

A REVIEW OF PARTNERSHIP AND MULTI-AGENCY WORKING

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1) The review's **aims** were to –
 - a) analyse and understand the possibilities of, and inhibitors to, multi-agency and cross-professional working.
 - b) establish a realistic understanding of the current state of multi-agency working in Knowle, Easton, and Lockleaze, and to contribute towards the development of greater opportunities for effective partnership working.
 - c) assess the impact of these projects at the levels of the front-line service, specialists and staff employed in agencies, and strategic managers and directors
 - d) promote learning about multi-agency and cross-professional working with the intention that this learning will develop practice in the future.
- 2) The concepts of **multidisciplinarity** and **interdisciplinarity** contribute to understanding about **multi-agency** and **partnership working**.
- 3) The main stage of the study is divided into three **sites of inquiry** – **Easton, Lockleaze and managers**. The YISPs are set within the social and geographical context of these areas. The range of different and multi-faith communities in **Easton** means that a united front does not necessarily exist in terms of understanding of young people's needs and services to be delivered. The public service provision in Easton tends to be fragmented, with competing agencies and bodies. In **Lockleaze**, at the operational level, *Better Together* is seen as having established an effective and successful multi-agency partnership for local workers in the statutory and community sectors who are working with children and young people.
- 4) The **Easton YISP** has been slower to evolve than the other YISPs in Bristol. The main reasons for this are the numerous groups in the field who are working with young people, and the amount of time that has been spent in finalising procedures. Less time has been spent on issues of identification and no time spent on developing the kind of services that would be on offer. Some voluntary sector organisations also feel it is being dominated by the statutory sector and a few feel the YOT is too directional. As far as the **Lockleaze YISP** was concerned, much has been achieved; however some obstacles to effective multi-agency and partnership working were identified including time pressures, initiative overload, and bureaucracy.
- 5) Most **managers** felt there was little option but to try and work effectively in multi-agency and partnership arrangements, for two reasons: these forms of delivery are government-driven; and managers felt that they made sense in terms of service provision. Managers recognised that the **dynamics of partnership and inter-agency working** (the distribution of power among actors in the partnership; the presence or absence of trust and authentic interpersonal relationships; the group dynamics in boards or panel meetings) could affect for good or ill the effectiveness of multi-agency and partnership working. A range of **external obstacles** were thought to prevent or inhibit effective partnership working, including the uncertainty and vulnerability of funding, central government's drive for

performance, and agencies' different cultures and languages. Strategic leadership was seen as paramount if initiatives such as YISP were going to build on the considerable development investment, and survive beyond the initial funding.

- 6) The **main issues** that the research has highlighted begin with the importance of the political, organisational, personal and professional cultures that can affect for good or ill the effectiveness of partnership and multi-agency working. **The main challenges** involved in trying to work collaboratively include: moving from discipline-based practice and into interdisciplinary practice; moving from the defensive to interdisciplinarity; preparing the ground for multi-agency and partnership working; and networking, power and inclusion. All of these pose considerable challenges to managers. It is argued that it may be fruitful to see partnership and multi-agency working from both a **strategic change perspective**, and as a **new form of governance**, each of which provoke frustrations and hope for stakeholders.

- 7) The report suggests some important **policy and practice implications**. **Differences between different agencies and key individuals** in terms of where they sit on a continuum of policy stances with regard to YISP impact upon efforts to construct positive inter-agency working. For effective collaboration, different perspectives need to be acknowledged and understood. Time needs to be taken both to gain a **sound understanding of the social mix, diverse relationships and cultural differences in the area**, and to assess their potential impact on any new initiative and to attempt to build upon positive reactions. **Clear criteria for membership** for partnership boards need to be developed, and informal contacts or friendship networks should not constitute the primary basis of membership. There is a **need to provide developmental and reflective space** for key actors in a partnership setting, to work on the feelings and emotions involved in collaboration. Managers may benefit from **understanding their 'holding' and 'containing' roles**, working with their own and others' anxieties: this could be accomplished through a process of **personal role supervision** or **learning sets**, and focus should be given to the **staff development implications** of multi-agency and partnership working. At a strategic level there is a need to find ways of negotiating **stable and long-term arrangements with funding bodies**.

2 INTRODUCTION

In this section, we discuss the aims of the research, its background, and the key questions it set out to review. We also tackle issues about terminology by exploring the range of meanings that exist about multi-agency, partnership and inter-professional working. Finally we outline the wider policy context within which developments like YISP are occurring.

2.1 BACKGROUND AND AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

The University (UWE) was approached in the summer of 2003 by Barnardo's in Bristol, the lead agency for the Bristol Children's Fund (BCF) partnership. The overarching aim of a review of multi-agency working in Bristol was to establish a realistic understanding of the current state of 'multi-agency' working and have a workable plan towards creating more opportunity to develop it, using the identification, referral and tracking (IRT), and Youth Inclusion and Support Panels (YISPs) context as a real time case of change and innovation. We submitted our proposal in response to this request in July 2003 with a view to starting the work in the autumn.

The aims of this inquiry, as expressed in our proposal, were to -

- 1) analyse and understand the possibilities of, and inhibitors to, multi-agency and cross-professional working.
- 2) establish a realistic understanding of the current state of multi-agency working in each of three **sites** – Knowle, Easton, Lockleaze – and to contribute towards the development of greater opportunities for effective partnership working.
- 3) assess the impact of these projects at three different **levels** within the partnership network:
 - front-line service deliverers and their immediate line management
 - specialists and staff employed in agency administrative departments (e.g. finance, personnel, IT)
 - strategic managers and directors
- 4) promote learning about multi-agency and cross-professional working among the stakeholders involved with the intention that this learning will develop practice in the future.

The details of the phases of the review, of how we set about achieving these aims, and an outline of our methodology, are discussed in section 7. Our "data bank" consists of field notes of 18 meetings of panels, workshops and participation meetings and of 45 interviews with front-line staff, managers and specialists (taking both stages of the inquiry together).

2.2 THE KEY QUESTIONS

Our brief was use the following set of questions as the basis of our interviews and discussions with actors and stakeholders –

- 1) What kinds of interagency work do they engage in, if any?
- 2) What advantages/disadvantages does it have?
- 3) Do they consider it would be more or less useful to work in this way?
- 4) What obstacles to trying to work in this way do they experience?
- 5) What would make it easier or more effective?
- 6) What changes in their own agency would make it easier or more effective?
- 7) What changes in other agencies would make it easier or more effective?

In our proposal we subsequently suggested that the lens through which we would observe the case was change – where it was embraced, where it was resisted, and why. We anticipated that multi-agency and partnership working would present a range of challenges at the personal and the collective levels, including -

- The constraints of statutory requirements and procedures designed for single-agency operations (e.g. referral processes);
- The nature of professional knowledge across different groups, where this makes multi-agency work compelling or bound with obstacles;
- Differences in subjective experiences, personal values and organisational cultures;
- Differing accountability pressures - given that each professional group and statutory service had its own, dedicated inspection system and national standards which made discrete requirements on professionals;
- The impact of differing policy contexts and funding arrangements – where the policy framework for a professional group is encouraging or discouraging of collaborative work;
- Variations in values and priorities across professional groups backed up by different training programmes;
- The politics of inter-professional and multi-agency working;
- The psychological investment in one's own professional group identity, and realistic and unrealistic fears regarding the behaviours and intentions of other professional groups.

These sets of questions and topics lay at the basis of entry into the field of inquiry.

2.3 THE WIDER POLICY CONTEXT OF MULTI-AGENCY AND PARTNERSHIP WORKING

One of the key strategic objectives of the Children's Fund focuses on the concept of *partnership*, i.e. "its role and impact on planning and service delivery. Especially in bringing together local agencies and ensuring greater accessibility to relevant services"¹. This sits with another strand of current government policy - the requirement for local authorities to take the lead in ensuring agreement of co-ordinated local preventative strategies for children at risk. A key element of this is the requirement that 25% of Children's Funds programmes in any given area must be earmarked for programmes aimed at the prevention of youth crime and anti-social behaviour. These programmes must be jointly agreed with local Youth Offending Teams (YOTs). The Children's Fund had also to make available resources to ensure that in every area there were

¹ Children's Fund (2001) *Guidance on Objectives, Target Setting, Local Monitoring and Evaluation*, p. 1.

identification, referral and tracking (IRT) systems in place for every child deemed to be at risk by September 2003.

Among the programmes that could be funded by this 25% are Youth Inclusion and Support Panels (YISPs). These are local multi-agency planning groups involving representatives from Social Services, Education and Youth service, Police, Health (CAMHS), schools, Housing Services, Connexions, YOTs and Children's Fund services. The main aim was to prevent offending and anti-social behaviour by offering voluntary support services for 8-13 year old 'high risk' children and their families. These panels were also expected to link IRT mechanisms and other systems aimed at identifying children at risk.

Within the BCF area three YISP development areas were identified: Knowle West, Lockleaze and Easton. The model of partnership put in place appeared to be one where a group of staff from partner organisations came together to work to a common agenda under aegis of a strategic partnership board. The group of staff continued to be managed by, and work to, terms and conditions of their employing agency. A single partner had the role of lead agency.

An underlying reason for setting up this partnership was to strengthen service delivery, born out of recognition that existing arrangements were not meeting children's and young peoples' needs effectively and that individual services focused on reacting to problems rather than preventing them. However for any effective strategies to emerge from this initiative, the administrative structures within the agencies from which the workers are drawn needed to be able to accommodate and work with the contingencies that the initiative gave rise to. Similarly strategic managers/leaders within them also needed to own the initiative and provide the space which allowed both administrative staff and frontline workers the space and flexibility to be responsive.

2.4 TERMINOLOGY AND MEANINGS: INTER-AGENCY, PARTNERSHIP, MULTIDISCIPLINARITY AND INTERDISCIPLINARITY

The concepts of multi-agency and partnership working and governance hold the prospect of increased complexity in professional staff's and managers' roles. In a workshop at a SOLACE² Conference in Newport back in September 1999, partnership, multi-agency working, joined-up or seamless government suggested a system of "unimaginable complexity" to Simon White, then Director of Social Services at the London Borough of Camden. First, he suggested that there were several types of joined up government, for example, pooled budgets, lead commissioning, and integrated provision. Second, cultural differences between partner organisations were inevitable. He argued that, while central government's rhetoric about partnership is simplistic - sometimes partnerships are not possible - the "complexity of human need" in society was such that it needed to be addressed by arrangements that transcend organisational boundaries. "Joined-up-ness" suggests that, somehow, numerous public, private and voluntary systems and sub-systems may be meshed together in a series of complex relationships in order to impact beneficially on society and the citizen.

² Society of Local Authority Chief Executives

While the formal aim of the research was to review *multi-agency* working, we rapidly encountered other overlapping concepts and practices such as *inter-professional* or *inter-disciplinary* working and *partnership* working. Sometimes people used these and associated terms interchangeably, often appropriately since one form of practice could be subsumed within another. We tried, however, to maintain some clarity for ourselves and during our field work about what these various terms could mean and what distinctions existed between them.

The post-1997 governance arrangements for the delivery of services for children involve fundamental changes in modes of working. Professionals are now challenged to rethink their ways of working individually and co-operatively. For example –

A local authority partnership is a process in which a local authority works together with partners to achieve better outcomes for the local community, as measured by the needs of the local stakeholders, and involves bringing together or making better use of resources. This working together requires the development of a commitment to a shared agenda, effective leadership, a respect for the needs of the partners, and a plan for the contributions and benefits of all the partners (DETR, 1999³).

The new jargon involved concepts of *partnership* and *multi-agency working*. The message for professionals was that they had to work together in a more co-operative way. What exactly this meant in practice poses big questions.

Professionals are trained to operate in cadres of ‘expertise’, which are associated with being able to be specialised in relatively small domains of knowledge though with great depth and highly developed skills. In a professional world of experts, individuals become keen on supporting their own fields and their individual attachments. What the new governance imperatives demanded from these professionals was the ability to move beyond such fields, learn and share knowledge and skills with each other. The concepts of partnership and multi-agency working were embedded in others, namely those of *multidisciplinarity* and *interdisciplinarity*.

In many professional circumstances, individuals feel the need to work with each other in ways that are inherently multidisciplinary and sometimes interdisciplinary. What the government proposed for children services was a compulsory move towards multi- and, if possible, interdisciplinarity.

Traditional multidisciplinary settings have included, for example, hospitals where nurses, doctors with various expertise, psychologists and other professionals commonly constitute a team. The nature of the setting promotes multidisciplinary. However, interdisciplinarity goes a stage further. Research⁴ has shown how power relations and individual attachments to professional niches have been contradicting the development of interdisciplinarity. Professionals are happy to work with other professionals, and to give their opinion as experts. They are less happy to see all colleagues in a team as equals, and to exchange knowledge, expertise and experience with each other. *Multi-*

³ DETR (1999) *A Working Definition of Local Authority Partnerships*, research on behalf of DETR conducted by Newchurch and Co. Ltd., p. 5

⁴ Klein, J. (1990) *Interdisciplinarity: history, theory and practice*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press

knowledge is accepted fairly readily; the creation of *collective knowledge* is embraced with more difficulty.

At the core of interdisciplinarity lies a comprehension of a problem in a holistic way. Its solution is not seen in the direct dependency on a simple answer, originated by a specific and single branch of knowledge. In the interdisciplinary context, solutions are the result of a co-operative sharing of knowledge, ideas and skills that originate a new, appropriate and more complete solution to the issue. This new knowledge is not attached to a particular knowledge field – it embodies elements of various fields, and it is the result of a process of some professional detachment from the individuals involved. Such a process does not mean however the denial of each individual's professional knowledge. It involves rather the ability to present such a knowledge to the group and to move beyond it, so as to see how this knowledge may be linked to others in order to create a new and more complete one to solve the problem at stake. As previous research⁵ shows, interdisciplinarity is still in its infancy. In most cases it is very much an ideal model.

Multidisciplinarity is easier to achieve. Professionals feel less exposed and thus less threatened by it. They are asked to give their expert opinion, but they are not asked to discuss it or to move beyond it, in order to find a collective result. They work as a team in which each individual has a clearly defined position, quite often established out of personality, prestige or power.

The concepts of *multi-agency working* and *partnership working* are directly related to those of multidisciplinarity and interdisciplinarity. Multi-agency working involves multidisciplinarity. Partnership working involves both multidisciplinarity and interdisciplinarity. The notion of collaborative work in partnerships may remain within a multidisciplinary framework, but it may evolve to one of interdisciplinarity. The new governance implies the latter. The reality exposes multidisciplinary work.

We will return to these notions in subsequent sections by examining how in practice professionals and managers understood the nature of their work and the challenges which inter-agency and partnership, multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary working, presented. What our research presents is a picture of how professionals in Bristol involved in this new governance tried to secure their jobs, learn from each other, deliver better services, attain targets and cope with pushes to new ways of working.

⁵ Butterfoss, F. D. *et al.* (1993) 'Community Coalitions for Prevention and Health Promotion' in *Health Education Research: Theory and Practice*, 8, pp. 315-30

3 THE CASE STUDY

The data that forms the case study is presented in this section. The study is divided into its three sites of inquiry – Easton (3.1), Lockleaze (3.2) and managers (3.3). We begin the Easton and Lockleaze sub-sections by outlining briefly our understanding about the nature of the local community, and then proceed to present and discuss key actors' and stakeholders' views about multi-agency and partnership working, ultimately with particular reference to the YISP developments. In section 4, we will examine the implications and key messages emerging from the data that we explore here.

The decision to focus on Easton and Lockleaze YISPs in stage 2 of this review (and not on Knowle West) was taken in consultation with the BCF. It was based partly in pragmatism and partly because of the nature of the data and potential lessons that each might emerge from these. From a pragmatic and resources point of view it was always the case that the main part of the inquiry would focus on two research sites in order that the UWE team could report on the review on time. As importantly, it was felt that Easton and Lockleaze provided potentially significant contrasts – in terms of their social and demographic characteristics, and because the Easton and Lockleaze YISPs were at different stages of development. The Easton YISP was at a nascent stage during our review period, while the Lockleaze and Better Together local partnership was longer established.

3.1 EASTON

The nature of the local community

Easton has always been home to some of Bristol's poorest residents. The exact boundaries of the community are difficult to define but they embrace two wards: Easton and Lawrence Hill. At the turn of the century the area was host to largely working class people who were suffering from endemic problems of low wages, unemployment, poor housing conditions, poor health and poverty. During the 1920's an economic slump deeply effected the area and in the 1950's a slum clearance programme saw the development of high rise and maisonette housing and an exodus of thousands of indigenous residents to sprawling housing estates on the outskirts of the city. Since these times Easton (along with its neighbour St. Paul's) has now become the first destination for the city's new poor. With the construction of Easton Way, the M32 and Temple Way in the 1970's the community of Easton took on a more remote and isolated disposition separate from the city centre and its neighbour St. Paul's and enclosed by surrounding suburbia.

According to the 2001 Census the community in Easton ward is racially mixed - 25% of the population is black: African-Caribbean 9%, Asian 10% and Chinese 1% and mixed race 4% (Bristol City Council, 2004⁶). There are above average levels of unemployment and overcrowding. Lawrence Hill has the worst quality of life in the City, across 28 different indicators (Bristol City Council, 1999⁷). It also has among the highest levels of deprivation according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (Office Deputy Prime

⁶ Bristol City Council (2004) *Census Figures 2001: Ward data*, <http://www.bristol-city.gov.uk/Fuguri/frame.html?P+PSD04901+BG+F+BMM00103+DET00105+PSD00112>

⁷ Bristol City Council (1999) *Indicators of Quality of Life in Bristol*, Health and Environmental Services

Minister, 2000⁸). There are also high levels of crime, drug use and the highest number of children on the 'at risk' register. The local police describe the area as the South West's 'regional drug capital.' It is also an area characterised by considerable population flux. Interviewees thought that the area is seen as having an insufficient number of three bedroom flats and houses, which, means larger families always aim to move out of the area at the earliest opportunity. High population flux means that resident young people tend to have less chance of education success. Education Welfare Services reported to us that children who join primary schools after year 7 and/or leave before year 11 tend to have poorer attendance records than anyone else. Educational professionals from both the statutory and voluntary sector suggest that education provision is further challenged by the growing refugee population in the area which increases population transiency and diversity and makes tracking of young people extraordinary difficult to achieve.

Easton - community or communities?

Regeneration officials tend to speak of Easton as a *community*. Yet in our research the majority of interviewees tended to speak explicitly about '*communities*' with different outlooks, traditions, cultures, needs and aspirations. For example at a recent Faith Communities Conference a speaker asked delegates to recognise the needs of a specific Easton community when he evaluated the validity of existing Census data on religious affiliation presented by BCC. In Easton and Lawrence Hill the 2001 Census data suggests that almost 1 in 10 people were self-defined Muslims, 2% were Sikhs and another 2% declared themselves to be either Jews, Hindus, Buddhists or other non-Christians. However Dabinderjit Singh from the National Audit Office suggested that this was a gross underestimation of the number of Sikhs in the community. BCC Census figures imply that there was merely 1,500 Sikhs living in the city, but 5,000 Sikhs attend the Gurdwaras every week. Three of the four city Gurdwaras are in the Easton/Lawrence Hill wards. He accused BCC and GOSW of failing to monitor or know how many Sikhs there were in the city and stressed that his community had become increasingly reluctant to define themselves as Sikh given the growing hostile reaction that had developed post-9/11 both in the '*community*' and nationwide (Singh, 2004)⁹. Our research suggests that the Muslim community not only feels a similar reluctance, but it also expresses what one interviewee described as '*an increasing paranoia*' and have developed a new mistrust of local officials in recent months.

the Muslim communities feel everyone is against them (Voluntary sector project manager)

Service deliverers themselves also perceive that the area is a collection of different communities -

Another factor is that you've got quite... large cultural groups living there where certain cultures have completely different ethics for the activities that are around for the young people to go to ... The Asian communities [are] a good example, they are very strict about the way that their children develop and grow up and want to know exactly what they are doing and where they

⁸ Office Deputy Prime Minister (2000) *Index of Multiple Deprivation*

⁹ Singh, D. (2004) *Keynote address to the Faith Communities Conference*, Bristol City Council, 19th April 2004.

are... And again many of the black-African community groups have very strong traditional values and the Somalians have very strong tribal values that they still maintain in the community they are now living in. (Statutory sector, senior manager)

If we accept that there are different communities within the Easton area we also have to acknowledge that these communities do not necessarily present a united front in terms of their understanding and their perception of young people's needs and the services to be delivered. Divisions, particularly along generational lines, mean that those seeking to represent and vocalise their community's interests and needs have to struggle with internal dynamics as well as external demands -

everyone who has gone to the mosques it is like well you have got a problem with drugs and the mosques turn round and say no we haven't, the kids are fine they are hunky dory and they believe that there are no problems with our youth in society. (Voluntary sector project co-ordinator)

If there is less than wholehearted support among traditional leaders, or even denial that there are issues to be addressed within the community they represent, then those delivering projects have an extraordinarily difficult task to address the issues and concerns of young people. This can be particularly difficult for second and third generation members of the community. We talked to two umbrella organisations in the Easton area who work hard to represent their community. Both of these groups were surviving on very small grants and project-specific budgets and both talked about the high reliance they have on voluntary effort and community support to ensure that they can deliver even basic events, training and opportunities to young people in their community. One group reported waiting lists of young people wanting to join their cultural and educational events. Elsewhere we ourselves even received pleas for more support for community specific youth groups.

