IVAR

Institute for
Voluntary Action Research

Evaluation of CollaborationNI Phase Two: Findings and reflections

8 January 2016

Authorship and acknowledgements

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Part One: Introduction

1.1   Background

CollaborationNI is a programme commissioned by the Building Change Trust (BCT) and run by a consortium of NICVA (Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action), Stellar Leadership and CO3 (Chief Officers Third Sector). It has run since 2011 with, since 2014, a focus on supporting '*collaboration of the willing for purpose*'.

The change that Phase Two (from July 2014) of CollaborationNI aims to bring about is:

1. *VCS* [voluntary and community sector] *organisations will be more willing and able to collaborate in order to bring about more meaningful and sustainable benefits for their beneficiaries and to be fit to deliver and shape services for a better Northern Ireland.*

2. *VCS leaders and organisations will have the skills, knowledge and confidence to collaborate more effective and productively, through:*

    - *Increased knowledge of what collaboration is and what is needed to make it work*
    - *Improved understanding of processes and challenges involved*
    - *Support and capacity to implement and manage change.*

The Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR) was commissioned by Building Change Trust (BCT) to conduct an evaluation of Phase Two of CollaborationNI. The purpose of the overall evaluation is:

1. *Assessment of the extent to which the outputs, processes and outcomes specified in the development plan and associated contracts have been delivered by the consortium and a consideration of the quality of the work carried out.*
2. *An assessment of the suitability of the structures established for management, delivery and oversight of the initiative.*
3. *Identification of the key learning points from the delivery of the initiative.*
4. *Recommending, on an interim and final basis, suggestions for improvements to management, development and delivery of the programme.*

1.2   Approach

IVAR reviewed and analysed the reporting and monitoring data summarised by CollaborationNI partners in quarterly reports. We also reviewed other documentation from CollaborationNI, including feedback forms from events, details of follow-up support, and reports from the policy symposia.

To gather feedback from organisations that had received support from CollaborationNI, we:

- Designed a web-based survey sent out, by CollaborationNI staff to organisations they have supported, once in February 2015 and once in October 2015. The first survey was completed by 34 respondents and the second by 67 respondents. Six people completed both, giving a total of 95 unique responses. The surveys were conducted anonymously, and respondents were not asked to name their

organisation. The majority of the questions were the same, enabling us to collate and compare the data. The October survey asked additional questions about challenges and outcomes. Unless otherwise stated the data in this report synthesises both surveys.

- Emailed a set of questions to six key participants in the policy symposia. The four responses were reviewed confidentially, with assurance that any quotes used would be anonymised.

- Conducted semi-structured phone interviews in February 2015 with ten people from organisations in receipt of more in-depth support and one independent funder supporting organisations in the human rights field. These interviews covered:

  - The support they had received
  - Views on the quality of the support
  - Views on the impact of the support
  - Possible ideas for the future.

- Carried out semi-structured interviews for the three case studies in this report in October 2015 with ten people representing nine different organisations involved in partnerships supported by CollaborationNI. The three case studies are The Consumer Rights Initiative Northern Ireland, Mid Ulster Advice Service (MIDAS) and The Raglan Project. The case studies were selected to represent a range of different approaches to collaboration and a variety of geographic areas. Case studies are written up in full in Appendix A, and we draw on the data throughout the report. The case study interviews covered:

  - The vision for the collaboration
  - Views on the impact of the support received from CollaborationNI
  - The challenges of working in collaboration
  - The impact of collaboration upon beneficiaries.

We also carried out semi-structured interviews with the BCT Director of Operations, and staff from the three CollaborationNI partner organisations in February 2015 and again in October 2015. A full list of interviewees can be found in Appendix B.

1.3   This Report

In Part Two of this report we set out our reflections as independent evaluators about the challenges of collaborative working, the contribution of CollaborationNI and the ongoing need for support for collaboration.

In Part Three we review the outputs, quality and outcomes of CollaborationNI's core offer from July 2014-October 2015.

In the report quotes are, where necessary, attributed either to 'organisations' (survey respondents and interviewees from organisations in receipt of support from CollaborationNI) or 'partners' (CollaborationNI partners and BCT).

Part Two: Commentary

Reflections

Our observations here are based on our work as advisers and evaluators to CollaborationNI in the period April 2014 to December 2015. We also draw on our accumulated insights into the challenges and critical success factors of collaborative working (both within the VCS sector and between VCS organisations and public agencies) from a series of research studies and support programmes carried out across the UK over the last 15 years.

The shortcomings of top-down collaboration

One of the dangers of discussions about collaboration is that they often start mid or downstream, and can be based on untested assumptions. So, for example, policymakers have traditionally alighted on mergers as a solution to their view that there is too much duplication and inefficiency within the sector. And yet such a view has often been found to be flawed. First, if there is duplication, it is either, in the case of organisations that operate outside of the reach of public funding, none of government's business; or, it has often come about as a direct result of governmental funding and, in some cases, active promotion of diversity. One of the consequences of policy encouragement for community-based provision, localism, social entrepreneurship and social innovation has been more organisations. So, if the sector does look bloated in certain areas, public agencies have had a hand in that. More specifically, policy makers and funders in Northern Ireland (through both the peace process and the influx of European money) were happy to encourage the development of organisations often serving one community or the other – with little thought given to the longer term sustainability and/or what to do when the funding began to dry up. Second, what little evidence we do have about mergers suggests that they are likely to be expensive to achieve and, furthermore, that it requires significant investment and time to bring about cost-savings. Mergers are an inexact science that rely more for success on human emotions and leaps of faith than they do on the work of accountants or lawyers.[1]

Little good is likely, therefore, to come from a top-down approach – we only have to look at governmental agencies and their ongoing struggles locally, regionally and nationally, to integrate and join up to appreciate that working across organisational or sectoral boundaries can be challenging . And if we consider the trend in England of issuing fewer, bigger contracts for health and social services, and the expectation or requirement that voluntary organisations will collaborate over bids, what do we find? Smaller organisations being squeezed out, or tacked on as afterthoughts. And forced marriages between incompatible partners, leading, inevitably, to problems with delivery. The drive towards competition is no guarantee of meaningful and productive collaboration.

Furthermore, despite the unprecedented levels of policy-driven interest in collaborative working involving voluntary organisations, we know from our work that individuals and organisations can experience practical difficulties when trying to work collaboratively with others. Policy assumptions about collaborative capacity are not always matched by the reality on the ground. There is what we might call a policy implementation gap – the situation in Fermanagh doesn't necessarily match the view from Parliament Buildings.

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[1] IVAR (2012) *Thinking about Merger*, London: Institute for Voluntary Action Research

However much sense collaboration might make, however compelling the case, we're talking here about independent organisations; organisations whose decision-making powers are their own; whose destinies are in their own hands. As one of our interviewees noted: *'The worry about a funder-driven collaboration is that it can look sensible and rational from a distance, but once you get into the detail, and exposed to the context and each organisation's history and ways of working, it gets messier and harder to reconcile differences'*.

The importance and value of collaboration for purpose

If our first observation is, in essence, about the importance of governmental bodies becoming more aware and sensitive to the practical realities of collaboration for voluntary organisations, and perhaps taking a less directive approach to how the sector organises itself, what about voluntary and community organisations themselves? We have noted before that, in an operating environment characterised by complexity and change, there is both a need and an opportunity to promote the benefits and opportunities of collaboration. Complexity here can be understood as a situation in which how to achieve desired results is not known, so there is high uncertainty; key stakeholders disagree about what to do and how to do it; and many factors are interacting in a dynamic environment that undermine efforts at control. This makes static, narrow models – the single agency solution – problematic.

So, complex situations challenge traditional practices. To quote one of our interviewees, '*work in complex areas cannot really be effectively tackled by one organisation on its own and therefore there is a need for collaboration*'. And, in an elaboration of that point, a similar perspective: *'people need help to shift mindsets from inward looking parochialism to a more outward looking approach. The focus needs to be on practical, meaningful changes to the way in which organisations can interact with each other and that needs to be prefaced by identifying shared issues and goals*'.

This shift in language and tone, to talking about the benefits and various models of *collaborating for a purpose* (in which the interests of beneficiaries are privileged over those of organisations) has been at the heart of phase two of CollaborationNI. As much as there has been an emphasis on a reality check for governmental agencies and officials, there has also been a sustained effort to issue a wake-up call for the sector itself. But with the critical caveat that the focus is on creating a more sustainable, effective, vibrant sector, not undermining it or diminishing it. And so collaboration has been promoted as an opportunity rather than a budget cutting measure for funders.

The contribution of CollaborationNI

Two thirds of the way through Phase Two of CollaborationNI, we have two observations in our role as independent evaluators. First, the volume and quality of activity is impressive, across all elements of the support and influencing offer. Whilst there can never be room for complacency, the feedback from individuals and organisations in meaningful contact with CollaborationNI confirm that the service is, both directly and indirectly, contributing to positive outcomes, from raised awareness, through to service improvement and innovations. We have written elsewhere about '*collaboration champions*' being a critical ingredient of effective and productive inter-organisational working.[2] The work of

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[2] IVAR (2011) *Thinking about Collaboration*, London: Institute for Voluntary Action Research

CollaborationNI, and in particular its focus on supporting and enabling 'collaboration with purpose', can be seen as an act of championing; our evaluation findings confirm that it is an act that produces real impact on the ground. This is in marked contrast to previous efforts at organising collaboration support in England where there tended to be a greater emphasis on more technical and generalist support at the expense of the more bespoke and sustained interventions provided by CollaborationNI.

