but working for ERW means *'It difficult to serve two masters'*. In hindsight, more spade work should have been done on mind-sets. Another interviewee disagreed, however, by arguing that clearer roles and hierarchy should have been put in place quicker.

Good communications are important for all collaborative activities and interviewees revealed that 'the message' could have been improved. There needs to be a consistent 'one voice' on school improvement.

One of the potential barriers to successful collaboration is that not all partners are going to benefit to the same degree, which then changes behaviour. While support

was initially focused on school improvement in Pembrokeshire and Powys, *'It's not just one-way traffic anymore'*. Practical issues such as time and geography act as barriers but more importantly, some of the current arrangements are informal with one council doing the work for another with no contractual arrangements in place. These *'informal arrangements can bring insecurity'*.

## **9. Learning**

Learning has taken place in three main areas: within the project and ERW; between RCF-funded projects; and from practices in England.

One of the aims of the project was to share best practice across the region. The three Hub leads, the managing director of ERW and chief education officers meet on a regular basis and examples of good practice from across the region are shared with challenge advisors. Pembrokeshire are looking to improve their planning at a departmental level and have received support and good practice from Neath Port Talbot. Both Powys and Pembrokeshire received support to improve performance at Key Stage 4 from the ERW 'Leaders of Learning'. More formally, regional learning events take place, which highlight effective ways of working.

Members of the core team have had contact with other RCF projects e.g. on joint legal services, to learn what has worked well (in particular the structures they were setting up) and its applicability to their project.

Learning has also taken place from the improvement processes of a school in England. There are some secondary schools in both Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire which are *'on a journey'*. They need support in raising their game and seeing what is happening elsewhere is important for their development.

*'Heads should not to be parochial but 'get out and learn''.*

Using additional resource from Schools Challenge Cymru Tranche 2, the project manager organised visits to The Cotswold School in Gloucestershire. The Academy school is 'consistently ranked as one of the highest performing comprehensive schools in the country' with Ofsted judging the school to be 'Outstanding' across all categories. Initially, nine senior teachers/leaders made a visit over two days to the Academy and this has been followed up by a visit for middle leaders. Teachers from the English school have also visited Wales and picked up lessons on inclusion. This learning opportunity would never have happened in the past before the development of ERW. Schools in Powys are also working collaboratively with similar schools in Swansea and Neath Port Talbot.

## **10. Sustainability**

The RCF money will stop in March 2016 but there is political commitment for the project manager post to continue and it will be co-funded by Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire. As there is no formal appointments process for joint posts, they are likely to second someone to this position.

Partnerships that have been set up (e.g. on 14-19, 21st century schools, foundation phase work, ALN, data analysis and tracking systems) will also continue. Participants have discovered that working together adds capacity and skills, can *'make life easier'* and even lead to promotions for people working in a collaborative way.

*'They can now phone up each other and get on with it. There is now no need for a financial incentive'.*

There are a number of examples of joint working occurring on an informal basis across all local authorities and across hubs. For instance, the foundation phase lead in Carmarthenshire is on maternity leave, so the Pembrokeshire lead has been providing support without money changing hands. Pembrokeshire are conducting data analysis on additional learning needs across both authorities and this work will continue but be funded separately. Both Powys and Ceredigion are sharing data analysis and schools management systems and capacity in ALN and leadership reviews. These informal arrangements are said to be working because of the team approach across authorities and hubs resulting from trust being built over time. There is a realisation that work should not always be conducted as a single authority basis and the RCF has paved the way to this situation.

*'The Fund has helped to create an ethos of regional working'.*

## **11. Conclusions**

The general view was that the RCF has made collaboration easier and speeded up existing arrangements.

*'We have definitely made the journey quicker as a result of the RCF'.*

The role of the project manager has been crucial in facilitating this. There is significant value in having someone who is able to see the big picture and work at different levels – ERW, the Hubs, schools (teachers and governors) and with individuals.

The RCF has helped to put systems in place for further joint working and lots of existing collaborative work will continue as *'business as usual'*. Built upon an honest discussion on strengths and weaknesses of both organisations and the opportunity to align these by providing things for each other, there are likely to be further opportunities for collaboration and rationalisation of services in future years. One interviewee described RCF as being like seed corn funding.

*'I'm convinced that RCF was the kick start that was required. It was useful pump-priming for change'.*

Given the early successes of the joint appointments, it raises the question why such a model was not introduced before. Interviewees suggested that the lack of progress was due to the inwardly focused outlook in some local authorities. There was a reticence to accept assistance from elsewhere and a *'belief in a drawbridge at the*



*end of the county boundary*'. The mood and culture has changed significantly in recent years with the spectre of local government reorganisation looming.

*'It is a delight to work with the bordering local authority now'.*

There are a number of challenges. First, it is important to ensure that the performance of good councils, in supporting others, does not fall back. Second, some interviewees raised concerns about a fear of change and parochialism from some quarters. In such an environment, informal arrangements and trust may only achieve so much. Third, how realistic are joint appointments at the top of the hierarchy? Pembrokeshire is currently advertising for a Director of Education because the volume of work makes a joint post unviable. Finally, while reports are taken to members on a regular basis, it is unclear how backbench councillors can put political pressure on the process.