We also have to be mindful that the communities who are articulating their own needs may, in the long run, not be strictly in line with an overall strategic approach being planned for young people in the future. One of the professional project managers reported that their organisation is currently campaigning for a fee paying, private, Islamic school in Bristol for which there is seen to be an obvious and growing demand within their community. In doing so they seek parity with Christian and Jewish communities who have a history of state support for education provision. The project manager estimated that around 2,000 Muslims worship regularly in the five mosques across Bristol, three of which are in Easton. Planning for intra-faith solutions to youth transition journeys is probably not part of any given strategic plan for youth provision. It is unclear how many Muslim young people would access these facilities if an application for a school proved to be successful, but intra faith solutions are not welcomed by everyone. It is also a cause of division amongst some projects in the area which feel that some of their fellow projects are insufficiently secular to be true representatives for their community in the local area. In fact we came across some resentment from service deliverers in the voluntary sector that faith-based groups with perceived insular perspectives were being awarded funding at the expense of more secular and self-proclaimed multi-cultural groups that work to attract all young people to mainstream, non-religious activities.

Religion actually promotes that you stick within religion anyway so I don't understand where it is all coming from. The funders are encouraging them to draw these boundaries. (Project Worker)

Our remit is not to verify whether this is true or not. Instead it is to report on the perceptions informing potential partnership relationships in the community. Clearly there is concern that certain faith-based groups working with young people are actively seeking to promote faith rather than community engagement and in this sense there is a perception that some community groups are perhaps working in an exclusionary way which could be inimical to allowing their young people to experience life in the mainstream -

I basically think that there is a feeling there, don't empower [BME group] kids. (Project manager).

Equally, 'multi-cultural' projects are sometimes criticised for failing to satisfactorily reach those young people living in their community who are deemed to be most in need.

Our data is suggesting that when we are looking at Easton we are looking at *communities* not a *community*. There is some frustration amongst certain groups that although funders express a secular, non-partisan, inclusive community approach their actions are sometimes ironically perceived as exacerbating community differences. These are broadly accepted by most service providers working in the community. In fact compared with other multi-racial urban centres across the UK, Bristol is sometimes seen as behind in terms of its approach of developing inter-racial relations and activities -

I have worked in London. Compared to what's happening in London or say Bradford, Bristol is about ten years behind. (Project worker)

Regeneration initiatives

Easton communities have seen quite significant regeneration investment in their local area. Since the 1980's the inner-city area which includes Easton has benefited from a variety of urban initiatives. One of the earliest initiatives (the Urban Programme) funded some settlement projects, children's playground and landscaping. The Inner City Task Force covering Lawrence Hill, Ashley and Easton in the late 80's and early 90's led to the creation of some jobs in the Barton Hill areas but the impact was fairly small. Though the Bristol Development Corporation made a tremendous impact on Barton Hill and The Dings through the construction of the Spine Road, its impact on the broader community was seen as largely irrelevant to local community needs (Hoggett, Kimberlee and Robertson, 2000)¹⁰.

Later funded streams had more impact in terms of enhancing the quality of people lives and providing opportunities. SRB2 Inner City Lifeline projects focused on the family, learning, support for elderly, and childcare projects particularly at the Barton Hill settlement. SRB3, 'Bridging the Gap' covered the whole inner city targeting employment. SRB4, 'Youth Owning Urban Regeneration' sought to engage the young

¹⁰ Hoggett, P., Kimberlee, R., Robertson, S., 2000, *SRB4 Interim Qualitative Report: Process issues and area profiles*, University of the West of England

people in local urban regeneration initiatives and SRB6 'Bringing Bristol Together' focused on joining together existing provision particularly in the areas of social exclusion, education and community safety. Further employment projects in what is now recognised as the New Deal for Communities area have come from Urban 2, ERDF, and ESF. There are potential spillover effects from the current investment from the South West Region Development Agency. The area also benefits from an Education Action Zone. There is also a large Sure Start programme aimed at tackling the roots of educational underachievement. Community at Heart, the New Deal for Communities programme, has funding available to tackle the issues of poor job prospects; crime; educational under-achievement; poor health, housing problems and the physical environment.

It is evident that local people in the area have been reasonably successful in terms of developing partnerships to attract money. In fact over the next few years there is approximately £16.2 million from Objective 2, SRB6, Neighbourhood Renewal and New Deal for the Communities funding streams available for regeneration activities in the Easton/Lawrence Hill and St. Paul's area.

Partnership issues in Easton

Fragmentation, duplication and lack of strategic direction

These funding bids have spawned an array of delivery partnerships within the local area. This is in addition to the many city-wide, umbrella, voluntary organisations who are often based in the area who aim to maximise access for and support to members of their communities throughout the city. A large number of these have been developed by and for the minority ethnic communities living in Easton (e.g. the Sikh Resource Centre, Bristol Muslim Cultural Society and SARI) but they support their communities across the city.

Fragmentation and a lack of joined up strategic direction is a theme we commonly encountered when we talked about partnership working to professionals working in the community. This lack of clarity is often seen as being reflected in the confusing engagement of BCC's departments in delivering regeneration programmes. Council officials' understanding of initiatives are seen to be variable, making effective partnership working difficult -

You sometimes wonder where the council is coming from because different people in different departments have so very different attitudes to us and what we do. There is no consistency even within the same department.
(Project worker)

For partnerships between local groups involved with delivering young people's services in Easton, similar fragmentation and division is witnessed. Not only have structural problems been highlighted but existing projects serving the needs of the communities have been seen as too small and disperse to mount successful and dynamic bids by themselves. In particular insufficient linkages between projects and service providers in the statutory sector have been identified.

The reason for an absence of linkages is often seen by professionals working on the ground. Possibilities of collaborative work have been seen as failing to occur because officials lack cultural sensitivity and because of poor knowledge by participants about different cultures. For example we heard of several examples of initiatives involving both Asian and African-Caribbean young girls which did not succeed. It is clear that donors and regeneration professionals are keen to promote collaborative work but professionals sometimes feel that they are not aware of the practical difficulties that are involved to delivering such projects locally -

There is a huge difference in Bristol and that is what I am convinced about. When we used to take kids with the police, when we went there we found that the black kids took over, but black kids are very outspoken. They could speak English, they had no problem with the language...The black kids if they wanted something my God they got it. They could fit into the Western music so in the evening when they had the dance and the black kids and the white kids were dancing with each other and the black girls had their arms around the white kids, our kids all sat in the corner. And in the debate time when our kids got up the black kids would laugh or crack a joke.

Failure to understand cultural differences is seen as a major handicap to effective partnership working in the local community and a problem that continues to affect relationships today. In fact it reinforces existing divisions in projects in the voluntary and community sector. However there are also real concerns about the capacity of the projects in the area to launch a major inter-agency/project bid. This may be a matter of confidence but it reflects a real scepticism of one's own potential to reach for something bigger -

There hasn't been a major partnership to raise like half a million. There is a need for it but maybe the communities are fearful about it because it is a lot of effort and work; and trust is required for any partnership to work and if such a partnership were to come about it would require commitment from the management committee. (Voluntary sector, project manager)

Although there are clearly several projects that meet users' needs and have provided a broad range of vital opportunities for some of the most vulnerable young people living in the city, professionals working in the area express a degree of cynicism about the provision and question what impact all the funding has had on the community. This is partly tied up with their experiences of witnessing funding streams and of their associated projects coming and going; and also a realisation that community regeneration is sometimes tied up with factions and politics that are apparently irresolvable. Whether this is true or not we cannot tell, but what we are reporting is a broad perception held by hardworking individuals who remain active in the community.

I know so many groups that come and go. Do you know Community at Heart? I can't remember his name. Attendance used to be in that group. No one could come up with anything. Now they had more money than anyone else put together and it was just three months application for funds. But there were so many factions in the area that I found it difficult to understand how anyone could get together and work. (Voluntary sector project leader)

There has been a real problem in this area [Easton] of projects coming and going and resources not being administered or spent effectively (Statutory sector manager)

The people who are doing the funding should recognise that there are other projects around that are probably doing the same thing anyway. (Voluntary sector project manager)

We can therefore also notice that some professionals working with young people believe that there can be duplication in provision of some youth activities in the area and there is some evidence of a degree of competition to ensure that project targets are met, e.g. the provision of outward-bound activities is provided by several organisations. Further, what was reported by our participants as undermining partnership working was a lack of trust in each other. Clearly, service deliverers have to provide services they are funded for but we discovered differences between projects as they chased after potential clients for whom their services are intended -

I remember we went to [another organisation] and we saw their kids. Our children were playing lots of cricket, football and different organised things. Their groups came in on a minibus. They all stood round the fence watching our children and I said to them come along join us - there is plenty here for everyone. We had coaches there. We were told that the kids were told that if you go there you would not be able to go to [name of organisation] again. And this happens a lot.

The politics of engaging in partnership working

We note elsewhere in this report that different participants from agencies and projects can evolve alternative approaches and outlooks with regard to partnership working in their local area. This is true of Easton. Participants reported a conflict of paradigms and values which may make consensus difficult to achieve. What is clear is that there is a plethora of partnerships in the area and that individuals ensure that any new proposed partnership has to be seen as relevant to their own organisation's needs before they become engaged. Secondly, we have several instances of interviewees feeling their presence is merely tokenistic. They recall examples of where they feel they have been invited to new initiatives simply to represent their particular community rather than becoming engaged in a new meaningful development.

Like other areas across the city, personalities are well known and meet frequently in the same meetings that our interviewees attend. Some professionals in the statutory sector speak openly of some colleagues in the voluntary sector being too ideologically driven. This could spell dangers for the local YISP since it could lead to early withdrawal of statutory partners who perceive themselves as entirely constrained by referral criteria.

Is X [name of a person] involved?... Is that X by himself? Jesus! (Statutory sector manager, reflecting on participants on the Easton YISP)

Other statutory sector representatives anticipated that they would have to engage with people whom they saw as ideologically driven individuals, to ensure that the focus of

projects like the YISP are not sidetracked into inappropriate avenues. However if they feel they are becoming unsuccessful in trying to develop an un-ideological approach then withdrawal from the project by statutory agencies could happen.

Given the complexity of existing partnerships, some interviewees stressed that one of the keys to successful engagement with a new partnership is awareness of participants' engagements in existing and previous partnerships. This is seen as important, firstly, for understanding and predicting other participants' motives for engaging in a partnership. Secondly, understanding the potential engagement of others can be a factor in evaluating one's own engagement and the potential of success. This is seen as particularly pertinent in Easton where trust is not thought to be high, and organisation's try to second-guess another agency's agenda.

I always think you have to guess why different people are there. Particularly in this area because an agency's agenda is very important. (Statutory sector manager)

In a multicultural area like Easton, voluntary sector organisations are particularly sensitive to the cultural values that underpin delivery plans and management systems for nascent projects. Early identification of anticipated difficulties or problems is sufficient to exclude any organisation from joining in at the start of a project. After all, participants have realised from previous examples that perceived exclusionary practices are hard to resist -

I have seen it all before. You know that certain people have their feet round the table and no matter what you say it is the friends of those involved who will get funding and that is it. (Voluntary sector project manager)

Willingness and reluctance to engage in partnership working

On the whole, there is a perception that there is a lot of goodwill between police, health and social services on the ground which has helped to enhance working relationships and the delivery of services in recent years. We also heard very good reports of voluntary sector agencies working well with statutory services to deliver specific services for which they were funded. In our interviews with professionals there was clearly no particular agency that was singled out for criticism. On the contrary interviewees were largely positive about service delivery. But, at the same time, interviewees emphasised that this did not mean that there were not any issues or problems.

In particular there seems to be a concern by voluntary groups that partnership working may undermine their independence, particularly in the eyes of the users they serve. Easton has a plethora of voluntary sector groups that support and even deliver services to young people. Some of them are based in the community but others have a city-wide focus. The nascent E-Map directory of current youth services in the area lists 28 affiliated agencies, the majority of which are in the voluntary and community sectors.

Interviewees talked about positive and constructive relationships between the voluntary and community sector and the statutory sector. However they are still very keen to keep their independence and voluntary groups sometimes feel that this is often difficult

because partnerships often tend to be dominated by statutory organisations' agendas. They are also keen to keep their independence because they think that young people turn to them because they feel the statutory sector has failed them or they do not trust statutory services. There are also concerns from the sector of the risk of young people being labelled through engagement with the statutory sector which could lead to inappropriate or insensitive treatment. Voluntary sector representatives on the Easton YISP have been active in ensuring that its referral and risk assessment exercise minimises opportunities to label young non-offenders

The role of schools in this context can sometimes be seen as problematic, that is to be thought of as unwilling to engage actively in partnership working. However, we have found that schools in Easton are generally seen as "getting better" in their willingness to link up with other agencies both from the statutory, voluntary and community sectors. It was thought that this was as a result of two factors - schools realising that they could benefit from such engagement to help them address some of the problems they face; second, as a result of their recruitment of non-teaching support within schools e.g. learning mentors, who have begun to link effectively with BEST and other extra-school organisations and agencies. In fact, projects reported that schools are becoming more receptive to involving external support -

When I first came here years and years ago now the schools wouldn't even let us past the gate. Can you believe that? ... But now we have good relationships with most, not all, but most schools.

It has apparently taken some time for this level of trust to develop. Clearly, head teachers were sceptical about involving outsiders in their affairs and there is still some resistance to developing a community focus. However broader encouragement from the LEA has enabled good working relationships to emerge. Legislative changes have been seen as vital too. For example the development of Crime and Disorder Partnerships since 1998 has positively increased the incentive for the police to share the burden of delivering on crime reduction. Prior to this development the police felt that BCC had appeared indifferent to developing joint approaches to crime reduction -

what we've found in the past is when it came to developing community awareness about the issues, community centres and the community problems and police problems, we always found that we were at the centre of it. We were organising it, we were chairing it, we were driving it and trying to chase people to involve themselves to do actions and it was very, very police-oriented. Then when the Crime and Disorder Act came in ..., the government actively supported us by saying [that] Crime and Disorder partnerships should solve community safety problems, not the Police and that we should be looking at the local authority being the primary owner of these kind of problems.

This broader legislative change together with the potential structural changes following the *Every Child Matters* (2004) Green Paper may set a broader framework where increasing partnership on the statutory side could be delivered. At a local level, in Easton, this may also be enhanced by acting on suggested proposals to localise Behavioural Support Services and a potential move of Educational Welfare Services to a neighbourhood format.

Potential factors undermining partnership working in the future

Our research participants identified several issues that they thought may undermine effective partnership working in the future.

There was some scepticism about the extent to which health services are active partners in addressing community needs. On a day-to-day casework basis, professionals usually find community non-GP professionals very helpful. However they are rarely seen to get involved in broader community partnership initiatives. There was a concern that there appeared to be little joined up working between health and social services. In fact professionals talked about particular problems surrounding referrals to CAMHS and one social worker admitted that the local referral process was unclear.

Currently EWS operates a cross-city approach to school attendance problems. In the medium term they are likely to move towards a local neighbourhood approach but the transition to a new service was thought likely to create greater problems. Another problem cited concerned a major secondary school in the area: the City Academy, it was reported, may seek to develop its own services and dispense with the current standard delivery across the city.

It is clear that representatives of agencies interviewed for this research have a very real concern about the young people they serve in their local area. All are keen to ensure that opportunities are expanded to meet local needs. However local professionals are very aware of the broader social problems confronted by the community. Their anxieties are deep and amongst their concerns is a sometimes realistic expression of what options are available for young people -

Drug dealers with expensive clothing and posh cars. It can be very influential on the mind of a young person thinking well, you know, if they've got that, now if I stay away from that I might end up in a dead-end job if I get one. So you need to have the right opportunities in place - more so in a place like Easton than you would do maybe in a rural area (Voluntary sector project manager)

What was generally accepted was that it is very difficult to engage young people in Easton who are already disengaged. The area is seen as having too few 'hands on' workers trying to work directly with them. The consensus was that projects are needed that can sustain the delivery of activities for young people, not just piecemeal projects that are switched on and off as funding streams ebb and flow.

The Easton YISP

The Easton YISP is evolving and has attracted participation from 28 agencies. YISP meetings are large and it is evident that the YISP Development Worker has been instrumental in attracting a lot of interest. In fact the majority of organisations cite him as the only reason why they volunteered to participate in the first place. However despite this breadth of participation, a few participants remained confused about the aim and function of the YISP, although some are very clear -

It's the buzzword, isn't it, "partnership". It means many things to different people. ... For me ... and for us as an organisation in this context of E-MAP and the YISPs and the YOT, it is about us as an organisation trying to work with the people in Easton to persist with a group of young people who are on the edge of social exclusion whether it is education or socially, on the edge of criminality: let's round up all these people and provide a more comprehensive service with them. Keep them in school or in some other activity. So it is working with all the agencies there - the BEST teams, the BLIPS, all those but also with some of the other minority ethnic communities which are quite influential there. ... My own preconception is that there is a fair lot of boundaries around these organisations so that part of E-MAP work is to actually have an osmosis factor in seeping through and leeching some of the activity and some of the expertise to work better together.

Not everyone however held this perspective. A few were confused and many were uncertain about whether it is going to pull in resources, has got resources or will simply be operating on 'a wing and a prayer.'

Am I down on the list? Well I haven't received an invite to any of the panel meetings. I don't know why that is, do you? (Voluntary sector panel member)

Easton YISP has been slower to evolve than the other YISPs in Bristol. There are many reasons for this slower evolution. Not the least of which are the numerous groups in the field who are working with young people. Secondly, it was felt by some participants that a huge amount of time has been spent arguing about the details of the assessment form and procedures, with little time spent on issues of identification and no time spent on developing the kind of services that would be on offer. Clearly participants feel very strongly about the nature of the programme. However we found a sense that there has been some repetition in the arguments and discussions pursued on the panel. But this is perhaps very necessary because the partnership has expressed very focused concerns around the issues of labelling, confidentiality and user involvement and the YISP Team have done their best to address these issues as thoroughly as possible. Some voluntary sector organisations also feel it is being dominated by the statutory sector and a few in particular feel the YOT is being too directional in its influence.

3.2 LOCKLEAZE

The nature of the local community

There are a number of distinctive features to the Lockleaze/Upper Horfield (L/UH) area which have provided a unique setting for multi-agency working and, more recently, the development of the YISP. One could capture something of this distinctiveness through the metaphor of a slightly neglected *cul de sac* – geographically, politically and in terms of programme and policy development. A local resident told us -

It goes nowhere, you can't drive through it to anywhere, it's a loop.

L/UH covers two electoral wards, most of Lockleaze and the eastern portion of Horfield. But the actual area known as Lockleaze was originally largely a council housing estate built in the 1930's and 40's lying to the north of Muller Road and to the west of Purdown. Today 41% of housing in the ward remains public housing compared to 24% in Horfield (both above the Bristol average). Although Lockleaze is 'only' the 10th most deprived ward in the city this disguises the low wage economy which dominates the working experience of local residents (fifth lowest ward in the city on income levels and child poverty index). There are very few local jobs. The area was originally largely a dormitory estate for people working for British Aerospace at Filton. These good, skilled jobs are now gone. Today only 8% of the adult population have been educated to degree or diploma level. Lockleaze has the fourth highest proportion of elderly residents living in the city but also an above average number of children under the age of 18.

Lockleaze does have open space given that part of it borders Purdown. But it has very little else that might constitute a public sphere – one small area of shops, few pubs, a meagre bus service, no youth club, etc.. It did have its own (underperforming) secondary school, but this is in the process of being closed down. The closure of Lockleaze School has taken on symbolic importance for even though it was underperforming there was a real sense in which it 'belonged' to the local community, and particularly to its young people. Inevitably such a closure makes it harder for those committed to working with young people in the area to overcome some of their and their parents' cynicism, that the 'authorities' are not really interested in them.

