



COMMUNITY POWER: THE EVIDENCE

Grace Pollard, Jessica Studdert and Luca Tiratelli

In partnership with:

Local Trust

New Local (formerly the New Local Government Network) is an independent think tank and network with a mission to transform public services and unlock community power.

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Any errors or omissions are those of the authors alone.



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FOREWORD

For a year now, this country and indeed the world has been grappling with the terrible effects of Covid-19. The pandemic has impacted every aspect of our lives. The virus has been a disrupter, sometimes an accelerator, but it most certainly has not been a leveller. People and communities that are most deprived and vulnerable have been the hardest hit.

Coming out of the worst effects of Covid-19, as we must surely do at some point, there is a growing determination to not simply go back to the old status quo, which left us so ill-prepared for the consequences of the pandemic. There is overwhelming support to 'Build Back Better', however that phrase is defined. This desire for change might not be sustained. Memories are short and the wish to simply put this terrible experience behind us will be strong. For those of us who believe that radical change is needed in this country, we must not lose this moment.

This report sets out, in an utterly compelling way, why one essential part of that change must be a massive expansion of community power: in decision-making, collaboration and meeting community needs. The case for doing this, and the positive impacts it would bring to the health and wellbeing of communities and individuals, community cohesion, prevention and long-term value are evidenced through practical case studies, both in the UK and internationally. Community power also offers the opportunity to move beyond the binary state versus market debate that dominates our politics.

My own awakening of the positive potential of community power came in my time as chief executive of Sheffield City Council. The city had still to recover from the enormous economic impact of the upheaval in the steel industry. The council faced big financial challenges that severely reduced its capacity to respond. Time and again I saw how local communities had stepped forward and achieved some remarkable successes, often in the most deprived areas. It was genuinely humbling.

I had the opportunity to pursue this further as the Chair of the Localism Commission set up by Locality, which looked at why the 2011 Localism

Act had not ushered in the change that had been hoped for when it was passed. What struck me then was sense of powerlessness that people felt – 80 per cent of people felt that they had little or no control over decisions affecting their country and 71 per cent felt the same about local decisions. There was a mismatch between where people wanted power to lie and where they actually experienced it as being.

Given the almost unarguable case for more community power, the question might be why, under successive governments, it has made such little progress. My personal view is that this country suffers from a deep-rooted centralised governance style that permeates the way it is run at every level. So local councillors are sometimes reluctant to share power with communities because they themselves feel powerless and frustrated by an over-dominant Westminster and Whitehall. Paradoxically, or perhaps not, this centralisation has not brought equality. We are one of the most spatially unequal countries in the developed world.

To break out from this logjam we need **both** devolution **and** localism. The devolution of power and resources to local government must come alongside greater community power – a point well recognised in this report.

Another reason, well-articulated in the report, for why we have not made the progress we should have in extending community power is that we measure it in ways that do not capture its true value. I have seen this for myself in the myriad short-term and over-complex performance regimes that are often established with grant funding regimes. I would also add to this the different conclusions that are drawn when community initiatives fail, often being taken as an argument against future community provision in a way that would never be argued for the public or private sector.

This timely report should be read by politicians of every political party, national and local. The insights are powerful and the recommendations practical. If we cannot be bold and ambitious in embracing community power now, then when will be?

Lord Bob Kerslake

February 2021



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Community power is an idea whose time has come. At its heart, community power is based on the principle that communities have a wealth of knowledge and assets within themselves, which if understood and nurtured by practitioners and policymakers, has the potential to strengthen resilience and enable prevention-focused public services.

Community Power: The Evidence draws on extensive existing evidence to set out the impact of a wide range of community power initiatives. Taken together, they chart a new direction for the wider system of public services – one that is community-led rather than institution-led.

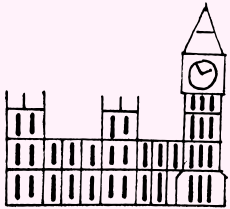
Yet at present public services are trapped in a hybrid of statism and market fundamentalism – what we term the state-market hybrid paradigm. This means that the real value of community-led approaches is not fully recognised by the current system. In this way, for community power to reach its full potential, we need a deeper shift towards a new way of looking at the world: a new community paradigm.

What is the Community Paradigm?

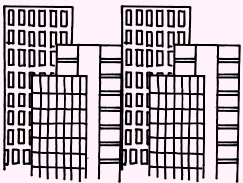
In *The Community Paradigm*, New Local sets out the case for a fundamental shift in how public services work.¹ The report made an urgent case for a wholesale response to the twin trends of rising demand on public services and people's unmet appetite for more influence over their lives. It argues that more power and resources should be given to communities rather than be held by central government or public services.



Currently public services are held back by two paradigms which became dominant when the challenges and opportunities for these services were very different to those that exist today:



■ **The state paradigm**, which came about in the 1940s, instils hierarchy, creates professionally dominated siloes and treats people as largely passive service users.



■ **The market paradigm**, which came into being from the 1980s onwards, injects a focus on efficiency and cost, reducing interactions to transactions and viewing the individual as a customer.

The term *community power* captures a wide range of different practices, approaches and initiatives. Common to all of these is the principle that communities have knowledge, skills and assets which mean they *themselves* are well placed to identify and respond to any challenges that they face, and to thrive.

This principle is not just a theory. It already exists in neighbourhoods, in local networks, and in voluntary and community organisations where people come together to overcome challenges and support each other. This comes to the fore in times of crisis, such as with the sudden flourishing of mutual aid during the Covid-19 pandemic,² but has endured for decades in many forms. It is also rapidly influencing

¹ Lent, A. and Studdert, J. (2019). *The Community Paradigm: Why public services need radical change and how it can be achieved*. New Local.

² Tiratelli, L. and Kaye, S. (2020). *Communities vs Coronavirus: The rise of mutual aid*. New Local.

practice in the public sector and local government. Public services are seeing the benefits of moving towards practices which involve actively collaborating with communities. New methods of enabling community insights to shape action are increasingly being developed: from councils trialling participatory and deliberative democracy; to frontline professionals using asset-based practice and co-production.

This report sets out the wealth of community power that exists today, and provides an evidence base capturing the diversity of these approaches in the UK and globally. These include practices which are gradually being adopted more widely by some public services, through to small-scale innovative approaches operating on the margins of the system.

We identify three clusters of approaches which hand more power and resources to communities:

- **Community decision-making:** Using deliberative and participatory tools to involve citizens more meaningfully in local decision-making.
- **Collaboration with communities:** Public services shifting from hierarchical and siloed ways of working, to more collaborative approaches which deeply involve communities as equal partners with essential insights.
- **Building community capacity and assets:** Equipping communities with the resources and skills they need to mobilise and genuinely participate in local action.

The impact of community power

This unique evidence base shows the bigger picture of community power. The numerous small-scale, innovative local practices shine brightly alone. But taken together, they collectively chart a different way for people, communities and public services to collaborate. The evidence demonstrates six ways in which community power has real, tangible impact for people, communities and public services:



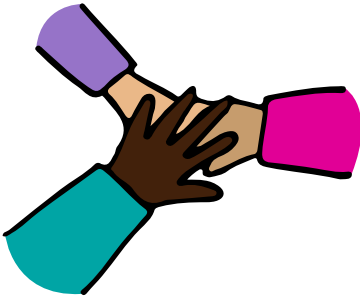
1. Community power can improve individual health and wellbeing. From well-established peer-support groups, to innovative community-led approaches, practitioners are recognising that people need to be active participants in all efforts to improve their health and wellbeing. They are also seeing the benefits this participation can bring for people.



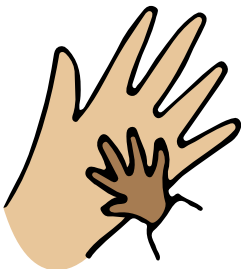
2. Community power can strengthen community wellbeing and resilience. Involving people in decision-making, alongside supporting them with resources and wider social infrastructure, can enable community action to improve wellbeing and resilience locally.



