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**Sir Adrian Webb** has been Vice-Chancellor of the University of Glamorgan since 1993. His expertise in the fields of health and social care, education, public sector management and social and economic regeneration has ensured that his services as an advisor have been in demand by Government Departments and policy groups for over thirty years. He has written extensively throughout his career and is the author of many books and articles in the fields listed above.

## Acknowledgements

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## Foreword by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury

This Government is committed to delivering the biggest programme of investment and reform in public services for decades.

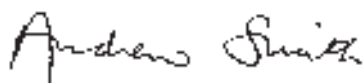
There is a huge amount that is good in our public services, but years of under investment have eroded the infrastructure of the public sector, and the public's expectations have grown.

This Government is committed to reversing the legacy of under-investment in our public services. We are investing record extra amounts in our key public services - schools, hospitals, transport - and public sector investment will double over this spending review period. But investment can only work if it is matched by reform.

That is why we have set all departments key targets in Public Service Agreements. These are, and are intended to be, challenging, and we do not underestimate the scale of the change required. I am therefore very grateful to have the Public Services Productivity Panel to advise organisations on how they can deliver a better service for the consumer. The Panel members, with their experience of managing large private and public organisations, can bring a fresh perspective.

I am very grateful to Sir Adrian Webb (Vice Chancellor of Glamorgan University) and Michael Frye (founding Chairman of West London Leadership) for preparing this report.

Working in partnership is an important part of public service delivery, but true partnership working can be very difficult to achieve. This report sets out what partnerships and government can do better to improve partnership working, enabling partnerships to deliver the outcomes both they and the Government want to achieve.



**Rt Hon. Andrew Smith MP**  
Chief Secretary to the Treasury





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## Definitions

*A partnership is a group of stakeholders brought together from a range of organisations, to be responsible for tackling mainly long-term challenges and opportunities in which they have a shared interest.*

*"...true partnership working is the only way to address some of the Government's most challenging long-term social and economic objectives... but effective partnership working is very difficult to achieve."*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. In a world of increasing change and growing interdependencies, some of the most difficult social challenges cannot be addressed by a single strand of government. Consequently, there has been a need to develop new ways of dealing with these multiple-factor problems, and true partnership working is the only way to address some of the Government's most challenging long-term social and economic objectives. Many partnerships have been successful, but effective partnership working is very difficult to achieve. We have found that:

- *There are essential features partnerships need if they are to be successful;*
- *The Government often fails to create the conditions in which these features are likely to develop;*
- *Too many partnerships have been and are being created, sometimes to address the wrong sorts of problem.*

2. As a result too many partnerships are unsuccessful, mostly unnecessarily. The consequences of a failed partnership in the area concerned can be long-term in respect of the damage done to trust between the organisations involved and hence the prospect for future joint working. A proliferation of partnerships in the same area also results in even the most necessary and successful partnerships achieving less than they otherwise could as a result of the critical people on the ground being spread too thinly.

3. This report discusses briefly

- *Some of the essential features for effective partnership working;*
- *The role of the centre (in particular central government) in giving partnerships the best chance of success;*
- *Using partnerships appropriately.*

4. It also makes specific recommendations to the Government:

- *To reduce the existing number of partnerships and put in place a gatekeeper on all new proposals that lead to their creation;*
- *For officials at the centre to use the advice here and attached checklist to guide their work with partnerships;*
- *To develop an interactive web-based learning environment and improved guidance on effective partnership working;*
- *To provide consultative advice at the regional level for people working in partnerships.*

5. Partnerships have been one of the most innovative and successful approaches adopted by government and others to address many local problems. By bringing together key stakeholders, they have enabled a variety of social and economic issues to be tackled, which, otherwise, would have been beyond the scope of any one particular organisation. However, largely as a result of their success, partnerships have been used in inappropriate circumstances. Effective partnership working is very difficult, time consuming and, during the outset, costly to achieve. Therefore, partnerships should be formed to deal with challenging long-term issues that require the involvement of multiple organisations, who really do need to work together as a team to develop complex and innovative solutions.

