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THE INTEGRATION OF SERVICE PLANNING AND  
MANAGEMENT IN RESPONSIVE LOCAL GOVERNMENT

A distinguishing characteristic of British Local Government is its professionalism. Each service is headed and staffed by people with long professional training, most of whom see their career development in terms of that profession, moving if necessary from one locality to another, to achieve advancement. In this respect it differs from British Central Government and many other nations' systems of local government, in so far as they are staffed by administrators or managers who move from one department to another to achieve career progression.

Councillors are elected locally, and historically, lacked relevant professional skills. One of their many functions has been to reconcile the competing claims of the professionals, in pursuit of what they perceive as "the local interest".

However, they are usually organised in committees whose topics of concern broadly coincide with groups of professional departments, whose officers constitute a very significant source of information (Mobbs, 1985).

A study of Patterns of Management in Local Government, by Greenwood et al, published in 1980, concluded that "Authorities vary in their numbers of service committees, and departments (extent of differentiation) and in number of coordinating committees and departments (extent of integration). Differences were also observed in their styles of integration. Much less variation was found in the kinds of committees and departments being used, with the overwhelming majority of authorities using

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a combination of service and programme criteria of differentiation.

A more recent study (Lomer and Mobbs, 1981) shows that the same remains true, with even fewer integrative structures than in the earlier study.

It is common for a reciprocal relationship to develop quickly in which officers lean to interpret the priorities and sensibilities of their committee chairpeople and the other prominent politicians concerned with their service, bringing items forward for decisions and messaging information in support of those decisions which will minimise the embarrassment of those councillors. For their part, the same councillors value the respect and concern which "good" officers show them, become committed to at least some of their professional values, and sustain and defend the services which "their" chief officers wish to provide.

There are exceptions to these generalisations. But generally political leaders and chief officers in conventional local government structures try to work towards an accommodation which has these characteristics.

The effect is that the professional separateness of the various services is sustained by a political separation, which makes the integration of service planning very difficult. Frequently opportunities for joint working are overlooked. In the worst cases, departments duplicate, or even undermine each others' efforts.

It was largely to avoid these difficulties that the concepts of corporate planning and corporate management were evolved in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Professor John Stewart was one of the most significant theoreticians in the corporate movement for UK local government. In a recent review he restated, "the argument for the corporate approach in the management of local government is the argument for a capacity within local authority to review and, where appropriate, redeploy the resources of the authority in relation to the needs and problems of the communities it governs." (Stewart, 1983).

Yet the corporate movement has not been popular within local government and most academic analysts conclude that it has

either failed to become established, or waned in importance after a temporary ascendancy. For the great majority of authorities corporate management has "become a phase to which it is increasingly difficult to give real meaning". (Greenwood, 1977, p.18).

Clapham (1984) argues that the increasing financial stringency to which most British local authorities have become subject, has reduced the importance of "rational" and "corporate" procedures. "Many rational structures and processes do not fit very well into this new emphasis. Techniques like programme budgetting and output budgets for example, are considered to positively hinder the management control of expenditure, as does the suggested split in responsibilities between officers and members. The increasing financial restraints on local government can therefore be seen as one factor which has led to a movement away from the structures and processes of corporate planning.

Jennings argues that much of the failure of corporate planning and management is attributable to "the sudden imposition of another system, another way of dealing with issues and policy making, the party political system". (Jennings, 1984, p.19). He correctly identifies crucial naivety in this area, in the official recommendations for changing local government management (Maud, 1967; Bains, 1972).

But it is the contention of the present paper, that the increasingly partisan political organisation of local authorities actually provides the essential foundation for corporate policy making. The real problems and difficulties with corporate planning and management and the integration of service planning arise in the absence of strong party machinery and discipline.

However, this is not by itself sufficient. If it is to secure effective service integration, the authority also needs to develop a satisfactory structure and systems to secure the accountability of the officers to the purposes of the authority.

If it is to be a genuinely responsive local authority, it also needs to develop a sensitivity to the needs of its citizens. The first remainder of this paper is concerned in the main with

the first of these two conditions. My first paper is concerned with the third.

