



RETHINKING SHARED SERVICES: TOWARDS SHARED OUTCOMES?



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Shared services are increasingly advocated as a means to achieve efficiency savings in public administration and improve user experiences. Understood as a type of partnership, involving new structures and processes of governance, it is argued that designing and implementing shared services involves attending to both practical/operational aspects and cultural/institutional dimensions. Taking Scotland as a case study, this article critically reflects on the evolving nature of shared services in the public sphere. With reference to the PESTLE (political, economic, social, technological, legal, environmental) methodology, the discussion considers how shared services, and community planning in particular, aim to reorient and reconfigure public service design and delivery through attention to the need to build social capital. Specifically, the paper focuses on the shift to a new public governance through shared outcomes, as articulated in Scotland's National Performance Framework, which serves to steer contemporary public services.

Public administration and public sector management matter because governments use the public sector to deliver goods and services to the public, either directly, as in the case of policing, defence, education and welfare payments, or indirectly, as in the case of family doctor services and the provision of roads and refuse collection. If the public sector fails then governments fail to deliver their manifesto pledges. If the public sector is corrupt or inefficient, or simply incompetent, then society

at large suffers and those who suffer most are the most vulnerable, the citizens who are the least able to protect themselves and depend on the government, via the public sector, to protect and nurture them (Massey & Pyper, 2005: 17-18).

Introduction

Answers to fundamental questions about managing the welfare and collective social and physical environment of a particular area continue to change over time and space. Certain questions remain the same. What type of public services should be provided, to whom, how, and with what resources? Related questions concern who should deliver these services and to whom delivery agents should be accountable. Underpinning these practical – and ethical – questions are then a number of core principles relating to equity, efficiency, effectiveness – and, more recently, excellence. Changing demands, ever-declining public resources and pressures to reduce government spending, however, have converged to demand radical public sector reform (Creamer & Driscoll, 2013). The Scottish Parliament (2013), for example, noted that, despite some progress in public sector reform, taken together with external drivers, such as new legislation, policy initiatives, and regulatory requirements, diminishing resources necessitated extending the pace and reach of reform. Given that “change in public services is inevitable and necessary” (Doherty, 2010: 16), there is a growing interest in devising alternative approaches to public service provision at the local level.

The interest in rethinking and reinventing public services to meet contemporary challenges is an international one. An OECD (2008) report on Ireland, for example, identified a tendency for public sector reform and modernisation to be inward-focused and primarily concerned with internal processes and structures. It made the case for improving policy coherence and coordination by reducing service segmentation and fragmentation, improving cross-sectoral dialogue and networks, developing scalar inter-dependencies, and



working towards an integrated and systemic approach (OECD, 2008). Such an extensive agenda is not an instrumental one, rather it involves a mind-set change towards delivering “broader citizen-centred societal outcomes” and devising performance measures that focus on “outcomes rather than inputs and processes” (OECD, 2008: 12). Indeed a central argument made by the OECD (2008) was that citizens better relate to results and service outcomes. But what does an outcomes-focus mean in practice? How can such a focus be brought about?

One feature of public sector reform is the increasing usage of partnerships, new delivery forms and structures, and alternative joint-working arrangements, including the use of state and non-state actors (Johnston, 2015). Shared service organisations feature as part of this mixed mode, multi-actor form of public service delivery (Grant *et al.*, 2007). Involving new structures and relations, it is argued that such new forms of working involve network governance and require alternative “control” mechanisms, since established forms of hierarchical or market governance do not fit the rather more diverse operating arrangements (Kenis & Provan, 2006). Moreover, as explored in more detail by Grant *et al.* (2007), implicit in these different models of collaborative or shared service are various types of multi-tiered governance involving different executive, operational and tactical roles and responsibilities. Moreover, the reasons for initiating shared services vary. Research by Paagman *et al.* (2015), for example, points to a fundamental concern with improving service delivery, consistency and quality, but also highlights access to external skills and resources and internal sharing of capabilities as important motivating influences. These findings demonstrate that the use of shared services can extend beyond reasons of cost and efficiency savings and seeking economies of scale. Given that interests and motivations will likely differ among the constituent parts, however, it follows that ‘governing’ such networks may demand rethinking oversight, management or steering approaches.

