



Steps to Collaboration – a how to guide

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Introduction

Over the past decade or so there has been an emphasis on voluntary organisations working in partnership with each other and with statutory and commercial bodies in order to produce better outcomes for service users, to increase efficiency, and to leverage additional resources. There have been significant funding initiatives to support partnership approaches, such as: Advice Plus (2008-9); the Advice Service Transition Fund (ASTF) (2013-2015), set up by the Big Lottery Fund (BIG); the Future Advice Fund, set up by the Legal Education Foundation, Unbound Philanthropy, the Baring Foundation, Comic Relief, and (until its closure) The Diana Memorial Fund. The latter built on the Baring Foundation's Strengthening the Voluntary Sector grants programme 2012-15.

These funding streams enabled some advice organisations to develop, create and implement structures to put agencies on a more sustainable footing. Funded organisations were also encouraged to share tools, resources and learning points across the sector.

THIS 'HOW TO' GUIDE

The environment continues to change in response to the complex interplay of social, political and economic factors. In order to share the latest developments, and look back over the factors which have produced successful collaborations, the Legal Education Foundation wanted to ask some organisations considered to be examples of best practice. The Foundation was interested in identifying what prompted the move towards greater partnership working, the objectives which the partners hoped to achieve and the extent to which they were achieved in practice. It was hoped to identify positive factors – and how these can be replicated elsewhere and how negative factors can be mitigated or avoided.

This 'how to guide' identifies the factors that made collaboration work in the three research areas and provides practical hints and tips, based on their experience. It also contains links to wider best practice materials. The three research areas were Bristol, Luton and Suffolk, the collaboration work in each area is described in more detail in appendix 1.

The guide is aimed at organisations which want to create collaborative networks to make best use of resources and deliver high quality legal advice services.

It would not have been possible without the generosity of those who shared what they were doing, and shared their experiences of what worked more, or less, successfully and the adjustments they made along the way.

REASONS FOR EXPLORING COLLABORATION

'Services for clients have improved. We've recognized what we're strongest at and how to target resources better. A referral will go somewhere.' Third sector manager, Luton.

Collaboration in the social justice sector can tackle the core issues of worklessness, homelessness and poverty, at the same time reducing costs, making better use of scarce resources and meeting customer needs more appropriately. However, working across third sector, commercial and academic organisations requires all parties to change, which can be difficult; but the results can often be well worthwhile financially.

'We are passionate about advice and we need to work in partnership. We say it's at the root of everything critical. With proper advice, we can save the health and social care budgets.' Third sector manager – Suffolk.

FINANCIAL BENEFITS ILLUSTRATION

Luton Borough Council recently calculated that its collaboration with the third sector, DWP and NHS (see below for more information), to provide a more streamlined access and referral pathway, delivered over £1 million in public value benefit and savings in a nine-month period. £120,000 was a direct saving to Luton Borough Council through preventing 26 families from becoming homeless. There were also significant savings for the DWP (£360,000), as complex cases were resolved with less intervention from them, and the NHS (£22,000), through saving G.P. time which would otherwise have been spent dealing with non-health matters. The other benefits were improved economic activity, debt resolution and income maximisation (£680,000).

12 Success Factors

All three geographical areas agreed that collaboration was worthwhile, and some thought it was essential to survival; but the experience of a successful project differed from place to place. For example, in Luton, consortium bidding for LSC contracts was positive, but in Bristol it was not. ASTF was considered positive in Bristol but not in Suffolk. People stressed that collaboration works differently in different places.

'I would recommend it to others but every environment is different.' Statutory sector manager. Luton.

The factors identified as contributing to successful collaboration included the following:

1. ANALYSE NEED AND PLAN

It was important to take some time to think through the needs that clients presented with to identify underlying issues, so that the partnerships could involve the right mix of agencies to tackle them. Having access to useful data, and being able to use it effectively was also important – see 'Data' below for more information about this.

Business case - theory of change

'Having someone [the local authority's external consultant] there with a research and theoretical background, free of organizational ties, who could provide critical thinking, was essential.' Statutory sector manager, Luton.

Planning

There was considerable evidence of cross agency and sector strategies and planning. Some areas put considerable resources into planning their newly configured services:

'There is a lot of work, for example developing the method statement on Saturdays. Our contribution included a lot of personal time.' Third sector manager, Luton.

