

PEEL spotlight report

The Hard Yards

Police-to-police collaboration



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Foreword

Nationally, forces are spending over a quarter of a billion pounds on collaborations every year. It is in police forces' interests to collaborate with other forces and other organisations, both on a local and a national scale. Collaboration done well can save money, reduce bureaucracy, and improve efficiency and effectiveness. Collaborations allow forces to club together to provide specialist services that they couldn't provide individually, and they help forces to learn from best practice. Ultimately, collaborations can improve the service that forces give to the public.

But too many police collaborations are failing, or not giving the results they should, costing forces money, time and effort.

For this report, we assessed six police collaborations, investigating the process from agreement onwards. These case studies varied in scope and scale from highly ambitious strategic collaborations, such as the Seven Force Strategic Alliance (7F) and the All Wales collaboration, to more focused and specific projects, such as the North West Underwater Marine Unit. We examined what they did well, and what didn't go so well. We considered why some collaborations succeeded and why some failed.

Too many forces weren't well informed about collaboration best practice: there wasn't enough information available nationally about police collaboration; and some forces didn't use the lessons they learned on one collaboration to improve others they were involved with. Many forces need to improve how they monitor the information and communication technology (ICT) they use to facilitate collaborations. They lack tools and understanding that would allow them to track the benefits – including financial savings – of collaboration. Forces are not always considering the risks and costs of failure when entering collaborations.

The delivery of large-scale collaborations can also affect all 43 forces' ability to make progress with their own projects. These national programmes include the single reporting portal (known as the Single Online Home) and replacing the current police Airwaves network with the Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme. These programmes are intrinsically linked to internal projects through which forces are reviewing their ICT strategies and digital platforms. Uncertainty about the national programmes means that forces can't make informed decisions on their own programmes. This is because it is difficult to understand whether or how national collaborations will affect their systems. And there is a lack of understanding in forces about when such national programmes will be delivered.

In this report, we make recommendations about what forces can do to collaborate successfully and productively. We have also made recommendations to national organisations to improve the support given to police forces as they collaborate.

We urge forces and the national organisations that support their vital work to reflect on these recommendations and put them into action to improve police efficiency and effectiveness.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Parr', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Matt Parr

HM Inspector of Constabulary

About this report

This report provides a national perspective on police-to-police collaboration. We have:

- reviewed a number of high-profile collaborations and strategic alliances;
- discussed the political context of collaborations with several police and crime commissioners (PCCs) across England and Wales; and
- reviewed findings from our 2018/19 integrated PEEL assessment (IPA) inspections and 2019/20 force management statements (FMSs).

What do we mean by collaboration?

In 2012, we defined collaboration as:

“All activity where two or more parties work together to achieve a common goal, which includes inter-force activity and collaboration with the public and private sectors, including outsourcing and business partnering.”

Many of the collaborations that have recently come to an end have been between two or more forces, rather than between a force and another type of organisation. This report focuses purely on police-to-police collaboration.

What is this report based on?

Our findings are based on our inspections of all 43 England and Wales forces. We have also chosen six collaborations as case studies. These cover 27 forces. We have assessed documents and data provided by the forces, examined publicly available information and interviewed the nominated leads for collaboration within the forces. We have included these case studies to serve as specific examples of wider national trends we have identified in collaborations. This report should not be considered a full inspection of the case studies.

We chose the following six collaborations because of the scale of the projects and their sustainability and success, and because we wanted to understand why some of them were ending.

1. The Seven Force Strategic Alliance (7F)

Formed in 2015, this is a complex and ambitious programme to identify opportunities for joint working to support the seven police forces from across the east of England (Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Kent, Norfolk and Suffolk). The 7F is built on three other well-established and successful collaborations within these seven forces that we didn't examine in this report.

2. The South West Tri Force and the Major Crime Investigations Team (MCIT)

These are two collaboration programmes between Avon and Somerset Police, Gloucestershire Constabulary and Wiltshire Police. The Tri Force covers firearms, dogs and traffic, while the MCIT is for the investigation of major crime. The former has now been dissolved.

3. The East Midlands Criminal Justice Service (EMCJS)

This collaboration covers four forces (Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire and Nottinghamshire). It creates and develops an integrated criminal justice service capable of providing operational support in all areas of criminal justice across the East Midlands.

