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A Community Paradigm Paper

Adam Lent, Jessica Studdert & Trinley Walker

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Community Paradigm Papers are a series of research outputs designed to build on the analysis presented in the NLGN report *The Community Paradigm* published in February 2019. Community Commissioning is the first in the series. Other papers will follow later in the year.

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Adam Lent, Jessica Studdert & Trinley Walker
July 2019

FOREWORD

Matt Leach
Chief Executive, Local Trust

Big Local is one of the most innovative and exciting grant programmes ever launched by a major lottery funder. Between 2010 and 2012, the National Lottery Community Fund identified 150 areas that had historically missed out on lottery and other funding. Each of those areas was allocated £1m of Big Local funding. This could be spent in any way they chose, provided residents organised themselves locally to plan and manage that funding, involving the wider community in the decision-making process.

Beyond that, the rules, constraints and priorities that define Big Local have been for local people to decide. By design, the programme is bottom-up and community-led; there are no top-down targets or centrally imposed delivery models. The timeframe for Big Local extends over fifteen years, allowing communities to take their time, build confidence and skills, make decisions and deliver change, without the usual pressures to meet end-of-year-spend targets or other arbitrary, bureaucratic deadlines.

The activities and initiatives that Big Local areas have chosen to support reflect the diversity of the communities themselves, including everything from building affordable homes to tackling antisocial behaviour; creating or preserving community facilities, parks and sports centres; launching new training and employment schemes; tackling local health and environmental issues; and addressing community cohesion. Most importantly, through the work that they have commissioned and delivered, residents of Big Local areas have collectively developed the skills, networks and confidence to successfully lead their areas into the future.

In many ways, the Big Local programme can be viewed as a large scale, practical exploration of the ideas set out in the New Local Government

Network's radical manifesto for the future of public services *The Community Paradigm*, published earlier this year. We were therefore delighted for the opportunity to work alongside NLGN as they continue to develop their ideas, focusing in particular on the ways in which community-led commissioning provides a valuable route forward for both communities facing multiple and complex challenges and local authorities looking to deliver more whilst facing continued constraints on their resources.

This is the second NLGN publication we have supported in the last year. The first, *Rebalancing the Power*, kicked off an important debate around how communities and local government can work most effectively together in partnership. We look forward to this important new report developing and deepening that conversation.

Donna Hall CBE
Chair, NLGN and Bolton NHS Foundation Trust

We have been overwhelmed by the positive system-wide reaction to *The Community Paradigm* report we launched earlier this year. The time is right – the time is now for a radical rethink of the role of public services and the people they serve. Our rallying cry for a social movement of public servants and communities has really struck a chord.

One of the essential criteria within *The Community Paradigm* is a fresh approach to commissioning; one which puts residents in the driving seat. It fully exploits their expert knowledge of the local area in which they live, of the day-to-day barriers people who live there encounter, the strengths and opportunities in the neighbourhood, of the illnesses they have and of the issues faced every day. It avoids wasting time and money on doing things that just won't work because they don't connect with the daily reality of people's lives.

At NLGN we are passionate about making a real difference in communities rather than just publishing interesting academic think-pieces. It's what truly drives us. We feel the examples of brilliant practice from across the

UK contained within this document will inspire everyone who reads it to hold a mirror up to their own commissioning practice; whether you work for a council, a Clinical Commissioning Group or another public sector organisation.

We are working with nearly seventy of the most progressive UK councils who share our passion for communities and our passion for a new public service mindset to shift away from ‘state knows best’, away from ‘markets know best’ and towards ‘our communities know best’.

1. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

The core method through which public services are currently designed and delivered is commissioning, defined by the Institute of Commissioning Practitioners as:

'…securing the services that most appropriately address the needs and wishes of the individual service user, making use of market intelligence and research, and planning accordingly'.[1]

It is a highly professionalised domain, focussed on the processes of needs identification, analysis and determination of how to meet those needs and then decisions over resource allocation. Although emerging good practice in commissioning seeks to involve service users in different ways, the initiative and power rests with the public service professional within the institution, rather than with people and communities.

This report seeks to re-define commissioning beyond this narrow focus on delivery of a service against an identified need and instead establish the principles and mechanisms through which a more open and empowering approach – community commissioning – could be established. In the context of continuing resource reductions for local government, with many discretionary services being pared back, this research explores how existing resource can be spent on the things that matter for people – and give them a very much greater role in defining this.

This vision draws heavily on NLGN's recent report *The Community Paradigm*[2] which set out the case for a paradigm shift away from dominant State and Market approaches towards one that is capable of mobilising communities to take on meaningful responsibility for their own futures. Such a Community Paradigm would seek to embed prevention, which is both more sustainable

1 Moss, I. (2010) *The State of Commissioning: Preparing Whitehall for outcomes-based commissioning*. Institute for Government.

2 Lent, A. & Studdert, J. (2019) *The Community Paradigm: Why public services need radical change and how it can be achieved*. NLGN.

and more humane. But it will only work if public services challenge their tendency to hoard power and instead find ways of sharing it with communities. As was argued in *The Community Paradigm*, we cannot simply exhort individuals and their networks to take on more responsibility for their health, well-being and happiness, they must be given the power and resource to do so – a process we call 'communitisation' to contrast with the processes of nationalisation and privatisation associated with older paradigms. Commissioning power, is we believe, one of these core powers currently held by the state that needs to be opened up to community influence.

As well as making the case for change and explaining why communities are so central to a preventative approach, the main part of the report seeks to provide a very practical guide to community commissioning. It highlights the key strategic decisions and methods public sector bodies should employ to hand some degree of commissioning power over to communities.

The paper argues that there are four key questions that public sector organisations need to consider when moving to a model of community commissioning.

- **THE NATURE OF THE SERVICE:** will the community be able to commission 'discretionary' or 'non-core' services (such as environmental services or health monitoring) or will they commission statutory or core services (such as social care or acute healthcare) or will it involve a combination of both?
- **THE NATURE OF THE COMMISSIONING NETWORK:** will the community commissioning the service encompass all residents within a certain geographical area (such as a specific neighbourhood) or will it be open only to those with a particular interest or need (such as disabled adults requiring social care)?
- **THE METHOD OF POWER TRANSFER:** what will be the formal and informal mechanisms to make sure commissioning power is transferred to a community in line with the aspirations for depth of participation?
- **THE DEPTH OF PARTICIPATION:** to what extent will the community be 'in the driving seat' of the commissioning process?

The answers a body may give to these questions are complex and nuanced and the report does its best to explore the many costs and benefits associated with each choice.

However, one finding that has come through strongly from our research for this paper, is that while distinctions (such as between discretionary and core or between geographic and service-need or, indeed, between different departments or institutions) may be important to public sector employees, they are of little interest to communities themselves who are far more likely to be led by the need to address specific challenges. Thus, public sector bodies should be ready, when embarking on a meaningful process of community commissioning, to accept that the boundaries they draw around that process may well have to disappear over time. In fact, those bodies should actively embrace such dissolution of boundaries given public servants have been working towards the breaking down of artificial siloes for many years with limited success.

The report also outlines a set of recommendations for central government that would help bring about this transfer of power to communities in the commissioning process. These are:

- The legal and regulatory framework around commissioning and procurement overseen by the Crown Commercial Service should be reviewed and reformed to require public sector bodies to engage service users and geographic communities in their commissioning and procurement processes.
- The UK's withdrawal from the EU should be used as an opportunity to rewrite rules around procurement to allow public sector bodies to easily communitise services.
- Government should encourage public sector bodies to establish 'community constitutions' that sets out how they will work to support communities and establish processes that ensure power and authority rests with them.
- Government should allow, encourage and fund experimentation with community commissioning.