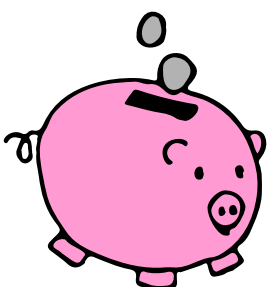
3. Community power can enhance democratic participation and boost trust. Deliberative and participatory methods can be used to navigate complex socio-economic challenges and to strengthen legitimacy of decision-making. It is at the local level that this dialogue and engagement can be most meaningfully realised.



4. Community power can build community cohesion. The common understanding and social ties that are necessary for cohesion cannot be imposed in the abstract from the national level. Community-anchored approaches demonstrate that cohesion is most sustainably built from the ground up.



5. Community power can embed prevention and early intervention in public services. Where some parts of the public sector are pioneering new approaches that draw on the capabilities and capacities of communities, they demonstrate a route to more sustainable and prevention-focused public services.



6. Community power can generate financial savings. There is growing evidence that investing in community power approaches can generate greater impact for existing spend and save money in the longer-term.

Realising the potential of community power

Mounting evidence shows the benefits of community power to people, communities and public services. Yet community power approaches often remain on the margins of a wider system dominated by large-scale service operations either run by the state or outsourced to the private sector, both ultimately accountable to Whitehall rather than people locally.

Why should this continue to be the case? *Community Power: The Evidence* argues that the state-market hybrid paradigm holds back the potential of community power through setting the terms for what constitutes 'success'. This notion of 'success' is characterised by approaches that can demonstrate short-term impact in a specific service area and are shown to be uniform and in turn scalable.

We argue that when it comes to proving value in evidence-based policy-making, community power is stuck in an *evidence paradox*. Community power practice, approaches and initiatives are required to demonstrate their own worth according to measures that are not set up to recognise their value. The value of community power is best captured qualitatively, yet the metrics are quantitative.

Community power approaches, by their very nature, are pluralistic, often small-scale and rooted in local context, but policymakers seek uniform and scalable approaches. Community power focuses on long-term impact, but short-term financial and political priorities drive the system. Ultimately, community power practice and approaches are characterised in ways which not only are undervalued by the state-market hybrid paradigm, but in many ways are actually the direct opposite of traditional public service practice. Table 1 on the following page summarises the challenge.

At present, this evidence paradox holds back community power from influencing wider system change. As things currently stand, although the evidence of their impact is palpable, it is not in the form required to prove a case for change according to the logic of the current system. This change will only happen when not only values and practices shift

within the public sector and government, but when the methods and metrics used to judge those values and practices change as well.

Until there is a wider shift towards a community paradigm, the impact of community power will always be limited and ad hoc, rather than mainstreamed, where its full potential can be realised.

TABLE 1: Community power embodies factors which are not recognised in the state-market hybrid paradigm

Evidence required by the state-market hybrid paradigm	Nature of community power
Guided by metrics	Guided by ethos
Quantitative	Qualitative
Immediate	Long-term
Large scale for efficiency	Small-scale for impact
Within a service silo	Embedded in the community
Related to a service output	Related to individual outcomes
Focused on proving	Focused on improving
Reporting data	Recalibrating relationships
Uniformity	Pluralism
Policy implementation	Human-centred design
Linear	Adaptive
Immediate cashable savings	Avoids costs occurring

Four shifts and four recommendations

We set out four broad shifts that are needed to support a transition to a community paradigm that would embed community power throughout the system. To achieve each shift, we identify four practical recommendations:

Shift One: **Uniform** **Pluralist practice**

Community power approaches are by their nature rooted in people, place and circumstance, meaning a model cannot just be taken from one area and rolled out in another.

Recommendation One: Practitioners should collaborate to share learning and build a stronger evidence-led case for the impact of community power approaches. The purpose of this collaboration should be to strengthen evaluation approaches; share learning and identify common principles; and develop shared measures of value. This should help build closer dialogue between policy and practice and strengthen the wider case for change.

Shift Two: **Metrics** **Ethos**

The potential of community power will not be realised by creating a new set of public management style targets, but rather through a system in which communities, professionals and practices coalesce around shared purpose or ethos.

Recommendation Two: There needs to be an ambitious approach to devolved, place-based budgets across local public services, as a core prerequisite for transferring more power to communities. Taking such a place-based approach to financing public services would introduce a new logic into the system, supporting the emergence of a new community-focused ethos across public institutions.

Shift Three: **Outputs** **Outcomes**

For national government, a greater focus on outcomes, particularly those that are meaningful to people's lived experience, would create a permissive environment for community power practice.

Recommendation Three: The Treasury should adopt a wellbeing approach to budgeting. This would catalyse action and redistribute power throughout the system. In turn, supporting the breakdown of unhelpful silos, a significant shift in focus towards prevention, and genuine collaboration with communities.

Shift Four: **State-market** **Community**

To act on the wealth of evidence revealing the benefits of community power, a major shift in policy is required at national level. At the heart of this shift would be a landmark piece of legislation, a Community Power Act.

Recommendation Four: Parliament should pass a Community Power Act. The Act would have four goals: to enshrine community rights; to enable community-focused devolution; to establish a Community Wealth Fund; and to provide a permissive legislative and regulatory framework for community power.

Unlocking community power and shifting to a community paradigm

We sit now at a critical crossroads. Community power is already supporting people, communities and public services to collaborate and improve outcomes. There is a real opportunity to build on this, and move towards a more sustainable, enabling and prevention-focused model of public services. The case has been building for a long time, but our collective yearning to recover from a brutal pandemic better and stronger than we were before creates a new imperative to be bold. The four shifts and accompanying recommendations set out here provide a route map to help further unlock the potential of community power and ultimately herald the system-wide emergence of a community paradigm.



INTRODUCTION

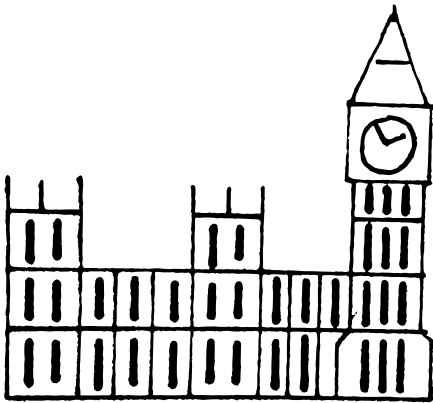
This report is about the simple but transformative idea of community power. About why it matters for building resilient communities and sustainable, prevention-focused public services. And about what community power looks like today, what impact it is having, and the steps needed to unlock its full potential.

At its heart, community power refers to the recognition that communities have a wealth of knowledge, skills and assets within themselves. This means they are well placed to understand what they need to resolve any challenges they face, and to thrive. It stands to reason therefore that communities are actively involved in the decisions, services and allocation of resources which affect them.

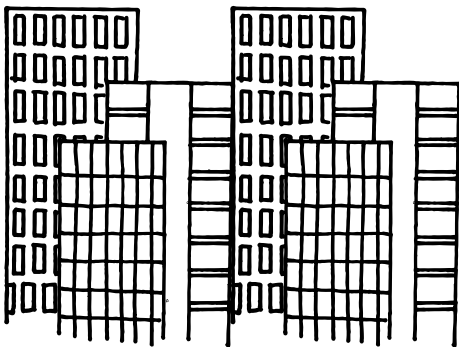
Community power is already operating across the country and beyond. But the movement is in a relatively nascent form, operating outside the logic of the overarching public services system. For the potential of community power to be fully realised, there needs to be a deeper recalibration of power and relationships between communities and existing public service institutions.



In **The Community Paradigm**, New Local set out a vision for such a transition.³ The report made an urgent case for a wholesale response to the twin trends of rising demand on public services and people's unmet appetite for more influence over their lives. The public services system is currently being held back by two paradigms which became dominant when the challenges and opportunities for these services were very different to those that exist today:



≡ **The state paradigm**, which came about in the 1940s, instils hierarchy, creates professionally dominated siloes and treats people as largely passive service users.