6. A wide variety of partnerships now exist. There are statutory partnerships, partnerships which result from top-down initiatives from central government, and partnerships which develop locally, albeit often to meet the requirements of, or to gain access to, government funding streams. This report deals primarily, but not only, with partnerships with executive functions, but most of its findings apply equally well to other types of partnership.

7. We conducted research into a wide variety of partnership types, using methods such as questionnaires, telephone surveys and case studies. Our work drew on a broad range of partnerships and helped us to draw conclusions about the key factors responsible for making partnerships successful.

### **The purpose of this report**

8. This report is primarily aimed at people in the 'centre' - whether this be local, regional or central government, or even a sub-regional partnership - who set up and/or sponsor partnerships. As well as identifying the necessary features for effective partnership working, the report also highlights the role played by these 'centres' in creating the conditions in which these features can develop. The centre can do much to enable good partnership working in the way it sets up new partnerships and interacts with existing ones.

*"...partnerships should be formed to deal with challenging long-term issues that require the involvement of multiple organisations, who really do need to work together...."*

## THE ESSENTIAL FEATURES FOR EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP WORKING

9. A large body of experience and research - including our own - provides clear evidence about many of the key determinants of successful partnerships. The most important features of an effective partnership are engaging the right people and ensuring they function as a genuine team. To achieve this requires:

- **A balanced team:** *Partnerships need to consist of a balanced team involving all relevant bodies. The team needs to have good leaders who can understand the complexities of group working, build up motivation and trust, and resolve conflicts between members when they arise. The team needs to have both senior people, who have the authority to take decisions on behalf of their organisations, and innovative people, who have the experience to develop new solutions to a range of problems.*
- **Trust:** *Before people are prepared to implement the partnership's decisions in their own organisations, they need a high level of trust in each other and hence confidence in the collective decisions they take.*
- **Motivation:** *To ask people and organisations to work in partnership is to ask them to adopt new ways of working and to accept a degree of collective control over their activities. To do this, people need to be motivated by a common vision in which they all believe, and a confidence in their collective ability to achieve it.*
- **Conflict resolution mechanisms:** *Bringing people together in partnership, often with divergent views on issues, leads to conflicts within the group. These need to be faced by the partnership and overcome through conflict resolution mechanisms, such as trading on a hierarchy of preferences. Resolving conflict within the partnership helps build trust and motivation within the team.*

"It really is down to individuals and personalities and unless you've got those enthusiastic, sometimes visionary people involved, the partnership can stagnate"

**Crime and Disorder Partnership**

- **Collaboration:** *The ability to work collaboratively and take collective responsibility for decisions reached is vital for effective partnership working. This requires that everyone's view is respected, and included in transparent and open discussion.*
- **Clarity of objectives and responsibilities:** *If the people working in partnership are to be well motivated and able to work well together, they need to be clear about what they are trying to achieve, how they are going to achieve it and where their individual and group accountabilities and responsibilities lie.*
- **Appropriate funding:** *Funding for partnerships needs to be pursuant to the task. Partnerships need long-term funding in order to deal with long-term issues. Funding for partnerships also needs to be simple to access and, where possible, be delivered by a single strand of government.*
- **Continued sponsorship:** *Successful partnerships enjoy the continued support of their key sponsors, helping them to address critical blockages.*
- **Room for manoeuvre:** *The organisations that make up the partnerships, particularly public sector bodies, need sufficient freedoms and flexibilities, for example in the use of budgets, in order to contribute effectively to the partnership.*

"We are very autonomous, but we have very good links with the city and local councils. They are very positive and supportive of our aims. We are focussed on a goal and the objectives are well-known."