Grounding this think piece in light of international efforts to promote shared services in the public sector and comparative research on community planning, the aim

of this paper is to reflect on more than a decade of concerted effort to rework the delivery of public services in Scotland. It is contended that public services remain in a state of constant transition in an effort to reach some sense of *transformed public state*. It will be suggested that, in Scotland, there has been a fundamental conceptual shift from presenting shared services as an operational objective to reorient effort and expenditure, in relation to the precepts of best value, to one advocating working towards shared outcomes as part of on-going attempts to radically change (transform?) the culture of what is understood as public service governance. In other words, this paper argues that shared services may be seen as emblematic of an intended re-balancing of state-market-civil relations to reshape what is understood as collective action. The discussion distinguishes between efforts to generate efficiency savings (an organisational perspective) and aspects of shared service provision which improve the individual citizen’s (user’s) - and wider community - experience of service interventions. Taken together, this dual perspective is intended to enrich our understanding of the broader shared services agenda, the different forms service sharing may take, and the ways in which aligning shared outcomes may be advanced.

The paper outlines the background to the reform of public service delivery models and traces the development of shared services in Scotland. As a mixed-actor response to service provision, community planning requires multi-sectoral, inter-institutional, and multi-scalar working (Pemberton *et al.*, 2015). Community planning may thus be seen as representing a fundamental shift away from traditional, sectoral and specialised public service provision by the state, to a more collaborative model. Predicated on devising a partnership approach, and underpinned by a statutory duty to cooperate, it is suggested here that community planning provides a sophisticated litmus-test for exploring the evolution of shared services. In examining how central government is seeking to instil a collaborative ethos in public sector reform, the paper presents the National Performance Framework, *Scotland Performs* (Scottish Government, 2016), which serves as an overarching strategic management device for monitoring performance and

guiding service outcomes in Scotland. The discussion focuses on examining this outcomes-focused approach. The paper concludes with some general reflections on the implications for shared working.

Rethinking Public Services

In terms of rethinking public services, it is generally accepted that the nature and remit of the Welfare State in the UK began to be severely questioned during the late 1970s. Terry (2004), for instance, characterised the 1980s as one of “massive upheaval”, not only in terms of the institutional arrangements and structures for delivering public services, but the privatisation of state utilities, creation of new executive agencies, contracting out of local government services, and an emphasis on improving financial management and accountability – all inspired by theories of (the then emerging) New Public Management.

The subsequent deployment of inspectorates and audit bodies during the 1990s was subsequently driven, it is held, by a desire by central government to control and maintain services standards, although this performance regime itself was deemed to be a somewhat blunt approach, introducing unhelpful tensions between inspector and inspected (Terry, 2004). The resulting marketisation of service provision created diversity in service form and function and contrived to lead, in some instances, to service fragmentation and duplication, whilst the nature of the auditing and business management metrics imposed also proved burdensome. Unintended consequences prompted further attempts at modernisation and reform and new models of service delivery. Such insights hint at potential challenges for governance ‘control’ regimes.

The UK Government’s White Paper, *Modernising Government* (Cabinet Office, 1999), for example, asserted the case for more joined-up, accountable and responsive public services. Shared services are part of this new mix; indeed, it has been contended that “a more collaborative shared services approach constitutes the ‘new age’ of public sector management” (Paagman *et al.*, 2015: 110). In a critical literature review of a range of different models for delivering public services

in the 21st century dedicated to the museums sector in Scotland, Doherty (2010), for example, highlighted the importance of clearly understanding the nature of the very different legal, institutional and inter-organisational aspects involved in adopting new public service delivery models. Furthermore, Doherty (2010) differentiated between individual and collaborative models, advocating considerable care when selecting the most appropriate type of service provision model.

As Table 1 illustrates, shared services are but one option in an expanding set of public service delivery models, and, as a sub-set of service models, shared services themselves involve a number of alternatives. Shared services may thus be understood as a spectrum of service options spanning both “back-office” internal functions – such as, payroll, accounting and procurement – and externally delivered, or “front-line”, public services but which potentially involve “common operational processes and systems” (Scottish Executive, 2006a: 2).