Upper Horfield is located north and west from the Lockleaze, an area wedged between two trunk roads (Filton Avenue and Gloucester Road North) leading from the city centre to Filton. Originally an area largely comprising public sector housing which was slightly older and in poorer condition than in Lockleaze, there has recently been an extensive programme of regeneration involving demolition of old stock and the building of up to 800 mixed tenure new homes. Whilst Horfield ward itself is relatively unexceptional in terms of deprivation indicators Upper Horfield remains, to some extent, the most neglected area within it. This is evidenced by the fact that 44.2% of the children attending Upper Horfield Primary School are eligible for free school meals (almost twice the city average). This primary school has an outstanding record of community involvement and its Headteacher has also played an important role in the development of the Upper Horfield Community Trust, a pivotal local community organisation.

Taken together L/UH comprises an area which has been in relative decline, experiencing social deprivation but not acutely and without the 'reputation' of areas like neighbouring Southmead to call it to the attention of local politicians and policy makers. As a consequence, in the past, the area never quite qualified for consideration

under government initiatives. It remained a bit of a backwater, with poor public facilities, and low levels of local community involvement. Local community organisations are few and far between. They include the Upper Horfield Community Trust, Lockleaze Neighbourhood Trust, Opportunities for Women in Lockleaze (OWL), North Bristol Advice Centre, the Lockleaze Adventure Playground (the 'Vench'), Purdown Credit Union and Taharka, the only local organisation oriented largely towards the needs of the area's black and ethnic minority population (which, at the time of the last census, stood at 7% of the area total and was the sixth highest in the city).

Unlike Easton and some other parts of the city, until recently there have been very few signs of partnership or community development activity. The recent targeting of the area by both the BCF and Neighbourhood Renewal has been a significant development and has helped stem some of the resentment one hears from local activists that some parts of the city (like Easton or Hartcliffe) get all of the resources.

Other notable changes in L/UH are a consequence of the 'right to buy' and the new 800 home development in Upper Horfield. Both of these are leading to greater social diversity. As one local Headteacher put it –

there are several different worlds co-existing here ... some people have a relatively high standard of living and some are on the breadline. Thirty years ago people were all much of a muchness.

However, the area's black and ethnic minority population is not very visible. Somalis now comprise the largest group though they are geographically dispersed. Anecdotal evidence suggests quite high levels of hostility towards some ethnic minorities in the area, particularly towards Somalis. But generally there is not the strong sense of belonging to the area that may be found in some other largely white housing estates in the city such as Knowle or Hartcliffe. This means that suspicion of 'outsiders', including professional workers, is less intense.

Children, young people and local agencies

While the area's primary schools generally have a good reputation, secondary education is characterised by low levels of educational achievement. Some research participants held an anxiety that, certainly in the short term, the closure of Lockleaze School and the mass transfer of children largely to Monks Park School, will further depress educational opportunities for children in the area. There are other indicators of the vulnerability of some of the area's children. Lockleaze ward, for example, not only has an above average number of 'looked after children' but it has the highest number on the child protection register in the city. In relation to crime, there was a 24% increase in crime in the Lockleaze policing sector in 2000/2001. Nevertheless rates for vehicle theft, burglary and violent crime are unexceptional. What is significant however are reports to police under the category of 'general disturbance' – normally a good indicator of public concern about crime, particularly linked in the public's imagination to the presence of groups of young people in open spaces. In the Quality of Life in Your Neighbourhood Survey in 2001, 52% of those surveyed felt that crime had worsened in the last three years.

The Better Together project originated from the work of the Southmead Local Action Group (which was itself part of the Bristol Community Safety Partnership). Originally funded by Neighbourhood Renewal it was built on the foundation of the Southmead Family Project. It was granted further funding from BCF April 2002 which enabled the development of activities in Lockleaze. It employed a project manager and project workers who came from a variety of professional backgrounds. There were also secondments from social services, health, police and the Government Office.

The project is managed within Health and Social Services in the City Council. It has been overseen by The Southmead Local Action Group (LAG), part of Bristol's Community Safety Partnership. Better Together's aims are "*To address the problems of social exclusion amongst a number of children, young people and their families living in Lockleaze and the Upper Horfield areas of Bristol. In particular the project aims to challenge a sense of isolation and alienation in relation to community safety, family relationships, educational achievement and pride in the physical environment.*" The aims would be achieved by co-ordinating a multi-agency approach in their work with identified children, young people and their families.

At the operational level Better Together is seen as having established an effective and successful multi-agency partnership in L/UH for local workers in the statutory and community sectors who are working with children and young people. The forum involves a wide range of individuals who are either doing outreach work or who are based in 'outposts' – for example, local schools, beat officers, learning mentors, a local librarian, youth workers and workers based in the small number of community organisations in the area such as the Adventure Playground and Upper Horfield Community Trust. As one worker put it –

multi-agency work was quite easy because these people were all wanting to be part of a network, they were all wanting to get some of that support, they were wanting to share ideas.

For such workers, multi-agency working has produced both tangible outcomes in terms of collaborative projects, shared resources and information, and has provided role-support. The workers most obviously absent from this forum have been those from the larger agencies – health and social services in particular. The Lockleaze experience reflects wider social and organisational changes occurring in society, particularly the way in which processes of de-institutionalisation are creating a new layer of professional workers who increasingly seek support, recognition and cooperation from colleagues outside, rather than from within, their own organisations.

Co-operation and collaboration

In contrast to Easton, voluntary and community organisations in L/UH are comparatively thin on the ground. This seems to encourage a greater degree of interdependency: agencies are less minded to protect their own turf when there are fewer of them competing for the same potential pots of resources. At least one local community activist also noted that funding agencies were more likely to respond positively if applications were made from several local groups acting together rather

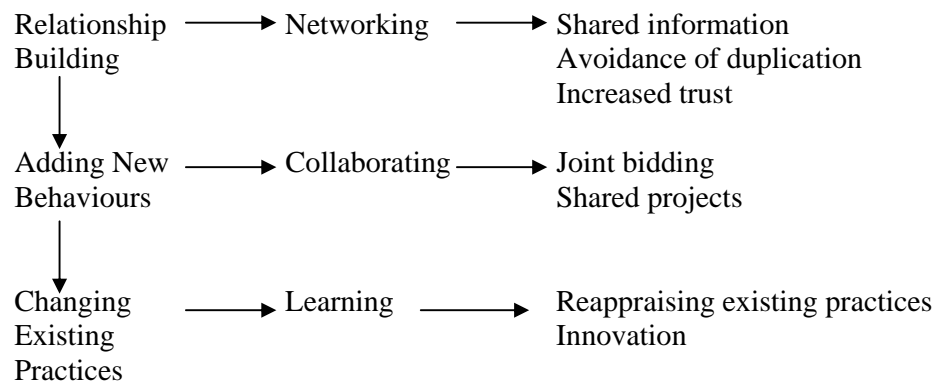
than if each group made its own small application in isolation. This has been the logic behind collaboration (through the Holiday Activities Group, a subgroup of the forum) around funding for holiday play schemes in the area. The downside of development work in an area like L/UH is that there are few community activists and much of the work of the two development trusts falls on the shoulders of a small group of activists. As a result the few initiatives that there are can severely stretch them. As one of them, explaining her non-attendance at recent forum meetings put it –

there's the Children's Fund steering group, credit union, domestic abuse forum ... and if I went to every meeting I'd never get any work done ... there's almost too many of them but you can't get everything covered in one.

The relative absence of ‘turf wars’ is also probably a consequence of the absence of identifiable ‘neighbourhoods’ within the area, so not only is there not much competition between local organisations for resources, there is little sense of rivalry between the two areas – Lockleaze and Upper Horfield.

The meaning(s) of partnership

In many respects – the absence of rivalries, a large number of relatively isolated workers, a shared sense of an overlooked but needy area – L/UH constitutes fertile ground for the development of multi-agency working at grassroots level. The multi-agency partnership that has emerged, facilitated by Better Together, was well regarded by virtually all of those whom we interviewed (interviewees included regular attenders and non-attenders). Three different dimensions of partnership working emerged from talking to our respondents. They can be considered diagrammatically as follows:



Relationship Building

Much of the perceived success of the L/UH multi-agency forum has been at the level of building relationships. In response to the question “What makes multi-agency working happen?” nearly all of our respondents answered “the people”. In other words no amount of shared missions, common objectives, etc. could compensate for good working relationships between people who had come to know each other

through repeated interactions based on mutual respect and reciprocity. As one respondent put it –

it works if you have got the people who can work well, be open and honest.

But, there can be tensions between different sectors. For example some participants thought that the statutory sector often assumes it has the expertise which it will then ‘dispense’ to local people –

I think sometimes statutory organisations don’t take into account what you know sufficiently (local activist).

Adding new behaviours

By combining effort individuals can achieve what, alone, it would be impossible to achieve. As one of our respondents put it –

you get a second level of interaction ... when you actually have to work together.

The Holiday Activity Group involving police, youth work, schools and local community organisations was cited as an interesting example of collaborative activity in L/UH. As one worker put it –

that grew out of a summer that was very difficult because everyone ran different programmes and it got very confusing.....lots of people had signed up to this idea that we were working in partnerships but actually practically everyone was still running their own stream.

The evaluation report on the Summer Holiday Activity Programme in 2003 corroborates one of our key findings in this review – the potential for duplication and fragmentation among a range of overlapping services. There were at least three different programmes of activity running along side each other - Upper Horfield Community Trust, the Youth Service and Better Together. It was thought likely that as a consequence participation on some or all of the programme suffered. However we were told the story of how key actors tried to address this situation, despite the fears involved in potentially relinquishing individual identities. As the Better Together worker in L/UH put it –

what we’ve worked really hard towards is one shared application, so one shared registration form, and one shared registration number.

While this may have maximised chances of funding success it has also meant that some of the larger agencies had to subsume their identity under a common rubric which, in the short term at least, may mean that their local profile is lowered. As a result of learning from the experience of the summer 2003 the Holiday Activity Group was established and it has planned and organised a joint approach to activities in subsequent holiday periods.

Some front-line workers whom we talked to felt that a prerequisite for collaborative working was the support of their own managers who needed to commit resources, especially time, to a joint endeavour. Some common themes emerge from the evaluations of several different Better Together projects in 2002/2003. The majority of the projects (e.g. Pyramid Clubs, Girls' Groups, Boys' Groups) were staffed by workers from different agencies with a nominated lead worker. The tension between commitment to partnership and commitment to agency/personal priorities often found expression in inconsistent attendance by staff members. As one evaluation put it -

Some difficulties were frequently experienced in terms of the staffing of the group – competing demands on co-workers time prevented availability for all sessions, and short notice of unavailability was difficult to address. In terms of multi-agency working, an agreement should be made and signed by workers and senior managers, if possible, to ensure that a piece of group work, such as this, should take priority over non-emergency situations. It should be the responsibility of management to ensure that their workers are able to set aside their own priorities and agendas for the good of the partnership.

Changing existing practices

Collaboration does not necessarily require partners to change current ways of working. As one respondent put it –

you can come along to lots of meetings and share information about what your project is doing, but that doesn't actually alter how you operate, it doesn't increase your understanding of another agency.

Sometimes new behaviours cannot simply be added on to existing repertoires; they provoke a reappraisal of existing practices. Respondents mentioned several areas of learning which have occurred:

Changed perceptions of self and other

Throughout this inquiry, we have found that participants could hold powerful fantasies about 'other groups' that help sustain their own self-identity, for example -

social worker, oh hippy, whatever; careers advisor was always, kind of, the bit more booted, suited, briefcase form. Or doesn't understand young people, and people go around carrying these little images in their heads and don't kind of think beyond it.

Several of our respondents noted how such long-standing prejudicial fantasies about another agency were modified as a result of relating and working together.

Awareness of alternative ways of working

Speaking of a Pyramid Club run at Romney Avenue Junior school one of our respondents said –

it was very interesting for me working with the play worker, a police officer and a learning mentor ... we all came with very different ideas about discipline and about the positive use of time.

Developing new ways of working

The Pyramid Club was different to most clubs of this sort because of the multidisciplinary team that ran it. This was an example of innovation, a change in the way of doing things. But it was emphasised to us that the innovation wouldn't have happened in this way without the relationships which had been built up through the multi-agency partnership –

It enabled me to make connections with [name of worker] at the Adventure Playground up the road, as a result of the meetings I got [him/her] to come to the school and help with the Pyramid Club, and then we had children starting to go up there after school (learning mentor).

This example illustrated the knock-on effects that can occur when working in a developmental way.

Obstacles to partnership working

We have already noted that competition between agencies, community groups and neighbourhoods has not been a major factor inhibiting partnership working in L/UH. The main external constraints impacting on most of those we interviewed were time, bureaucracy and the rate of change itself.

Time

Time pressures were felt especially in education where, without the additional capacity provided by learning mentors, consistent involvement by local schools proved impossible –

I have to keep focused on the fact that my main aim is to raise achievement, but there's not enough time to even do the main job ... last week I had to sit with my cleaners and do a 12 page job evaluation questionnaire (head teacher).

Bureaucracy

As we will see in 3.3 later, the performance culture and targets that are features of contemporary public service scene could present some respondents with difficulty. The same Head teacher quoted above said –

Then there's the accountability side, the follow up ... it's interfering with how much we can do ...there [motioning to a filing cabinet], I've got four surveys wanting to know how we're doing ... we're evaluation happy. Take the Pyramid Club ... you've got to undertake a Health & Safety Risk Assessment, ensure people are properly trained ...

The learning mentor added –

Doing things spontaneously is not an option, it takes the joy out of things.

Initiative overload

For many of our respondents YISP represented just one more initiative which has followed a procession of previous initiatives. This could create feelings of resignation and cynicism. One team manager parodied it in terms of being given a year to plan, a year to run and a year to review. The pace of change can itself become a major source of exclusion. A lay activist involved in work with children in L/UH only had a hazy idea of what the YISP was –

I understand they'll have a database but I don't know what will happen then ... there's all these different things, there's YISP, there's YOT ... it's very hard to get a grip.

Some managers confessed that they found it difficult to keep up. A head teacher said –

Who are we dealing with now? Which provider are we going through now? How do they work? We're having to relearn everything, there isn't time for that.

The Lockleaze YISP

The L/UH experience suggests to us some quite important distinctions to be drawn around the question of leadership. Our case study suggests that partnership leadership can occur at both the strategic and the operational levels.

According to the Better Together project worker in Lockleaze –

I consider probably 50% of my time is spent on ensuring that ... relationships are kept up ... all that stuff that I do around getting people around a table and the links that are made through that process, no-one's really tracking that.

At ground level interpersonal and group dimensions were felt to be highly salient. Not only is the group important in the life of the inter-agency network, it is also crucial to the way in which projects are delivered, for many of the projects are delivered by small groups of up to four representatives of different agencies. For the Better Together project worker 'group work' skills, including facilitating and mediating, were paramount. At the interpersonal level, relational leadership skills were seen as crucial, e.g. being personable and welcoming, putting people at their ease, valuing the person behind the role, being accountable to do what one has undertaken to do, following things up, chasing others to make sure that they deliver on their commitments, and so on.

I think quite often the multi-agency work isn't focused enough. I think we're often spending quite a lot of time sitting in a room with five or ten

people discussing an issue for two hours without committing ourselves to doing something.

I believe that in the context of the Green Paper, that fragmented services are very wasteful and very destructive. I think that services that are driven by the desire to do good things, but without clarity of purpose and function are also wasteful.

Sometimes I don't believe in democracy but more in benign dictatorship.

These quotes are from senior managers who are participating, or have participated, in the Southmead Local Action Group. The message is that there is a need for focus on the task and to deal with others who have the authority to act and are not sent as observers or delegates. At this strategic level the style is directive, authority is embedded in clear institutional hierarchies, exemplified by the police, with a chain of command leading from the top. As we observed meetings at which such voices were expressed, we wondered whether the propensity for action and decisiveness was a defence against the anxiety generated by complexity and the multiple demands to contain many, often sensitive, issues relating to confidentiality, privacy and the human rights of young people. While unafraid of taking decisions this task-focused form of leadership can be impatient with time consuming 'housekeeping' and nurturing (relationship maintenance) issues. It can become exclusive, 'fast tracking' via informal 'corridor' decisions. The preoccupation with 'ends' (results, deliverables, etc.) could, some felt, lead to some difficult questions of 'means' being overlooked.

The rationale behind the YISP is that it will bring several levels together. In Lockleaze the proposed structure is as follows:

Level 1	Keyworkers	<i>Front-line workers some of whom will be drawn from the existing Better Together multi-agency partnership</i>
Level 2	YISP panel	<i>Team managers from major local agencies.</i>
Level 3	Local strategic steering group	<i>Senior managers from major agencies many of whom have had previous involvement in Southmead LAG.</i>
Level 4	City-wide steering group	

The leadership cultures necessary for success at levels 1 contrast with those necessary for success at levels 3 and 4. We are aware of the danger of lapsing into essentialist generalisations, and we recognise that the two styles of leadership we have discussed coexist within particular arenas of multi-agency and partnership working. However, based on our fieldwork, we were drawn to the view that, at level 1, relationship-focused styles of leadership may need to predominate; while at levels 3 and 4, more emphasis may be given to dealing with the challenges of managing resources and performance. How these two different cultures are brought together seemed to us to be crucial to the effectiveness of the YISP. Clearly the two cultures meet at level 2 but

in L/UH this is the least developed of the three. Whilst level 1 and level 3 are emerging from pre-existing networks (the Better Together L/UH multi-agency partnership and the Southmead LAG) there is no equivalent at level 2. They will in many ways be starting from scratch. In the pre-YISP period the gap between levels 1 and 3 has largely been filled by Better Together itself. The biggest challenge facing the development of the YISP in Lockleaze therefore lies at level 2, the level of the panel, for it is at this level that two different agendas, ways of seeing the world and leadership styles will meet.

3.3 MANAGERS' FEELINGS ABOUT PARTNERSHIP AND MULTI-AGENCY WORKING

This third part of the case study concerns the feelings and views of middle and senior managers. While the recent and ongoing development of the YISP project formed the core of our case study, we were able to ask managers across organisations to reflect on their broader experience of multi-agency and partnership working. It will have been noticed that we were able to interview local senior managers, like head teachers, in Lockleaze and Easton as well. In addition, we conducted 12 interviews of managers and specialists employed in the relevant agencies and organisations who contributed part of the data in this section. We were also given open access to observe four Partnership Board meetings (in addition to local YISP Panel meetings in Lockleaze and Easton). Together, the two forms of data have enabled us to build a picture of the opportunities and dilemmas that inter-organisational and –professional collaboration offer at this level. This section therefore presents an insight into managers' views about –

- Their understandings about the meanings given to multi-agency and partnership working.
- The dynamics of partnership and inter-agency working
- Externally caused obstacles to partnership and inter-agency working
- The contribution of leadership, its role and effects
- Users and their involvement
- The YISP development

The meanings given to multi-agency and partnership working

One of our tasks in this part of the review has been to see the range of meanings that these actors in the system – managers – gave to the terms *partnership* and *multi-agency working*. We found that all our participants were able to disentangle the respective meanings that these concepts hold, with only slight differences between them. One manager thought that –

Partnership is like a marriage, whereas multi-agency working is like have a number of affairs.

This participant, like many of the participants we interviewed, felt that partnership working entailed pooling resources. Distribution of funding and coalescing around a common goal tended to be the unifying elements of several understandings. However, as managers reflected, they could identify that there was a gap between the rhetoric of partnership working and the reality that they had to deal with. Everyone agreed that,

in an ideal world, all partners sharing the same goal, working equally towards this goal, should be the primary purpose of partnership working. However, many recognised that other factors, such as the fragility of some projects that were dependent on government funding, contributed to a sense that issues to do with funding and resources could dominate the partnership discourse – we will return to this issue later.

In addition, several respondents felt that the boundaries between multi-agency working and partnerships in practice held some ambiguity. Distinctions could be blurred by the fact that some managers were working for organisations which were themselves partnerships between several agencies and bodies. Managing at the interstices of each of these required handling complex, political and multi-directional patterns of accountability and reporting relationships within interdependent governance relationships. In fact, as one put it –

There's a lot of governance we have to deal with.

Despite the obstacles to effective partnership and multi-agency working (see below) there was a feeling that in order to provide effective services to the community, there was no other option. This imperative for partnership and multi-agency working was felt in at least two connected sense: there is no other option both because managers understand that agencies have to work together to address broad social problems; and because government insists on it. There was an acceptance that much of this was government-driven and that more was happening on the ground in terms of service provision –

The government kept setting up new partnerships and initiatives. They didn't like local authorities so they kept creating new things outside of the councils and with different geographical boundaries. And now what they are saying is that what we really need is Children's Trusts under the local authority to bring things back together again.