### Attempts to Integrate Service Planning and Management without Strong Party Discipline

To begin, let us deal with Jennings' argument about the party political system. Jennings correctly recalls that neither the Maud Commission nor the Bains report saw strong party discipline as important. However, the Bains Committee did recommend that each authority appoint a chief executive, free from departmental responsibilities who would lead a team of chief officers in securing overall coordination and control. This officer role was to be complimented by a policy and resource committee to guide the authority in setting objectives and priorities, co-ordinating and controlling the implementation of objectives, and monitoring and reviewing performance.

What Bains and Maud grossly underestimated was the difficulties which such a system would impose upon council members elected on the basis of constituencies of special interests. For elected members, the pressure arising from the pursuit of rational integration has demanded the explication of their various objectives, the allocation of weights between them, and the introduction of a degree of systematisation which seems to threaten their flexibility.

Thus in some authorities where there is no single party in overall control, it is very difficult to commit the council to a stable pattern of objectives or even policies. Officers in such authorities as Walsall and Calderdale report that planning policies have become so incremental, volatile and inconsistent, that they are difficult to defend in public enquiries and appeals.

Even in authorities where one party is in nominal control, but party discipline is weak, there is a lack of a clear, corporate policy process. Power is distributed on a polycentric basis, and the committees and their chairpeople almost inevitably

align themselves with the departments which execute their business.

However several local authorities consistently lay claim to workable systems of corporate planning and management, which secure a relatively high degree of service integration. Judging from the documentation they produce, a list would include:

- Arun District Council,
- Berkshire County Council,
- Bexley London Borough,
- Bolton Metropolitan District,
- Bradford Metropolitan District,
- Cambridgeshire County Council.
- Clwyd County Council,
- Copeland District Council,
- Devon County Council,
- Harlow District Council,
- Middlesbrough District Council,
- Wrekin District Council.

Most of these authorities are firmly in the control of single, disciplined political parties, but there are three exceptions: Berkshire, Bradford and Clwyd. In both of the first two cases, the corporate planning systems were evolved under the control of a strong party apparatus - the first being conservative and the second labour. Now that these parties share control with others, the systems remain, but they are less central than they were. More decisions are made by political accommodation and bargaining, and the corporate planning documents merely record what has been agreed. This still serves an essential function; it exposes the purposes and policies of the councils, and therefore, renders them and their officers more accountable to the public.

In Clwyd, a curious accommodation has been reached between the parties, with the conservatives controlling some committees, labour others, whilst some are controlled by "independents". Here the corporate planning process predates the party politicisation of the council, and its centrality as an integrative device is open to question.

With the possible exception of Clwyd, then, the cases which I have investigated support my contention that integrated service planning and management in responsive local government depends on rather than is threatened by a disciplined party system.

Attempts to Integrate Service Planning and Management  
on the Basis of Strong Party Discipline without a Satisfactory  
Structure and to Secure the Accountability of Officers  
to the Council

There are several British local authorities where disciplined parties have a clear majority but where the parties still fall short of the ideal of service integration.

Jennings describes three conservative examples, where the budget was "close ended" by political direction, but the detail of policy was left to individual departments, backed by their own chair people. His most corporate authority, which he described as "a county with the countryside conservatives in power" "the majority party wanted an officer operated system and did not want to bring pressure on the chief executive in such matters for fear of upsetting the system" ... "the chief education officer was cautiously picking and choosing where the department would link into the new systems. He wanted to retain control while becoming corporate. As long as he could protect his financial base and divide management questions away from what he deemed were professional objectives, his department would keep trying out its participation".

Politicians were co-opted into the process, to defend the territories of the departments: "social services looked to its defences. The chairman of the committee was convinced to keep a watchful eye on policy and resources deliberations should the matter arise by chance. The director made sure that the item did not surface in the officers management team or any of its working groups".

In this same conservative authority, the policy and resources committee proposed a degree of decentralisation to area

offices. "Social services and education were to be first; social services was ready, education was not". Jennings claims that area offices, "for education became a piece of 'cosmetic corporateness'."

On the labour side, a couple of examples suffice to make the point. Merseyside County Council has a strong, disciplined labour group, determinedly committed to fighting the present Central Government's plans both to cap their rate in the short term, and abolish the council in 1986. Yet they have not succeeded in establishing the degree of corporate working which they are striving for. (Mobbs, 1983).

In a recent example, the chief constable not only failed to attend a critical financial meeting, but did not notify the committee that he was unable to be here. "There is a long history of confrontations over accountability between the Committee and Mr Oxford (The Chief Constable) rising to a peak over the spending of £5 million on overtime during the miners' strike". (Dunn, 1985).

