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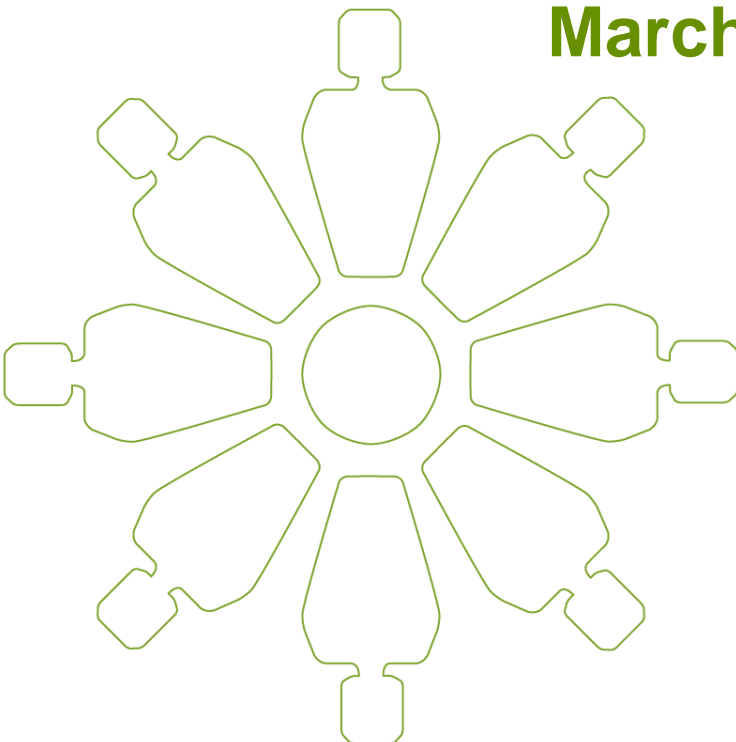
ACCORD

On behalf of the East Midlands Centre of Excellence



Strategic Review of the Welland Partnership Concluding Report

March 2007



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Summary

1. Accord Consulting was engaged by the Welland Partnership to assess its strengths and the reasons for its success. We have found that the Welland has been and continues to be very effective in its dual roles of:
 - drawing attention to the special needs of rural areas and market towns and taking steps to address them through economic development and regeneration initiatives;
 - Generating economies and increasing efficiencies in the provision of backroom services through partnership working.
2. From our 31 interviews, we have found that the main reasons for the success of the Welland can be summarised as unity of purpose, shared vulnerability, personalities, shared vision, shared commitment, willingness to work together, flexibility and tolerance, no political agendas, no bureaucratic structure and a lot of hard work by Members and Officers of the five councils.
3. We have identified a few operational learning points which we believe, if implemented, will enhance the work of the Welland in the future. They can be summarised as:
 - clearer outcomes, reviewed regularly, with critical success factors adopted at the outset;
 - more systematic reporting to/briefing of Members of all five councils, by whichever means are felt to be most appropriate;
 - allocation of sufficient resources to support the work of the Partnership, where additional external funding is not available for the purpose;
 - greater consistency in briefing staff regularly on the work and progress of the Welland;
 - consistently robust business cases and financial risk assessments for all projects;
 - more systematic monitoring and management of performance against critical success criteria, milestones and timelines.
4. Accord Consulting was not asked to explore options for the future of the Welland. However, in the course of our work, questions about the future of the Partnership have loomed large, particularly since the publication of the White Paper. It is clear that there is mounting pressure for multi-agency partnerships within county or unitary boundaries which cannot be disregarded. We believe that there are real benefits to be derived from locality-based partnership working.
5. At the same time, the fundamental concerns which brought the five councils together – rural issues, the needs of the market towns, resource constraints, and the need for regeneration, economic development and economies of scale – remain valid and cannot simply be ignored. Moreover, the relationships of trust between Members and Officers of different councils, the mutual support, the transfer of learning, the informal networks and the exchange of information and resources together constitute a powerful asset too valuable to lose.