There was also some evidence that where resources were more limited, partnerships could still develop:

'Collaboration can develop ad hoc, when we have no time to set objectives. We have developed all our outreaches because we were approached by communities.' Third sector manager, Suffolk.

2. RECOGNISE THE IMPORTANCE OF DATA

People will not commit resources to collaborative working unless it can be shown to achieve results. Data is critically important as evidence of need when designing services. It is equally essential to monitoring, evaluation and accountability.

The partners in the research areas found that sharing data allowed them to demonstrate the need for their services more powerfully than they could by collecting it individually.

It also helped them to show funders the impact their redesigned services were having and that they were financially worthwhile.

'Sharing information is a big issue for us. Information assurance is important as you've got client data. We have all agreed an information sharing protocol.' - Third sector manager, Suffolk

'Sharing a case management system has been very useful. Although Citizens Advice uses its own system, the Manager has been very accommodating.' Third sector manager, Bristol.

'Because the CCG is involved they can access health stats we couldn't get hold of.' Third sector manager, Suffolk

'Having a single outcome framework for all the organisations was helpful.' Statutory sector manager, Luton.

'All working to transparent good practice has had a positive effect on quality.' Third sector manager, Luton.

'We get more feedback from where clients go. Now we know we've done the right thing.' Third sector manager, Luton.

3. IDENTIFY THE KEY PARTNERS

Statutory and third sector participation

In all three areas both statutory and third sector agencies were involved. The statutory agencies were local authorities and health authorities such as Clinical Commissioning Groups. Universities were also partners in all three areas. In Bristol and Suffolk there was also significant involvement of private sector organisations such as firms of solicitors and local Law Societies. In Luton and Suffolk there was significant involvement of local trusts.

Universities

University Law departments are an increasingly important partner in promoting social justice. Universities were working in partnership third sector agencies in all three areas.

'So many law students in Bristol, not enough training contracts. They are a massive resource.' Third sector manager, Bristol.

Law Societies

Local Law Societies were identified as supportive partners in both Bristol and Suffolk.

'We led the pro bono network with the Law Society, chambers etc. Everyone who had a pro bono partnership worked together. We only did it because we'd heard they had one in Birmingham. The BPP co-ordinator mentioned it.' Third sector manager, Bristol.

'A local firm of solicitors did a big push on pro bono and won an award. We were [In a separate initiative] awarded £24,000 to promote the law. We got 75 local solicitors and barristers involved. The local Law Society was very supportive.' Third sector manager, Suffolk.

Commercial partners

Some third sector agencies worked with commercial organisations; but they tended to be part of a wider network and were not part of the core group in any of the areas.

'There are private sector partners as well. It's not always the usual suspects.' Third sector manager, Bristol.

'We have a good relationship with Hewlett Packard, it's not just lawyers.' Third sector manager, Bristol.

'We work with a private counselling service.' Third sector manager, Suffolk.

4. IDENTIFY CORE MEMBERS

In all three areas, there was a relatively small number of key partners, from both the statutory and voluntary sectors who formed a core group. They could support a wider network which did not need to be so closely involved in strategy and leadership.

Core group members have to have a clear understanding of the common goals and ways of working. If a partner can't commit to that, they probably need to move into the wider network and allow others to drive the initiative from the core group. This prevents friction and conflict from distracting the core group from the strategy they are working towards.

Conversely, when a partner from outside the core group shows that they are willing to commit their time and energy at the level required to be a core member, they can become part of the core group. For example, in Luton, one agency clearly showed that they were willing to make that commitment, although in the early days they were part of the wider network rather than the core group.

'Trust has to be there. As long as you have a strong core, say 3-4, others can be involved outside the core.' Third sector manager, Suffolk.

'As long as you have a strong core driving it (say 3-8), others can become involved. They may not be as positive and accommodating as I would have liked; but that's OK as they are outside the core.' Third sector manager, Suffolk.

'The low point was LSC consortium bidding [X organisation] had to be put out of the group. They didn't have the flexibility.' Third sector manager, Bristol.

5. DEVELOP REFERRAL PATHWAYS

Improving referral pathways was seen as the key to improving services for users and improving efficiency.

'Partners are a resource, others can solve the client's problem better.' Third sector manager, Bristol.

'If organisations have targets to meet, we assist them to meet them using the funding they already have.' Third sector manager Suffolk.

‘Citizens Advice goes up to a certain level; but when it gets very specialist, what do we do with these clients? There’s much less specialist casework.’ Third sector manager, Bristol.