It has taken a ministerial directive using consortia and a wide range of other funding pots, including RCF, to take the school improvement agenda forward. While generally, performance is improving, some schools are still struggling and it can take time to detect areas for improvement in 'coasting' schools. The ultimate aim is for schools to help themselves and support others.

*'If we get what we are doing right, there will be no role for us'.*

*'It will only work if we get the school to school work done and progress is being made here'.*

While a lot of change has been introduced in a short period, there is a need to consolidate and perhaps to formalise existing informal arrangements. While the predominant view was that: *'The regional concept itself has worked'*, there is some way to go until there is a self-supporting system in place.

## **12. Interviewees**

- Jamie Adams – Leader, Pembrokeshire County Council
- Meinir Ebbsworth – Head of Hub, Powys and Ceredigion County Councils
- Kate Evan-Hughes – Head of Education, Pembrokeshire County Council
- Glenn Evans – Senior Education Consultant, Carmarthenshire County Council
- Mark James – Chief Executive, Carmarthenshire County Council
- Andi Morgan – Principal Challenge Advisor, Carmarthenshire County Council
- Gareth Morgans – Chief Education Officer, Carmarthenshire County Council
- Marian Phillips - Challenge Advisor, Pembrokeshire County Council
- Barry Rees – Director of Education, Ceredigion County Council
- Aneirin Thomas – Head of Standards, ERW (previously Principal Challenge Advisor)
- Alan Walters – Head of School Effectiveness, Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire County Councils

## North Wales Economic Ambition Board

### 1. Project scope and ambition

The aim of the Economic Ambition Board (EAB) is to work collaboratively across the six local authorities, the private, public and third sectors to transform the economy in North Wales. It was described very succinctly by one interviewee as '*collaboration for a strategic purpose*'.

There is a reasonably long 'back-story' to the EAB. Informal discussions have taken place for a number of years between all the key stakeholders involved in economic development. Given cuts to public services, there was a realisation that as economic development is not a statutory service, local authorities needed to work together in different ways to improve the quality and coverage of the service.

There was also agreement that the economic performance of the region over the last 20 years has not been acceptable and more needs to be done to reduce the productivity and income gap with the rest of Wales and the UK. With a number of major projects that could be transformational to the economy coming on-line (worth up to £20bn if they all delivered), it is important that councils and their partners are working together for the good of the region so that the local economy drives the maximum benefit from the investment.

A proposal to the Regional Collaboration Fund (RCF) was made in February 2013 to institute a programme of work aimed at making better use of existing resources and delivering improvements to economic growth. The original bid to the Welsh Government was for £600,000 but the total allocation agreed was £340,000, which was then slightly reduced to £334,000. The project was largely protected from the cuts to RCF funding which were significant in other projects. One interviewee remarked that:

*'The RCF was a mechanism to get some traction and momentum beyond just talking to co-ownership and delivery of a joint agenda'.*

It would provide welcome resource (already top-sliced from local government finances) to drive priorities forward.

The RCF took considerable time to get an agreed bid together to go to Welsh Government initially and then '*it had a difficult birth*'. The proposal set out three priority programmes as follows:

- Destination North Wales – developing the profile, visibility and offer of the region to encourage inward investment;
- Advanced Manufacturing – targeting supply chains, supporting growth and building networks; and
- Energy and Environment – targeting supply chains, supporting growth and building networks.

There was lots of to-ing and fro-ing with Welsh Government about the proposal and, in particular, whether the Destination North Wales workstream would duplicate work for which the Welsh Government has the primary responsibility. This led to a 'stalemate' with no movement being made on the project and blame being attached to both sides. One interviewee described a rocky relationship with the Welsh Government politically with the EAB not having Ministerial support. The EAB didn't help itself by being critical of Welsh Government. This meant that work was held up for more than a year and the project spans two, rather than three years.

The 'approval letter' for funding (dated April 2014) suggested that there should be a focus on connectivity and infrastructure and supply chains. There was also a ministerial task force on transport in the region that reported in late 2014. The task force proposed that a regional structure to prioritise transport was needed and that the EAB could undertake this role. The future direction of the EAB was designed in December 2014 after consultation with Welsh Government, which included four key priorities:

- Supply chain development;
- Infrastructure and connectivity;
- Skills and employment; and
- Marketing and communication.

The RCF has also supported the skills and employment workstream. This is a separate project (NW29) than the focus of this case study (NW33), but skills and employment form a key component of EAB's work. There were delays in the funding for this project which meant it starting six months late.

These workstreams are cross-cutting priorities and underpin the sectors (Energy and Advanced Manufacturing) which were previously workstreams in their own right. There is now an increased emphasis on ensuring that businesses and the work force are well placed to take advantage of the transformational projects in the region.