≡ **The market paradigm**, which came into being from the 1980s onwards, injects a focus on efficiency and cost, reducing interactions to transactions and viewing the individual as a customer.

This state-market hybrid paradigm dominates the ethos and culture of public services. A narrow view of what success looks like constrains the ability of public services to respond effectively to the pressures of today. There are few incentives to work with people as equals, to have open conversations about how they envisage their future, or to recognise the role that wider social networks

³ Lent, A. and Studdert, J. (2019). *The Community Paradigm: Why public services need radical change and how it can be achieved*. New Local.

and community assets can play. The ‘system’ tends towards an institutional response which takes each issue it is presented with in isolation. Services are reluctant to hand more resources and power to people and communities to respond to challenges affecting them. In turn, this perpetuates future demand on services.

Yet the nature and impact of existing community power practice demonstrates that there is another way. Already in many communities, led by individuals, community groups and innovative local public services, people are finding new ways of working that meet these challenges head on. Our research reveals that there are three broad principles underpinning existing community power approaches: empowering communities with decision-making capabilities, creating a culture where public services collaborate meaningfully with communities, and giving communities greater control over local resources.



practice is, by definition, bespoke and anchored in different places, responding to a range of contexts. Yet across the evidence base there are clear patterns of impact which collectively show the potential of a deeper shift in this direction.

This report compiles a unique evidence base for community power and demonstrates the very real impact this is already having on people, on communities and on public services.⁴ Community power practice is, by definition, bespoke and anchored in different places, responding to a range of contexts. Yet across the evidence base there are clear patterns of impact which collectively show the potential of a deeper shift in this direction.

We set out how community power practice has the ability to improve both individual health and wider community wellbeing. It has the capacity to enrich our democratic space and increase community cohesion. And for public services themselves, community power practice has proven to embed early intervention and prevention, with some evidence of direct cost savings as a result. Taken together, the evidence indicates how it could be possible to break out of the vicious cycle of ever-growing demand. It informs how we might create a deeper paradigm shift towards a more sustainable, enabling system of provision umbilically linked with the capabilities and capacity of communities themselves.

⁴ Research for this report is based on an extensive review of existing evidence; a round table with policy experts and practitioners held in May 2020; and additional interviews and feedback with policy experts and practitioners.



Until we enable a wider community paradigm shift, the impact of community power practice will always be limited and ad hoc, rather than mainstreamed, where its full potential can be realised.

So what is stopping this happening immediately? Why, with the evidence mounting as to the widespread and deep benefit of community power practice, is it still operating largely on the edge of the system? We argue that the state-market hybrid paradigm is holding back the potential of a new approach. The dominant frame of public service provision, as we will explore, sets the terms for what constitutes 'success' – those approaches that can demonstrate short-term impact, in a specific service area and are shown to be uniform and scalable. Therefore, existing community power approaches operate on a hand-to-mouth basis – although often held up as 'innovation', they struggle for deeper recognition, and are frequently pioneered and sustained by the efforts of talented individuals or just within specific services. Until we enable a wider community paradigm shift, the impact of community power practice will always be limited and ad hoc, rather than mainstreamed, where its full potential can be realised.

Community power approaches are stuck in an *evidence paradox* which requires them to demonstrate their worth according to measures that are not set up to recognise their value. Their value is best captured qualitatively, yet the metrics are quantitative. Their approach is relational, yet the services need to define costed units of transaction. Their impact is long-term, but short-term financial and political priorities drive the system.



We ask two questions: what is the value of community power now? And how could the system better recognise and respond to that value in the future?

Escaping this evidence paradox requires a tricky balancing act. Community power practice must demonstrate its worth in the *current* system, while also informing a *future* paradigm shift that would enable community power to reach its potential. This report sets out to do just that.

We ask two questions: what is the value of community power now? And how could the system better recognise and respond to that value in the future?

The report is structured in two parts which respond to each of these questions in turn, and sets out some core recommendations for practitioners and policymakers to realise a paradigm shift towards community power in practice.

PART 1

THE IMPACT OF COMMUNITY POWER

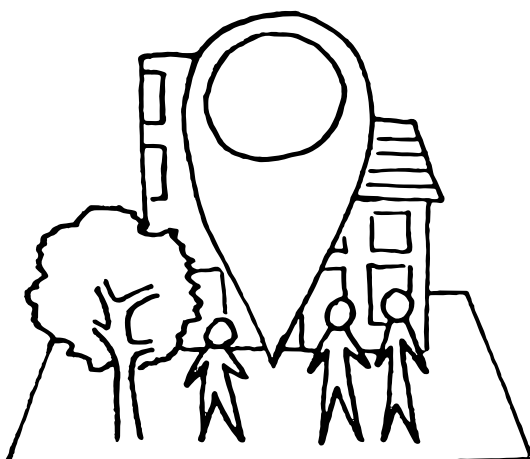
In practice, community power works in many ways, and we set out here to uncover the extent and depth of its reach today. The evidence base demonstrates the diversity of the phenomenon in the UK and globally.

What is community power?

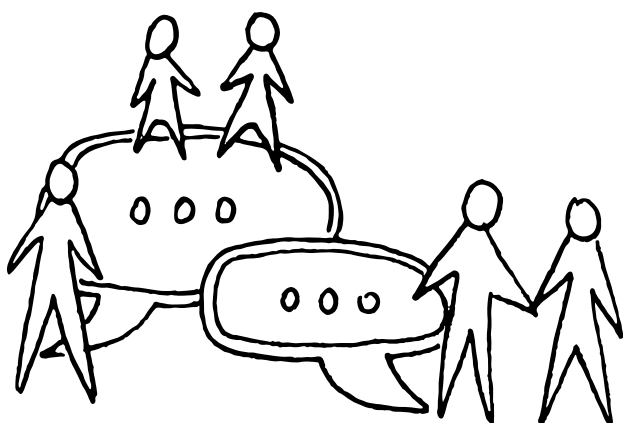
Community power exists where neighbours come together to respond to a common concern. It manifests when people experiencing the same illness reach out to support each other. It happens when voluntary and community organisations support communities to lead in deciding how a grant should be spent. It is growing in the public sector, where services develop practice that works with people as equals, and when the public sector develops new democratic methods to open up participation.

So, when we use the term *community power*, this captures a wide range of different activities, approaches and initiatives. Common to all of these, is the principle that communities have knowledge, skills and assets which mean they are well placed to identify and understand what they need to resolve any challenges they face, and to thrive.

The term *community* itself is fluid, and so it is important to clarify what we mean when we refer to it at the outset. We refer to two core types of community in this report – communities of *place* and communities of *interest*.



≡ **Communities of place** are geographic networks anchored in a neighbourhood or locality – the boundaries of which are subjective, but meaningful for those that inhabit the space.



■ Communities of interest are networks where people come together, united around an issue, experience or condition. These communities may reach beyond a specific geographic location, but they are often situated in a particular place where shared interests are connected physically.

People as individuals will belong to multiple and interconnected communities and may move in and out of these communities at different points in their lives. The fluid nature of communities makes it easy for institutions to underestimate their significance. Nonetheless, communities are very real and relevant to people's everyday lives and experiences and are potentially powerful vehicles for change.

The depth and reach of community power practice

This report sets out a comprehensive evidence base for community power. The evidence presented is intentionally broad in scope. The report includes **citizens assemblies**, **co-production** and **community asset transfer** – to name just a few examples. These approaches by their very nature are bespoke, often small-scale, and anchored to the people involved and the local context. But what they all have in common is the principle that communities should be active participants in the decisions, plans, initiatives and services that shape local places – the principle of community power.

In compiling this evidence base, we have particularly focused on how the public sector is adopting community power and enabling communities to take more control over decision-making, local areas and services that affect them. Casting the net wider, we have also included evidence from the voluntary, community and social enterprise sectors (VCSE) and other local organisations who are playing important roles in fostering nascent community power, with relevant insights

for the public sector. While the UK is the primary focus of this project, international evidence is highlighted to further demonstrate the scope and potential of community power.