Second, we note the sustained reluctance on the part of public agencies to move beyond embracing the rhetoric of collaboration to invest directly in support for collaborative working. It would appear that, whilst voluntary organisations continue to be, at best, encouraged and, at worst, cajoled into collaborative working, policy rhetoric is not matched by any investment for support. This is despite the findings highlighted in this report, and elsewhere, that working across organisational boundaries can be difficult and complex, and invariably requires significant time and resource.[3] We were struck by this comment from one of our interviewees: '*It requires a different mindset and a wider rethinking of the space that we occupy. For collaboration to really yield benefits, it will take time and effort and trust: look at the NI Executive if you want an example of how difficult it is and how long it can take*'.

Our observation here would be that organisations will always struggle to collaborate meaningfully and effectively if they do not have the time and space to fully understand the drivers, purpose and potential benefits of coming together. A mutually beneficial collaboration relies on shared vision, mutuality and strong interpersonal relationships as much as it does on operational logic. Invariably, that process requires and benefits from independent facilitation and expert guidance. So, in our view, the case for support for collaborative working is compelling.

Looking forward

In a series of independent studies with both VCS organisations and public agencies in England, we have highlighted an increasing demand on health and social welfare services and growing inequality affecting service users and beneficiaries. We have also noted that the challenges which many organisations are dealing with are more varied and complex than those relating to the availability of funding alone. For example, an increase in client referrals due to changes in service thresholds and welfare provision or as a result of other organisations in the area closing.[4] While some of these changes are not new, it seems to us that the scale and uncertainty of change is qualitatively different because of its pace and unpredictability. And for the organisations currently being served by CollaborationNI, we can add reforms to local government and heightened expectations around the integration of health and social care services

We've observed that economic uncertainty and social upheaval has exerted two kinds of pressure on organisations.[5] First they are experiencing pressure to define their mission – who they are and why they exist. Second, they are having to renegotiate and renew external relationships (with key interest groups, collaborators and competitors). In thinking about

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[3] IVAR (2013) *Building Healthy Partnerships*, London: Institute for Voluntary Action Research

[4] IVAR (2012) *Duty of Care: the role of trusts and foundations in supporting voluntary organisations through difficult times*, London: Institute for Voluntary Action Research

[5] IVAR (2013) *Turning a Corner: transition in the voluntary sector 2012-13*, London: Institute for Voluntary Action Research

these pressures of transition. For these organisations to flourish and thrive, we would suggest that the need for specialist and bespoke support with collaborative working (across both organisational and sectoral boundaries) won't disappear in a hurry.

Part Three: Key findings

In Part Three we summarise the evaluation data on: activities; the reasons organisations sought support from CollaborationNI (drivers for collaboration); the support available to collaborating organisations; perceptions about the quality of the support; the challenges of working in collaboration; the ways in which CollaborationNI helps organisations to overcome these challenges; the influencing work; and the impact and outcomes of the work to date.

3.1 Activity

Since the start of Phase Two, over 500 organisations have engaged with CollaborationNI.[6] Support activity has included:

- 48 action plans agreed
- 33 legal support sessions
- 68 legal documents drafted
- 34 expert facilitation sessions with 217 participants
- 82 in-house sessions with 316 participants
- One conference (with another scheduled for 7 April 2016)
- 21 follow-up support sessions
- Six policy symposia with 353 participants.

Collaboration NI has offered support to a very wide range of VCS organisations, including health, housing and advice subsectors. It has also engaged with over 130 different public sector bodies (including unions, government departments, health bodies and local authorities) through meetings, seminars and training.

3.2 Drivers for collaboration

Our online surveys asked organisations to specify their initial motivations for working in collaboration. In the October 2015 survey, '*delivering better outcomes for beneficiaries*' was the most significant reason for respondents wanting to collaborate, with 87 per cent selecting 'fully' or 'partially'. This is consistent with the findings from February 2015, when 94 per cent selected 'fully' or 'partially'. In the October survey, respondents said that the second most significant reason for collaborating was '*competing for public sector contracts*'; in the previous survey it was '*organisational survival*'. More than half the respondents in the February survey, and 46 per cent in the October survey agreed either 'fully' or 'partially' that collaboration was needed in order to survive.

We explored these factors further during the semi-structured interviews with organisations in receipt of support from CollaborationNI. Interviewees were frank about the funding pressures that led them to explore collaboration. In some cases they had been explicitly told to collaborate or merge: '*it became clear that if we didn't merge there wouldn't be funding*'.

In others, organisations anticipated that local government reform and the commissioning approach meant that newly merged councils would look to a single provider of services in certain areas of provision: '*collaboration was what we needed to do; needs must*'.

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[6] As at 30 September 2015

In this context, *'What* [CollaborationNI] *was offering was what we needed as RPA* [Review of Public Administration] *comes up'*. Some of the organisations we spoke to had been encouraged to approach CollaborationNI by their funders with the explicit aim of being supported to work more closely with others in their sub-sector.

3.3 Type of support sought from CollaborationNI

Survey respondents sought a variety of support from CollaborationNI. *'Legal guidance and advice'*, '*hands-on facilitation of working in collaboration*' and '*information about other models of collaborative working*' were the top three areas, while '*influencing commissioners about the skills and requirements for groups being asked to collaborate*' was the least sought area of support (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: The areas of support organisations sought from CollaborationNI (findings from both the February 2015 and October 2015 surveys)
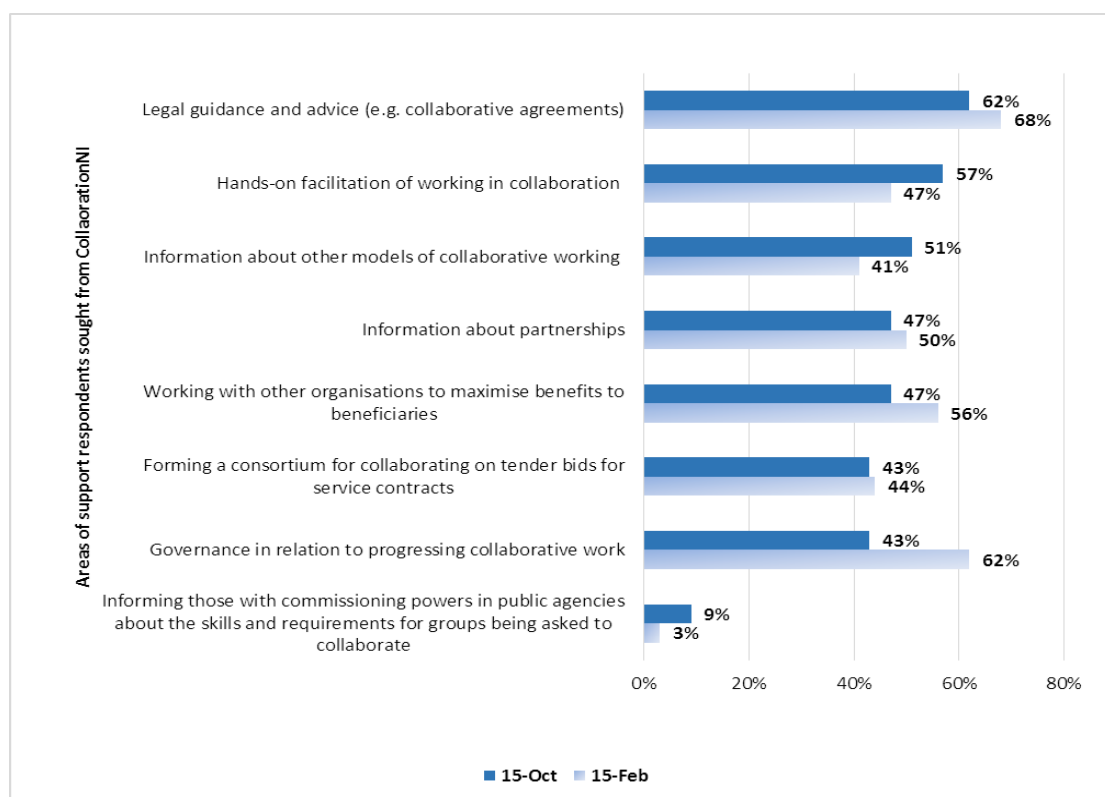
In the survey comments, there was also clear evidence of the need for support with collaboration:

> *'The voluntary sector needs this service for the future of austerity.'*

> *'CollaborationNI is one of the best services available to the community sector in NI.'*

From our interviews, the depth of support required to work effectively was also apparent. For example, one collaboration had received three facilitated group work sessions, as well as governance input and guidance on the process that might lead to the prospective merged structure, including drafting a Memorandum of Understanding:

> '*I think it was a combination of the legal support and facilitation* [that moved us on as] *we are a group of very strong, very vocal people.* [The] *Memorandum of Understanding was invaluable.'*

We found that all aspects of the support provided by CollaborationNI were useful to organisations. Most of the organisations we interviewed had received a mix of facilitation and legal advice. These were seen to work extremely well together and to provide '*invaluable'* support.