A new workstream on 'Funding and EU projects' has been set up which is co-ordinating and identifying strategic projects for EU funding that will have the most impact on North Wales and which supports the other workstreams. The Board agreed in November 2015 to set-up another workstream to take advantage of the developments happening in Liverpool, Manchester, Warrington and the 'Northern Powerhouse' where powers are being devolved locally. While they have had some existing collaborative arrangements in place (e.g. the Mersey Dee Alliance), there is a need to maximise the opportunities of working with others across the border. Members of the Board see this cross-border working with England as a key part of the growth agenda and offering mutual benefits.

## **2. Collaborative capacity and capability**

The EAB has all the key stakeholders on board which includes the six local councils, and representatives from the private sector, higher and further education and the third sector. The EAB does not deliver transformational projects but aims to facilitate everyone playing complementary roles in supporting the improvement of economic

development across the region. All partners attend regularly and interviewees talked enthusiastically about representatives '*playing their part*'.

The various organisations have a '*relatively good base*' of working together. There is no disagreement over principles and the '*end destination*', but there can be tensions between partners in how these principles are going to be delivered. Interviewees reported some defensive behaviour from some authorities at times, but this has is said to have improved. There is now a greater acceptance from all councils that they are trying to deliver improvements for the region and more will be achieved through collaboration.

Tensions between organisations are inevitable when there is a move to a more collaborative way of working. As one interviewee suggested,

*'It is a huge cultural shift from where we used to have six economic development teams working in isolation in a fragmented way'.*

The key is trying to put processes in place to manage these tensions and the EAB has helped in making work more integrated and connected. One of the processes is that a Senior Responsible Officer from one council leads each workstream according to their own area of interest. This was described by one officer as

*'We all have our pet projects to pursue'.*

This means that councils have to trust each other to deliver their individual workstreams and the region will benefit if they are delivered successfully. The different workstreams are intertwined to some extent; so for example, Destination North Wales would have nothing to sell without the other workstreams identifying opportunities and projects. As one officer explained,

*'We are trusting and empowering Wrexham to deliver on Destination North Wales and they are trusting us'.*

This trust in other councils was said to have strengthened over the life of the project and is crucial for making the EAB deliver. There is concern that the impacts of some workstreams will benefit parts of the region more than others, however there is an appreciation that the economy as a whole benefits if connectivity and infrastructure is improved.

There will always be winners and losers from collaborative working and while there is said to be greater maturity around the table, questions still arise as to whether everybody is representing North Wales or their own organisation. The Board's constitution suggests that members are accountable to their individual councils and to the Board as part of their duty to co-operate. Until there is reorganisation, officers have to play this dual role and displaying some self-interest is not surprising. There is room for improvement here as it is important that this self-interest is transparent and can be challenged. Two respondents suggested that they are not very good at resolving tensions:

*'We scrutinise a lot and progress is slow and it is quite frustrating at times'.*

*'There is a tendency to try and smooth things over but perhaps we need to be more mature and debate these differences'.*

It was suggested that the Board may not be the best fora for some of this debate (as it includes partners from beyond the six councils including the Welsh Government), and that challenge should be bottomed out within the workstreams.

There are a number of ways of trying to counter individualistic behaviour from councils. The commissioning of independent research has been useful in providing an impartial perspective and having partners signed up to the Regional Skills and Employment Plan also helps to ensure that councils act on a regional basis. This Plan provided evidence for developing five regional umbrella projects for EU funding. The dedicated resource provided by the RCF has provided the capacity to design these bids collaboratively.

An outcome of improved trust between partners is that representatives from Wrexham and Flintshire councils (as well as the project manager and Chair of the North Wales Business Council) have been asked to score the EU bids for the current round on funding and make recommendations to the EAB on what would be best for the region. These two councils are not part of the West Wales and the Valleys EU programme and therefore do not have the same vested interest in the decision. These arrangements will reduce the usual jockeying for funding and respond to the Welsh European Funding Office (WEFO) request for projects to be truly regional and endorsed by the EAB.

Interviewees had a mixed response to the on-going discussions about local government reorganisation. For some, the difficulties surrounding discussions about 'the map' were manifest within the EAB. Those councils against merger were concerned about signing up to collaborative arrangements in case this signalled their position on reorganisation. Other interviewees suggested that they managed to skirt the issue of reorganisation through the EAB as they have focused on the workstreams and the region and moving to a smaller number of councils would make little difference to their work. According to one:

*'While collaboration may be on the shelf, it is a good thing for the Board to go forward'.*

### **3. Leadership, project management and the role of the LSBs**

The overall body responsible for the EAB is the North Wales Regional Leadership Board (consisting of the chief executives and leaders of the six authorities and other public service leaders) (see governance structure diagram below). There was no mention, by any interviewee, of the LSB. There is a lead chief executive for the EAB and there is a Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) for the Programme who is a Corporate Director from Gwynedd Council. The common view was that he is the glue that holds it all together and no one envied the difficult role he was playing. The EAB is chaired by the leader of Conwy County Borough Council. There is a Programme

Management Group (consisting of all the SROs) which reports to the Economic Ambition Board (chaired by the Programme SRO) and the various workstreams sit underneath all of this. The governance arrangements were described as being *'simple, open and working effectively to date'*. The EAB is an independent entity which allows it to be an honest broker. In addition to these formal structures, informal communication between the SROs takes place on a regular basis.