4. All Wales

This programme oversees and develops the progress of new collaborations between Welsh forces (Gwent, South Wales, Dyfed Powys and North Wales). It also provides leadership and management for existing operational arrangements.

5. The North West Underwater Marine Unit

This is a collaboration of six forces (Merseyside Police, Greater Manchester Police, Cheshire Constabulary, Cumbria Constabulary, Lancashire Constabulary and North Wales Police). It provides specialist services, such as recovering dead bodies from water and other difficult situations: for example, badly decomposed bodies from a home or from woodland.

6. The North West Motorway Police Group (NWMPG)

This provides a regionalised policing service for the motorways within the Cheshire, Lancashire, Merseyside and Greater Manchester police areas. It was established in June 2008 in partnership with Highways England. Lancashire Police has recently withdrawn from this collaboration.

PCCs have a central role in developing and reviewing collaborations. We don't inspect PCCs, but we did invite all 43 to give their views on collaborations and the scope within which they are operating. Five chose to give us their insights and we are grateful for these contributions, which help us to understand the political context in which collaborations are operating.

Summary of findings

Our findings highlight some good practice and areas for improvement. The findings fall into four themes:

- Purpose
- Benefits and cost analysis
- Leadership and governance
- Skills and capabilities.

In 2012, we found that all forces either had, or were planning to make, savings from collaborations. Most of these collaborations were with other police forces. We said that the quality of the financial cases that forces made needed to improve. We also provided some questions for forces to gauge the costs and service benefits of a proposed collaboration. So it was disappointing to find in 2018/19 that some collaborations had ceased or were currently having difficulties, with many of the problems we identified in 2012 unresolved.

Purpose: collaborations must demonstrate a benefit to the public

It is essential that collaborations have a clear objective. This helps forces to show the public the benefits of the collaboration. When the purpose of a collaboration is clearly set out and understood by all forces involved, it determines collaborative activity between all parties. It is particularly important that all parties have the same appetite for risk: it means that decision making is more predictable and less bureaucratic.

It helps if collaborations have a clear identity. This means that there is consistency between how the collaboration sees itself, and how it is presented to the forces and to the public. This is easier when operating in areas of common geographical, demographical or political identity, such as in Wales.

Each collaboration in the six case studies had a stated initial purpose. However, each purpose needs to be supported by those involved. When this is the case, staff are more likely to understand how they can contribute to the success of the programme. Most collaborations were implemented to produce cost savings, but it was often unclear how this work was otherwise benefiting the public or improving service. This has contributed to delays in implementing some of the programmes and achieving success.

Two collaborations – All Wales and the 7F – recognised that having a clear purpose for collaboration was important and invested time and effort in getting this right. It is clear that this contributed to creating momentum.

Benefits and cost analysis: some forces aren't tracking the benefits of collaboration and fail to think beyond savings

Forces need to understand how and where they are achieving benefits through collaboration. Benefits such as saving money and using resources more effectively can change over time as costs increase or financial contexts change – for example, the recent announcement about increased police recruitment. Tracking benefits is crucial, both to retaining support for the collaboration and to determining where it may be underperforming.

We found that many forces are reviewing collaborations to see if they are achieving what they originally set out to do. But they are not always assessing whether they can achieve anything else by enhancing collaborative working. When collaborations were set up to achieve a certain amount of savings, some forces started to withdraw once those savings appeared. But they sometimes failed to take into account the true cost of withdrawal and starting again.

Trust is an essential element of good leadership and governance

Collaborations between forces are also collaborations between leaders, many of whom will have competing demands and varying pressures. We were told that chief officers didn't always have the capacity to be involved effectively, but also that some chief officers were reluctant to devolve responsibility to other force leads. This increased the effort needed to reach a decision, creating frustration with the project teams and increasing the perceived costs of collaboration.

Forces should set out what they are trying to achieve: they should decide what level of risk they are willing to take, what is in scope and what is out of scope. At that point, they should be able to agree how decisions will be made and who will make sure that tasks are allocated and completed. In one collaboration, a perceived lack of trust contributed to a failure in agreeing more streamlined structures. We also found a case where a perceived lack of trust at higher levels of management resulted in prolonged debate, which delayed projects and increased costs.