The legal advice service was highly valued by the organisations we spoke to, with interviewees reflecting on the high quality of the support and the independent, knowledgeable staff:

> '*The input of the Legal Adviser was really thoughtful and clear, recognising the importance of language and flagging up potential issues.'*

Similarly, the practical and skilful support of the facilitation service was greatly appreciated as it enabled discussions to move past tricky issues and old ground:

> '*There are long-term ingrained difficulties between the partner organisations. The facilitation helped to get awkward things onto the table; they weren't necessarily resolved but we were able to discuss them.'*

> '*There were a few 'crusty' people,* [the facilitator] *dealt with it very well, for example,* [him saying] *I think we need to look at the bigger picture.'*

> '*The pace and way of facilitated working has allowed all parties to have their say.'*

Alongside this was the importance of what one interviewee described as '*hand holding'*:

> '*The hand holding has made the biggest difference, they appreciate having an independent person who gives long-term support.'*

This emphasis on the human side of collaboration, alongside the legal and governance support, came through powerfully in our interviews, and was greatly appreciated by the organisations supported by CollaborationNI.

> '[We wanted support with] *mediation. As we were all looking for a piece of the pie, there was no tension per se but there was a lot of anxiety.'*

Having an independent, external body to handle both the facilitation and legal advice was seen to be critical in moving collaborations along: '*CollaborationNI was independent, I never felt at any stage that that was compromised'*.

3.4   Quality of support

The high quality of CollaborationNI's work comes through extremely strongly from our data. 99 per cent of survey respondents said that they had confidence in the practical support offered. 95 per cent felt that the '*support was tailored to* [their] *organisation and its circumstances'*, and the same figure felt '*supported towards a positive outcome for* [their] *organisation'*.
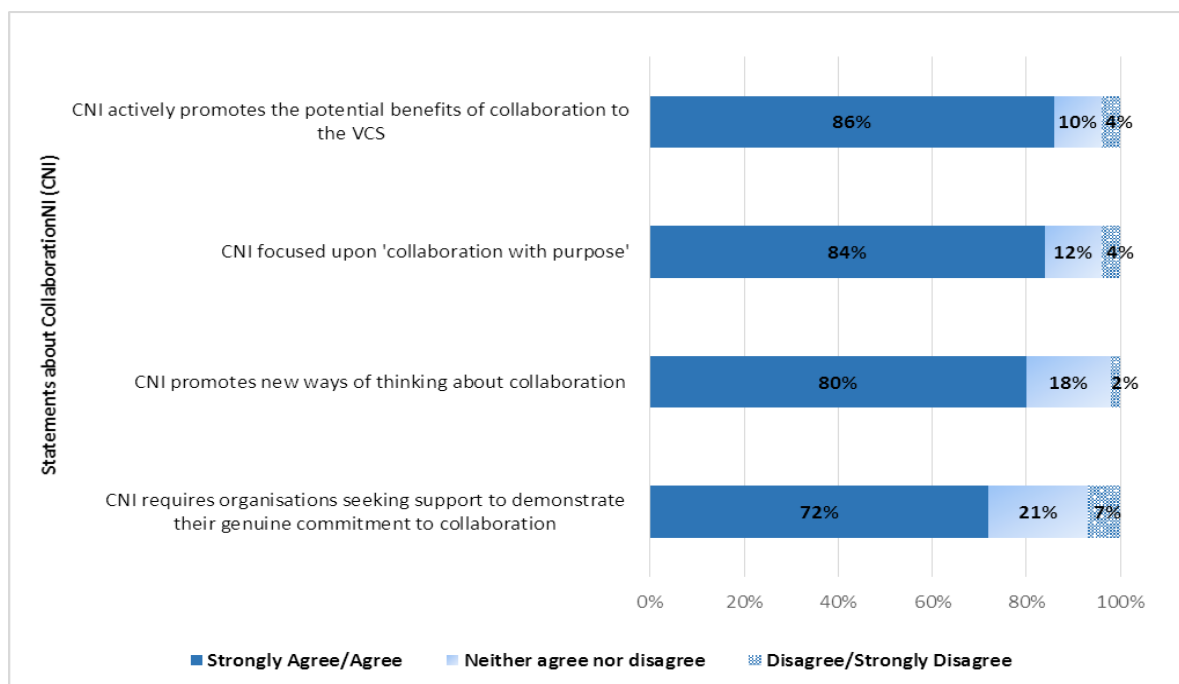
Survey respondents agreed that CollaborationNI focused on '*collaboration with a purpose*' and '*promoted the value of collaboration to the VCS without making demands*' – the collaboration was owned by the collaborators:

> '*I have enjoyed the benefits of their knowledge and expertise in a non-pressurising setting. We were allowed the ability to take time and not feel pressurised or rushed into producing legal documents. In fact quite the opposite – this was completely our initiative which helped us as organisations to drive the need to work collaboratively.*'

> '*Straightforward, helpful and concise advice. Great support and expertise.*'

> '*Excellent work. Professional, comprehensive and a massive help in our undertaking.*'

Table 2: Views on the support provided by CollaborationNI (October survey)

The expertise and support of CollaborationNI staff was particularly valued and highly praised by survey respondents. They were described as:

- '*independent and honest*' (99 per cent 'strongly' or 'partially' agreed);
- '*professional*' (99 per cent 'strongly' or 'partially' agreed);
- '*knowledgeable*' (100 per cent 'strongly' or 'partially' agreed); and
- '*impartial*' (98 per cent 'strongly' agreed).

Positive comments from survey respondents about the quality of CollaborationNI staff included:

> '*The staff are excellent – really down-to-earth but very professional and informed as well.*'

'[Staff were] outstanding in helping four organisations, including ourselves to work more closely together. They were supportive, patient and afforded the organisations an opportunity to voice their opinions.'*

'The support we received from the two CollaborationNI workers was excellent and greatly enhanced all the meetings and forward thinking of the two organisations.'

Interviewees were also effusive in their praise for CollaborationNI, both in terms of the support on offer and how it is delivered:

'They brought expertise to the table but didn't make us feel we didn't have it.'

'Their facilitation from the start was fantastic, it assuaged a lot of concerns.'

'We came out wiser than when we went in.'

3.5   Challenges of working in collaboration

The case studies, interviews and October survey show that there can be significant challenges to working in collaboration. The challenge that most survey respondents[7] had faced was '*dealing with difference'*, while the challenge that the least number of respondents had faced was '*dealing with the emotional impact of working in collaboration/partnership (e.g. job losses/changes to job roles*)' (see Table 3).[8] In 80 per cent of cases, respondents had experienced two or more of the challenges listed, and 66 per cent had experienced four or more of these challenges.

Table 3: Challenges experienced when working in collaboration/partnership (October survey)

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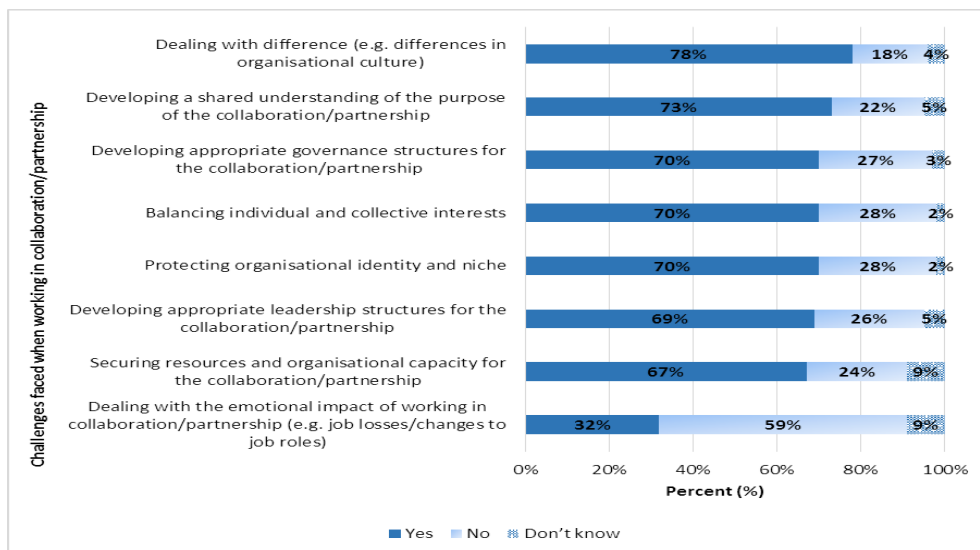
[7] At the beginning of this section of the survey, respondents were asked whether or not they were currently involved in a collaboration/partnership; 79 per cent of the respondents said that they were. However, the findings included here are based on responses from all participating organisations because some of the respondents may have been able to reflect on previous experience of collaborative working. Respondents also had the option of answering 'N/A' to each question, therefore removing themselves from the analysis.
[8] This finding potentially reflects the limited number of respondents who had undergone significant organisational change (for example, merger) as a result of collaboration.