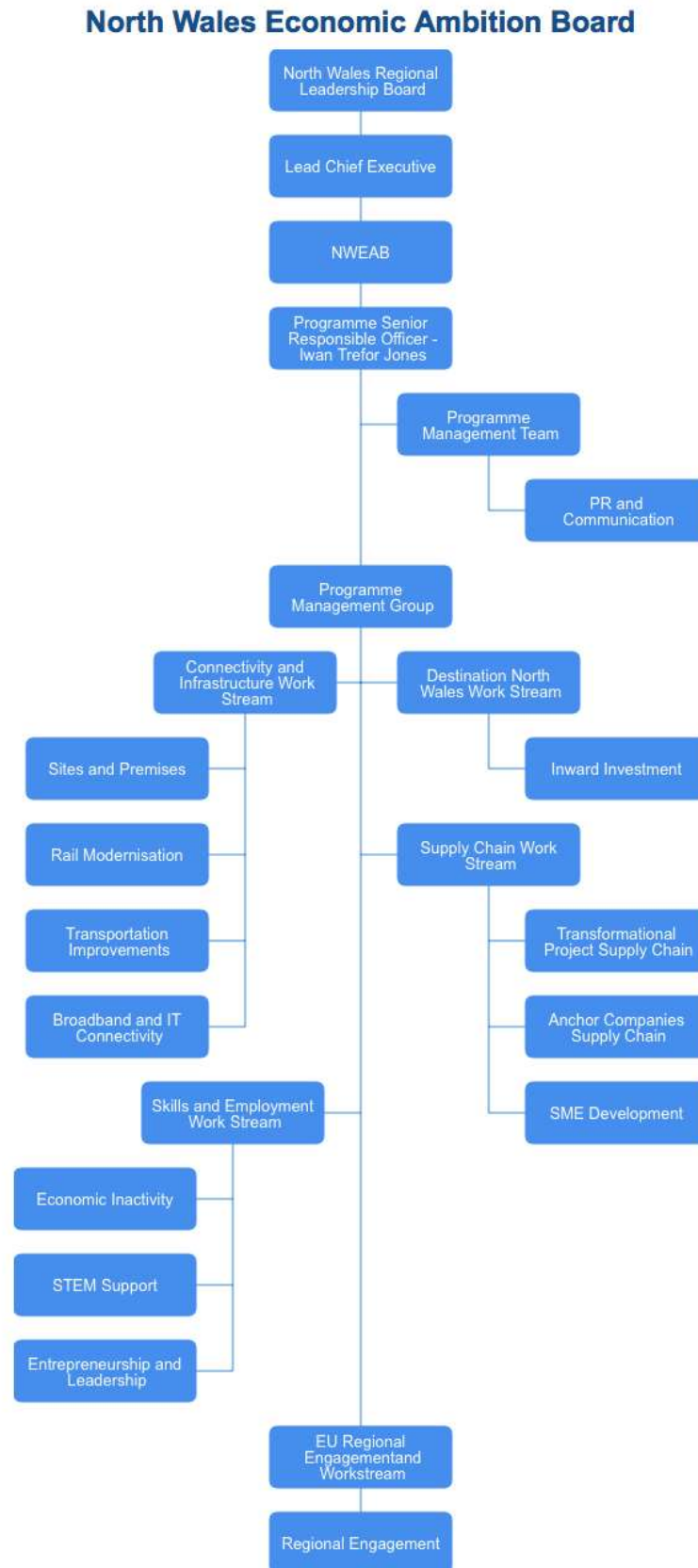
The Chair of the EAB was described by various interviewees as providing strong and effective leadership and is proactive in raising the profile of the Board (e.g. a recent visit to Westminster selling the EAB and North Wales). He has been in position for over a year and the relationship with Welsh Government has improved since this point. The Chair is a Plaid Cymru politician, but is said to have a close and constructive relationship with the Labour Minister (Edwina Hart) which gives Welsh Government confidence that the EAB can deliver. In addition, he works across political (and country) boundaries in regional discussions with North-West England.

