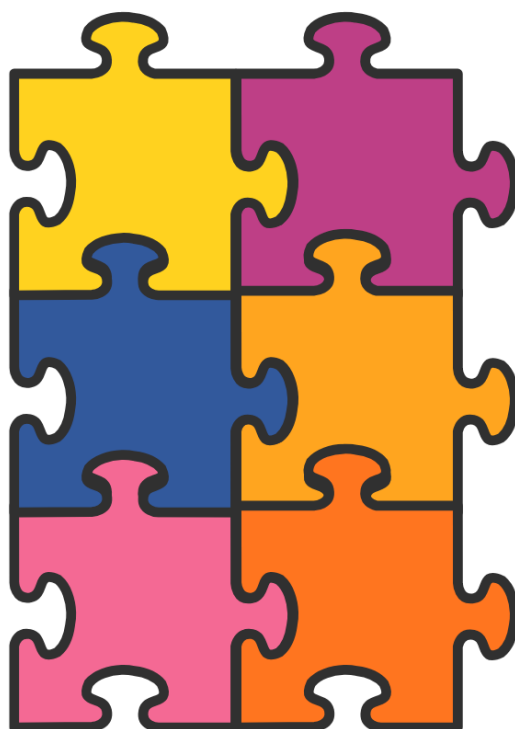


Better Join Up, Better Outcomes for Child Poverty

The evidence underpinning the collaborative needs assessment

A pragmatic literature review

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Adeiladu Cymru
iachach
Building a Healthier
Wales

Dr Eugenia Cronin,
Consultant in Public Health (Locum)

This report has been prepared with the following audiences in mind:

- Chairs and members of Public Service Boards
- Chairs and members of Regional Partnership Boards
- Chairs and members of other partnership boards involved in the delivery of the Child Poverty Strategy for Wales

Readers may find this a useful recourse to consider when evaluating their own partnerships, how they work, the readiness of participating organisations to collaborate, and where they might need to focus to strengthen collaboration so that value is created and goals are met.

“To drive the change that is needed and have a tangible impact on child poverty, it is essential that the Welsh Government, local government and other public services in Wales work together ... we need stronger coordination and collaboration between organisations working at the local and regional levels on tackling poverty including child poverty”,
Child Poverty Strategy for Wales, 2024

Thirty per cent of children in Wales are living in poverty, and their lives are being cut short. Living in poverty impacts a child’s chances for living a healthy life, getting a good education, and their future job prospects. Poverty harms the lives of children and families in a multitude of ways, from social and emotional wellbeing to educational achievement.

In the development of the [Child Poverty Strategy for Wales](#), people told Welsh Government that ‘things are not joined up’. They said it can be difficult to grasp a good picture of what different organisations are doing in local areas and regions.

One of the purposes of Building a Healthier Wales (BaHW) is to support intersectoral collaboration. During 2025, BaHW is conducting a needs assessment on collaboration with partnerships involved in delivery of the Child Poverty Strategy, to identify system enablers that will support those partnerships.

Collaboration is a cornerstone of the Strategy, so shining a light on how to facilitate and improve collaboration will support implementation.

We wanted to ensure the needs assessment asks the right questions about collaboration, so we set out to review the literature on features of successful intersectoral collaboration.

[Intersectoral collaboration](#)

The purpose of the review was to help us develop data collection tools to explore the collaboration needs of those working to deliver programmes to address a major public health problem in Wales, that of reducing and mitigating child poverty.

We explored the significant field of literature on intersectoral collaboration encompassing public health, social policy and public management disciplines. The review sought to identify features of effective collaboration in the range of contexts where it is used. Studies of intersectoral collaboration within the child poverty policy context specifically did not come to light and we see no reason why intersectoral collaboration within this context would be different from collaboration on other sets of policy aims. Indeed, the findings from this review could apply to many areas of policy implementation which rely on intersectoral collaboration.

Exploring the literature has deepened our appreciation of the complexity of intersectoral collaboration, and how to ensure it delivers – or that ‘good things happen’¹.

