Exercise to explore different organisational cultures
(Face-to-face with all partners together) This will be achieved more effectively if you can have as wide a range of representatives of each organisation as possible, to try and get different perspectives on how the organisation ‘ticks’. A larger group should be broken up into small groups of ideally no more than six people.

• On postcards or post-it notes, ask participants to describe their organisation’s characteristics (one characteristic to one postcard or post-it) and structure (using a different colour for each organisation). It’s useful to give some examples: eg ‘entrepreneurial’, ‘trusted’, ‘user-led’, ‘so years old’, ‘good (or bad) at supporting staff’, ‘hierarchical’, ‘relaxed (or strict) attitude to time-keeping’. You may also want to prompt participants to describe:
  • Attitude to risk
  • Flexibility and acceptance of change
  • Decision-making approaches
  • Level of participation by staff and beneficiaries
  • Management style
  • Involvement of trustees
  • Remuneration and reward systems.

• Then ask participants to place their post-it notes on a flip-chart – grouping them under appropriate headings.

• On a flip chart or wall, draw two overlapping circles (or as many circles as there are organisations involved in the collaboration).

• Where it seems as though there’s a mix of coloured post-its under a certain heading, place these in the overlapping part of the circles, and those that appear to be different, place in the ‘outside’ part of the circle, grouping them by organisation. What you have now is a visual ‘map’ of where there is synergy and where things are done differently.

• With the group as a whole, explore the significance of the differences that have been identified. Do any specific actions need to be taken? Will working practices need to change? Are there examples of good practice in one or more of the organisations that others would like to adopt? Or indeed bad practice that needs to be improved?

• Agree an action plan with the group on how this is to be taken forward and by whom – and whether the issues identified need to be explored further.