

April 2008

## **A collaborative city? A snapshot of current collaboration across the public sector in London**

### **1 Introduction**

This paper sketches a picture of current capacity for joint and strategic working across tiers of government and public services in London. It looks at the kinds of partnerships, networks and other mechanisms that exist, at perceptions of how well they are working and at attitudes to collaboration more generally.

The London Collaborative project is completing phase one (scenario development and identifying strategic challenges) and moving on to working with public sector leaders to explore specific challenges and to build strategic capacity. The information set out here has been brought together as a starting point for that endeavour. It does not form a comprehensive baseline, and a deeper understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of collaboration across London's public sector will emerge as the programme unfolds.

The paper addresses two main issues –

**Current pan-London, cross-boundary and cross sector work:** what types of collaborative arrangements are already in place, which issues are well covered, where are gaps evident?

**Experiences of, and attitudes to, collaboration:** how do public sector leaders rate current joint working arrangements, what are success factors and barriers, what is the appetite for more pan-London and cross sector working?

Implications for the next stages of the programme and proposals for extending our understanding are covered at the end of each section. Sources of information drawn on include –

- Desk-based mapping of partnerships, networks, joint work across London's public sector
- A survey of London local authority chief executives (November/December 2007)
- A survey of the London Leadership Network (March 2008)
- Discussion at workshops on future scenarios
- Feedback gathered at the London Collaborative launch event.

## 2 Current pan-London, cross-boundary and cross sector work

The complexity of London's governance and public sector structures is well known. It includes the shifting pattern of partnerships, networks, joint boards, working groups, professional and service-based boards and one-off co-operative efforts that are in place across boundaries of geography, organisation and sector.

We have started to map the structures and will keep adding to the picture. It is unlikely ever to be comprehensive. LSPs are not included although of course perceptions of the collaboration and partnership working often reflect experience at that local cross-sector level.

Commentary on the main kinds of partnership and preliminary conclusions are offered below.

**Sub-regional partnerships are a key level between borough and pan-London work, but they are not all regarded as equally effective**

Both the prominence of sub-regional partnerships and their perceived success varies substantially. The West London Alliance is seen as strong and by some as meeting the need for cross-boundary working more effectively and appropriately than pan-London work can.

South and North-London partnerships are somewhere in the middle, with more divergent perceptions, and East London is seen as having weaker sub-regional partnerships. It is not clear where the specific and high profile partnerships around the Thames Gateway and the Olympics are included in this assessment.

38 per cent of respondents in the leadership network survey said their sub-regional partnership works well, and 34 per cent said not well. 26 per cent did not know (the highest level of 'don't know' against a list of partnerships which might not be surprising given the strategic level at which they operate).

Some partnerships have sub-groups (eg West London Community Cohesion Partnership) and there are housing and regeneration partnerships at the sub-regional level as well (eg Central London Regeneration Partnership).

Sub-regional boundaries are fluid to an extent and do not always map onto key partner agencies eg LSCs, Jobcentre Plus which can create problems. Firm boundaries for sub-

regional partnerships are questioned by some who think a variable geometry is more desirable.

Identifying the right spatial level for collaborating and responding to strategic challenges – borough, sub-regional, ‘family’ groupings of boroughs, pan-London, wider south east and UK, international is key.

**Professional forums constitute important networks for individuals .They perform advisory, good practice and strategic roles**

Members of the leadership network identified their professional connections as the strongest, more so than links across other boroughs or sectors (see below).

London branches of professional organisations (from treasurers to chief executives, from communications professionals to planners) perform a diverse range of functions.. Some forums play active roles in relation to strategic issues, such as London ADASS which has, for example, championed the need to improve the connections between health and social care.

Exploring the roles these networks play now and their potential to contribute to meeting future challenges, to develop new thinking, to collaborate across professions could form a useful strand of work with the London Leadership Network.

**Partnerships in key policy and service areas bring GLA, boroughs and other sectors together and will need to be engaged in scoping any proposals for further collaboration in these areas**

These partnerships, including the London Community Safety Partnership, the London Health Commission, the new London Housing Board as well as the Biodiversity Partnership and the London member development network, work on strategies, co-ordination, exchange of good practice and/or specific projects, and in some cases have more statutory and formal roles.

This is a rapidly changing landscape, with new high level partnerships such as the London Skills and Employment Board appearing regularly, and more informal networks such as the London Scrutiny Network.

There are large numbers of organisations on waste, but the issue can still appear to be not fully owned anywhere. There is London Waste Action, the Association of London Cleansing Officers, the London Community Recycling Network (a charity), London Remade, the London Regional Technical Advisory Body on Waste, as well as the North

London Waste Authority and South London Waste Partnership (and probably others). At the same time, tensions between the GLA and boroughs remain. There is also divergence of views among chief executive as to whether this is an issue best left alone or one that needs 'sorting' strategically.