There are three clusters of approaches within the evidence base, each enabling more power to be handed to communities:

- = **Community decision-making** practices using deliberative and participatory tools as ways to give communities greater influence and more meaningful involvement in how decisions are made locally. Practical examples of this include **citizens assemblies, citizens juries, and participatory budgeting**.
- = **Collaboration with communities** is about public services moving from working *for* communities to working *with* them. This means shifting from hierarchical and siloed ways of working, to more collaborative approaches which deeply involve communities as equal partners with essential insights. Practical examples include using **strength- or asset-based approaches** and **co-production**.
- = **Building community capacity and assets** is about equipping communities with the resources they need to mobilise and genuinely participate in local action. **Asset transfer, activities to mobilise communities, and asset-based community development** approaches focus on building and strengthening community knowledge, skills, cohesion and connections as well as local resources. In other words they develop the social, physical and economic infrastructure within a local area.

The examples explored in this report each adopt these community power approaches either separately or in combination. We capture the impact of each cluster of approaches. Yet we also show how, taken together, there is a deeper opportunity to mainstream these methods throughout the system, thereby to shift from isolated practice to system-wide renewal. The building blocks of a future paradigm shift are already in place.

The evidence presented in this report demonstrates six impacts of community power:



1. Improving individual health and wellbeing



2. Strengthening community wellbeing and resilience



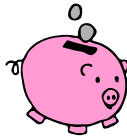
3. Enhancing democratic participation and boosting trust



4. Building community cohesion



5. Embedding prevention and early intervention in public services



6. Generating financial savings

In this first part of the report, we explore each of these six areas in turn, demonstrating how handing more power and responsibility to communities is improving outcomes for people, communities and public services. This evidence base shows the potential that already exists for a deeper system-wide shift, if we only recognise what is being undervalued in the existing state-market hybrid model of what constitutes “success”.

This challenge is tackled more fully in the second part of this report. For now, we take a look at what the evidence tells us about the impact of community power.



1. COMMUNITY POWER CAN IMPROVE INDIVIDUAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Our own individual health and wellbeing are crucial factors shaping our ability to live a good life and actively participate in our communities. The What Works Centre for Wellbeing, building on the ONS Measuring National Wellbeing Programme, defines wellbeing at its simplest level as “how we are doing” both as individuals and as wider communities.⁵

Conceptually, this question of “how we are doing” goes beyond simply addressing illness through clinical interventions. The wider factors that impact our health are known as ‘social determinants’, which cover a range of factors including our “social environment” and “material circumstances”.⁶ As such, the places we live, the opportunities afforded there, and the communities that support us can significantly influence our health and wellbeing.

This section explores how community power is intrinsically linked to improving people’s health and wellbeing. Social networks are at the heart of this, providing benefits in their own right and enabling communities to mobilise and take further action to improve their health and wellbeing. Community power underpins well-established practice such as **peer-support networks**, and its potential is beginning to be recognised in the NHS, particularly through the use of **social prescribing** which brings in the wider resource of communities to respond to individual health needs. A number of organisations and

⁵ ‘What is Wellbeing?’. What Works Centre for Wellbeing. <https://whatworkswellbeing.org/about-wellbeing/what-is-wellbeing/> (accessed 13/01/21)

⁶ The Marmot Review. (2010). *Fair Society, Healthy Lives: Strategic review of health inequalities in England post-2010*.

initiatives are increasingly fostering **community-led responses** as an effective way to improve health and wellbeing outcomes.

Social networks are both a source of support and a means to activate communities to take more control of their health and wellbeing

The seminal Marmot Review, conducted in 2010, established the growing evidence that social networks and social capital are important factors in supporting people's health and wellbeing.⁷ This point is reiterated in analysis on 'ignored places' in the 2020 report which reflects on ten years since the Marmot review was published.⁸

Some practice has built on this understanding by mobilising social networks to facilitate direct community action. This can improve a local area and in turn the health and wellbeing of those living there. Local Conversations, an initiative that works with disadvantaged communities to address social determinants of health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities, is an example of this (see case study 1 on page 30). The initiative supports communities to identify and lead activities that improve their health and wellbeing, while also strengthening social ties. Local areas have seen improved social connectedness and growing focus on activities to influence change locally.⁹

Peer-support networks help people by drawing on mutual insight and understanding

Building on the importance of social connections, **peer-support networks** are a long-standing model to support health and wellbeing. They incorporate the principles of community power - mutual support, knowledge and expertise. These networks can build a community around a shared interest or challenge, through which people can develop the skills and capacity to support one another outside of formal services. As those involved coalesce and strengthen their confidence, skills and knowledge, these communities can increasingly play a bigger role in shaping formal services to meet their needs.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Marmot, M. et al (2020). *Health equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 years on*. London: Institute of Health Equity.

⁹ *Evaluating Local Conversations 2020*. (2020). The People's Health Trust.

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) is a well-known **peer-support model**. Established in 1935, today it has two million members worldwide. The approach aims to support alcoholics to achieve sobriety through a 12-step method of understanding the impact of alcohol in one's life, using meetings and mentoring to support people through. A review of studies into the approach found that the AA intervention led to higher rates of abstinence over the long term compared to other treatments.¹⁰

Antenatal classes for expectant parents are another prominent example of **peer-support networks** that many will be familiar with. For example, the National Childbirth Trust (NCT) has offered a range of support to parents since the 1950s. These are focused on providing information, but often based on a model of bringing together groups of parents-to-be so that they can meet each other and form ongoing support networks beyond the sessions themselves. Each year in the UK around 90,000 people access an NCT antenatal or post-natal course, with notable positive impacts: participants report improved confidence around labour and becoming a parent and feeling less lonely and isolated.¹¹

There is growing evidence and interest in **peer-support networks**. Research from Nesta shows their capacity to increase people's knowledge and confidence, reduce isolation and improve health and wellbeing outcomes for people with long-term physical and mental health conditions.¹² Nesta worked with the Cabinet Office to help organisations to up-scale peer-support systems of this kind.¹³

One example of this is Parents 1st, a social enterprise, delivering programmes in Essex as well as supporting other organisations nationally, where parents and grandparents support expectant and new parents from deprived communities through what can be a challenging period of change in their lives.¹⁴ This support differs from more formal, professional support, as it focuses on building a rapport

¹⁰ Kelly, J. F., Humphreys, K. and Ferri, M. (2020). 'Intervention (2020) Alcoholics Anonymous and other 12-step programs for alcohol use disorder.' Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews.

¹¹ In 2018/19, 87 per cent of parents attending an antenatal course felt more confident about labour and birth, and 83 per cent reported feeling more confident becoming a parent. Of parents who did an Early Days Postnatal course, 87 per cent said it had helped them feel less lonely or isolated; *Annual Report and Accounts: Year to 31 March 2019*. (2019). National Childbirth Trust (NCT).

¹² Tran Graham, J. and Rutherford, K. (2016). *The Power of Peer-support: What we have learned from the Centre for Social Action Innovation Fund*. Nesta.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ The programme trained 370 volunteers to support local people.

and more 'informal' help both at home and in hospital. The evaluation of this programme showed a statistically significant improvement in wellbeing for 59 per cent of expectant parents. Participants also had higher breastfeeding rates compared to the average in both the local area and England as a whole.¹⁵

With the right initial help, **peer-support networks** can continue to grow organically and increasingly become participant-led. An example of this is a social club called Murton Mams, in County Durham, formed as part of the RSA's Connected Communities Programme. The group grew out of community research identifying social isolation experienced by many single mums. Participants increasingly took on organisational and governance roles, and successfully secured local NHS funding to continue to grow the group.¹⁶

Activities to support individuals to improve their health and wellbeing are often rooted within the local community

The very fact of participating in **community-based activities** can improve people's health and wellbeing. The Marmot Review emphasised that participation can help people feel a greater sense of control, and this has potential knock-on benefits for wellbeing and in turn other health outcomes.¹⁷

Social prescribing is one of the more mainstreamed community-based responses to improving health and wellbeing. The practice involves a clinician referring a person to a non-clinical activity as a remedy for poor health and wellbeing – such as gardening, sports or befriending sessions.¹⁸ The NHS Long Term Plan has committed to developing social prescribing and adopting it as standard practice.¹⁹

¹⁵ Tran Graham, J. and Rutherford, K. (2016). *The Power of Peer-support: What we have learned from the Centre for Social Action Innovation Fund*. Nesta.