When there are agreements that effectively manage the interests of each force, collaborations can achieve trust between all parties. This is shown in the All Wales team, through the appointment of a single chief officer lead, which reduced bureaucracy and improved efficiency. In this example, the assistant chief constable is the collaboration representative and presents the business case for all forces involved. The chief officers schedule their meetings, so they are held on the same day and in the same place as the PCCs' meetings. This means that decision makers are all in the same place at the same time, making the work easier. The collaboration representative role is rotated around each force to make sure that they all have the opportunity to run the programme.

The current structure of PCC and chief constable, and the legal framework within which they operate, has the potential to conflict with police-to-police collaborative projects. The PCCs are responsible to their electorate – that is, to the public of each one's local region. Meanwhile, chief constables must work according to threat, harm and risk factors, and each has a responsibility to meet national

priorities and collaborate with other forces. These priorities and responsibilities do not always align.

Some forces are continually failing to use their resources effectively and exchange learning

Forces need to recognise the complex and specialist nature of collaboration. It is a highly skilled change-management process that needs good relationship building, financial management, political skills and creativity. Too often, collaborations are staffed by the people who are available, rather than those with the right skills. Staff allocated to collaborated functions tend to be operational. So they are technically competent in the collaborated area of policing – for example, firearms or roads policing – but not specifically trained to strategically manage collaboration or innovate. Putting the right people with the right skills in place leads to success and improves the efficiency and effectiveness of the programme. So forces need to bring in people with these skills or train existing staff.

Given that so many forces are engaged in collaborations, we were surprised to find limited evaluation and exchange of learning between forces as to how to collaborate better. There is no shared repository for information or central resource to support forces. Addressing this would mean that forces are more able to maximise the benefits of their collaborations and minimise the risk of collaborations failing.

The National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) needs to consider how collaboration knowledge can be developed and how forces can be supported better by the College of Policing, the NPCC and central government. We recommend the establishment of a central repository or register detailing types of collaboration and contacts to allow forces to compare good practice more effectively.

Are current police collaboration agreements fit for today's policing?

Forces need a strong case for entering into collaborations and a more considered approach if they want to withdraw

Forces are more aware now of the need to provide value for money. This is leading to a review of many collaborations that were set up during a time of intense financial challenge. All forces use a generic template for completing police force collaboration agreements. This template is based on sections 22A to 23I of the Police Act 1996, which covers these agreements.¹ While generic templates have benefits, such as efficiency, ease of use and a corporate approach, nationally we are concerned that agreements lack quality and detail. For instance, during our 2018/19 inspections of West Mercia and Warwickshire police forces, which were ending a strategic collaboration at the time, we found that their collaboration agreement wasn't detailed enough for either of the leadership teams to make fully informed decisions.

The generic template West Mercia and Warwickshire police forces used to create their collaboration agreement includes references to reasonable costs the withdrawing force is meeting. But the template was not precise enough. This made the costs difficult to assess with any accuracy, particularly when collaborating forces operated under contrasting budgets and faced different funding difficulties. Review periods are a requirement under the section 22/23 agreements, and they include analysis of costs and benefits. But we found that too often forces aren't tracking benefits effectively and most reviews are conducted annually, with little feedback to help improve achievements. An effective review process would help make sure that the programmes stay on track, and would highlight potential problems at an early stage.

Collaboration agreements need more consideration and should include more detail about the arrangements for withdrawing from a collaboration. For example, a cooling-off period once a decision to withdraw is made might be beneficial. It would also be helpful for there to be a requirement that any decision to withdraw should be supported by a business case. This would ensure that any such decision recognises the potential cost and effect on the withdrawing force, other forces, communities and

¹ Sections 22A to 23I of Police Act 1996 (as amended) (the Act) set out the provisions under which collaboration agreements may be made between two or more police forces and/or two or more local policing bodies (i.e. PCCs), as a means of achieving more efficient and effective provision of policing services. Such an agreement between police forces is known as a Police Force Collaboration Agreement (PFCA). A chief officer may only make a PFCA if they think that the agreement is in the interests of the efficiency or effectiveness of one or more police forces. Section 23A of the Act enables two or more PCCs to make an agreement about the provision of joint support services. 'Support' includes the provision of premises, equipment, staff, services and facilities.

the services to the public. The agreement could include a requirement for wider public consultation when forces are considering terminating a collaboration.