**There is a degree of consensus about 'good' partners and agencies that are harder to engage or work with productively**

The Metropolitan Police and borough commanders are seen as strong partners by local authorities, successfully combining the strategic pan-London role and local responsiveness and flexibility. There is still a desire for greater influence and democratic accountability.

Health is seen as a more problematic partner driven by national directives and looking up rather than out to boroughs or to local communities, although local relationships and collaboration on LAAs and specific programmes are often reported to be good. There are many voices in favour of improving the relationship with London SHA and some see a growing potential to achieve this.

Views from chief executives on these two major partners are borne out by the leadership network with 72 per cent rating crime and community safety partnership work in their borough as good, compared to 52 per cent for health partnerships.

Another key partner is government. There is uncertainty and some impatience as to whether GOL wants to offer support or simply pass on central directives. DWP and Jobcentre Plus are cited as not able to bring the flexibility and strategic capacity to the table that is needed to test new solutions for worklessness, the skills gap and changes to benefits dependency, although again there are examples of good local engagement.

The relationship with the GLA is shaped by political tensions with the Mayor (about growing powers, housing targets, planning, waste and central London focus) but there is a pragmatic view that there should be dialogue and that the relationship can be, and needs to be, improved.

**Knowledge and awareness of key pan-London organisations is patchy**

66 per cent of members of the leadership network say that they have good knowledge about the GLA but only 39 per cent say this about the LDA and about the MPS, and only 11 per cent know about the London Community Safety Partnership.

59 per cent have good knowledge of GOL and 43 per cent about Capital Ambition. As one would expect, professional networks like LEDNET or CELC are not very widely known.

### **What does this snapshot of key partnerships tell us?**

The diverse picture that emerges makes it hard to assess whether key strategic issues for London have a natural 'home' and to generalise about how fit-for-purpose partnerships are without more detailed analysis.

Issues for the London Collaborative to consider in the next stage of its work are mapped out below.

#### Evident gaps

- The model of the LSP as a 'partnership of partnerships' is not replicated at London level. There is no equivalent of a London LSP.
- While there may be no appetite for a London Strategic Partnership as such, the absence implies a lack of unified engagement of the third and business sectors, and no capture of citizen and customer voice or dialogue with Londoners across the public sector at this pan-London level.
- It is clear that most policy areas are covered by existing partnerships but the extent to which they address future issues and explore new way of dealing with problems is less clear.
- Intelligence, and analytic and research capacities are critical but there is no shared function. The GLA family is likely to hold the greatest amount of public sector data.
- Universities and other research institutes feature little in pan-London partnerships and LSPs for that matter.
- Specific challenges such as adaptive capacity or behaviour change identified by the programme are not currently a focus of partnerships.

#### Avoiding duplication in future collaborative work

- Not duplicating what is already in train is one of the criteria for selecting the four or five challenges the London Collaborative will work on.
- Once a theme, say gangs and youth crime, is chosen scoping needs to include further examination of what existing agencies and partnerships are already doing, and possibly engaging them to be part of the work. In the example, we would look at the London Youth Crime Prevention Board, at the collaboration of five boroughs in this area, and also at related partnership work on children and young people, community cohesion etc.

Dialogue about the appropriate spatial levels and issues for collaboration

- This too needs to feature in selecting and shaping themes for the London Collaborative and its programme
- Is there also a case for brokering a general discussion about this involving the GLA, boroughs, sub-regional partnerships and different sectors?
- There are divergent views on whether waste, shared services and housing targets are suitable areas for the London Collaborative, or collaboration generally. Should these areas be investigated further?

Learning from strong sub-regional and other joint work

- Should there be work on strengthening the sub-regional partnerships?
- Can success models be replicated?

Improving relationships between key players

- There may be some quick wins for collaboration across London if relationships with key partners such as DWP and health could be improved,
- Constructive engagement between boroughs and the Mayor in areas of common concern would also bring benefits.

### **3 Experiences of and attitudes to collaboration**

This section looks at current capacity for collaboration from the perspective of attitudes and perceptions. It is based on a telephone survey of local authority chief executives (all except two participated) and a questionnaire survey of the London Leadership Network. The network currently consists largely of some 220 senior council officers ranging from directors, ADs, ACEs to heads of service. Most boroughs, and most service areas and functions are represented.

61 responses were received and the small absolute numbers need to be borne in mind but they do represent the local government constituency the London Collaborative will work with. Much of the survey probed views on future challenges but questions on collaboration more generally were also included. Highlights are presented below, alongside findings from other sources.