¹⁶ Parsfield, M. et al. (eds.). (2015). *Community Capital: The value of connected communities*. RSA.

¹⁷ The Marmot Review (2010). *Fair Society, Healthy Lives: Strategic review of health inequalities in England post-2010*.

¹⁸ 'What is Social Prescribing?'. (2017 updated in 2020) The King's Fund. <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/publications/social-prescribing> (accessed 13/01/21).

¹⁹ 'Social Prescribing'. NHS England. <https://www.england.nhs.uk/personalisedcare/social-prescribing/> (accessed 13/01/21).

There is emerging evidence of the positive impact **social prescribing** can have on a person's quality of life and wellbeing.²⁰ In a social prescribing pilot in Rotherham, patients and carers saw improvements in their mental health and wellbeing. Early indications also showed patients becoming less reliant on hospital resources, reducing their use by up to a fifth, in the 12 months after being referred to social prescribing activities.²¹

Social prescribing in its current form embodies elements of community power, in the fact that it recognises the significance of wider non-clinical interventions on individual health and wellbeing. Yet it has been incorporated into the structure of the health service, rather than being part of a more fundamental shift towards good health creation focused in the community. In this way, it is a first step towards community power rather than the end point. At its best, social prescribing has real potential to shift resources and power to communities to have greater say over the design and delivery of services which support good health and wellbeing. This in turn helps to root preventative work in communities with the potential to relieve pressure on acute services.

Some community power approaches have recognised this deeper potential. Well Communities, formerly Well London, is a **community development framework** set up to improve health and wellbeing in deprived neighbourhoods. The approach focuses on supporting communities to build their capacity to identify and address issues impacting on their health and wellbeing. The programme also focuses on connecting with local services to ensure these serve the needs of communities in the best ways.²² The programme has been extensively evaluated to test and develop the framework.²³ Evaluation shows promising results in relation to high levels of participation and reported improvements from participants around wellbeing and lifestyle.²⁴

²⁰ 'What is Social Prescribing?'. (2017 updated in 2020) The King's Fund. <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/publications/social-prescribing> (accessed 13/01/21).

²¹ The pilot was delivered by Voluntary Action Rotherham for NHS Rotherham CCG, and took place between April 2012 and March 2014. It reached over 1,500 local people with long-term health conditions; Dayson, C and Bashir, N. (2014). *The Social and Economic Impact of Rotherham Social Prescribing Pilot: Main Evaluation Report*. Centre for Regional and Economic Social Research, Sheffield Hallam University.

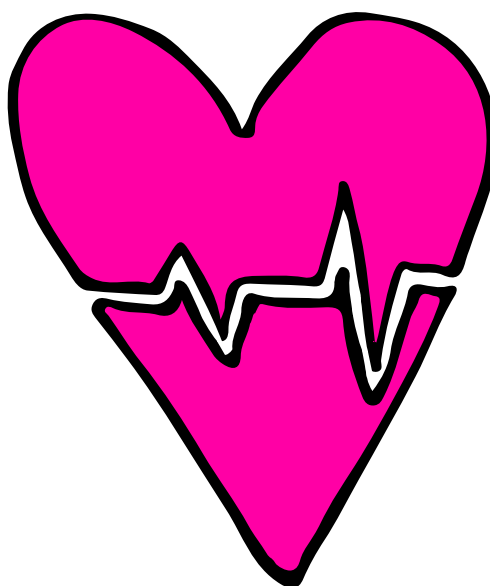
²² 'Our approach'. Well Communities. <http://wellcommunities.org.uk/our-approach/> (accessed 13/01/21).

²³ 'Our approach'. Well Communities. <http://wellcommunities.org.uk/our-approach/> (accessed 13/01/21); The phase one evaluation ran between 2007–2011, phase two between 2012–2015; a third phase is yet to report.

²⁴ Phase one and phase two evaluations can be accessed here: <http://wellcommunities.org.uk/our-approach/our-research/> (accessed 13/01/21).

The Bromley By Bow Centre was an early adopter of the principle that health is shaped by social factors and therefore mechanisms to improve health must be rooted deeply in the community (see case study 2 page 31). Their innovative approach combines a GP practice with community facilities and a range of other services providing support on issues such as employment.²⁵ At the heart of the model is the principle of reciprocity between supporting the development of a strong community to in turn support good health and wellbeing.

Facilitating people to actively improve their own health and wellbeing is critical for nurturing healthy and resilient communities – this is the foundation for sustainable and prevention-focused public services. Community power is central to this ambition because it recognises the intrinsic value of social ties, and the deeper potential to mobilise people through networks and communities to take meaningful action. **Peer-support** can be a means for people to come together, help each other and mobilise around a particular issue. Approaches like **social prescribing**, and **community-led initiatives** are furthering a shift in emphasis towards building good health and wellbeing in communities.



²⁵ 'About Us'. Bromley by Bow Centre. <https://www.bbbsc.org.uk/about-us/> (accessed 13/01/21).



Case Study 1: Strengthening social networks – Local Conversations

Local Conversations, run by the People’s Health Trust, is a programme supporting disadvantaged communities. It focuses on addressing social determinants of health, improving health and wellbeing, and supporting a reduction in health inequalities.²⁶ The programme identifies and works with each community by supporting them with an initial grant of around £20,000, followed by a full grant of £200,000 – £300,000 over two to three years and top-up grants to sustain them for the long-term (for up to nine-years).

Local Conversations focusses on identifying community priorities and community-led action. In each local area, communities are supported to “take action” and increase their “control and influence” on issues important to them. For example, in Lozells, Birmingham, residents choose three priorities, including one around place and the local environment. Activities to support this priority have included community gardens and working closely with the local authority to take action and co-produce a community-led response to litter and dumping issues.

The programme is evaluated through qualitative case studies, a longitudinal survey of participants, and support for projects to carry out “self-appraisal”.²⁷ There is evidence from case-studies and the resident survey that participants have improved their social connections. There has also been growing evidence of activities to influence change through engagement with local services and democratic processes. Significant change will take time, but the programme is laying the foundations so that communities have the skills, confidence and connections to improve their neighbourhood while also advocating for change on the issues that matter to them.

²⁶ This case study is drawn from *Evaluating Local Conversations 2020*. (2020) The People’s Health Trust. This report covers findings from the third year and is based on data collected up to August 2019.

²⁷ The evaluation of the programme is led by NEF.



Case Study 2: Putting the community at the heart of health – The Bromley By Bow Centre

East London’s Bromley by Bow Centre combines an extensive neighbourhood hub with a medical practice and community research project– it includes a GP practice, community and art facilities, social care, and skills services. It is founded on the insight that “health is primarily driven by social factors, not medical ones”.²⁸ Through the combination of services offered, the centre reaches an estimated 33,000 people, with an overarching aim of improving their health and social circumstances, through helping build community.

The model involves a focus on relationship building, growing social networks, and creating “platforms for growth” that allow innovative community projects and initiatives to thrive.²⁹ The approach to health and wellbeing specifically recognises that these factors need to be understood holistically in order to be addressed, so the services work as a cluster.

The Bromley by Bow Centre has particularly focused on developing its approach to research, learning and evaluation. This has been developed from a research project, *Unleashing Healthy Communities*, where researchers were embedded at the centre and carried out participatory research with staff and community members – involving workshops and creative activities. The research aimed to explore the value of the integrated approach taken by Bromley by Bow and to understand what was important in terms of value and outcomes for the people, both staff and community members, at the centre. From this research, a theory of change was developed along with a framework of six high level “stretch outcomes”.³⁰ This innovative research approach aims to capture what is often lost in more conventional evaluation approaches and ensure what is measured is relevant and meaningful to the staff and communities at the Bromley by Bow Centre.

