

Review of Anglesey and Gwynedd Local Service Board

Gwynedd Council and the Isle of Anglesey County Council

Audit year: 2014-15

Issued: April 2015

Document reference: 286A2015

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Summary report

Introduction

1. Public sector organisations have, for several years, come together to form Local Service Boards (LSBs) in an attempt to co-ordinate and deliver benefits for citizens through strengthening joint working across all public services in Wales. Anglesey and Gwynedd's joint LSB was established in April 2013 through the merger of the previous two LSBs.
2. A range of partners from the public, third, and independent sectors and academia are represented on the LSB Executive Group as shown in Exhibit 1.

Exhibit 1

Anglesey and Gwynedd Joint Local Service Board Executive Membership

Member	Sector
Grŵp Cynefin	Independent – Housing Association
North Wales Police	Public
Office of the North Wales Police and Crime Commissioner	Public
North Wales Fire and Rescue Service	Public
Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board	Public
Bangor University	Higher Education
Grŵp Llandrillo Menai	Further Education
Medrwn Môn	Independent agency providing support and advice to voluntary organisations and community groups in Anglesey
Mantell Gwynedd	County Voluntary Council promoting and supporting the third sector in Gwynedd
One Voice Wales	Representing Community and Town Councils in Wales
Snowdonia National Park Authority	Public
Probation Wales	Regional Public
The Isle of Anglesey County Council	Public
Gwynedd Council	Public
Welsh Government	Regional Public

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3. Collectively, these organisations provide a wide range of public services across Anglesey and Gwynedd, whilst some cover the whole of North Wales and wider. By bringing senior managers from these organisations together, the LSB provides better opportunities for partners to understand each other's agendas, to encourage collaboration and to add value to the work programmes of individual organisations.
 4. Although LSBs have been in place for several years, partnership working is frequently underdeveloped in the public sector. Partners often meet regularly to share information but few partnerships have a clear focus on jointly delivering improved outcomes. In 2012, the Welsh Government published guidance on integrating partnerships and plans¹, which noted that '*...to make a difference partnership must mean working together not just talking together. Its focus must be on a shared agenda of better outcomes, placing the emphasis on priorities, pace and performance.*' The guidance also identified local authorities as having a clear leadership role in supporting LSBs.
 5. The Auditor General has commenced a four-year cycle of corporate assessments that began in 2013-14. The corporate assessments include a theme specifically examining the effectiveness of partnerships and collaboration. The Isle of Anglesey County Council's corporate assessment concluded in April 2015, while the arrangements for Gwynedd Council's corporate assessment are yet to be announced. The findings of this review will feed into both councils' 2015 Annual Improvement Reports.
 6. This review is therefore important in assessing the progress of the LSB as an aspect of both councils' compliance with Part 1 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009. The review covered the LSB's:
 - work to date; and
 - its progress in re-establishing its vision, strategic direction and priorities and the likely effectiveness of its arrangements to secure improved outcomes for the residents of Gwynedd and the Isle of Anglesey.
 7. Between December 2014 and March 2015, we interviewed Council officers and Members from both councils, LSB partners and staff from the joint Partnership Unit. We also observed Council scrutiny and LSB meetings, examined minutes from previous LSB meetings and supporting documents. Our review focused on whether the Anglesey and Gwynedd LSB is working effectively to deliver improved outcomes for local people.
 8. We found that, **after a slow start, the Local Service Board has clarified its focus and is improving its governance but the pace of recent progress needs to be maintained.**
 9. We reached this conclusion because:
 - progress within the LSB was initially slow because of a lack of co-ordination and a focus on operational details at the expense of key strategic issues; and
 - a detailed review has resulted in improved commitment from all partners, ambitious objectives and more streamlined governance arrangements but important risks to the LSB's momentum remain.

¹ *Shared Purpose – Shared Delivery*, Welsh Government: June 2012.
<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/improvingservices/publicationsevents/publications/sharedpurpdel/?lang=en>

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10. The LSB is aware of the need to strengthen some of its arrangements and has plans for doing so. The proposals for improvement arising from our review are intended to complement or reinforce the improvement actions that are already underway or in development.

