

Public Social Partnership in Scotland: A report on lessons learned



Executive summary

Public Social Partnership (PSP) is a new approach to public service delivery. Public Social Partnership has as its foundation a co-planning approach, where partners from the public sector and the social economy sector share equal responsibility for service design to maximise outcomes for service users.

The Scottish Executive has recognised the valuable role that social enterprises and voluntary organisations play in the delivery of public services. Particularly the potential for added value they provide through their proven ability to innovate and their experience in working with particular client groups.

There are, however, a number of factors which have the potential to limit the effectiveness of Public Social Partnership as an approach. These may act as barriers to social enterprises and voluntary organisations seeking to work with the public sector to deliver services.

With the ongoing development of Community Planning in Scotland the EQUAL Social Economy Scotland Development Partnership (DP) sought to pilot three initiatives to test public social partnership. The approach adopted by the DP was influenced by development work in PSP and co-planning from other European countries, particularly Italy.

The Pilots

Across all three projects, participants from both sectors sought to work in partnership to design the services (known as the co-planning approach) and (with the exception of the third project) organisations within the social economy sector were able to identify and develop partnerships (social economy consortia) capable of competing for and delivering the service. This has also provided the opportunity to consolidate existing services into a more manageable, user focused package.

North Lanarkshire

Homereach is a consortium of voluntary organisations and social enterprises which is collaborating with North Lanarkshire Council in a pilot PSP project to design and develop a service that will deliver furniture packs to disadvantaged individuals and families living in North Lanarkshire and to secure and store furniture left behind following on from failed tenancies.

Renfrewshire

Reaching Older People Across Renfrewshire (ROAR) is a consortium of voluntary organisations which is participating in a pilot PSP project involving Renfrewshire Council and NHS Greater Glasgow to design and develop new

social care services for elderly people living in Renfrewshire, that will reduce the need for high dependency services.

Edinburgh

Work to establish an Edinburgh Employability Consortium (EEC) which would bring together a range of organisations presently working across Edinburgh to provide employability support to hard to reach client groups, was not successful. As a consequence, work is underway to consider alternative pilot opportunities which might see a third pilot PSP project emerge towards the end of 2007.

Lessons Learned

A key aim of this report is to draw lessons from the processes involved in these pilots. Although the experience of participants varies from pilot to pilot six common lessons can be identified. These lessons are likely to have implications for any roll out of Public Social Partnership activity across Scotland.

Problem definition and solution

The overarching message to come out of the evaluation is that participants of PSP within both sectors must buy in to a shared problem definition and a shared solution.

In the case of the North Lanarkshire pilot, the local authority recognised that a need exists for an efficient furniture service. The three voluntary organisations involved in the consortium presented a solution to this problem and identified a way in which they might be able to deliver added value to the public sector. In contrast, one of the key challenges for the Edinburgh project has been the lack of a clearly defined problem and ownership of that problem with potential partners from both sectors being unclear as to what exactly they were buying into.

Culture change

Whilst both the public and social sectors have responded positively to the idea of PSP it is apparent that there is still a need for culture change on both sides. The co-planning approach requires both sectors to be equal in the partnership and there have been times within all three pilots where the importance of this and the time it takes to make this happen has been underestimated. Both sectors also need to have a clear and shared understanding of the required outcomes from the process.

Part of this involves the sharing of information and establishing processes that allow for joint service design. This was one of the barriers identified in North

Lanarkshire where the service design and steering groups were not meeting and sharing information on a regular basis.

This culture change also needs to extend to attitudes towards funding and resources with the public sector needing to adopt an “invest to save” approach and the social sector needing to focus on “invest to gain”.

Scale and scope

The issue associated with scale and scope exists at two different levels. Part of the problem with respect to the Edinburgh project was that the scale of the PSP was very large as the scope was too wide ranging (because the problem had not been clearly defined). As a consequence, no parameters were established. This meant that the consortium would have to include a number of social enterprises and voluntary organisations providing a variety of services to a diverse client group. In reality, this proved unmanageable. In contrast, the Homereach and ROAR consortia focused upon developing specific services to defined client groups and resulted in the establishment of consortia which could deliver these services.

However, the issue of scale (and scope) also exists for smaller, clearly defined problems in that the level of investment and resources required, in terms of development and support could be disproportionate to the value of the resulting contract. A carefully considered options appraisal by a public sector body should address this problem as it ought to be apparent where the cut off point rests on a case by case basis.

Capacity building and development support

In all three pilots there has been a clear need for training, capacity building and development support for participants within both sectors. If PSP projects are to realise their full potential it is likely that these elements of support will need to be factored into the process.

Communication and relationship building

Good communication and relationship building within and between the sectors has proven invaluable. One of the key success factors for the North Lanarkshire project (Homereach) has been the level of buy in at a senior level within the local authority. In the case of the Renfrewshire pilot (ROAR) involving operational staff (from the local authority) at an earlier stage in the process would appear to have led to smoother communication links between the two parties during the initial stages of operation.

Time and resources

Perennial issues to do with time and resources exist for the public sector and social economy sector and have the potential to limit the effectiveness of

projects. PSP is no exception. The full report explores the issue of timing (with respect to the process) and the resources involved in the process of co-planning services and consortium building.

It is clear that for many of the participants the experience has been a rewarding one but that the time taken to progress the pilots was markedly longer than expected.

If the level of investment (in terms of time and resources) is to be proportionate to the value of the resulting contract then it is clear that future projects will require to determine whether each opportunity under consideration merits the allocation of the projected resources involved. For the public sector agency this means that it will have to determine whether it stands to gain value from employing the co-planning and/or consortium approach. For social enterprise and voluntary organisations it will mean working out whether they stand to gain as a consequence of their involvement to such a degree as to justify an investment of resources.

The North Lanarkshire project and the Renfrewshire projects have seen the proposed services piloted for roughly a year. Perhaps, given the length of time it takes to develop such projects and to inform procurement processes following on from the experience of co-planning, it would make sense to allow pilots to run for two years to enable any issues to be addressed and the impact of any resulting changes to activities properly tested and evaluated.

The way forward

The report identifies a number of benefits from the use of the consortium model and co-planning approach and concludes that these have the potential to support the attainment of added value in public services through PSP.

The report makes a series of recommendations to key stakeholders which could ease the process of co-planning services and building consortia for delivery but which would also have the potential to enhance the prospects for Public Social Partnership more widely.

The report strongly recommends that funding for and the provision of training and capacity building forms the backdrop of any policy and activity to stimulate the development PSP in Scotland.

The full report will shortly be available electronically to download from the following addresses:

<http://www.socialeconomyscotland.info>

<http://www.forthsector.org.uk/resources.htm>