6. We feel that these two options need not necessarily be mutually exclusive. Many of the people we interviewed expressed great pride and confidence in the Welland and a strong desire that it should continue in some form. There is a willingness to be flexible and to compromise. We have sensed recognition that the current developments may present new opportunities and a desire to find innovative ways of capitalising on them. We believe that, if there is the will and the willingness to trust, the Welland Partnership and county-based multi-agency partnerships could operate alongside each other, be mutually complementary and meet the various needs of all the agencies involved.
7. By way of a footnote and supported by experiences elsewhere, it is possible to conclude that unless clear outcomes and their associated indicators are agreed and in place at an early stage, the task of evidencing “collaborative gain” becomes at least difficult and at worst impossible. Difficulties are exaggerated in partnerships of this type when funding streams are merged, supported by other budgets and activity is reported on in different ways in each Authority. Moreover, because the partnership has been flexible, nimble and opportunistic focused in securing funds, it has often lacked coherence in its approach to measurable definition of outcome.

A note on methodology

A major driver behind the commission was to test a new methodology for evaluating and improving partnerships – Pathways to Partnership (P2P). The underlying principle behind the P2P approach is that achievement in partnership is dependant upon the quality of the interaction between individuals across the partnership.

This is not to say that technical processes, such as governance arrangements or performance management, are not necessary. But rather to suggest that making sure that personal relationships are right is at least as important. This is confirmed in the Welland, which grew and developed without many of the formal trappings of organised partnership – and yet has been a success story, we believe because of the investment of and the relationships between individuals.

Indeed key individuals within Welland see a lack of formality as a strength. An outside view would more likely suggest that, flexibility notwithstanding, the strength of personal relationships and the high levels of trust between key individuals has (by and large) negated any disadvantage caused by imperfect technical arrangements. Whichever view is right (and they are not mutually exclusive) it is clear that good personal relationships are critical to long term partnership success.

Importantly from our test drive (and despite a partial deployment of the Relationship Pathway) we have gained sufficient confidence in our methodology to complete its development and web enable both the information gathering and first stage analytical work. A partial deployment of the analysis software and algorithms underpinning the reporting framework also confirms the rectitude of our intuitive view. We are also able to confidently confirm the relevance of the P2P approach to both partnerships and complex cross cutting arrangements in single organisations with a subsequent live test elsewhere of the web-based product.

Introduction

Broad Purpose of the Partnership

The Welland Partnership (commonly referred to as ‘the Welland’) came into being in 2000. It comprises five councils – East Northamptonshire (Northants), Harborough District (Leicestershire), Melton Borough (Leicestershire), Rutland County and South Kesteven District (Lincolnshire) – which decided to enter into a partnership of choice which has endured until now. These five councils, recognising their common interests as rural councils with market towns, set out to attract funding to address some of their shared issues.

Over a period of six years, the partnership has been recognised regionally and nationally as a remarkable success in drawing in funding for regeneration and service improvement. Through joint working, strong relationships have been built at both organisational and personal levels. Full details of the concrete outcomes of the Partnership’s work are set out in Appendix A.

Objectives of Commission

Accord Consulting has developed a diagnostic tool to test the strength of multi-agency partnerships (Pathways to Partnership – P2P) and suggested that it could be used to assess the strengths of the Welland and explore the reasons for its success. This could provide some useful insights for the Partnership and its member councils, while enabling Accord Consulting to ‘test-drive’ its methodology.

It was agreed that the views of up to 10 Members and Officers of each council would be sought using P2P, that a report would be submitted and, based on the findings, an article would be published jointly highlighting the success of the Partnership and the value of P2P.

The commission was part-funded by the East Midlands Centre of Excellence.

Pathways to Partnership – the approach

The P2P methodology is based on the 6 Technical Pathways:

- Outcomes
- Governance and Process
- Consultation, Communication and Involvement
- Developing Proposals/Actions
- Financial Management
- Performance Management and
- The Relationship Pathway

Accord Consulting believes that these seven elements need to be addressed effectively to create and sustain successful partnerships. The diagnostic tool explores the way in which each of these pathways is being addressed to assess the overall strength of a partnership and to identify those areas where further development will strengthen the partnership and its performance.

Accord Consulting, in collaboration with the University of Birmingham, has developed a computer programme which, on the basis of an accompanying questionnaire, can show graphically the nature of organisational relationships within a partnership.

Interviews undertaken

Accord Consulting interviewed 31 people in total from the five councils for about one hour each. In addition, each interviewee was invited to complete the relationships questionnaire in advance. The full list of interviewees is attached at Appendix B.

The interviews stretched over a four-month period and we are aware that circumstances were changing while we were working with the Partnership.