There is no formal scrutiny of the Board although some of the councils report to their own scrutiny committees. The focus of questioning locally is how the EAB is benefitting and adding value to the individual council. The EAB would be an excellent opportunity for councils to work together in jointly holding the performance of the Board to account, but this hasn't happened. A number of interviewees thought that some scrutiny would help support improvement as:

*'No-one is asking the basic question – what have you achieved?'*

#### 4. The governance structure of the North Wales Ambition Board

**Figure 3:** The governance structure of the North Wales Economic Ambition Board



## 5. The Project Manager

The project management role is crucial as the senior responsible officers need a dedicated resource to help them to deliver on outputs and outcomes. Just over a quarter (28 per cent) of the project's total costs (£94,000) are devoted to project management and co-ordination. The project manager (PM) was appointed by Gwynedd Council and works as a consultant on a part-time basis but this is evolving into a full-time role. He acts as the bridge across the different workstreams as he provides an important overview. Given the concern over the sustainability of economic development teams across the region, the strategy of bringing in external capacity rather than using a secondment was questioned.

It is a difficult balancing act for the project manager as the Board is focused on introducing positive change at the regional level. While people can easily sign up to the general strategy, they are often concerned about how this impacts upon their own organisation. He therefore has to be an '*honest broker*'. His role is to work with SROs and others to deliver positive outcomes across the region. In order to do this, the project manager needs to be mobile, working across the region, and to communicate well with all partners.

In addition to the PM working on the EAB, there are staff funded by the RCF to work on some of the workstreams e.g. a project manager on infrastructure and connectivity and three on skills including a project manager (funded through another RCF project). On this latter workstream, the RCF funding has helped in providing expertise and capacity through a PM to take work-load off the SROs across the six councils. It is said that:

*'The project manager makes all the difference'.*

In addition, the workstreams that have made the greatest progress have had dedicated staff resource. This capacity has enabled a number of activities including bringing all the key players together to design a funding bid rather than involving them towards the end of the process. This helped to build ownership of the project so they have an interest in delivering outcomes. In contrast, a member of staff recruited on the supply chain workstream (also funded by the RCF) moved to a new permanent position after only weeks in the role. This has slowed progress on this workstream and it has been difficult to recruit someone to a short-term position. Seconding staff has proven difficult at times and where it has taken place relies on trust and cooperation between authorities. There is an issue here to be resolved as this can be a barrier to collaboration.

The project manager for the EAB is said to understand the region, have sufficient knowledge and experience and knows the individuals involved personally. One interviewee suggested that he has introduced real discipline on programme management. The PM on the skills workstream shares similar skills and this suggests that such roles would be much harder for a generic project manager to undertake.



## 6. Organisational and service change

The EAB is a new way of working in the region which recognises that many elements of economic development such as skills and employment, infrastructure, tourism etc. make sense at the regional, rather than the local level. Some of these issues are more important for some councils than for others. Tourism, for example, is important to a few councils but is not regarded as being an issue to drive transformational change across the region. Creative media was given as another example which is important to at least one council, but is regarded by others as not being a *regional* priority.

There is a constitution that governs behaviour of the EAB but there are no other formal agreements in place. A non-council interviewee suggested that it has been really refreshing for his organisation to be able to engage with all key organisations at the same time. He suggested that councils would previously compete and the Board has brought coherence:

*'I've been really impressed with the way the local authorities have worked together'.*

Another public service stakeholder suggested, however, that it has taken significant time to set up workstreams and conduct meetings before anything is produced and this can be frustrating.

As a SRO from one council leads each workstream, progress is largely dependent upon the skills and capacity that each council can bring. For instance, there were up to ten people working and supporting Destination North Wales at one point for a short period of time (a number of weeks) but it is now down to a few staff working part-time. This means that some workstreams are moving at a faster pace than others with the skills and employment workstream being regarded as making the most progress to date and performance being '*stop-start*' in the supply chain workstream.

A large number of outputs have been produced to date which include:

- Commissioning of external research into the modernisation of the rail network which will build into the investment case for Welsh Government;
- A Directory of Advanced Manufacturing businesses;
- A Regional Skills and Employment Plan;
- Bringing sector experts and employers together through summits (one on manufacturing and another on energy);
- Four out of six councils have migrated into a new CRM system (Evolutive project) which manages inward investment inquiries;
- Bids made to the EU for funding;
- Full analysis of the demand and supply of skills across the region; and
- Various communication initiatives e.g. marketing films, website, twitter.

A range of other processes have been put in place such as providing support for transformational projects (such as the prison development) but these are difficult to measure. (As the prison is relatively small in relation to other transformation projects, one interviewee suggested that it has been helpful for them to cut their teeth on this). Interviewees argued that outputs such as increased labour market intelligence, improved working relationships and understanding of responsibilities between the six councils and the Welsh Government has also been delivered, which will help in achieving outcomes.

In addition to the significant “in kind” contributions from partners, each council contributes around £30,000 a year towards programme management and to workstreams. This is a very small budget compared to the expenditure on economic development across the region and there is no other sharing of resources. There is on-going discussion about the introduction of a new delivery model which would encompass more staff being based regionally. This programme office approach would need to be centrally funded. At the moment, a number of interviewees complained that everyone is doing two jobs:

*‘Some dedicated resource would really help to make the difference’.*

It was suggested that the office should involve secondments from the best economic development officers in the region (thereby giving councils a ‘stake’ in the model) as well as potentially key stakeholders such as Welsh Government, Careers Wales etc. Some partners were keen on this approach being introduced from the outset as they have created a two-tier structure at a time when councils are looking to make cuts in their budgets. Others believed that you need to build trust in working together before introducing this joined-up approach. All councils believed that this model of working was essential and supported it being led by Gwynedd Council (which also lead this project).