- After Brexit, to support the Government's commitments to enable communities to take back control, the Shared Prosperity Fund should be devolved to communities directly to decide local priorities for the investment in line with the demands of the Communities in Charge campaign.
- The next wave of dormant assets should be established as a Community Wealth Fund to provide resource for the most deprived communities to commission services and local improvements on their own behalf as proposed by the Community Wealth Fund Alliance.

2. THE CASE FOR CHANGE

There are significant underlying trends in the economic, social and political spheres that have implications for public faith in public services as currently constituted. These were established in *The Community Paradigm* as reasons why traditional ways of working were losing their efficacy and credibility. They also inform the context for why we should consider pushing beyond the boundaries of traditional commissioning to give communities a much more direct role.

DEMAND PRESSURES ON PUBLIC SERVICES ARE GROWING RAPIDLY AND ARE CHANGING THE NATURE OF SERVICES REQUIRED. A combination of reduced public expenditure, an ageing population, and increasingly complex socio-economic needs are creating rising pressures on public services.[3] Just as resource is being pared back, we are living longer, and many of us now have one or more long term conditions which require ongoing management. For services to be sustainable in the future, they will need to make a shift away from acute response to prevention in the context of wider support networks.

PEOPLE'S DESIRE FOR MORE INFLUENCE OVER THEIR LIVES IS GATHERING PACE AND MEANS THAT SERVICES NEED TO RESPOND TO MAINTAIN CREDIBILITY. Social change, such as the rise of individualism and the decline of deference from the 1960s onwards, have been catalysed in recent years by technological changes. Digital capabilities create new opportunities for people to connect, organise and network with others, and we are becoming more used to the immediate efficacy of these interactions. A growing appetite for more influence in the public realm is notable from the Brexit vote, which took place in the context of a growing mistrust of experts. For services to maintain legitimacy with people in the future, they will need to better harness people's desire for more tangible influence over their lives and their immediate community.

3 See *The Community Paradigm* for a discussion of this.

Traditional commissioning, a process led by professionals and with decision-making taking place deep within the public service institution, possesses features which limit its ability to respond to these trends. These characteristics can be seen to have their roots in the paradigms that dominate our public services today:

STATE PARADIGM HIERARCHY EMPHASISES THE PRIMACY OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR PROFESSIONAL AND UNDERMINES GENUINE COLLABORATION WITH SERVICE USERS AS EQUALS. Although commissioning is a method that evolved after the era of the State Paradigm's dominance between the 1940s and 1980s, its legacy has significant implications for today's dominant framework. Our public services are currently organised along the lines of professional specialisms, with siloes inevitably developing as a result.

These siloes have several consequences for how we think about public services. First, they provide a dominant frame for how a service user's 'problem' is understood – in other words, which specialised remit it sits within. From the perspective of the service user, this often fails to take into account the totality of their situation, and can result in being bounced unsatisfactorily between services. Second, through over-professionalising general human interactions – personal challenges and crises can become bureaucratised and at worst can be damagingly pathologized.[4] Third, the high status – relative to services users – of professionals within the system, in the context of the primacy of public service institutions, prevents genuine recognition of the potential of people themselves to be specialists in their own situation or condition.

MARKET PARADIGM TRANSACTIONALISM INCENTIVISES COMMISSIONING AT SCALE, WHICH CAN'T COPE WITH COMPLEXITY AND CREATES PERVERSE INCENTIVES FOR PROVIDERS. As the dominant frame for public services from the 1980s onwards, commissioning as a discipline emerged under the Market Paradigm. The method of commissioning itself requires the commissioner to identify a series of

4 Alex Fox's book – *A New Health and Care System* - has a disturbing account of how normal teenage behaviours can become pathologized or even criminalised when displayed in a care setting.

outcomes and measures against which to make decisions about the nature of the service, who should provide it and how it should be held accountable for performance.[5]

There are several consequences to this traditional approach to commissioning. Firstly, it struggles to do justice to complexity – reducing complex socio-economic needs to a series of identifiable service transactions that can be articulated in a single specification. Outcome-based commissioning tends to succeed in generating improvements in separate silos rather than tangible real-world outcomes people might recognise.[6] This can lead to failure demand, where new demand is created when an individual's needs are not met by their first interaction with a service.[7]

Secondly, the funding model which supports the approach encourages particular behaviours on the part of providers to game the system and prioritise producing 'good looking data' rather than qualitative improvements for people.[8] Thirdly, traditional commissioning under cost pressures lends itself to scale, often advantaging large providers who can ensure efficient low unit prices over smaller, local community organisations which are more closely connected to existing social capital.[9] Attempts to remedy this through introducing 'social value' criteria into procurement criteria are widely recognised as largely tick-box exercises unable to escape the logic of a transactional system.[10]

The upshot of the dominant State and Market Paradigm features which characterise traditional commissioning is that they both take a primarily deficit-based approach to service user 'needs'. Neither are fundamentally

5 For a discussion of this, see Lowe, T. et al. (2017) *Commissioning in Complexity*, Collaborate.

6 Lowe, T. and Wilson, R. (2015) 'Playing the Game of Outcomes-based Performance Management: Is Gamesmanship Inevitable? Evidence from Theory and Practice', in *Social Policy and Administration,* vol 57, issue 7, pp. 981-1001.

7 Some estimates attribute failure demand for 80 per cent of demand into health and social care services. See Locality (2014) *Saving money by doing the right thing: Why 'local by default' must replace 'diseconomies of scale'*. Locality.

8 Lowe, T. and Wilson, R. (2015) 'Playing the Game of Outcomes-based Performance Management: Is Gamesmanship Inevitable? Evidence from Theory and Practice', in *Social Policy and Administration,* vol 57, issue 7, pp. 981-1001.

9 Locality (2014) *Saving money by doing the right thing: Why 'local by default' must replace 'diseconomies of scale'*. Locality.

10 Cabinet Office. (2018) *Civil Society Strategy: Building a future that works for everyone*. Cabinet Office.

capable of mobilising wider community assets and strengths which are required if a shift towards the preventative approach of *The Community Paradigm* is to take effect.

3. WHY COMMUNITISE? THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF COMMUNITY COMMISSIONING

Building on emerging innovative practice to date, there are a range of benefits that can be identified as potential gains to be made from the model of community commissioning. The evidence demonstrates impacts on three levels: the individual, the community and society in general. This empirical evidence is supplemented by findings from Big Local areas (see case study on p.17), which echo the potential gains to be made from handing power and resource over to communities.

A. INDIVIDUAL WELL-BEING

For the individual, the opportunity to participate directly in decisions can have direct powerful benefits. An evidence review undertaken by the What Works Centre for Well-being, found links between increased levels of 'collective control' and better health and well-being across the community.[11] Impacts were identified across a range of established determinants of health and well-being including the physical conditions in which people live, social relationships, individual physical and mental health, with a knock-on effect on community-wide levels of well-being.

Findings directly from Big Local areas indicate that people participating are developing new connections and taking the opportunity to bring their own ideas and skills to bear on projects. As one interviewee from Barrowcliff Big Local stated "we may not have the skills to put everything on – but often we know a man or woman in the area who does know and can take the idea forward". In Kingsbrook and Caudwell, one Big Local interviewee reported "people are talking to each other more and are much more networked".

11 Pennington, A. et al. (2018) *A systematic review of evidence on the impacts of joint-decision making on community well-being.* Technical Report. What Works Well-being.

Another interviewee noted how residents themselves have personally developed over time from the experience of participation: "for a majority of the partnership it was the first time they had been in this position [at a stakeholder meeting]. These people are now really good scrutinisers, good at challenging, good at lateral thinking but at the beginning would have kept quiet".[12]

CASE STUDY: THE BIG LOCAL

The Big Local programme has given 150 neighbourhoods in England £1.1 million each to spend over at least ten years. Funded by the Big Lottery Fund and managed by Local Trust, each Big Local area numbers between 6,000 – 8,000 residents, typically with high levels of unemployment and having experienced the decline of local industry. The funding committed to each area comes with relatively few conditions attached to how it should be spent – beyond light touch governance and some support from Local Trust – and no prescription on the pace at which it must be spent. Each Big Local area forms a resident-led partnership which leads community engagement and drives forward the plan to use the funding. The investment is designed to build social capital and help communities develop, potentially becoming better placed to secure their own funding in the future.

