

shared services
survey
2011

the report

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Foreword

Rob Whiteman



Rob Whiteman

The financial challenges for councils have never been greater. In rising to those challenges, all authorities are having to act quickly across a large number of fronts. At the LGA we're clear that the scale of the cuts is such that many councils will have to reduce or even decommission services to the public.

Having already made greater efficiency savings than other parts of the public sector over the last 6 years, local government does not have any soft options.

Nonetheless it is true that some smaller councils face particular problems and that for many key areas of delivery, economies of scale can count. This survey tells us that more than half of local authorities in England share services, both front line and back office, already and most agree that there are rewards in terms of finance and performance from such arrangements.

The survey also points up, however, the barriers that council officers see to pursuing the shared service option. It's not a panacea or a short cut. When it comes to outsourced services, we also need to recognise the additional social value that can be delivered by small, local voluntary sector providers and not write them out of larger-scale procurements.

The survey tells us that more than 8 out of 10 managers would consider outsourcing services on a case by case basis, with a much smaller proportion supporting a larger-scale, strategic partnership approach. That seems to chime with the experience of councils which have successfully delivered savings through a mixed economy, focusing on what works rather than a dogmatic across-the-board approach.

Time may seem to be too short for a sector-wide debate on this issue. We certainly don't have the leisure to sit back and reflect. But the decisions are tough and the more evidence we have, for example from this survey, the better.

Rob Whiteman
Managing Director
Local Government Improvement and Development

Foreword

John Tizard



John Tizard

For years and indeed decades there has been much discourse across the public sector on the potential benefits of shared service arrangements. There has been considerably less action but there are signs that this might all change. The survey undertaken by Browne Jacobson would certainly suggest this. Why?

The dominant stimulant to consider and develop shared services undoubtedly is the bleak prospects for public expenditure. The Chancellor has made it clear that the current Coalition Government intends to cut public expenditure over the next four years and few commentators expect significant if any growth in the next spending review period. Faced with these financial pressures, and for some local authorities the level of reduction being imposed is in excess of 40% over the next three to four years, shared services is a seriously attractive option.

However, it is not a panacea. Shared service arrangements are unlikely to produce major savings in the first year or so. There will be transition and possibly procurement costs. Simply aggregating inefficient services or activities will not necessarily reduce costs. To gain the most from shared service arrangements financially it is necessary to underpin them with service and process re-design.

To maximise financial benefits for “back office” support and administrative services the option to move the activity “off-shore” could take a further 20-30% of costs out of the system - though of course there could be additional social costs and the cost of domestic unemployment. Some local authorities and others are considering the “off-shoring” option.

They may assume that the social costs will be borne by another agency which may be short-sighted. A decision to offshore must be taken with all the implications taken into account. Whilst much of the focus has previously been on support and administrative services there are increasingly examples of shared professional and expert staff; managements including local authority chief executives; contact centres; specialist equipment such as police helicopters and forensic services.

Shared services are high up the agenda. This is to be expected and right.

Before an authority or agency proceeds with a shared service opportunity it needs to be clear about its objectives:

- service enhancement or resilience or cost cutting or a combination
- the quality that it wants and can afford
- its willingness to redesign processes
- how it will support and treat its workforce
- the accountability arrangements it requires
- the delivery model - social enterprise; jointly own public authority company, outsourcing or joint venture with the private sector (on or off-shore) or even securing the services on a commoditised basis from a provider

Ultimately these are political not managerial decisions.

This survey is timely. It shows the resurgent appetite for shared services. It shows what can be done. It can provoke thinking. But serious and considered thinking there must be!

John Tizard
Director
Centre for Public Service Partnerships

“Going forward local authorities may have little choice but to reconfigure service provision because only through collaborative working can authorities hope to meet the twin pressures of rising service demand and fiscal tightening”.

Dominic Swift, Head of shared services, Browne Jacobson

Introduction



Dominic Swift

In 2008 we published a report that shed new light on the state of shared services in the public sector and unravelled a complex picture of the key challenges, risks and barriers faced by those tasked with delivering the Government's efficiency programme. Nearly three years on we felt that it was the right time to re-visit the research and understand the views of those on the ground.