Looking at the case studies, we can see that the organisational challenges of working in collaboration are eased by having a shared vision; there being little sense of competition between partners; having a clear understanding of what each organisation brings to the table; and the collaboration being driven by a vision, rather than being funder led.
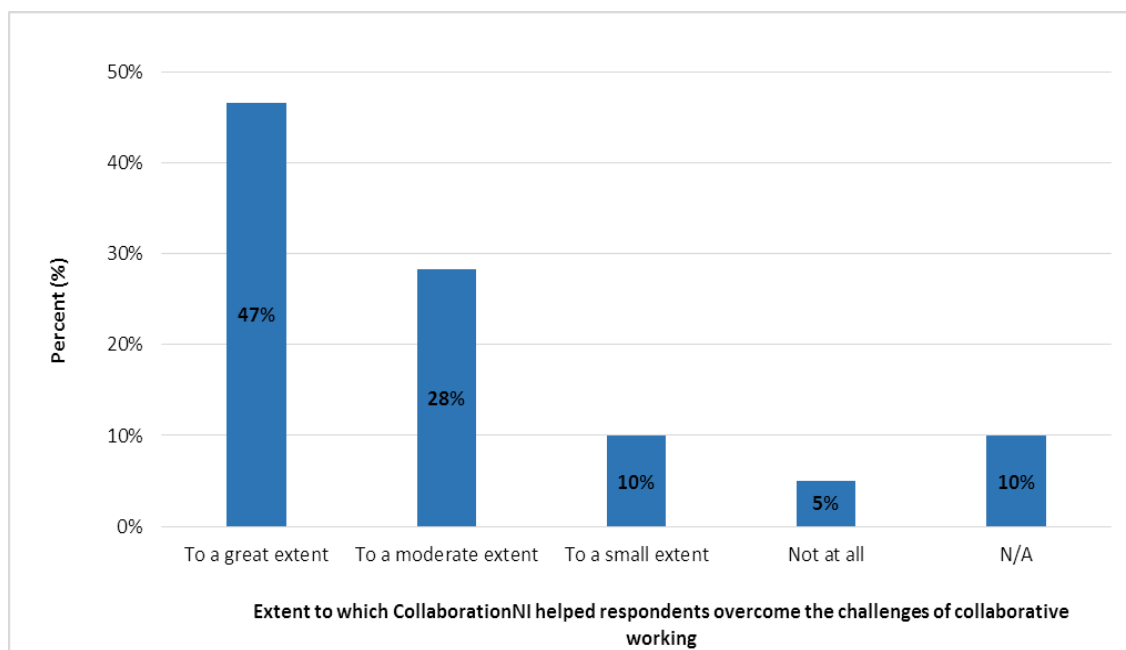
3.6   Overcoming the challenges: Support from CollaborationNI

Supporting organisations through collaboration requires long-term and often delicate support. Just to reach the point of launch or agreement of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) requires substantial and sustained support and expertise. All three case studies demonstrate the length of time needed to reach agreement, and the depth and variety of support needed to reach that point – even for MIDAS, where there was a very clear and shared motivation to collaborate:

> 'The most vital part of the CollaborationNI input to this project was the skill of mediation to ensure that all obstacles to the final MoU were overcome in a timely, yet friendly manner.'

75 per cent of survey respondents felt that CollaborationNI had helped them to overcome the challenges of collaborative working to a 'great' or 'moderate' extent (see Table 4 below).

Table 4: The extent to which respondents felt that CollaborationNI had helped them to overcome the challenges of collaborative working (October survey)

Survey respondents were asked to comment on the elements of the support that they had found most helpful in overcoming the challenges of collaborative working. The analysis shows that respondents appreciated the practical support provided by CollaborationNI, as well as the knowledge that they contributed to the collaborative venture itself (see Table 5 below).

Table 5: The elements of CollaborationNI's support that survey respondents found most helpful in overcoming the challenges of collaborative working

Practical support
- Facilitated meetings/discussions
- Provided advice on, and helped draw up, partnership agreements
- Provided information and advice: '*The work that CollaborationNI have provided on legal advice has been excellent*'
- Helped bring in new partners to an already formed partnership
- Helped to push things forward/keep things moving.

Knowledge
- Input of new ideas
- Anticipated difficulties: '*They provided advice on what problems we may encounter and how to deal with them*'
- Managed people's expectations of working in collaboration
- Existing knowledge: '*They brought their experience of other organisations collaborating so that we are not re-inventing the wheel*'.

Conditions of the support
- Input of an external, independent and impartial perspective, acting as an unbiased broker
- Provision of a neutral environment, creating '*space to discuss things openly and honestly*'
- CollaborationNI staff being very willing to help and providing a great deal of flexibility.

3.7   Influencing work

Part of CollaborationNI's remit is to increase public sector officials understanding of collaboration, and the need to support it. The partners have addressed this objective through work with local authorities and through policy symposia looking at issues related to collaboration.

Since September 2014 there have been six policy symposia with a total of 353 participants. Stakeholders attending the symposia were extremely positive about their usefulness and impact, feeling that they were asking the right questions and attracting an influential audience. The evaluation forms gathered at the symposia also show a high level of support for the events. Out of the 108 evaluation forms returned, 21 per cent recorded the events as 'excellent'; 46 per cent as 'very good'; 30 per cent as 'good', and only 3 per cent as 'satisfactory'.

Positive comments from respondents to our short survey about the influencing work include:

> '*I found all the events extremely interesting and beneficial.*'

'It was a worthwhile session with relevant speakers and useful discussion. It was relevant to my current role and helpful to have an external organisation bring people together in a constructive way.'

'[The follow-up reports] *are very useful in helping to maintain a focus and identifying next steps to move forwards*.'

Respondents also felt that CollaborationNI's work in this area has increased the understanding of the need for collaboration:

'There is a strong support for the need for collaboration from public sector officials. I think this is driven by a belief that collaboration will result in significant financial efficiencies.'

'[CollaborationNI's work on this has brought] *greater awareness of the challenges and benefits of collaboration; greater awareness of and commitment to collaboration throughout the sector; new models of collaboration beginning to develop; opportunity to implement 'game changer' via alliance contracting.'*

'[There is] *growing awareness of CollaborationNI within the public sector and very useful conversations starting which CollaborationNI have prompted,* [about] *commissioning approaches; alliance contracting, and procurement models.'*

However, we also heard concerns (both from partners and policy symposia participants) about the apparent reluctance of government officials to accept that support is necessary to bring effective collaboration about, and that this support has a cost – there is increased awareness of these messages, but no one is yet willing to take on the costs:

'It is variable; there is a lack of understanding about the skills required and the importance of support and facilitation in taking that collaboration forward.'

'I think they know how important it is, but, in the face of funding pressures and austerity, they won't prioritise the money for it.'
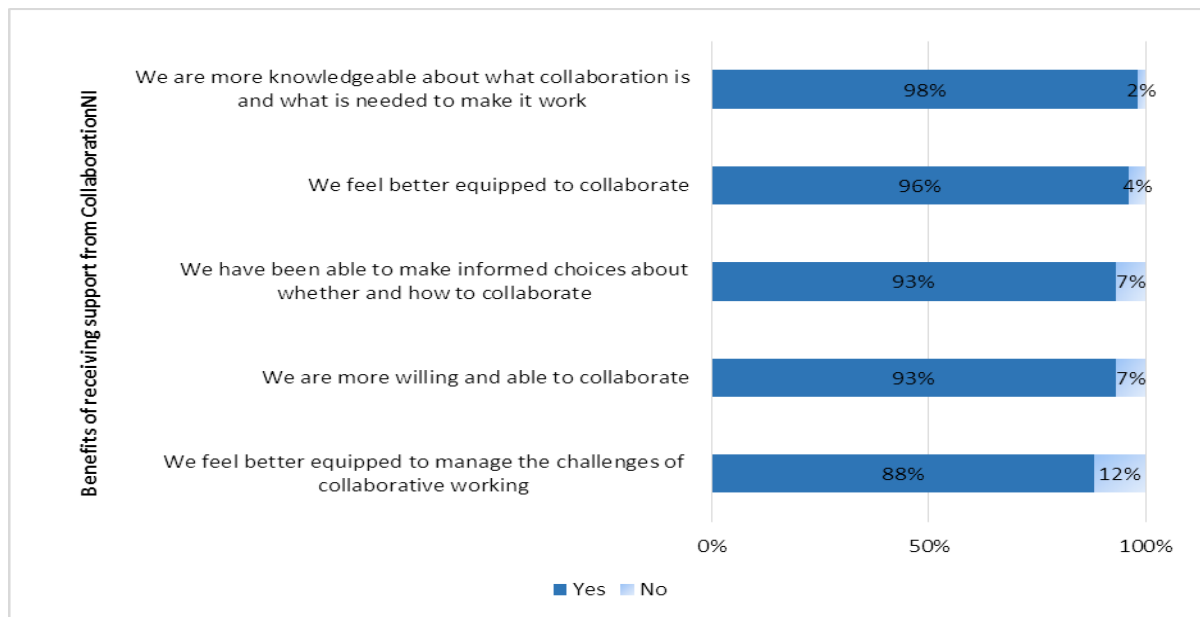
3.8 Outcomes[9]

3.8.1 Impact on knowledge and skills

In the majority of cases, the support provided by CollaborationNI resulted in survey respondents[10] being more knowledgeable about collaboration as well as becoming more able and willing to collaborate (see Table 6 below). In addition, respondents said that they felt better equipped to collaborate and face the challenges of collaborative working.