Councillors contribute to the work of a partnership of this kind in significantly different ways from officers. We have sought to recognise this in the report of our findings below.

Findings

Outcomes

Accord Consulting believes that outcomes drive the whole process of partnership and adopting clear agreed outcomes and measures of achievement in the early stages of the life of a partnership are a main key to future success.

We found that the partners were generally clear about the purpose of the Partnership and the outcomes which were to be achieved.

Some interviewees felt that the aspirations for the Partnership were limited at first, while others thought that the expectations were too grand and optimistic. In some cases, the aspirations of the Partnership had to be changed to fit with the agenda of individual member councils. As far as we are aware, the outcomes were not set out explicitly with associated critical success factors in a single document which was formally adopted by the Partnership and agreed by the constituent councils.

Most partners believed that the agreed objectives were capable of successful implementation, even though they were not sufficiently specific in some cases. In the event, they were in substantially achieved.

The interviewees believed that performance measures were adopted more systematically where the Partnership was bidding for external funding. It is generally agreed that performance measurement improved over time.

As the Welland developed, new opportunities were identified and adopted as outcomes. We formed the impression that, after the highly purposeful, focused and successful start, there was an element of seeking new objectives for the Partnership in order to justify its existence.

This underlines the evolutionary nature of the Welland and its ability to rapidly shift focus in response to emerging opportunities and challenges. In an uncertain world this resilience and flexibility must be regarded, on balance, as an asset and a strength.

Governance and Process

Governance

Putting in place appropriate arrangements for accountability, achieving proper, coordinated and safe decision making and establishing contractual obligations are among the most significant requirements for partnership working. Accord Consulting believes that it is important to be clear from the outset how the major decisions are going to be made, what contractual rights and responsibilities individual partners should have, how disputes and conflicts are to be resolved, how the day-to-day decision-making is to be handled and how all partners are to be fully engaged with the partnership.

Some interviewees felt the governance arrangements needed to be more formal; others valued their flexibility and the fact that governance of the Partnership was based on trust. In the early days, the Welland adopted a Memorandum of Understanding which guided the work of the Partnership thereafter. At the same time, the Partnership has adopted an evolutionary approach based on pragmatism and the general preference for compromise has meant that the governance arrangements have not been rigorously tested

A most striking feature of the Welland is that it has been seen by all partners to be a 'partnership of choice' and a 'partnership of compromise'. Partners could choose which partnership activities to commit to and it has been perfectly acceptable for individual partners to opt out of particular initiatives. Where a new initiative gained insufficient support to make it viable, it was not pursued. Tension has, however, arisen occasionally where partners have initially participated in a particular piece of work but then chosen not to commit at the 'signing up' stage. This approach has been seen as a strength and a weakness.

It was clearly understood from the outset that the Executive Panel, comprising three Members per council advised by the five Chief Executives, has been the body which has made the main executive decisions.

At the management level, it is the Chief Executives' Group which has overseen the work of the Partnership. The impetus for many new initiatives has emanated from this group and, in the absence of a formal dispute resolution procedure, it is this group which has dealt with areas of disagreement. "Escalating matters to the Chief Executives' Group" was a phrase which we heard repeatedly, although it is clear that most matters of an operational nature were resolved within the project groups.

These executive arrangements have worked well in general. We were told that their success and the commitment to the Welland came in significant part from the 'founders' and the strong working relationships between the individuals involved. As key people moved on, there was an identified risk of loss of momentum. This was addressed by an informal induction process to ensure new arrivals understood both context and ambition. In the wake of the publication of the White Paper and as discussions about the future of the Partnership have got under way, we have detected a new energy beginning to build.

We enquired about the involvement and engagement of Members in the Welland. It came as no surprise that leading Members were appropriately engaged in the work of the Partnership, understood it well and sought to make it successful. However, there is a widely held view that

the main body of members in each partner council, whilst aware of the existence of the Welland, were not as well acquainted with the debates and considerations which sat behind its work as they might have been. Several Members we interviewed referred to the 'democratic deficit' and we understood that some people felt this weakened the Partnership.

Process

Where a number of partners are involved in a joint enterprise, strong project management is essential. Significant capacity is required to facilitate the decision-making process, support the activities of individual partners, undertake the work of the partnership and institute and maintain arrangements to monitor and manage progress.