**Voluntary Sector Partnership**

*“The consequence of a failed partnership can be long-term in respect of the damage it can do to trust between the organisations involved and hence the prospects for any future joint working.”*

10. Building the essential features for effective partnership working is difficult and time consuming, so it is essential that partnerships are realistic about what they can reasonably achieve in the short-term. Partnerships' chances of success are also inhibited if there are simply too many of them. The greater the number of partnerships there are in any particular area, the more thinly the right types of people will be spread. Senior people in the relevant organisations often do not have time to commit to all the potential partnership calls on their time. The consequence of a failed partnership can be long-term in respect of the damage it can do to trust between the organisations involved and hence the prospects for any future joint working.

## **GIVING PARTNERSHIPS THE BEST CHANCE OF SUCCESS**

11. Important as they are, the 'internal' features and dynamics of partnerships and team working are by no means the only determinant of success. Partnerships do not work in a vacuum. Their work, and their chances of success, are profoundly influenced for good or ill by the context in which they operate. That context is primarily structured, whether intentionally or not, by 'the centre'. Surprisingly little work has been done on this aspect of partnerships. There are few unequivocal guidelines for the 'centre' on how to structure the environment in which partnerships have to operate so as to maximise the chances of success and minimise frustrating barriers to effective working. It is precisely this area on which we focussed our work.

12. The centre interacts with partnerships in a variety of different ways, discussed further below: setting objectives and targets, providing funding, sponsoring and monitoring. Many of the partnerships in our study felt that the way the centre behaved in one or more of these areas inhibited partnership working on the ground.

13. Of overriding importance is that those in the centre responsible for promoting or sponsoring partnerships need to work together at least as well as they expect people in the partnership to do so. Any silo-based working at the centre will undermine partnership working on the ground.

### **Objectives and targets**

14. The centre should work to eliminate the gap between strategy formulation and implementation. Although the Government should set the strategic vision and high-level objectives, the partnerships need to be consulted during this process. Similarly, although the partnerships should lead in developing their own operational objectives and targets, the centre

*“...the Government should set the strategic vision and high-level objectives... the partnerships should lead in developing their own operational objectives and targets....”*

should be involved in their preparation. This process helps to cultivate trust, increases motivation and gets community buy-in, whereas imposing specific local targets from above leads to a feeling of dislocation from the task and a lack of shared purpose.

15. The desired outcomes of a partnership must be of the highest priority to the Government as reflected in its Public Service Agreements. As the early stages of partnership working are difficult and time consuming, it requires a huge commitment from senior management in all the organisations involved. If these organisations believe that other government objectives for which they are wholly or mainly responsible for delivering are of much greater importance, then the chances of getting sufficient motivation to deliver an effective partnership are small.

16. All central government departments need to align their priorities to the outcomes they want the partnerships to deliver. Too often the organisations working in partnership have incompatible priorities. One partner at the local level who regards the partnership as a lower priority than others can hold up progress entirely. Everyone, both across central government and within the partnerships, needs to be clear about where priorities lie from the outset.

### Championing and monitoring

17. The 'centre' must provide two simultaneous and continuous roles. First as a champion, facilitating the partnership's development and working to unblock any obstacles. Second as monitor, reviewing performance and ensuring that partnerships meet their objectives. It is important that the centre plays both these roles throughout the life of a partnership. In practice it is all too likely that an initial sponsoring mode will move very rapidly into one of premature monitoring of performance against short-term targets.

18. Because partnership working requires so much from those who form the partnership, much better guidance is needed to help people to work together effectively. Some guidance has to be partnership specific, and take into account the different capacities of the likely audiences. Other issues are more generic for which common material should be developed, particularly on the key behavioural features of partnership working which are fundamental to successful partnerships.