Recommendations

All forces need the tools and commitment to implement collaborations effectively

- Forces need to have access to the right knowledge and information to improve collaboration. So the police service needs to develop a national picture as to how forces collaborate and where they collaborate, with examples of successes and failures to help improvement. A 43-force picture needs to be developed to give forces an insight into what collaboration is taking place and how they can use it to improve services.
- There are already established ways of collating and sharing information about funding, investment and resource, but all forces should use them consistently. Forces can achieve more by building relationships with other forces, senior leaders and central functions, such as the Home Office, the NPCC and the College of Policing. The involvement of these agencies can help build confidence and knowledge, while providing valuable information to police forces.
- Technology offers many opportunities for policing. But if forces are to take full advantage of their chosen system, they need effective methods of monitoring how they use and develop it. This monitoring should be set against the original requirements.
- Forces must improve their ability to understand the benefits of collaboration. This includes where programmes of work are already being implemented, but the benefits are unknown or poorly understood. This understanding also needs to include costs, and forces must measure these costs against the benefits they have identified.
- Although forces track the financial savings they achieve through collaboration, they need to better understand other benefits such as improvements in efficiency and in the service they provide to the public.

Recommendation 1

- By March 2021, the NPCC lead, the College of Policing and the Home Office should work together to establish a central repository for police collaborations.

Recommendation 2

- By March 2021, the NPCC lead, the College of Policing and the Home Office should identify a methodology that supports forces in tracking benefits for police collaborations.
- If forces haven't yet implemented an effective system to track the benefits of their collaborations, they should use the methodology created by the NPCC, the College of Policing and the Home Office.

Themes

Purpose

What can a clear objective for collaboration add?

In each of the six case studies, we found that too many of those involved in the projects had an inconsistent understanding of their purpose. When we spoke to people working within the collaborations, we found they often had a different understanding of the aims of their projects. So programmes took longer to implement and often took time to gain momentum. Having a clear purpose that is understood by all those involved helps guide what forces need to do, how they should invest, and where they can align resources to create improvements.

We found that, when collaborations had a clear purpose, this became a strong motivator for collaborative working. People could fully commit themselves to the programme and understand what they were trying to achieve. We also found that, if each force agreed on the level of risk it was willing to accept, this helped in forming a strong purpose.

What our case studies told us

The purpose of collaborations isn't always clear, although saving money is still a common reason for collaboration. Forces and national organisations need to do more to understand how collaborations improve services to the public.

The East Midlands Criminal Justice Service

The initial purpose of this collaboration was to achieve a single technology system (platform) and a single senior management structure across the forces involved. These objectives have been achieved.

But there is a limited desire to develop this any further by, for example, sharing buildings and people. Having achieved what they originally set out to do, two of the forces are reviewing the collaboration with one of these likely to withdraw.

To avoid this, forces should adopt a rigorous review process that considers progress against the original purpose for collaborating, but also actively pursues additional opportunities.

All Wales

In this programme, we found that a strong sense of purpose to improve policing for the whole of Wales was an important reason for working collaboratively. The initial work in 2015 allocated a deputy chief constable as the lead for the All Wales collaboration.

But the programme struggled to move forward because it was insufficiently clear what the specific aims of the collaboration were. Within the first two years, a lot of information was gathered but there was little further progress.

Two years into the programme, all the decision makers, including chief constables and PCCs, met. They agreed three aims for collaboration, which would harmonise:

1. information technology (a need to streamline systems);
2. recruitment and human resource processes and training (their people); and
3. policies and procedures (better alignment of policy and working practices).

This agreement set the direction for the All Wales collaboration. The agreed approach is also a reference point for challenge and further considerations. Since this was agreed, the programme leaders have reported a change in how efficiently they are implementing the collaboration. Each lead we spoke to could clearly express the purpose of the work.