In our interviews, we were told that the Welland has attracted substantial external funding, a small part of which has been used to meet the cost of resourcing partnership management. On some projects, however, where no external funding was available, Officers provided the required capacity either by working additional (unpaid) hours or by delaying other work. The same was true of partnership activity within the partner councils. It was felt by some that the burden on the councils leading specific projects was too great.

We think it is inevitable in partnership working that there will be quite severe peaks and troughs which will impose at times significant additional demands on those responsible for the work. In the case of the Welland, despite the periodic additional pressures, by and large sufficient capacity was found to get work done within acceptable time.

We enquired about project management. Our impression from the interviews was that, whilst it was not treated as a central element of the Partnership's work, it was generally satisfactory. Monitoring and management of progress was thought to be acceptable in most cases but relied to some extent on the informal network of relationships. In a number of instances, there was serious slippage and progress was very slow. However, we were also told that the Welland recognised the difficulties of working in a partnership of this kind and tolerated a degree of failure.

Consultation, Communication and Involvement

Accord Consulting believes that consultation, communication and involvement are important in partnership working both to establish and maintain the confidence of the public and external stakeholders and to build the commitment of staff, upon whom the success or failure of the project depends.

In response to our question as to whether the public at large were aware of the work of the Welland, we were told that the initiatives it undertook were in large part 'back office' functions and were not therefore directly visible to the public.

Public statements had been made from time to time and the public were probably aware of some of the successful outcomes of the Partnership's work but most would not normally have realised or been concerned to know that a multi-council partnership had done it. There was, however, a publicity officer at one stage and there was much of public relations activity when the community websites were launched. The Welland Sub Regional Strategic Partnership was well advertised and continues to have good visibility.

It had not been thought necessary or appropriate to put in place formal public consultation arrangements, channels for the public to express views or means of public challenge.

Key stakeholders were generally aware of the existence and work of the Welland and efforts were made to keep them informed of progress.

However, more had been done in most of the member councils to keep staff informed. There were opportunities for staff to express their views through the usual management channels. Those efforts had been relatively successful, but several interviewees commented that more could have been done, particularly in keeping people informed about plans and progress outside their own councils and areas of expertise.

Developing Proposals/Actions

Accord Consulting regards the processes for developing practical proposals and initiatives to give effect to a partnership's aspirations as keys to success. These processes need to be inclusive, business-like, targeted and cost effective. A well constructed, comprehensive business case which provides a sound basis for careful consideration of the benefits and costs of each proposed change is one of the crucial outputs of this process.

From the interviews we carried out, it was apparent that the processes for development and evaluation of proposals and initiatives were generally sound, if not always wholly coherent. The initial impetus came from the Executive Panel, the Chief Executives' Group and the Executive Sub Group. Groups had then been formed comprising representatives of all participating authorities to plan and manage the development of each new activity or service. These groups were encouraged to think through the implications of each proposal.

The Partnership's work was felt to be sensitive to local needs in that partner councils were free to opt out of initiatives which did not fit comfortably with their priorities.

Business cases had been prepared and presented for the majority of projects and these covered most of the key issues. Some people felt that business cases had not been sufficiently robust. However, most agreed that, where the Partnership was bidding for external funding, business cases were stronger.

Arrangements for reporting back to the Chief Executives' Group and, as appropriate, to the Executive Sub-Group were well established. The monthly meetings of the Chief Executives' Group contributed significantly to the development of proposals.

Financial Management

Self-evidently, the financial management of partnership work is of great importance. The active involvement of directors of finance in partnership processes and the preparation of financial implications and financial risk assessments are indispensable where partners' resources are being used for common purposes.

We formed a very positive impression of the financial management arrangements of the Welland. It was clear to us that the financial implications of all projects were identified and reported on effectively. Section 151 Officers were fully 'in the loop'. They worked together systematically in managing the financial aspects of the Partnership's work and financial implications were evaluated and reported in the individual business cases.

In large part, the financial pressures which the Welland might have faced were offset by the significant success the Partnership enjoyed in securing external funding. If there was any area which might have received greater attention, it was that of financial risk assessments in general

and, specifically, the potential impact of partners pulling out before final commitments were entered into. There were mixed feelings among interviewees about the quality of financial risk assessments.

Performance Management

Accord Consulting places a high priority on systematic performance management. We advise that critical success factors should be identified when outcomes are adopted and used as the basis for measuring the success of a partnership and individual projects. Where new initiatives or services will benefit the public, a measure of community gain should be identified.