For the purposes of this discussion, community planning is located within this wider family of shared services. Effectively multi-sectoral partnerships with common responsibilities for defined local areas, in practice, community planning partnerships are encouraged to share the use and maintenance of local assets, such as public buildings, facilities and vehicles, and to find other ways of reducing duplication and rationalising service provision. In contrast to IT-based back-office functions, such citizen-centred activities may be considered to represent a sophisticated form of service sharing.

It is important to be aware that there are a number of counter-arguments in relation to the adoption of shared services based, in part, on a fundamental concern that a 1980s’ business solution might not easily transfer to the public sector (Kearney, 2005). Attention has been drawn to the potentially significant up-front costs involved and important qualification that “shared services will not provide all the answers to efficiencies and should not be seen as an end in themselves” (SOLACE Scotland, 2011: 23). Concerns include the potential adverse human resource implications, including the devaluing

Table 1: Potential Public Service Delivery Models

Level 1 Service Provider	Level 2 Collaboration Partner Model
Local authority	Shared services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Co-location of services ● Joint provision of services ● Provision of specialist services ● Provision of emergency / out of hours cover ● Cross public sector provision ● Process simplification or standardisation ● Training ● Community planning
Trust	
Social enterprise	
Mutual organisation	
Community Interest Company	Consortium
Industrial and provident society	Public Social Partnerships
Community limited by guarantee	Service-based models <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Prime contractor ● Outsourcing ● Joint venture ● Place-based commissioning ● User-led commissioning ● Framework agreements ● Indefinite delivery /indefinite quantity
Scottish charity	
	Investment-based models <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Private Finance Initiative ● Concession ● Integrator ● Alliancing

(Source: Derived from Doherty (2010))

of professional skills and expertise and the loss of personalised service (Unison Scotland, 2001); and change management issues, such as overcoming internal organisational resistance (McCracken & McIvor, 2013). Establishing a consensus around shared benefits is thus a prerequisite for multi-actor active engagement.

In advancing the concept of *New Public Governance* to better capture the multi-actor, multi-directional context of public services, Osborne (2006) differentiates between the *plural state*, comprising multiple inter-dependent actors, and the *pluralist state*, involving multiple processes and influences. Sensitive to the asymmetric nature of new organisational forms, Osborne (2006)

contends that the new conditions of service delivery have shifted emphasis from output-oriented and intra-organisational effectiveness associated with New Public Management to a concern with inter-organisational and relational dimensions, service effectiveness and outcomes. The reorientation from results to relationships, outputs to outcomes, and intra- to inter-organisational working is profound, raising questions about how such new working arrangements can be achieved in practice. It is maintained, for instance, that joint working involves overcoming silo-thinking so as to better work across various organisational, institutional, professional and geographical boundaries (Sullivan & Skelcher, 2002). Arguments to encourage or promote partnership working



have emphasised the need for collaborative networks to be based on trust and cooperation (Bevir & O'Brien, 2001). How can such a shared state be secured in practice?

Collaborative public service provision is predicated on the political will and attendant institutional and organisational capacity to co-design, co-produce and co-deliver services. Following Favoreu *et al.* (2015), *operational* dimensions of collaborative working may be characterised as falling under the rational approach to strategic policy design and implementation, offering, in practice, limited insights into the political, highly complex and potentially conflictual contexts of pluralistic public service delivery environments where there is unlikely to be strategic homogeneity of aims, priorities, practices and values. Indeed, it is recognised that collaborative approaches to service design, delivery and management require a relatively more sensitised understanding of network governance (Kenis & Provan, 2006). Releasing creativity and experimentation requires a different environment. Favoreu *et al.* (2015: 6) summarise a detailed literature review as follows:

"Coordination within these multi-stakeholder arrangements is based mainly on flexible social and relational mechanisms such as trust, shared values, implicit standards, collaboration and consultation, thus distancing itself from rational bureaucratic mechanism based on control, hierarchy and chains of command. Inter-organisational flows of exchange are considered to encourage innovation through pooling of different visions, experiences and perspectives, leading to learning phenomena and, ultimately, to the development of social capital."

