



a good beginning
for Australia's children

A 'Sure Start' to Collaboration

- UK Perspective

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Introduction

This paper provides notes to the key note speech outlining the lessons to be learned around collaboration of early years provision. Delivered by Jayne Meyer Tucker, National Director of *Good Beginnings Australia*, one of Australia’s most successful organisations of collaborative working in early years provision. Prior to this appointment Jayne directed a Sure Start Local Program in Kent, based in the south east region of the UK. The presentation and paper reflects upon her experience of the introduction of the UK’s Children’s Trust agenda and mainstreaming of Sure Start early years provision into core services across all sectors. A Sure Start to collaboration – UK perspective reflects on the ‘Local Area Agreement’ agenda to improve both the effectiveness and the efficiency of the way in which government works with local authorities and their delivery partners to improve public services for all ages.

Local Area Agreement

The Local Area Agreement (LAA) Prospectus was published by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) on 27 July 2004. The Government set out the key aim of LAAs, to improve both the effectiveness and the efficiency of the way in which central government worked with local authorities, and their delivery partners, to improve public services. During December 2004 the first in a series of advice notes was prepared in partnership with the pilot LAAs, Local Government Association (LGA), Government Offices (GO) and other government departments. This advice included details as to what the links were with other initiatives such as 2nd Generation Local Public Service Agreements (PSA), Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) and Rural Pathfinders.

The initial advice note focused on the length of the agreement and highlighted that the negotiations were to be set within a three year target. It was envisioned that this approach provided an option for annual reviews that would reflect both local and national priorities. This would also enable an authority’s local PSA to be taken into account within the LAA. Three blocks ‘Children and young people’, ‘Safer and stronger communities’, ‘Healthier communities and older people’, were all identified by Government as being key to sustainable development. This further strengthened the need for authorities and their partners to promote synergies to reflect a sustainable community in their locality.

Partnerships, roles and responsibilities

The LAA prospectus is best described as central government’s commitment to local flexibilities incorporating an acceptance that ‘one size’ does not ‘fit all’. It was clearly identified in the Prospectus that LAAs should be taken forward by local authorities in line with Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP). Like all LSP work the engagement of all sector partners was a pre-requisite to a functioning agreement. The specific arrangements of how all the appropriate partners were to be involved in the negotiations was determined at a regional level through the regional GO.

The preference was to build on existing partnerships although in some cases the pilot LAA process would offer an opportunity to review current arrangements and for local partners to develop new arrangements where necessary. One of the new arrangements was through the establishment of the Local Public Service Board (LPSB) approach which was an option for those authorities deemed excellent through Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA). It was a requisite of the LAA to include a statement of the involvement of the voluntary and community sector in the design and delivery of the agreement and how this builds on the infrastructure or capacity building of services. It was also recognized that ‘Local compacts’

would be set up and form the basis of the partnerships relationship with the community and voluntary sector.

Local Authorities and Local Strategic Partnerships

It was recognized within the advice note of December 2004 that for two tier authorities, arrangements would be more complicated due to the number of LSPs and community strategies. It was equally recognized that this presented an opportunity to improve relationships between county and district councils and that the pilot areas would have to work hard to identify shared priority outcomes. This was proposed to be achieved through setting out in the agreements the particular contribution from each partner to be made to the agreed outcomes and what funding they would receive.

The freedom to achieve agreed outcomes through the pooling of the various funding streams offered local areas considerable freedom and flexibility. In the initial submission pilot LAAs were encouraged to identify any statutory and/or administrative obstacles that if removed could have significant impact on the delivery of services. Although these were raised with GOs and relevant Departments any requests to changes within primary legislation would nearly always take a significant period of time. Local Development Frameworks (LDF) were established to be the link between community strategies and legislation. Kent was one of the pilot LAA areas and as it is a large two tier authority with twelve borough/district councils, this whole process was both challenging and complex. The LAA is known in Kent as the Kent Agreement and is presented in a ‘Vision for Kent’ document that is also inclusive of the three blocks:

1. Children and Young People
2. Safer and Stronger Communities
3. Healthier Communities and Older People

The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) clearly linked the future of the Local Sure Start programmes (LSSP’s) to the LAA via the Children’s Trust route. By April 2006 all LSSP’s were planned to be mainstreamed into Children Centres and their funding accountability was changed to be centrally managed through the local authority. A key essence of the LAA was that it provided a single platform for initiative funding via a collective funding route through the local authority. The Children Act 2004 also required local authorities to take the lead in developing a Multi Agency Children and Young Persons Plan (CYPP). Kent agreed with its partners that it would be a useful process to help in implementing the Children Act and the Children and Young People outcomes of the LAA.

Kent Children and Young Peoples Plan

The Kent CYPP was structured around the five outcomes of the Every Child Matters (ECM) framework with additional sections on Looked After Children and Children with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities. It also reflected the ‘Vision for Kent’ and incorporated the key outcomes from the Children and Young People’s block of the LAA. The Kent CYPP consisted of a cross cutting section that outlines the following:

1. Build on strategies and local processes for mapping needs for services against provision, assessing Value For Money and evaluating effectiveness, to sustain preventative and early intervention initiatives that are effective and enable better commissioning of services
2. Improve joint working between services and agencies to achieve the best outcomes for Children and Young People

Outcomes Framework

The LAA was extremely clear on its definitions between outcomes, indicators and targets:

Outcomes: objectives high level statements of intent
Indicators: what is measured to demonstrate progress against outcomes
Targets: the numbers attached to indicators

The purpose of the Outcomes Framework was to establish a clear understanding between the local area and central government. Clarity to this understanding was believed to be the key to enabling local authorities and their partners to deliver national outcomes in a way that reflected local priorities as identified in the community strategy. In balancing this central and local continuum a limited number of high level outcomes were outlined as mandatory and had to be drawn from national PSA Targets. Consequently some of the funding streams were linked to mandatory indicators and likewise some of the indicators were linked to mandatory targets. Sure Start became one of the mandatory outcomes, indicators and targets and Kent proceeded to agree these at a county level whilst consulting with each borough/district through a District Children and Young People Strategic Plan.

Dover District – Children’s Trust Like arrangement

At a Dover District level the SSLP Delivery Plan was used as the ‘co-ordination tool’ to link the Kent CYPP and a Dover District Children and Young People Strategic Plan. The program of change was also linked to the Children’s Trust agenda and primarily sat across the District Cluster arrangements and District Children’s Consortium. The purpose of the two arrangements in Dover district were historic as both had aims to develop dynamic learning communities, promote partnership working, raise achievement, improve standards and to meet the needs of children and young people. Clusters were based on the concept of shared responsibility for young people and their communities. The District Children’s Consortium in Dover represented the vehicle of change and was charged with both commissioning and planning preventative services for Children and Young people living in the Dover District.

Summary

The four ways in achieving interagency agency collaboration explored in this presentation and paper are based on Sure Start experiences during the implementation of the LAA in Kent. These experiences could be identified at all levels - between central and local government, local government and district councils, district councils and community partners. The need for an **outcome driver** role stems from the importance of needing clear lines of accountability and governance. During such negotiations the role of a **critical friend** was imperative for joint planning and commissioning. At many stages the role of **broker** needed to be played to ensure joint working was maintained. Finally the **platform** became the end framework to enable an integrated team or concept to be based upon. In being mindful of these four ways some major changes occurred in Kent. When considering interagency collaboration experience from Sure Start it is important to consider the broader changes and involvement that occurred across all UK sectors.