

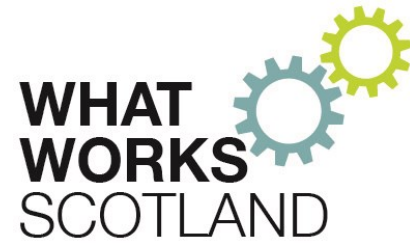
Partnership working across UK Public Services

Dr Ailsa Cook, Outcome Focus

ailsa.cook@outcomefocus.org



Overview



- Why review the evidence on partnership?
- Aims and approach
- Findings
 - Evidence landscape
 - Features of effective partnership
 - Factors influencing partnerships
 - Improvement
- Implications for policy and practice





Why review the evidence on partnership?

- Central strand of Scottish Approach to public service reform
 - Community Empowerment Act (2015)
 - Public Bodies (Joint Working) Act (2014)
- Identified as key challenge by WWS community planning partners and research



Aims of the review



- Present evidence on partnership working in an accessible way so it can be used to inform policy and practice
- Develop a framework to help partnerships put evidence into practice

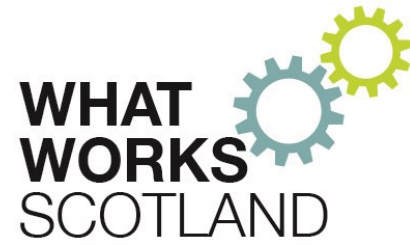


Approach

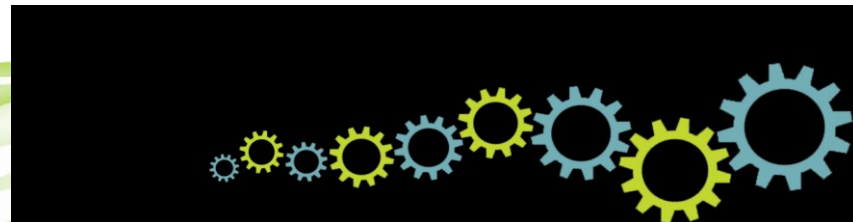
- Evidence Bank Review Approach
 - Developed by Centre for Research on Families and Relationships
 - Focus on accessibility, relevance and timeliness
 - Peer reviews by academic and user experts
- Systematic approach to searching
 - 31 rounds of systematic searches
 - 5813 articles screened



Inclusion criteria



- Empirical research in UK public services
- January 2000 – July 2015
- Included partnerships between public, third and private sectors
- Excluded
 - public / private sector partnerships
 - Local communities and people using services
- 71 research studies included (peer review and grey literature)



