

Working Together Better Guide

Dumfries &

Galloway

Together is
Better

MAY 2012

Introduction

Individual staff working alone cannot deliver effective public services for the population of Dumfries and Galloway. We need to work together to ensure that we meet the needs of local people.

We need to make sure that when we work together we have chosen to do so because it is the best way to deliver our services. This guide is designed to help partnerships, new and current, to look at all the essential components and to help ensure that conditions are set for successful partnership working.

This “Working Together Better” Guide will ensure the preconditions for a successful group are in place from the beginning and ensure efficient and effective working practices.

Community Planning Executive Group

Gavin Stevenson
(Chair)

Working Together Better

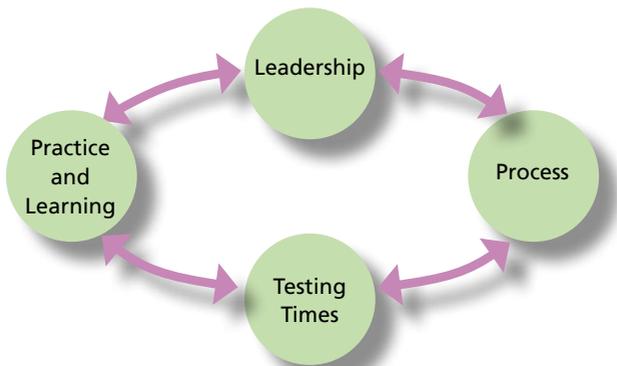
What do we mean by working together? We work together on a daily basis in many different ways, both formal and informal. This Guide will be useful for any group which involves:-

- The need to deliver a shared purpose
- A more formal way of working, i.e. generally through meetings of agreed members
- A purpose which will involve more than one or two meetings

How effectively are you working together?

Working together effectively takes time to achieve, and can be difficult and complex. Research completed locally¹, supported by literature², ³shows that the following components are essential for effective groups.

For groups that work there needs to be



Leadership - where members have a common purpose and harness their energies to achieve more than they could on their own.

Process - where members put in place necessary structures, processes and resources, to make and manage the changes needed.

Testing Times - where members are mutually accountable, share risks and rewards fairly and support each other through testing times.

Practice and Learning - where members continuously seek to improve a joint approach in order to meet the needs of service users.

- 1 McCreddie, S. (2003) Interagency Working - Rhetoric and reality, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow
- 2 Digging Deeper - Finding Answers, Smarter Partnerships. Local Government National Training Organisation
- 3 Hardy, B. et al, (2003) Assessing Strategic Partnership Office of Deputy Prime Minister, London.

How to Get the Best Out Of the “Working Together Better” Staff Guide

This Guide is in two sections - A Pre-Partnership Checklist and Partnership Evaluation Tool

The Checklist should be used when a new group is being considered. The Checklist is designed to help groups consider all the components and to ensure that the conditions are set, at the beginning, for successful working. It is intended to be used as a group exercise where all partners discuss and agree what needs to be done.

The Evaluation Tool can be used by individual members on their own but is intended as a group exercise where all the members complete it, either individually or together. The ratings are then collated and discussed together.

A sample action plan is included to capture the steps you agree to improve working together.

Facilitation

The piloting of the Guide demonstrated that external facilitation, particularly when using the evaluation tool, can be extremely helpful. External facilitation means using a facilitator who is not a member of the group. The external facilitator can be used in a number of ways, from producing a report on the responses to the evaluation tool to leading the whole process, depending on the wishes of the group. Using an external facilitator does allow all members to fully participate in the process on an equal footing and adds an objective dimension to the analysis of responses. Notes for facilitators will be available and external facilitation may be available on request.

Section One - Pre-Partnership Checklist

Based on four key components, this Checklist should be used by any group when it is being set up. It will help ensure that the foundations for effective working are in place.

This Checklist should be discussed and completed by all members.

1. Leadership	Y	N	Action needed
1.1 Is there a common purpose for the group, i.e. what is the purpose of the partnership and what is the difference it is trying to make? Is it written down and agreed?			
1.2 Have the members articulated what the group can deliver which cannot be delivered working individually. i.e what is the collaborative advantage? Is it written down and agreed?			
1.3 Are all members committed to the group purpose and prepared to make changes to deliver it?			
2. Process	Y	N	Action needed
2.1 Is there an agreed group structure and written agreement?			
2.2 Are the roles, responsibilities and contributions of all members clear and agreed? Is the role and authority of the Chair clear and agreed?			
2.3 Are there any objectives, targets or milestones yet or is there a clear agreed process for drawing these up?			
2.4 Is the group going to use a project management approach?			

