

Copeland Borough Council

Shared Services Strategy

Introduction

This strategy aims to provide an overarching framework for the Council's approach to 'Shared Services'. Since every shared service will be different it does not attempt to provide a definitive guide to the establishment of a shared service, instead it aims to provide a general overview of issues to be considered by those services seeking to enter into a shared service arrangement.

The delivery of shared services in partnership with other organisations has the potential to reduce costs, improve the quality of services and increase the resilience of delivery teams. The Local Government Whitepaper "Strong and Prosperous Communities" published late in 2006 states "*there are significant opportunities to improve the quality and efficiency of services by joint working – either between some of the 388 Councils in England, with other local public bodies, or at a regional or national level. We want all local authorities to unlock these potential benefits by delivering more services in collaboration with each other, with other local public service providers and with the private or third sector.*"

Copeland is a relatively small Council and, in common with all, is facing the dual dilemma of how to meet increasing public expectation whilst financial resources are increasingly squeezed. To meet these challenges new thinking and new ways of working will be required to ensure the public receives the level of service required. Sharing services will be a key element of the Council's response.

Shared services present both opportunities and risks to the Council. Any shared service proposal should be supported by a business case demonstrating the service and financial benefit to the Council and its customers together with the advantages and disadvantages of proceeding. The business case will be scrutinised and agreed by elected members before the business case can be implemented.

Definition

Shared services can range from co-locating with another organisation so by reducing premises overheads, through partnership working and the sharing of best practice procedures and systems, to full integration of management and operational activities with other public, private or voluntary sector organisations. The mechanism for sharing will be different in each case depending on a number of variables including the nature of the service, its location, the number of partners and the number of employees concerned.

Which Services?

The assumption of this strategy is that any function of a local authority is capable of being shared. Clearly some services are more suitable to share than others and whilst the Council may be willing to share certain services with specific partners it should be recognised the targeted partner may not be in a similar state of readiness. The Council itself should always be open to approaches from others when asked to consider sharing a service.

Principles

Any shared service into which the Council considers entering must conform to the following principles.

- There must be a clear business case outlining the benefits to the Council's customers in terms of service quality and cost.
- Shared service arrangements should be set against a performance management and value for money framework so that the Council and its members can be assured (and monitor) performance improvement and best value.
- No shared service should be entered into if there is a detrimental impact on other Council activities. Decisions should be taken in the best overall interest of the Council and its customers.
- Shared services carry risks as well as benefits and a balanced risk appraisal must form part of the business case. Measures should be put in place, commensurate with the level of risk, to control these risks for the life of the shared service.
- In all cases the Council's Constitution, Financial Regulations and Contract Standing Orders should be taken into consideration. Where variances are required to affect a shared service such variances should be agreed by the Council's properly constituted body.
- Management governance arrangements for the shared service partnership should be clarified as part of the business case.
- Political governance arrangements should be considered to ensure elected members retain the appropriate level of oversight, scrutiny and control consistent with the nature of the shared service and the number of partners.
- Effective consultation and communication with affected employees, trade unions and elected members is required as shared services business cases are developed and implemented in accordance with good employment practice.
- Shared services are likely to lead to an overall reduction in the number of employees engaged in the activity. As an area with significant economic challenges employment availability in the borough is important. Therefore, the aim should be, averaged over all shared services, to retain an equivalent number of jobs in the area commensurate with the overall 'downsizing'.

Further Guidance

Further guidance and background for those pursuing a shared service can be found in the Cumbria Shared Services Strategy 2008 which can be found on the intranet in Policy and Performance – Performance Improvement