Proposals for improvement

Proposals for improvement

- P1 Ensure there is sufficient continuity in the partnership to maintain and support collaborative arrangements in the event that the LSB executive membership changes.
- P2 Review the Single Integrated Plan to incorporate the LSB's new priorities and specifically:
- clearly identify individual partners' contributions and shared accountability to priorities and work streams;
 - provide useful links, signposting partners' shared outcomes and corporate plans, which could include website hyperlinks; and
 - provide information on the ways the public and stakeholders can engage with the LSB on shaping future priorities.
- P3 Provide up-to-date and clearly signposted website access to the work and progress of the LSB on both Council websites, or through a dedicated partnership website.

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Detailed report

After a slow start, the Local Service Board has clarified its focus and is improving its governance but the pace of recent progress needs to be maintained

Progress within the Local Service Board was initially slow because of a lack of co-ordination and a focus on operational details at the expense of key strategic issues

11. A joint LSB was established in April 2013, following the merger of the two formerly separate LSBs in Gwynedd and Anglesey. Changes to the structure resulted in the development of a single Partnership Unit responsible for co-ordinating the LSB's activity across both counties, with Gwynedd Council hosting the arrangement. The restructured LSB offered new opportunities for partners to work more effectively together across two council areas, whilst halving the number of meetings for regional partners, such as Police, Health, Fire and Probation services.
12. However, difficulties encountered during the initial arrangements of the newly formed LSB resulted in slower progress than was anticipated. Weaknesses in the co-ordination and management of the LSB led to some partners believing its focus was too narrowly based on low-level and operational issues, instead of concentrating on strategic concerns. This subsequently led to a number of partners feeling detached from the LSB's objectives, resulting in lower attendances at formal meetings. The situation deteriorated, with some partners delegating responsibility to less senior staff, which weakened decision-making and was impeding the LSB's progress.
13. Both councils and partners recognised the situation was not sustainable and significant change was required for the LSB to make progress and promote better collaboration opportunities amongst partners. A pause-and-review stage followed, including the appointment of a new Partnership Manager to co-ordinate the LSB, help produce a joint Single Integrated Plan for both Gwynedd and Anglesey, and collectively agree new priorities for the LSB.

A detailed review has resulted in improved commitment from all partners, ambitious objectives and more streamlined governance arrangements but important risks to the Local Service Board's momentum remain

14. In early 2014, during the 'pause-and-review' stage, the LSB made a number of important decisions including:
- developing a new ambition with greater focus on bridging the funding gap in public services;
 - identifying an appropriate balance between effective demand management and spending in the short term, and effective multi-agency interventions and impact on service demands in the medium to long term;
 - developing a small number of key priorities for delivery over the next two years; and
 - reviewing partnership structures and the LSB's governance arrangements.
15. During the early stages of the joint LSB, regular liaison between partners was inconsistent, other than discussions at formal meetings at which limited progress was made. However, following the new arrangements, the Partnership Manager set up regular bilateral meetings with individual LSB members to provide support on the next steps of redeveloping its new vision and priorities. This simple, but effective initiative was welcomed by partnership members, promoting better communication, greater trust, commitment and buy-in. Subsequently, attendances at LSB meetings improved and individuals who had greater influence within their own organisations represented partners.
16. To assist the LSB in developing its new priorities and work streams, an independent consultancy and facilitator were engaged and a *Systems Thinking*² approach was adopted to develop the work programme. An LSB summit was subsequently held in June 2014, helping to shape the partnership's future ambition and vision. During our review, the majority of LSB partners agreed that the pause-and-review stage had been necessary in order to reconsider the partnership's vision, while the summit had promoted a better understanding of each partner's priorities and cultures, creating a common platform which the LSB could more effectively work towards.
17. Further progress was made during the following months, including the publication of the joint Single Integrated Plan (the Plan), '*Strengthening our communities in Anglesey and Gwynedd (2013-2017)*' in August 2014. Afterwards, the LSB agreed three new priorities which are clearer, simpler and were developed in conjunction with, and are complementary to, both councils and their partners. The priorities are:
- Older people
 - Sustainable communities
 - Build resilient families

² Systems Thinking is an approach for developing models to promote understanding of events, patterns of behaviour resulting in the events, and the underlying structure responsible for the patterns of behaviour.