19. Each type of partnership needs to have its own performance review mechanism that is both relevant and proportionate to the partnerships' overarching high-level objectives and the key milestones and targets they have devised locally. This mechanism needs to be agreed by all the relevant

*"People from the community need training, and an induction to the work of the partnership, to stress that they are not there to pursue a personal agenda."*  
**Voluntary Sector Partnership**

*"The lead sponsor... needs to develop clear criteria for success and failure linked directly to the agreed priorities and objectives."*

sponsoring bodies, so that partnerships are not faced with a variety of incompatible monitoring requirements. The review mechanism should take account of the time scales necessary for a partnership to develop the capacity to deliver and not overburden partnerships from the outset.

20. The lead sponsor of any partnership, in negotiation with all relevant departments and the organisations expected to work in partnership, needs to develop clear criteria for success and failure linked directly to the agreed priorities and objectives. A single lead should be identified to analyse the performance of partnerships against these criteria and take appropriate action. The nature of any intervention and the conditions under which it will be taken should be clearly defined at the outset.

### **Funding**

21. Government needs to build-up new partnerships' resources gradually, reflecting the gradual development of their capacity to spend effectively. In some cases too much funding is offered to partnerships before they are operating effectively. This can distort the process of partnership working, such that it becomes dominated by "spending the money". Paradoxically, by the time a strong partnership has developed funding may be becoming scarce as priorities shift elsewhere.

22. Inappropriate funding cycles are one of the most common barriers to effective partnership working. In terms of time-scales, partnerships are asked to tackle some of the most intractable and long-term problems, but in too many cases they are subject to some of the most complex, ad hoc and short-term funding. Partnerships need the same sort of funding arrangements that government departments have to support their long-term planning and delivery.

23. Setting up new partnerships is also very expensive, both in terms of administration and strategic planning costs, and in terms of the opportunity costs incurred when switching to new working practices. When a new partnership is established, the sponsoring bodies need to fund these costs appropriately.

24. Many partnerships currently rely on a variety of different funding streams from different sources, including many short-term funding pots geared to specific outputs. The consequent multiple bidding processes are extremely time consuming, while the uncertainty they create and the constraints they apply make it very difficult for partnerships to conduct sensible business planning and effective performance management. The centre should work to unify these funding streams wherever possible, and reduce ring fencing, which constrains the abilities of the partner organisations to contribute effectively.

*“Partnerships need the same sort of funding arrangements that government departments have to support their long-term planning and delivery.”*

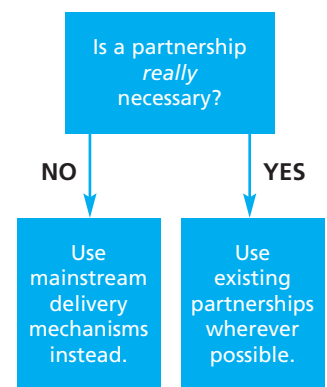
*“...partnerships waste too much time and effort accounting for different funding streams in different ways.”*

25. All government departments involved in funding partnerships need to work together to develop coherent and proportionate controls and accounting mechanisms. At present too many partnerships waste too much time and effort accounting for different funding streams in different ways. This results in a multiplicity of different and often inconsistent accountabilities, which produce a cumulative burden of multiple reporting and micro-management.

## USING PARTNERSHIPS APPROPRIATELY

26. In order to stop the proliferation of unnecessary partnerships, and to ensure that partnerships are used appropriately, the centre needs to be ruthlessly selective when considering whether or not to use a new partnership.

- *Does the problem really need to be tackled on multiple levels, and will the solution be different from one area to the next? If a wide range of people representing different organisations is not essential, then the initiative may well be delivered more effectively by a single organisation, or two or more employing better methods of joint-working.*
- *As effective partnerships can take several years to develop, new partnerships are inappropriate vehicles for outcomes expected in the short to medium terms. New partnerships should only be set-up when the nature of the problem requires them, and there are genuine prospects of creating the conditions for success within the desired timeframe. If the 'centre' wants short term results, another method of delivery or an existing partnership should be used instead.*
- *Once partnerships are set-up and have developed the key features necessary to work successfully, they become effective delivery mechanisms. Therefore, when partnerships look an appropriate and proportionate response to a particular problem, the centre should examine carefully whether an existing partnership can be used to deliver the objective. This approach will almost certainly deliver results more quickly and effectively, even if this requires some adjustment to the existing scope and membership of the relevant partnership. Existing partnerships can achieve big wins quickly at lower costs.*