Another manager said -

The message that government has been giving to social services is that you are an ambulance at the bottom of a cliff. They are therefore trying to get different agencies involved rather than everyone simply saying that they will refer this to social services. This is a shift to greater multi-agency ownership.

There was also a sense that each new manifestation of these forms of collaborative working (like the YISP) retained an experimental character and that entailed, in each case, managers and professionals having to follow government-imposed changes, and having to find their way around by themselves, with little or no staff development support -

As often happens with these concepts that seem to arrive from nowhere; Everybody suddenly realises that's the new word, and it's the new jargon,

and everybody tries to do it. Some are more successful than others, and we played around with partnerships when they first appeared, which was seven years ago or something like that, ... we've made a lot of mistakes and we're still grappling with it, really.

We're not taught how to do partnership, there are some basic rules around partnership working, I guess it's a bit like team development.

The dynamics of partnership and inter-agency working

We asked managers how these partnerships worked in their experience. Participants felt that the fundamental and inter-related factors which contributed to, or reduced, effectiveness were –

- the distribution of power among actors in the partnership
- the presence (or absence) of trust and authentic interpersonal relationships
- the group dynamics in partnership board or panel meetings

The distribution of power among actors in the partnership

One senior manager felt that the dynamics of partnerships would be explained by the simultaneous existence of power sub-groups (which may actually represent partnerships themselves) within 'overall' partnerships–

The first group, the statutory services officers, who are the ones seen as having the most power, partly because of the resources they bring with them, but also because they bump into each other in these meetings all the time. The next group will be the staff working in a partnership organisation, who are in quite a powerful position because they hold a lot of knowledge, but who are in a quite powerless position because their jobs depend on their relationship with the people with power. And then you've got the voluntary sector and community groups, who have quite a lot of power in terms of status ...but haven't got much power because they depend on the funding.

We understood this to mean that there existed partly conscious, and partly subconscious, memberships of sub-groups within these settings. It was accepted that the boundaries between groupings could be blurred, according to different circumstances, and that other psycho-social factors such as gender played their part in contributing to a group dynamic -

It varies, it depends on how you see yourself there. ... we don't sit down and say, am I middle, top or bottom? ... you sort of just find your place, don't you, to put it crudely. You kind of float sometimes; it's not as clear cut ...

The presence (or absence) of trust and authentic interpersonal relationships

A specialist colleague in a major agency observed that the inherent difficulties in inter-agency working could be exacerbated by a lack of trust between partners and by the sometimes entrenched views of specialists who had not been brought up in a culture of inter-organisational collaboration, but rather in the “silo mentality” of some large agencies –

... we've grown up all specialised and different, and sometimes there is no trust – “This is my budget; this is my patch – get off!” People are feeling their ways towards partnership working. There's always been a lot of inter-professional and multi-agency working, but these structures [like Bristol Children's Fund] are quite new ... There's a will at the top to introduce co-ordinated services; on the ground it's also OK. But it's the middle bit where there are the problems, where there are so many entrenched views – different professional, different personnel procedures, people protecting their own budgets and so on. You really need someone at the top to over-ride all this, but this doesn't happen enough.

Another manager believed similarly that, culturally, agencies quite often do not trust each other, but that this was also an individual issue –

It also comes down to individuals again, not just agencies as sort of faceless organisations. I think that also comes down to actual people on the ground. If one person traditionally has not got on with someone else just for a clash of personality or an incident that happened ten years ago, you know ... are they going to come around the same table and share information with each other?

The group dynamics in partnership board or panel meetings

The quality of interactions and communication between people on a panel or a board were thought to be very important. Managers were often able to cite examples of both positive and negative experiences. On the negative side, this aspect of inter-disciplinary working could be immensely frustrating. In some meetings communication between some of those attending could be deficient or non-existent. One manager told the story of the experience of a woman colleague who had encountered a situation where there was communication among some sub-groupings but not among all. Quoting the colleague concerned –

I just got the impression that these men [the statutory services officers] meet up all the time outside of this arena, and they get frustrated with us going on in the meetings, because they think: “We'll sort that out in a corridor somewhere next week.” And that's true – that's what happens.

On a positive note, however, most managers we talked to who were involved with BCF and the YISP development felt that the quality of relationships they had with each other were good -

I think that it works far better. What it does is, it equalises the relationship, power doesn't just stay in the local authority or the funding body ... It makes you clarify goals - to do it effectively.

In some managers' experiences, there was a difference between *effective partnerships* (i.e. partnerships that work) and what we may term *pretend partnerships*. Each might espouse the advantages of collaboration between organisations for the sake of effective service provision, but the reality could be different on the ground –

Where it doesn't work [is where] certain partnerships are called partnerships but I think they aren't really. It's where people are sort of forced to come together or feel they should be around the table because it's an agency perspective rather than actually something they think will help they're own work. That isn't as much a partnership, more multi-agency for the sake of being ... rather than part of a group that is part of the same direction or the same process.

In contrast, *effective partnership working* is (as one senior manager put it) –

when you come together around a common goal ... leading to a service that needs to be developed, ... you identify how you going to deal with that, how collectively you're going to use your resources, how you share the power, how you do things together.

Managers realised that the success or failure of a partnership arrangement depended on, firstly, issues of group or agency inclusion, and secondly on the values that attach to partnership and interdisciplinary work. So, dealing with how the appropriate bodies can participate, and ensuring that the right ones are not excluded ought to be an early priority for a new arrangement. At the same time it is argued that attention needs to be given to the different and similar values that representatives hold around the table, to determine which values they have in common, or to discover if they are very disparate, that they could not call themselves a partnership.

Externally caused obstacles to partnership and inter-agency working

Managers were able to suggest three categories of externally caused obstacles that prevent or inhibit effective partnership working –

- The uncertainty and vulnerability of funding
- The consequences of central government's drive for performance
- Agencies' cultures and different languages

The uncertainty and vulnerability of funding

For some senior managers, effective partnership and multi- or inter-agency working was not so much to do with money, but rather the quality of interpersonal relationships. There was however a widely held view that, while the rhetoric of partnership and inter-agency working concerned the effective provision of services to those people who matter – in this case, vulnerable children and young people, the concern which actually dominated the relationship was money – getting it, keeping it,

and spending it. This focus on finances was magnified by a real sense of fragility of, and short-termism in funding from government sources. Our impression was of managers who were trying at all costs to keep a hold of the fundamental purpose of the work, but vulnerable to the exigencies of government funding shifts which some put down to civil service incompetence. Such vulnerability created emotion: the following is an extract from the researcher's field notes of a Board budget meeting –

*There was a sense of helplessness and anger among those present.... [Manager A] felt that they were “stuffed” because they were operating under so much uncertainty about funding. There may be more money, or maybe there won't. [Manager B] reported that he had a meeting earlier with [local scheme] workers, and “I really couldn't look them in the eye. This wasn't what I came into the job for, and none of this is our f***ing fault”. [Manager C]: “So we have a group of pissed off workers!” [Manager B]: “No, it's worse than that – they're all keen, motivated and blissfully unaware of all this”. [Local scheme] workers had been appointed for two years even though the money could run out either in October 2004 or March 2005.*

This kind of uncertainty was mentioned many times by our participants. Managers face the following kind of dilemma: on the one hand they have to deliver and promote a new form of governance and working. On the other hand, the rules and financing associated with this new way of governance and working change in unpredictable ways. The result of this is that everybody (including especially, as the above example shows, front-line professionals) feels uncertain about the future. However, managers could not always contain the anxieties of people on the ground as they themselves sometimes do not know what will happen next. As one senior manager said –

People's energy gets caught up in this day-to-day management and concerns and worries about financing and we have to remind ourselves why we're doing this.

The unpredictability of funding could shake managers' confidence about the whole rationale of a partnership arrangement -

The only thing that's making this an absolute headache at the moment is the CF financial situation, where they don't know from week to week what's going to happen ... just in the sense of talking about strategic partnerships and partnership working, it takes one factor like that, you know, the partnership is shaking really, because you've got good people here and everyone is starting to think, hang on a minute, why should we commit to something ...is this still going to be here next year or in six months ...?

A senior accountant in one of the agencies felt that there was scope for looking at how budgets were set up in the first place and managed thereafter –

Ideally ... a unified budget for the complete project “in one pot”, and a clearly identifiable manager in charge of the project.

While this manager was not dealing specifically with BCF, she was aware of the potential 25 per cent cut in government funding that was threatened during this research, and she observed that these kind of projects were always “on the line”. Staff had to be employed on short-term contracts –

The question always is, if they are government-funded projects, when are they going to cut the gas off?

She added that such highly specific government funded projects left little room for local managerial discretion in reality. Projects were ring-fenced, and managers could not “steal” money from one project to another. One manager was able to quantify his area of budgetary discretion – about 16 per cent of the total funding of his service. In corroboration, a number of managers reported on the difficulties the climate of unpredictability and circumscribed authority had on their attempts to manage the situation properly. Some argued that they did not have enough resources to provide the core range of services they were accountable for effectively, and –

managing a range of staff on short-term contracts, and dealing with staff who are not sure if they’re going to be in the job tomorrow – this is not just BCF, but is a characteristic of partnership working generally.

The consequences of central government’s drive for performance

All of the managers we interviewed expressed in one way or another the frustration caused, as they saw it, of constant change in policies, and the continuous stream of new initiatives, emanating from central government, for example -

Problems occasionally cropped up when partners had to shift their guidelines, and they negotiated changes with some partners but not with others, and this could result in some groups feeling confused and frustrated.

There were a couple of aspects to this frustration. One concerned the pace of change, and a perception of short-termism in government policy change. The second was felt to be the sometimes confusing and complex numbers of potentially overlapping groups and partnerships that were set up in response to a range of government-funded initiatives, a phenomenon that we pointed to in our preliminary report in December 2003 (see appendix).

Managers’ feelings were however paradoxical. They recognised that there was more money from central government to address issues of youth offending and crime reduction, and as a result of the initiatives there was felt to be “more going on” to address social problems. Furthermore, some managers attributed positive policy and practice development to government initiatives, for example, in how users are seen by professionals, and government insistence on partnership working has been a positive drive to develop inter-professional practice and learning. The trouble is that the cumulative effect of these initiatives, coupled with the unpredictable funding, plus the imperatives of targets attainment, made managers’ jobs very difficult –

We're trying to manage well the government's bad management ... the government keeps changing the rules.

To turn to the first of these frustrations, managers noticed how the pace of change had increased substantially since the inception of the New Labour modernisation agenda. They felt that there was a strong political message about change. One manager explained what he was experiencing by analogy. He had been talking to a police inspector recently in a neighbourhood in Bristol. The police had to act in a reactive way to devote resources for a week or so to a crisis situation. But then he had to move them on to the next situation that had to be dealt with. This manager felt that the government was working in a similar way. It was not however possible for him and his colleagues to work like this –

I can't shift resources just like that, and besides the service is very thinly spread anyway. It takes three months to build up trust with a young offender, so you can't just pull people about from one task to another.

This manager, like many of his colleagues, also felt that the time lag between central government policy creation and its effects on the ground was reducing. So, for example, he predicted that the likely time gap between the passage of the Children's Act and the setting up of a children's trust in Bristol would be only 15 months –

Sometimes they'll hose down funds to our level very quickly.

... too quickly, as some managers put it. In the case of some other recent initiatives, it was just six months between the time that these developments “appeared on the radar” and the obligation to implement them.

The second frustration, and a possible cause of inefficiency and duplication, concerns the perception of a plethora of agencies and partnership arrangements that may have overlapping responsibilities. We shared in our December 2003 report the impression given to us by participants in stage 1 of this review that there exist many different kinds and levels of partnerships, and, as we have seen (section 3.1) this has been a problematic feature of multi-agency working in Easton. The variety of partnerships is a response to funding opportunities which require evidence of partnership working as one of the key qualifying criteria. A possible consequence of this is that these partnerships may be put together hurriedly without necessarily a shared understanding of either purpose or process. Consequently the coherence of any given partnership may become unstable over time. One manager we interviewed confirmed that this remained a worry –

there's another one [partnership] trying to do similar things, and somehow they don't meet, or they do meet but you know...different personalities, different groups that developed around funding quite often ... [it] is very easy in an area to have two partnerships, really, really easy to have that, with many similar memberships but different as well. There are some common people on both, and there's some who would go to that one but not to this one. Breaking these down so that you can try and come back to one is sometimes impossible - that is frustrating but ... the thing they're trying to achieve is quite often the same. And that's frustrating

because some funds will go down this stream, some will go down [the other] stream ... if only they got together they could make such a difference.

A connected worry concerned the government's insistence on performance evaluation and measurement, and some felt this was leading, or had led, to a "tick-box" mentality –

There's always evaluation, and we have to rely often a lot on some independent evaluation of a system or a scheme to know how it is affecting the person or the people you're trying to get to. Unfortunately, that sort of evaluation is normally based around figures, percentages and increase of this, and not really around the stories or actual real situation. Somehow we need to get clever or get more involved in actually finding out the real [situation], to do the qualitative stuff.

Another senior manager confirmed that for some people the understanding of partnership working is –

about being able to tick the box than rather to deliver in true partnership.

Agencies' cultures and different languages

The effects of agencies' histories and cultures could subtly affect the capacity of partnership and inter-professional working. Colleagues from different bodies could be seen as representing not only their particular agency or voluntary sector body, but also bring with them to the table a pattern of expectations, accountabilities and different language that could be antithetical to collaboration. One instance of this cited by several managers was the issue of confidentiality, and this remained a concern for some managers in the YISP development as well as in other partnerships. Here are three examples –

With what right will people share information about individuals?

Highly potentially damaging.

It's right for people to be cautious.

A challenge among people trying to make a partnership arrangement work well was the differing priorities and "ways-of-seeing" issues (such as confidentiality) that were part of the fabric of individual agencies and bodies. So, statutory agencies like Social Services were thought to have very clear priorities and guidelines about child protection and confidentiality –

Confidentiality is a big mess anyway because of the Data Protection Act. There are meetings I've attended where you can't talk about cases because all concerned have not got permission. It comes down to finding compatibility with each agency. People are off on their own agendas ticking boxes that aren't always compatible.

The contribution of leadership

Leadership is seen to be a pivotal process in effective inter-agency and partnership working. Managers felt that a combination of personal qualities and skills (passion, credibility, respect and power) and the symbolic importance of leaders in this environment were critical. Authoritative leaders were seen as giving credibility to partnerships. One senior manager felt that, in relation to the BCF, the fact that the Director of Social Services agreed to chair the partnership (“it said something about the status of the organisation”) was significant in its own right, but this was also a response to the significant leadership of senior managers. Another manager acknowledged that leadership is distributed, but that certain individual leader characteristics were important, in particular -

People need to feel passionate to move the work forwards, and strategic thinking is fundamental for that.

Strategic thinking was seen as paramount if initiatives and schemes such as YISP were going to build on the considerable development investment that was going on, and survive beyond the initial funding.

So, while personal leadership was thought to be important, there was also a recognition among our participants that leadership could be shared process. This had the effect for some of enabling people “other than middle-aged white men” to have better access to power and voice. As another manager said -

There are leaders all the way through [the levels of hierarchy] ... You could cope if you didn't have one [an effective leader in] one of those, but I think you'd find it hard if you didn't have strong leaders in two.

There also emerged something about the importance of leader resilience and trust within the complex context of multi-agency and partnership working. One manager was creative in his use of metaphor as he painted a vivid picture of what was facing managers in this system -

It feels like we're the skippers of a boat going through difficult weather conditions, and the crew saying “Shit! This is going to be rough”, but on the whole having trust in and respect of the skippers. But having to sack one or two people is going to be a sever test of this trust. [Researcher: So it's about leadership then?] Yes, but we are only leaders of part of the fleet – the question is, is there respect for the admirals? (Admirals = government).

Users and their involvement

As we have implied throughout this section, managers regularly emphasised the ultimate goal of partnership and inter-professional working – in this case of improving the life of vulnerable children and young people. However we have also seen that in this complex and difficult-to-manage system, it is easy to lose sight of this goal in the struggle to deal with funding and day-to-day pressures. As with the

whole of this review, it was important that we maintained the focus on the user ourselves as we explored managerial and leadership processes.

So, our first question was whether it was possible to lose touch with what this was all about. One senior manager felt that the fact that managers originally started out as professional workers enabled them to retain the focus on who users were -

Are they real people? ... Are they just numbers and figures? ... I think that even at the strategic level people do come back to the base line that we're talking about real people's lives. So even though they're talking ... in a more strategic way, I do still feel that at strategic level people are still aware of what it is they're talking about on the ground. Not that they necessarily know how it's delivered, not that they necessarily know about partnerships that may be developing among specific workers and agencies, that they line manage. ... But I don't think they lose sight of the fact that they're talking about real families and real communities. You know, you don't just start at strategic: you start as a practitioner, slaving the way [up], then you go to middle [management] and ... then you go up. [But] you've still been there.

Our second main question in relation to users was how they might be involved in processes of decision-making. We found a range of opinions among managers about this. For some, it was very difficult to involve children in decision-making. Rather, participation and front-line workers had to be trusted to perform the role of being a communication link between users and policy-makers. Therefore the importance of two-way communication between managers and the front-line was emphasised, as was the need to ensure that professional workers had access to decision-making arenas. There was also a sense that the methodologies of involving children were not agreed. Such views thus represented the problematic aspects of involving the user in decision-making, though all were careful to emphasise that users' views should count. On the other hand, some felt that serious attention should be given to the involvement of children, even though there were many difficulties with this.

It's legitimate that children's voices are heard as children's voices. So for example, [if] we could ask children to write a report, how valid it would be? I am suggesting that it would be very valid ... The child's view on whether funding has been correctly applied, whether staff have been effectively deployed and so on, they wouldn't be able to do that because they're not professionally trained to do it. What frustrates then is when untrained children's views are given less weight than untrained adult's views. I think that children are well able to tell us how a service is running. It's how much credit you give it against other sources of information, and that's the tricky one.

The YISP development

The views we have represented include those of middle and senior managers who were not necessarily involved directly in the YISP development, as well as those who are centrally involved. However, our research task has been facilitated by

being able to focus on this specific development in order to contain our review. Therefore, as the final part of section 3.3 we gather together a range of representative views about the challenge of partnership and multi-agency working, through the YISP lens.

In general, BCF is seen to be a good example of partnership working (“one of the more ‘partnershipy’ partnerships”, as one senior manager not directly involved put it) and therefore something of an exemplar.

Participants were worried about the YISPs’ vulnerability and raised questions about its long-term sustainability. So, this part looks at managers’ views about -

- The origins of the YISP and its purpose
- YISP’s sustainability.

Origins of the YISP and its purpose

I have to be perfectly honest with you. YISPs are something that has been thrown at us. We have to do it, so we will do it with the best of our abilities.

It’s making out the best of a bad situation. I’m not saying the YISP is bad but, you know, it’s a situation they didn’t ask for, something they’ve got to do.

The perception of the managers we interviewed about how YISP came about are similar. It is seen as something that had to be done, and was to a great extent imposed by government initiative as a reaction to a national political crisis concerning youth offending. Having said this, managers were clear that they wanted to make it work despite the problems that it does and will face. It is seen fundamentally as a partnership of a group of agencies coming together on the basis of the needs to share and exchange information and expertise. The panels are seen to be central to the initiative, and YISP is not thought of as existing in itself but rather as a place where agencies and voluntary bodies should feel they have to go as organisations representing a particular area. The panel can refer children to an appropriate service “before something happens”. The development is regarded as facilitative of the creation of local YISP panels –

The YISP is nothing without its members, and that’s the whole point. We’re not giving you a YISP. We’re just helping you to form your own.

One of the problems that managers and colleagues have had to deal with is a view that the origins and purposes of YISP were unclear to many people, and there was a need to give time and energy to explaining what it was. Two managers encapsulated YISP’s purpose as follows -

I guess the point of the YISP is not coming from one agency. What agencies are saying is, this is our idea you need to sit around the table with me. This is a concept which can make all your lives easier, you can provide a better service at the end for the people who need it. We can

provide you with the protocols and the referral forms and the database, the structure of it really. In that sense, it's coming independently to offer a service to all of them.

The YISP is not about funding or services. The YISP is a panel. Its value is that it's supposed to be a convergence of a range of skills and knowledge to be able to find... look at children and young people and it's going to see whatever sector is available and is best for [them] ...

