

Flight of the Flamingos (updated for 2009)

IDeA Partnerships and Places Library

Synopsis:

<p>Abstract</p>	<p>The 'Flight of the Flamingos' is a training and development programme in Wolverhampton intended to help middle managers bring about change and strengthen partnership working, leading to improved delivery. It was piloted by the Health and Well-Being Partnership of the Local Strategic Partnership(LSP) in 2006/07, and has since been rolled out by all theme partnerships. It has generated benefits in each instance, and led to 'new generation' delivery planning where the LSP focuses on four cross-cutting delivery plans. This case study updates an earlier study on 'Flight of the Flamingos' in the Partnerships and Places Library.</p>
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<p>Authorities involved</p>	<p>Wolverhampton</p>
<p>Themes</p>	<p>Crime</p> <p>Delivery planning</p> <p>Partnership working</p> <p>Vulnerable adults</p> <p>Worklessness</p>
<p>Performance indicators</p>	<p>1 % of people who believe people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area</p> <p>5 Overall/general satisfaction with local area</p> <p>15 Serious violent crime rate</p> <p>16 Serious acquisitive crime rate</p> <p>21 Dealing with local concerns about anti-social behaviour and crime by the local council and police</p> <p>32 Repeat incidents of domestic violence</p> <p>45 Young offenders engagement in suitable education, employment or training</p> <p>57 Children and young people's participation in high-quality PE and sport</p> <p>75 Achievement of 5 or more A*-C grades at GCSE or equivalent including English and Maths (Threshold)</p> <p>110 Young people's participation in positive activities</p> <p>112 Under 18 conception rate</p>

	<p>115 Substance misuse by young people</p> <p>120 All-age all cause mortality rate</p> <p>142 Number of vulnerable people who are supported to maintain independent living</p> <p>151 Overall employment rate</p> <p>153 Working age people claiming out of work benefits in the worst performing neighbourhoods</p> <p>156 Number of households living in Temporary Accommodation</p> <p>171 VAT registration rate</p> <p>187 Tackling fuel poverty - people receiving income based benefits living in homes with a low energy efficiency rating</p> <p>195 Improved street and environmental cleanliness (levels of graffiti, litter, detritus and fly posting)</p>
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The issue

Middle managers and partnership delivery

Key individuals within the Wolverhampton Partnership recognised that there was a need to adopt a 'whole systems' approach to improving collaborative working, and driving improved performance. They recognised that middle managers, while playing a pivotal role within organisations, can, in terms of their work practice, present obstacles to change. Many are under great pressure to meet organisational targets – which are not necessarily partnership targets.

Wolverhampton Partnership have maintained a commitment to developing the skills and knowledge of all involved in delivering its priorities, in accord with the principles set out in the national Neighbourhood Renewal Skills and Knowledge programme in 2002. The programme argued that addressing skill gaps in partnership working was an important strategic issue and exhorted LSPs to develop Skills and Knowledge Plans to tackle this. By 2006, Wolverhampton had tackled the needs of front-line staff, residents and partnership representatives, but not the organisational tiers in between.

What Wolverhampton did

The 'Flight of the Flamingos' was piloted by the LSP's Health and Well-Being Partnership between October 2006 and January 2007, focusing on services for older people, and has since been rolled out by all theme partnerships.

The programme sought to develop participants' understanding of the service-delivery system and their ability to influence within it, with the stipulation that it would lead to actions in pursuit of LAA targets and service improvements, especially in making 'seamless services' a reality. Knowledge of systems thinking was built into programme design. For example, in:

- making imaginative use of group facilitation techniques to help address some of the common obstacles to effective partnership working, in particular the use of the 'World Café'
- ensuring commitment from senior members of the LSP and theme partnerships in promoting and engaging with the programme, as 'champions' and mentors for individual participants, and taking part in open exchange sessions

The programme's name was inspired by pioneering partnership work on complex problems in South Africa, described in Adam Kahane's 2004 book 'Solving Tough Problems'. The phrase comes from one of a number of scenarios posed for the transition of South Africa in 1991, shortly after the release of Nelson Mandela: "...then there was one bright vision of a future to work towards: Flight of the Flamingos, in which the transition is successful because all the key building blocks are put in place, with everyone in the society rising slowly together". This image was contrasted with other images representing scenarios to be avoided: the 'Ostrich', where the white government sticks its head in the sand; 'Lame Duck', a prolonged transition which satisfies no one; and 'Icarus', where a black government embarks on an unsustainable spending programme and crashes the economy.