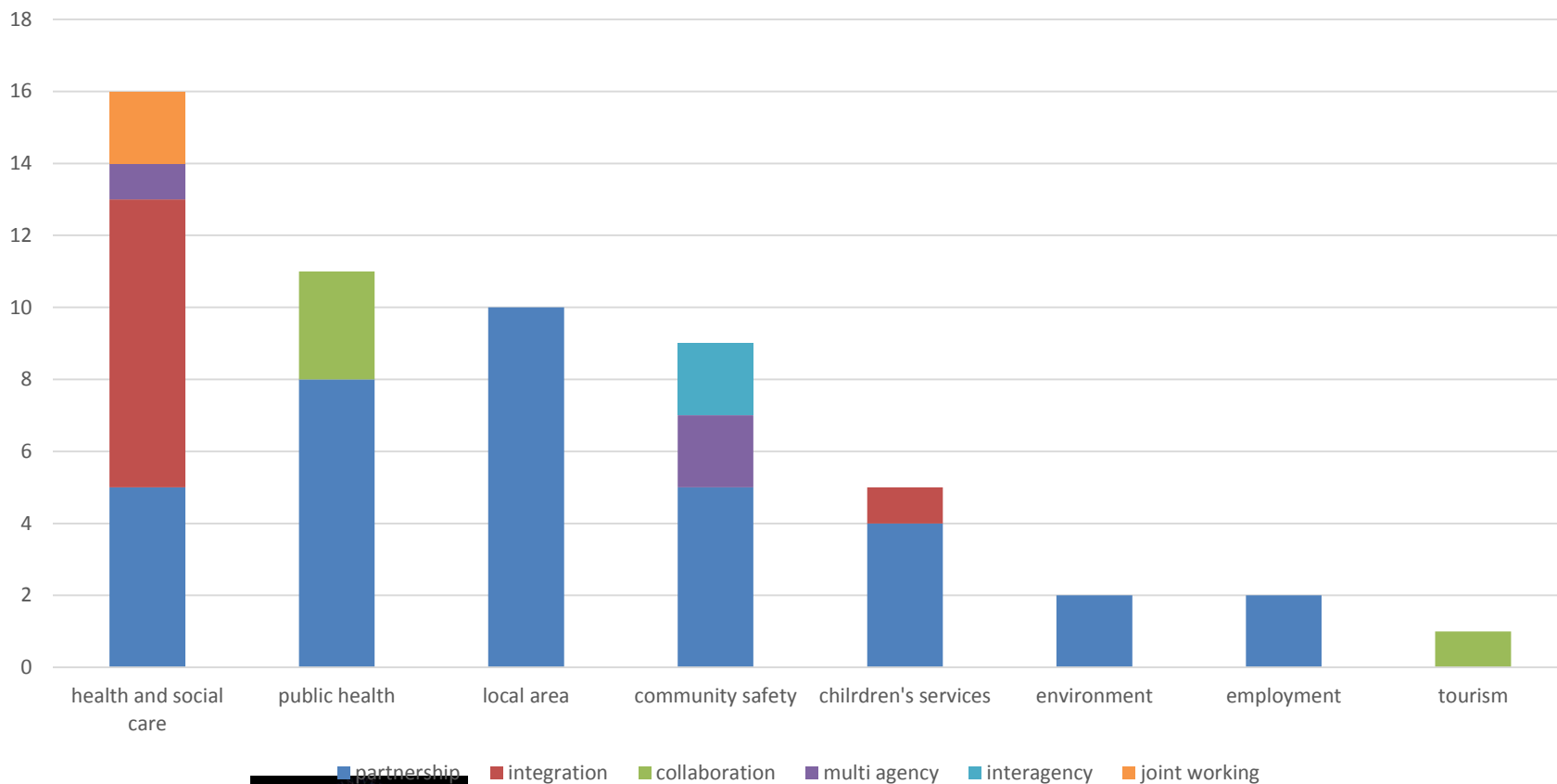
Questions

1. How is partnership working conceptualised and defined across UK Public Services?
2. How is the effectiveness of partnership working evaluated?
3. What are the features of an effective partnership?
4. What factors influence partnership effectiveness?
5. How can partnerships be improved?

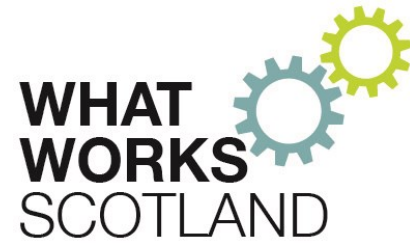


Language of partnership

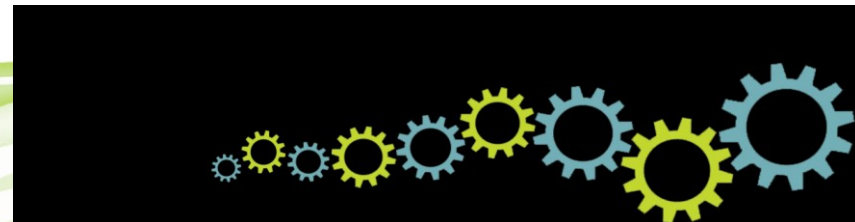
Number of articles using terms in each sector



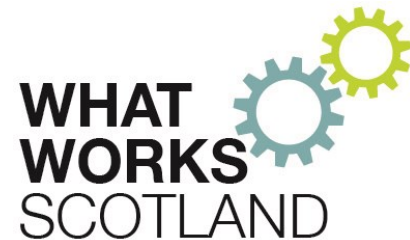
Understanding partnership



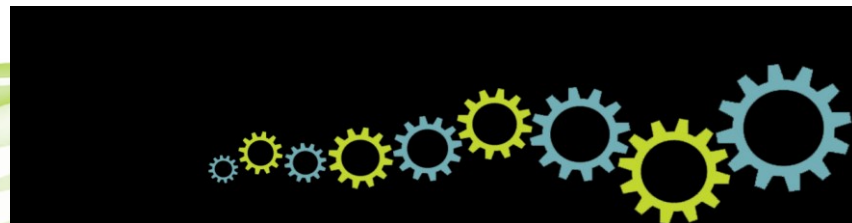
- Partnership working is a messy phenomenon
- Range of overlapping definitions
- Partnerships conceptualised in relation to:
 - Organisational forms
 - Features
 - Social processes