YISP's sustainability

Regardless of individuals' understanding of the origins and nature of YISP, its sustainability when the BCF's funding runs out emerged as a basic concern for all. Managers expressed a range of optimistic and more sceptical predictions about what may happen. Some of the scepticism was fed by a feeling that, given its vulnerable nature, key actors in the system had their work cut out in explaining what YISP is about, and this would be tough. One manager's scepticism was reinforced by a view that the fundamental design of YISP was flawed -

I don't understand the logic in the way it has been set up. YISP is being established through the Youth Justice Board, but IRT has been set up through the local authority, with completely separate channels and different time frames. These should have been together. ... So it's flawed. But there's a lot of committed staff out there who are trying to make the bloody thing work. It takes a lot of nerve ...

There was a consensus among managers that if YISPs were to have a future, a precondition for their survival was that people on the ground, in localities, felt and took ownership of it –

If people in an area, a local partnership gets together and says, it would be really good to be able to do this and we need to go and find funding for it. It's more likely to be successful than if somebody says, here's some funding, here's some criteria for it and you must do it this way, if you want to do it any other way you can't. And I just worry that some of YISP stuff may be something similar ...

Several participants made a similar point. It seemed to them that the strategic priority was to ensure that agencies and other organisations were structurally and culturally "locked in" to the way of working that YISP represented. It would either fail, or not work to its full potential, unless this was achieved. Managers felt that much of this, as we have seen, will be to do with the quality of leadership and of interpersonal relations among key actors. No one saw this an easy challenge, but these two managers represented a more optimistic view that the development of YISP had already contributed to a cultural shift towards better inter-professional working that is now presented to people as being necessary for effective partnership working –

I think that what is in its (the YISP's) favour is that there is a real cultural shift about working together. So it's no longer cool for professionals to shut the door and maintain their professional distance. You're now the

best professional on the block if you can show how effectively you engage in partnerships.

I'm not sure that if the CF had not the funding it would be as successful as it is. When the money is all gone, I think the legacy will live on, but I don't think that people would have got around the table as they have done behind the CF without funding. Whether people will get behind the YISP without funding I don't know. Either have funding or strategic sign-up.'

4 KEY ISSUES FROM THE REVIEW

The purpose of this section is to discuss the key issues and questions that the case study has revealed. The reader will draw her or his own conclusions from the data presented in the last section, and these will be as valid as ours. We have analysed the data in section 3 (and occasionally from stage 1 of this review), and drawn out the main themes and topics that seem to us to be important to highlight, including –

- The *context* in which the BCF and the YISP project operate – the political, organisational questions, and the personal and professional cultures, which can affect for good or ill the effectiveness of partnership and multi-agency working (sub- section 4.1)
- The *main challenges* for stakeholders who are trying to work in collaborative ways (4.2), including –
 - Moving from discipline-based practice and into interdisciplinary practice
 - Moving from the defensive to inter-disciplinarity
 - Preparing the ground for multi-agency and partnership working
 - Networking, power and inclusion
 - Challenges to managers
- Seeing partnership and multi-agency working from a *strategic change perspective* (4.3)
- *A new form of governance* - the frustrations and the hope that this holds for stakeholders and actors in the system (4.4).

4.1 A CONTEXT FOR MULTI-AGENCY WORKING

Politics and organisation

It has become a commonplace to observe that contemporary social reform initiatives take place in a context of multiple innovation, and this is no less true for the BCF. Multi-agency working is located in a volatile milieu. In one sense, Bristol can be seen as a social laboratory for intensive experimentation in education, health and social services, largely unregulated by overarching local political authority. This has both costs and benefits.

On the benefits side of the equation, this defines a learning environment. The attendant multiplicity of partnership arrangements guarantees a cadre of innovators and theorists of change, *ad hoc* groupings of professionals and citizens who deliberate over issues that may have lain dormant for years. To continue with the laboratory metaphor, multiple, simultaneous initiative is like botanical trials in which many strains have to be seeded in order to identify the few that are hardy enough to withstand challenging conditions. The conditions of funding can produce a flexible workforce, potentially improved productivity, and the development of new cultures and ways of working, e.g. –

It enabled me to make connections with [name of worker] at the Adventure Playground up the road, as a result of the meetings I got [him/her] to come to the school and help with the Pyramid Club, and then we had children starting to go up there after school (learning mentor, Lockleaze).

On the cost side, partnership and multi-agency working can promise both fragmentation and duplication, as problems are reinvented in each initiative, and as partnership boards across the city compete to promote the partial interests of their own initiatives –

There has been a real problem in this area of projects coming and going and resources not being administered or spent effectively (Statutory sector manager, Easton)

Another issue for [the interviewee] is the plethora of different agencies and organisations “out there” who could be working with the same children and young people as her and others. Sometimes she has gone out to work with a group of kids to find that another community group (also funded by BCF) was working with the same group. [Researcher’s field notes, stage 1 Initial Report].

As we saw, short-term working creates an insecure workforce who, perforce, spend significant proportions of their time seeking out funding and employment opportunities rather than focusing on the task in hand. There is an attribution problem – i.e. many groups laying claim to the same success statistics, while setting off responsibility for failure. Finally, though funds are often available for small evaluation exercises the temporary nature of the system and its scaffolding provides little by way of a sustained learning resource.

It is the lack of political regulation that is a distinctive feature of these multiple initiatives, many of which are designed to come up with more flexible alternatives to conventional arrangements. Initiatives are funded in *ad hoc* ways, staffed so as to avoid entrapment by professional traditions, and they are more exposed to central stipulation and accountability. Political oversight is replaced by technical compliance with indicators and targets. Where, once, local authorities and statutory agencies would typically commission temporary and voluntary groups to trial experiments and deliberate over whether or not to adopt them, now funding bypasses local authorities, goes directly to those *ad hoc* groups and permanent authorities. Some local managers struggle to keep up with these developments –

Who are we dealing with now? Which provider are we going through now? How do they work? We’re having to relearn everything, there isn’t time for that (head teacher, Lockleaze).

Accountability to communities, once focused on tightly-knit local authority arrangements, is dispersed across a plethora of partnership and management groups – which is both corrosive of sustained accountability relationships and, at the same time, more immediate in its access and oversight by communities, whose leaders sit on boards rather than being indirectly represented through elected councillors.

This does not diminish the perennial problem of how to translate experiments into mainstream public service provision. Statutory agencies and the professions are still resistant to rapid change – one of their obligations is to maintain stability and predictability. Thus, the much sought-after practice of ‘joined-up working’ still has to overcome cultural and organisational barriers (hence, in part, the funding of this inquiry). In this sense, there remains a confusion at the heart of contemporary social reform initiatives like the BCF and YISPs. They have to function as both experimenters and providers at the same time – posing, perhaps, a double threat to statutory services and local authorities. We cited the example of a team manager in Lockleaze who parodied this phenomenon as “being given a year to plan, a year to run and a year to review”.

We can look at this confusion of multiple initiatives alongside statutory provision through three lenses – *sequence*, *continuity* and *coherence*, represented as the following questions:

- 1) Is there an order (sequence) to the implementation of local initiatives such that one follows another for particular reasons, such as progression on the basis of learning?
- 2) Is there continuity of effort in that issues and understandings are sustained from one to the next?
- 3) Is there coherence across initiatives such that, taken as a package, they all relate to an overarching theory of change?

The more each of these obtains – i.e. the more ordered and rational the environment for initiatives – then the more stable and predictable surroundings are and the greater the likelihood of professionals confronting challenges which visit instability upon them, for they are more likely to see their place within the broader scheme of things.

Personal and professional cultures

Professional action takes place with cultures of professionalism. Community nurses, social workers, teachers, police officers all have familiar and distinct knowledge bases protected behind professional boundaries and expressed through conventional practices, forms of reflection, rules and rituals. These provide a platform of stability and security on which to build a response to the challenge of professional action and on which to construct manageable relationships. That platform is made up of familiar technique, cherished values, habitual practice, and other facets, all of which combine to provide a ‘social system’ within which practices are fashioned. Professions are not only sources for stable economic careers, they provide for moral and psychological security –

... we’ve grown up all specialised and different, and sometimes there is no trust – “This is my budget; this is my patch – get off!” People are feeling their ways towards partnership working (agency manager).

Multi-agency and partnership working brings potential challenge on all these fronts – potentially to the whole social system within which professionals live and work, for it threatens the integrity of the protective boundary and the stability of day-to-day

assumptions. Relationships may become unpredictable and, since they tend to be subject to competing forms of accountability, unmanageable. Thompson-Klein (1990)¹¹ in writing about *interdisciplinarity* poses the challenge of cross-boundary working like this:

"Interdisciplinarity is neither a subject matter nor a body of content. It is a process for achieving an integrative synthesis, a process that usually begins with a problem, question, topic or issue. Individuals must work to overcome problems created by differences in disciplinary language and world view."

The 'working to overcome' involves critical reflection on the professional boundary with the intention of stepping outside of it –

When I first came here years and years ago now the schools wouldn't even let us past the gate. Can you believe that? ... But now we have good relationships with most, not all, but most schools (Easton).

The challenge of coming to terms with an alternative world view can persuade people to settle for the lesser multi-disciplinarity – i.e. making contributions to shared problems from behind the security of unchanged professional boundaries with no questioning of those boundaries. The question in respect of partnership working is whether we are witnessing the emergence of new, interdisciplinary professions, or whether we are seeing the momentary integration of distinct but collaborating professional and occupational groups. As we reported earlier, the YISP development in Bristol gave some managers grounds for cautious optimism in this respect –

I think that what is in its [the YISP's] favour is that there is a real cultural shift about working together. So it's no longer cool for professionals to shut the door and maintain their professional distance. You're now the best professional on the block if you can show how effectively you engage in partnerships (agency manager).

4.2 THE MAIN CHALLENGES

All of the above analyses apply to the BCF contexts in the experience of this inquiry. There is fragmentation, but a large body of untapped and unsystematic learning. The history of Bristol is seen by some to have been one of large departments ("silos") 'slugging it out', and it proves hard to shake the legacy –

You sometimes wonder where the council is coming from because different people in different departments have so very different attitudes to us and what we do. There is no consistency even within the same department. (Project worker, Easton)

One person characterised multi-agency and partnership working as '*mutual loathing tempered by the pursuit of funds*', though others expressed more benign views. A

¹¹ Klein, Julie Thompson (1990) *Interdisciplinarity: History, Theory, and Practice*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

partnership forum could be felt to moderate extreme views, to generate alternative arguments and shared ownership of social problems –

when you come together around a common goal ... leading to a service that needs to be developed, ... you identify how you going to deal with that, how collectively you're going to use your resources, how you share the power, how you do things together (senior manager).

There was a varied reaction to the challenges and promise of multi-agency and partnership working. Certainly, there are complexities which suggest risks that are not for the faint-hearted. One person reminded us of the data protection issues to be negotiated in sharing data across agencies, and of the risks of being drawn into unfamiliar territory of child protection issues.

Given the lack of oversight of initiatives and a much-diminished role for local authorities in 'holding the ring', we found little evidence of an ordering of initiatives, little evidence of ideas being sustained in continuous ways and little that made initiatives coherent one with others. This is not at all to say that people were not doing worthwhile and honourable things – much less that initiatives themselves were not worthy. Our task was not to look at the significance or worth of any initiative – not the BCF nor the YISP initiative – but to look, in a sense, at the interstices between them.

Moving from discipline-based practice into interdisciplinary practice

Our data suggests some difficulty in breaking out of discipline-based practice and into interdisciplinary practice. As we observed meetings and interviewed people we heard as much about differences and insecurities as we did about integration and enthusiasm. Indeed, our data suggests that multi-agency and partnership working cannot be separated out from multi-community and multi-faith issues and a general sense of a lack of 'joined-up-ness' and strategic direction (see especially data from Easton, section 3.1). In a general milieu of competition for scarce resources, professional groups being forced to compete for funding and status merely join the fray of other forms of competition which, together, make up part of the threat to community cohesion. The key point here is that where the lesson of community cohesion is the essential basis of trust, partnership working provides sites and forums within which trust is difficult to achieve without adequate preparation.

Moving from the defensive to inter-disciplinarity

A number of research participants mentioned the importance of group dynamics and group formation in partnership boards and meetings, and the importance of trust and openness in interpersonal relationships to enable effective multi-agency and partnership working, e.g. –

I consider probably 50% of my time is spent on ensuring that ... relationships are kept up ... all that stuff that I do around getting people around a table and the links that are made through that process, no-one's really tracking that (Better Together project worker, Lockleaze)

This suggests something of the move from multi-disciplinary to inter-disciplinary action along Thompson-Klein lines. Initial reactions on partnership teams are defensive and confrontational, but this yields to building, the design of strategies for performance, etc.. The process ends with the team being able to set aside confrontation in favour of deliberation, and the desire for mutual learning –

There is good partnership working within areas like Knowle and Lockleaze, but she felt that there was insufficient learning and contact between projects in these areas. There was now a need, she felt, for some city-wide information co-ordination and a directory of all services to children and young people which would help [her agency] connect and communicate with the right people. BCF could act more as an umbrella organisation, and the next stage in multi-agency working is to get groups together from time to time, say once a year to learn about what is going more widely [researcher's field notes from stage 1].

On the other hand, a significant contributor to defensive postures and barriers to collaboration is that some people can be seen as too ideological, too interested in maintaining their group allegiances, or in single issues like drugs. Defence of valued practices and essential territory can be read as non-negotiable ideological posturing. Some people were happy to engage in multi-agency and partnership working so long as 'core principles' were not challenged.

Preparing the ground for multi-agency and partnership working

An inhibitor to inter-disciplinary working may be the lack of preparation, a key aspect of sequence, continuity and coherence –

We're not taught how to do partnership, there are some basic rules around partnership working, I guess it's a bit like team development (manager).

If the ground has been prepared, people are aware of and signed-up to the prospective challenge. If the ground has not been prepared, the groups expected to work across their professional and cultural boundaries are still trained, managed and held accountable according to historical conventions rooted in single-agency/single-discipline practice. Lack of preparation and a pervasive sense of competition and mistrust seem to make it more difficult for professionals to negotiate their different values and working assumptions. For example, teachers, social workers and others will hold different visions for, and definitions of, young people, as will statutory and voluntary sectors. We saw evidence of first attempts to negotiate these in a sustained and meaningful way, but, on the admission of many participants in the research, there remains some way to go –

Some [partnerships] are more successful than others, and we played around with partnerships when they first appeared, which was seven years ago or something like that, ... we've made a lot of mistakes and we're still grappling with it, really (manager).

On the other hand, when practical problems were being pursued ‘on the ground’ and there were visions available of possible solutions, we found evidence of goodwill and a willingness to work together –

what we’ve worked really hard towards is one shared application, so one shared registration form, and one shared registration number (Better Together worker in Lockleaze/Upper Horfield)

It’s the buzzword, isn’t it, “partnership”. ... For me ... it is about us as an organisation trying to work with the people in Easton to persist with a group of young people who are on the edge of social exclusion whether it is education or socially, on the edge of criminality. ... So it is working with all the agencies there - the BEST teams, the BLIPS, ... also with some of the other minority ethnic communities which are quite influential there. ... part of E-MAP work is to actually have an osmosis factor in seeping through and leeching some of the activity and some of the expertise to work better together.

This reflects Thompson-Klein’s view that interdisciplinarity starts best from a ‘problem, topic, question or issue’. What this implies is that multi-agency working may operate more effectively where partnership meetings are between practitioners, and less so when they are among practitioner representatives or managers.

Networking, power and inclusion

Since reform initiatives mostly exist without permanent and generic governance structures they must network if they seek to communicate. This puts more than normal premium on who knows whom and on being included in key forums –

You know that certain people have their feet round the table and no matter what you say it is the friends of those involved who will get funding and that is it. (Voluntary sector project manager, Easton)

Problems occasionally cropped up when partners had to shift their guidelines, and they negotiated changes with some partners but not with others, and this could result in some groups feeling confused and frustrated (senior manager)

This can lead inevitably to an asymmetry in power among bodies and agencies. Clearly this has always been the case under more conventional local authority and statutory service arrangements, but the fragility of effort and survival among temporary initiatives intensifies the need for inclusion and heightens the consequences of exclusion.

Challenges to managers

The management of multi-agency and partnership working is a complex task. Frequent policy changes, funding vulnerabilities and key changes in personnel make for difficulties in planning ahead. Some managers may themselves be on short-term contracts that could make for risk-aversion. Added to this is the persistent need to

respond to target- and audit-cultures which distorts and overloads working practices: a typical view as represented by one senior manager was that partnership working could be -

about being able to tick the box than rather to deliver in true partnership.

One of the main challenges to strategic managers was that of trying to hold together their roles as ‘containers’ for stakeholders’ and professional workers’ anxieties that were provoked by the uncertainty surrounding the YISP development, for example. We saw how managers had to struggle to try to reassure staff on short-term contracts in the face of funding vulnerabilities.

4.3 A STRATEGIC CHANGE PERSPECTIVE

There was a realisation among managers that “partnership working” could in fact be a pretence, a ritualised meeting together that contributed little to effective service delivery. Implicitly, the real work took place back in the agency -

It’s where people are sort of forced to come together or feel they should be around the table because it’s an agency perspective rather than actually something they think will help they’re own work. That isn’t as much a partnership, more multi-agency for the sake of being ... rather than part of a group that is part of the same direction or the same process (senior manager).

You can come along to lots of meetings and share information about what your project is doing, but that doesn’t actually alter how you operate, it doesn’t increase your understanding of another agency (participant, Lockleaze).

This suggests a distinction between partnership as an adaptation to or extension of practice, on the one hand, and multi-agency and partnership working as an innovatory project, on the other. The question, then, is whether we may expect multi-agency and partnership working to happen of its own volition – as a response to an unavoidable set of conditions – or whether it needs its own change strategy.

There was talk of multi-agency and partnership working being hampered by lack of transitional resources –

People’s energy gets caught up in this day-to-day management and concerns and worries about financing and we have to remind ourselves why we’re doing this (senior manager).

People have enough to do with what they do already (there are counter-arguments here, too) and have few resources to set up preparation and migration programmes. There are significant costs associated with setting up collaborative forms of working – aligning discrepant assessment/referral processes; negotiating mutually exclusive accountability systems; retraining managers and practitioners; publishing new training, development and publicity manuals, etc. Even where resources are available, we have noted how local managers’ room for discretion to administer funding in

innovative ways is highly circumscribed. Partnership working, that is to say, might be treated, not as a policy or as a practice (it is clearly both), but as a highly challenging project of strategic change.

4.4 A NEW FORM OF GOVERNANCE - THE FRUSTRATIONS AND THE HOPE

This research presents examples of how some professionals and managers in Bristol understand the nature of their work and the challenges facing them. Each has his or her understanding of the theory and the practice involved in the notions we introduced in section 2 (and which are discussed in more depth in section 5). At strategic levels a great deal of thought has been given to inter- and multidisciplinary. Setting up and working within a partnership means at minimum the development of multidisciplinary teams. Many professionals associated partnership working with ‘good team working’. Many of their frustrations relate to the lack of interdisciplinarity in their work. They complain about –

- duplication and fragmentation of services
- the tensions between professional attachments to agencies and to the partnership
- power relations and trust that affect the ways in which they may be more or less able to share and exchange knowledge and experience with each other.

Professionals are faced with having to work together, to move increasingly towards multidisciplinary settings. They are also faced with the need to look at problems collectively and in a more holistic manner. This forces them to evolve to more interdisciplinary ways of working. Associated with this are important aspects -

- professionals have to clearly understand the nature of their work
- they have to be willing to trust each other, and to share with each other
- they must have professional stability.

Two fundamental factors lie at the centre of the review: this form of governance was imposed by the government; and this same government does not provide the conditions of stability needed for it to evolve –

We’re trying to manage well the government’s bad management ... the government keeps changing the rules (senior manager)

What this research has presented is a picture of instability produced by incoherent and rapid government change in fundamental matters such as policy and funding, leading to initiative fatigue. Professionals reach points of indecision and uncertainty that in extreme circumstance involve job losses.

Alongside such an unstable working environment, these professionals and managers are embedded in a performance culture of standardisation and attainment of targets. Thus, they have to find ways to work together which allow them to attain government targets while having to cope with constant uncertainty. In this case, the development of interdisciplinarity faces many difficulties that beyond individual ways of working and understandings of the nature of such work. These difficulties are firstly the result

of contradictions between government policy, government demands and government distribution of funding.

As to the YISP, the initiative appears to be the harbinger of a new policy paradigm that concerns policing in the context of what some, nowadays, call the 'therapeutic state'. As one of our respondents put it –

If you look at the YISP reference material it's very clear that if you're going to tackle crime and the drift towards crime at the preventive end, you're actually tackling exactly the same issues as if it was an 'education attainment' based group or a 'family dysfunction' based group'.

