

Who is this guide for?

- Senior decision-makers
- Policy staff



When should I use this guidance?

Design stage and ongoing delivery.

Effective governance takes time, thought, and resource in programme planning and early delivery stages. It requires tailoring based on the relevant local and national governing structures. It evolves over time as systems mature. How this evolves will vary depending on the duration of programme design and delivery.

Evidence from [Greater Manchester Working Well](#) highlights several practical approaches to consider at different stages.

TIP: Establish clear structures (e.g. meetings and forums), roles, and accountability across partners from the start, ensuring devolved administrations are consulted and included so approaches are effective in representing different parts of the UK.

Clear governance arrangements help ensure effective delivery and accountability across all organisations involved. By defining who is responsible for strategic direction and who manages operational delivery, partnerships can work more efficiently and resolve issues quickly, especially in programmes that span multiple sectors such as employment, health, and local services.

In the Working Well programme, structured governance was achieved through separate strategic and operational groups that met monthly:

- **Strategic group:** Included senior representatives from the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), local authorities, and the NHS. This reflected the programme's cross-cutting focus on employment, health, and access to local services, and ensured high-level input and oversight.
- **Operational group:** Brought together programme managers, providers, and delivery partner leads, ensuring representation from all partners for joined-up delivery and problem-solving.

This structure was supported by the Working Well Programme Office (a GMCA coordinating group), which oversaw delivery, performance, and partnerships, and provided oversight, strategic direction, performance intelligence, and active issue resolution.

TIP: Set a clear direction but allow local flexibility.

Providing strong strategic leadership ensures that programmes have clear priorities, while allowing flexibility at the local level enables delivery partners to respond to emerging needs.

In Working Well, the Combined Authority provided clear strategic leadership and linked the programme's outcomes to wider local priorities. Providers still had ongoing flexibility to adapt delivery and introduce targeted programmes to reflect local needs, supported by evaluation and feedback.



TIP: Use governance to strengthen partnership working over time.



Work and health initiatives often rely on many partners, including employment, health, skills, and voluntary and community organisations.

Governance should bring these partners together consistently from project design through to delivery for shared decision-making, problem-solving, and stronger partnership working.

It is important to note that these relationships and ways of working take time to build and may evolve as partnerships develop.

Greater Manchester Working Well did this through strategic and operational groups, integration boards, and multi-agency meetings. These forums reviewed progress, identified challenges, and co-designed solutions relating to health and wellbeing, skills and qualifications, and work readiness.

TIP: Ensure funding models support programme flexibility and targets.

Using funding approaches that give local areas more control, flexibility, and longer-term security helps programmes adapt to service-user needs and improve over time. More flexibility requires clear but realistic ways to track progress, which might include specific contracted employment outcomes, and acknowledgement of 'distance travelled'.

Greater Manchester Working Well supported greater flexibility by setting their own local targets, using a test and learn model, and allowing adjustments in approaches in response to change.



TIP: Enable ongoing clear communication between strategic and operational levels.

Strong, clearly defined, and facilitated communication between strategic and operational levels helps ensure that decisions are informed by delivery and emerging effective practice and challenges. It can also support better integration of partners and wider services.

In GMCA, Local Leads helped connect Working Well's strategic and operational levels and remove barriers to delivery. They linked Working Well to relevant support services, supported integration, brokered relationships, and escalated issues within the local authority. Over time, the level of engagement from Local Leads reduced as relationships and processes became more developed, and the delivery model was more established.



These top tips are based on evaluation evidence identified through a [Rapid Evidence Assessment \(REA\)](#) on what enables effective design, delivery and evaluation of local work and health programmes.

The top tips in this guide have been given a confidence rating of indicative - moderate. This means that the evidence these top tips are based on is suggestive and cannot be directly linked to outcomes. It also means that the evidence comes from at least one study which has been rated as moderate using the [Youth Endowment Fund Evidence Quality Assessment tool](#).