This analysis would suggest that an important question is the extent to which the necessary social capital for network governance evolves organically or whether new forms of influence are required. If the latter, what does this mean for traditional forms of hierarchical government control?

Since the turn of the millennium, and against the backcloth of emerging pluralistic service models, political

devolution in the UK has provided the opportunity for greater experimentation in public service delivery at the local level. This is a complex position. The reform agenda may be understood as involving both a technocratic dimension, primarily emphasising improvement in the efficiency and effectiveness of public services, and a democratic dimension, highlighting issues of equity and engagement and, in particular, addressing growing societal inequalities and the complex needs of the most vulnerable. In terms of putting shared services into practice, two domains merit particular attention: practical/operational aspects; and cultural/institutional aspects. The next section traces experience of shared services in Scotland, considering the different dimensions involved in operationalising shared services through applying the PESTLE framework. Used in change management contexts, for example, this methodology uses the acronym PESTLE to designate the Political, Economic, Social, Technical, Legal and Environmental aspects of organisational management. PESTLE serves to structure the discussion.

Shared Services in Scotland

Traditionally, individual local authorities in Scotland have had primary responsibility for the delivery of a wide range of public services, including: cultural services, economic development, education, fire and police services, housing, leisure and libraries, planning and the environment, regulatory and protective services, roads and transportation, regeneration, social work, and waste management. Conventionally, these public services have been delivered by individual departments within local council areas. The shared services idea, however, provides a new context for the design, management and delivery of such public services and invites consideration of the sharing of services both within (intra-) and between (inter-) local authorities. Efforts to reform the public sector in Scotland provide useful insights into the emergent strategic management of central-local and cross-scalar relations through the advocacy of a shared public service practice and culture. Notably, the guidance supporting the introduction of community planning, for example, highlighted the comprehensive nature of collaborative working:



A local authority which fully embraces the concept of Community Planning will demonstrate joint working in its political management structure; corporate planning and service planning; consultation with stakeholders; communications with staff and others; codes of governance; allocation of resources; training and development and its review machinery and so on (Scottish Government, 2004: 11).

This combined ambition is intended to be open-ended, implying an ever-evolving and holistic embracing of joint-working in all aspects in the management of change.

As the concept of shared services has matured, models of shared service provision have diversified and extended to involve private and third sector partners (Scottish Parliament, 2013). Implementing shared services raises two sets of related questions. As set out in earlier government guidance (Scottish Government, 2007), there are practical issues of implementation to consider. There is a need to make a clear business case setting out a strategy to take account of legal, financial, technological and resource implications. Such strategies must be well communicated internally and externally. The required personnel with the right skills need to be in place, including those with the necessary leadership qualities. A second set of organisational issues relates to mobilising a multi-sectoral approach. Shared services potentially challenge professional domains and service fiefdoms since the core logic is one of cross-departmental, if not inter-organisational, working. Creating a culture for the type of shared working required by shared services/community planning demands more than an instrumental/technical approach; a change management strategy is also a prerequisite.

Political

In Scotland, political support for shared services was prompted by a drive to secure efficiency savings through joining up public services and minimising duplication (Scottish Executive, 2004; 2006a). The *Shared Services Guidance Framework* (Scottish Government, 2007) published by a minority Scottish National Party, provided background information and

resources on shared services, setting out the policy aim as follows:

“To support Shared Services opportunities that will provide Scotland wide solutions for smaller simpler Government, which improve the service to the customers” (Scottish Government, 2007: 5).

From an operational perspective, putting a shared model of service delivery into practice and sustaining the momentum then required certain strategic and managerial aspects, alongside an understanding of whether service improvements have been made in practice. The Scottish Government’s overarching Purpose provides the guiding strategic management framework for public sector activity in Scotland. Succinctly stated, the Scottish Government’s Purpose is:

“To focus government and public services on creating a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth.” (Scottish Government, 2016).

Introduced in 2007 as part of the Spending Review, and subsequently refreshed in 2011 and 2016, the National Performance Framework (Scottish Government, 2016) elaborates the strategic vision by means of five strategic objectives, an associated set of national outcomes, and an accompanying dashboard of indicators intended to monitor progress towards the various objectives.