‘Services for clients have improved. We’ve recognized what we’re strongest at and how to target resources better. A referral will go somewhere.’ Third sector manager, Luton.

Luton access client journey peer review

In Luton, the third sector agencies carried out an audit of each other’s records to understand the user’s experience. They found that referral and signposting between the four key partners and other organisations were working well and communication needs were being addressed. There was evidence of joint working on a client’s problem by more than one of the partners where this was needed, and of one partner using another partner’s expertise when dealing with a problem, when this was needed. The audit across organisations also increased understanding between the partners. See Appendix 2 for a summary of the peer review process and Appendix 3 for the form used.

6. ADDRESS GOVERNANCE

It is important for collaborative initiatives to be accountable and demonstrate their value (see ‘Data’ below); but it was also important not to constrain developments by creating a bureaucratic structure for the partnership itself. More informal models worked better in the research areas.

‘The local authority had to get over the fact that we don’t have minutes of meetings – we have an action log instead. If organisations have targets to meet, we assist them to meet them using the funding they already have.’ Third sector manager Suffolk.

‘The best collaborations are quite informal. We certainly didn’t find ASTF positive. You can’t engineer relationships, that can be quite disruptive. We work with people who get the job done. Organically. Being able to end a collaboration easily can be important.’ Third sector manager Suffolk.

‘What I like about Citizens Advice now is that they are prepared to work with one. They don’t seem to feel they have to clear things through head office all the time.’ Third sector manager Suffolk.

'We're not a body, we're not bogged down in governance, we're not a thing, we can morph. It's quite big and messy; but it keeps people together.' Statutory sector manager, Luton.

Where more formal governance structures were needed, perhaps when bidding for contracts as a group, these could include agreeing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), service level agreement or consortium agreement. Guidance on developing formal structures has been produced by NCVO (amongst others), see 'Useful further reading' below for more information.

7. IDENTIFY FUNDING TO CREATE CAPACITY

People need sufficient flexibility in their jobs to develop relationships, and funding for brokerage can result in more mature partnerships.

'Two things make it work – funding or a funder acting as a driver, and a non-partisan neutral voice to bring people to the table.' Third sector manager, Luton.

Financial stringency can both stimulate and restrict collaboration:

'We don't have enough management resource. To collaborate across two districts, you would need someone full time. That would cost £20,000 for six months.' Third sector manager, Suffolk.

'When money started to get tight, we weren't telling each other things unless we needed a partner to get funding. Things have changed.' Third sector manager, Luton.

Funders' approaches and priorities can have a positive impact on collaboration:

'The airport making the decision to develop its community fund was a catalyst. It has to be a charitable donation, so they can't tell you what to do; so they created a partnership fund. We created an agreed way of working. We all get donations from the airport, so we are all in the same boat' Third sector manager, Luton.

'The LA has been prepared to invest where the third sector can put forward a business case – not just an unremitting process of cuts. Creates optimism and continued commitment to collaboration.' Statutory sector manager, Luton.

'If organisations have targets to meet, we assist them to meet them using the funding they already have.' Third sector manager Suffolk.

'Some partners were struggling. We had to rally round to help them secure funding.' Third sector manager, Bristol.

8. DRAW ON TRUST AND MUTUAL SUPPORT

'We've had good relationships over 25 years. The CEOs must have a mutual respect and understanding. Each of the partners has brought something unique to the mix. The objectives have changed over time; but we are all committed to work collaboratively for the benefit of clients, even though at times we've disagreed how this was to be achieved.' Third sector manager, Luton.

A positive philosophy

'Every time I go to a partnership meeting, I come away feeling as though I have been given a boost. Energised, that feeds across your week.' Third sector manager, Suffolk.

'What makes it work – no blockers. We had [X organisation] but they dropped out. Steering the partnership is shared between about 5 people.' Third sector manager Suffolk.

9. EMBRACE CHALLENGE

It is important for third sector organisations to have a key role in developing partnerships and the way partners work together to deliver services. However, there can be a danger that partners remain within their comfort zone, talking to other organisations they already know and which think along similar lines. This can be positive; but it can also restrict exposure to new ideas and new ways of doing things. Sometimes funders can use their leverage to challenge the third sector to think in new ways.