It could be argued that Big Local is not strictly a form of commissioning because the funds come from voluntary sector funding rather than the public sector. However, it is clear that the principle that informs Big Local – handing significant funds to a community to spend as they see fit in line with their own needs – is very much a form of community commissioning and as such of great significance to the arguments being made here.

Five years into the programme, Big Local areas have funded a wide variety of projects, having been given the freedom to define their own priorities and what would best enhance their community. Some examples include:

12 McCabe, A et al (2018) *Big Local: Reflections on 'resident led' change (Paper One)*, Local Trust, Sheffield Hallam University and TSRC.

- **RAMSEY MILLION, CAMBRIDGESHIRE:** boosted the area's profile in terms of its heritage, supporting events and creating a brand to attract more visitors to the town centre which had experienced decline. Tackled geographical isolation by supporting rural transport and summer play schemes for children.

- **BARROWCLIFF, NORTH YORKSHIRE:** created SPARKS, a coaching and support system for chaotic families working intensively with them on life skills, well-being, parenting and learning. This complements existing provision but is geared to developing greater trust with families. [13] The partnership also built a playpark which was designed with the direct involvement of local children and their experience of other parks.

- **KINGSBROOK AND CAULDWELL, BEDFORDSHIRE:** financed a community health champion post at a GP surgery, which acted as a bridge between primary care and community support networks, saving GP financial and capacity resources. The local council has subsequently funded further community champion posts in the area, building on the success of the Big Local scheme.

- **LAWRENCE WESTON, BRISTOL:** worked with the local authority and private industry to develop solar panels and wind turbines in the area to both generate green energy and develop an income stream for Big Local itself.[14]

- **GROWING TOGETHER, NORTHAMPTON:** this partnership across five estates has taken the lead on initiating a programme of environmental works to rejuvenate the condition of three local lakes, through coordination of a project and a European Funding bid involving the Environment Agency and Northampton Borough Council. The Big Local has also led the local consultation and development of a Neighbourhood plan.[15]

13 See Barrowcliff Big Local Plan 2018-2020.

14 Tjoa, P. (2018) Rebalancing the Power. NLGN. Available from: https://www.learningfrombiglocal.org.uk/resources/rebalancing-the-power-five-principles

15 Ibid

These examples give an indication as to how the injection of a significant budget into a community can catalyse a conversation among residents and lead to the commissioning of activity which enhance value for residents. Evaluations have reported that there have been instances of the significant power that the funding has given areas that were previously largely overlooked. As Lawrence Weston and Growing Together demonstrate, their funding brought significant stakeholders to the table, and one area reported 'getting conversations going between council departments from three different councils and the parish council, which was "unheard of in recent memory".[16]

B. COMMUNITY COHESION

At a community level, there is evidence that participation can lead to greater cohesion. For example, a Government-initiated study of participatory budgeting in England concluded that it had helped create community cohesion, fostered more engagement, and increased social capital.[17]
The work of political scientist Robert D. Putnam identified social capital - defined as trust, horizontal networks and reciprocity norms – as critical for determining successful outcomes for communities.[18]

The benefits to community cohesion and a sense of greater belonging are strong factors that emerge from Big Local areas. As one interviewee from Ramsey Big Local said, "the vast majority of people responding to a survey thought Ramsey had got better over the last five years. People thought there was more community spirit… attitudes have changed – people think things can happen". In Kingsboork and Caudwell Big Local area, previously rather atomised community groups had the opportunity of a new common purpose to bring them together. As one interviewee said, "before Big Local the different groups in the area were disjointed, one of the first things we did as a Big Local was get a meeting of the different groups and we have been working together ever since".

16 McCabe, A et al (2018) *Big Local: Reflections on Community Leadership (Paper Two), Local Trust, Sheffield Hallam University* and TSRC.

17 Gov.uk, 'Communities in the driving seat: a study of participatory budgeting in England' (2011), 5-7.

18 See, for example, Putnam, R (1993) Making Democracy Work

C. SOCIETY AND STATE

On a wider societal level, there is strong evidence to suggest that giving people a direct say over decisions that affect them has positive consequences for the effectiveness of those decisions, the efficiency of resource allocation and for people's ongoing trust in the system's capability.

Evidence from a Europe-wide study of participatory methods found that citizens' knowledge of issues resulted in new ideas and more diverse input that would otherwise be lacking.[19] The experience of Austria's Citizens' Councils demonstrated that by involving people in decision-making, a broader range of expertise could be used which helped officials develop effective solutions and uncovered blind-spots.[20] The landmark participatory budgeting initiative in Porto Alegre, Brazil, which improved local government financial planning, led to better allocation of funds to services, so officials could plan more efficiently for the entire financial year, reducing overall costs and expenditure.[21] More broadly, participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre in Brazil has led to a number of wider attendant benefits including: a reduction in clientelism and corruption, significant levels of participation, and, the redistribution of public goods.

Linked to this evidence of greater effectiveness, there are indications that by going through the process of participation in collective decision-making, people develop a stronger appreciation for trade-offs that exist.[22] By being more closely involved in the complexities of issues and the resource available to commit to finding solutions, there is some evidence that their attitudes can shift.[23] People who have actively participated in decision-making processes are also potentially more inclined as a result to believe

19 Davies, A, Simon, J, (2012) 'Citizen engagement in social innovation – a case study report'. A deliverable of the project: "*The theoretical, empirical and policy foundations for building social innovation in Europe*". Tepsie.

20 M. Hellrigl and M. Lederer. (2014) 'Wisdom Councils in the Public Sector' in R. Zubizarreta and M. zur Bonsen (eds), *Dynamic Facilitation*, 1-13.

21 A. Schneider and B. Goldfrank. (2002) 'Budgets and ballots in Brazil: participatory budgeting from the city to the state', IDS Working Paper 149.

22 Offe, C. (2014) The Europolis experiment and its lessons for deliberation on Europe. *European Union Politics*, Vol 15, issue 3.

23 Department for Communities and Local Government. (2011) Communities in the driving seat: a study of participatory budgeting in England'. DCLG.

that civic institutions are working to their benefit, with a greater willingness to pay taxes.[24]

This empirical evidence is borne out by the experiences in many Big Local areas. The model of the community as a neighbourhood coming together to make decisions as equals was seen as crucial in the Barrowcliff Big Local area, where there had been a breakdown of trust with authorities. As one interviewee said "people distrust statutory bodies on estates…don't trust social services, the council. They see these people as normally only coming to do something bad to them… 'serve them a notice' and things. But your neighbour won't do that". While engagement had been challenging at first, as a result, there is now an active programme of activity led by a resident steering group focussed on raising aspirations and removing barriers to work.

In Blackpool Revoe, one of the ten most deprived wards in England, residents went through an extensive process of consultation and negotiation to agree priorities for their Big Local. While there was early consensus that the key issue in the neighbourhood was the misuse of illegal drugs, opinion was divided over whether to take an approach that emphasised early intervention and support or a speedier enforcement led approach which would "get rid of the druggies". In the end, a twin approach was adopted which funded a range of community support measures including CCTV and shop front security, alongside local drop-in sessions and commissioned life-coaching and drug support services.[25] This example shows how deliberation amongst a community can reach consensus and buy-in to a solution despite divergent views.

The evidence is thus overwhelming that greater participation and involvement of citizens and their communities in the decisions that affect their lives improves well-being and social capital and leads to more impactful, holistic services and policies. These happier, healthier, better connected, more active and civic-minded populations will inevitably be less likely to drift into crisis and more likely to address challenges themselves. These well-evidenced advantages that provide a convincing case that such participation is key to enabling a preventative agenda to emerge which will, over time, reduce demand on public services.