Service Monitoring

Whilst Members and Officers of the partner councils were able to speak about the ultimate objectives of the Welland and the successes which were achieved, they were not always able to specify critical success factors or other outcome measures which had been used.

In our interviews, we formed the impression that the adoption of hard performance measures might have presented a problem by setting stringent targets for a multi-agency partnership which, if not met within timescale, would provide evidence of failure. The approach was therefore light touch and pragmatic. This could have been a bigger issue if the Partnership had been providing primarily public-facing services. We understand these sensitivities but feel that targets could have been adopted which recognised the additional complexities of partnership working. Appropriate performance measurement provides a sound base for effective performance management and the relative lack of it until now has been something of a deficit in the Partnership's work.

The services and initiatives which the Welland proposed to undertake were not for the most part to be provided direct to the public and it would have been difficult to find real and useable measures of community gain. However, the regeneration activities of the Partnership, the provision of substantially improved customer access facilities and the reduction in costs through shared services have all generated genuine benefits for the councils' communities. Adoption of measures to demonstrate these successes could have helped to build confidence in The Welland, particularly among Members, Officers and key stakeholders.

Process Monitoring

In contrast, our respondents were clear that timelines and milestones had been adopted for individual projects and, while timescales had been ambitious and resources had not always been adequate, in most cases acceptable progress had been made.

Relationships

One of the unique aspects of the P2P approach which Accord Consulting emphasises is the importance of relationships within partnerships. No matter how accomplished the partners are in addressing the technical aspects, partnerships will simply fail if compatible values, common

purposes, mutual trust and shared commitment are not present to at least some degree. We also place great store by the informal work which goes on behind the scenes to build confidence in the network, find mutually acceptable solutions to differences of view and generate support for particular courses of action.

We are clear that the key relationships between four of the councils were and are strong. This has particularly been true where groups of Members and Officers have had clear roles and remits. However, South Kesteven has been somewhat reserved in its relationship with the Partnership and has not generally shown the same level of commitment as the other partners.

Many people referred to the strength of shared commitment of the 'founding' chief executives and of the importance of the description 'partnership of choice and of compromise'. However, there has been some loss of impetus as the incumbents have changed.

There was also strong evidence of the appropriate involvement of staff at each level but the difficulties of communication with staff were seen to be a major issue by nearly everyone we met.

We also heard several times of cooperation and mutual support between Officers of the different councils on issues outside the work of the Welland and we were left with the clear impression that this was an additional outcome which should not be undervalued. It is clear that there has been real added value in terms of ongoing working relationships, sharing of information, troubleshooting and problem solving in the day-to-day work of the partner councils. In our experience, this is somewhat unusual.

This spirit of cooperation extends into the way that the Chief Executives adopt informal and complimentary roles within the partnership, playing to their experiential strengths and backgrounds.

Overall Conclusions

Reasons for the Success of the Welland

The Welland is recognised both regionally and nationally to have been a highly successful multi-council partnership. All interviewees agreed that the Partnership has levered in substantial external funds, capitalised on the e-government agenda, found new and more effective ways of providing services on a shared basis and drawn attention to the special needs of the market towns and to rural issues. Many people spoke with justified pride of the achievements of the Welland Sub Regional Strategic Partnership.

This is largely because the councils share strong common needs and a commitment to make the most of their collective strength. That the Welland is a 'partnership of choice and of compromise' has been a major influence.

In some senses, the position of Rutland County Council is different. We heard on several occasions about Rutland's need to work in partnership to deliver effectively the broader range of its services. Equally, we were aware of the challenges facing the district councils, for whom giving up direct control of some key services could have a significant effect.

Nevertheless, the individual councils have participated in initiatives because they saw the benefits of doing so, not because they said they would. The Welland has been successful because four of the councils have a shared agenda and have been willing consistently to align their individual needs and aspirations in the interests of the common good.

The Welland has clearly 'punched above its weight' in terms of influence, finance and enhanced value for money. For a group of small councils, this is a formidable achievement.

Many respondents felt that the Welland has drawn on the strengths of Members and Officers and has gained from the strong personal working relationships across the partner councils, based on unity of purpose, shared vulnerability, personalities, shared vision, shared commitment, willingness to work together, flexibility and tolerance, no political agendas, no bureaucratic structure and much hard work by Members and Officers of the five councils

Difficulties

The partner councils have had to manage the competing demands of other county-based partnerships. The Welland has been seen by some other councils as a threat to the necessary partnerships within county areas. The recent White Paper has reinforced that tension.