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[9] This section mainly draws on the October survey as this focused on outcomes in more detail.

[10] In the comment boxes, a number of respondents mentioned that they are still receiving support from CollaborationNI, therefore they felt unable to comment on the outcomes of the support as yet. Between 10-30 per cent of respondents answered 'N/A' to each of the statements. For the purpose of this analysis, these responses have been excluded and the percentages recalculated.
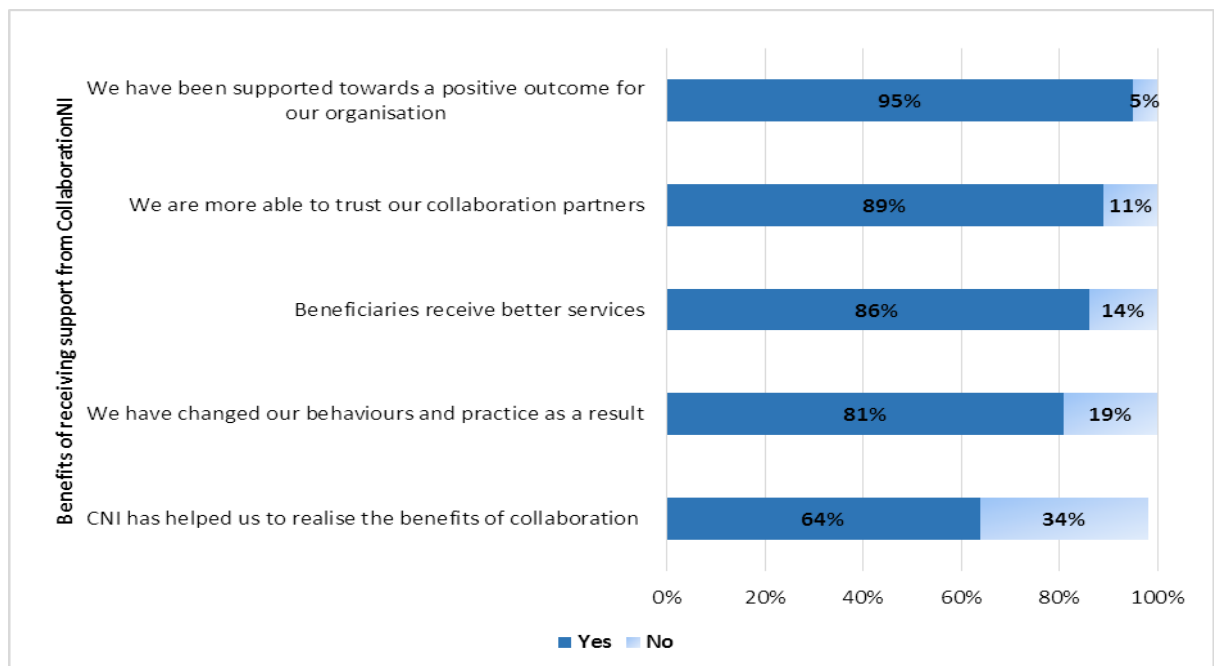
Table 6: The benefits of receiving support from CollaborationNI (October survey)

Benefits of receiving support from CollaborationNI

- We are more knowledgeable about what collaboration is and what is needed to make it work: 98% Yes, 2% No
- We feel better equipped to collaborate: 96% Yes, 4% No
- We have been able to make informed choices about whether and how to collaborate: 93% Yes, 7% No
- We are more willing and able to collaborate: 93% Yes, 7% No
- We feel better equipped to manage the challenges of collaborative working: 88% Yes, 12% No

Legend: ■ Yes ■ No

3.8.2 Impact on practice

CollaborationNI has supported respondents to develop their practice and service delivery positively (see Table 7 below). In particular, 81 per cent of respondents said that they have changed their behaviour and practice as a result of the support, and 89 per cent said that they are now more able to trust their collaboration partners. The overwhelming majority also felt that CollaborationNI has helped them to achieve positive outcomes for their organisation as well as their beneficiaries. As one respondent said, things would have been different without CollaborationNI's support: '*Without CollaborationNI supporting us through the set-up of our consortia, I doubt it would ever have happened so quickly and effortlessly*'.

Table 7: The benefits of receiving support (October survey)

Benefits of receiving support from CollaborationNI

- We have been supported towards a positive outcome for our organisation: 95% Yes, 5% No
- We are more able to trust our collaboration partners: 89% Yes, 11% No
- Beneficiaries receive better services: 86% Yes, 14% No
- We have changed our behaviours and practice as a result: 81% Yes, 19% No
- CNI has helped us to realise the benefits of collaboration: 64% Yes, 34% No

Legend: ■ Yes ■ No

3.8.3 Impact on formalising collaborations

Survey respondents were asked about the support they had received from CollaborationNI to formalise their collaboration or partnership (see Table 8 below).

Table 8: Formalised partnerships (October survey)
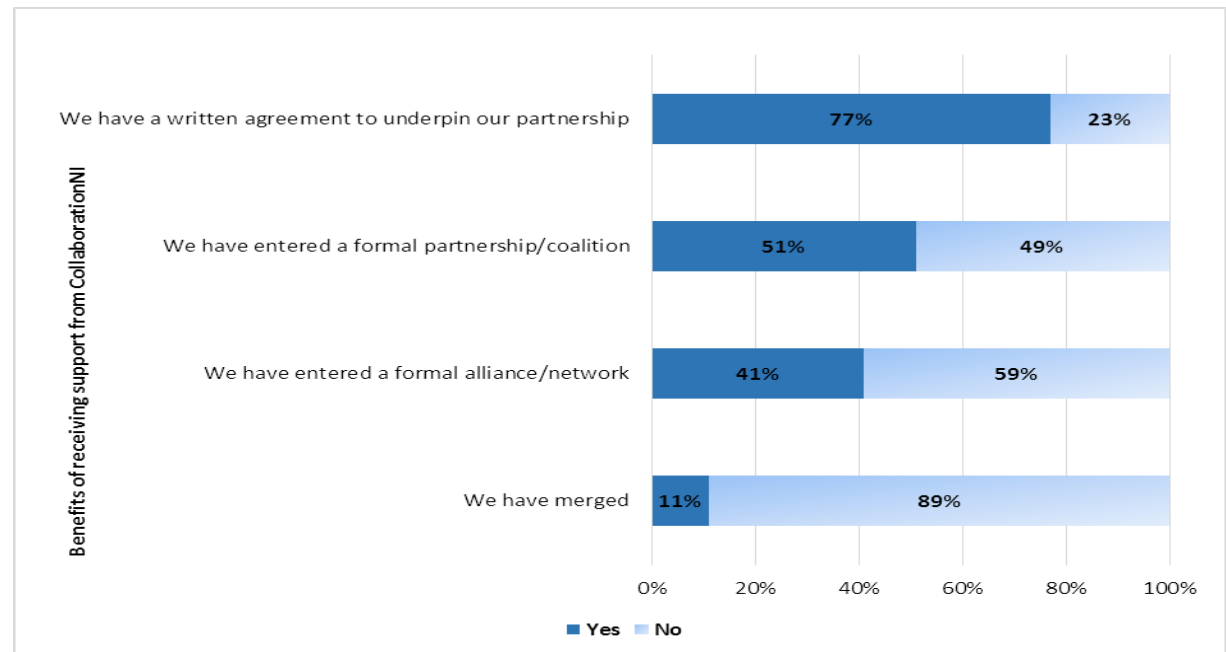
While the number of respondents answering 'yes' to each of the statements is not as high as in other areas of the survey, 80 per cent of respondents answered 'yes' to at least one of the statements, suggesting that all respondents received some support in this area. In fact, two of the comments that were made by respondents suggested that formalisation of a partnership is not necessarily a measure of success of the support received, acknowledging instead the general value of the support provided by CollaborationNI:

> *'Following subsequent meetings which we held with our potential partner, our Board agreed that the proposal was not viable for our organisation. The advice from CollaborationNI however was useful.'*

> *'The support which we requested – and received – was about our future direction in general, of which collaboration was one option. It was about scoping the potential for collaboration, the reasons, the benefits, the potential partners. This was timely support for our organisation*.'