Forces should make sure that important decision makers are involved in initial discussions so that they agree the approach from the start.

The Seven Force Strategic Alliance

The collaboration began in a proof of concept phase, which provided a clear purpose. The collaborating forces were to focus on exploring the possibilities that a very broad strategic alliance could bring in terms of cost savings and service delivery. This was effective in the early years of the project.

However, we were later told by people currently working on the collaboration that they weren't always completely clear what objectives the collaboration was meant to be achieving. They said there were delays getting the programmes of work off the ground and that the collaboration lacked a common purpose to bring senior leaders together.

Recently, this issue has been addressed and the collaboration is now in good shape. The lesson is that leaders need to be fully aware of their collaboration's purpose, and agree on what they are asking their staff to do. Good communication about the reasons for collaboration is also necessary.

The South West Tri Force

This collaboration, covering roads policing, dogs and firearms, was motivated by cost savings. The aim of the collaboration was to create a centrally managed specialist policing unit that was intelligence-led and able to meet demand at any time or place across the three forces. While this aim was clear, because of poor change management, it didn't sufficiently engage the staff involved. So the forces failed to gain the right support from staff, and the relationship became fragile. The purpose wasn't strong enough and some tasks weren't allocated quickly enough.

Staff working in the collaboration then reverted to the roles they had in their own forces. This affected how effectively they could work in the collaboration. Because of the perceived risk attached to the use of resources, such as firearms and the high public interest in these specialist policing units, we were told that too often chief officers and PCCs were reluctant to devolve responsibility.

The collaboration appointed an assistant chief constable lead but struggled to get staff involved enough to develop the work. During termination discussions, one force presented a lead force solution: people, dogs, equipment and buildings would remain within the forces on their original terms and conditions, and the development of the collaborated function would be led by one force. However, the others didn't consider this to be workable.

As part of agreeing the purpose of collaboration, forces should consider the level of risk each is willing to take, and make sure that this is clear and fully supported by each individual force.

The Major Crime Investigation Team

In contrast, the MCIT provided by the same forces is a successful and effective collaboration made up of experts in their fields. From the outset, there was a clear purpose: improving major crime investigation. Staff were clear on what the purpose was, and each force supported them as their work developed and improved.

The purpose hasn't changed since the collaboration's inception and the leadership is focused on providing improved services in a specific policing area. The success of the MCIT realised further benefits, with Gloucestershire Police joining the collaboration in 2015.

Forces should look for examples of successful programmes both internally and externally. They should take lessons into account when considering new ventures.

The North West Underwater Marine Unit

The six forces in this collaboration had a clear purpose: to provide a specialist service for the public in the north west. This collaboration has continued to provide what was originally agreed and is frequently reviewed against the purpose set out at the start.

Forces should continue to review their collaborations even when they are performing at the level expected.

Matching purpose to benefits

In five of our case studies, the stated purpose failed to fully describe the benefits to the public. Most collaborations were set up to achieve savings or to reduce bureaucracy. But it was not clear that the forces had linked benefits to the service they gave the public – for example, by showing that the project improved response to calls for service.

When collaborations were succeeding, we found there was consistency between how they saw themselves, and how they were presented to the forces and the public. In some collaborations, a sense of identity is easier to achieve. For example, the All

Wales team is supported by the broader Welsh identity and a desire to improve policing for the communities of Wales. The sense of identity is supported by Welsh government involvement.

Benefits and cost analysis

Forces need to know if collaborations are achieving what they set out to

Our 2018/19 inspection programme highlighted the need for forces to understand benefits analysis and tracking. It is an important part of collaboration.

Collaborations need to be able to show how and where they are saving money. They also need to understand how this links to service provision, and the effect on the communities the collaboration serves. Given that saving money is a critical reason for many collaborations, it is surprising that some can't clearly show efficiencies for each force. Not only would such an assessment show the value the collaboration has created, it would also help forces to understand how much more it would cost to provide the service alone.

In five of our case studies, the stated purpose failed to clearly describe the benefits to the public. Most collaborations were set up to achieve savings or to reduce bureaucracy. The central government guidance on appraisal and evaluation – the [Green Book](#) – isn't used as widely as it should be. Some forces lack understanding of how it could be used. Forces need to develop systems for effectively tracking benefits and we believe that support should be provided centrally. In our next round of inspections, we will focus on collaborations in more detail. This will have a focus on value for money and benefits.

