Research Report   Summary

Research into Emergency Services Collaboration

Jon Parry, Professor Eddie Kane, Dr Denise Martin, Dr Siddhartha Bandyopadhyay

_____

Background

In September 2014 the cross-sector Emergency Services Collaboration Working Group was established with funding from the Home Office, Department of Health and Department for Communities and Local Government with the remit of providing strategic leadership, guidance and an overview of collaborations across England and Wales, to act as champion for innovation and best practice and to drive forward the statement of commitment to collaboration made in February 2014 by the Chief Fire Officers Association, Association of Ambulance Chief Executives and Association of Chief Police Officers.

In November 2014 the Emergency Services Collaboration Working Group, through the Home Office, commissioned research to evaluate existing and emerging emergency services collaboration in order to establish an evidence base for greater cooperation across the emergency services. This research focused on six emergency services collaboration projects across England and Wales, covering efficient services, effective services and emerging best practice.

Aims of the Research

In evaluating these projects, the research sought to address the following questions:

- To what extent are projects operating as outlined in their project plans and business cases?
- How has collaboration been achieved?
- To what extent do these collaboration projects support wider public service change?
- How do collaboration projects ensure longevity and become sustainable?
- What lessons have been identified?
- What evidence is there of successful outcomes (including financial) of these projects?
- Which indicators should be used to monitor collaboration activity in the future?
- What evidence is there of wider sharing of the lessons and of them being learnt?

Selection of Case Studies

The case study areas were selected from a list of national projects contained within an overview of collaboration produced by the Emergency Services Collaboration Working Group.[1] The following criteria were used to determine the selections:

- **Coverage of all three areas of project focus** – *efficient services, effective services, emerging best practice*

_____

[1] Emergency Services Collaboration, The Current Picture (An overview of collaboration in England and Wales) http://publicservicetransformation.org/images/Emergency_Services_Collaboration_2014.pdf (accessed on 16/3/2014)

- **Geographical coverage** encompassing rural and urban areas, national areas, projects within single local authorities and projects across joint authorities
- **Coverage of projects involving all three emergency services** – *ambulance, fire and police* – as well as local authority partners[2]

Methodology and approach

In order to capture the complexity of collaborative projects a mixed method approach was applied. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected from primary and secondary sources. This included:

- **interviews** (51 in-depth semi-structured with senior staff from all services)
- **focus groups** (in three key areas)
- **surveys** (covering emergency services across England and Wales and a public opinion poll)
- **reviews** of performance reports, academic literature and policy documents

The collection and analysis of these multiple sources increase the opportunities for triangulation and enhance both the validity of the findings. The field work was conducted between December 2014 and February 2015.

Collaboration: enablers and barriers

Throughout the research, particular attention was focused on developing a clear understanding of the environments and processes that enabled or inhibited collaboration. The areas included in this report are those that emerged as common in each phase of the evaluation; literature review, in-depth interviews and surveys.

Fig. 1: Identified enablers of and barriers to collaboration

Enablers	Barriers
A clear and **shared vision** of the objectives of the collaboration.	**Current focus** of collaboration (which requires broadening).
Trust at all levels of the collaborating agencies.	**Funding streams** and cycles (which require aligning).
Clear, shared **resource plans**.	**Organisational differences**.
Agreed and realistic **timeline and delivery pathways**.	Staff engagement and **liaison with representative bodies** require some attention.
Local cross-party **political buy-in** and explicit support.	A number of instances where **legislation** was a barrier to collaboration were highlighted.
Robust governance architecture.	Government departments need to set out a more, consistent and **shared vision**.
All three blue light services have easily **recognisable identities** and retaining these is important.	

---

[2] This included Fire Authority Chairs, Chief Executives and councillors with an interest in the police and ambulance services

Survey findings

In order to gather further evidence on collaborative activities taking place and to understand wider attitudes to collaboration, two linked emergency services surveys were undertaken across England and Wales[3] and a public opinion poll was conducted.[4] The questions covered awareness of emergency services collaboration; extent and nature of involvement in collaborative projects; perceived barriers/enablers; confidence in emergency services collaboration; and importance of emergency services collaboration.

The following are some of the key findings:

98% ... of emergency services respondents were **involved in some form of collaboration** with another emergency service and/or local authority.

90% ...of respondents reported that the **extent of their organisation's collaborative activities had increased** over the previous 12 months.

72% ...of the respondents to the public opinion poll thought that the **emergency services should work together more often** to provide a better all-round service.

84% ...of the respondents to the public opinion poll stated that it was **important for leaders to work together closely** in order to protect the public.

76% ...of the respondents to the public opinion poll were confident that the **emergency services worked together effectively** to respond to emergencies.

> *"Closer collaboration has enabled us to maintain meeting the needs of our local communities"*
>
> **Ambulance service respondent, England and Wales survey**

> *"[A good outcome] would see a greater evidence based approach around 'what works' in emergency service collaboration"*
>
> **Police respondent, England and Wales survey**

> *"Collaboration always requires extra work communicating, negotiating and sometimes compromising. However, if done well the benefits always outweigh the disadvantages"*
>
> **Fire and Rescue respondent, England and Wales survey**

---

[3] The first survey was targeted at the Chief Officers of each service (including local authorities), Police and Crime Commissioners and Chairs of Fire Authorities (57 respondents out of sample of 188). The second survey was targeted at those organisations representing staff within emergency services, e.g. trade unions and professional associations. (59 respondents out of sample of 92).

[4] 1,069 individuals were polled across England and Wales.

Conclusions and recommendations

Collaboration is driven by both efficiency and in ensuring better outcomes for the public. There are a number of different ways in which collaboration is taking place both *intra* and *inter* service. Despite some innovative practices, collaboration remains patchy due to a number of factors, including the nature and timing of funding streams, local politics which can inhibit progress, inconsistent messages from different government departments and legacy issues of previous collaborations. Successful collaboration occurs when there is a shared vision, trust and understanding between organisations and where effective governance structures are in place. Sustainability will depend on continued investment and monitoring of outcomes through core KPIs.

Recommendations were divided into three distinct areas (increasing collaboration, overcoming barriers, promoting enablers) and three levels depending on their complexities and the support for them from respondents.[5]

Fig. 2: Recommendations by level of support

Level 1 - characterised by substantial support and deliverability	Level 2 - characterised by strong support but with more issues to manage/overcome	Level 3 - characterised by mixed support and with key barriers to manage/overcome
The creation of more single back offices	*Implementation of shared operational staff*	*More integrated local and national governance structures*
Adoption of shared key performance indicators	*Development of shared command structures*	*The adoption of integrated control rooms*
Further capital resource rationalisation	*Address the disparity in data collection*	*The adoption of one merged local budget*
Adoption of co-located control rooms	*Increase in joint training programmes*	*Alignment of terms and conditions*
More funding streams	*Supporting leadership*	*More comprehensive intra-service rationalisation*
Promotion of good practise	*More direction from central government*	*Police devolution*
Sharing of individual service data		
Further implementation of common protocols		

In conclusion, whilst there is evidence of innovative collaborative partnerships happening across emergency services in England and Wales, sustained collaboration will be determined by governments and services ability to invest in and monitor partnerships in the long-term to establish best practice. Both policy and legislative change may also be required to overcome some of the more complex structural and organisational barriers.

---

[5] This section aims to provide a flavour of the recommendations provided, for a complete outline of please see full report - http://publicservicetransformation.org/images/articles/news/EmergencyServicesCollabResearch.pdf