The Government's recently announced austerity measures means over the next few years the public sector will come face-to-face with its biggest challenge to date - how to protect frontline services against the backdrop of the biggest cuts in state funding since the Second World War.

In fact local authorities are already starting to feel the pinch. But it is not just the financial pressures that they will have to deal with. Demand for some services such as care for the elderly and the homeless is on the rise. The need to demonstrate value for money in public services has never been greater.

In light of this, what options do local authorities really have - is it a case of simply cutting services or should they seek to deliver major efficiencies through other means? What is abundantly clear is that maintaining the status quo is no longer an option. Simply cutting front line services year on year can only lead to service standards dropping; radical changes to organisational structures and operating models are needed.

There is a growing realisation that, depending on the type of delivery vehicle adopted, it can be influential in improving access to capital investment and expertise. New service delivery options can also significantly bring down the cost base. For example Westminster and Hammersmith & Fulham, are planning to save up to £3.1m over three years by merging their education services by 2011.

We are also already seeing examples of local authorities seriously questioning established models of service delivery in favour of a more varied "commissioning approach".

Going forward local authorities may have little choice but to reconfigure service provision because only through collaborative working can authorities hope to meet the twin pressures of rising service demand and fiscal tightening.

On one hand there appears to be tension between the Government's localism agenda and the move towards shared services and outsourcing which have the potential to break the link between the service providers and the locality in which those services are delivered, and undermine one of the Government's key ideological objectives. However it is also arguable that localism has the potential to bring new energy and a new perspective to shared services. For example, the general power of competence can give councils more confidence to deliver creative and innovative shared services arrangements. Too often the worry about whether an authority has power to implement a good idea can prevent its delivery. In the end, whatever your opinion, the sheer pressure on public sector finances and the need to deliver cost savings are likely to sweep aside any ideological concerns.

So what, if anything, has changed since we last talked to the very people responsible for driving forward the Government's public sector efficiency programme, particularly in light of the Comprehensive Spending Review 2010? In partnership with leading market independent social researchers Ipsos MORI we talked to 150 senior local authority managers in England for their views on a host of issues - from sharing back office and front line services and the potential savings they anticipate, to the barriers the sector continues to face three years on.

The findings may surprise some - there have been some interesting developments since we last surveyed the sector in terms of how local authorities are addressing these issues, and will do in the future, through the shared services agenda. If you have any views on the research findings in this report or wish to discuss your own views about shared services we would be delighted to hear from you. You can contact us via the details on page 16 or via www.brownejacobson.com/sharedservices

Finally I would like to express our thanks to everyone who contributed to the report, in particular all the local authorities that took part in the survey. I would also like to thank Victoria Harkness and Benjamin Collins of Ipsos MORI for their valued support, expertise and assistance in helping us to undertake this research.



Dominic Swift
Head of shared services, Browne Jacobson

welcome

Executive summary

It has been more than six years since Sir Peter Gershon published his Review and set the Government's efficiency ball rolling. Three years ago we published a comprehensive insight into the state of shared services across the public sector. We called for a bolder approach from public authorities with a greater focus on sharing front line services and a closer collaboration with the private and voluntary sector.

On the evidence of this report local authorities are starting to deliver. Our report highlights:

- tangible evidence of a step change in attitudes towards service transformation
- a growing willingness to be innovative and imaginative in the delivery of services
- changing attitudes towards working with external partners either through collaborations with other public sector bodies, joint ventures with the private sector or outsourcing arrangements

Cost efficiencies will always remain a key driver, but senior managers don't simply see shared services as a route to a lower cost base.

Interestingly for a sector that has traditionally been regarded as risk-averse, a significant number of authorities are starting to challenge old assumptions about how and by whom services are delivered.

However, as in 2008, there is still a lot to do. In compiling this report we have uncovered some excellent examples of collaborative working but the pace of change has been slower than many would have hoped.

Winning the hearts and minds of those directly affected is clearly uppermost in the minds of the managers we talked to. Greater transparency is fundamental to ensuring much needed public and political buy-in, as is a robust business case.

The shared services journey can be arduous and demands strong leadership from those at the very top for it to succeed. There are opportunities to work with the private sector to be exploited, and major obstacles still to overcome. It is also clear that a shared services approach will not suit every case. But where it does, those authorities exploiting shared services can reap significant rewards.