Scotland’s outcomes-based approach has been enshrined in legislation through the *Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015* and may be seen, following Kenis and Provan (2006), as an attempt to define public goods and exert control over diverse networks. Articulation of an outcomes-focus is intended to mobilise shared effort around results achieved for service users, rather than sectoral/organisational inputs and outputs. The objective is to improve individuals’ quality of life through making sustainable improvements to public services. Critically, the Government’s aim is to instil a partnership approach and to align the public

sector around the Government's Purpose and National Outcomes. Based on the 2007 version of national guidance, Table 2 sets out how it was anticipated that

shared services could contribute to the Government's high level national objectives.

Table 2: Role of Shared Services in meeting the Scottish Government's Strategic Objectives

Strategic Objective	Role of Shared Services
Wealthier and Fairer	Delivery of high quality, multi-channel services, as cost effectively as possible to ensure that citizens and businesses contribute less of their wealth to support the State.
Healthier	Development of efficient, responsive high quality health and community care services delivered on a cross-agency basis to return citizens to a state of health and well-being as quickly and simply as possible, especially in disadvantaged communities.
Safer and Stronger	Implementation of efficiency gains that, in turn, allow public sector organisations to reinvest in local communities and frontline services to offer improved quality of life.
Smarter	Expansion of choice to access multi-channel early development, education and lifelong learning opportunities.
Greener	Reduction in the need to make contact with a range of dispersed agencies; development of common business processes to support multi-channel access, virtual delivery mechanisms and choice of access; and provision of options for flexible and remote working, potentially reducing individuals' carbon footprint.

(Source: Derived from Scottish Government, 2007: 4)

The prevailing political ideology, taken together with research, pilot initiatives, case studies and guidance, has provided a particular politically-driven learning context for the introduction and continuous improvement of the public sector, including shared service arrangements. Drawing together a wide evidence base, the final report of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee (Scottish Parliament, 2013) nevertheless noted the relatively slow progress in shared services and identified a number of issues and lessons learned with respect to shared services. Learning points included the need for good baseline information, being clear on what service might usefully be shared, accepting that one size solutions do not fit all, investigating economies of

skills and, interestingly, "avoiding treating partnership and shared services as necessarily a good thing" (Scottish Parliament, 2013: 15).

Economic

Securing efficiency gains remain a critical fillip driving shared services in Scotland. Initially, emphasis was placed on the potential benefits of deriving economies of scale and a commitment to tackle the perceived "waste, bureaucracy and duplication in Scotland's public sector" (Scottish Executive, 2006a: iii). Explicitly articulated as a transformational ambition (Scottish Executive, 2006b), however, the shared served services agenda comprises a number of objectives, including continuously improving



efficiency, productivity and quality, encouraging innovation, increasing accountability and ensuring services are organised around users' and citizens' needs, rather than the convenience of service providers.

The intention of providing public services that are user-centred is predicated on an ethos of a set of services that are joined-up. The personal user experience is thus intended to be one of minimal separation between services, better reflecting, perhaps, the composite or wicked (Rittel & Webber, 1973) nature of the inter-related and inherently complex problems experienced by some individuals and communities. Economic gains should not therefore be understood solely in terms of organisational financial savings based on reconfiguring existing services, but rather in terms of potential value added of savings (in terms of human and financial costs) to be gained through integrated and anticipatory services driven by a preventative service focus.

Social

The ambition of shared services, and particularly the mainstreaming of community planning, may be seen as a way to instil collective/collaborative working as integral to public service planning, delivery and review across providers. This agenda is articulated through a commitment to address social issues and the widespread inequalities of outcomes experienced by communities across Scotland. A refocusing of effort onto preventative measures, greater community engagement and involvement by local people in decision-making, for example, were highlighted by the Christie Commission (2011) as necessary to improve community planning. Progressive advocacy of community empowerment in Scotland may be seen as further evidence of the Scottish Government's commitment to active community engagement in public services, whilst the preparation of Local Outcome Improvement Plans (formerly Single Outcome Agreements) is designed explicitly to align the work of the local authority led community planning partnerships with national priorities.