24 B. Torgler and F. Schneider, 'The impact of tax morale and institutional quality on the shadow economy," *Journal of Economic Psychology* 30(2), 228-245.

25 McCabe, A. & Wilson, M & Macmillan, R. (2017) *Big Local: Beyond the early years*. Our *Bigger Story: The Longitudinal Multi Media Evaluation of Big Local*. Third Sector Research Centre, University of Birmingham.

4 COMMUNITY COMMISSIONING IN PRACTICE

Drawing on the experience of innovation in commissioning and research conducted for this paper, we have concluded that there are four key questions that public sector organisations need to consider when moving to a model of community commissioning.

- THE NATURE OF THE SERVICE: will the community be able to commission 'discretionary' or 'non-core' services (such as environmental services or health monitoring) or will they commission statutory or core services (such as social care or acute healthcare) or will it involve a combination of both?
- THE NATURE OF THE COMMISSIONING NETWORK: will the community commissioning the service encompass all residents within a certain geographical area (such as a specific neighbourhood) or will it be open only to those with a particular interest or need (such as disabled adults requiring social care)?
- THE METHOD OF POWER TRANSFER: what will be the formal and informal mechanisms to make sure commissioning power is transferred to a community in line with the aspirations for depth of participation?
- THE DEPTH OF PARTICIPATION: to what extent will the community be 'in the driving seat' of the commissioning process?

There is also the crucial issue of the nature of support any public sector organisation must offer to communities taking on extra power and responsibility. That is dealt with separately at the end of this chapter.

We will now explore the issues associated with each of these key questions.

A. THE NATURE OF THE SERVICE: DISCRETIONARY/NON-CORE OR CORE?

The great majority of currently existing community commissioning falls into discretionary/non-core budgets and services. There are three reasons for this. Firstly, it is regarded as less risky to give communities influence over non-core budgets given that they are subject to less regulatory and statutory oversight. Secondly, core services are often regarded as central to the identity and mission of institutions, so there is more likely to be organisational resistance to the idea of handing over commissioning power in those areas. Thirdly, core services tend to involve more technically challenging delivery and are often focused on the most vulnerable or acute cases. This means they commonly require highly specialised design and delivery skills.

There is no doubt that a focus on more discretionary spend can be an important driver of prevention. From a council perspective, handing power to communities to commission environmental, youth and a range of other non-statutory services can mobilise a network around the type of contextual factors which have a big impact on either driving up or reducing demand. As explained in the previous section: cleaner streets, better maintained parks and green spaces, flourishing youth and community centres designed and delivered by communities themselves would undoubtedly benefit the health and well-being of residents.

However, there are significant benefits to moving towards community commissioning around core services, even if this is less common currently. Core services deal directly with those who are the biggest drivers of demand for public services: troubled families, those with chronic and multiple health conditions, those living in poverty, the homeless, the disabled and the elderly. It would be a strange prevention strategy indeed that did not find a way of engaging the citizens who potentially hold the key to reducing demand. We would argue that shifting power and resources to high demand groups, enabling and thus providing them with the tools to take responsibility for their own health and well-being is a vital part of any community commissioning strategy.

In addition, it is at the core of public service delivery that one tends to find the most intransigent commitment to older hierarchical and transactional mindsets focused on acute response to crisis demand rather than a more holistic, empowering approach aimed at prevention. This may be the result of organisational culture but an equally significant driver is simply the fact that, with reduced funding and rising demand, core services are often forced to focus on day-to-day crisis management of their acute response function and lack the resource and bandwidth to shift to prevention models. Thus, unless community commissioning reaches into core services, it is highly unlikely that the shift towards a prevention model based on community power will take root nearly deeply enough to have a significant impact on demand.

We would argue therefore that the community commissioning approach needs to be applied to core services as much as discretionary and non-core services. There are, however, two important qualifications to this. Firstly, the imperative of a shift to core should not be taken to mean that empowering the community around the commissioning of discretionary services is somehow second best. A community commissioning approach across discretionary and core services can ensure that both preventative contextual factors and more targeted collaborative work with high demand service users are developed.

Indeed, and this is the second qualification, the very distinction between discretionary/non-core and core is one that should disappear over time with genuinely empowered communities in the driving seat. The distinction owes its existence to historical legacies of institutional structure, culture and statute rather than to the real world experience of people. In that world, the connection between local environment, economic development, community resilience, family breakdown, ill-health, disability and poverty is seamless. These factors are interwoven in complex and unbreakable ways and must be dealt with holistically rather than in artificial siloes imposed by institutional mindset, budgets or law.

B. THE NATURE OF THE COMMUNITY: GEOGRAPHIC OR SERVICE NEED/INTEREST?

Commissioning that is led by a geographical community such as a neighbourhood or ward brings with it certain strengths. Most notably, if done in a participatory, open fashion, it can be highly inclusive, drawing in a wide range of diverse citizens to work together in potentially very impactful ways. In that sense, it can also be a powerful promoter of social capital which in itself can be an important source of prevention as described in the previous section.

Commissioning through a geographical community also promotes participation that is pluralistic. Everyone in a defined area has a 'right' to take part. Community commissioning as led by a geographical community has the potential to empower individuals who might otherwise not have perceived they could exercise a role as a decision maker.

A geographical approach also makes a focus on the wider social determinants of health and well-being more susceptible to community mobilisation than may be the case with a commissioning process led by a service need or interest group. Geographical communities are more likely to address problems such as local environment, housing, social capital, economy than non-geographical groups and indeed may have more capacity and more of the necessary networks to do so.

Evidence does show, however, that it can be more difficult to mobilise geographical communities in areas with large transitory populations or where a strong sense of identity associated with a place is lacking.[26] In these areas, efforts must be undertaken to build greater cohesiveness with groups new to areas that might be termed 'transient'. These efforts may take the form of activities including the provision of ESOL classes to overcome any immediate language barriers, or encouraging children-led activities that can lead to wider engagement between families.

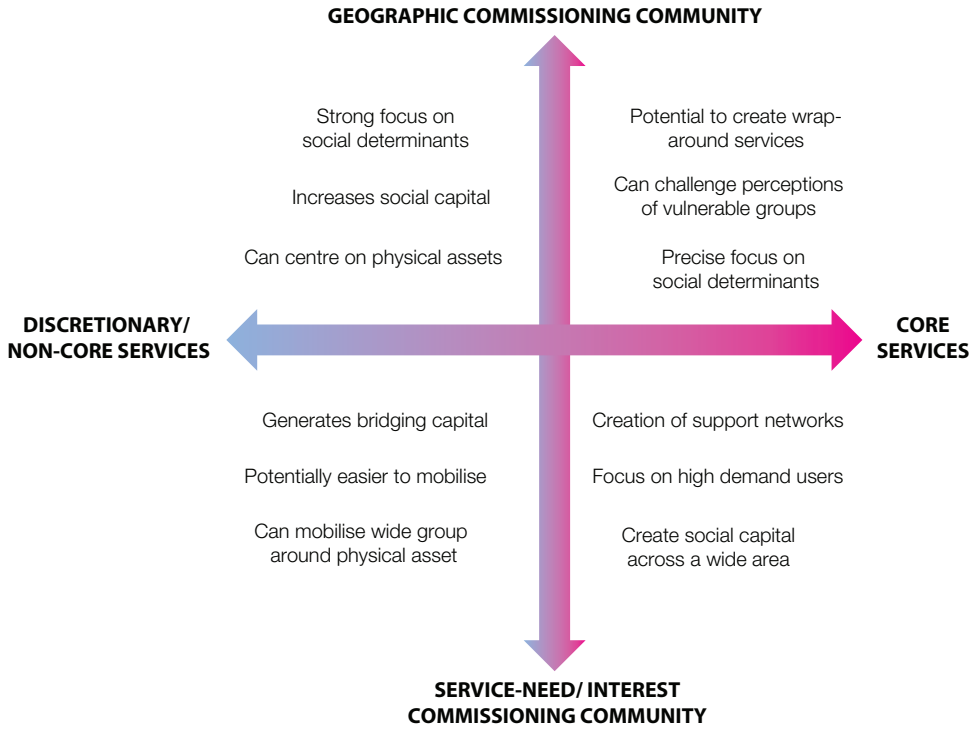
Commissioning communities based on *non*-geographical connection also brings certain advantages. It may be more easy to mobilise as there will be

26 Local Trust. (2018) The Future for Communities: Perspectives on Power. Local Trust.

existing connections between individuals, based around shared interests or service needs. Also, if led by a specific service need or shared condition or challenge, there is the possibility for a significant shift to prevention based on a detailed shared understanding of need and service failure in the past. In addition, there is the prospect that a mutual support network will emerge and/or be at the heart of the commissioned service which, as was explained in *The Community Paradigm,* plays a crucial role in prevention.