This is Tony Blair's 'tough love' which seeks to bring together tough cop with soft cop, traditional policing with clinical intervention, law and order with the human services. Within our research sites this seems to have offered opportunities for old, sometimes hostile, relationships to be reviewed and new relationships to form. This is the hope.

5 COLLABORATIVE WORKING IN PRINCIPLE

The purpose of this section is to set our inquiry within a wider theoretical and policy context. We offer a review of existing theory, relevant frameworks, and previous recent research. This is important because the BCF partnership and the YISP initiative of course have not been set up in isolation from a national discourse and belief that, fundamentally, says that partnership and multi-agency working mean good delivery of welfare. The section therefore brings together a series of ways of looking at this form of public and social delivery, including –

- The imperative for collaboration – the *musts* of partnership and multi-agency working (sub-section 5.1)
- Normative models of partnership – the *shoulds* of effective collaboration (5.2)
- Descriptive models of partnership – the *what is* of effective collaboration (5.3)
- Tensions and contradictions in collaborative working – the potential *problems* (5.4)

The section also revisits the terminological and conceptual issues that we introduced in section 2.

5.1 THE IMPERATIVE FOR COLLABORATION

It is difficult to find a contemporary policy document or set of good practice guidelines that does not have collaboration as the central strategy for the delivery of welfare, whilst the professional literature extols its virtues (Gillies, 1998)¹². The pressure to collaborate and join together in partnership is overwhelming (Mayo, 1997)¹³, although it can also be time-consuming and frustrating. The continuing presence of complex and seemingly insuperable social problems has brought *universal* acknowledgement that no agency or profession can be expected to address these single-handedly. Sullivan and Skelcher (2002)¹⁴ assert that collaboration is now an embedded principle throughout the world in the way policy is made, managed and delivered. Organisational and professional partiality and territoriality, with their inherent tendencies toward restrictive practices, alongside organizational, philosophical and cultural differences, have long been a detriment to the service user and have contributed to policy failure. On gaining office in 1997 the Labour government gave a clear signal that it would, “end competition and replace it with a new statutory duty of partnership” (*Guardian*, 10/12/97) so that services would ‘pull together rather than pull apart’. Whilst this was welcome news, the fragmentation of welfare services which became greatly exacerbated under Thatcherism has not been reversed by Labour; indeed in many respects the proliferation of new private, quasi-governmental and not-for-profit agencies has increased since 1997.

¹² Gillies P. (1998) The effectiveness of alliances and partnerships for health promotion, *Health Promotion International*, Vol. 13, No. 2.

¹³ Mayo M. (1997) Partnerships for regeneration and community development, *Critical Social Policy*, Issue 52, Vol. 17 (3)

¹⁴ Sullivan and Skelcher (2002) *Working across boundaries: Collaboration in Public Services*, Basingstoke, Palgrave

Concerns over policy failures, especially in relation to children and young people, as well as mental health, have generated increasingly loud calls for the development of a culture of collaboration and partnerships between agencies, professions, and across sectors. The expanding mixed economy of service providers, involving a greater number of marketised and fragmented agencies, stretching across three distinct sectors, coordinated and regulated by the state, has increased the need for collaboration. Government commitment to greater social inclusion, through ‘joined-up’ thinking and the dove-tailing of policy objectives and practice expectations reflects and reinforces the message (PAT 17, 2000). Consequently, collaborative practice is expected and assumed to be good practice or is required by legislation. There has been a marked growth in the number of formal and informal collaborative relationships across the policy spectrum between state agencies and the market, voluntary and community sectors, as well as within and between state agencies themselves.

The dominant perception is that collaborative partnerships are an essential prerequisite for the organisation of contemporary welfare practice. Such was the fragmentation between and within public service organisations and professionals that working together around the same objectives had much merit. Similarly, the issues to be tackled are often complex, multi-faceted, and obdurate (Wilkinson, 1997)¹⁵ and the multitude of previously uncoordinated efforts have failed to address them. For those managers, professionals, and other stakeholders with an insight into the limitations and shortcomings, as well as the strengths, of fragmented services and partial contributions, the prospect of addressing the “wicked issues” (Stewart, 1996)¹⁶ with a systemic or comprehensive approach has a strong appeal. The diversity and complexity of contemporary life is such that any one organisation or professional is unlikely to have a sufficient grasp or understanding of the range and significance of emergent needs amongst the population. Pooled knowledge and experience is therefore crucial to any credible and sustainable problem analysis. Critics might suggest that this pooling of knowledge could lead to a dispersal of responsibility such that all can contribute, but no one can be held responsible for any shortcomings. However, while working in collaboration with other providers appears self-evident, irrefutable, and long overdue, the extent to which the expectations surrounding collaborative working can be realised is much influenced by the surrounding context.

A number of concepts, some well-established, attempt to capture current or proposed relationships between stakeholders in the delivery of public services (Powell and Exworthy, 2002)¹⁷. These include, ‘joined-up’ government, seamless services, coordination, networking and joint-working. Collaboration is central to all. As we introduced in section 2, nevertheless there are significant differences between the concepts although there is a tendency to view them as interchangeable. there are conceptual overlaps between them but the orientation, focus, values, and potential

¹⁵ Wilkinson D. (1997) Whole system development – rethinking public service management, *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, Vol. 10, No. 7, pp. 505-33

¹⁶ Stewart J. (1996) *Local Government Today*, London, Local Government Management Board

¹⁷ Powell M. and Exworthy M. (2002) Partnerships, quasi-networks and social policy in Glendinning C., Powell M. and Rummery K. (Eds.) (2002) *Partnerships, New Labour And The Governance Of Welfare*, Bristol, Policy Press

offered by each concept contain important distinctions. Three dominant concepts, those of inter-agency, inter-professional, and partnership working are considered further here.

Inter-agency collaboration

Inter-agency work is closely associated with a geographic place, with those agencies that work in the same 'patch'. There are a number of levels on which this can take place. Collaboration might require some boundary adjustments, both physical and organisational, to ensure greater coterminosity. Failure to secure such adjustments has repeatedly proven to be a stumbling block in achieving successful inter-agency work. In a complex world of multiple providers, spatial coterminosity for two agencies can create spatial disunity for others. Boundary sharing might be restricted to those agencies with a special or significant relationship, but with multiple providers it is unlikely that 'significance' can only be applied in relation to one other agency. Agencies located in different structures of accountability, sometimes reinforced by political boundaries, face the additional challenge of balancing the potential advantage of coterminosity across all agencies within the structure or between themselves as a single agency and another located elsewhere. Political differences between areas of government may prevent any re-drawing of boundaries irrespective of the potential benefits to service users.

Most commonly inter-agency work involves the sharing of information, tasks, and/or resources, agreeing procedures or protocols to address particular problems, reaching shared decisions, or planning and reviewing policies and procedures. Agencies frequently approach collaboration committed to their own agendas, priorities, perceptions, habits and customs, and with little intention of fundamentally changing these as a consequence of inter-agency activity. Too often, inter-agency working involves negotiating with others, while remaining firmly within one's own organisational framework. When participants work to their own agency agenda, the question of who owns inter-agency work becomes critical. When adopted as an 'afterthought' to organisational life, inter-agency activity will remain marginal and will not encourage investment and risk-taking. Inter-agency work is closely associated with a geographic place, with those agencies that work in the same 'patch'. There are a number of levels on which this can take place.

Where inter-agency work involves non-managerial professionals, the issue of agency accountability is one that needs clarification and is often the source of conflict. Hambleton et al (1995)¹⁸, among others, highlight this tension between effectiveness in the achievement of the stated purposes underpinning the inter-agency collaboration and internal agency accountability that can result in a drift toward a relationship characterized by 'talk' rather than 'action'. When participants do not bring the authority to make decisions that in some way commit the agency the exercise can quickly become ineffective and futile. Where there are differential levels of authority between participants those with least authority can become marginal to or spoilers of decisions.

¹⁸ Hambleton R., Essex S., Mills L., and Razzaque K. (1995) *The Collaborative Council: A Study of Inter-Agency Working in Practice*, London, Joseph Rowntree Foundation and LCC Communications

Inter-professional collaboration

Professional loyalties, knowledge and insights offer the possibility of reaching out beyond organisational boundaries to colleagues located elsewhere. Inter-professionalism focuses not on organisational boundaries and procedures but on encouraging collaboration between those with different professional roles in any common situation. Inter-professional working is considered essential given the complexity of the issues to be addressed and the partial knowledge and skill base of any single professional group. By combining distinct contributions each is valued and all benefit from what others bring.

At a pragmatic level inter-professionalism is oriented around a problem-solving approach that concentrates on the range of skills, knowledge, and experience contained within the multi-professional team. Such teams can be contained within single or multiple agencies. Policy and practice guidelines encourage the development of a jointly owned strategy, agreed procedures, shared resources, the exchange of information, and regular reviews based on common criteria for the evaluation of effectiveness. Inter-professionalism needs to be distinguished from multi-professionalism that is more a by-product of inter-agency collaboration. This does not require participants to abandon or re-examine their professional cultures, practices, or knowledge base. It is not an integrative approach requiring the development of new professional practices but is concerned with the harmonisation of different and sometimes competing disciplines.

Inter-professionalism challenges the bureaucratic tendencies within public service organisations. Professional expertise can be restricted and autonomy curtailed by the boundaries, rules, and procedures, imposed by organisational requirements. Professionals can look beyond the confines of any single agency and, holding the service user as the central focus, identify the contribution of other professional colleagues in the satisfaction of user needs. Unlike inter-agency work, inter-professionalism acknowledges the range and diversity of professions within a single agency. It thus encourages the development of horizontal linkages within and across organisational boundaries (Audit Commission, 1992)¹⁹.

Inter-professionalism remains neutral as to whether some professional perspectives are valued or count for more than others. To admit to a differential weighting in values, status, and power undermines the concept's potency as the discourse and outcomes would be seen to reflect those more powerful professions. Inter-professionalism is equally silent on whether all public service occupational groups are entitled to be designated as a profession. The denial of professional recognition to any key occupation undermines the development of productive relationships founded on a single unifying concept. Conversely, internal occupational anxieties associated with status or identity weakens the collaborative relationship, producing deferential and defensive behaviour. Differential power and influence, relative success in the achievement of professional recognition, disagreements over the desired meaning of professionalism, and a commitment to what have been the consequences of

¹⁹ Audit Commission (1992) *Community Care: Managing the Cascade of Change*, London, HMSO

professionalism all continue to be sources of contestation within and between occupational groups and between them and the state.

Working in partnership

Current policy, in response to increased complexity, both in relation to the issues to be tackled and the range of stakeholders involved, requires not only improved coordination but partnerships involving all stakeholders (DETR, 2001)²⁰. This inclusive approach is to include the recipients of any service or programme (McArthur, 1996)²¹ and for some writers is “premised on the bottom-up notion of community consultation, involvement and ultimately ownership ...” (Hughes and Carmichael, 1998, p.1)²². Partnerships are seen by some as distinct formations (Lowndes and Skelcher, 1998)²³ while others define them as a ‘quasi-network’ (Powell and Exworthy, 2002). Clarke and Glendinning (2002)²⁴ make the point that partnerships should not be thought of as an arrangement to be associated with the current Labour government. Rather, they represent a “transition to new modes of governing statutory welfare services” (p. 34). Within such arrangements there is some autonomy for local discretion and initiative. These are, however, bounded by government resourcing, control over direction, monitoring and evaluation. Jessop (2000)²⁵ warns that the state is just as likely to dissolve or remove those partnerships that no longer match its requirements or fail to meet expectations.

By involving all stakeholders, partnerships are expected to produce a deeper understanding of the problem and its context and consequently more creative mutually owned responses (Wilkinson and Applebee, 1999)²⁶. They are a means to generate information sharing, improve communication, enable a better understanding of stakeholder contributions to emerge, avoid duplication, reduce inefficiencies, and identify opportunities for the effective sharing of resources. They are also meant to act as effective vehicles to lever in external resources inaccessible to any one party, facilitate mutual learning and, through dialogue and risk-taking, discover new approaches (Maddock and Morgan, 1997)²⁷. More significantly, partnership implies openness in decision-making, responsibility, and accountability (Pugh, 1997)²⁸. In an

²⁰ Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) (2001) *Local Strategic Partnerships: Government Guidance*, London, DETR

²¹ McArthur A (1996) The active involvement of local residents in strategic community partnerships, *Policy and Politics*, Vol. 23, No. 1, pp. 61-71

²² Hughes J. and Carmichael P. (1998) Building partnerships in urban regeneration: a case study from Belfast, *Community Development Journal*, Vol. 33, No. 3 205-25.

²³ Lowndes V., Skelcher C. (1998) The dynamics of multi-agency partnerships: an analysis of changing modes of governance, *Public Administration*, Vol. 76, Summer, pp. 313-333

²⁴ Clarke and Glendinning (2002) Partnership and the remaking of welfare governance, in Glendinning C., Powell M. and Rummery K. (eds.) *Partnerships, New Labour and the Governance of Welfare*, Bristol, Policy Press

²⁵ Jessop B. (2000) From the KWNS to the SWPR, in Lewis G., Gewirtz S., and Clarke J. (eds.) *Rethinking Social Policy*, London, Sage Publications/Open University Press

²⁶ Wilkinson D. and Applebee E. (1999) *Implementing Holistic Government: Joined Up Action on the Ground*, Bristol, The Policy Press

²⁷ Maddock S. and Morgan G. (1997) *Barriers to professional collaboration and inter-agency working within health and social care*, paper presented at the Public Services Research Unit Conference

²⁸ Pugh G. (Ed.) (1997) *Partnerships in Action*, London, NCB

ideal form, partnerships are characterised by trust, respect, reciprocity and mutuality. Such coalitions seek agreement on strategic priorities, committing their wider constituencies to a set of objectives, values, and action plans that impinge not only on others but also on themselves. Recent government publications suggest that partnership is, “a mechanism for change ... the maximising of influence ... being able to build a way of working for the future, something that will last longer than the life of the project...” (DfEE, 1998, p.9)²⁹.

Partnerships are active relationships, built up over time and not abandoned when difficulties arise. To achieve this they require, “regular maintenance and support on a continuing basis, if they are to survive and flourish” (Mayo, 1997). They rely on an active commitment to networking, searching for and maximising ‘win-win’ situations, open and reflexive dialogue, and a willingness to invest without the expectation of short-term dividends. Participants require a proficiency in inter-personal relationships and sensitivity to group dynamics as well as a capacity to deal with the formal business. Successful partnerships cannot be imposed but require participants to genuinely want to work in partnership (DoH, 2001)³⁰.

Partnerships go through a number of processes and prior to the establishment of any formal set of arrangements there is usually a period of informal networking that is heavily dependent upon committed individuals (Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002). Lowndes and Skelcher (1998) identify four such phases in the life cycle of a partnership – pre-partnership collaboration, partnership creation and consolidation, programme delivery, termination and succession. Relationships internal to the partnership throughout such phases are likely to be influenced strongly by resource dependency relationships. While financial power is a key resource it is not the only one and others, such as reputational power, organizational and individual capacities can be significant. In all partnership working individuals’ perceptions of the meaning and value of partnerships, their commitment to it, the actions they take and their relationships with other members of the partnership will be critical to its success.

5.2 NORMATIVE MODELS OF PARTNERSHIP

In recent years a large number of normative models of partnership (i.e. models prescribing what partners ‘should’ do to be effective) have emerged. These tend to provide checklists of necessary conditions and or principles that if adopted will enhance effectiveness. Such guidelines for effective partnership working are increasingly available (Taylor, 1995³¹; Audit Commission, 1998³²; LGA, 1999³³;

²⁹ Department for Education and Employment (1998) Public private partnerships: A guide for school governors, London, DfEE. www.dfes.gov.uk/ppp/intro.htm

³⁰ Department of Health (2001) *Keys to Oartnership*, Community Care Development Centre, London, DoH

³¹ Taylor M. (1995) *Unleashing the Potential: Bringing Residents to the Centre Of Regeneration*, York, Joseph Rowntree Foundation

³² Audit Commission (1998) *A fruitful partnership: Effective partnership working*, London, Audit Commission

³³ Local Government Association (1999) *Take your partners*. LGA hearing on partnerships, London, LGA

Hardy et al, 2000³⁴). Stewart *et al* (1999)³⁵ identify nine drivers in a positive cycle of collaboration -

- Consultation or engagement at all stages with all stakeholders
- Open and facilitative organisational structures to ensure dialogue
- Flexible and responsive systems
- Clarity on task definition and accountability
- An implementation culture of ‘can-do’
- A capacity to act strategically
- Rewards for innovation
- Impact evaluation and continuous learning

The Department of Health paper *Keys to Partnership* (2001) identifies nine building blocks in what it describes as a ‘partnership readiness framework’ -

- Shared vision, values and principles
- Specific goals in relation to policy and service changes
- A willingness to explore new service options
- Clarity about the boundaries to the partnership
- Clarity about organisational roles in relation to commissioning, purchasing and service provision
- Agreement on shared resources
- Effective leadership
- Dedicated partnership development capacity
- The development and sustaining of good personal relationships

A further ten components for partnership working are then added -

- Strategic partnerships concerned with governance and the overarching framework and objectives
- Engagement with users and other local people
- Promoting ownership via effective communication and sharing the benefits of partnership
- Planning and delivery of strategic decisions to ensure the achievement of planned changes in service delivery
- Shared assessment and care management systems
- Integrated information and support systems
- Shared training
- Joint workforce planning
- An integrated monitoring and review system
- Shared approach to performance and audit

Hardy *et al* (1997)³⁶ identify six generic partnership principles applicable to but not confined to the public sector. These are not offered as a guarantee to success but with

³⁴ Hardy B., Hudson B., and Waddington E. (2000) *What makes a Good Partnership?*, Leeds, Institute for Health/NHS Executive, Trent

³⁵ Stewart M. *et al* (1999) *Cross Cutting Issues Affecting Local Government*, London DETR

³⁶ Hudson B, Hardy B., Henwood M. and Wistow G. (1997) *Inter-agency collaboration: Final report*, Leeds, Nuffield Institute for Health

a warning that unless attention is paid to them attempts at partnership working are likely to be undermined. The six principle are -

- Acknowledgement of the need for partnership
- Clarity and realism of purpose
- Commitment and ownership
- Development and maintenance of trust
- Establishment of clear and robust partnership arrangements
- Monitoring, review and organizational learning

Whilst they have their uses such checklists inevitably abstract from the concrete reality facing different kinds of partnerships working in different kinds of area with different sets of objectives. There is a danger that such frameworks become idealized and used as a structure that actual partnerships feel obliged to imitate rather than as a heuristic advice which offers a set of prompts and stimuli which practitioners can adopt, discard or adapt as befits their own particular circumstance.

5.3 DESCRIPTIVE MODELS OF PARTNERSHIP

Descriptive models give more emphasis to `what is' rather than to `what should be'. They are more useful to understanding the particular constraints and opportunities that different partnerships face.

Partnerships can operate either within a formal structure or as a set of informal relationships. They range from the very pragmatic, in which the parties collaborate on a single short-term task, to longer-term relationships such that it becomes hard to imagine working in any other way. Mackintosh (1992)³⁷ identifies three partnership models. In the 'synergy model', the sum is greater than the parts with the outcome better than that produced by all those concerned when working separately. The 'budget enlargement model' is designed pragmatically to lever-in additional funds. The 'transformative model' is innovative and change oriented. The point is that no one model is necessarily 'better than' any other. In some circumstances the 'budget enlargement model' is entirely appropriate for the tasks facing a particular group of partners.

Snape and Stewart (1996)³⁸ identify three similar types described as, 'facilitating', 'coordinating' and 'implementing' partnerships. Facilitating partnerships manage entrenched, highly problematic, contentious and/or politically sensitive issues in which issues of power are at stake and trust and solidarity are essential for success. Coordinating partnerships focus on less contentious issues and where partners agree on priorities but are equally concerned with other pressing demands specific to themselves. Implementing partnerships are more pragmatic, time limited, concerned with specific and mutually beneficial projects.