The 'Flight of the Flamingos' programme was developed by managers in the council, LSP and Learning Partnership, in conjunction with the consultants who facilitated the programme. The pilot in Health and Well-being was followed by programmes with the Economic Development and Housing Partnerships and subsequently the remaining six theme partnerships during 2008. An exercise was also run for theme partnership co-ordinators, which supported thinking through the approach that the LSP should adopt to implementing the new Local Area Agreement (LAA).

The 'Flamingos' model

The Flamingos pilot developed the model that was subsequently run in similar forms with the other theme partnerships. The pilot set out to recruit 12 managers with different roles and from different parts of the partnership who would have shared interests in improving the system. Theme partnership members and senior managers were asked to each nominate two middle managers who had been involved, either in commissioning and delivering services, or working in partnerships concerned with older people.

The programme gave participants the opportunity to step back from their day-to-day work, be reflective, experiment with ideas, and challenge their thinking about their jobs and how best to meet the complex demands placed upon them in a partnership setting.

Those nominating potential participants were expected to provide support by 'sponsoring' these managers. The role of a sponsor varied, but could involve:

- ensuring that 'Flight of the Flamingos' formed part of a broader development programme

- supporting the individual in putting their learning into practice
- attending a 'Flamingos' session, in order to listen and respond.

During the course of six half-day group sessions over six weeks, the programme sought to develop skills and understanding in:

- negotiating with and between partners
- managing across boundaries
- creative thinking and risk-taking
- providing leadership and managing change
- developing a shared vision and joint-planning
- the wider system of policy and service delivery, and how to interpret this for others.

The budget for the pilot programme was £17,000, allocated from the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund. Subsequent programmes have cost a similar amount, but with expenditure tailored to the particular partnership and chosen focus.

Techniques

The facilitators used innovative ways to address typical issues arising from partnerships, which included:

- 'World Café', a structured process intended to encourage dialogue and bring out everyone's knowledge and experience of confronting difficult challenges. Conversations link and build on each other as people move between groups in the same room. These sessions were run with a wider range of stakeholders than just the participants, to bring wider perspectives on the systems in which people operate.
- 'Appreciative inquiry', which aims to help participants picture a shared future and develop ways to bring it about. Participants concentrate on opportunities and on what works, rather than on obstacles or difficulties.
- 'Scenario planning', considering alternative views of the future and their implications.
- 'Seeing systems', helping participants to see inter-related parts that make up organisational systems and the distinctive pressures and perspectives of each part. The approach uses evocative categories to increase understand of different perspectives, such as 'burdened tops', 'torn middles', 'oppressed or vulnerable bottoms' and 'done-to customers'.

The impact of the pilot programme

The pilot programme was independently evaluated, and found to be well-conceived, organised and facilitated, with a high level of participant satisfaction. Furthermore, it had largely achieved its objectives, and demonstrated the value of focusing on the middle-management tier.

Personal outcomes

Participants felt that the programme had enhanced their understanding of the roles, motivations and constraints of partners, and helped develop their capacity to collaborate. Typical feedback included comments such as:

"It was surprising how little we knew about each other and it was useful to discover ways of getting people to talk more freely. There was real value in

getting people away from their silos and it reduced the likelihood that we'd have adversarial conversations.”

“It was helpful to have time to reflect on systems and organisations, on what enables and what disables ... It was also an opportunity to explore big questions like integrated budgets.”