3.8.4 Organisational benefits of working in collaboration

The survey asked respondents what they felt they had gained from working in collaboration/partnership. Of the list of benefits provided, the top four answers were:

- Learnt from others and shared best practice (n = 35 (65 per cent))
- Maintained, improved or expanded existing services (n = 27 (50 per cent))
- Enhanced our organisational reputation (n = 27 (50 per cent))
- Achieved greater voice and influence (n = 26 (48 per cent)).

On average, respondents had experienced at least three of the benefits listed; 36 per cent reported to have experienced four or more benefits. However, a number of respondents (9 in total) noted that their collaboration/partnership is in its early stages and therefore they did not feel able to answer this question.

Table 9: Benefits gained from working in collaboration/partnership (October survey)


3.8.5 Impact upon beneficiaries

Survey respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with a range of statements about the benefits that collaborative working can have for beneficiaries. The findings show that working in collaboration enabled many organisations to make improvements for service users in terms of their overall experience and the quality of the service provided (see Table 10 below). There was also fairly strong agreement (55 per cent or more 'agree' or 'strongly agree') that collaborative working can:

- Address problems relating to gaps in services
- Lead to a streamlining of services
- Improve service user choice
- Enable the survival of key services for users.

Table 10: The benefits of working in collaboration/partnership for beneficiaries (October survey)
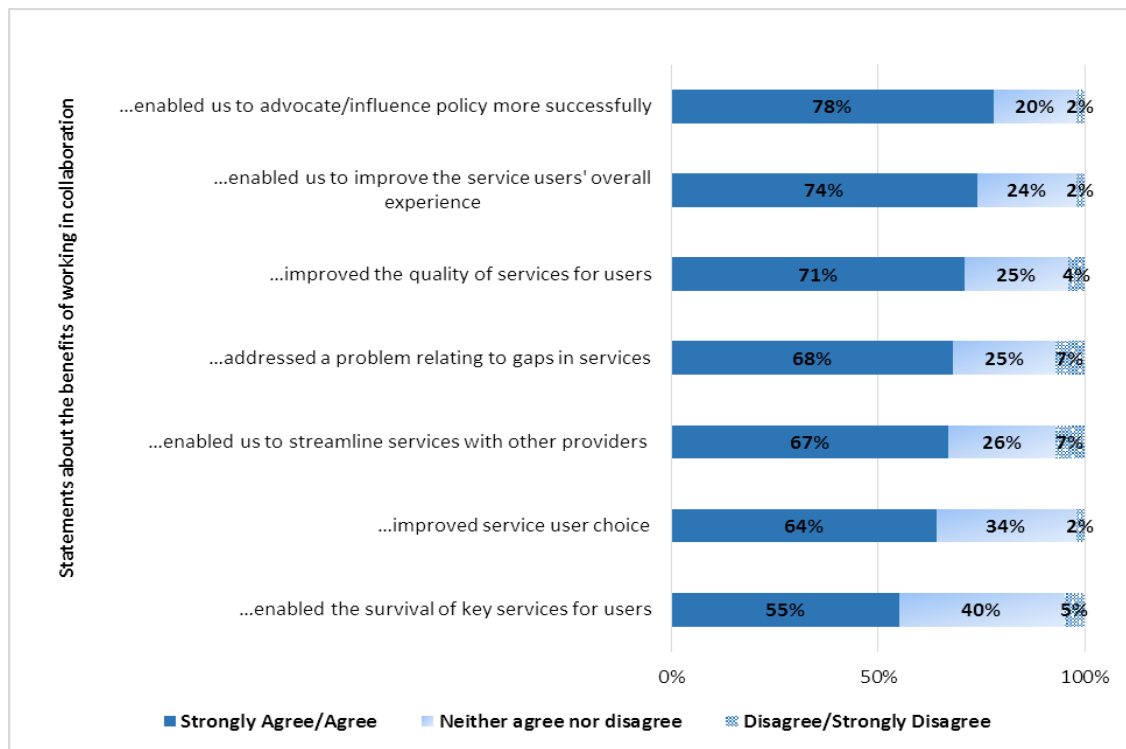
It is useful to note that 47 out of the 59 respondents (80 per cent) 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' with at least one of these statements; and 39 (66 per cent) agreed with two or more of these statements.

Our case studies echo the survey findings and also show that collaborative working can have a range of benefits for service users. Interviewees spoke about the different kinds of impact – either existing or hoped for – that they saw for beneficiaries as a result of their collaborations. These can be grouped into three main areas:

Greater reach in services: MIDAS is now able to reach a greater geographic area than STEP NI and Magherafelt Advice Services (MIAC) were able to do individually: '*Working together provides a more seamless service, and allows service users from the central area to access services.*' With more front line workers offering a wider range of expertise, they are able to take on more complex cases. For The Raglan Project, simply being more visible has meant a greater uptake in clients accessing Slemish services. The Consumer Rights Initiative envisages offering a '*one stop shop advice for consumers*', reducing the time spent navigating different agencies. Both MIDAS and The Consumer Rights Initiative argue that collaboration will lead to significantly better referral systems: '*Effective inter-agency referral mechanisms between different advice agencies, referring and signposting seamlessly and at the earliest possible opportunity*'.

Higher quality services: Working together means that MIDAS staff have access to the AdvicePro software and more opportunities to learn from each other. Interviewees felt that this is having a material impact upon the quality of advice offered. Having improved premises is allowing people accessing Credit Union services at The Raglan Project to spend more relaxed time with advisers.

At The Raglan Project, improved premises mean that people accessing Credit Union services can spend more time and be more relaxed with advisers.

More innovative and responsive services: MIDAS has developed a debt advice service in a particular town, which would not have been possible without the flexibility which comes from having more front line advice workers. Working together can provide '*intelligence that improves providers' awareness of issues that matter most*'. The Raglan Project is now offering a debt and well-being course; without the premises, and the breathing space this has brought, this would not have happened.

3.8.6 Impact upon policy

Table 10 above shows that 78 per cent of survey respondents 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that collaboration enables them to advocate/influence policy more successfully. Strength in numbers can help voluntary organisations to speak out with less fear of adverse funding implications. Both MIDAS and The Consumer Rights Initiative felt that they were more likely to be able to influence policy through working together, in part because they simply represent more people. MIDAS has now adopted STEP NI's approach of deciding as an organisation when and how to advocate about the issues front line staff see in their work with clients.

In the July-September 2015 quarterly report, eight collaborations were identified as contributing to influencing work, with CollaborationNI supporting them in this.

Appendix A: Case studies

Case Study 1: The Consumer Rights Initiative Northern Ireland

Part One: Background

Partners

1. **The Northern Ireland Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux**
2. **Advice NI**
3. **Law Centre (N.I.)**
4. **The Consumer Council.**

Background – Formation of the Advice Services Consortium in 2012

CNI first began to work with the Advice Sector in November 2011 when CNI supported the Northern Ireland Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux ('NICAB') and AdviceNI ('ANI') with a proposed joint tender for telephone debt advice services. Expert facilitation and legal support was provided by CNI and terms were agreed in December 2011. Unfortunately, by January 2012, the Board of one of the organisations had rejected a key term (agreement on who would act as Lead Partner) and the collaborative approach to the tender collapsed. Each organisation submitted a separate bid.

However the foundations had been laid in terms of:

- Building relationships and trust
- Buying into the value of partnership working
- Involving an independent process facilitator
- Developing an agreed process
- Capturing the negotiated points in a written agreement.

In 2012, under the RISP programme, DSD required a single entity to receive funding to deliver advice sector umbrella support – where previously each organisation was funded separately. As a consequence, all three advice sector umbrella organisations (NI CAB, ANI and Law Centre NI) approached CNI for support with the formation of a regional Northern Ireland Advice Sector Consortium (NIASC). The Legal Adviser negotiated and drafted a Consortium Agreement which was signed off in May 2012.

The Consumer Rights Initiative Northern Ireland

In 2014, Arlene Foster MLA, the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, made a statement of her intention to: '*Work with the DSD to ensure greater collaboration between the consumer and advice sectors, with the aim of improving effectiveness of representation and value for money*'.

Following the Minister's statement, it was proposed that a new collaboration be negotiated which brought together the Northern Ireland Advice Services Consortium and the Consumer Council (an independent consumer organisation, set up by statute and funded by DETI).

CNI were brought in at an early stage to facilitate the process and negotiate the agreement. Following 11 months of facilitation support and legal advice, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed by all parties on 7 October 2015.

Potentially this new collaboration could:

- Provide better advice services to consumers
- Provide more value for money for the funders
- Avoid or remove duplication of services
- Develop cross-referral mechanisms
- Signpost effectively to provide consumers with a seamless service
- Inform policy and legislation.

Part Two: Summary of interviews with the four partners

Drivers to collaborate

Interviewees identified one overarching driver for this collaboration: '[A] *funder and policy-led response' t*o perceived shortcomings in the coherence, consistency and quality of consumer advice:

> 'Political pressure, manifesting as an expectation, bordering on requirement, for a collaborative initiative to address concerns around consumer advice.'

For some interviewees, the real motive (for government interest in this initiative) was cost savings:

> 'There are a lot of warm words about added value and service improvement. But really this is about cuts, and collaboration is seen, crudely and myopically, as a way of saving money.'