'We could never have done it without [the local authority's external consultant]. The other partners were mistrustful of one access point; but she drove the partners so they could see how well it works.' Third sector manager, Luton

10. BE PREPARED TO DO THINGS IN NEW WAYS

People recognized that the difficult financial climate had forced them to consider changing the way they did things.

'Partnership is becoming a key to survival. We're at a crossroads where we have to work differently.' Third sector manager, Bristol.

We have been prepared to develop the relationship over time and find the issues where the LA and third sector can work together. Better relationships have enabled quicker problem-solving for members of the public when they approach the third sector providers for help as they have direct contact with people in the LA who can

sort out issues. This has enabled the third sector to see more people, and prioritise casework resources for more vulnerable people. Statutory sector manager, Luton.

Location

In Luton, the co-location of a number of the partners in one building was mentioned as an important development (which was not without its challenges).

'Co-location was a big step.' *'Having a large proportion of the partnership under one roof really helps.'* Two different third sector managers, Luton.

11. COMMUNICATE AND ENGAGE

Explain, explain, explain!

Listening to others and having the time to engage more widely was identified as important, as well as explaining what the partnership itself is doing.

'If you don't talk to people, you don't know. I completely get why people can become inwardly focussed, dwindling money, demand rising; but that's how you can find out if there's a better way. Allowing yourself to feel it's not an add on – you need to do this. You drink a lot of coffee.' Third sector manager, Bristol.

'The Suffolk and North Essex Law Society covers the constituencies of 8 MPs. We briefed them on the legal issues their constituents were facing – and offered to take on those presenting at surgeries with legal issues.' Honorary President, Suffolk Law Advice Centre.

Managers also need to ensure there is regular communication internally as their colleagues will need to buy into the changes that are being made to the way they work. That isn't going to happen if they don't understand why change is needed. They are also likely to have good ideas on the best way to implement the changes.

'We've been able to bring staff on quickly by listening and dealing with the issues.' Third sector manager, Luton.

Engage

Once a partnership picks up momentum, it can create a virtuous circle:

'It's good for morale. Staff and volunteers can see collaboration working. It helps clients and it helps them.' Third sector manager, Luton.

'We tried not to trumpet it until [the partnership] started to deliver. All of a sudden, people have started to 'get it'.' Statutory sector manager, Luton.

'The local authority now let us know when they are going to do a mass mail out, so we can be prepared for people coming in. They consult us on policies now.' Third sector manager, Luton.

12. RECOGNISE IT TAKES TIME

Organisations stressed that developing positive collaboration takes time. There may be some 'quick wins' but the most valuable outcomes take time to achieve.

'It's been challenging; but it's certainly rewarding. It's really long-term.' Third sector manager, Luton

'The thing I hear against partnership is the amount of time you have to put into it that isn't directly funded. People can get caught up in the target driven culture. If you think about the organisation's charitable objectives, then it's worthwhile. Partners help with referrals, and that's valuable. It also gets people to understand what our organisation is all about.' Third sector manager – Bristol.

'We learned quickly from our mistakes – our initial view was that LA and third sector services could be integrated into one LA run organisation. We realised this was a mistake and have been prepared to spend time getting to know the third sector really well and understand its values – why they do the things they do in the ways they do them.' Statutory sector manager, Luton

'We're trying to work in a holistic policy context – many other LAs work more in silos. This has resulted in trust and mutual respect. This has meant that the third sector agencies have been prepared to change things (maybe quite slowly), which has helped the LA to achieve wider integration and objectives. If the LA had wanted more 'quick wins' and pushed harder, earlier, it would have encountered more difficulty. It would have been counter-productive.'

As a result, the LA has been in a position to be a critical friend and challenge 'the way we do things round here' and the third sector agencies have worked together to find budget savings rather than cuts being implemented by the LA. Statutory sector manager, Luton.

'Three years ago, the suggestion was that the third sector partners should merge with the local authority's Customer Service team. Today there is mutual respect and understanding of our common purpose.' Third sector manager, Luton

COLLABORATION CHECKLIST

CONDITIONS FOR COLLABORATION

- Funding to create capacity
- Brokerage e.g. respected independent person who can bring people together
- Challenge
- Trust and mutual support
- Time

IDENTIFY KEY PARTNERS

- Statutory sector e.g. local authority, clinical commissioning group
- Voluntary sector e.g. law centre, citizens advice, independent advice agency, community groups providing information/advice
- Local law society
- University
- Commercial organisations

- Who is in the core group?*
- Who is in the wider network?*

PLANNING FOR CHANGE

- Understand the need
- Develop a theory of change
- Funding and commissioning identify strengths within the partnership, shift resources where required

DATA, EVIDENCE, MONITORING AND EVALUATION

- What data do you gather?
- What systems do you use?
- Data sharing *Agree protocols – think of data protection principles*
- What information will you need in future? *Plan in from the design stage*

COMMUNICATION

At all stages!