²⁸ ‘About Us’. Bromley by Bow Centre. <https://www.bbbbc.org.uk/about-us/> (accessed 13/01/21).

²⁹ Stocks-Rankin, C., Seale, B. and Mead, N. (2018). *Unleashing Healthy Communities: Summary Report: Researching the Bromley by Bow Model*. Bromley by Bow Insights.

³⁰ Stocks-Rankin, C., Seale, B. and Mead, N. (2018). *Unleashing Healthy Communities: Researching the Bromley by Bow Model*. Bromley by Bow Insights; Stocks-Rankin, C., Seale, B. (2019). ‘Measures of wellbeing and impact – who decides’. What Works Centre for Wellbeing. <https://whatworkswellbeing.org/blog/bromley-by-bow-wellbeing/> (accessed 03/02/21).



2. COMMUNITY POWER CAN STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY WELLBEING AND RESILIENCE

An important principle underpinning a community paradigm is that power and resources should be handed to communities so they can collectively respond to the challenges they face. As shown in the previous section, this can improve outcomes for individuals. It can also improve outcomes for communities as a whole.

There is evidence that where people are heard in local decision-making, and community capabilities and assets are nurtured – this can build community wellbeing and resilience. This section explores how the local ecosystem of communities, public sector organisations, businesses and the VCSE can all play a role in fostering these vital qualities.

Community wellbeing can be improved by giving people decision-making powers and access to resources to shape their local area

Community wellbeing is closely related to, but distinct from, individual wellbeing. The What Works Centre for Wellbeing sees community wellbeing as constituting the components that a community identifies it needs to thrive – these may include the social and physical environment of a place, as well as its economy and assets.³¹

³¹ Gamsu, M. et al. (2019). *Debating What Works for Community Wellbeing: Findings from two national public hearings on community wellbeing, health inequalities and local systems*. What Works Centre for Wellbeing. This definition builds on Wiseman and Brasher (2008).

A systematic review, for the What Works Centre for Wellbeing, looked at the impact of **joint decision-making** on community wellbeing. The review included evaluations from OECD countries on a range of decision-making activities.³² Despite recognising challenges in gathering evidence from complex interventions, they concluded that the available evidence showed benefits for both individuals and communities. Social benefits included improved trust between people and reduced antisocial behaviour, as well as physical improvements to local areas.³³ These improvements in turn support community wellbeing.

As with individual wellbeing, community wellbeing can be affected by the environment people live in. **Community ownership** is one way for communities to play an active role in improving their local environment.

Community land trusts, a type of **community ownership**, can act as a vehicle to improve the quality of housing and the local environment. Granby Four Streets, a community land trust in Liverpool, is a high-profile demonstration of this in action. Set up in 2011, the trust has renovated ten homes for low-cost sale and rent, set up a ceramics workshop, developed a community garden, and ensured the continuation of the Granby Market.³⁴ In terms of impact, it has improved the local area through creating green spaces, while at the same time benefitting the local economy.³⁵

The opportunity for communities to own and manage assets often happens through **community asset transfer** – a process whereby a building or piece of land is moved to **community ownership**, generally from a local authority, for below market value.³⁶ The Quirk Review, a detailed and landmark investigation into community assets conducted in 2007, found that these assets can support employment opportunities for local people, improve incomes and have knock-on benefits on people's

³² 29 evaluations were included. Many of the evaluations were focused on urban renewal activities, but others looked at participatory budgeting and citizens juries.

³³ Pennington, A. et al. (2018). *A systematic review of evidence on the impacts of joint-decision-making on community wellbeing*. What Works Centre for Wellbeing.

³⁴ 'History of Granby Four Streets'. <https://www.granby4streetsclt.co.uk/history-of-the-four-streets> (accessed 13/01/21).

³⁵ World Habitat Awards, Granby Four Streets Community Land Trust. <https://world-habitat.org/world-habitat-awards/winners-and-finalists/granby-four-streets-community-land-trust/#award-content> (accessed 13/01/21).

³⁶ *Places and Spaces: The future of community ownership*. (2016). Locality.

health. Restoring "iconic" local assets to productive use can also benefit community wellbeing, giving people "new hope in their future".³⁷

Locality has pointed to how **community ownership** can help to protect green spaces, which can be important places for community activities as well as for boosting health and wellbeing.³⁸ An example of this in practice is in Sheffield, home to Heeley's People's Park. The Park was transferred to community ownership, through Heeley Development Trust. The Trust and volunteers worked to reclaim vacant land to form the park which is now home to a wide variety of leisure facilities as well as space for activities like adult education.³⁹

Community businesses are another increasingly significant part of the local ecosystem that can have positive effects on community wellbeing – as of 2019 there were an estimated 9,000 of them operating in England.⁴⁰ Community businesses are defined as being locally accountable, with profits benefitting their local area.⁴¹ There are a diverse range of community businesses cutting across sectors. For example, a community-owned energy company in Grimsby benefits local people through reducing CO2 emissions, tackling fuel poverty, and supporting community members to gain new skills.⁴² A community-led garden centre in Hulme, Manchester, runs sessions in its community gardens for people with physical and learning disabilities.⁴³

A recent systematic review conducted for Power to Change found evidence, across qualitative studies, that **community businesses** benefit community wellbeing, social connections and local neighbourhoods. As the examples set out above illustrate, community businesses deliver these benefits through strengthening local infrastructure, providing people with skills and training and reinvesting money into the local economy.⁴⁴

³⁷ *Making Assets Work: The Quirk Review of community management and ownership of public assets.* (2007). The Quirk Review.

³⁸ *The Future of Community Asset Ownership.* (2018). Locality.

³⁹ Heeley People's Park. <http://heeleytrust.org/heeley-peoples-park/> (accessed 13/01/21).

⁴⁰ Highton, J et al. (2019). *The Community Business Market in 2019.* Power to Change.

⁴¹ 'What is community business?'. Power to Change. <https://www.powertochange.org.uk/what-is-community-business/> (accessed 13/01/21).

⁴² 'Grimsby Community Energy'. Power to Change. <https://www.powertochange.org.uk/what-is-community-business/stories/grimsby-community-energy/> (accessed 13/01/21).

⁴³ 'Hulme Community Garden Centre'. Power to Change. <https://www.powertochange.org.uk/what-is-community-business/stories/hulme-community-garden-centre/> (accessed 13/01/21)

⁴⁴ *Community Business: How do community businesses affect community wellbeing?* (2020). What Works Centre for Wellbeing.

Community resilience grows from cultivating community assets, strong social ties, and the local economy

Closely related to community wellbeing is the idea of community resilience. The notion of resilience, increasingly coming to the forefront of policy thinking as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, considers how communities can access the systems and infrastructure they need to be flexible, resourceful and responsive to challenges.⁴⁵ Beyond shocks like public health emergencies or flooding, these could be long-term structural economic and social challenges.

The Covid-19 crisis brought into focus the latent capacity that exists within communities to respond with agility and compassion to sudden extremes. In the early days of the first national lockdown, **mutual aid groups** sprung up around the country to support each other and ensure shielded groups got what they needed. They responded with a speed and specificity that could not be matched by public services.⁴⁶ In many cases, what started as collectives to deliver food and medicine, have evolved into initiatives that address longer-term social issues such as loneliness and isolation which have been further exacerbated by the pandemic. In some instances, informal community groups have supported councils with local knowledge to help deliver statutory functions.⁴⁷

There are three different routes through which communities can and are building their resilience: physical, social and economic. Physical community assets can serve as **hubs** which anchor a community's response to a crisis. An example of this is Hebden Bridge Town Hall – ownership of which was transferred to Hebden Bridge Community Association in 2010. The town hall played an important role in the wake of the 2015 Boxing Day floods. It became the heart of the community response, providing everything from cleaning items and a foodbank,

⁴⁵ Tiratelli, L. (2020). *Towards Resilience*. Local Trust. For a related discussion on the terminology see: McCabe, A., Wilson, M. and Macmillan, R. (2020). *Rapid Research Covid-19: Community Resilience or Resourcefulness?* Local Trust.