³⁷ Mackintosh M. (1992) Partnerships: issues of policy and negotiation, *Local Economy*, 7(3), pp. 210-224

³⁸ Snape D. and Stewart M. (1996) *Keeping up the momentum: partnership working in Bristol and the West of England*, Bristol, Bristol Chamber of Commerce and Initiative (unpublished)

Partnership work is the most inclusive of the collaborative concepts. They can transcend organisational, professional, and sectoral boundaries and can operate at different levels of government, local, regional, national, and supranational. *It is the only collaborative concept currently in use that explicitly embraces the service user and other community stakeholders.* According to the PAT 17 report (DETR, 2000)³⁹, a holistic approach can only be achieved by creating, "... a new relationship between the public sector and the individuals and communities they serve" (p. 21), based on dialogue. Yet its flexibility creates problems in establishing whether or not an appropriate partnership is in place, in relation to both its inclusion of all the legitimate stakeholders and nature of its work.

5.4 TENSIONS AND CONTRADICTIONS

Formal partnerships are now found across all public sector activity and, for the current government, despite or because of their opaqueness, represent the vision of a cohesive inclusive society of collaborating citizens, organisations and sectors (Hastings, 1996⁴⁰; Atkinson, 1999)⁴¹. As with other forms of collaboration, participants do not necessarily take their place at the partnership table as committed collaborators (Local Government Association 1997⁴²; Clarke 1996⁴³). They bring to such arrangements diverse agendas, priorities, and levels of commitment to a shared outcome and have uneven levels of awareness about the need for strategic collaboration. Participants are often reluctant collaborators, there because partnerships are rapidly becoming a statutory requirement or an essential prerequisite for government and private sector funding (DETR, 2001). Alternatively, partners are as concerned with the partnership mechanism as a means by which to pursue a number of other interests.

For partners to espouse collaborative working, while elsewhere behaving in contrary ways, presents real problems. While some may expect greater behavioural consistency, other partners understand collaboration as a pragmatic necessity that does not imply any behavioural change in other areas of operation. Previous relationships, of hierarchy and power, can continue to dog all participants (Atkinson, 1999). For all participants, the key partnership requirements of trust, listening, networking, openness to learning and a willingness to change priorities or practice for the common good are challenging. These contrast sharply with the requirements of more traditional forms of bargaining, negotiating and conflict strategies. However, the two are not incompatible. Indeed it may be more realistic to accept that the need is to find ways of holding the contradiction between both. It seems clear however that previous modes of governance have either encouraged competition or indifference and uncooperativeness between different agencies, professions or sectors. Switching from one mode to another takes time and, to date, some participants have yet to be

³⁹ Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) (2000) PAT 17 (2000) Joining it up locally, Report of Policy Action Team 17, National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, London, DETR

⁴⁰ Hastings A. (1996) Unravelling the process of partnership in Urban Regeneration Policy, *Urban Studies*, 33, pp. 253-268

⁴¹ Atkinson R. (1999) Discourses of partnership and empowerment in contemporary British urban regeneration, *Urban Policy*, Vol. 36 No.1 pp. 59-77

⁴² Local Government Association (1997) New deal for regeneration, London, LGA

⁴³ Clarke M. (1996) Urban policy and governance, *Local Government Policy Making*, vol. 23, No. 1, July

convinced of the benefits that such a change would bring. The experience of partnership activity has left some stakeholders feeling that they continue to be marginalised, excluded, or ignored. Inter-sectoral cultural clashes have also been experienced over how business should be conducted, especially over issues of legitimacy, accountability and representativeness.

Some of the difficulties are compounded by the fact that partners do not exist in isolation at the local level. Many agencies are themselves subject to very strong steering mechanisms from central government which reward sectional behaviours prioritising agency specific performance targets and which seek compliance with agency specific modes of inspection and quality assurance. Moreover the shift towards a budget making process which increasingly ties resources to specific objectives means that many 'mainstream' agencies have very little resource flexibility which hampers their ability to bring much of significance to the 'partnership table'. All of which is to say that partnership working is itself caught up in the contradictions of governance under Labour in which the demand for greater collaboration runs up against the reality of increased hierarchical and departmental control.

Partnerships built around specific and quite limited objectives are therefore more likely to succeed in producing more effective policy outcomes, based on the maximization of available resources. More ambitious initiatives are likely to be controversial, generating either fundamental conflicts of interest or impressive rhetoric but little of substance (DETR, 2000). Central to any initiative, however limited, must be the opportunity to spend time exploring existing cultural differences. Managing this requires skill, patience, commitment and perseverance, as well as time. Often these are in short supply especially when partnerships are constructed around specific funding requirements. Such pressing demands, the outcomes of which can be the difference between survival and closure for some agencies, prevent the emergence of sustainable strategic partnerships based on informal networking and grounded in trust, mutuality and shared vision. Instead, parties are more likely to approach the partnership with a history of mistrust and antagonism, seeking to maximise their own interests.

Partnerships need clarity of purpose and remain focused on agreed goals, as well as trusting, honest and committed relationships (DoH, 2001). They require an appropriate balance in relation to representation, quality and skills, money and resources, innovative practice, and to be well networked with local communities. The real test is whether, on the basis of what each partner knows about the other, they are able to take risks and engage in the manner that is required. Only if all partners do so can partnerships develop. While the feeling persists that this will prove to be yet another albeit more sophisticated mechanism to further particular interests, 'partners' will remain cautious about any committed engagement.

6 POLICY & PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS

The focus of this review has been to explore the nature and patterns of collaborative relationships in the context of children's services within locations in Bristol. The process of setting up of YISPs provided the research with an opportunity to explore the dilemma, tensions and challenges involved in attempting to set up a new set of multi-agency and partnership relationships. A key aim of the research was to *“promote learning about multi-agency and cross-professional working among the stakeholders involved with the intention that this learning will develop practice in the future.”*

We have given attention in this report to the concerns and issues associated with building a collaborative learning practice around the YISP initiative. In this section we draw out some of the key lessons learnt. We also use this opportunity to remind ourselves that policy matters and that the specific nature of any new policy will have an impact on the commitment of participants to work collaboratively and will contain elements that either facilitate or militate against partnership working. Similarly, our area-based case studies remind us of the importance of taking account of the social and economic nature of an area, and in particular of the importance of existing social capital, when planning any intervention. This section therefore covers -

- The impact of the YISP initiative on multi-agency and partnership working
- The impact of the social and geographical context in which partnership work is to be undertaken
- The creation of collaborative structures in response to YISP
- Improving the collaborative processes

6.1 THE IMPACT OF THE YISP INITIATIVE ON MULTI-AGENCY AND PARTNERSHIP WORKING

YISPs are meant to provide a framework of multi-agency identification, assessment and interventions with children at risk of offending in order to stop them from committing crime. These panels are multi-agency planning groups that seek to prevent offending and anti-social behaviour by offering voluntary support services to high-risk 8 to 13-year-olds and their families. The YISP strategy arises from a central government concern about crime prevention, to be implemented through funding accessed through the Children's Fund⁴⁴. The basis for the development of the strategy lies in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, which explicitly states that:

*“It shall be the principal aim of the youth justice system to prevent offending by children and young people”*⁴⁵

The actual development of the strategy was based on research carried out for the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales. This research argues that there is,

⁴⁴ CYPUP (2002) *Use of Children's Fund Partnership Funding for Crime Prevention Activities Jointly Agreed with Youth Offending Teams: Guidance*, London, HMSO

⁴⁵ Crime and Disorder Act, Section 37

“A considerable body of research has been identified demonstrating clearly that a firmly evidenced-based approach to the prevention of youth crime is both a realistic proposition and a strategy that can be confidently expected to be successful”⁴⁶

It is argued that preventative strategies should only be targeted at ‘high risk’ children and their families and that for these to be successful “*a relatively prescriptive approach is desirable*”.

Thus the basis of this development is at odds with the stated aims of the BCF in encouraging the empowerment participation and involvement by children in the development of interventions. This, coupled with the top-down nature of the initiative, has led to both confusion and resistance⁴⁷. Our research has identified levels of confusion and lack of clarity about the role and purpose of the YISP at the front line operational level.

At the heart of the policy there is a fundamental tension in its underpinning philosophy. This is centred on whether the objective is to create a more effective and creative preventative service for children and young people thought to be at risk or a controlling mechanism designed to manage young people who as yet have not committed any offence or strayed across any major social unacceptable boundary. The strategy gives rise to range of concerns about issues of confidentiality, data protection and the risk of stigmatisation. This tension suggests competing views of how the policy can be used to pursue different agency, professional or individual objectives. Differences between the different agencies and key individual participants in terms of where they sit on this continuum impact upon efforts to construct positive inter-agency working. **For collaboration to be effective it is important that the different perspectives are both acknowledged and understood. At the very least such matters and individual/agency responses should be part of a dialogue within YISP related structures. YISP will need to work consciously with a critical assessment of the policy identifying both its potential and its associated risks.**

The YISP is an addition to the multiple, and sometimes competing, partnerships with overlapping membership that already exist within the localities researched. Thus the membership of the panels for individual members raises issues about how much commitment and personal resources they feel able to offer. YISPs as well as other partnerships need a reason why participants would want to prioritise engagement. Each participant is likely to have a different view on how significant YISPs might be in adding value to their core work. For some it will be critical for others very marginal. This may result in inconsistent and fluctuating attendance and thus poorer quality decision-making, a lack of consistency and continuity, and lower levels of agency. Our evidence suggests that a lack of clarity about YISP processes and functions, has contributed to the confusion within potential and actual panel members about the basis of participation. **There needs to be open discussions about such**

⁴⁶ Anderson, B., Beinhart, P., Farrington, D., Longman, J., Sturgis, P. & Utting, D (2001), *Risk and Protective Factors associated with Youth Crime and Effective Interventions to Prevent It*, Youth Justice Board Research Note

⁴⁷ This was identified as occurring nationally in the first annual report (2003) of the National Evaluation of the Children’s Fund: *Developing Collaboration in Preventative Services for Children and Young People*, DfES

differences and their implications within the panels. Panels may decide whether such differences (that might be the basis of variable attendance, contribution, ownership etc.) should be the basis of different stakes in the process or reflected in different levels of engagement and decision-making.

Individual actor and agency engagement in YISPs is being driven by different and competing motivations. YISP provides an opportunity for some to secure a higher profile in the policy process, to become more influential, to extend existing networks, to 'voice' a set of ideas. For others it might present as a threat holding the prospect of a loss of status or control or generate an anxiety about having to work in new ways and establish new relationships. In such cases participation might be driven by a desire to maintain as far as possible existing pre-partnership relationships.

Individual actors and agencies enter initiatives such as YISP from different positions both in terms of their respective locations within their organisations and in terms of their relationship with each other. Some feel as though they participate with high levels of agency authority to support the arguments they adopt while others feel relatively weak in this respect. The extent to which frontline workers, middle and senior managers can establish a new set of productive relationships will be a challenge to the YISP process. All partners in the YISP come with a history of a relationship with some or all of the other partners. Not all members of YISPs are aware of the nature of such relationships between other participants. Some of these relationships are longstanding. All involve power and bring a degree of unfinished or unspoken debris that could block future interactions or intrude upon the working relationships of others.

Clearly there will be a range of policy-related matters on which YISP members may have differing perspectives, and these will impact on how panels work and members interact. Below we identify some of these issues -

- Actors approach such deliberations about 'at risk' young people with very different agendas. There will be different and competing definitions over the meanings of being 'at risk'. There will be different levels of tolerance in relation to such behaviour and consequently competing views on the timing of when agencies should intervene, the nature of such interventions, and who has the authority or legitimacy to intervene in order to produce the desired outcomes, which might also be the subject of contestation
- In the Easton research site, reference was made to the importance of recognising multiple and diverse communities. For some sections within some communities there is a strong faith-related emphasis. The YISP needs to recognise these differences and offer some reassurance that such diversity can be incorporated into their understanding of risk. A recognition and acknowledgement of such differences, is the minimum required to address the tensions within faith-based and secular oriented approaches.
- Divergent views about the extent to which YISP interventions that reflect the outcomes of a dialogue with children and young people deemed to be at risk or whether the orientation is essentially with an adult world and formal structures.

- There are complex issues around referrals, interventions and human rights. Clarity will be required as to the source of authority on which referrals are received. What role will parents and young people have in deciding that a referral should be made to the YISP? What rights do parents and young people have in determining what information is disclosed to the YISP? How will matters of confidentiality and data protection be managed by the YISP? Are there any protocols, etc.?
- Fundamentally, YISPs will need to establish the basis on which panel members unfamiliar with the individual child can make decisions about future interventions in the life of that child. Conversely, panels will need to ensure that those who do have some deeper knowledge of the child and his/her social world are able to provide information and assessments to the panel
- YISPs will need to establish a clear policy in relation to the allocation of resources and the rationale for why some young people 'benefit' while others do not.

6.2 THE IMPACT OF THE SOCIAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT IN WHICH PARTNERSHIP WORK IS TO BE UNDERTAKEN

The research in both Easton and Lockleaze demonstrates the impact of social and geographical contexts in which partnership work is planned and undertaken. In particular we highlight the importance of understanding the social mix, diverse relationships and cultural differences. Other factors such as the strength of voluntary and community organisations, the experience of previous external interventions into the community and the level of resources in the area were also identified as being key to strategic planning. However the evidence shows that the impact of such factors is not necessarily easily predictable and **that time needs to be taken both to gain a sound knowledge base of the area, assess the potential impact of any new initiative and attempt to build upon any positive reactions.**

The creation of collaborative structures

The research looked at the different levels at which partnership arrangements need to operate. While there are pre-existing networks at front line, locality and at the city wide strategic levels, the collaborative structures of YISPs themselves are new. Panel membership is clearly a key issue. The evidence in one of the sites suggests that the membership has been built organically through existing professional and personal networks. While this is to a certain extent both inevitable and welcome, **it is important that the YISP has clear criteria for membership** and that informal contacts or friendship networks should not constitute the primary basis of membership.

Improving the collaborative processes

For effective partnership working it is important that the partners develop a shared understanding of aims of the enterprise as well as mechanisms to release the potential of its shared human resource. Below we offer some strategies to move towards improving the collaborative process -

- **The need to provide developmental and reflective space for key actors in a partnership setting, to work on the feelings and emotions involved in collaboration.** These include a consideration of the hopes and fears of participants; expectations regarding self and others, and generally to maintain attention to considering ways of working as well as about performance and task issues.
- Generally (and this applies to subsequent ideas as well), **there should be as much emphasis on considering relational aspects between actors and stakeholders as on the mechanics and ‘business’** (e.g. the quest for funding). We have called this ‘preparing the ground’ for multi-agency and partnership working in section 4.
- **To realise that there is something important about management and leadership of inter-agency and partnership working,** and to give managers the opportunity to develop the knowledge and skills necessary for effective leadership in a partnership context.
- In particular, managers may benefit from understanding their ‘holding’ and ‘containing’ roles, working with their own and others’ anxieties, and **this could be accomplished through a process of personal role supervision (for the individual) or an action learning process (for a small group of managers holding similar partnership management roles).** Part of the leadership ‘holding’ role is keeping sight of the main purposes of the partnership - i.e. the vulnerable child or young person. Such processes would be intended to enable individuals, singly or (preferably) together, to develop their capacities for -
 - Recognising permeability of organisational boundaries
 - Recognising and understanding cultural differences between participating agencies and organisations
 - Paying simultaneous attention to internal and external worlds
 - Having a tolerance for ambiguity/uncertainty
 - Taking up roles of ‘buffering’ and ‘boundary scanning’
 - Recognising that not all demands are reconcilable.
- As far as possible, managers who are working at a strategic level in a partnership need to **find ways of negotiating stable and long-term arrangements with funding bodies (especially central government),** and to be aware of the problems inherent in fragile and short term funding arrangements.
- **Staff development** (for both managers and professional workers) in preparing for partnership and multi-agency working needs to be based on the following principles - that it –
 - involves emotion – the potential for envy, fear, competitiveness
 - negative projections, pride in one’s own profession, prejudice about ‘the other’
 - creates defences against anxiety
 - represents complex political/power relations

- requires effective relational work – a function of both of leadership (as emphasised above) and ensuring that inter-professional working is facilitated by effective dialogue, including a spirit of inquiry to try to understand each other's language.

7 HOW WE CONDUCTED THIS INQUIRY

7.1 THE CASE METHOD

To accomplish our aims we needed a database. We recommended at the outset that this would be best formed out of direct accounts of people's experiences on the ground and in their roles, using these as a focus for reflection and analysis. We anticipated that there would be a range of experiences, attitudes and values about partnership and multi-agency working, and our methodology needed to be sensitive to capture such varied data.

We proposed, therefore, to use the *case study approach*. Case study is the study of the particular. What is it about *these* services staffed and managed by *these* people, under *prevailing* conditions and with *given* purposes that lead to certain outcomes and not others? We have studies of the general – for example, theories of organisation and of professional action – and these provide us with a broad repertoire of explanations (see for example section 5 of this report). But the study of local contexts and cases allows us to test out theory and to fashion it to the needs to understand change in particular situations. Where existing theories just don't fit, local studies, with their emphasis on conversation and reflection, provide a base from which to generate explanations specific to the context. Case study combines knowledge and action.

Case study is also a way of linking inquiry to development. In seeking local explanation, case study works close to research participants, engages them in reflection on what they do and what they value. Proximity itself draws participants into the process of theorising – in this case, about inter-professional and inter-agency futures – and gives them a stake in the inquiry. Case study can engender ownership – both of the problem and of options for change. Where people have a voice in articulating the problem and in theorising about it, they are more likely to invest in solutions.

The study of the particular is not confined to the narrow limits of local contexts – case study also provides a base for generalisation. The lack of fit between multi-agency initiatives and the procedures and knowledge bases of statutory services is being ever more widely acknowledged as a key problem for contemporary change in the public services. Each local study broadens that repertoire of explanations and analyses available for all to review and to use as appropriate.

7.2 DESIGN OF THE INQUIRY

The review consisted of three stages, the last of which is ongoing as this report is published.

Stage 1 – Setting up the inquiry (July to December 2003)

We were concerned to ensure that this review would not only be methodologically and ethically sound, but also that it would be conducted in a collaborative way with key stakeholders concerned with the BCF and YISP. It was important that joint ownership of the project was built. In order to achieve this we argued, and it was accepted, that the YISP Partnership Board would act as an advisory group for the

UWE research team. The idea was, as it proved to be, that this group would assist the inquiry by –

- ensuring that the UWE research team had access to research sites for data collection,
- providing a sounding board at which we could test out tentative ideas about what the data was telling us,
- serving as a potential safety net for both the inquiry team and its participants.

It was during this first stage that we conducted our initial data-gathering in the three research sites (including Knowle West). This consisted of 15 interviews and observation of several meetings of the Board itself, of consultation events and staff workshops. The outcome from this first foray into the field was the production of our *End of Stage 1 Initial Report* that we presented to the Board on 5 December 2003. In essence this painted a picture of complexity and fluidity in partnership and multi-agency working as these applied to the YISP innovation (see Appendix). The general endorsement by the Board enabled the UWE team subsequently to refine the questions and methods it was going to use in stage 2.

Stage 2 – Case Study fieldwork (January – April 2004)

It was during this second stage that the bulk of our case study fieldwork was accomplished. There were three sites for inquiry – Lockleaze, Easton and “management”. The data (in section 3) was accessed in similar ways to stage 1, i.e. interviews and observation of meetings. We conducted 30 interviews and observed 8 meetings of the YISP Partnership Board and of local panels.

Stage 3 - Dissemination and subsequent action (May 2004 and ongoing)

This report forms the beginning of the dissemination strategy for this review. From the beginning, the intention has been that this review would not just “sit on the shelf”, but would be used as a means of promoting learning, development and further action and change, and of involving participants in theorising about the data and arriving at conclusions. This is consistent with the fourth aim of the inquiry - “to promote learning about multi-agency and cross-professional working among the stakeholders involved with the intention that this learning will develop practice in the future”. Our purpose throughout has been to facilitate the emergence of perspectives and experiences, and to offer frameworks which stakeholders may use to aid their deliberations about system improvements. We support and encourage any intentions on the part of the BCF and partner organisations to set up deliberative forums to consider the implications of this review for future action.

7.3 RESEARCHERS’ REFLECTIONS ON CARRYING OUT THE INQUIRY

Finally we reflect critically on what conducting this review on behalf of BCF has meant for us as a research team. Our hope, as mentioned above, is that the inquiry provides useful learning for people involved in multi-agency, inter-professional and partnership working.

The research team of eight colleagues was drawn from four UWE research centres and faculties. When researching contemporary developments in public services and governance, we are required to work in partnership and in an inter-disciplinary manner. Such developments contain a complex matrix of political, social policy, educational, organisational and psycho-social considerations that are not amenable to single analyses. We needed to be open to learning about what the different discourses represented in different academic disciplines had to offer. This meant that it was fruitful for us to consider from time to time how our team may have mirrored the tensions, dilemmas and opportunities that were being experienced by our research participants in the field. As a team, we needed to divide the labour between us, and this could lead to feelings of fragmentation and isolation as we carried out our respective research tasks. Members of the team had from time to time differential levels of engagement with the project. All this meant that, we also were faced with challenges of data co-ordination, communication and leadership. It occurred to us on occasions that our own feelings may have been reflections of our interviewees' feelings.