About the research

At the end of 2010 Browne Jacobson commissioned Ipsos MORI to conduct research with 150 senior managers in local authorities in England. Quotas were set for local authority type and council position (of those surveyed 51% were corporate managers - including chief executives, deputy chief executives and chief finance officers - and 49% were service heads - including environment, social services, and leisure). Interviews were conducted by telephone between 29 November and 17 December 2010.

Where results do not add up to 100%, this may be due to multiple responses, computer rounding or the exclusion of don't know/not stated response categories.

Respondents by authority type



Highlights of the research findings

- An overwhelming majority of local authorities are sharing services, with 89% of organisations sharing either back office functions, front line services or a combination of the two.
- 68% of local authorities are looking for more sharing of front line services in the next twelve months with **91% targeting front line services within the next 2 years**.
- Some 65% of authorities are looking for more sharing of back office functions within the next twelve months with **89% considering sharing back office functions within the next 2 years**.
- 70% of senior managers identified **environmental services** and 34% **social care** as the two service areas most likely to be shared by their authority in the future.
- Of those that responded two-thirds of managers (63%) plan to **save up to 10% of their total budget savings** by sharing services in the financial year ending April 2012.
- Over half of all local authorities in England (56%) currently share both front line services and back office functions, with environmental and social care services being the most prominent front line services being shared.
- Nearly every authority (98%) we talked to would be comfortable sharing services with another public sector partner, but a majority (78%) would also consider **working in partnership with the private sector** in the future delivery of services.
- More than eight out of ten managers (85%) would consider **outsourcing services** on a service by service basis, whilst around one third (35%) would consider signing up to a **large scale outsourcing project**.
- A lack of political and public buy-in was seen as a **major hurdle** with almost three in ten (28%) identifying it as the biggest barrier.
- The vast majority of senior managers (84%) agree that the **long term rewards from shared services justify the short term pain**. However, major concerns over implementation remain with 77% claiming shared services arrangements between public organisations are 'attractive but hard to deliver'.
- One in nine (11%) of authorities has **no shared services arrangements in place at the moment**.

If you want to talk to us about our research findings, you can call Dominic Swift on 0115 976 6148

research

“It is not surprising that local authorities are more readily considering the sharing of front line services. It is no longer seen as the radical approach, but a way of continuing to deliver quality services in straitened times”.

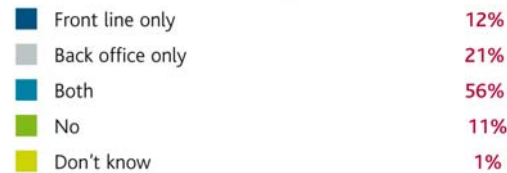
Richard Barlow, Head of administrative and public law, Browne Jacobson

From back office to front line

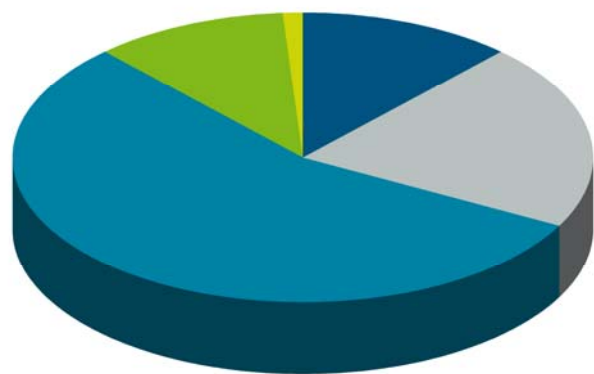
In 2008 the overwhelming majority of public sector organisations were engaged in delivering shared services in some capacity. Of the local authority managers we interviewed at the time 62% saw the opportunity for front line services consolidation.

The enthusiasm for shared services remains high three years on with almost nine in ten (89%) authorities in our latest research sharing either back office functions, front line services or a combination of the two. Surprisingly, one in nine authorities has no shared services arrangement in place at the moment. But, the research suggests that could change over the next 12-24 months.

Q: Does your authority currently share any front line services or back office functions with other local authorities or local public bodies?