The risk with building a commissioning community around specific service need is that wider social determinants of health and well-being may get less attention and/or the types of networks created have less capacity to address issues such as local environment, housing, economy which have such a significant impact on demand.

Combining these two aspects of community commissioning allows us to immediately develop four alternative approaches. These are presented below with specific strengths associated with each.



Obviously, the sections of the quadrant associated with either geographic/service need commissioning communities or discretionary/core services will bring their own advantages and challenges as outlined above. However, when we consider the interaction between these two characteristics by considering each quadrant of the chart above, a further layer of understanding of distinct benefits can be woven in (as indicated in the chart) which it is worth considering briefly here.

GEOGRAPHIC/DISCRETIONARY & NON-CORE: This is an approach exemplified by Big Local and most forms of participatory budgeting. It will be a commissioning process open to all citizens in a specific geographical area such as a ward, a neighbourhood or even a housing estate. The focus will tend to be on services that are less directly related to those who require more intensive support from a public service and will thus include things like economic development, environment and public health.

Thus, as with all geographically based community commissioning this approach provides a strong basis to focus on the social determinants of health and well-being as geographic communities tend to be more interested and more able to address issues such as housing and environment. This is an advantage enhanced by a discretionary focus which also tends to be centred on those issues as opposed to the acute response focus of core services.

The potential of a geographic/discretionary approach to community commissioning to enhance social capital would also seem high. Many people identify closely with, or at least care about, the area in which they live giving people a point of commonality. But also, it is simply more practical for people who live near each other to make closer social connections. Thus, a commissioning approach which draws people together within a defined area to address challenges in that area would seem to have a high chance of generating greater social capital than existed before which can have many benefits for individual and community health and well-being as explained in a previous chapter.

Finally, smaller geographic communities tend to care about physical assets such as open green spaces, public amenities such as libraries and buildings

and how they are or aren't being used to address local challenges. The possibility of mobilising a geographic community around improving or finding novel uses for such physical assets is high particularly given the nature of discretionary services.

SERVICE NEED/INTEREST & DISCRETIONARY/NON-CORE: This approach is exemplified by many community businesses established by local authorities which often mobilise groups of residents with a shared interest in shaping and delivering a particular discretionary service such as libraries and parks. Or, as in the case of the Morecambe Bay NHS Vanguard described in *The Community Paradigm* report, communications and public health.

It is an approach with a number of specific benefits. It can be particularly effective at generating so-called 'bridging capital'. By focusing on an interest or service need rather than geography, it offers a possibly stronger potential to create social connections between people from different backgrounds and groups.

It may also prove easier to mobilise if an interest or need can be identified that is known to be of particular concern to a large number of people across a wide area. Creating a critical mass of support for effective input into the commissioning process and then collaboration around delivery can be more swiftly and cheaply achieved. For example, Durham County Council, has had success creating a network of snow wardens tasked with clearing streets during periods of heavy snowfall. This network has then gone on to collaborate around a range of other discretionary issues.

Finally, if the commissioning process is centered on a physical asset (particularly one with strong significance across a wide area such as a centrally located theatre, park, library etc.), the possibility to draw in a wide range of skills, experience and broader enthusiasm may well be greater than if there is a focus on a much smaller geographical footprint such as a single ward or neighbourhood.

GEOGRAPHIC & CORE: This approach has not been widely used but the benefits of encouraging a defined and relatively small geographical area to focus on core services provided to those with intensive needs may well

be high and as such it is growing. It is an important feature, for example, of the Neighbourhood Cares pilots being developed by Cambridgeshire County Council.

With this approach, the capacity would seem high to create so-called 'community wrap-around' services where individuals and assets within a community are mobilised to support troubled families, disabled people, those facing isolation or recovering from serious illness and others facing various challenges. If such wrap-around services were hard-wired into the actual commissioning process by involving a neighbourhood or ward in the design of a service then the opportunity for such mobilisation must be better than if efforts were made after the commissioning process is complete.

Combining a geographic focus with core services may also allow a very precise focus on the social determinants of good health and well-being for vulnerable groups. As mentioned previously, smaller geographic groups tend to address issues such as housing, environment and networks when given power and resource. If this focus can be combined with the needs of a particularly high demand group – rather than the more general population in an area – then the benefits for a more preventative approach may be great.

The approach may also undermine negative local perceptions of vulnerable groups by bringing people into direct contact with those facing challenges, creating human connections and showing that, with support from a network, people can overcome those challenges rather than face stigma and marginalisation.

SERVICE NEED/INTEREST & CORE: This is probably one of the most widely used approaches of the four given that consultation with and engagement of services users in the design of services is increasingly common even if the depth of participation in the commissioning process is highly variable.

The benefits of this approach to community commissioning as opposed to the other three in this section, are relatively straightforward. There is obviously the capacity to focus the commissioning process very directly on the needs of a particularly vulnerable or high demand group and to redesign a service so it precisely meets those needs. It also has the potential to

create strong networks of mutual support and place those at the heart of service design and delivery with all the attendant benefits to long-term health and well-being. And finally, it can create social capital across a wide geographical area bringing together those with shared conditions or needs into a potentially very close group.

None of these four approaches is necessarily better than the other. Each serves distinct purposes and comes with different costs and benefits. However, it is important to keep in mind that they are themselves merely only useful starting points for a journey that leads to ever deeper community engagement in the commissioning process. The arrows on the chart above are meaningful. They indicate, as was pointed out above, that the dividing lines between discretionary and core and between geographical area and service need that might be central to the mind-set of a public sector institution are much less relevant to communities. It is quite likely that a commissioning process, for example, that begins with a geographic and discretionary focus will find itself moving to consider core services as well as forging links between specific service users as a community's understanding of a challenge becomes more sophisticated and granular. While this may well be challenging to a public sector body, it should be seen as a measure of success and the wider opportunities and benefits it offers should be seized.

C. METHOD OF POWER AND RESOURCE TRANSFER

Maybe the most crucial issue for public sector organisations to consider when undertaking community commissioning is the method by which power and resource will be transferred. Our research has indicated four main broad methods with which public sector organisations are experimenting. These are not mutually exclusive and we have attempted to provide a sense of the benefits and costs of each approach below. A successful community commissioning approach will almost certainly involve a blend of two or more of these approaches.

I. OPERATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

This method involves public sector workers – or associated or contracted third parties such as voluntary sector organisations – developing relationships with communities which allows those communities to have far greater say over, and involvement in, the design and delivery of public services. There is not necessarily any formal hand-over of power and resource and the engagement often remains focused on quite operational, very local and immediate concerns. However, the approach of public servants is to build up significant and multiple relationships of trust which allow communities to play a more substantial role than they would under the normal commissioning process.

Even though this approach does tend to focus on the operational, there is the potential to pick up patterns of concern and required reform which can then feed into broader considerations around commissioning of services which could be addressed through the more strategic methods highlighted below.