At its conclusion, we feel we can claim that the data generated, and the meanings contained in this data, have been rich and multi-faceted. Broadly speaking we achieved what we set out to do. However there are one or two gaps between our initial intentions and what actually happened in conducting this inquiry. In retrospect, the laudable idea of somehow involving the clients and users - the children, young people and families – was over-ambitious. We suggested in our *Initial Report* that, while we knew it was unrealistic to be in direct contact with users, we thought that our research could include the examination of secondary data - appropriately anonymised documentary material that would enable us to build a profile of users' engagement with the services. In the event, this proved to be “data too far”. We would also have liked to have done more with a “mapping exercise” which would have captured visually the multiplicity and complexity of agencies, bodies and individuals. We did find however that several research participants had such “maps” already in one form or another. It may be that a participative mapping exercise could be carried out during any workshop or staff conference that arises as a result of this review.

7.4 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This review would not have been possible but for the support and participation of all our research participants. We were impressed by their willingness to give the time to meet and talk with us, and when they did, we appreciated their openness and honesty. We were always made to feel welcome by colleagues as we attended and observed meetings. Participants let us in, collectively and individually, to see and record their fears, struggles and hopes for partnership and multi-agency working. We hope they feel we have done justice to their “data”.

Thanks also to Tony Benjamin of Barnardo's and the Bristol Children's Fund for commissioning us on behalf of partner agencies to carry out this review, and for being around regularly to talk and encourage us during this work.

APPENDIX



A REVIEW OF MULTI-AGENCY WORKING

**An Inquiry funded by the Bristol Children's
Fund**

End of Stage 1 Initial Report

5 December 2003

The UWE Research Team

- Yusuf Ahmad, Faculty of Health and Social Care
- Mike Broussine, Bristol Business School (Project Manager)
- Professor John Davies, Faculty of Education
- Professor Paul Hoggett, Humanities, Languages and Social Sciences
- Dr. Richard Kimberlee, Faculty of Health and Social Care
- Professor Saville Kushner, Faculty of Education
- Dr. Chris Miller, Faculty of Health and Social Care
- Cristina Santos, Faculty of Education
- Jacqui Sirota, Humanities, Languages and Social Sciences

Purpose of the initial report

This report brings together the results of the UWE Team's stage 1 exploration of multi-agency and inter-professional working in Bristol as it pertains to co-ordinated local preventative strategies for children at risk and the prevention of youth crime and anti-social behaviour. In the period September to December 2003, the team has interviewed 17 people (managers and front line professional workers) within, or connected with, the three sites given priority in this research – Easton, Lockleaze and Knowle West. In addition we have observed several meetings of the YISP Partnership Board, and attended a few multi-agency workshops and meetings.

We want to thank colleagues across the agencies who took part in this stage. We found a high degree of co-operation with the research, and all considered the research to be potentially useful for developing multi-agency and inter-professional practice. They were interested in the process of feedback/discussion associated with the project and looked forward to the possibility of participating in the second phase of the study.

This report therefore –

- outlines our understanding of the key issues concerning multi-agency and inter-professional working;
- identifies questions and issues which are to be investigated in stage 2 (December 2003 to March 2004);
- provides an opportunity for critical review and feedback.

Aims of the study

- 1) to analyse and understand the possibilities of, and inhibitors to, multi-agency and cross-professional working.
- 2) to establish a realistic understanding of the current state of multi-agency working in each of three sites – Knowle, Easton, Lockleaze – and to

contribute towards the development of greater opportunities for effective partnership working.

- 3) to assess the impact of these projects at three different levels within the partnership network:
 - front-line service deliverers and their immediate line management
 - specialists and staff employed in agency administrative departments (e.g. finance, personnel, IT)
 - strategic managers and directors
- 4) to promote learning about multi-agency and cross-professional working among the stakeholders involved with the intention that this learning will develop practice in the future

Status of data in this report

It should be borne in mind that the purpose of stage 1 of this research was to set up the inquiry. The bulk of the fieldwork will take place in the next stage. We do not claim that the issues and data identified in stage 1 are exhaustive. Such views as we offer here should be regarded as tentative and open to critical review and amendment. Our task was to carry out an initial exploration of the issues by interviewing a range of people so that we could get a handle on what was going on in the relevant systems and sub-systems. We relied heavily on colleagues in the YISP Partnership Board (the advisory group for this study) to suggest people whom we might interview and those interviewees in turn suggested others. We believe that stage 1 has thrown up a number of important questions and issues that are worthy of reflection and further inquiry.

Key issues concerning multi-agency and inter-professional working

Complex multiplicity of agencies and partnerships

There exist many different kinds and levels of partnerships. An impression we gained was that the variety of partnerships that exist at different levels are responses to funding opportunities which require evidence of partnership working as one of the key qualifying criteria. A possible consequence of this is that partnerships may be put together rapidly without necessarily a shared understanding of either purpose or process.

We found an example of this in a project that works with street kids, which at the point of inception appeared to be 'owned' by a variety of different agencies including housing, police, youth service, social services, etc.. However by 2002, following changes in key personnel representing different agencies, responsibility seems to rest with a single agency.

Similarly an umbrella multi-practice partnership currently includes a wide range of agencies. In practice this project appeared to us to mean simply co-location of these agencies under one roof (though, as we mention below, co-location was seen as an important contributor to collaborative relationships in other cases). The hope invested in this partnership by a senior manager who was involved in its setting up was different from operational staff. As one of them described the new initiative:

'Well basically we are merging and we are working together so that we can address some of these issues so that I am not as isolated and projects are not separately doing their own things. But that is alright in theory but in reality I am still just on my own but in a room with everybody else.' [Interviewee]

Some front-line workers and managers reported that long-standing informal relations and networks had been built up over time (occasionally with people who had been students together), and this contributed to some "street wisdom" in being able to find one's way around these complex networks. Some interviewees felt there was a lot of goodwill existing on the ground between front-line professionals. Co-location in the same building and attendance at multi-agency meetings helped considerably in these cases. Such colleagues who had less of a sense of isolation expressed great faith in multi-agency and inter-professional working. Two interviewees added that Bristol is a relatively small city, and their experience was that the same organisations and individuals are often represented in a range of partnership arrangements.

We have only just begun to understand the multiple and varied relations between the agencies and groups involved, and between individual actors in these sub-systems. The complexity is added to by the fact that some individuals hold more than one role "hat", with several organisational and role boundaries to walk, each with varying levels of clarity and ambiguity. We will suggest for stage 2 of this study that we attempt to map this range of relationships.

Some questions we are left with –

- There seem to be a number and range of 'provider' agencies. It would be useful to get a handle on their relationship to the local authority. Are they simply local authority services that have been re-badged? Or are they genuinely independent agencies?
- YISP will employ development workers who will be involved in pre-panel meeting assessments of the child. What makes these workers different from those who have worked with the child previously? Is the aim to develop inter-professional working? And, does this mean yet another project in the child's life?

The potential for competition and overlap between agencies

Some interviewees told us that there can be an overlap of provision in the sense that different projects could be targeting the same group of children and young people. This could lead to a sense of competition between agencies -

Another issue for [the interviewee] is the plethora of different agencies and organisations “out there” who could be working with the same children and young people as her and others. Sometimes she has gone out to work with a group of kids to find that another community group (also funded by BCF) was working with the same group.
[Researcher’s field notes]

Possible duplication of services across various partnerships with a similar focus was pointed out by some interviewees. Among some, we sensed a preliminary concern with the development of the YISP as it may add to this perceived duplication, e.g. with regards to what already is being done by IRT and BEST. Yet, it was clear that dialogue was being established so as to develop common work and to minimise possibilities of service duplication.

Where agencies are worried about their funding, there can be some real barriers to partnership working in the community. Once they have a young person that fits their criteria they might be very reluctant to refer him or her on to another project.

Alongside possible duplication of services, some mentioned an opposite possibility, that some particular children and young people might fall between two stools in terms of service provision. For example one thought there was a lack of clarity about who was working with “the kids hanging around on the street”. We came across an example of a project that is specifically designed to work with young people at risk of offending which is struggling to get agencies (statutory and voluntary) to recognise its existence. It is even harder to get clear referrals onto the scheme. Another problem mentioned concerned children banned from youth centres because of bad behaviour. This meant that options became closed for those young people and they were more likely to mix with inappropriate circles that could lead to an increased risk of offending. Partnership working does not appear to have solved this problem.

Some questions we were left with -

- We learned that in Bristol there will be multi-agency practitioner groups (MAPGs) in addition to the YISP. What is the relationship between these two bodies?
- YISP & CF emphasise that there is a need for children to access mainstream services. However, to be referred to a YISP panel and to pass the standard of 'need' to be eligible, these children are already in contact with mainstream services. So what will YISP offer that cannot be secured in the ordinary way?

Strategic and Operational Objectives of partnerships and partnership working

This study's focus is on multi-agency working, and it will not be an evaluation of YISP (not least because YISP is not yet established). However we have been present to observe discussions about YISP's objectives, and this provides a good example of a current innovation to develop inter-professional and multi-agency working with children and young people at risk. We have learned from our field work so far that there may be a tension between viewing the process as being driven by the (a) 'needs of vulnerable children and young people' and (b) seeing the process being driven by the needs to contain criminality amongst them. While these two drivers are clearly not mutually exclusive, emphasising one or the other leads to different perceptions about the role of YISPs –

There was another interesting but unresolved discussion [in a YISP Partnership Board meeting] around what the process means. Is this a criminal process or a means of drawing down resources? Everyone in the room felt it was the latter but they did not seem to resolve the issue as to whether the actual engagement of a YISP in a young person's life would cause more problems or less. One representative said: 'this is about us getting our act together and the YISP should be about flagging up problems early and making sure that no one gets left out.' *[field notes]*

We found that there was some confusion about YISP in the field. On the one hand the aims and objectives of YISP are stated and restated; on the other hand it seems to mean different things to different people/groups. There was a range of views about YISP, but the hope seemed to be that the YISP will provide co-ordination around the numerous initiatives available for young people to ensure that something is found for the young person who needs support.

The complexity of partnerships working is added to by two other factors. First partnerships appear to have both "bottom-up" and "top-down" dimensions. In Lockleaze, for example, the 'partnership' (so far) is primarily a bottom-up initiative that has been facilitated by *Better Together* whose agenda is a) the avoidance of duplication in terms of roles and tasks, and b) information exchange. It consists of street-level professionals (youth workers, beat officers, learning mentors, etc.). As we understand it, the intention is to graft the YISP on to this pre-existing network.

Secondly, do partnerships have shared agendas or a hierarchy of agendas? Despite the 'bottom-up' nature of initiatives such as those in Lockleaze, some participants experience a 'hierarchy of agendas' and this seems to parallel experiences of being central to or marginal to the partnership.

As we ourselves tried to understand the complexities of partnership working, we arrived at a range of questions that we offer as an aid to reflection –

- What paradigms exist among those involved in partnership working: for example, should we see the *raison d'être* of multi-agency working as a means of securing funding for additional projects? And/or is it concerned primarily with promoting multidisciplinary/interdisciplinary work?
- How could we judge the effectiveness of *partnership*? Should the focus be on the fact of the existence of an effective panel or steering group? Or could we judge it by the quality or effectiveness of co-operation between frontline staff in respect of particular children? Or by the willingness of senior managers to co-operate? Or by all three of these?
- How do, or might, the voices of children, young people and the community influence the various partnerships' objectives and operational strategies?

Management and representation arrangements in steering groups

We found that projects and partnerships invariably had a steering group to support them. However, these are not always effective –

'They don't really happen really. ... They were supposed to be every six weeks. Since January they have met three times and in the last one there was only two people there and now there hasn't been any for about two or three months now. Anyway I think that it has just been disbanded now because we are moving into [xxxx] so there isn't going to be a steering group any more. But I don't know what is happening from there.' [Interviewee]

Several interviewees made the point that participants in partnerships could feel that their primary accountability was to the organisation that they represented. Consequently, conflicts of interest could occur and working towards a common goal might not constitute the most important aim in partnership working. Some interviewees felt that this could be an obstacle to effective multi-agency working. In addition, as different agencies hold different power within partnerships and representatives are accountable to their agencies, participation and voice could be different among participants of the same partnership.

In effective partnership groups, we were told of instances of patchy representation by some agencies –

When they began, the Steering Group consisted mostly of middle-aged men, but over time and through added membership, the gender balance has evened out, and more younger women represent their agencies on the group. The representation of the police however could fluctuate because policemen/women could be moved around quite frequently.
[field notes]

Two questions we are left with -

- Is leadership of partnership and multi-agency working equated with effective steering groups or boards?
- How does, or might, *leadership* enable effective partnership and inter-professional working?

Culture and communication

The differences in experience and understanding of partnership work with the same organisation appear to be another feature within the networks we were concerned with. So with respect to CF a senior manager in one of the statutory agencies, while being very positive about his contact with the CF manager, expressed anxiety that the understandings arrived at this level were not communicated to staff lower down within the CF hierarchy. We found wider evidence of this as some interviewees reported communications difficulties between those at highest and lowest management levels of a partnership. There were some difficulties about 'passing' messages to higher levels of management to make them understand the difficulties faced by the front-line. Some interviewees also pointed out that, in their experience, the problems seem to lie at a middle level of management/administration, that is, the level which establishes the link between decision-makers and front-line workers.

Sometimes, the lack of an understanding of the nature of working in multicultural settings constituted a barrier to the development of collaborative work between different groups.

On the other hand, some partnerships' representatives expressed positive relations with CF. They were happy with the open environment in which CF operates and with the good communication that it allows. They are –

'very easy to talk to; very fair; anything you ask, they try to help; I'm very impressed. If they have under-spent money, they asks us if we want to apply for something; and if we have under-spent money, they suggest to us how to use it.' [Interviewee]

Questions that occur to us include –

- How do the internal organisational cultures of participating agencies and bodies affect partnership working between organisations?
- What communication strategies and practices within agencies are needed to support multi-agency and inter-professional working?

Shared training opportunities

A strategic approach to shared training across the relevant organisations is considered by some to be of major benefit in underpinning partnership working. As one sample interview showed –

There is good partnership working within areas like Knowle and Lockleaze, but she felt that there was insufficient learning and contact between projects in these areas. There was now a need, she felt, for some city-wide information co-ordination and a directory of all services to children and young people which would help [her agency] connect and communicate with the right people. BCF could act more as an umbrella organisation, and the next stage in multi-agency working is to get groups together from time to time, say once a year to learn about what is going more widely [field notes].

Some questions we have here are –

- What is, or might be, the role of training programmes to promote inter-professional working?
- What form(s) does, or could, training take to achieve this?
- What strategies exist to promote cross-city learning for managers and staff of the partnerships and agencies involved?

Potential benefits from multi-agency working

Some interviewees felt that if partnership working was simpler, less bureaucratic and developed by people with similar multi-agency paradigms, it could be an important asset for the development of work with children at risk. Some felt that the real barrier to effective partnership working was that many professionals (particularly in the statutory sector) feel that they are already working beyond full capacity. However, among the benefits of multi-agency working mentioned were –

- improvement of services due to the existence of more funding;
- the introduction of new services, e.g. those provided by learning mentors;
- better individual support to particular children.

One professional however thought that a mark of good partnership working in the community was whether service deliverers working together could offer the many young people on the streets a drop-in service somewhere in the community where they lived.

Recommended questions and issues for stage 2

The nature and purpose of stage 2 of the study was set out in the earlier UWE proposal. Briefly, the intention is to develop in-depth case studies within two of the sites that will comprise –

- Profiles of a small sample of children and young people involved as ‘users’ to identify their specific needs for multi-agency working and to trace the service response to need

- Further interviews with key actors and stakeholders about their perceptions of multi-agency and interdisciplinary working
- Observations of project meetings
- Observations of liaison meetings with statutory services
- Analysis of relevant documentation

The issues identified in stage 1 potentially give us some points of focus and emphasis for stage 2. The UWE team proposes that the following issues are worth looking at in greater detail within the contexts of the case studies.

Strategic objectives

We recommend that stage 2 should inquire further into the extent to which there is a common understanding of the objectives of partnerships both at strategic and operational levels. There seem at the moment to be different sets of understandings, paradigms and beliefs with reference to service users (e.g. in relation to upper and lower age limit qualifications) and to partnership working itself. We think the study might usefully examine the implications of these multiple understandings and policy differences for service effectiveness.

User focus

Our initial findings suggest that for bottom-up partnerships at least the dynamics of the partnership may be influenced by a) the nature of the client group and b) the nature of the 'community' and its history in which the partnership is based. It is often argued that a shared user focus across the relevant agencies will underpin successful partnership working. We feel that the research strategy might include an attempt to access somehow the voices of children and young people and the community in relation to partnership and inter-professional working. We will not seek at this stage to be in direct contact with the children and young people. Rather, we will ask for access to secondary data by working collaboratively with professional staff and line managers in the relevant agencies, seeking access to appropriately anonymised documentary material that will enable us to build a profile of users' engagement with the services.

Joined-up thinking in relation to other services

Some of the questions we posed above concerned the issue of how a multiplicity of partnerships and agencies relate to each other and other children services. For example, to what extent will YISPs act as a point of referral for children and young people who are at risk for reasons other than anti-social or offending behaviour (e.g. mental health problems, physical disability, etc.)? How are they going to sit in relation to established processes around child protection?

Our feeling is also that, in pursuance of the development of the case studies in stage 2, more work may need to be done about partnership working

involving schools (particularly learning mentors, family and school link workers) and youth workers. In general we sense that the case studies might give the opportunity to carry out a mapping exercise of the complex burgeoning provision for children and young people. Because local (neighbourhood) histories and conditions have impacted on local partnership arrangements, we suggest that we will need to examine the detail of what is going on within each of the areas chosen for the stage 2 case studies while keeping an eye on enabling comparative analysis across the city – the “micro” and the “macro”.

Inter-professional working

Stage 1 has begun to examine professional colleagues’ views about multi-agency working. We think that there may be a need to continue to try to understand more about front line professional staff’s roles and concerns, for example by examining questions concerning –

- potential differences in professional knowledge and practices;
- the effects of different or competing accountability systems;
- the part that training might play in facilitating cross-professional working;
- how professional identity is maintained in the context of multi-agency working; how cross-agency managers see their identities;
- issues of confidentiality within a particular context.

Questions and comments

This preliminary report is offered as a chance for critical review and feedback by participants in the relevant networks and systems. We would be grateful for pointers where we have got things wrong, and we would equally welcome additional comments and examples which will help us to ask the right questions in the next stage of the study. Comments can be addressed to –

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Mpb, 03/12/03

UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST OF ENGLAND REVIEW OF MULTI-AGENCY WORKING FOR THE BRISTOL CHILDREN'S FUND

Ethics protocol

The UWE researchers acknowledge the potential sensitivity of this inquiry, for both the organisations involved and for individuals. Our underpinning idea is *negotiation* starting from the position of *confidentiality*. UWE are proposing that the following principles will govern our relationships with you:

- People will be treated as 'owners' of their own data. We will only incorporate your data in our reports where we are permission to do so.
- All data will be treated as confidential until (a) anonymity has been assured, or (b) the individual has given permission for its release.
- Where people are likely to be identified or where data is attributed to an individual (a) that person will have an opportunity to review and amend their account, and (b) the data will be subject to their agreement as to its use.
- This last clause cannot be used by any individual to censor the researchers' accounts – i.e. where a refusal to give permission to include data threatens to compromise a report. In such cases the researchers will appeal to the principle of reasonableness and negotiation in reaching agreements.
- UWE accepts the obligation of making you aware of what is involved in agreeing to participate and the potential consequences of doing so.
- We will seek to negotiate drafts of our reports with a sample of participants. We will use our judgement as to the breadth of a sample for negotiating drafts.
- The researchers will be bound at all times by an obligation to be fair, relevant and accurate, and they will be open to appeal on these criteria at all times.
- The UWE team will work with the YISP Partnership Board which will act as the Advisory Group for this review. The Group will suggest places and people to include in the study. UWE will use the Advisory Group to address any complaints or difficulties that may arise where people do not feel able to confront the research team directly.

The UWE team will want eventually to publish reports and other accounts of this review and accepts a continuing obligation to fairness, accuracy and ethical probity. The purpose of this further dissemination is intended to allow other agencies and stakeholders to learn from our experience.

Mpb, 10/10/03