[Intersectoral collaborations can be complex, and requires a special style of leadership](#)

Intersectoral collaborations can be complex, consisting of a “tangled web” of individual, organisational, and collaboration goals that change over time. This presents a leadership challenge of aligning initial conditions, structures, processes, outcomes and accountabilities in a sustained way over time, so that public value can be created¹. Key to this is identifying win/win strategies² and developing trust and mutuality³.

Intersectoral collaboration has many aspects, including the linking or sharing of information, resources, activities, and capabilities by organisations to achieve jointly an outcome that could not be achieved by organisations in one sector separately¹. Collaborative activity can span policy, strategy, service design and delivery² and the

utilisation of common administrative datasets⁴. As such, effective intersectoral work is about collaboration strategically and operationally, and not just about the careful construction of partnerships⁵, although a formal partnership may be part of and even the visible embodiment of the collaboration.

The National Audit Office identified the importance of a style of leadership which explicitly encourages collaboration⁴, whilst others have said intersectoral collaboration calls for adaptive leadership with its emphasis on the ability to mobilise collective action, and on learning and adaptation.

Effective intersectoral collaboration may not 'just happen'

Intersectoral collaborations need to be deliberately designed, so that processes and structures lead to the desired outcomes being achieved. Ongoing learning should be built-in to the design, including learning about what goals and performance indicators should be¹. Indeed, the right measures and metrics will help to create the environment and framework within which collaboration can happen organically⁵.

There is often a lack of institutional mechanisms to enable intersectoral collaboration⁶. Participating organisations need to be ready for collaboration, with collaborative mechanisms in place and with staff who are skilled at working across organisational boundaries. Part of being ready for collaboration is aligning the goals of the collaboration with the core business or mission of the agency and sector⁷, and it will require collaborative organisational structures that set the parameters for the collaboration⁸.

Staff may need to be trained to do intersectoral collaboration, and shared staff development between sectors and organisations could be beneficial. Those adept at spanning boundaries have a range of competencies such as building sustainable relationships, managing through influence and negotiation, managing complexity and interdependencies, and managing roles, accountabilities and motivations⁹.

Commentators say that intersectoral collaborations have proliferated in recent years, but they are not an easy answer to complex public problems¹. There have been calls for greater evaluation of intersectoral collaborations, and for greater detail in guidance about how models should be established, managed and delivered^{4 5}.

Public Health at the forefront?

We have explored a substantial research field which is interested in intersectoral collaboration, and this crosses various academic disciplines, including public health. The international literature suggests that public health tends to be at the forefront of joined-up approaches. It is not just that collaborative working is needed to improve public health, but also that pursuing a public health mission is likely to galvanise joined up working and lead to system innovations⁵.

Features of intersectoral collaboration

The literature review identified a set of features of effective intersectoral collaboration, which relate both to the *specific partnership* itself and to the *participating organisation*.

We have converted the features we found in the literature review into statements (see Table 1 below), which have been used in a questionnaire on the topic of child poverty in Wales. Table 1 shows these statements and the reference or references on which they were originally based.

Readers may find this a useful list to consider when evaluating their own partnerships, how they work, the readiness of participating organisations to collaborate, and where they might need to focus to strengthen collaboration so that value is created and goals are met.