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18. By November 2014, further developments included the appointment of a new LSB Chairperson and the introduction of new operating principles agreed by all partners. The Chairperson represents an independent organisation, bringing knowledge of a number of issues which tie into the LSB's new priorities, such as housing, social and economic issues. We believe that the appointment of an independent chair demonstrates the councils' and partners' intent to work with and use the skills of other sectors.
19. Progress within the LSB is reported separately to both councils' scrutiny committees and the LSB Executive. Although not an ideal arrangement, the councils and partners recognised the need to modernise the LSB's governance arrangements. A multi-partner task and finish group was formed to help develop an option appraisal of three scrutiny models, evaluating their strengths and weaknesses, while considering the impact of potential changes in local government. Following the option appraisal process, the LSB agreed a single governance and scrutiny model (Gwynedd and Anglesey LSB Scrutiny Panel) in January 2015. The scrutiny arrangements have yet to be finalised, but will include members from both councils, the public and third sectors, and co-opted members. We believe the model is representative of, and brings external expertise and knowledge from, a range of partners. The model takes account of good practice and has attracted interest from the Welsh Government and neighbouring LSBs. Three workstreams for delivery of the priorities were agreed, with individual LSB members taking responsibility for oversight and progress as an interim measure. The LSB has subsequently engaged the Centre for Public Scrutiny³ to provide input and support as the governance and workstream arrangements develop and embed.
20. More recently, the LSB held two *Systems Thinking* workshops, where partners commenced developing the workstreams to support and contribute to the new priorities. In addition, the LSB Chairperson and partners are networking more closely with regional partners and other LSBs across North Wales to identify shared issues to help realign common priorities.
21. The pause and review stage was practical, as well as necessary, as it provided the opportunity to reshape the LSB's priorities, generate greater commitment and change the way it operates. Consequently, both councils, partners and LSB are better placed than before to contribute towards more effective partnership working. Examples include:
- considering the early implications of the Future Generations Bill⁴ and potential local government reorganisation;
 - focusing on solutions to break the cycle of behaviours and patterns of some individuals and communities, which can cause greater demand and fragility across partners' services; and

³ The Centre for Public Scrutiny is a registered charity to promote public scrutiny, accountability, transparency and involvement for the public benefit.

⁴ The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Bill.

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- the importance of the involvement of a range of partners, such as Snowdonia National Park, Medrwn Môn, Mantell Gwynedd and Bangor University, which can support and provide valuable input to address the new priorities whilst alleviating pressure on mainstream public services.
- 22.** The LSB has planned its forward work programme from April 2015 to March 2016, which includes:
- an annual review of the LSB and Single Integrated Plan;
 - approval of the key priority workstreams;
 - introduction of an LSB development programme; and
 - finalising the LSB structure and governance arrangements.
- 23.** However, there are a number of issues that need attention to ensure that the LSB's momentum is maintained. As mentioned earlier in our report, the Single Integrated Plan was published prior to the LSB developing its new priorities. However, the Plan needs to reflect the most recent position, including individual partners' contributions and shared accountability for the new priorities and work streams. The Plan should also include more detailed information on the way the public and stakeholders will be engaged. Progress of the LSB should also be more clearly signposted through the councils' and partners' websites, or by means of a dedicated website, as up-to-date information is not presently available online.
- 24.** Both councils and partners have collectively worked hard to improve their partnership arrangements, developing shared priorities and a clearer leadership role. Difficulties experienced during the early stages of the LSB were addressed, resulting in greater commitment, and buy-in from partners but it is too early to measure any significant contribution or benefits to the public. The new arrangements have the potential to deliver improved outcomes for the public, but there are some risks, which must be managed appropriately in order to maintain the LSB's momentum. The recently-announced retirements and departures of a number of Executive Board members and the Partnership Manager throw resilience and capacity into sharp focus and present a risk to the LSB achieving its aims. The partnership therefore needs to ensure continuity amongst its members and maintain the pace of change in order to achieve sustainable progress, while demonstrating value for money and contributing benefits for the public.

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