Exercises such as scenario planning and ‘seeing systems’ encouraged participants to think creatively about how to design and deliver services better in future. There was also greater recognition of the need to go further in ensuring services are designed for users, not providers.

Participants were reassured about their own strengths, skills and approach. They reported gains in their personal confidence, their knowledge of partnership skills and their understanding of their learning and development needs. They valued time out for reflection away from day-to-day pressures, and to reconnect with their inner motivation to provide a better service.

Organisational outcomes

After the completion of the pilot programme, most participants could point to actions to improve services, which they had taken as a result of their experience. Importantly, the programme led to participants pursuing joint projects and bids, involving new configurations of partner involvement, such as in developing new primary care and community health facilities. There was also evidence of participants taking advantage of new techniques. For example, in using scenarios in service planning.

During the programme, participants developed a statement of ‘joint commitments’. This specified shared undertakings to create “a service wheel with our customers at the centre, where we make the system fit the person, not the other way round”. This has since influenced their practice.

Better dialogue was developed between organisations and levels within the partnership. The Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) gained a higher profile – as did the Council’s library service, recognising how it already plays an important role in services for older people, and ways in which it could do more.

Participants were confident that their experience of the programme would lead to further improvements in services and outcomes for older people. Most thought that the gains made would not have been achieved without the programme, or, at least, would have taken longer to realise.

Impact of subsequent programmes

Each programme was shaped to ensure that there was a focus on practical steps that participants could take in their jobs to implement their learning. In the case of the social-care pilot, a core group presented a ‘Flamingos’ offer to the Health and Wellbeing partnership to take forward actions to develop seamless services for older people.

In the subsequent theme of Reducing Worklessness, the programme drew in different partners and gave momentum to joint action planning and commitment to local implementation of the ‘City Strategy’ on employment and skills in the city region. There was

also greater recognition of the need to make more of the critical inter-relationships between enterprise and education and skills.

The 'Flamingos' programme on Housing took advantage of a recently completed study of affordable housing needs, and identified a range of productive ways forward, including a policy change to revoke council-tax relief on vacant property, encouraging landlords to ensure properties are occupied – and thereby increasing revenue for the council.

On Children and Young People, an early outcome was a commitment to organise a major conference on child poverty with the University of Wolverhampton, which proved successful in raising awareness and galvanising action by a wide range of stakeholders – particularly amongst those not involved with the Children and Young People's Partnership. A child poverty initiative has since been adopted by the LSP.

On Environment, the main focus for follow-up action, led by Wolverhampton Homes (not previously part of the theme partnership), has been to tackle 'orphan sites': unkempt, uncared for spaces where ownership and responsibilities were in doubt. Partners are now tackling these in a much more systematic way and seeing these sites as opportunities not problems. Local feedback suggests an increase in resident satisfaction with their area as a place to live.

The 'Flamingo' groups on Worklessness, Child Poverty and Environment, have since become theme partnership sub-groups (the latter specifically on Derelict Land). As with Health and Well-being, the 'Flamingo' programmes also spawned new collaborations amongst individual participants.

Influence in LAA delivery planning

In most cases, the 'Flamingo' programmes have led to some specific practical actions and helped strengthen the commitment of participants to partnership working. Though it was not part of the original design, the experience of 'Flamingos' proved a strong influence over the Partnership's approach to delivery planning in the new LAA agreed in 2008. 'Flamingos' helped shape realisation that the challenges facing the City could only be resolved by concerted and collective action by all partners, taking a cross-cutting approach to get to the roots of local challenges. Consequently, while the theme partnerships maintain responsibility for performance management and the LAA targets, they agreed that it would make more sense to concentrate their delivery planning on just four critical issues:

- Employment, Skills and Enterprise
- Building Young People's Capacity
- Neighbourhoods That Work
- Supporting Inclusion.

Each Delivery Plan has been developed by groups of senior representatives, typically involving broad participation. The plans adhere to principles agreed by the council's cabinet in:

- dealing with the causes rather than the consequences
- focusing on prevention rather than cure
- joining-up actions to release efficiencies
- adopting a commissioning approach.