As already mentioned, South Kesteven, has been seen to be more reticent in its involvement with the Partnership. In this respect, the 'partnership of choice' approach has been a weakness as well as a strength. However, the fact that the Partnership continues to work and that South Kesteven remains "in contact" is testimony to the maturity and durability of the Welland.

A few respondents felt that the Partnership lacked ambition, focusing on small-scale projects rather than a large-scale strategic partnership.

Change of personalities was flagged up as a potential problem, since the personal commitment of the founding Members, Chief Executives and key staff has been a major reason for the Welland's success. However, as individuals have left and been replaced the risk of potential loss of momentum has been much reduced by informal induction. However, as indicated earlier, we had begun to sense a renewed energy towards the end of our interviews.

A further inhibitor was the fear of staff losing their jobs and Members losing their influence as a result of service sharing and possible downsizing or outsourcing.

And finally, the shortage of resources is believed by some to have held the Partnership back.

The Future Direction of The Welland – The Pro's

The future of the Welland is far from clear. Many interviewees are keen to maintain the longstanding relationships but feel that the purpose and goals of the Partnership need to be reviewed and refreshed. Some believe that the Welland needs to refocus from backroom functions to community issues.

On the one hand, there are already established projects and services, including the Sub Regional Strategic Partnership, which have been set up on a joint basis and which require inter-council cooperation for their continued operation and success. There are joint projects and services in development and it is anticipated that these will be brought to fruition. It is also believed that there will, in all probability, be new opportunities which the Welland will be better placed to exploit than other partnerships in which the member councils may be involved in the future.

On the question of the continued existence of the Welland, several interviewees spoke of their great reluctance to 'throw the baby out with the bath water'.

The Future Direction of The Welland – The Con's

On the other hand, there are powerful pressures for councils to work in partnership within their own county areas. Coterminosity with other public agencies such as the Police, Primary Care Trusts, Probation Services and county-based local government services such as Education and Social Services can offer great advantages for joint working. The absence of coterminosity can create serious obstacles for the collaborative delivery of some services.

The recent Local Government White Paper, whilst not ruling out other partnership frameworks, urges non-unitary councils to work in partnership within county areas to enhance services to the consumer.

There are also fears that as projects are delivered; the Welland could dwindle in significance.

South Kesteven has already determined that the Welland will take a lesser place than county-based partnership work, although there remains the possibility of some continued involvement with the Welland where shared arrangements are of specific benefit to the Council.

The Future Direction of the Welland - the Benefit-Cost Balance

It has become apparent to us that the Welland has two broad objectives – to raise awareness and change thinking about rural needs locally, regionally and nationally and to develop and provide in partnership cost effective services in the rural context. We also recognise that some aspects of the Partnership's working arrangements are seen as strengths by some and weaknesses by others, most notably the concepts of partnership of choice and partnership of compromise.

We have identified a few operational learning points which we believe, if implemented, will enhance the work of the Welland in the future. They can be summarised as:

- clearer outcomes, reviewed regularly, with critical success factors adopted at the outset;
- more systematic reporting to/briefing of Members of all five councils, by whichever means are felt to be most appropriate;
- allocation of sufficient resources to support the work of the Partnership, where additional external funding is not available for the purpose;
- greater consistency in briefing staff regularly on the work and progress of the Welland;
- consistently robust business cases and financial risk assessments for all projects;
- More systematic monitoring and management of performance against critical success criteria, milestones and timelines.

We believe that the Welland can make an important contribution in the future. Where there are opportunities to consolidate and build upon the already successful Welland model, these will certainly emerge as the future of the Welland is debated. Our comments on the various aspects of the working of the Welland can be used as an aide memoire in these discussions.

If the Welland wished to continue in existence, it might well have to look to generating community gains rather than concentrating solely on backroom economies from its activities. It seems that the White Paper and the Government Offices want to make the relationship between Local Strategic Partnerships and Local Area Agreements more direct and understandable. If the Welland partners play an active part in county-based partnerships in the future, they will have a great deal of knowledge and experience to offer on partnership working in general and shared services in particular.