3. Testing Times	Y	N	Action needed
3.1 Is it clear that there is mutual accountability for successes and failures and is there an agreed process for this?			
3.2 Is there a clear communication plan - is it written down and agreed?			
3.3 Have there been discussions about behaviour and values and dealing with conflict within the group?			
3.4 Does the group structure and agreement make sure that there is an equal say in decision making?			
4. Practice and Learning	Y	N	Action needed
4.1 Are the outcomes for the group clear and agreed?			
4.2 Is evaluation and review of outcomes built into the structure and does this involve all stakeholders?			
4.3 Has a regular monitoring and review process for the group been agreed?			
4.4 Has any time been allocated for sharing of skills and knowledge within the partnership?			

If action is needed reference to pages 8 and 9 of the Guide may help.

The outcomes from completing this Checklist should form the basis of a group agreement.

Section Two - Partnership Evaluation Tool

The four key components of effective group working are set out below. Read the benchmark statements and rate your group by ticking the appropriate box.

1 = Strongly Agree, 6 = Strongly Disagree

1. Leadership Benchmark	1	2	3	4	5	6
1.1 Members share and agree a common purpose of the difference they want to make and the direction to take.						
1.2 Members focus on the group's added value; how they can demonstrate collaborative advantage.						
1.3 Members are willing to make changes to achieve shared goals.						
1.4 Members facilitate group working and engender support within their own organisations or interest grouping.						
1.5 Member objectives are aligned in a common direction.						
1.6 Members are clear about the demonstrable benefits for its customers.						
2. Process Benchmark	1	2	3	4	5	6
2.1 The group structure fits its purpose.						
2.2 Roles, responsibilities and contributions of all members are clearly defined and accepted.						
2.3 Objectives, targets and milestones are set and owned by those responsible.						
2.4 Adequate resources are devoted to achieving shared goals.						
2.5 Members use appropriate methods for project management and co-ordination.						
2.6 The lines of accountability for quality of service are clear for all members and customers.						

3. Testing Times Benchmark	1	2	3	4	5	6
3.1 Members are mutually accountable for their contributions, sharing responsibility for the success of the partnership.						
3.2 Members understand and respect differences amongst members.						
3.3 Members behave openly and deal with conflict and frustration promptly.						
3.4 Communications are sufficient and effective.						
3.5 Members ensure that there is fair sharing of contributions, risks and rewards amongst members.						
3.6 Everyone has an equal say in decision making.						
4. Practice and Learning Benchmark	1	2	3	4	5	6
4.1 The group continuously seek improvements in activities and ways of working.						
4.2 Members maintain a focus on outcomes and the needs of the area/communities/service users.						
4.3 The group regularly reviews its vision and achievements including collaborative advantage and reduced unnecessary contact for customers.						
4.4 Members seek to learn from each other and from experience elsewhere.						
4.5 Members recognise and use strengths and talents within the group.						
4.6 Members manage the changes needed for improvements to be made.						
4.7 The group uses evidence to identify customer needs and priorities.						
4.8 Members promptly share information across the group whenever appropriate.						

Working Together Better - some useful prompts for the Evaluation Tool

1. Leadership - direction of travel

- 1.1 Is the common purpose written down and signed up to?
Does everyone have a copy?
How often is it referred to?
If new members join the group how are their views and agreement with this sought?
- 1.2 Is the group clear about what it is doing and why it is working together?
Have you clearly expressed what you can achieve together which you cannot achieve alone?
Is this written down somewhere?
- 1.3 Can you think of examples when changes have been made by members to facilitate the aims of the group?
- 1.4 Are you reporting back regularly to your own parent organisations to sell the benefits of the group?
How are you doing this - speaking to staff, copying minutes, having meetings?
- 1.5 Are you aware of the objectives/needs of other members?
Do you all stand to gain something out of this both individually and collectively
Are you all working in the same direction?

2. Process Benchmark - explicit systems and structures

2.1 Are the right people members of the group and how did you agree on membership?

Does the group have a communication strategy/policy?

2.2 Are roles and responsibilities clearly written down and understood by everyone?

How does a new member learn about such processes?

2.3 Is there a written action plan with targets and timeframes?

Is everyone aware of it and is it updated regularly?

2.4 Is the division of responsibility and resources acknowledged and accepted by all members? (money and/or time)

Is the commitment to the group explicit?

Is any of this written down and formally agreed?

2.5 Do you have a project management system or a business plan or action plan with a process?

3. Testing Times - when things are a bit difficult

3.1 Is there a blame culture?

Is the credit for achievements shared equally or is no one seeking to take all the credit?

3.2 Are you good at respecting differences?

Is there enough honesty to say when there is a difference of opinion?

3.3 Can you think of an example of when conflict arose, and if so, how did the group deal with it?

Is there honesty about when disagreements/conflict arises?

Would you feel comfortable to disagree within the partnership?

3.4 Does everyone feel listened to and heard?

Is someone giving more than others?

3.5 Does everyone contribute the same or at least according to ability to do so?

Does everyone benefit equally ?

3.6 Are decisions made on a fair basis?

Is any inequality acknowledged, recognised and dealt with?