⁴⁶ Tiratelli, L. and Kaye, S. (2020). *Communities vs Coronavirus: The rise of mutual aid*. New Local.

⁴⁷ Wilson, M., McCabe, A. Macmillan, R. (2020). *Rapid Research Covid-19: Blending formal and informal community research*. Local Trust.

to a place where people could charge their phone and access WIFI.⁴⁸ Recent research from Carnegie UK Trust has identified the importance of hubs set up during the Covid-19 pandemic. These hubs were able to act responsively and served as focal points for partnership working between councils, the VCSE and communities.⁴⁹

Asset-based community development is an approach that builds social ties and social capital,⁵⁰ which in turn can help a community strengthen its resilience to both short shocks and longer-term upheavals. This approach has been used in North and South Ayrshire, where, building on existing community networks, a team of community 'builders' supported people to connect to one another and develop ideas for new groups and projects (see case study 3 on page 40). Through this work, a range of initiatives have been formed, often with the aim of improving health and wellbeing.⁵¹ In so doing, social capital is created, community bonds forged, and resilience enhanced.

Barking and Dagenham's 'Every One Every Day' project demonstrates another way communities can be supported to grow social capital and networks.⁵² Through this project the council, in partnership with Participatory City, has invested in creating support and infrastructure to allow people in the community to come together organically and collaborate.⁵³ In practice, this has meant creating a series of 'shops' across the borough, where citizens can come to discuss their ideas for **community projects** and be supported by staff to make them happen. This approach has greatly increased the number of community projects, groups and initiatives that exist within the area, allowing for more social capital to be built, and again, for resilience to be enhanced.

In terms of economic resilience, **community wealth building** is a strategy for local economic development. It involves identifying and retaining anchor institution spend, such as through procurement, within

⁴⁸ *Powerful Communities, Strong Economies*. (2017). Locality.

⁴⁹ Coutts, P. et al (2020). *Pooling Together: How community hubs have responded to the Covid-19 emergency*. Carnegie UK Trust.

⁵⁰ See Asset-Based Community Development. <https://www.nurturedevelopment.org/asset-based-community-development/> (accessed 13/01/21).

⁵¹ *Building Community: An evaluation of asset-based community development (ABCD) in Ayrshire*. Final Report to NHS Ayrshire and Arran. (2018). Social Market Gateway

⁵² Every one every day. <https://www.weareeveryone.org/> (accessed 13/01/21).

⁵³ Tiratelli, L. (2020). *Community Mobilisation: Unlocking the potential of community power*. New Local.

a local area. In this way, it seeks to use existing levers to increase the financial, social and human capital that exists in the place, and stop it leaking out beyond.⁵⁴ The practice originated in the USA, where in Cleveland, Ohio, the Democracy Collaborative has worked to ensure anchor institutions such as universities and state providers spend their money with local, worker-owned and democratically controlled co-operatives.⁵⁵ This promotes economic growth, creates jobs, and enhances local democratic control of the economy. The model has been applied in the UK – for example in Preston⁵⁶ – where over £100 million has been retained in the local economy as a result.⁵⁷

In a recent report, Local Trust looked at how Big Local Partnerships (see case study 4 page 41) have been using a range of community wealth building activities alongside other **community-led activities**. These include arranging money advice services and partnering with local credit unions, supporting the development of local businesses and social enterprises, and organising activities to support people into employment. The report also highlights nascent evidence of some Big Local activities starting to affect the wider local economy. For example, community asset ownership is enabling unused buildings and land to become “socially productive”. In two of the case study areas, partnerships were looking at opportunities around procurement with local anchor institutions.⁵⁸ These examples from Big Local areas show communities prioritising efforts to improve economic resilience.

Co-operative councils have focused on encouraging **co-operatives** as a way to strengthen local economic resilience. For example, Plymouth City Council is pursuing a strategy to strengthen its co-operative economy with plans to double the size of this sector by 2025. The council plans to support cooperatives to form in areas such as the wellbeing

⁵⁴ Boyce, T. and Brown, C. (2019). *Economic and Social Impacts and Benefits of Health Systems*. World Health Organisation.

⁵⁵ 'The Cleveland Model: How the Evergreen Cooperatives build community wealth.' <https://community-wealth.org/content/cleveland-model-how-evergreen-cooperatives-build-community-wealth> (accessed 13/01/21).

⁵⁶ 'The Preston Model'. CLES. <https://cles.org.uk/tag/the-preston-model/> (accessed 13/01/21).

⁵⁷ McInroy, N. (2019). 'Celebrating eight years of community wealth building in Preston'. CLES. <https://cles.org.uk/blog/reflecting-and-celebrating-eight-years-of-community-wealth-building-in-preston/> (accessed 13/01/21).

⁵⁸ *Building Community wealth in Neighbourhoods*. (2020). Local Trust and CLES. See also *Achieving Local Economic Change: what works?* (2019). Local Trust; For wider reflection on ensuring communities are actively involved in community wealth building and the extent of its wider economic impact see *Community Wealth Building from the grassroots: What we learnt from our tour of England*. (2020). Local Trust.

economy and community-owned infrastructure such as renewable energy.⁵⁹ The aim of this kind of co-operative strategy is to ensure communities have a greater control over vital services and the local economy.

Social infrastructure is vital for community power to flourish

The process of citizens coming together to improve their wellbeing and strengthen community resilience does not happen in a vacuum. Many of the examples discussed in this section illustrate the importance of social infrastructure – the resources needed for a community to be resilient and have greater control over its wellbeing. The importance of social infrastructure can be evidenced in its presence, but also in its absence.

The sociologist Eric Klinenberg describes social infrastructure as an enabler to bring people together in a community. In other words, it is “the physical conditions” which determine whether social capital develops – the places people meet and interact, both intentionally and incidentally.⁶⁰

Klinenberg’s work on the 1995 Chicago heatwave dug below quantitative data to understand why similarly deprived neighbourhoods in the city experienced different heat-related death rates during the crisis. He concluded differences in social infrastructure encouraged mutual support in some neighbourhoods, and not in others – and that this had a significant impact on how people fared in these places.⁶¹ This demonstrates the extent to which community resilience is underscored by the presence of social infrastructure, and how these both have knock-on effects on health and wellbeing.

The importance of social infrastructure is increasingly being recognised in the UK context – particularly in response to the government’s levelling

⁵⁹ ‘Doing it Ourselves – Plymouth City Council’. (2019). Co-Operative Councils Innovation Network. <https://www.councils.coop/case-studies/doing-it-ourselves-plymouth-city-council/> (accessed 13/01/21); ‘Plymouth leading the way with cooperative economy’. Plymouth Newsroom (16 November 2018). <http://plymouthnewsroom.co.uk/plymouth-leading-way-cooperative-economy/> (accessed 13/01/21).

⁶⁰ Klinenberg, E. (2018). *Palaces for the People: How to build a more equal and united society*. Penguin Random House.

⁶¹ Ibid.



The importance of social infrastructure can be evidenced in its presence, but also in its absence.

up agenda.⁶² For example, Local Trust has documented the impact in some Big Local areas (see case study 4 on page 41) of the absence of social infrastructure. This means residents not having places to meet, few active community organisations, and lack of connections to other places. The impact of this is that communities are inhibited in their capacity to "respond to crises and challenges when they arise".⁶³ In other words, social infrastructure is a vital enabler of community action and resilience.

This section has shown how involving citizens in decision-making and strengthening community capacity, assets, and social infrastructure can support the development of community wellbeing and resilience. Public sector organisations, alongside others in local ecosystems, can act as enablers to this – investing in social infrastructure and supporting communities to make use of assets and networks to build resilience and improve wellbeing.