*"...effective partnerships can take several years to develop.... Existing partnerships can achieve big wins quickly at lower costs."*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

27. We make the following recommendations to help officials in the centre develop partnerships and programmes in a way which creates the best chances of success, and for partnerships themselves to develop the essential people and behavioural features necessary for effective delivery.

### Rationalisation

28. There is general agreement that there are currently too many partnerships, undermining their performance at the local level. Much of this problem has been caused by the proliferation of Central Government partnership-creating initiatives, plans and programmes. A number of reviews have been undertaken which are intended in part to help rationalise partnerships, but this work has had little if any impact on the ground so far. To enable partnerships to achieve all that they are capable of, it is essential that this problem be tackled at both central and local government levels.

29. Because responsibilities in relation to partnerships are currently split within Whitehall, there is no coherent control over their proliferation. We recommend that a central body be given the authority and responsibility to:

- *Co-ordinate and take forward the work that has already been done on partnership, plan and programme rationalisation, with the objective of significantly reducing the number of existing partnerships;*
- *Act as a central gatekeeper, with a remit to examine all proposals that could lead to the creation of partnerships on the ground. This body should have the power to modify or veto any proposals which either fail to give partnerships the best chance of success, or use new partnerships where alternative delivery mechanisms would be more efficient.*

30. At the local level, we are hopeful that Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) will address some of the problems highlighted in this report. As with any other partnership, they will need to function as genuine teams and be given the necessary time to develop into effective delivery vehicles. Two key aims of the LSP framework are to produce more effective partnership working at the local level and to bring about some rationalisation of

existing partnerships. At the moment, we do not believe that LSP guidance and accreditation criteria sufficiently encourage and incentivise them to do this. Also, to make that process easier, it would be helpful to LSPs if central government were more flexible in its requirements, enabling them to choose the most effective rationalisation model for their areas.

## Checklist

31. We have produced a checklist for officials in the centre, to help them assess whether they are creating, or have created, the conditions for successful partnership working.

## Website

32. We recommend establishing a bespoke interactive web based learning environment to offer practical help and advice to people working in all types of partnership. The website will need to be accessible to everyone working in partnerships. It should function as:

- *a database of best practice for a range of partnership working issues;*
- *a portal to the wide range of government guidance available on partnership working, as well as providing links to other resources not produced by the Government;*
- *a network learning area, in which people working in partnership can share best practice, ideas and answer one another's questions.*

The website should be administered by an intelligent gatekeeper, so that only the best and most useful information is included, and it should be summarised in such a fashion as to make it as easy to navigate as possible.

## Advice

33. We recommend that an informal partnerships advisory service should be provided at the regional level. The advice should be offered by volunteers, drawing on existing networks and goodwill, and provide practical assistance to people who experience difficulties when working in partnership. Those providing the advice should have real experience of partnership working, and be sufficiently experienced to offer workable solutions to specific problems. The service needs to be administered by an appropriate regional body, such as the Government Offices of the Regions, and include the capacity to share best practice between areas.

### [OurPartnership.org.uk](http://OurPartnership.org.uk)

Our recommendation for a partnership skills website is being taken forward by CMPS with the support of the Productivity Panel Unit in HM Treasury, and will be connected to the Partnerships Advisory Service we also recommend once that too is up and running. We recommend the website to partnership members everywhere. It is available at [OurPartnership.org.uk](http://OurPartnership.org.uk).

Further details of the Public Services Productivity Panel, including this and copies of earlier reports and details of work in progress can be found on:

[www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/pspp](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/pspp)

Further copies of this document are available from:

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