In all the case studies we assessed, there was an acceptance that this is an area for development. Forces need to understand wider considerations, such as the effect of the collaboration on the public, and softer and often hidden benefits. An example of 'softer benefits' would be the ability to invest the savings achieved through collaboration in improved service provision.

In addition, those entering a collaboration need to understand better:

- the set-up costs of the collaboration;
- the costs of achieving collaborative working; and
- the costs of failure.

For example, the costs of withdrawing from a collaboration, in terms of compensation and service reorganisation, have the potential to wipe out any savings made over the course of the project.

We have found that forces are adept at putting a figure on potential savings. For example:

- 7F has identified potential savings in several areas:
 - procurement (£11m);
 - enterprise resource planning (£10m); and
 - ICT convergence (£10m).

- These are in addition to introducing wider business cases to improve service and to pooling back-office functions to save money.
- All Wales oversaw an e-recruitment project that identified potential savings of £743,758 between the four forces.
- The MCIT and the North West Underwater Marine Unit both provide specific expert services. An enhanced service across the forces involved makes sense to both the forces and members of the public. But quantifying this benefit is difficult because it is not easy to compare the service supplied under the collaboration with the service the forces would supply individually.

What is missing from all six case studies is a fully effective benefit tracking system and a process to measure success against cost. This analysis is necessary for collaborating forces to understand whether they are achieving the purpose of the collaboration or whether it needs reviewing.

Understanding the benefits they are achieving and the costs they are incurring is probably the weakest element within most of the collaborations we have examined. This is consistent with the findings in our [PEEL inspections](#).

The cost of teams set up to provide services in a collaboration varies from project to project. Forces can detail their staff costs, but again they are not always reviewing the benefits realised. Also, it wasn't obvious that the projected benefits took account of the cost of running the projects.

There is a lack of detail on costs, particularly the potential cost of withdrawal:

- The 7F received central funding to initiate its work in identifying opportunities for joint working across the east of England. But this doesn't seem to have been reviewed, and we do not believe there is a comprehensive understanding of whether its work has provided the expected benefits. The annual cost of the team is about £1.3m across the seven forces. The project has certainly achieved savings – for example, the first saving identified was around £156,000 through the progressive alignment of the chief firearms instructor role (there were seven chief firearms officers across the forces; this has been reduced to one). It has also identified pipeline savings of £11m by recently moving to a single procurement function. But we were unable to establish whether the collaboration was achieving all the savings anticipated.
- The NWMPG was set up to operate a single control function for policing the motorway network across four neighbouring force areas. The control room is located within a purpose-built facility owned and run by Highways England, which is also part of the collaboration. All forces continue to police the motorways, but are allocated tasks by the NWMPG. There was minimal cost in setting up the collaboration for each force. A small cadre of control staff work from the control centre and are employed and managed by Cheshire Police. The annual staff costs are split between the participating forces, using a formula based on length of motorway, demography and number of incidents. Other than a shared estate and a reduced demand on force control rooms, it is difficult to quantify what the true benefits are. A review by Lancashire Constabulary in 2018 resulted in the constabulary withdrawing and providing this service themselves. The withdrawal of Lancashire led to the need to cut staff in the central control facility. It isn't

clear what the effect has been on service for the remaining forces. The forces generally perceive the collaboration to be effective, but there is very limited data to support this.

- The South West Tri Force model failed to fully track benefits and the true cost of the collaboration across the three forces. This led to a limited understanding within each force about demand, how tasks should be allocated, and how to use resources effectively. As a result, it wasn't clear what each force was getting for its money. The inability to provide unit costs (cost per officer) created some discord. This contributed to the collaboration ending.
- Not all benefits are financial. The North West Underwater Marine Unit gives each force a specialist service that they could not afford to provide individually. The forces recognise the benefits of this. It was accepted that each force would have different demands of the service, and this would mean that some would benefit more than others. However, the benefits were thought to outweigh all other considerations. This has led to a long-term solution for those involved. It is reviewed regularly to make sure that complacency doesn't set in and it is achieving its initial purpose.