## **7. Outcomes**

The proposal for funding was unusually clear in outlining what success would mean. This *‘will be measured in terms of tangible benefits – jobs, investment and profile both domestically and internationally’*. Key measures of success included:

- jobs created;
- jobs safeguarded;
- inward investment projects secured;
- private sector investment secured; and
- procurement/supply chain development (value of contract awarded).

The original plan was for efficiency savings to be released through making better use of existing resources deployed on economic development across the region and the EAB *‘will lead to a rationalisation of services’*. The RCF was needed to *‘kick start’* the programme of work.

The interviewees were unanimous in admitting that, partly due to the late start of the project, it is too early to assess whether the EAB has had any impact on any of these

measures, although it is heading in the right direction. As outlined above, a series of processes have been put in place and plans produced, rather than outcomes delivered. Members of the Programme Management Group suggested that the project has been putting foundations in place for businesses to be more successful and so identifying outcomes at this point is difficult. It is illuminating, however, that:

*'These outcome measures (in the proposal) are never referred to at the Board'.*

All interviewees argued that economic development is a '*slow burn activity*' and the proposal itself recognised that the EAB is a medium to long-term strategy. As the EAB is about transformational change, it is difficult to produce outcomes in the short term. Some of the projects will not bear fruit until 2020 or later, and some outcomes e.g. rail electrification are outside of councils' control and dependent on the business case they have worked with Welsh Government being approved.

Individual councils in North Wales have set their own metrics for assessing their success in transforming the local economy (e.g. getting more people into work (below national average for JSA), increasing household income (above the Welsh average), increase turnover and survival of local businesses etc.). It seems that notwithstanding the good intentions in the proposal for funding, they haven't had the time to get to the level of collective measures, although the data is there within the North Wales Observatory. The project can demonstrate outputs but cannot provide evidence on ultimate outcomes such as improving GVA (Gross Value Added) and no indicators for intermediate outcomes have been set.

Most interviewees recognised that there needed to be more work done to develop suitable indicators (which lie under the GVA) that can be included in the business case for further funding. There was also general acceptance that there needed to be more active scrutiny and challenge on performance and a more formal reporting system introduced e.g. a performance management report discussed at every Board meeting.

## **8. Role of Welsh Government and RCF funding**

The RCF resource has been vital because interviewees suggested that councils would have struggled to prioritise resource going to economic development. For one interviewee,

*'It does help to focus the mind when 'it is someone else's money'.*

The cuts to the public sector have provided an incentive to do things differently. The councils and other partners weren't forced to work together before and politics got in the way. There is now a realisation that more can be delivered with less resource by working together.

Unsurprisingly, interviewees were supportive of the idea that the EAB had provided value for money as the costs involved were relatively small, but no efficiencies have yet to be measured. Most of the resource going into the EAB has been provided in-

kind through staff time, but it is very difficult to put a figure on this. This combination of RCF and in-kind support was necessary as,

*'If we want this to work, we need to commit to it and make it happen'.*

Expenditure from the RCF varies across workstreams. For instance, the RCF only funds networking events on the EU workstream and no RCF resource has been spent on the 'Destination North Wales' workstream to date. The North Wales Business Council has used the balances from the North Wales Economic Forum accounts when it was disbanded to support this workstream. The Business Council has been clear in outlining targets which need to be delivered in return for this investment. The workstream has delivered a new CRM platform, seven promotional films on social media, a website and content (such as case studies) for Welsh Government.

It is not just resource which is important, but also relationships. On the Destination North Wales project, the team has needed to work closely with the Welsh Government to ensure that there is a clear message of what Wales had to offer. Members of the workstream felt that they needed to prove to Welsh Government that they were capable of marketing themselves and handling inward investment inquiries. Now these processes have been set up and trust is developed, there are good relationships in place with the inward investment team in Cardiff.

All interviewees agreed that the relationship with Welsh Government across the different workstreams is significantly better than before. Two interviewees explained:

*'There is nothing but support from the Welsh Government. A relationship is a two-way thing and trust is key'.*

*'We're partners to increase output in the region'.*

This Welsh Government support is demonstrated by the Minister attending an EAB awareness-raising event in Cardiff in September 2015 and Welsh Government officials attend the Board meetings. They play a supporting role and provide an effective communication channel for the Minister. The relationship with Welsh Government provides an opportunity for the EAB to promote examples of their work which can then be shared across regions.