Outcomes of Partnership



- There is little evidence linking partnership working in UK public services to improved outcomes
 - One study linked partnership working as an organisational form to improved outcomes
 - Research linked partnership working with improved processes
 - Research linked partnership process to final outcomes
- Lack of evidence attributed to at least in part to methodological challenges



Evaluation challenges

- Complexity of partnership initiatives
- Time taken to realise benefits
- Understanding contribution of partnership vs single agencies
- Invisibility of partnerships to end users of services

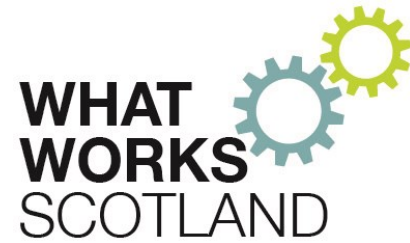


Partnership features

- A wide range of features have been identified in research as associated with partnership effectiveness
- There is strong agreement about the features of effective partnership, across UK public services
- The contribution of specific features to outcomes is shaped by the way they are operationalised.
- This is shaped by context, structure and social factors
- People across partnerships have different views of what is important for effective partnership working



Linking process to outcome



- To help partnerships use this evidence we
 - Identified features for which there was strongest evidence
 - Grouped them according to whether they are inputs, processes or different levels of outcome
 - Created a results chain to show relationships between features.
- Approach informed by contribution analysis

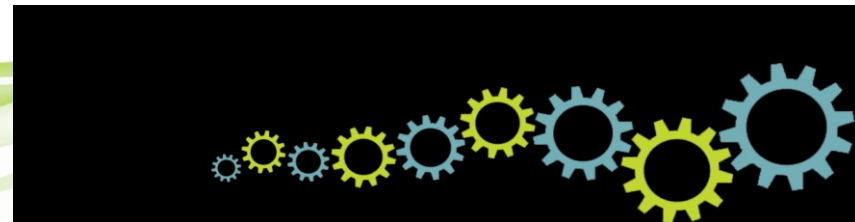
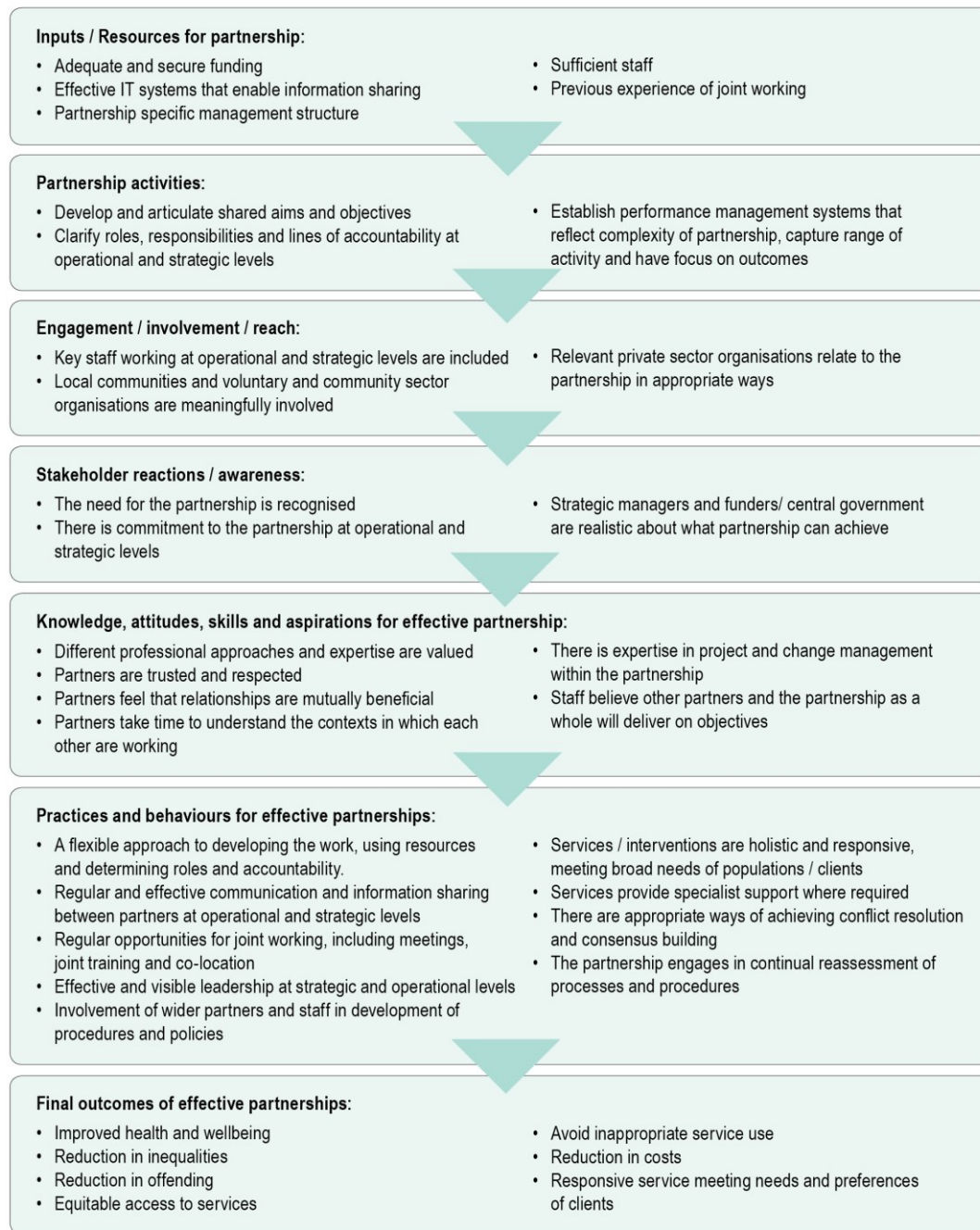