This is the approach being developed by Cambridgeshire County Council and Huntingdonshire District Council amongst others.[27] There, frontline teams are based in specific localities and seek much closer, direct working relationships with residents and services users with the aim of shaping a service around the community's needs.

The Bromley-by-Bow Health Centre has been taking such an approach for many years seeking to co-create their service with a range of people from across the local community. Recognising the influence of socio-economic factors in people's health outcomes and the role they play in prevention, the Centre not only provides care but offers a range of support tailored to individuals' needs, whether this be helping someone to read or enter the job market for the first time.[28]

Turning Point's Connected Care model is led by the expertise of ordinary members of the community, which it allows to design and deliver new solutions.[29] In Hartlepool, this involved employing community researchers

27 Ibid. The Community Paradigm
28 Trimble, R. Unleashing Healthy Communities. Bromley by Bow Health Centre.
29 House of Commons Health Committee. (2011) Written evidence from Turning Point (COM 80).

to carry out an audit of the needs and aspirations of the local community, their perceptions of current services and the extent to which they do or do not meet needs.[30] This led to the establishment of a community-led social enterprise – a navigator scheme that provided services and support for vulnerable older people in the community and supported living services. Cost savings as a result of this approach for someone with complex needs were estimated to be £66,238.[31]

Operational Engagement also bears a close resemblance to 'co-production' which is increasingly widely applied in different forms across the public sector. It is defined by the Social Care Institute for Excellence as 'designating and delivering public services in an equal and reciprocal relationship between professionals, people using services, their families and their neighbours'.[32]

Nesta's 'people-powered commissioning' approach, for example, focusses on health and social care, and emphasises bringing together different parts of these systems including patients, practitioners and providers.[33] It sees the next era of commissioning as not simply procuring a service but a more sophisticated 'market-making' role which focusses on commissioning different types of services, supporting new alliances of providers and building up provider capacity including outside the mainstream. Collaborate and Northumbria University also emphasise the importance of relationships for practitioners advocating what they call a 'human learning systems' approach for commissioners which involves strengths-based practice, a data-driven learning culture and system-wide accountability combined with opening up design of services to users and their networks.[34]

Many of these examples and the Operational Engagement approach to community commissioning owe much to the practice of Asset Based

30 Bruce, G et al (2011) "Connected Care Re-visited: Hartlepool and Beyond", *Journal of Integrated Care*, Vol. 19 Issue: 2, pp.13-21.

31 Koussa, N. (2015) Connected Care

32 Pennington, A et al. (2017) Scoping review of review-level evidence on co-production in local decision making and its relationship to community well-being. What Works Well-being.

33 Nesta and Innovation Unit. (2013) *People Powered Commissioning: Embedding innovation in practice*. Nesta and Innovation Unit.

34 Lowe, T and Plimmer, D. (2019) *Exploring the new world: Practical insights for funding, commissioning and managing in complexity.* Collaborate and Northumbria University.

Community Development which has exerted a growing influence on public service over the last three decades. Like community commissioning it places the mobilisation of communities and leadership from within those communities themselves as the key to developing a more humane, sustainable and preventative approach to public services.[35]

One of the great benefits of the Operational Engagement approach is that it is lighter touch and lower profile and hence lower risk than other methods. It thus may lend itself well to an organisation wanting to test community commissioning. It may also provide a particularly useful early stage approach that allows a public sector body to adapt working methods, gain intelligence and secure community trust and willingness to mobilise before going for one of the higher profile methods below.

None of this is to say that the Operational Engagement method is easy. Early pilots have shown that it requires significant shifts in working practices to be meaningful which often conflict with established hierarchical and transactional modes.

An obvious question which arises with this method is whether it constitutes a genuine transfer of power and resource sufficient to enable a meaningful shift to a preventative model. On its own, we remain unconvinced that it is. It essentially amounts to a significant change in practice but one which can be undone relatively easily by a public sector institution and one which still leaves major strategic decisions over commissioning in the hands of public sector institutions rather than communities. We would argue, therefore, that while Operational Engagement offers a very useful way of securing intelligence and building relationships, it is best seen as the beginning of a more thoroughgoing process of power transfer which will involve one or more of the methods below.

II. NON-BINDING DELIBERATION

This method involves public sector bodies engaging in more or less structured deliberations with communities about the commissioning of

35 Blickem, C. et al. (2018) What is Asset Based Community Development and how might it improve the health of people with long-term conditions? A realist synthesis. *Sage Open*. Vol. 8, issue 3.

services. This can focus on delivery aspects as with the former method but importantly also provides the space for wider strategic decisions to be considered and taken by the community. The nature of the forums varies widely including roundtable discussions and workshops to more elaborate and structured approaches such as deliberative gatherings and citizens' assemblies. The type and size of the events at the heart of the process will be determined by a range of factors including capacity, cost and the state of the institution-community relationship. The nature of the events may also change over time.

Sutton Council have developed a Citizen Commissioners model, initially involving young people who were given accredited training to advise on decommissioning and re-commissioning services for younger people in the borough.[36] Over time the service areas that younger people were involved in broadened. The model has since evolved to be open to all age groups. In 2016-2017, by the end of the contract commissioned, the programme had a pool of 115 individuals recruited, of which were trained or were actively participating in a range of commissioning decisions. This has included the commissioning of a new information and advice service, commissioning AGE UK Sutton as the lead partner to support older people in the borough, a personal care framework for vulnerable people, Sutton Healthwatch, Beddington Park Regeneration and the Sutton Recycling Campaign. Their involvement is across all phases of the commissioning cycle: including understanding need, working with providers, procurement and evaluation. On average, there have been5.4 commissioning activities undertaken by the citizen commissioners per month.[37]

Durham County Council has undertaken a significant programme of ongoing participatory budgeting through their Area Action Partnership (AAP) structure, engaging tens of thousands of residents to make decisions on local projects.[38] Each of the fourteen AAPs is comprised of 21 individuals: seven members of the public, seven councillors and seven partners organisations from the voluntary or public sector such as health and fire partners. They have £100,000 of core funding annually to use for identified

36 Public Service Transformation Academy. (2018) 2018 Case Studies from the Public Service Transformation Academy. *'What do they know of cricket who only know cricket?.* PSTA.
37 Community Action Sutton. Annual Review 2016-2017. Volunteer Centre Sutton.
38 Durham Action Area Partnership. (2018) Annual Report 2017/2018. DAAP.

budgets, and conduct a series of community events through which to engage people in decisions.[39] The budgets have been allocated to a range of projects according to locally-determined priorities, from piloting police e-bikes to support community safety in Chester-le-Street[40], to an arts and culture project in East Durham[41]. Other projects have addressed mental health, social isolation and career advice.

The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham has recently established a model through which a share of funds from the Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy (NCIL)[42] will be spent via a resident panel. The panel has been established by sortition, with twenty people participating following an invitation being sent to a thousand residents, representative of the diversity of the borough's overall population. There is currently £327,000 of NCIL available for spend and approximate predicted income figures of between £150,000 to £800,000 per annum until 2020.[43] Under the arrangements, voluntary groups submit bids for NCIL funding – which are presented to the panel for screening, discussion and decision making. £133,000 has been awarded to local groups in the first round of the NCIL Resident Panel Grant Award Process. It is envisaged that further in the lifespan of the panel, digital platforms will be used by the panel to facilitate increased participation in the process.

The key differentiator between Non-binding Deliberation and Binding Deliberation, covered below, is the extent of formal, political or constitutional power afforded to the deliberative mechanism. In the non-binding approach, there is no formal power meaning that the community is, in effect, being consulted with the public sector body reserving the right to ignore or change the decisions taken by a community. There may, of course, be a more or less significant political or reputational cost to a body that does ignore such decisions (as well as damage to relations with the community itself) but there is nothing stopping an institution taking that risk.