That each delivery plan addresses the LAA target for a 'thriving third sector', demonstrates the increased recognition of the role of the voluntary and community sectors.

All four plans seek to lessen the impact of the economic downturn on the City's residents and businesses, by including actions that will tackle the effects of the downturn.. Again, 'Flamingos' has provided a platform for participants to better understand these impacts and how partners can best respond to them.

Having only four plans gives more concentrated focus, and reduces the number of plans to monitor and review. This also addresses concerns that LAA delivery planning runs the risk of duplicating work on individual service plans.

'Flamingos' has a thumbprint on the content and approach of individual plans:

The Building Young People's Capacity delivery plan will result in a comprehensive reconfiguration of services for young people, facilitated by targeted expenditure of over £7million. Under the auspices of the Children's Partnership, the plan has been developed by a working group involving Children's Services, the PCT, Connexions, Youth Service, YOT, the voluntary sector and neighbourhood managers, Teenage Pregnancy Unit, and the Substance Misuse Commissioning Officer. The plan seeks to address the underlying causes of a range of negative outcomes that young people may experience (eg, poor mental health, drug misuse, conception, not being in education, employment or training, anti-social behaviour and criminal activity), implementing the national 'Youth Matters – Next Steps' policy.

The Neighbourhoods That Work delivery plan incorporates a sharper focus on narrowing the gap between the worst performing neighbourhoods and the rest of the city, particularly in terms of employment and skills levels in the city. The plan will deliver increased adult skills-levels and improved employment in the priority neighbourhoods, as defined by the Employment, Skills and Enterprise Delivery Plan. The other priority is to increase resident satisfaction by giving the community a stronger voice in decision making about services, especially around the 'safer/cleaner/greener' and youth-activity agendas

The Supporting Inclusion delivery plan seeks to support people who are vulnerable and at risk, to improve prevention and promote inclusion, concentrating on four areas:

- a 'one city' approach to information and advice, with coordinated information and advice services providing consistent information in various formats and at different venues across the city, and the development of an 'alert' system in relation to people at risk or vulnerable
- financial inclusion – again through a co-ordinated approach
- outreach: improved community-based support to individuals and families most at risk and in vulnerable circumstances
- risk prevention developing more effective and efficient services through integrated commissioning and new approaches to working with such individuals and families.

The delivery plan was drawn up by a working group from the council (Supporting People, Library Service, Tenancy Sustainability), the PCT, Director of Public Health, Wolverhampton Homes, Citizen's Advice Bureau, Voluntary Sector Council, Housing Partnership, West Midlands Police, and Neighbourhood Management. In addition, a consultation event involving the voluntary and public sectors and the Health and Well-Being Partnership, have met to discuss it. The approach drew strongly on the 'Flamingos' experience.

The Employment, Skills and Enterprise delivery plan was developed by a joint-working group. This included, in addition to the council, Jobcentre Plus and the LSC, representatives of Wolverhampton College, the Learning Partnership, the Economic Partnership, Neighbourhood Management, and ABCD (the New Deal for Communities partnership).

A key principle underlying the development of this plan was to identify ways to complement the raft of national and regional policy developments, such as welfare-to-work reforms and integrated employment and skills provision, while addressing local challenges relating to access and participation and low aspirations, skills and levels of business development.

For the future

Now that all theme partnerships have had the opportunity to run a 'Flamingos' programme, the approach is likely to be adopted in future where there are pressing challenges within the partnership. In these circumstances, the LSP may determine the focus, rather than leave it to an individual theme partnership. These may be more intensive and carried out over a shorter period.