4. Practice and Learning Benchmark - evolving not being static

- 4.1 Are you standing still or moving forward in the agreed direction of travel?
Are you innovative in how you work together or is keeping things the same important?
- 4.2 Do you have agreed group outcomes, if so, are they the main focus for activity?
- 4.3 How often do you stop and ask whether you are being effective?
Does the group have a projected lifespan and how do you make decisions about the need to make changes?
- 4.4 Do you look outwith the group and Dumfries and Galloway for ideas?
Do you make the time to consider other ideas?
- 4.5 Do you seek to identify each other's strengths and talents and use them to best advantage?
Are you aware of what they are?
- 4.6 When did the group last agree to change and how was this managed?
Would you say that you are a reactive or proactive group?
Can you think of a time when the group has adapted its structure or processes?

The Evaluation Tool has been designed locally and reflects good practice when working together in groups.

You've done the assessment, now what?

Action Planning

What does the assessment tell you?

Is there broad consensus or are there differences in how members have scored the different sections?

How significant are the high and low score findings?

What consultation do you need/want to do next?

What personal action can you take to improve how the group operates?

Members need to examine areas of common and differing views about the group's strengths and weaknesses to determine if further action is required to improve how the group works.

If the score could be improved on (look at where your responses rated below 2) what actions and decisions do you collectively need to take:

What do you need to do now?

Which benchmarks do you need to target first?

How do you record actions?

How do you review what progress you have made?

Who can help you?

Would a group agreement be useful?

Here is a template to capture your actions and translate them into SMART (Specific, Measurable, Agreed, Realistic, Time bound) objectives for the group.

Key Development Action	Measure of Achievement	When By	Lead Person

Examples of possible actions you might want to take around each of the four components are set out below, to help focus on practical actions.

Leadership - Possible Actions You Might Take

- ✓ Clarify, agree and articulate the collaborative advantage.
- ✓ Develop common understanding of needs and opportunities through enquiry, clarification and engagement.
- ✓ Define success measures/tangible outcomes.
- ✓ Check the impact and relevance of decisions made in the group on other areas of their organisation (direct and indirect).
- ✓ Reflect on ways of working - covering behaviours and practices.
- ✓ Promote wider understanding of the purpose and benefits of the group.
- ✓ Provide incentives for staff involved in working together by:
 - Renegotiating their workload
 - Giving recognition to individuals for the particular knowledge and skills they have
- ✓ Clarify the level of authority individuals have to commit to decisions that are needed to deliver the required results.
- ✓ Ensure that individual members are clear why they are there and what their commitment is to the group.

Process - Possible Actions You Might Take

- ✓ Ensure that structures encourage individual members to work across boundaries.
- ✓ Have in place mechanisms and structures that deal with strategy, reviews and system issues.
- ✓ Explicitly recognise that members need to maintain a commitment to the agreement, even when it is hard.
- ✓ Pursue joint bids, lobbying and approaches for sponsorship - involve new members.
- ✓ Ensure high level strategic agreement is in place, where necessary.
- ✓ Develop common approaches to project management across all organisations.
- ✓ Ensure effective communication strategies are in place.

Testing Times - Possible Actions You Might Take

- ✓ Keep the vision in front of you at all times to guide actions.
- ✓ Organise regular reporting and review sessions.
- ✓ Look for ways to reveal people's personal qualities.
- ✓ Clarify mutual expectations and required standards so that you can hold yourself to account and be held to account by others.
- ✓ Clarify expectations around communications.
- ✓ Have personal integrity around communications (e.g. confidential, mutual trust and respect).
- ✓ Help other members achieve their own objectives through the group.
- ✓ Seek 'win-win' solutions.
- ✓ Create conditions for all members to contribute to the best of their ability by listening and enabling others to contribute.
- ✓ Review procedures for consultations, agenda setting and decision making.

Practice and Learning - Possible Actions You Might Take

- ✓ Promote, support and evaluate pilot projects.
- ✓ Provide opportunities for all stakeholders to be involved in planning and evaluating service delivery.
- ✓ Set baselines for assessing progress.
- ✓ Create clear reporting structures and timescales.
- ✓ Create opportunities to learn together.
- ✓ Encourage experimentation.
- ✓ Recruit individuals to task groups according to the contribution they can make as team members.
- ✓ Ensure that there are sufficient skills within the group to effectively engage all stakeholders.
- ✓ Celebrate what has been achieved.
- ✓ Help members develop effective change management skills.

Useful Publications

The following publications may be of use to you if you want to explore partnership working.

McCreadie, S. (2003) *Inter-agency Working - Rhetoric and Reality*, University of Strathclyde. Glasgow

Digging Deeper - Finding Answers, Smarter Partnerships. Local Government National Training Organisation

Francis, D. *Partnerships with People - A Practical Guide*. DTI Publications

Hardy, B. et al, (2003) *Assessing Strategic Partnership* Office of Deputy Prime Minister, London.

Audit Scotland - *Effective Partnerships*

Working Together Better - Officer Challenge

Public Service Improvement Framework: Partners and Other Resources

**If you would like some help understanding this or
need it in another format please contact
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