39 Centre for Public Scrutiny. (2017) Durham County Council- what winning and MJ Award meant for us. CfPS.

40 Chester-le-Street & District Area Partnership (AAP). 2018, Board Meeting – Minutes. Chester-le-Street & District Area Action Area Partnership.

41 Davies, S. (2015) Evaluation in participatory arts programmes. Creative People and Places.

42 NCIL is drawn from the larger Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) fund which is split in two parts: strategic CIL (85 per cent) and NCIL (15 per cent).

43 Barking & Dagenham London Borough Council. (2018) Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy. Report of the Cabinet Member for Community Leadership and Engagement. BDLB.

This again raises the question of whether sufficient power and resource is being handed over with this method. We would argue that with meaningful political will and commitment on the part of public servants, Informal Deliberation can offer a real shift in power and resource particularly if it is combined with the Operational Engagement described above. A commissioning process based in large part on closer operational working with a community combined with genuine opportunities for strategic deliberation with the same community would represent a significant break with current institution-led methods of commissioning and, if done well and consistently, place communities closer to the driving seat, if not entirely in it.

Deliberation of all sorts does involve a significant pitfall to which public sector bodies seeking a shift to a preventative model must be alert. Conventional deliberation is designed to involve communities in decision making of state institutions. However, one of most important outcomes of community commissioning (as well as all forms of communitisation) is the community taking on greater responsibility for its own health and well-being. If deliberative forums simply reproduce old hierarchical and transactional models with communities regarding them as merely an opportunity to tell public sector bodies what to do on their behalf then the full benefits will have not been achieved. This is why we feel it is important, firstly, to see deliberative forums as part of a wider engagement with communities around building trust and mobilising for change; and, secondly, to structure deliberation in such a way that it is not solely about decision-making but also focuses on how public sector bodies and communities can work together to solve the challenges that commissioning aims to resolve.

III. BINDING DELIBERATION

The main difference between this method and the previous is the extent of formal power offered to the deliberative events involving the community in the commissioning process. The binding nature of the deliberation can range from a strong and public commitment by political or public sector leaders to implement community decisions to an actual constitutional role, whereby a public sector body is required through regulation or law to implement community decisions. The latter may include a threshold such

as a certain percentage of support being required at a deliberative forum before a body is held to that decision.

This method is not widely employed in the UK but international examples do exist of which the Citizens' Assembly of Gdansk is maybe the best known instance. This was covered in detail in *The Community Paradigm*, but the core point in this context is that the assembly, which is made up entirely of Gdansk residents, has very significant power to shape key strategies to the extent that if 80 per cent of participants back a certain course of action, the city government is obliged to implement it.

Participatory budgeting has a certain binding element to it, in that decisions about how to spend discretionary funds reside entirely with bodies made up largely of residents. This is a big part of the Durham and Barking and Dagenham approaches mentioned above. However, the funds are usually relatively small and are focused almost entirely on discretionary areas rather than core. Nevertheless, they do at least show that the appetite of public sector bodies and communities to engage jointly in formal, participatory decision-making does exist.

The great strength of this approach is that it provides for a genuine transfer of power, resource and hence responsibility to a community. If deliberative forums of this sort can involve both the mobilisation of communities around specific commissioning challenges as well as engagement in key decisions then it has the power to enable a very meaningful shift to prevention. In addition, if the meaningful transfer of power and resource is seen as a key driver of community participation, then it seems logical to conclude that more formal power of this sort is more likely to engage a community in depth and consistently than less formal approaches.

There are two major challenges with this approach. Firstly, the pressure to ensure well-informed, consistent and impactful commissioning decisions is high with Binding Deliberation meaning that the capacity and resource required of any public sector body convening such processes will be significant. Secondly, it raises questions about the relationship between direct bodies and the role of elected representatives, which some, particularly elected representatives themselves, find challenging. This is a topic we covered in *The Community Paradigm* but suffice it to say here that there are now numerous examples across the world of direct,

deliberative forums existing very comfortably alongside more conventional representative assemblies.

IV. FORMAL GOVERNANCE

In this method, formal and legal governance power for the commissioning and/or the delivery of a service or group of services is handed over either entirely or in considerable part to a community. This could be done by appointing members of a community to a committee which has formal power to direct commissioning processes and decisions. Alternatively, it may involve setting up an organisational vehicle (such as a charity or community business) separate from the public sector body with the power and resource to commission a services or services and which is entirely or largely run by a community.

This is increasingly widely exemplified by community asset transfer or community management whereby a particular public sector service is transferred out of public sector control and into the hands of a community organization. Staffordshire County Council, for example, has transferred twenty-three of its libraries to community management; where community organisations and volunteers deliver and shape their local library offer with local authority guidance and support. Interestingly some of these libraries went on to locate health and well-being services within their premises and are taking an active role in advancing literacy skills within their areas indicating the type of innovative shift to prevention made possible by community commissioning.

One of the most interesting examples is Essex County Council which has established a charitable foundation separate from the council through which alcohol and drug rehabilitation services will be commissioned. Through the foundation's governance structure those recovering from substance misuse play a central role in strategy and commissioning decisions as part of a formally constituted advisory committee and roles on the Board of Trustees.

Formal Governance is clearly the most complete form of power and resource transfer and thus brings with it the greatest potential for a shift towards prevention driven by communities taking on responsibility for their own health and well-being. It does, however, involve unique challenges of which the two most significant will be mentioned here.

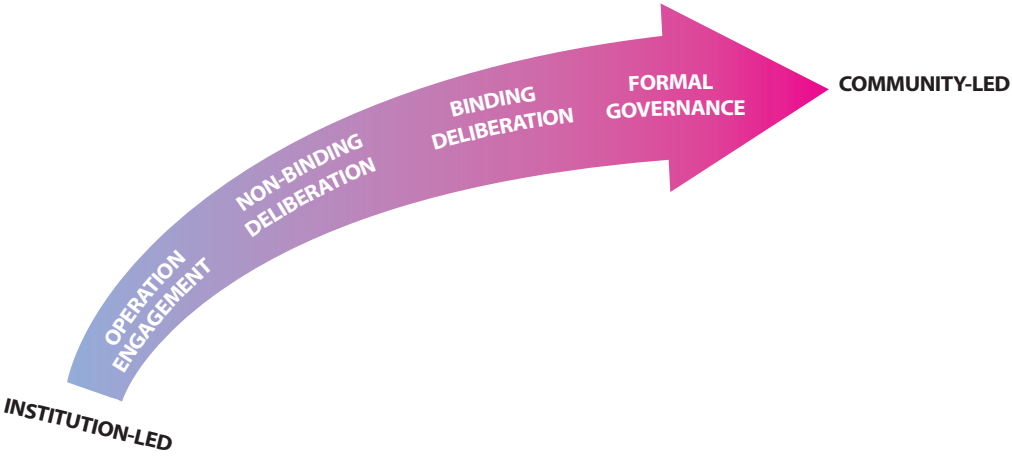
The first is the risk of what might be called 're-institutionalisation'. This is where a new community-led commissioning body merely replicates the hierarchical, transactional and acute response failings of public sector bodies. Avoiding this means that a Formal Governance approach to community commissioning cannot be simply a matter of creating a new committee or institution. There must also be a focus on embedding principles of openness, participatory decision-making and inclusivity. This may involve careful formulation of the articles of association or constitution for any new body but also, and maybe more importantly, a precise focus on shaping culture and behavioural norms. One possible route to that is to ensure that the previous three methods of community commissioning play a significant role in the decision-making and delivery process of a new body.

The second major challenge is the need to build capabilities within a community to take on a governance role. Public sector professionals possess the necessary confidence, expertise and skills that enable them to lead commissioning processes. At least some of that will have to be transferred along with power and resource to communities through training and ongoing support. This inevitably takes time and costs money. However, it is important to acknowledge that a Formal Governance route does not necessarily exclude public sector professionals. They can remain in prominent governance or professional roles alongside community members offering ongoing expertise although, ideally, they would not be in a position to capture any new community-led body for the founding institution.