Lessons from 'Flight of the Flamingos' programmes

Factors lying behind the success of the programmes have included:

- focus on a common vision and a real-world agenda with a commitment to report to the theme partnership at the end of each programme
- the wider engagement of partnership stakeholders (users, managers, colleagues) in looking at the 'whole system' and creating conditions for better dialogue
- the level of interest shown by senior LSP representatives – participants were impressed and motivated by this, and felt that their initiative would be welcomed
- sound and imaginative programme design, with learning objectives for each session, practical exercises and creative use of techniques appropriate for dealing with typical partnership challenges
- active involvement of participants in the programme – through tasks in each session and between sessions, and through participants acting as hosts or facilitators at the 'World Café'.

Designing the training

Important considerations when designing the training were:

- to ensure that the programme had a manageable focus.
- to frame learning objectives for the whole programme and clear learning outcomes for each session
- to build in plenty of opportunities to consult and take feedback from participants so that they could shape the programme
- to identify a 'product' for participants to develop, such as a set of joint commitments
- to use innovative and creative practical techniques to help participants address typical issues in partnership working, and help participants develop their understanding of how to use these techniques in their work
- to make sure that expectations were explained clearly to all those taking part, and expect attendance by all at a pre-programme session, using this to shape the programme content
- to be open to the agenda that the participants are likely to develop

- to evaluate the programme so that lessons would inform any future programmes or help to translate the approach to other areas of partnership working.

Connecting systems

Some final suggestions to consider are:

- Ensure that the programme has a ‘real world’ agenda to work on, and make links to the LAA, the community plan and other strategies.
- Arrange for the sponsoring partnership, or other body, to receive the output and ensure that it gets proper consideration.
- Ask senior managers to act as sponsors, and ensure that they accept responsibilities to support their participants as mentors, and in giving backing to subsequent actions to overcome partnership obstacles and improve delivery.
- Engage a wide group of stakeholders –users, managers, colleagues – in the programme by, for example, inviting them to a ‘world café’, or by involving senior representatives from partner organisations, and inviting them to join in discussions.

Data and evidence

Each delivery plan groups relevant LAA targets, and identifies whether the plan makes a direct or indirect contribution to their achievement.

Building Young People’s Capacity

National Indicator (NI)	Indicator title	Direct (D) / Indirect (I)
112	Conceptions to 15-17 year olds, per 1,000 females in population	D
115	% young people reporting frequent misuse of drugs or alcohol	D
117	% 16-18 year olds not in education, employment or training (NEET)	D
75	% achieving 5+ A*-C GCSEs inc English and Maths	D
110	Young people’s participation in positive activities	D
156	Obesity amongst primary school age children at Year 6	I
57	% of 5-16 year olds who spend a minimum of 2 hours a week in high quality PE and sport	D
45	Young offenders engagement in ETE	D
21	Anti-social behaviour	I
15	Serious violent crime	I

Neighbourhoods That Work

National Indicator (NI)	Indicator title	Direct (D) / Indirect (I)
1	People from different backgrounds get on well together	D

5	Satisfaction with local area	D
15	Serious violent crime rate	I
16	Serious acquisitive crime rate	D
21	Perception of dealing with local concerns about anti-social behaviour and crime by the police and local council	D
110	Young peoples participation in positive activities	D
115	Substance misuse by young people	I
151	Employment rate	D
153	Working age people on out of work benefits in worst performing neighbourhoods	D
195	Improved street and environmental cleanliness	I

Supporting Inclusion

National Indicator (NI)	Indicator title	Direct (D) / Indirect (I)
142	Vulnerable people who are supported to maintain independent living	D
15 and 16	Violent and acquisitive crime	I
32	Domestic violence	I
115	Substance misuse	I
116	Child poverty	I
120	All age, all cause mortality	I
115	Employment rate	I
153	Working age people on out of work benefits in the worst performing neighbourhoods	I
187	Fuel poverty	I

Employment, Skills and Enterprise

National Indicator (NI)	Indicator title	Direct (D) / Indirect (I)
151	Employment rate	D
153	Working age people on out of work benefits in the worst performing neighbourhoods	D
171	VAT registration rate	D
116	Child poverty	D
163-165	Levels 2, 3 and 4 qualifications	D
117	16-18 year olds who are NEET	D

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