Hoped for benefits

The initiative is still in its infancy. However, interviewees were all precise about the benefits that they hope (and expect) will accrue for this collaboration. Three key points were highlighted. First, and most importantly, the consolidation of an improved and seamless service across Northern Ireland for consumers:

> 'People getting the right advice from the right people at the right time, as befits their circumstances and needs.'

> 'A one stop shop for consumer advice. If a consumer has an issue, there should be no confusion or debate about where to go. Instead, there is the place to go and there are the referral mechanisms to ensure that happens.'

Second, as part of the creation of an '*effective pathway*', improvements to inter-agency liaison and joint working: '*Effective inter-agency referral mechanisms between different advice agencies, referring and signposting seamlessly and at the earliest possible opportunity*'.

Third, a more effective and comprehensive mechanism for gathering and acting on intelligence about consumer needs and concerns – '*intelligence that improves providers' awareness of issues that matter most*'; '*improved intelligence about issues that are important to consumers in order to help shape future design and delivery of services, and to support appropriate campaigns for change*', including the extension of services to currently under-represented groups.

Concerns and challenges

Despite a widespread conviction that this initiative will deliver tangible benefits and prove more than the sum of its parts, interviewees highlighted two concerns about the partnership. First, reservations about collaborations that come about at the behest of governmental agencies:

> '*There is a worry that expediency has been prioritised here. The status quo wasn't seen to be working, so they just jumped into the existing advice collaboration, without proper regard for what was required and what might be most effective.*'

> '*The worry about a funder-driven collaboration is that it can look sensible and rational from a distance, but once you get into the detail, and exposed to the context and each organisation's history and ways of working, it gets messier and harder to reconcile differences. It will go nowhere unless partners put in time, effort and commitment to it. To be honest, it's good for the optics rather than tangible, practical benefit. And it doesn't really require a consortium to deal with the challenge of referrals and signposting.*'

Second, concerns about the composition of the partnership and the risk that some partners might feel that they are in a '*forced marriage, with some sense of mistrust. This is not helped by the fact that some partners are, in other arenas, competitors, so we are still feeling our way a little, with each partner cautious with being open about what they do want to share, but also holding some things back in order to retain some competitive advantage*'.

While the prevailing view was that the initiative has genuine merit in relation to its potential to deliver real benefit to beneficiaries, the manner of its formation and its current composition mean that sustained effort will be required for the hoped-for benefits to be realised.

Views of collaboration support

Interviewees were effusive in their praise and respect for the support offered through CollaborationNI, variously describing it as: '*First class*'; '*upfront, honest and trusting*'; and '*patient and resilient*'. Reflecting on the different roles played by CollaborationNI staff, interviewees talked about them acting as '*referee*', '*honest broker*' and '*trusted third party*'. Their style was praised as '*neutral and attentive*', with the focus remaining at all times on what was '*realistic and achievable*'. For those less convinced about the need for support, the experience had been particularly enlightening:

> '*I started off sceptical as it all seemed pretty straightforward, but then the process surfaced some mistrust and it was crucial to have a neutral person seeing us through the difficulties. They acted as a referee and that helped to improve our behaviours, it kept it objective, it kept people on their best behaviour. The material gain has been the formal agreement. More subtly, it has helped us keep our focus and put our energy into what is achievable.*'

Going forward, interviewees suggested that the emphasis of collaboration support for the VCS might need to shift in two ways. First, '*it may be important to move beyond organisations that are already at the collaboration table, and try to reach out to other organisations to encourage them to get to that table*'. And, second, a slightly more assertive

style might be required: '*A tougher edge to name poor behaviour and challenge entrenched position*s'.

Reflections on collaborative working

Interviewees drew on their experiences within both NIASC and the more recent Consumer Rights Initiative to reflect on the potential and challenges of collaborative working. Some people highlighted the importance of putting beneficiary benefits at the heart of collaboration:

> '*The most important learning I've taken away from this experience is that trustees really need to take on board the potential commercial and beneficiary advantages of collaboration. Focus on the added value that collaboration might bring for beneficiaries. That said, collaboration has to be judged on its merits: collaboration for collaboration's sake – just to satisfy politicians and funders – may well not be the best thing for your mission or your beneficiaries. So, you need a collaborative mindset, but each opportunity needs to be thought through carefully. And nine times out of ten, you will need dedicated support for that.*'

Others expressed concern about the willingness of individuals and their organisations to make the sacrifices necessary for collaboration to succeed:

> '*For it to work, it requires acts of generosity: are we prepared to surrender/give something up in the hope/faith that* [that] *will help change the environment and lead to improvements. Unless people are prepared to take that risk, it won't happen. It requires a different mindset and a wider rethinking of the space that we occupy. For collaboration to really yield benefits, it will take time and effort and trust: look at the NI Executive if you want an example of how difficult it is and how long it can take.*'

Finally, while it was widely acknowledged that organisations might sometimes need to be jolted into working together – '*sometimes a catalyst is necessary to shake things up and move people from entrenched positions and away from vested interests*' – a top-down approach to collaboration in the sector is riddled with risks and dangers:

> '*The ideal type is a vision-based partnership, with the MoU built around and servicing that vision, and with specialist and sustained support from independent third parties. That has every chance of succeeding. And that is precisely the opposite of relationships imposed and dictated from outside.*'

> '*One of the downsides to all of this is that collaboration risks driving out independence and choice, and that by focusing on what government wants and requires all the time, we forget about our beneficiaries. We should apply a public benefit test to all collaboration.*'

Case Study 2: Mid Ulster Advice Service (MIDAS)

Part One: Background

Partners:

1. **South Tyrone Environment Programme (STEP NI)**

2. **Magherafelt Advice Services (MIAC).**

Project description

Mid Ulster Advice Service (MIDAS) was launched on 16 September 2015. It brings together STEP NI, based in Dungannon, and Magherafelt Advice Services (MIAC), based in Magherafelt.

Community development underpins all STEP NI's activities. It was established in 1997 to help build local community capacity in the South Tyrone area, and has assisted in the set-up and development of a number of local organisations. STEP NI offers training services, support to migrants (including translation services) and undertakes policy, research work and advocacy. The organisation has seen an increased number of people seeking advice, and wanted to develop its ability to offer advice services.

MIAC offers free, confidential and impartial advice to all sectors of the community. It is housed in the Council offices in Magherafelt, and has specialist and experienced advice workers across a range of areas.

The partners met initially at an event hosted by CollaborationNI and Advice NI in 2012, and had felt that there could be potential for working together. They explored these ideas, and developed the concept of MIDAS. They invited another key local provider to be part of the collaboration, but this offer was declined. The partners then contacted CollaborationNI directly and were offered support in formalising some of the issues that had already been discussed.

CollaborationNI has subsequently offered ongoing support to MIDAS, working with them to develop a MoU and supporting the collaboration through the launch. Support has included facilitation and legal advice, as well as advice about how to build capacity through restructuring some roles.

Part Two: Summary of interviews with the partners

Drivers to collaborate

Interviewees identified four key drivers to their collaboration:

'Gap' in services: Dungannon and Magherafelt are separated by the Cookstown area, where another advice provider operates. Feedback from their services users had led both organisations to understand that there was a gap in services around Cookstown, which could be filled effectively by them working together.

Complementary skills: MIAC has specialised in advice services, whereas STEP NI comes from a community development ethos. The partners recognised that these complementary skill sets would bring benefits to the individual organisations as well as to their beneficiaries.

Geography: Both STEP NI and MIAC operate in geographically distinct areas, offering services only within those areas. This meant there was no sense of competition between them, and a clear vision of how working together would benefit their own service users.

Funding: Partners recognised that new funding opportunities meant that working in collaboration would be an advantage – however, they were firmly of the view that this was not the key driver for the collaboration.

Hoped for benefits

MIDAS's mission is:

> *'To provide free, confidential, independent and impartial advice to all sectors of the community, whereby assisting and helping to raise awareness, ensuring individuals do not suffer because of a lack of knowledge of their rights and/or responsibilities, or of the network of services available to them. We aim to influence the development of social policies and services, both locally and regionally.'*

Services include outreach clinics; migrant worker clinics; telephone advice; drop-in facilities and home visits. The aspiration is for a more holistic and integrated flow of services where people are not bounced from one organisation to another if they have complex cases: '*people aren't loyal to a brand, they'll go where their needs are met*'. One interviewee gave the example of a client who had been sent to five different organisations before coming to MIDAS.

Interviewees described how working together is already benefiting service users through:

- Increased quality of advice – through higher advice standards and training, and the rollout of the AdvicePro software system across both organisations. AdvicePro is also critical for funding bids.
- Greater geographic spread, particularly in the Cookstown area, which now has more services on offer: '*Working together provides a more seamless service, and allows service users from the central area to access services*'.
- Greater flexibility and responsiveness in service provision through shared front line staff. For example, one town was showing a peak in demand for debt advice services, so MIDAS have set up a time limited debt advice service targeted at that area.
- A community development approach now being used more extensively in Magherafelt.
- Greater flexibility in developing partnerships, for example with Women's Aid.
- Greater ability to conduct robust policy and advocacy work, with strength in numbers: '*The battle about insufficient resources can only be done in collaboration*'.