Each council will ultimately have to decide how its own priorities can best be met and it is conceivable that, from within the range of opportunities available, the Welland will be able to continue to offer best value in creating and providing some services and to identify new opportunities for beneficial collaborative working among existing partners or possibly by developing relationships with other councils.

Pathways to Partnership

Accord Consulting has greatly appreciated the opportunity to pilot its P2P diagnostic tool with the Welland. We have found the P2P methodology to be a useful framework for assessing the Partnership and its work and have discovered through this pilot ways of refining and improving it. We have concluded that P2P has a contribution to make and we will continue to use it where appropriate.

Unfortunately, an inconsistent response to and incomplete number of Part 2 questionnaires were returned to enable us to use reliably deploy the software which we have developed with the University of Birmingham. This may be in part because the questionnaire was too long and may partly be attributable to the technical difficulties we encountered in circulating it electronically. We have now web enabled the Relationship questionnaire and this should resolve operational issues and ensure consistency and evidential integrity.

Thanks

Accord Consulting would like to express its profuse thanks to the five councils for agreeing to participate in this pilot project, to all the Members and Officers who gave their time for the interviews and to the administrative staff who provided information and arranged the interviews.

Appendix A - Value added, cashable and non-cashable benefits and collaborative gain

External Funding

The Welland Partnership has received £3.794 million support from a variety of sources between 2001 and 2006:

- £1006K from DTLR
- £2642K from ODPM
- £118K from EMCE
- £10K from EMDA (via SSDP)
- £18K from DCLG

The funding was injected to support a number of initiatives and reflected the incremental growth of the Welland. It also reflects the transition of the Welland from a group of like minded authorities sharing the load in pursuit of e-Government and its later evolution into shared services.

Importantly, 96% of funding (£3648K) was secured in the early years (2001-2003) to support e-Government initiatives. Here the emphasis was on engagement and improving frontline services rather than direct or indirect financial benefits which became a later priority and are more appropriately considered in the context of later phases of the Welland. Indeed, it is helpful to consider the Welland in 3 Phases:

- Phase 1 – e-Government
- Phase 2 – shared services
- Phase 3 – further exploration

2001 e-Government Pathfinder (Phase 1)

The first of the initiatives was the DTLR sponsored e-Government Pathfinder Project. This project revolved around the development of 11 community web sites based on the market towns.

It was driven by the need to live test innovative technology and provide a successful demonstration project.

The innovative template allowed local residents and businesses to contribute information which encouraged self-help and fostered engagement. The cutting edge software brought council services to the websites and planning was first to be implemented – Harborough was the first Council in the UK to go on-line for planning applications and members of the public could view applications on line and provide input..

This initiative not only reduced long term absolute staffing requirements, (reduced correspondence, talking individuals through the process etc) it also streamlined the process with access 24/7 and significantly reduced time wasted by the public (appointments and delays) and applicants (do I need Planning Permission?).

Websites worked in tandem with main Council sites and two-way links were established.

The average cost of each community web site was some £90k.

2002 Welland Contact Centre Initiative (WCCI) (Phase 1)

The principal driver behind this project was the e-Government agenda and the need to improve the quality of connection between the citizen and his or her Council.

WCCI was about the development of 5 customer service centres, one in each of the Authorities. This in itself was not innovative. However, the difference here was that each service centre was linked and could accept calls from other service centres when busy. The Councils were able to reduce staffing and improve response.

Also, the software purchased as part of the earlier Pathfinder Project was developed and enhanced into a fuller CRM system creating one stop shops and extra functionality.

Each Council made an investment in its Centre and this was supported by £1070K from ODPM under Round 4 Invest to Save. Costly external support is avoided by an officer technical support group led by one Council and drawing on staff across the Welland. Development continues, most recently on work flowing between front and back office services.

The ODPM (through Local Government Online) also supported the introduction of an electronic records management system (WERMS) into each Authority (£650K). This sat alongside the Contact Centre systems to enhance services to citizens and used scanning and viewing technology.

Further support was additionally provided through ODPM (again through Local Government Online) of £498K to enable residents to verify and pay Council Tax on-line (WACTOL).

2003 Dissemination (Phase 1)

In terms of success, this is underlined by ODPM funding of £174K to support Welland partners in sharing best practice and explain their approach to other Councils through seminars, exhibitions, conferences, a DVD and other promotional material.

The Welland model of work sharing and shared agreement to volunteer lead authorities and standardised implementation processes is put forward both as a cost saving approach and one which reduces risk.