Table 1

Features of successful intersectoral collaboration relating to partnerships	
1	There is an explicit shared understanding of the goals of the partnership ^{9 x xi}
2	Differing priorities and policy clashes are understood ^{xii}
3	The diversity of different organisational cultures is acknowledged ⁹
4	The core values of each sector are reflected in the work of the partnership ^{xiii}
5	Ways of working build trust and mean that people feel they have an equal voice regardless of levels of political influence or resource ³
6	There is a strategic commitment from each partner to owning the collaboration/partnership ^{xiv}
7	Partner responsibilities for specific activities are clear ^{4 xv xvi}
8	All partners are listened to and involved in decision making ³
9	There is regular two-way communication ^{7 12}
	Win-win strategies have been identified by the partners involved ^{7 12}
11	The partnership has a learning and evaluation culture, and shares good practice and lessons learned ^{1 12 16}
12	The style of leadership of the partnership facilitates collaborative ways of working ^{3 xvii}
13	The development of the collaborative/partnership was built on existing relationships ^{7 15}
14	The processes and structures of the collaboration/partnership were designed so that the desired outcomes would be achieved ¹
15	Data on population need informs delivery, and datasets are identified and used collectively ^{4 16}
16	The partnership has access to expertise in evaluation ¹²
17	There is meaningful and tailored performance management ⁹
18	People with lived experience of the issues are engaged and can influence the work of the partnership ²
19	Sustainable funding models are in place ^{11 16}
20	There is a dedicated management structure with continuity of staff ^{9 15 17}
21	There is support for shared finance approaches ¹¹
22	There are opportunities for shared workforce development/training ¹¹
Features of successful intersectoral collaboration relating to participating organisations	
1	Leadership encourages, recognises and rewards working collaboratively throughout the organisation ⁴
2	The goals of the partnership are aligned with the core business or mission of the organisation ⁷
3	Collaborative activity spans policy, strategy, service change and delivery ²
4	Corporate plans refer to joint funding or joint delivery ^{xviii}
5	Staff are receptive to doing interagency working ¹⁶
6	Staff are supposed to develop the skills needed for effective partnership working ⁹

Notes on methodology and limitations

Searches were carried out during October/November 2024.

A pragmatic approach was taken:

- Google Scholar was searched from 2015-2024
- Publications from public health, social policy and public management disciplines were included from peer reviewed journals
- Titles were scanned initially, and the abstracts of those that appeared relevant were then reviewed, selecting those that addressed the review objectives (see Table 2)
- Quality assessment was not performed
- We added known frameworks to the set of studies identified through literature searching
- We interpreted features to produce statements which would make sense in the questionnaire.

Table 2: Numbers of papers accessed in the review

<i>Review objectives</i>	<i>Number of abstracts scanned</i>	<i>Long list of abstracts</i>	<i>Shortlist of published papers</i>
Identify relevant published frameworks which describe features of effective partnership working in the public sector	100	40	10
Identify relevant published frameworks which describe features of effective intersectoral collaboration	50	8	6
Assess known frameworks from grey literature to identify features of effective intersectoral collaboration	N/A	7	5
	150	55	21

References

- ¹ Bryson, J.M., Crosby, B.C. and Stone, M.M. (2015), Designing and Implementing Cross-Sector Collaborations: Needed and Challenging. *Public Admin Rev*, 75: 647-663.
- ² Such E, Smith K, Woods HB, Meier P. Governance of Intersectoral Collaborations for Population Health and to Reduce Health Inequalities in High-Income Countries: A Complexity-Informed Systematic Review. *Int J Health Policy Manag*. 2022 Dec 19;11(12):2780-2792
- ³ Wales Centre for Public Policy, Multisector collaboration to improve community wellbeing, July 2024
- ⁴ National Audit Office, Cross-government working, Good practice guide for leaders and practitioners, July 2023
- ⁵ TRUUD (Tackling Root Causes Upstream of Unhealthy Urban Development), Joining up government for public health, Policy briefing, September 2024
- ⁶ Pescud M, Rychetnik L, Allender S, Irving MJ, Finegood DT, Riley T, Ison R, Rutter H, Friel S. From Understanding to Impactful Action: Systems Thinking for Systems Change in Chronic Disease Prevention Research. *Systems*. 2021; 9(3):61. <https://doi.org/10.3390/systems9030061>
- ⁷ Tooher R, Collins J, Braunack-Mayer A, Burgess T, Skinner S, O'Keefe M, Watson M, Marshall H, Intersectoral collaboration to implement school-based health programmes: Australian perspectives, *Health Promotion International*, Volume 32, Issue 2, April 2017, Pages 312–321
- ⁸ Hendriks A, Jansen M, Gubbels J, De Vries N, Molleman G, Kremers S, Local government officials' views on intersectoral collaboration within their organization – A qualitative exploration, *Health Policy and Technology*, Volume 4, Issue 1, 2015, Pages 47-57, ISSN 2211-8837
- ⁹ Cook, A (2015) Partnership Working Across UK Public Services Edinburgh: What Works Scotland