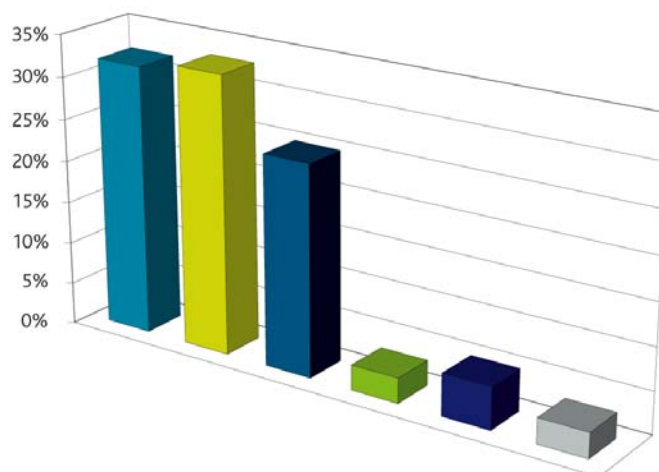


Base: All respondents (150)



The future for shared services also looks bright. Of the 150 senior managers we interviewed 65% say their authority is considering sharing back office functions, or plan to share further back office functions in the next twelve months and a staggering 89% in the next two years.

Q: Is your authority considering sharing any/further back office functions in the future?



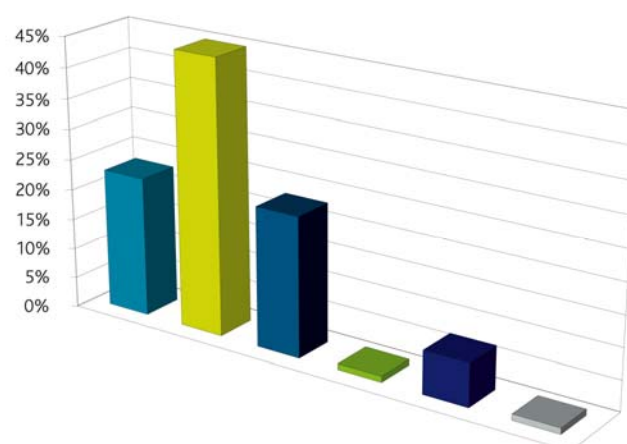
"Being absolutely clear on the end result from the start was vital in driving the project. Having this clear view ensured that both authorities were able to remain focussed on the end result."

Andrew Barratt of Tamworth Borough Council on the joint waste collection service with Lichfield

efficiency

It's a similar picture on the front line with 68% looking to share further front line services over the next year, and 91% within two years. In terms of the front line 70% of managers see environmental services and 34% see social care as prime targets when it comes to a shared services arrangement.

Q: Is your authority considering sharing any/further frontline services in the future?



Case study: waste collection partnership

Tamworth Borough Council (TBC) and Lichfield District Council (LDC) have joined together to deliver a shared waste and recycling service to their communities. LDC needed to considerably cut the cost of providing a waste and recycling service, while maintaining its high standard of service for residents. As TBC was preparing to re-tender for its outsourced waste and recycling service, it was a great opportunity to see if, by joining forces, both local authorities could not only make savings, but offer an improved service. An administrative arrangement was the preferred model.

The move will save both local authorities money. LDC will save around £250,000 and TBC will save around £450,000 each year. In preparation for the joint service, both local authorities launched fortnightly wheelie bin recycling collections delivering the additional benefit of a considerable reduction in carbon emissions, while saving on the cost of fuel. As a bigger customer the authorities are also able to negotiate better value from suppliers, and better placed to test out new recycling methods more quickly.

Nothing illustrates this growing trend more than the recent decision by 10 local authorities across Greater Manchester to merge services in a bid to save £2billion. The local authorities have earmarked 10 areas that will be shared, including adult and children's services, ICT, vehicles, corporate and back office services, property and asset management, workforce development, income and customer contracts.

These types of initiatives are being driven by a number of factors - budget reductions, the government-led efficiency drive, rising customer demand from front line services and growing expertise with shared services.

02

“If councils wish to flourish and continue to respond to customers needs, they will need to develop partnerships and new operating models both with other public sector organisations and equally importantly with the private sector that put customers at the forefront of the agenda”.