In terms of what might be understood as the acculturation of mixed mode partnerships and generation of social capital (Favoreu *et al.*, 2015), there are clearly efforts to reinforce key messages and build capacity.

By way of example, it is hard not to miss the reiteration of the term "shared" in Audit Scotland's (2014) report, *Community Planning: Turning Ambition into Action*, for example. Continuous improvement, it is contended, involves addressing the increasing pressures and demands on public services by recognising "shared strategic challenges" (p.9), making community planning more of a "shared enterprise" (p.10), developing a stronger sense of "shared ownership" (p.10), and working towards "shared and agreed community planning priorities" (p.12). Audit Scotland (2014) suggests that emphasis should be less on formal accountability arrangements but instead focus on "trust between partners, [and] a shared commitment to change" (p.14). In practical terms, joint working might involve "a shared approach to community consultation" (p.22), based on a "shared set of principles". Ambitiously, then, the emphasis on sharing extends beyond definitions, understanding, aims and commitment to encouraging the sharing of savings through preventive work, shared properties, resources and budgets. It also involves strong shared leadership (p.30). Related efforts include the development of outcomes frameworks (see, for example, Ford *et al.*, 2014) which, it is argued, can help to assist individual service providers identify shared outcomes with other service partners. Given the comprehensive list of ambitions needed to enact community planning, the implications are that building social capital remains somewhat elusive.

Technological

In broad terms, international experience has drawn attention to the potential advantages offered by technological innovation and the positive benefits of shared services in terms of cost savings, improved effectiveness and enhanced service user experience (Dollery *et al.*, 2009). In practical terms, the Scottish Government's (2011) guidance emphasised the need for an appropriate ICT strategy to underpin a shared service business strategy, for example. Supported by new institutional arrangements, such as the Improvement Service and National Shared Services Board, for example, strategic projects have emphasised shared capacity, collaborative workforce planning, Scotland-wide initiatives such as MyJobScotland, and shared specification of ICT provision. Here, the internet has



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provided opportunities for shared learning. A Scotland-wide survey of collaboration (Improvement Service, 2009), for example, revealed a range of shared service approaches happening on the ground, including: process simplification/standardisation and the sharing of out-of-hours or emergency cover services across geographical areas.

Legal

As the Scottish Parliament (2013) noted, public services find their legitimacy in statute. The statutory arrangements relating to individual public services are relatively complex, involving particular duties, regulatory responsibilities and accountability regimes. In operational terms, shared services necessitate organisational flexibility. Despite some apparent concerns around sharing responsibility and accountability, the Scottish Parliament (2013) found no evidence that the statutory basis of particular bodies and associated legal arrangements adversely affected joint-working in community planning in practice, although the need for some guidance was identified to address perceived barriers in terms of sharing staff, funding sources and budgets.

The *Local Government (Scotland) Act 2003* gave community planning statutory force. The initial legislation required the setting up of community planning partnerships involving joint-working and partnership to achieve community well-being. Most recently, the *Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015* has given communities a greater say in how public services are to be planned and provided. More specifically, a community body can request that a service is improved, or help improve a service, if it believes such action is needed to tackle inequality, contribute to regeneration or economic development, or improve health or well-being. Importantly, it was deemed necessary to introduce the 2015 legislation to strengthen the duty on relevant partners to work together to improve outcomes for local communities based on nationally agreed outcomes. Why has this legal instrument been necessary?

Environment

The Christie Commission (2011) asserted not only the case for improved efficiency gains through the removal

of duplication, but also advocated the prioritisation of services that prevent negative outcomes; improve outcomes; and empower individuals and communities to be involved in the co-design and delivery of services. In short, the Commission stated that community planning partnerships, as vehicles for maximising shared capacity, needed to work better with each other and with local communities. This perspective goes beyond an understanding of shared services as a back-office function; rather this vision of shared services emphasises a collective and deliberative endeavour by partners and users based on continuous learning. The Christie Commission (2011: 13) noted:

"Increasingly, we will look to leaders of Community Planning Partnerships across Scotland to disrespect boundaries between public services and focus on the achievement of shared outcomes and cross-sectoral workforce development strategies. Articulating the values and principles for shared learning are likely to prove fundamental in securing what may be seen as potentially transformative change. Added value does not stem from achieving efficiency gains (alone) but from securing greater effectiveness and equity - the transformative potential to individuals' quality of life".