- Within partner organisations
- Across the wider network
- Outside the network

Appendices

Appendix 1 - People and organisations involved in developing this guide

Advice Brighton and Hove, Paul Sweeting (former Coordinator of Advice Plus and ASTF projects).

Alison Lamb, CEO of Royal Courts of Justice Advice and Citizens Advice Islington.

NETWORKS

Advice UK – Chilli Reid; Citizens Advice – Claire Blades; Law Centres Network, Julie Bishop and Stella Russell.

BRISTOL

The Bristol Advice Partnership is made up of the six major advice agencies in Bristol: Avon and Bristol Law Centre, Citizens Advice Bristol, North Bristol Advice Centre, Talking Money, South Bristol Advice Services, St Paul's Advice Centre. They work together with other agencies across the voluntary, public and private sectors to reduce poverty, help avoid homelessness, improve health and well-being and improve individuals' confidence and self-esteem. Bristol Advice Partnership members are also members of ACFA: The Advice Network, which works in partnership to combat poverty and social justice by improving the quality & provision of free, independent advice across the South West. Bristol Advice Partnership has recently produced a report showing the positive impact they have on people's lives.

Sue Evans (Director Citizens Advice Bristol); Clare Carter (former Director Avon and Bristol Law Centre); Ginette Corr (Director Avon and Bristol Law Centre), Dipika Keen, Head of Business Transactions/Knowledge Osborne Clarke and Trustee of Avon and Bristol Law Society, Becky Moyce, President Bristol Law Society.

LUTON

In 2010 The Luton Advice Network (LAN) was formally set up as an Advice Plus project, although partnership working across the legal/advice sector in Luton pre-dated that by a number of years. The LAN also had a wide membership of smaller community groups, providing information, advice and guidance as part of their services. Lottery-funded LAN projects delivered a range of services to the

members including training and outreach sessions, to enhance and develop advice services in Luton.

Simultaneously, the LAN Partners were working with Luton Borough Council (LBC) on a shared approach to service delivery which also includes LBC's Customer Services, which is known as 'Luton Access'. Luton Access enables the public and voluntary sectors to provide a fast, seamless, effective service through co-locations, shared use of resources, customer and performance information and a single point of access that connects all elements to help service users to identify and resolve problems quickly, at an early stage, and prevent reoccurrence in the future.

Luton – Julia Cornelius (Director Citizens Advice Luton); Gillie Sharp (Manager Luton Law Centre); Rumi Chowdhury (Manager Luton Rights); Noelette Hanley (Director Luton Irish Forum and a director of Healthwatch); Sue Nelson (Head of Revenues and Benefits Luton Borough Council).

SUFFOLK

Although there were discussions about creating a unitary authority for the county about ten years ago, they were not taken forward and so there is a patchwork of funding and service provision through the County Council, seven District and Borough Councils, as well as Parish and town councils. Although some of the local authorities have merged their communities teams, the fragmentation of local government has an impact on social justice and advice provision tends to be a patchy. Organisations tend to work with others on a more local basis rather than county-wide, although those partnerships can include a wide range of different trusts, statutory, voluntary and private/commercial organisations. They all share a common aim, which is to provide better services for local people and to encourage better health and well-being. Partnerships include a social prescribing project involving the Clinical Commissioning Group, a major health centre, the District Council and the Police, amongst others.

Suffolk – Simon Clifton (Fundraising and Contracts Officer, Mid-Suffolk Citizens Advice); Jane Ballard (Director Citizens Advice Suffolk West); Janet John (District Manager North East Suffolk Citizens Advice); Audrey Ludwig (Legal Services Director ISCRE); Roger Finbow (Chair Seckford Foundation), Jonny Ripman (Honorary President, Suffolk Law Advice Clinic).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Vicky Ling has significant experience in managing third sector legal services; a Law Centre, a CAB with an employed solicitor, and an independent advice centre. She has provided specialist management consultancy to legal service providers, including many NfP agencies, for around twenty years.