Keith Gordon, Assistant Director Efficiency & Delivery Improvement & Efficiency West Midlands

Working with the private sector

Much of the public sector has, until recently, shied away from engaging with commercial organisations. Our survey in 2008 indicated that only 5% of public sector managers (local authorities, health, social care, education and fire services) saw opportunities for working with the private sector due to concerns about control, organisational ethos, trust and job security. Adopting a public-private sector model does indeed demand a leap of faith, and perhaps a willingness to adopt a more commercially minded approach.

Three years on senior managers are starting to see the long term picture. There is clearly a greater appetite for looking at alternative shared service arrangements (SSAs). Our research has unearthed a significant shift in attitudes with three-quarters (78%) of local authority managers now open to the idea of working with the private sector. Understandably the vast majority (98%) are still more comfortable sharing services with another public sector partner, but the changing attitudes towards the private sector is a major step change. This could be down to a growing realisation of the benefits such SSAs can bring, whether it is securing the high levels of upfront investment that typify SSAs, or tapping into the expertise and experience private businesses can offer to complement public sector know-how.

Case study: public - private partnership

In 2006 Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire County Councils entered a ground-breaking tripartite partnership with Fujitsu to create a unique Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) shared service. The solution enables the two local authorities to share the delivery of back office processes and transactional services across a range of key functions, including finance, human resources, on-line procurement and payment facilities. The underlying infrastructure is owned, hosted and managed by Fujitsu, which also provides shared technological support and application development. Benefits of the arrangement have included, amongst others, improved customer experience, reduced costs, and enhanced operational agility. The project was the first time in local government that two county local authorities have collaborated on such a large scale on the strategic development of an ERP shared service. In December 2010 both local authorities extended their relationship with Fujitsu by agreeing a new 7-year contract, projected to save the local authorities approximately £7m.

“Councils are being driven to consider shared services arrangements which, until recently, they may have viewed as a potential loss of control over key resources. An important factor in overcoming some of these reservations is an existing, positive relationship between senior officers and members”.

Anon, Head of Service in a post now shared between two local authorities

Outsourcing

Collaboration models will vary from authority to authority. Not surprisingly the majority of local authorities would opt to share services with another public sector body, as 98% of senior managers testified. However, another area that is likely to see increased activity over the coming years is outsourcing.

Local authorities have dipped their toe into the outsourcing pool in relation to back office functions. Private sector operators are now gearing up for greater opportunities as fiscal restraint forces local authorities to re-think front line delivery.

According to consultants Credo, the private sector accounted for around 22% of the public sector's £169bn operating expenditure in 2008-09. It is a share that is likely to increase as our survey suggests with 85% of local authority senior managers willing to consider outsourcing services on a service by service basis.

For example, Bournemouth Borough Council has recently signed a ten year £150m outsourcing deal with Mouchel which could save the council up to 40% of its revenue budget in the next decade. The deal will initially see the council's ICT, revenues, benefits and facilities management services taken over by Mouchel.

The council believes the partnership will see the standards for these services improved, to be within the best 25% in the country by 2013, whilst also saving 5.9% a year on their running costs. The deal could also create up to 650 private sector jobs in Bournemouth, 350 of these guaranteed by the contract.

Our research also indicates a significant number of local authorities open to the more 'radical' idea of large scale outsourcing. One in three senior managers (35%) believes their authority would consider such an option.

For example, Suffolk County Council has already agreed to cut its £1.1bn budget by 30% - outsourcing almost all its services over the next four years. More recently, Selby District Council took a bold decision to become effectively a “commissioning council” by setting up an arm’s-length service delivery vehicle, supported by a core of only 14 council staff.

The sheer scale of the cuts is forcing some local authorities to explore this bold and radical approach. Whilst some are at least willing to give such ideas serious consideration, it will be a step too far for others.

Outsourcing, like all other collaborative models, is not without its challenges and risks. The procurement process can be lengthy, which may deter some private operators and also put strain on internal resources.