### **There are positive but pragmatic views about collaboration**

Asked to pick statements reflecting their views from a list, the following emerged as the top three choices:

- Collaboration is hard to do but worth it for results (31 per cent)
- This kind of joint working/collaboration is becoming more necessary (27 per cent)
- This kind of joint/collaboration is a great idea (23 per cent)

Among more negative statements, 8 per cent chose 'collaboration is not necessarily the answer to our problems', and 4 per cent 'that it is often tried but mostly fails'.

### **Clear, shared objectives and good levels of trust and personal relationships are key**

Selecting up to three success factors for collaboration, the top choices were -

- Shared, common and clear objectives (28 per cent)
- Trust, confidence and personal relationships (26 per cent)
- Understanding that solutions have to be joint ones (11 per cent)

The potential for efficiency (8 per cent), sufficient time and long term relationships and organisations and managers expecting and rewarding it were next (both at 6%).

### **There is an appetite to work with others on solving problems**

Views on priority challenges are informing discussions on selecting programme themes. Here it is useful to note that most public sector leaders we have engaged with so far clearly see the need to tackle problems on a London-wide level and to look to the future.

This is not naïve support, and there are a some sceptics about attempts to collaborate at the pan-London rather than the sub-regional level (see above). More people supported an approach which identifies the right level for collaboration according to the issue.

'Most policy areas would benefit from cross London working – but services may have to be tailored to local needs.'

'...need a balance of joint working at local level, sub-regional and pan-London.'

'... should not lose out on opportunities for collaboration in smaller groups of boroughs, maybe look for like-for-like groupings ...'

Many people insisted that existing joint work be recognised but saw the need for more, or for different approaches.

‘... the best solutions come from people from a range of disciplines working together.’

‘Ability to achieve success only through extensive partnership working and shared services’.

Asked about leadership development preferences in the context of the London Collaborative, 93 per cent of the network said participating with colleagues from across London in scoping and finding solutions to future challenges would be a useful development activity.

85 per cent said ‘networking with a purpose, focused on challenges or themes’, and 75 per cent said ‘scenario sessions on different futures’ would be useful.

The leadership network survey shows a degree of variation in capacity to step outside the primary role and day-to-day concerns: some respondents chose strategic priorities largely from within their own service, policy and professional area, while others picked broader challenges (climate change, population churn) or other future-oriented issues (implications of web 2.0) without any obvious link to their roles.

Asked about barriers to collaboration or issues where a joint approach is not possible, most respondents identified things they clearly see as local such as place-shaping in the borough, community empowerment, social care (although each of these topics were also seen as areas for pan-London collaboration by others). Surprisingly, few areas were seen as off-limits. The key factor there is political constraints.

### **Space for thinking, shared intelligence, inspiration ... but not talking shops**

The following list emerges from answers to an open-ended question about the kind of leadership development that would equip them to face future challenges in the network survey and from other sources –

- Strategic thinking – including problem solving (see above)
- Space to think
- Pooling knowledge, shared intelligence, good ways to use data
- Change management
- Place shaping/interactive leadership
- Inspiration
- Learning from other sectors, cities and countries who have achieved success



- Challenging
- Thought leadership
- Learning to achieve things through fluid networks

A few direct quotes illustrate these points –

‘capacity to think beyond own council and area of expertise’

‘creating space to come together and develop skills to look beyond normal budget/planning cycles’

‘being equipped to deal with future challenges – demographic, social, economic trend information, examples of tackling issues from other major cities’

At least one chief executive explicitly also stated a need for time and space to think, and this was a strong theme in the scenario workshops as well.

At the same time, there is concern to avoid ‘talking shops’ which some see as an inherent danger of setting up new forums or partnership work in general. And of course there are real constraints on the time of senior public sector leaders.

Alongside support for joint problem solving and leadership development activity, there is also an appetite for more individual mentoring, peer activity, shadowing and networking backed up by secondments and exchanges between organisations and sectors among network members.

### **Implications for the next steps of the London Collaborative**

One conclusion from this snapshot is that there is already considerable strategic capacity

- going into the large number and wide range of current cross-borough partnerships and joint work
- evident in the level of understanding of the need to work together on future challenges and in the appetite for developing shared approaches to problem-solving and space to think.

This existing strategic capacity is clearly helping London’s public sector to respond to current challenges. But there is scope for it to be better deployed, and some resources may be untapped as yet.

The London Collaborative is developing a programme of leadership development to build on the findings, in particular about collaboration at the right spatial level, creating

space for thinking together and cooperation on solving real problems, and responding to a desire for new tools and challenging ideas.

This snapshot sits alongside a more conceptual paper on the kind of leadership that is needed for a collaborative city, which will also inform how we design the programme.

Defining what success looks like for the leadership programme will be important. For example: do we want a leadership network that is able to self-sustaining over time? Do we need to find ways to make collaboration across boundaries more natural? Are we looking for ownership of pan-London as part of the day job?

Stakeholders are invited to comment on the messages emerging from this snapshot and on the shape to be given to the development programme.

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