Vicky was a founder member of the Civil Justice Council and served two terms. She was heavily involved in access to justice and pro bono issues. She was a member of the Low Commission (2012-15) on legal advice and support, which carried out extensive research and developed a strategy for funding social welfare law advice and support.

Vicky is co-author (with Simon Pugh) of the LAG Legal Aid Handbook, most recently updated in 2017-18 (subsequent developments are posted on a blog www.legalaidhandbook.com). She has recently co-authored a complaints handling toolkit and client care toolkit (with Fiona Westwood) for the Law Society.

Vicky is a Chartered Quality Professional and is an approved Lexcel Consultant. She has carried out many reviews of legal and advice services, internally for organisations themselves, on behalf of network organisations and in partnership with funders.

FUNDER

Matthew Smerdon joined The Legal Education Foundation at the end of October 2013 as its Chief Executive.

Matthew has worked in the foundation sector since 2004 when he joined the Baring Foundation as Deputy Director. Whilst there, he developed programmes supporting the legal advice sector, latterly on supporting the sector to adapt to the new environment of reduced public funding and increased need for services. Much of this work has been done in partnership with other UK foundations and City law firms and via engagement with policy makers.

Previously Matthew was Director of Community Work at Community Links in east London where he continued as an advisor from 2004-2012, supporting research and development projects and, from 2007-2009 being seconded to the Prime Minister's Council on Social Action. In September 2013, Matthew was appointed to the Civil Justice Council.

Matthew is the author of publications on legal advice, social action, public services, the voluntary sector and grant making and contributed significantly to the 'Collaborative Voices' research project from his experience.

Appendix 2- Useful further reading

1. 'Building Collaborative Places: Infrastructure for System Change', Anna Randle, Hannah Anderson - Collaborate – February 2017
http://wordpress.collaboratei.com/wp-content/uploads/Building-Collaborative-Places_Digital-Report-Pages-2.pdf
2. 'Delivering Advice Together, learning from the Advice Plus experience', Advice UK, Citizens Advice, Law Centres Federation, July 2012
3. 'Future Advice: the Strengthening the Voluntary Sector grants programme 2012-2015' Matthew Smerdon, Joe Randall, Baring Foundation – January 2013
<http://baringfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/STVSFA8.pdf>
4. 'How to Capture Value from Collaboration, Especially If You're Skeptical About It' Heidi K. Gardner, Herminia Ibarra Harvard Business Review – May 2017 <https://hbr.org/topic/collaboration>
5. 'Joint working agreements' NCVO Collaborative Working Unit, 2006
https://www.ncvo.org.uk/images/documents/practical_support/public_services/Joint_working_agreements.pdf
6. Low Commission (2012-2015) on the Future of Advice and Legal Support was established to develop a strategy for access to advice and support on Social Welfare Law in England and Wales. There are numerous working papers and several reports including examples of good practice, which can be downloaded here: <http://www.lowcommission.org.uk/>
7. 'Making a strategic shift towards early action' Guy Robertson, Positive Ageing Associates for the Early Action Funders Alliance – June 2014
<http://positiveageingassociates.com/prevention/>
8. 'The Anatomy of Collaboration' Dr Henry Kippin, Professor Bill Fulford – Collaborate – June 2016 http://wordpress.collaboratei.com/wp-content/uploads/Collaborate_Anatomy-of-Collaboration-Digital-Report.pdf
9. 'Thinking about... collaboration', Ben Cairns, Margaret Harris, Romaine Hutchison - Institute for Voluntary Action Research - March 2011
<https://www.ivar.org.uk/publication/thinking-about-collaboration/>
10. 'Working in Partnership – a snapshot of needs and experiences in Scotland', Lucy Stewart – commissioned by ACOSOVO - December 2013
https://www.acosvo.org.uk/sites/default/files/20140108_Working_in_Partnership.pdf

Appendix 3 – Luton client journey peer review process summary

WHY DID THE AGENCIES CARRY OUT A ‘CLIENT JOURNEY’ PEER REVIEW?

It was hoped that carrying out a cross-agency peer review of the ‘client journey’ would enable all agencies to see how well arrangements are working and promote better relationships and understanding between staff members. It was also hoped that the findings would complement the findings of a Luton Access mystery shopping exercise.