The Scottish Parliament (2013: 3) acknowledged that attitudes to risk, disconnection from local communities, poor communication and leadership and "very deep-seated attitudes and behaviours" were undermining progress in community planning, clearly a flag-ship policy initiative in terms of integrated service delivery. Importantly, then, a turn to an outcomes-based approach in Scotland represents an important step-change in advancing a shared culture for co-producing public services, addressing what the Scottish Parliament (2013: 62) defined as "cultural challenges". Importantly, then, the reshaping of public services in Scotland continues to redesign the working environment. Indeed, the *Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015* has given statutory force to the use of national outcomes and enshrined a duty to cooperate on partners. Resorting to statutory provisions illustrates just how hard inculcating



sharing certain services may be in practice, indicates that the necessary social capital falls short, and points to the continuing challenges around government control and public service governance.

Closing Observations: Towards Shared Outcomes?

Public services are no longer the sole remit of the state but provided through a mix of state, market, and voluntary sources. As a mixed mode of delivery, shared services at the local level comprise a range of approaches, based on the type of service, experience, expertise and institutional arrangements involved, but also depending on the leadership, resourcing and institutional and individual personal commitment present (Peel *et al.*, 2012). A challenging agenda, implementing shared services requires actively working with a range of agencies, bodies, charities, and the private sector – as well as local communities themselves. Such integrated working requires a new crucible for melding service expertise and specialisation in understanding and intervening to address particular issues and invites questions around strategic management. As such, operationalising shared services necessitates coaching partners towards a shared ethos since it not only necessitates practical questions around service design and delivery, but cultural issues of collaboration and coordination. As such, shared services call for conformity in norms, values and culture.

The case for shared services has gathered a particular momentum in Scotland, but its unique role has also been questioned. Ultimately, shared services are but one tool in the tool-box, a tool also requiring bravery at senior and political level in terms of implementation (Scottish Parliament, 2013). As the Local Government and Regeneration Committee examining progress on public sector reform in Scotland concluded:

“...a prerequisite for success in finding new ways of delivering services is a shared common understanding and purpose of the vision, aims, and purpose of any initiative. In simple terms, where there's a will, there's a way”
Scotland (Scottish Parliament, 2013: 28-29).

Sometimes that way is statutory force. Initially introduced in 2003, community planning may be understood as a sophisticated form of shared services. This policy initiative has been strengthened via the *Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015* with a clear emphasis on multi-sectoral partners adopting an outcomes-based approach and aligning service delivery with national priorities. This turn to outcomes is consistent with Osborne's (2006) characterisation of New Public Governance and suggests an externalisation of focus away from inward-looking organisation-centric preoccupations with inputs, systems and processes to an explicit concern with those experiencing services and assessing results on the ground. As the opening quotation highlights, those service users may well be the most vulnerable in society; service results matter.

Experience in Scotland reveals the complexity of operationalising shared service as network governance within a government context. Adopting an outcomes-based approach is one mechanism for securing alignment of activities across a pluralist state and of effecting strategic government control. Building what Favoreu *et al.* (2015) identify as social capital for network governance then involves political, technocratic and democratic dimensions, as well as making a sophisticated economic case around economies of skills and gains derived through preventative spend. There are also social dimensions to consider, including professional aspects, across scales and boundaries, and building social relations of trust and cooperation.

Over a decade of experience, critical reflection and learning in Scotland suggests that public sector reform involving shared services requires a multi-pronged approach. This includes demanding, collecting and disseminating evidence at a national level; resourcing and reviewing local pilot projects; facilitating dialogue through consultation papers and parliamentary debate; using case studies to show practice on the ground; and ultimately, perhaps, giving legal weight through statutory levers, such as those strengthening partners' duties in relation to community planning. As communities line up to play a more significant role, it is clear the journey towards shared service responsibility is not complete and



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the nature of the shared service agenda has to continue to evolve and innovate.

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