D. DEPTH OF PARTICIPATION

A further key decision facing a public sector body undertaking a move to community commissioning is the extent to which the process will be institution-led or community-led. Clearly, there must be some meaningful shift to a greater role for the community or it would hardly merit being described as 'community commissioning'. However, the extent to which the community is in the driving seat can be calibrated to suit different institutional and community appetite and can also be deepened over time as institutional and community confidence grows.

The diagram below explains simply the extent to which we believe each of the four methods of power transfer above allows a deepening of participation and a growing move towards a more community-led approach. However, it is important to recognise that within each of these individual methods the balance between institutional and community power can vary significantly. In addition, we would not want this diagram to give the impression that participation deepens as one method usurps the previous method. In reality, the growth of a community-led approach is likely to involve a messier combination of all four approaches in which each builds on the strengths or synergies of the other three. For example, Operational Engagement, although offering the shallowest form of participation, does also provide the space for a degree of highly detailed co-design of services that may be less possible under Non-binding and Binding Deliberation which, tend to focus on the more strategic.



It is our strong view that public sector bodies should look over time to move up this 'arrow of participation' and incrementally shift to commissioning processes that are ever more community-led without necessarily jettisoning the less participative approaches. As all of the preceding analysis in this paper and in *The Community Paradigm* has suggested, it is only through such a change that communities will be empowered to take on really

significant responsibility for their own health and well-being and hence effect a move to a preventative system.

IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORT

Whichever method is adopted by a public sector body, it is vital that close attention is paid to the need to maintain support for a community taking on extra power and responsibility for the delivery of a service. A key lesson from Big Local and all those engaged in innovation in this area is that capabilities need to be built with care often over long periods of time.

This may not be such a pressing concern for the Operational Engagement method where the responsibility taken on by a community may be relatively limited and modulated over a lengthy time frame.

However, deliberative approaches and Formal Governance will require more extensive support. In the case of Non-binding and Binding Deliberation, there is an obligation on public sector bodies to create an environment that is genuinely deliberative and inclusive and which avoids risk of polarisation or special pleading. Most importantly, public servants organising deliberative forums should provide sufficient and accurate information to allow well-informed debate and realistic decision-making. Provision of such information and creation of such an environment requires experience and skill which may, of necessity, involve specialist consultancies.

Formal Governance inevitably requires a greater intensity of support. This may involve training to ensure community members taking on governance roles have sufficient knowledge and skills to fulfill their responsibilities and may well also require ongoing mentoring, advice and support.

As mentioned above, there is also an important role for public servants with experience of organisational development to make sure that new bodies maintain participative and inclusive practices and cultures to avoid the simple replication of exclusive institutional practice. This is likely to be a long term or ongoing role.

CONCLUSION: WHAT SHOULD GOVERNMENT DO?

Government has a major role to play in encouraging the public sector to adopt a community commissioning approach. Some of this comes down to relatively minor tweaks to the regulatory framework to taking a proactive approach to promoting or requiring public sector bodies to hand over commissioning power to their communities.

As a starting point, the legal and regulatory framework around commissioning and procurement overseen by the Crown Commercial Service (CCS) should be reviewed and reformed to require public sector bodies to engage communities in their commissioning and procurement processes. At the moment, the CCS frames the commissioning decision in a binary form that reflects the dominance of state and market paradigms. Hence, commissioners are encouraged at the earliest stage of a commissioning process to take a so-called 'make or buy' decision meaning a choice between in-house provision or outsourced provision by private or voluntary sector organisations. If the latter route is taken, then many strict regulations come into play to ensure, theoretically, that the procurement process is fair.

There are two issues to be addressed here. Firstly, public sector bodies should be discouraged from taking such major decisions about the nature of service provision without first consulting, at the very least, the service users likely to be affected by the decisions. More importantly, however, this binary mindset clearly ignores the third option we have been outlining in this paper: working closely with a community to design and deliver a service.

The CCS should move to a position where it encourages commissioners to understand their decisions are trinary rather than binary: make, buy or communitise. They also need to make it clear that where there is a strong imperative to control demand and move to a preventative system in a service area that the third option is likely to offer superior outcomes.

The regulations around the procurement process may also need revising to enable easier and speedier communitisation. Currently, if a public sector body wants to hand a service over to a community to run, they need to set up a special vehicle such as a charity to avoid having to open up the service to a formal tender process involving bids from the private and voluntary sector. This is costly, time-consuming and ultimately stifles experimentation with other types of governance and corporate structures which could enable community commissioning. Since much of this procurement law originates from the European Union, our departure from the EU gives the Government a good opportunity to make communitisation easier in this regard.

However, the Government should also be playing a more proactive role in positively encouraging public sector bodies to launch and develop community commissioning approaches.

For example, the Government should be encouraging and supporting public sector bodies to establish 'community constitutions' that set out how they will work to ensure that as much power and resource as possible rests with communities. Processes by which commissioning decisions are made should always refer to this constitution as a matter of course. Taking such a step will help to engender new organisational cultures across the public sector, and better allow for a change in mindsets so that hierarchical and transactional approaches are shed and replaced with the collaborative and egalitarian ethos outlined in this report and in *The Community Paradigm*.

Government should also be providing the space, support and funding to enable public sector bodies to experiment with new forms of community power and commissioning. This could include novel uses of data and digital technology but, more importantly, should also enable organisational development, new governance models, and engagement techniques linked to the four methods outlined above.

Finally, central Government should itself be setting an example on empowering communities with regard to commissioning and how public funds are spent. In this regard, Government could do no better than adopt

the ideas promoted by the Communities in Charge campaign[44] in which a coalition of organisations are seeking to have the Shared Prosperity Fund (the replacement for European Structural Funds following withdrawal from the EU) subject to community scrutiny and with priorities set by those communities in most need of the funding.

A similar idea originates with the Community Wealth Fund Alliance[45] which proposes that the next wave of dormant assets be distributed to the most deprived communities for them to spend over a 10-15 year period as they see fit. An approach clearly modelled on Big Local. It is an idea that along with the Communities in Charge proposal, the Government would do well to enact.

44 Co-operatives UK, Locality & The Plunkett Foundation. (2018) *Communities in Charge: Give people the power to prosper after Brexit*. Locality.

45 Community Wealth Fund Alliance. (2019) *Strong resourceful communities: The case for a community wealth fund*. Local Trust.

APPENDIX: METHODOLOGY

This study was based on research encompassing a policy and practice scan, to review existing literature inclusive of evidence on commissioning, citizen engagement and involvement.

Twenty-three semi structured interviews were also conducted, both with practitioners, including Big Local area participants, and experts, as part of the research process. Interviewees were identified both at the beginning of the research and throughout the project, as new innovative practice was identified.

A workshop was also held to test the emerging propositions in the research. Attendees included representatives from the voluntary and community sector, local government and academia.

ABOUT LOCAL TRUST

Local Trust was established in 2012 to deliver Big Local, a unique programme that puts residents across the country in control of decisions about their own lives and neighbourhoods. Funded by a £200m endowment from the National Lottery Community Fund – the largest ever single commitment of lottery funds – Big Local provides in excess of £1m of long-term funding over 10-15 years to each of 150 local communities, many of which face major social and economic challenges but have missed out on statutory and lottery funding in the past.

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If we are to move to a preventative system in public services, communities need to take on more responsibility for their own health and well-being. That means handing power and resource over to communities that is held by public sector institutions.

The commissioning of public services is one of the most important functions of the public sector but also one that is deeply embedded within the institution. Community Commissioning makes a convincing case for why the process needs to be led by citizens and service users not public sector professionals. Importantly, it also explains in detail how this shift is happening in practice.

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