Diagram 1: Effective Partnership Processes: Evidence Overview



Influencing Factors

- Motivation for establishing the partnership
 - Partnerships that develop organically more robust and broader connections
 - Establishing a partnership because it is expected is linked to failure
- Involvement of Central Government
 - Major funder of partnerships
 - Short term time scales and small budgets to deliver on complex problems and rigid performance management requirements act as barriers to success



Influencing Factors

- Hierarchical vs collaborative form
 - Partnership structures found to privilege more powerful partners
 - Hierarchical mechanisms lead to disenfranchisement of less powerful partners
- Links between strategic and operational levels
 - Third sector and operational staff excluded from strategic decision making
 - Leads to inappropriate commissioning, reducing outcomes for people using services



Influencing Factors

- Engagement of the third sector
 - Brings efficiency, information, ability to deliver
 - Reduced by hierarchies, funding issues, negative perceptions and short term performance targets
 - Challenge of representativeness
- Power
 - Overarching factor running across all research
 - Major structural impediments to equitable distribution and use of power within partnerships



Conditions for efficacy

Assumptions

- This is a partnership
- Partnership is the appropriate form of organisation to address this issue
- There is a clear need and rationale for the partnership
- There are shared understandings of final outcomes
- The partnership has sufficient autonomy and authority to make decisions
- All partners are involved in clarifying direction and decision making
- There is effective power sharing across the partnership
- There are sufficient resources to deliver on objectives
- Timeframes are realistic

Risks

- Term 'partnership' used cynically to mask hierarchical arrangements
- Partnership formed naively as it seems the right thing to do
- No clear sense of purpose and outcomes
- Programme of work complex and unwieldy
- Not all partners involved in decision making and agreeing direction of partnership
- Voluntary and community sector excluded and marginalised
- Operational staff excluded from strategic decision making
- Work of the partnership dominated by performance management reporting requirements
- Lack of ownership amongst partners



Partnership improvement



- Very little empirical research addresses this issue
- Research has examined action research and inter-professional education and training
- Successful approaches:
 - Engage with complexity
 - Support staff to reflect critically on policies and practice
 - Support staff to work together to develop understanding of the contributions and cultures of different partners

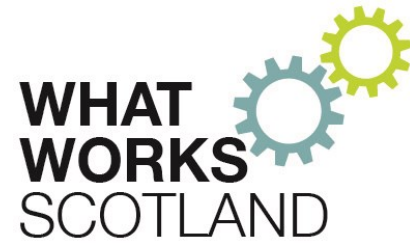


Conclusions

- Given methodological diversity and challenges, findings surprisingly clear
- Effective partnerships are transparent, inclusive, flexible and responsive.
- Unequal distribution of power and ongoing tensions between hierarchical and collaborative governance makes partnership working difficult
- ‘One size fits all’ approaches to improvement will not work
- Effective partnerships need leaders who can understand and engage with pressures and staff who are supported to work in challenging contexts



To improve your partnership



- Be clear partnership is the right approach
- Share and make explicit aims, objectives, roles and responsibilities
- Have a dedicated management structure
- Meaningful and tailored performance management
- Ensure staff are supported and skilled for partnership
- Involve all partners in decision making
- Maintain links between strategic and operational functions
- Be mindful of power – strive for equality and transparency
- Engage with complexity – tailored solutions to local issues