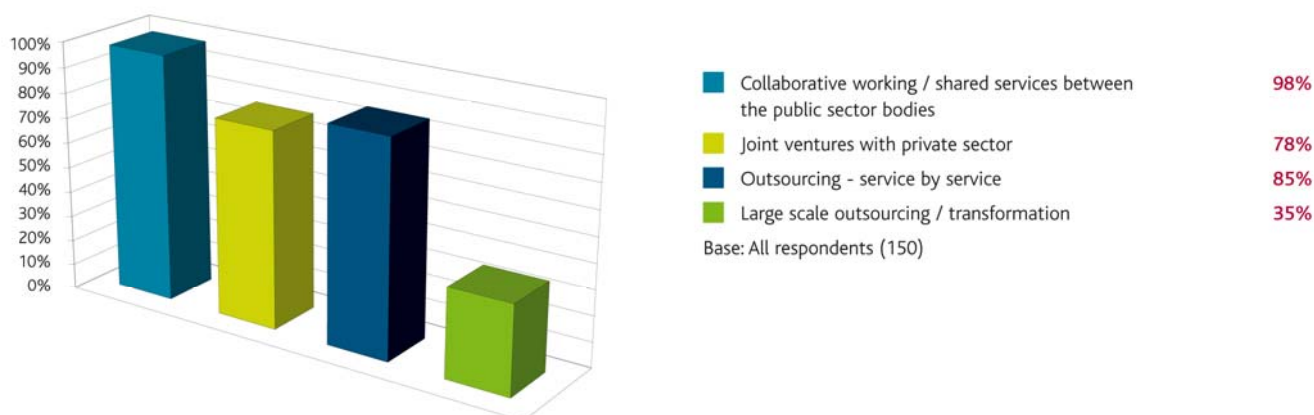
Local authorities may also be reluctant to enter into multiyear contracts which could be expensive to renegotiate if circumstances change. Many are also fearful of overreliance on one provider and the dangers of supplier lock-in when it comes to re-negotiating contracts or exiting an arrangement, particularly in niche sectors where it might be difficult to source alternative providers.

One of the biggest challenges centres on accountability with elected representatives seen as having a more peripheral role. This could explain the high levels of perceived opposition from elected members which managers predict as being one of the biggest barriers to delivering the shared services agenda (see chapter 4: Barriers).

Local authorities are under unprecedented pressure to do more for less. Outsourcing potentially offers significant cost saving and risk sharing benefits but it is certainly no silver bullet.

collaborate

Q: Which, if any, of the following models do you think your authority might adopt as a future means of service provision?



04

“There is often a tension between the individual interests of the shared services “partnership”, and its constituent members. This is particularly the case in strained economic times, when the members are understandably even more concerned to protect the interests of their own organisation.

To overcome this, it is important for strong and flexible relationships to exist between those who do understand and support the partnership and who are also able to take a longer term view on the overall benefits”.

Michael Kendall, Managing Director, East Midlands
Broadband Consortium

Barriers

In 2008 the public sector managers we surveyed identified a set of significant barriers to successful delivery of shared services. Lack of financial resources came top of the list, with half of public sector managers citing workforce opposition (53%) and lack of a collaborative culture (51%) as significant obstacles.

In 2010 we see a somewhat different picture. It appears on the surface that some of the barriers of the past are being seen as less of a hurdle as the full impact of austerity hits home.

Asked what was *the* biggest barrier, 28% of senior local authority managers identified political and public opposition. Only 6% of senior managers regarded opposition from unions and staff as the biggest single obstacle, while 2% say it is a lack of financial resources with 7% identifying the lack of a collaborative culture as key. Interestingly, only 4% of senior managers referred to a risk-averse culture and 8% identified a difficulty trusting partner organisations as the single biggest barrier.

It is understandable that elected representatives will have grave concerns about any perceived loss of control and accountability. The general public, on the other hand, will be preoccupied with quality of service. It is also worth remembering that some excellent SSAs have folded or been watered down due to a lack of member support.

That said, these barriers are not insurmountable. A robust business case will be important as plans come under ever greater scrutiny from both elected representatives and the general public. There needs to be sustained and regular communication with all stakeholders. The transparency agenda will also be important to ensure members and the public alike are kept on board during all stages of the shared services lifecycle.

“Getting past the barriers and building trust was a challenge.

Transparency from both parties has resulted in significant benefits for both authorities.”

Steve Gerrard, Deputy Director of Property, Derbyshire
County Council

A changing world

Whilst the issue of risk was not the focus of our survey it is obvious from the way those involved in the delivery of public services are now talking that there is a willingness to embrace a more entrepreneurial approach. We are witnessing the beginnings of a sea change in the way that public services are being delivered, but that change will not be without its risks and challenges:

Accountability and public reputation

High on the agenda for all local authorities is their public reputation. So there is an ever greater need for those involved in shared services projects to clearly understand the nature of each project and the sensitivities involved. It will be critical to establish who is accountable for different aspects of delivery and what the reporting lines are for approvals and decisions.