The role of the Welsh Government differs across workstreams. For example, the skills workstream has been given a specific remit by becoming one of three regional skills partnerships in Wales. As a result, they have to produce an annual skills needs plan, a skills supply and demand assessment and agree on regional skills priorities. For the Welsh Government, this means they can engage through three avenues rather than the 22 councils (and associated partners). The Welsh Government is encouraging the EAB to work with authorities in North-West England in one of the new workstreams. Engagement with Welsh Government on the other workstreams is less structured, but valuable support has been readily available to develop their work. In all workstreams ensuring that there is no duplication of work between the EAB and the Welsh Government is essential to increase effectiveness.

## **9. Third Sector involvement**

There is little involvement of the third sector in the EAB although a representative from the WCVA does sit on the Board. Third sector organisations have been actively involved in the development of projects for EU funding where they can bring expertise e.g. in working with economically inactive people.

## **10. Enablers and barriers to collaboration and achieving outcomes**

In addition to enablers of collaborative working such as leadership, resources and the role of the project manager, there are other factors which have helped to facilitate change. The primary factor mentioned by a number of interviewees was politics. It is clear that while there are different political priorities across the region, relationships have matured over time and this can influence officers:

*'We could have done more if everyone was on the same page in the beginning'.*

It is important to get political support lined up from the outset and to nurture the relationship over time. The decision to contribute resource to any joint venture is a political decision where the value of pooling money needs to be weighed up against the value of making that investment locally. There are concerns about the potential for Ministerial changes resulting from the forthcoming Assembly elections impacting on economic development.

Effective collaboration also depends upon getting the right people around the table, and the inter-personal relationships between these individuals. This means that there is a risk to the project when these relationships are punctured either by irreconcilable differences or if personnel move on. The EAB has managed, so far, to have continuity of senior officers. It is a concern that the facilitation of multi-billion pound investments in the region can rely quite so heavily on a small number of individuals.

Sustaining positive working relationships across six councils alongside the private and education sectors is not an easy job. Having key staff, such as project managers, in place as soon as possible is crucial. While it is important to set up effective governance arrangements as these are the foundations of the project, some interviewees suggested that this was a slow process and could be speeded up. The funding from RCF is now finishing and they are still putting some processes in place. Finally, one interviewee believed that given the limited resource, there should be no mission-creep. They should only be delivering what has been agreed and not expanding beyond this into new areas.

## **11. Learning**

Prior to making an application to the RCF, work was conducted on how other regions in both Wales and England were approaching the need to address their own economic difficulties. One of the aims of this project was to capture and communicate lessons with other regional collaborative initiatives and to be open to lessons learnt from others. Lessons from the project have not been shared to date as they have concentrated on their own relationships and ways of working. In

addition, a few interviewees suggested that there needed to be better communications to:

*'explain to the world out there that the Board is not just a talking shop'.*

There are instances of where the EAB have tried to learn the lessons from others. The Board recently invited a presentation from the Warrington and West Cheshire LEP and are trying to improve links with cities such as Liverpool and Manchester. The EAB is also continually monitoring developments with the Growth Bids and Devolution deals in England, and there are some interesting delivery models and approaches developing. The new workstream will focus upon connecting North Wales to the Northern Powerhouse to better capitalise on the cross-border economy. The region has closer economic links with parts of England (Liverpool, Manchester, Cheshire etc.) where there are cities with a high concentration of advanced manufacturing businesses, than with Cardiff or Swansea. Economically, North Wales has always looked to the East for many of its markets, and businesses do not see the border as a barrier in the same way as public bodies. The Destination North Wales workstream, led by Wrexham, aims to generate enquiries for all councils in the region, but the cross-border economy in this area can mean that it is better for them to share inquiries with Cheshire, than say Gwynedd, rather than lose the project, which can cause some political issues.

## **12. Sustainability**

Funding from the RCF finishes in March 2016. Councils are currently contributing around £30,000 each and in-kind contribution of around a day a week for each senior responsible officer that equates to an additional £250-300,000 a year. While it is likely that these contributions could continue in the future, without some matched funding, the EAB would have no capacity to deliver outputs at the same pace, reduce the probability of producing outcomes and existing staff would lose their jobs.

A draft business plan was agreed at a Board meeting in November 2015 to bid to Welsh Government for another three years of funding. The final plan will be submitted in February 2016. The Minister has been assured that they are not asking for more resource than they need to continue at the same pace. Funding would be used in two areas – to continue the workstreams and deliver the programme office approach. All interviewees were positive about the likely impact of the EAB is the business plan is funded. One argued that,

*'If three years of cash is provided, we will be able to prove we will be successful'. We will be able to deliver regardless of the relationship with Cardiff'.*

Such a positive response is expected given that the business plan will sustain some people in employment.

Interviewees reported that conversations with the Minister (Edwina Hart) are heartening and the Welsh Government seems supportive of the agenda. Meetings have also been held with Jane Hutt and with DFES regarding the skills workstream. There was some concern about the impact of the spending review and continuing

uncertainty about local government reorganisation. If the Government does approve the plan, it will be a strong indication of their confidence in the EAB to deliver for the region.

