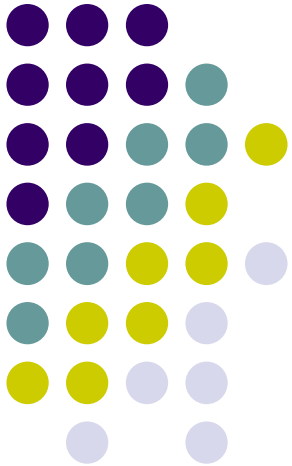
SPINE

Public library services in the East of England working together

Roger McMaster

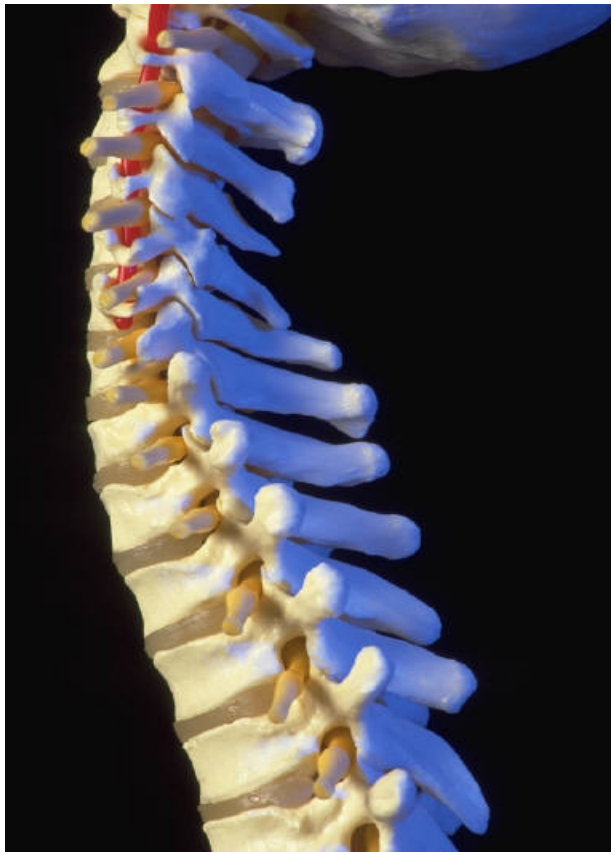


SPINE

- We are:
  - Cambridgeshire, Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Thurrock, Southend and Hertfordshire
- Existing relationships and record of joint working
  - (SCL and Co-East)
- Strategic endorsement by corporate directors
  - (ADASS)
- Drivers
  - Financial,
  - Strategic
  - Professional

Start up

- Gaining early agreement to a vision and common purpose
  - Different starting points for original six, now seven, partners.
- Feasibility funding from Improvement East
- Working to an ‘ambitious’ timetable



Key criteria

- Potential to achieve 25% savings over 3 years
- Achievable within timescale
- Satisfies legal and statutory requirements
- Manageable risk
- Transferable and scaleable to other services, other authorities within the region, and to other regions
- Attractive to all stakeholders

Where we are…

- Two models for detailed enquiry
  - Shared services delivered by a single point, through a traded service or similar, offering stock management and supply, best practice, opportunity generation and horizon scanning for a number of specialisms. Leaving front line delivery and management (possibly) with councils.
  - Full and separate regional library service, doing everything, via a separate legal entity. Commissioned by the local authority which retains statutory responsibility
- Now need to do cost benefit analysis to enable the board to decide which option goes ahead

Challenges

- We are all different
  - Hard to get common shared baseline quickly
- Regional efficiencies V's local offer
  - Where is the community involvement?
- Sheer scale of potential savings needed
  - Is something better than nothing?
- Technical bits
  - Legality and all that
- Pace needed
  - Started December 2009
  - Aiming for something April 2011
- Investment

How’s it been for us?

- We are all still involved
  - 7 authorities is a lot
- Its been a journey (and will continue to be)
  - We are all coming from different starting points and assumptions
- Change is difficult, wherever you are
  - There is no certainty
  - Speed can be done but is hard
  - Conceptual agreement can be challenging when it becomes real (turkeys and Christmas!)
- We have:
  - Built stronger relationships,
  - Deepened our mutual understanding,
- Understand ourselves better
  - None of the work will be wasted

Conclusions

- Working together:
  - Is obvious
  - Is not straight forward
  - We can move quickly
  - Offers options to make significant savings
    - But maybe not the full solution
  - Requires thinking about what is really important about what we do.

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