Whether delivered in house, outsourced or as part of a joint venture arrangement the public will not make a distinction if service delivery is adversely affected. Ultimately the local authority will be accountable and will see the impact on its public reputation if delivery falls short.

Entrepreneurism

It could be argued that the delivery of shared services requires a more entrepreneurial approach, and with that comes its own challenges. Can local authorities, who are traditionally risk averse, really transform themselves into entrepreneurial organisations and do we really want our local authorities to adopt an entrepreneurial ethos that encourages risk taking?

We would do well to remember that many entrepreneurs fail time and time again and that only a few truly succeed. So if we are to encourage entrepreneurship should we not limit that extent of the services exposed to any risks and should we not try to identify a new breed of local government employee who truly embraces this ethos. Perhaps more authorities need to follow the lead set by Sunderland who recently screened thousands of their employees for entrepreneurial talent!

It might be prudent, rather than adopting a purely entrepreneurial approach towards core service provision, to concentrate on striking the right balance between risk, control and innovation.

Workforce and union opposition

All of the results in our survey represent a snapshot in time and whilst only 6% of senior managers regarded opposition from unions and staff as the biggest single barrier to shared services this risk should not be under-estimated. Failure to involve staff and trade unions in the planning and design of projects can lead to opposition and deep uncertainty. It is obvious from what has happened in Greece and Ireland that the threat of major cuts in public sector spending and consequent job losses can quickly become the catalyst for civil and industrial unrest.

However, there is a balance here and not all changes in the way services are delivered has to impact negatively on the workforce. Posts being reduced in one area can be created in another and authorities that deliver their services in a more commercial way may require a different mix of skills.

Integration

Moving to new ways of working is often difficult and painful. Integration issues are not just technological and often the keys areas of concern centre on governance and cultural issues.

In our experience the key to delivering a successful project is to truly understand the risks from the outset as this allows the project manager to ensure that there is the political will required to support the project and that the risks can be proactively addressed during integration. It also allows a full risk assessment to take place.

The greater use of partners and novel service delivery options means risk management has never been more important and must be central to the delivery of any shared services arrangement.

Resilience

It seems inevitable that layers of management will be reduced as part of the response to the austerity measures. At the same time, those senior managers who remain in post could be asked to take on a wider range of responsibilities, potentially impacting on their ability to drive forward large-scale projects and overall affecting the resilience of the local authority.

Maintaining performance during these changing times will be the biggest challenge of all, but it is essential, particularly given the scale of the change in local government, that authorities continue to place this at the heart of any shared services project.

challenges



About us

Browne Jacobson LLP is one of the largest law firms in the midlands, with regional and national reach through our offices in Birmingham, London and Nottingham. The firm is over 500 strong, including 70 partners and over 200 other lawyers.

We have a long established and nationwide reputation in all areas of our public sector, insurance and commercial practice. Our public sector experience and commitment to understanding the issues faced by our public sector clients enables us to provide a tailored and effective legal service.

Shared services is a key issue for the public sector currently, and in recognition of the challenges faced by our clients and contacts in this area, we have a dedicated team of specialist shared services lawyers, led by Dominic Swift. Our knowledge, coupled with a straightforward approach, means that clients can expect our legal advice to be based on an understanding of their practical needs, evolving responsibilities and the complex challenges they face.

As a full service law firm we can advise on a wide variety of legal matters. Our comprehensive range of services includes:

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- Data protection and freedom of information
- Property
- Construction
- Funding
- Partnerships, LLP agreements and corporate
- Pensions, tax and charities
- Employment
- Planning

For more information on how we can help, please visit www.brownejacobson.com/sharedservices

If you have any thoughts about our research or about shared services in general then we would love to hear from you. Please get in touch with any member of our team.

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During the course of constructing this report we spoke to a number of our clients, who we'd like to give special thanks to for their thoughts and contributions.

The legal bit

The information and opinions expressed in this report are no substitute for legal advice. It is guidance only, if in doubt please telephone 0115 976 6000.

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