Whilst it is tempting to depict these confrontations as to do with personality, as Dunn does, Councillor Lady Simey, a key protagonist in the struggle, is at pains to stress that the problem derives from the ambiguous pattern of officer accountability. The position of the police in local government outside London is peculiar. But it merely serves to highlight the difficulty not only of integrated service planning, but even of settling the overall dimensions of the authority's budget.

In the Merseyside case, the situation is even more complicated. Whilst UK Central Government's Home Office, which provides 50% of the funding of the Police, has agreed one budget with the Chief Constable, the Central Government's Department of the Environment has capped Merseyside's rate and in effect set its spending limits to £213 million. The only way in which Merseyside could meet its half of the Police Budget within that limit would be to very drastically curtail many other services. This would undermine further any attempt at integrated service planning.

No amount of party discipline on its own will suffice to overcome this difficulty.

My third example is Langbaugh, a labour controlled district in North East England, where the party group is strong, and there is rigid political control of any capital initiatives. Nevertheless, it has proved very difficult for the authority to review its activities across the board, because the level of mutual trust and confidence between officers and members is very low.

Officers say that they find it difficult to integrate the planning of their services because they have not been able to develop a forum or a mechanism through which to do it. The Council's Chief Executive took early retirement and has not been replaced, and though a Clerk to the Council has been appointed, the officers' management team has been dismantled. (Mobbs, 1985).

I conclude from these three very different examples, that whilst a strong party may be a necessary condition for effective service planning, it is by no means a sufficient condition. For chief officers of service departments it not only threatens their autonomy; it also threatens to expose their activities to potentially critical review. So chief officers have tended to resist corporate management.

From his recent study of four major local authorities, Jennings concluded "it is evident that large departments such as education and social services can resist going corporate with a good deal of success. Even if their political power has been reduced by party policy putting a tight check rein on the service committee chairmen, there are still sufficient means available to chief officers to waffle and go slow".

#### The Integration of Service Planning and Management on the Basis of Strong Party Discipline and a System to Secure the Accountability of Officers to the Purposes of the Council

Most authorities have financial targets or budgets and more or less cumbersome systems of financial control and reporting. However, if responsive local authorities exist to bring benefits

to their communities, they need a process to monitor progress against targets expressed in terms of those benefits. At least three authorities have developed systems which go some way towards this. The system which has received the greatest publicity is the Cambridgeshire Performance Planning and Review System.

In this, medium term (3 year) plans are prepared on the basis of:

a) a review of changes in the environment and circumstances of the Country;

b) a political expression of the direction of the authority in the coming years.

Each chief officer and his senior staff set out their own performance targets in the light of the above, and these are discussed and agreed by each person's line manager. At the top of the organisation, chief officers' performance targets are agreed with the Chief Executive, Chairmen and the Leader of the Council. At the end of the year performance against target is reviewed, and new targets are agreed.

A distinct and novel feature of the Cambridgeshire system is the progressive devolution of financial accountability to lower cost centres in the organisation. For example, with greater autonomy in virement between expenditure heads, some school headteachers now work with their governors, teachers' representatives and parents' organisations, to alter established working practices, to obtain whatever they agree between them to be the greatest educational advantages for their children. School heating has been "traded" for technical equipment; stand by or "supply" teachers to cover for absences have been "traded" for additional permanent members of staff.

This kind of system puts a premium on the officers specifying what they will achieve in the light of the general political direction they have been given.

Proposals exist for the linking of pay to performance, with above average performance being rewarded with additional increments for below average performance.

However, this aspect of the system is confined to the top 200 of the staff, and so far has not been made operational.

By contrast Bexley LB has a system which is long established, and extends to the lowest professional layers of the organisation.

Bexley LB has developed, over nine years, a performance planning and management system which set performance targets each year, and demands that officers formally report on the progress they have made. Departmental chief officers report to their Directors each month; Directors report to committees each quarter, and the whole Council produces an annual report for the public (particularly interest groups and organisations) at the end of the year. Though three quarters of British local authorities now produce an annual report of some kind, Bexley is one of the few which reports in terms of published performance targets.