Whilst outside the scope of this report, it would be interesting to understand the effectiveness of the Welland as a catalyst for innovation and service improvement outside its boundaries.

2004 ongoing - Shared Services (Phase 2)

There seemed to be reluctance among the partners to allow the Welland to fall into decline following its successful collaboration around the e-Government agenda. This reluctance found focus in a (seemingly) opportunistic move to explore shared services.

Four services were put forward:

- Procurement
- Audit
- Legal

- Revenues and Benefits.

General support from ODPM of £250K was secured, with EMCE providing an additional £118K to assist the development of shared procurement. DCLG also provided £18K to assist capacity building.

Progress to take forward Legal and Revenues and Benefits has proved to be slow and halting. Some of the barriers have been technical (Revenues and Benefits), some internal resistance (Legal) and some about internal capacity and the ability to maintain momentum on a broad front.

But Procurement and Audit have moved forward with pace and enthusiasm, with Joint Committee governance in place and TUPE transfer of staff and posts to lead selected Authorities.

Benefits in sharing Audit services are indirect and therefore difficult to assess. Staff numbers have remained the same (8 FTE), but mix and overall capacity is much enhanced. This has given each of the participating Councils access to a much improved service (with the indirect benefits that brings) at no extra cost.

Procurement, on the other hand, was principally about tangible benefits and major contributor to the achieved and available cashable and non cashable benefits shown below:

Non cashable savings	2006/7	2007/8	2008/9	2009-10	2010/11	Total
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
All Councils	249.8	31.4	27.4	17.4	8.9	334.9

Cashable savings	2006/7	2007/8	2008/9	2009-10	2010/11	Total
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
All Councils available	78.3	393.3	331.8	294.6	286.3	1,384.3
All Councils achievable	53.1	257.9	239.1	183.8	175.5	909.4

2005 ongoing – Further Exploration

The evolution of the Welland is subject to internal and external pressures and influences. This occasionally creates the need to reflect and take stock.

That said, the Welland maintains its dynamism and has and is exploring the future in the context of a number of initiatives.

It is engaging with Authorities neighbouring Welland on a shared building control service.

Welland “Wheels to Work” which provides youngsters with scooters to enable travel to work is an interesting extension of partnership working between 3 Councils.

The joint preparation and publication of the “Welland Tenants Compact” was a useful demonstration of how not to “reinvent the wheel”.

This led to the Welland Stock Option Appraisal standard methodology, which promulgated a common approach whilst allowing each Council to develop the appropriate solution for its area.

By way of a footnote, accepted wisdom within the Welland (which has developed over time) suggests that where 4 or 5 partners fully engage with an initiative, then it is likely to be viable. But where 3 or less engage, then viability is doubtful

Appendix B - Interviewees

Authority	Interviewee	Title
East Northants	Rob Austin	Head of Financial Services
	Pat Bird	e-government and Information Manager
	Alison Cressey	Customer Services Manager
	Barbara Ding	Executive Director
	Cllr Eloise Finch	Vice-Chairman
	Mark Lovell	Executive Director
	Cllr Andy Mercer	Leader
	David Oliver	Chief Executive
	Cllr Barry Sauntson	Chairman of Resources
Harborough	Cllr John Fort	Chairman of the Council
	Paul Clarke	Head of Corporate Services
	Cllr Simon Galton	Leader of the Executive
	Vicki Heathcote	Head of Financial Services
	Beverley Jolly	Head of ICT
	Kamal Mehta	Deputy Chief Executive
	Cllr Robin Totten	Ex-Leader
	Sue Smith	Chief Executive
Melton Borough Council	Lynn Aisbett	Chief Executive
	Keith Aubrey	Strategic Director
	Martin Bowen	Head of Revenues and Benefits
	Dawn Garton	Head of Financial Services
	Cllr Malise Graham	Policy, Finance and Administration (Leader of the Council)
	Tony Hall	Head of Procurement Unit
	Christine Marshall	Strategic Director
	Angela Tebbutt	Assistant Chief Executive
	Colin Wilkinson	Assistant Chief Executive
Rutland County Council	Helen Briggs	Chief Executive
	Cllr Roger Begy	Leader
	Kevin Brooks	Head of IT
	Neil Taylor	Head of Corporate Services
South Kesteven	Duncan Kerr	Chief Executive