Forces need to understand how their collaborations affect the services they give to the public

There are other significant benefits from collaboration beyond those that can be described in financial terms. These include increased resilience in providing regular services under extraordinary circumstances. For example, a collaboration means that a force can draw on extra resources for occasional but critical events – for example, the 2018 UEFA Champions League Final held in Cardiff, which required a huge multi-agency response.

Collaborations can help by unifying systems to improve sharing of intelligence, data and good practice between forces.

The ability to describe other benefits means that some collaborations may continue even when savings aren't being made, or are less important than the quality or availability of the services.

Collaborating forces need to show they are considering the wider implications of their work. To do this, they need to track the monies arising from their savings. So they need to be able to state that the money has been reinvested to fill funding gaps within the force, or to improve services – for example, by investing in mental health triage in the control room, which benefits both the police and the public.

Leadership and governance

Decision making is too often complex and bureaucratic

The nature of collaboration is complex and will involve several leaders who each have competing demands. It is not always easy to understand these complexities and bring everyone together to support a common goal. It is also not always clear whether each organisation can adapt its structure to fully achieve the benefits of the collaboration.

It can be unclear at times who has overall responsibility for the collaboration, and it can be difficult to reach agreement across several forces and meet deadlines. Some collaborations are starting to address this problem, but more work needs to be done. Multiple meetings soak up managers' and leaders' time, and failures to agree mean that decisions are escalated through the organisation. The result of this is that senior leaders in policing are considering matters such as excessive overtime or provision of kit, which wouldn't normally need their attention. While senior leadership involvement is positive, there needs to be more autonomy in lower-level decision making. This gradual escalation in the level of accountability creates frustration and increases the perceived costs of collaborating.

Active senior leadership plays an important role in moving collaborations forward. We found examples of PCCs and chief officers showing commitment to developing collaborations and recognising the value of collaborative working. But often the lead is an assistant chief constable or above who is expected to lead on collaboration as well as all their other work, rather than it being the focus of their role.

In the 7F, we found the programme lead was attending six or more meetings to inform the seven forces before decisions could be made. We identified the need to establish risk and appetite for each project, force and collaboration. Doing this would support decision making and governance. The 7F collaboration has made significant progress in this regard recently.

In All Wales, an agreed governance structure has streamlined decision making. The team develops collaboration concepts in a business case and presents it to the All Wales chief officer group for a decision. The chief officer group has aligned their meeting to the All Wales PCC meeting to make sure that decisions can be made efficiently. And a dedicated assistant chief constable leads the project without the distraction of other policing responsibilities. The team has also addressed sustainability by making sure that new members of senior leadership groups are briefed on the collaboration work. So they understand what has been agreed and the basis for those decisions. The changes the 7F collaboration has recently made will put it on a similar basis.

In the NWMPG, there is no clear governance structure. The responsibility has fallen to Cheshire Constabulary. There is a nominal lead for the collaboration – a superintendent from Cheshire who takes leadership responsibility for operational decisions and for the staff and operation of the control centre. There is no formal governance arrangement to support this and the superintendent has simply assumed this responsibility. Strategic direction and decision-making arrangements lack clarity. There is a superintendent-level point of contact in each force, who liaises in operational decision making. However, more strategic decisions are made by the regional organised crime unit's assistant chief constable in the north west deputy chiefs' council meeting. This involves other forces that are not part of the collaboration.

We were told that individual leaders' desire to keep informed on how collaborations were progressing increased bureaucracy. Forces failed to agree simple processes for decision making or to support those involved effectively. There were elements of micro-management. And forces lacked confidence that their own interests would be looked after. As we mentioned above, the legal framework within which chief

constables and PCCs operate means that their priorities and responsibilities do not always align.

Skills and capabilities

Tomorrow's workforce: right people, right place, right skills?

Collaboration is a highly skilled change-management process. Building and maintaining collaborations call for the building of relationships, financial management, negotiation skills, creativity and the ability to learn. In too many places, the skills of people leading and managing collaborations are not enough to meet the problems they face.