Aims of the exercise:

- Identify whether the model was working effectively or needed further development
- Enable agencies to share expertise
- Provide an opportunity for career / personal development of those involved
- Have a positive effect on relationships between individual advisers and advice agencies
- Improve the quality of information and advice provided to service users
- Increase consistency of practice
- Provide funders with an increased level of quality assurance

Summary of findings

The client journey peer review process was felt to be useful, both in identifying the client’s experience and also in increasing understanding of the partners as to how they work.

It was felt to be manageable as an annual exercise, within the partners’ existing resources.

Referral and signposting between the four key partners and other organisations appeared to be working well.

Organisations referred and signposted to were mainly in the Luton Directory. Where this was not the case, it was due to the nature of the client’s problem, for example the client needed private solicitors.

There was evidence of joint working on a client’s problem by more than one of the partners where this was needed.

There was evidence of one partner using another partner’s expertise when dealing with a client’s problem itself.

There was evidence of communication needs being addressed, eg. use of an interpreter.

The extent of personal data recorded varied according to agency and type of enquiry, there was also a variation in whether client data protection consent was recorded (more likely when a client was seen in person, less likely when dealt with by telephone only).

GROUND RULES

Confidentiality and data protection

If people from another agency are going to look at records this raises issues of client confidentiality and data protection. Agencies involved in the exercise needed to discuss and agree:

- *Has to be clients' choice (it's their confidentiality)*
- *How to obtain adequate authorisation (from clients)*
- *Data protection compliance*
- *Managing client expectations & explaining the purpose of the exercise*

Conflict of interest

It was recognised that there could be potential conflict of interest issues between agencies which needed to be considered, for example;

- A peer reviewer who had previously worked for an agency they were now going to review
- Making it clear that the local authority would not have access to records
- Any disagreements between a peer reviewer and the agency they were reviewing about whether the agency had taken the most appropriate course of action for a service user, or anything else involved in the peer review

Experience and expertise

The agencies agreed that:

- Each organisation would identify someone to carry out the peer review.
- All organisations were happy to rely on each other to select an appropriately experienced person.
- Any organisation could object to any peer reviewer without giving a reason.

Process

Agencies also discussed and agreed:

- What records should be looked at?
- It would use a minimum sample of 3 client records per agency (more might be needed if the first sample could not be assessed for some reason).
- It was noted that the records would be very different as they would vary from agency to agency, due to the different nature of the work done by each one.

- What are the criteria that are being assessed?
 - o The peer reviewer would look for the quality of the client's journey through the Luton Access system, not quality of advice as each agency has its own supervision systems for that and the particular peer reviewer might not have appropriate knowledge/expertise in relation to the subject area being reviewed.

- What 'good' looks like; some examples could be whether the agency has:
 - o picked up all relevant issues
 - o suggested appropriate next steps, including sign-posting or referral to others
 - o used appropriate information sources, including the Luton Directory
 - o identified any communication issues and used the most appropriate method of communication as per the Accessible Information Standard

- When and how feedback would be provided
- When the peer review should take place
- Anything further that needs to be put in place
- Any further support needed

Appendix 4 - Luton Access Client Journey Peer Review Checklist

Was the client:

- a) dealt with by the organisation itself ?
- b) signposted to another organisation?
- c) referred to another organisation?

Was it clear from the record that the action above was appropriate in the client's circumstances?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Other – please explain

What personal data was the client asked to provide (eg. name, address, DOB, NINO, E&D characteristics etc.)?

Was it clear from the record that the client was asked to give data sharing/protection consent?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Other – please explain

If the client was referred to another organisation was it one that is included in the Luton Access Directory?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Other – please explain

Was any deadline clear from the record?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Other – please explain

If there was a deadline, was action taken in good time?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Other – please explain

If the client was signposted or referred to another organisation, was it clear from the record that the client had been told what they could expect from that organisation?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Other – please explain

If the organisation *being referred to* charges for services, was it clear from the record that the client had been told about this?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) N/A
- d) Other – please explain

If the organisation *being referred to* does not charge for services, was it clear from the record that the client had been told it would be free?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) N/A
- d) Other – please explain

Did it appear that the client could speak in privacy if this was requested?

This could be eg. a notice in the waiting area, it does not have to be recorded on the client record

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Other – please explain

Was it clear that there was information about the client's right to complain?

This could be eg. a notice in the waiting area, it does not have to be recorded on the client record

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Other – please explain

Was it clear from the record that the client was asked whether they had any communication needs (eg. language, format, method of communication)?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Other – please explain