Members of the EAB believe that they are breaking down administrative boundaries and given the size of the potential investments in the region, that this is a once in a generation opportunity. The cost to Welsh Government (of less than £500,000) was described as being good value for money and insignificant compared to the cost of city regions. One interviewee explained that:

*'It's peanuts compared to South Wales'.*

But at this stage there is little evidence in terms of costs vs outcomes/efficiency savings.

The draft plan does not currently contain targets and measures. Given the discussion above about the lack of outcomes to date from RCF, it will be important to design measures that are meaningful and show how the funding has made a difference to the region. There needs to be a shared understanding of the outcomes at the outset, a plan to ensure that all partners have a role to play in taking the agenda forward and consistent monitoring of performance. One interviewee was adamant in stating that the project definition documents (which form part of the business plan) are not an end in themselves, but are only the start of the work.

Interviewees were clear that they have focused on collaborating where there is a clear purpose and activities that will add value e.g. developing an infrastructure plan. The Welsh Development Agency would have conducted some of these things at a regional level in the past but these strategic interventions have been lacking. There was said to be a vacuum in this area and the EAB are now working proactively to entice businesses to relocate in North Wales.

There was an acceptance that economic development services would be rationalised in the future as new structures are introduced. If the number of councils in North Wales reduces to two or three, it becomes easier to propose regional teams. Interviewees believed that there is still a role to be played regionally and that they are moving in the direction of a potential regional agency in the future. If the EAB is able to deliver outcomes, it will put itself in an excellent position to support the delivery of future transformational projects in North Wales.

### **13. Conclusions**

Economic development has been conducted in a fragmented way in the past which has been significantly improved in the last few years since the EAB was established. The lack of resource available for a non-statutory service has had a positive effect on encouraging a more joined-up way of improving services. The EAB has improved the exchange of information across councils, their lobbying activities and enhanced cross-sector working. There is, of course, room for improvement such as the extent of challenge/scrutiny and the assessment and achievement of outcomes using data from the North Wales Observatory which is under-utilised. Those involved in the EAB

believe that they are on the right path and there is a shared recognition that collaboration can deliver more than the sum of the parts.

It is important to recognise that the EAB has been designed from the bottom-up. It is a way of working that the various partners have developed rather than something imposed on them by the Welsh Government. This means that members have ownership of it and a personal stake in ensuring it delivers. This contrasts to the approach of some city regions and respondents felt that there is the potential for others to follow their lead. The commitment from partners has been backed-up by some resource, particularly in programme management, to co-ordinate activities and help to deliver across workstreams. Given the potential £20bn investment in the region, all interviewees highlighted the importance of having regional capacity to support and deliver transformational economic change. This would mean a properly resourced programme office rather than the recruitment of staff on short-term contracts.

While it has taken considerable time and effort to get to this point, the RCF has helped to put the foundations in place for further collaborative working. Councils continue to have different priorities so the aim is for all stakeholders to realise mutual benefits if the EAB is to deliver. For example, if the private sector sees a well-organised region with infrastructure, supply chains, and skills in place, this will be a factor in encouraging businesses to relocate to the area. Young people will benefit from being provided with the skills which will be needed to work in the region in the next 20 years. In addition, the Welsh Government can use the EAB as a vehicle to deliver their ambitions for the region's economy.

While the various workstreams are now embedded, there are still challenges ahead. The process of building trust has started but this will be tested when decisions have clear benefits for some councils with less 'trickle-down' for others. The collaborative arrangements have not yet led to the pooling or significant aligning of resources and it was suggested that:

*'We tend to be tinkering. Some councils do still have different views'.*

The possibility of local government reorganisation means that while it is a difficult time to be doing this, it is a necessity. The current situation where local and regional systems are duplicated needs to be streamlined to make it more efficient. The relationship with Welsh Government needs to be nurtured and improved through more joined-up working – staff currently have to deal with a number of different groups within Government (e.g. sector team, Business Wales etc.) Ultimately, the EAB needs to build upon the experiences to date to deliver promised outcomes and, if successful, to disseminate the learning from these to partners and the wider public in the region as well as to Welsh Government and other Welsh regions.



## **14. Interviewees**

- Steve Bayley - Head of Assets and Economic Development for Wrexham Council
- Clare Budden - Chief Officer Community and Enterprise for Flintshire Council
- Sasha Davies - Strategic Director Economy & Place for Conwy Council
- Glyn Jones - Chief Executive, Grwp Llanrillo Menai
- Iwan Prys Jones - Project Manager for the EAB
- Iwan Trefor Jones - Corporate Director for Gwynedd Council [Senior Project Lead for the EAB]
- Rebecca Maxwell - Corporate Director: Economy and Public Realm for Denbighshire Council
- Cllr. Dilwyn Roberts- Leader of Conwy Council [Chair of the EAB]
- Ashley Rogers - North Wales Business Council
- Iwan Thomas - Project Manager for the Skills Workstream
- Dylan Williams - Head of Economic and Community Regeneration for Anglesey Council
- Sioned Williams - Head of Economy & Community for Gwynedd Council