We have reported, following our IPA inspections, that forces need to do more to map the skills and capabilities of their workforce. They also need to better align these people to work that makes the most of their skills and potential. Not having the right people in place can contribute to delays, and the impact can be significant.

In the South West Tri Force, there was a lack of programme and project support after the collaboration was set up. This hindered sorting out the remaining problems after it went live, and these were substantial.

In the case of the 7F, the recruitment of the initial team was designed to deliver proof of concept and it contained a mix of skills including those in project management. This team achieved what it set out to do. However, it took a significant amount of time to achieve the desired results. Two years into the project, the team membership was re-profiled. The seven forces employed a project manager with a proven track record and in the following months the membership of the team changed significantly. The 7F recognised the need to refresh the team, skills and capabilities to allow it to deliver the ambitious projects it had identified. As this took place, momentum improved. Within a relatively short time, projects have been developed with significant business cases going to the board for decisions. If achieved, the savings will be substantial. This demonstrates the value of reviewing and potentially refreshing teams to make sure that collaborations receive the support they require to meet changing demands.

We found that significant collaborations stalled because the skills were not present in the team at the beginning. However, once the skills gaps were addressed, the collaborations began to make good progress.

In all the collaborations, we found that forces relied on police officers to pull the team together. This is probably because they are experts in policing. However, collaboration can be split into two functions: the business, which includes finance and negotiation; and the operational, which is policing. Both functions need skilled people. It is rare that a single person possesses both sets of skills, but both are needed for collaboration to work. We also found a tendency to move people into a collaboration if they could no longer effectively do the role for which they were first employed, even though they did not have the right training, skills or experience for the new role. This doesn't promote effectiveness or efficiency in collaborative working. A few programmes have had to go through a complete review to renew their teams, as seen in the 7F and All Wales projects.

Consideration from the outset of the skills and capabilities required is an area of weakness. If present in the case studies, this may have addressed some of the other challenges we have identified. Furthermore, forces may have been more likely to share what they had learned from the collaboration, and to reflect it in their FMSs. The lack of investment in this area introduces delays. So forces are not necessarily making the most of the opportunities from collaboration.

Forces need to learn from each other's experiences

Few collaborations have made sure that they have enough capacity and capability to take account of learning. We found that there is limited evaluation of collaborations, and limited learning between forces in how to collaborate better. This is in stark contrast to other operational areas of policing. Also, there is no central repository or common resource to help forces.

Two of the six collaborations we studied (All Wales and the 7F) have a similar approach to identifying collaborative opportunities. These forces have created a small team of people who actively seek and develop opportunities to collaborate and look at wider opportunities. Both are proving to be successful. This approach is replicated in the north east with the regional North East Transformation Innovation and Collaboration project.

We have found that these forces have more ambition than others for collaboration and invest significantly in their teams to make sure that they are afforded the best opportunity to succeed. They have achieved improvements such as the e-recruitment project in All Wales and the procurement project in the 7F. However, there are still variances in how they operate. And they need to strip out some of the bureaucracy that larger collaborations inevitably attract.

Smaller, more specific collaborations, such as for firearms and roads policing, benchmark themselves against other forces on the operational side of the collaborative working. But they could not always show us how they learned from others about the business side of collaboration.

Conclusion

We saw some good practice and some areas for improvement. Given the amount of public money spent on police collaboration and the potential for service improvement inherent in collaborations done well, we are keen to see improvement in this area.

We have made recommendations to both forces and central functions. We hope these will drive better collaboration within the police service.

Annex A: The scale of police-to-police collaborations

South West Tri Force

- Avon and Somerset
- Gloucestershire
- Wiltshire



All Wales Collaboration

- Dyfed-Powys
- South Wales
- North Wales
- Gwent



North West Motorway Patrol Group

- Cheshire
- Merseyside
- Greater Manchester
- Lancashire



East Midlands Criminal Justice Service

- Nottinghamshire
- Leicestershire
- Lincolnshire
- Northamptonshire



North West Underwater Marine Unit

- Cheshire
- Greater Manchester
- Merseyside
- Lancashire
- Cumbria
- North Wales



Seven Force Strategic Alliance

- Bedfordshire
- Hertfordshire
- Kent
- Cambridgeshire
- Norfolk
- Suffolk
- Essex



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