MIDAS has received very positive feedback from the local MLA's office, which is already referring service users directly.

Concerns and challenges

The key internal challenge was bringing front line workers from both organisations on board with the changes. In part, this is an issue of geography – Magherafelt and Dungannon are seen as a long way away, and people were concerned about having to travel for work. Some staff also had concerns about whether there would be job losses. However, these concerns were fairly quickly allayed, and staff feel the benefits in developing their own skills through training and sharing expertise.

Interviewees' main concerns relate to the challenges of operating in a context of political and sectoral change:

> *'This is against the background of sector changes, there's a very high uptake of advice services at the moment, as the system is changing so rapidly.'*

> *'A lot of NGOs are currently unwilling to raise their voices in case of losing funding, it makes doing this more challenging. You have to work within the system, but cogniscent that it is a flawed system.'*

Views of collaboration support

Interviewees were hugely positive about the support offered by CollaborationNI. In particular they valued the external facilitation and objective view provided by CollaborationNI staff: '*This made it much easier – we had someone on the outside, which was important – particularly with the Board. Having external facilitation was critical'.*

External input also gave the partners momentum as they were accountable to someone else, which helped them to keep things going: *'CNI really pushed for the launch, it would have been very tricky without them'.*

Interviewees welcomed the expertise brought by CollaborationNI, and also the way in which this was delivered:

> *'They brought expertise we didn't have around collaboration, and a wider perspective on issues of collaboration in advice.'*

> *'They brought expertise to the table but didn't make us feel we didn't have it.'*

> *'They answered practical questions about governance and took the fear out of it.'*

Reflections on collaborative working

Interviewees were clear that the complementary skills and experiences of the people and organisations involved meant that they worked well together. They identified their strong relationships as key to the collaboration. This was aided by the fact that MIDAS is focused upon advice, and MIAC had more expertise in the advice sector – so it was clear who should be the lead partner. There was no competition for power, or any sense that one organisation or individual had to give up something of value: '*There was no sense of competition, and clear recognition of where the value added would be*'.

Interviewees felt that they are learning from each other, and that both organisations – as well as MIDAS – gain from this deepening expertise. Previously both had unsuccessfully tried to work with another provider, so being able to work together came as a relief.

In terms of the process, all interviewees felt that having had a long lead-in time, and a good deal of discussion about their vision meant that there was plenty of time for issues to come out into the open. Both organisations were supported by their Boards, which took a strategic view of the need to collaborate.

Case Study 3: The Raglan Project

Part One: Background

Partners

1. **Brookeville Enterprises** (provides accommodation and facilities to community and voluntary organisations in the Harryville area of Ballymena)
2. **Harryville Partnership Initiative** (an umbrella organisation providing accommodation and facilities to community organisations in the Harryville area of Ballymena)
3. **Slemish n tha Braid Credit Union Limited**

Project Description

The Raglan Project is based in Ballymena. The partnership aims to regenerate the Harryville area of Ballymena by re-developing the derelict Raglan Pub into premises for the Credit Union and as a community and social enterprise hub.

Slemish purchased the Raglan Pub, and the first phase of the Project was to refurbish part of the building to serve as new premises for the Credit Union. This first phase completed in summer 2015 and the Credit Union has now re-opened in the refurbished premises. It was launched on 15 October 2015, International Credit Union Day.

The second phase of the Raglan Regeneration Project will require the remainder of the building to be rebuilt, refurbished and relaunched as a community and business development and social enterprise facility.

CollaborationNI has been supporting the Raglan Project since September 2013. Staff met with representatives of the three partners, as well as other community organisations, following three expert facilitation sessions.

The meeting focussed on issues such as: which organisations should be involved; the development of the project plan; funding; the role of the partners; and the most appropriate legal structures. The CollaborationNI Legal Adviser then prepared a first draft Memorandum of Understanding for the project.

From March-June 2015 CollaborationNI staff met with the Raglan Project representatives on three occasions. The key issues were to:

- Progress Phase One of the Project – the refurbishment of part of the Raglan building and its re-opening as the Slemish Credit Union premises
- Support Brookeville in making its application to the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland for charitable status
- Support the Project in accessing funding for Phase Two of the Project. NICVA's Funding Advice Officer provided information about potential funders
- Negotiate the Memorandum of Understanding for the Project. Phase One could be driven by the Credit Union alone – Phase Two would require a genuine partnership approach and a strong steering group.

CollaborationNI will continue to provide on-going support to the Project as its focus moves towards accessing funding for Phase Two. In order to support the development of a sustainable business model for the Raglan Project, CollaborationNI has proposed it meets with representatives from similar projects in other parts of Northern Ireland.

The partners are discussing what to do next now that the building is ready. They are looking at offering office space and retail units to local businesses, to further help regenerate the area.

Part Two: Summary of interviews with the partners

Drivers to collaborate

Slemish needed new premises and, in discussion with Harryville and Brookeville, decided to buy the derelict Raglan Pub. All three interviewees saw this as a means of starting the regeneration of that area of Ballymena, and shared a vision of seeing '*the building being used to its full potential and helping the community*'. Having a very supportive local MLA who is also on the Board of Brookeville Enterprises, helped in driving the project forward. Partners brought different skills and capabilities, but critically all shared in the vision.

Hoped for benefits

The most visible benefit is having a very smart credit union building in place of a completely derelict pub. Interviewees felt that this is already having benefits for community pride: '*We've renovated an eyesore into something for the community*.' There are two other main areas of benefit:

Local financial capability and resilience: Slemish is already seeing a significant uptake in membership. Half their annual new members (128) joined in the two months since opening the premises. Having a visible presence also leads to greater interaction with the community, allowing for more informal opportunities to discuss finances. With the post office and another bank branch recently closing, Slemish is now the only financial institution in that area of town. Along with the longer opening hours, this helps more people to have access to bank accounts. Slemish are planning a course on well-being and debt, targeting local people and customers. This will look at how to use money better, and help people to improve their financial situation. Running a course such as this would not have been possible without the new premises.

Longer term regeneration: As discussions about the future of the building progress, the partners hope to facilitate greater local employment and spending power as new businesses and potentially voluntary sector organisations move into the office space and retail units:

> '*A bespoke business/community hub providing employment opportunities for all, plus community facilities for the local, ever ageing community at competitive rental rates; any surplus left would be used to further develop local community activities.*'

Concerns and challenges

There were wide differences in financial capability between the partners, perhaps inevitably given that one is a financial institution: '*It was very easy for the principal group to have a vision for the project. Projecting that vision to other groups was the most difficult part, especially where there is a conflict with the current function of that group.*' This created tensions as there were different levels of comfort around money and debt. Overcoming these meant that the MoU had to go through several drafts to reach the point where the partners could all sign up to it.

Views on collaboration support

Interviewees were very appreciative of the support received from CollaborationNI. The external, objective and professional advice was hugely appreciated in reaching the point of the MoU being signed. Alongside this, they credited the expert facilitation as helping them to overcome the challenges of having different levels of understanding and capability:

> *'Their facilitation from the start was fantastic, it assuaged a lot of concerns.'*

> *'We came out wiser than when we went in.'*

> *'It couldn't have been done without that external support – you need somebody from the outside.'*

Reflections on collaborative working

Interviewees felt that the challenges have been overcome effectively. The organisations have clearly defined roles – particularly Slemish – which has helped to keep the collaboration going. They are aware that there is a great deal of work still to do, but feel that there is a shared vision now between all the partners:

> *'We still need the advice as we move towards implementation.'*

Appendix B: List of interviewees

The CollaborationNI Partnership

Leeann Kelly, NICVA (February and October 2015)

Una McKernan, NICVA (February and October 2015)

Nigel McKinney, Building Change Trust (February and October 2015)

Richard O'Rawe, Stellar Leadership (February and October 2015, via email for the second interview)

Nora Smith, CO3 (February and October 2015)

Andrew Talbot, NICVA (February 2015)

Organisations in receipt of support from CollaborationNI (February 2015)

Orla Black, North Antrim Community Network

Christine Bowen, NI Theatre Association

Peter Boyd, Atlantic Philanthropies

Maureen Collins, Dove House

Catherine Farrimond, Limavady District Council

Keara Fulton, UAYD

Pat Hutchinson, Newtownabbey CAB

Lisa-Marie McDaid, Rosemount Resource Centre

Ursula O'Hare, Law Centre NI

Louise Scullion, Causeway Coast and Glens Council

Bob Strong, Advice NI

Case study organisations (October 2015)

Pol Callaghan   Citizens Advice

Edel Fox   STEP NI

Marie Gilmore   MIAC

Glenn Jordan   The Law Centre

Don Leeson   Consumer Council

Bernadette McAliskey   STEP NI

Billy Millar	Brookeville (via email)
Bob Stronge	Advice NI
Robin Swann	Ballymena MLA and Director of Brookeville Enterprises
Tracey Wallace	Slemish n tha Braid Credit Union