Nor is the system confined to high levels of reporting. It is used in some departments to organise and control the entire work of front line staff. For example, in social services, the Council has specified an average amount of social workers and social work assistant time which each category of client is expected to need. On the basis of this, individual field workers plan, with their seniors, in regular supervision sessions, the way they intend to work with each of their client cases over the coming month. As the month proceeds, the social worker completes a day sheet and a client record, so that at the next supervision session, the first part of the agenda is to review progress against targets.

Though the system generates a great deal of documentation, almost all those concerned, including the lower level workers, feel they benefit from the system, and are, in a sense, protected by it.

Recently Arun DC has adopted a system not unlike the Bexley system. A novelty of the Arun approach, which stands in contrast to the Cambridgeshire approach, is that the District began by dismantling the individual bonus systems for manual workers, and replacing it with a group performance bonus system, which makes workers collectively responsible for the achievement of targets. Although subsequently they reintroduced a proficiency element

to discriminate slightly between those who were making more or less substantial contributions to the work, the new system has enabled Arun to reduce considerably the amount of documentation, inspection and supervision of groups of workers and their work, markedly improving the productivity of the workforce, and the total effectiveness of the organisation.

It is no coincidence that all these systems have been introduced in local authorities with strong and disciplined conservative groups in majority control. It will be interesting to see whether the Cambridgeshire system remains intact now that the party has lost overall control at the May 1985 election.

The attraction of the systems is their ability to focus attention on what the council is trying to achieve, rather than the imposition of arbitrary intermediate controls. It enables the staff to concentrate on what the council wants them to do; indeed it demands that they do so. But the only check on whether the objectives are acceptable to the citizens is whether the party is re-elected.

The whole system stands or falls by the operational objectives which the majority group (and the officers) set. Since there is no way that the dissenting opinions of citizens can enter the system, the whole edifice is in danger of becoming efficient and effective but unresponsive.

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#### INTEGRACJA PLANOWANIA I ZARZĄDZANIA NA SZCZEBLU WŁADZ LOKALNYCH

Lokalne władze brytyjskie stanowią organizacje wielofunkcyjne działające w skomplikowanym i zmieniającym się otoczeniu. Mając konkretne obowiązki prawne zostały one także wyposażone w szerokie uprawnienia. Wydatki czynione przez nie są wydatkami koniecznymi. Ich uprawnienia pozwalają im na reagowanie w sposób elastyczny na zmieniające się potrzeby lokalne, lecz usprawnienie sposobu ich reagowania na te potrzeby stwarza znaczne problemy związane z integracją.

Trudności wiążące się z integracją służbową powiększa specjalizacja zawodowa personelu, oraz struktura kontroli politycznej sprawowanej poprzez komitety, która często prowadzi do jeszcze większego zróżnicowania funkcji zgodnie ze specjalizacją zawodową.

Z problemu tego zdawano sobie sprawę od dłuższego czasu. Ruch naukowy związany z planowaniem i zarządzaniem korporacjami znalazł swoje odzwierciedlenie w szkoleniu kierowników reprezentujących różne dyscypliny. W ostatnim czasie Komisja Kontroli Finansowej została wyposażona w statutową odpowiedzialność za właściwe wykorzystywanie funduszy przez władze lokalne.

Mimo tych posunięć, pewne badania przeprowadzone ostatnio na szczeblu władz lokalnych wykazały, że wiele z nich nie podjęło do tej pory odpowiednich skutecznych środków mających na celu integrację działania poszczególnych ich ogniw, oraz inte-

grację planowania i zarządzania. Większość organów władzy lokalnej ma nadal bardzo zróżnicowane struktury i działa w oparciu o specjalizację zawodową.

Celem tego opracowania jest analiza przyczyn braku integracji w odniesieniu do konkretnych przypadków. Następnie opisano trzy przesłanki efektywnej integracji planowania i zarządzania w obrębie władz lokalnych. Są to:

- silny aparat partyjny i dyscyplina przestrzegana przez wybranych członków;

- istnienie odpowiednich struktur i systemów gwarantujących podporządkowanie służbowe urzędników członkom rady;

- istnienie adekwatnych struktur i systemów gwarantujących dopływ odpowiednich informacji do władz o potrzebach, życzeniach i preferencjach obywateli, oraz odpowiedzialność władz przed obywatelami za podejmowane działania.

Ten ostatni aspekt zagadnienia był tematem mojego poprzedniego opracowania.