⁶² Leach, M. (2020). 'Keeping Social Infrastructure on the Agenda'. Local Trust. <https://localtrust.org.uk/news-and-stories/blog/keepingsocialinfrastructureontheagenda/> (accessed 13/01/21); APPG for Left Behind Neighbourhoods, see: <https://www.appg-leftbehindneighbourhoods.org.uk/who-we-are/> (accessed 13/01/21); Kruger, D. (2020). *Levelling Up Our Communities: Proposals for a new social covenant*. Commissioned government report.

⁶³ Leach, M. (2020). 'Keeping Social Infrastructure on the Agenda'. Local Trust. <https://localtrust.org.uk/news-and-stories/blog/keepingsocialinfrastructureontheagenda/> (accessed 13/01/21); *Left Behind? Understanding communities on the edge*. (2019). Local Trust.



Case Study 3: Asset-based community capacity building in North and South Ayrshire

In Ayrshire an asset-based community development programme has demonstrated how strengthening social ties can help improve community mental health and wellbeing.⁶⁴ The main strand of the project was called 'Ahead' and was focused in North and South Ayrshire. It began with funding from the NHS Endowment fund in 2014 and was evaluated between 2014–18.

Working across seven communities, the programme consisted of 'community builders' connecting people with shared interests to existing activities, as well as supporting them to set up new initiatives where necessary. These included a bereavement club for those dealing with grief, and an allotment project for the community more widely.

Focus group and survey feedback illustrate the success of this approach. Social connections improved, as did people's self-reported health and quality of life. In North Ayrshire there was a statistically significant increase in people's mental wellbeing score. People also reported improvements such as visiting the GP less, exercising more, and relying less on prescription medication.

⁶⁴ This case study is drawn from the Social Market Gateway Evaluation. For further details see: Social Market Gateway (2018). *Building Community: An evaluation of asset-based community development (ABCD) in Ayrshire*. Final Report to NHS Ayrshire and Arran.



Case Study 4: Resourcing overlooked communities – the Big Local programme

Big Local is a funding programme, coordinated by Local Trust, that aims to empower communities that have been historically overlooked in Britain. The programme provides them with an award of £1.1 million that can be spent over a ten to fifteen-year timeframe. The money is spent by communities themselves, at their own pace, on their own specific ideas and projects.⁶⁵ This encompasses a range of community building activities, from small acts of engagement, to purchasing buildings for the community. The programme is 'different by design' due to its long-term focus, and its non-prescriptive, resident-led approach.⁶⁶

Evaluations of Big Local have found it generates a range of positive outcomes. Many of those directly involved in running a project report they have gained confidence and new understanding of their area, as well as learning new skills, particularly on topics like budgeting.⁶⁷ More significantly perhaps, people have seen their sense of 'control' over the areas that they live in increase,⁶⁸ starting to shift local power dynamics to communities.

For the wider communities in areas benefitting from the programme, evidence suggests that people are coming together more, that new spaces are being created for community activity, and that people are feeling more connected to one and other. Research has shown that, through its creation of 'participative spaces' in which local people come together, Big Local can be associated with increasing the breadth of participation that occurs in the areas that it works, as the range of opportunities for people to get involved with different kinds of activities is so extensive.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ 'About Big Local'. Local Trust. <https://localtrust.org.uk/big-local/about-big-local/> (accessed 13/01/21).

⁶⁶ *The Halfway Point: Reflections on Big Local*. (2019). Local Trust.

⁶⁷ *Big Local: The early years. Evaluation Report*. (2015). Local Trust.

⁶⁸ 'How is collective control developing among residents involved in the Big Local programme?' Communities in Control Study: Research summary 1. <https://communitiesincontrol.uk/learning/learning-power/> (accessed 13/01/21)

⁶⁹ 'Spaces for resident participation in place-based programmes'. Communities in Control Study: Research summary 4. <https://communitiesincontrol.uk/learning/learning-participation/> (accessed 13/01/21)



3. COMMUNITY POWER CAN ENHANCE DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION AND BOOST TRUST

This section begins by exploring the difficulties faced by public institutions tasked with addressing complex policy challenges in a climate of public distrust and frustration. It then sets out the potential of participatory and deliberative methods to respond to these challenges and create more meaningful and sustained engagement between citizens, institutions and representatives.

Our public institutions and representatives are tasked with responding to an increasingly complex interwoven set of challenges, all of which have serious implications for people and communities. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic will likely be felt for many years. On top of this, the complexity of post-Brexit, as well as the ongoing fallout from the Brexit referendum campaign, will have a significant influence over the shape of local economies and politics for the foreseeable future. Responding to the threat of climate change has huge implications for our way of life. This is all accompanied by a wide range of immense underlying challenges such as race and health inequalities, child poverty and growing demand for social care.

But there is increasing public distrust and frustration with the very institutions tasked with responding to these challenges. According to the Hansard Society in 2019, a record high of 47 per cent of people in Britain felt they had no influence over national decision-making. A majority also felt our system of governing needs improving, and

around half the population thought that the main parties did not care about them.⁷⁰ The experience of Covid-19 has deepened this chasm, with an increasingly widespread perception that a rigid centrally led one-size-fits-all response was ill-suited to the variable local manifestations of the pandemic, and unequal impacts of the economic lockdowns. The disconnect between the local leaders in Greater Manchester and the UK Government over the support for local lockdowns in October 2020 symbolised this deepening divide.⁷¹

A system of representative democracy only requests people's engagement occasionally – at election time or through formal consultations, for example. This is increasingly out of kilter with people's expectations for influence. The addition of ad hoc binary referenda to our democratic landscape over recent years has only seemed to deepen divisions between people, forcing them to pick a side which then characterises polarisation well beyond the day of the vote.



Growing the capacity for ongoing citizen involvement is increasingly recognised as a route to navigate complexity, and build wider legitimacy and confidence in the outcomes of decisions made.

Representative and direct methods treat democracy as an event, rather than an ongoing process. These feel increasingly ill-suited to complex interrelated socio-economic challenges and very different experiences of life between demographic groups and geographic areas. Growing the capacity for ongoing citizen involvement is increasingly recognised as a route to navigate complexity, and build wider legitimacy and confidence in the outcomes of decisions made. As the evidence presented in this section demonstrates, often these are most constructively conducted locally, where shared dialogue and direct engagement can take place.

⁷⁰ *Audit of Political Engagement 16: The 2019 Report*. (2019). Hansard Society.

⁷¹ Jennifer Williams, 'Two weeks that unmuted Greater Manchester', *Manchester Evening News* (21 October 2020). <https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/two-weeks-unmuted-greater-manchester-19144543> (accessed 13/01/21); John Harris, 'Local lockdowns dreamed up in London are causing nightmares for the rest of England', *The Guardian* (11 October 2020). <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/oct/11/local-lockdown-london-england-pandemic-manchester> (accessed 13/01/21).

Deliberative and participatory methods offer more meaningful engagement with the complex and interrelated challenges we face today

Deliberation and participation refer to a wide range of methods which all aim to bring different voices to the table and give people the opportunity to be actively involved in decision-making. The charity Involve has established definitions for understanding these families of methods:

- **Deliberative methods** are characterised by providing space for participants to weigh up a variety of information, discuss this with fellow participants, and “develop their thinking together”, before then forming a view.⁷² Examples of deliberative methods include **citizens’ assemblies**, **citizens juries** and **deliberative polling**.⁷³
- **Participatory methods** refer to a less specific group of practices. Participation is essentially how citizens engage with public decision-making processes and institutions.⁷⁴ There are many different types of participation, often presented as a spectrum, the original iteration of which is often attributed to Sherry Arnstein’s ladder of participation.⁷⁵ This has since been modified and updated, with versions existing today such as The International Association for Public Participation’s spectrum – inform, consult, involve, collaborate, empower.⁷⁶

In this report, we focus less on traditional engagement activities which inform and consult people, since they do not constitute genuine community power by still holding a significant degree of initiative within the formal institution. We focus more on innovative practices at

⁷² ‘Deliberative public engagement’. Involve. <https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/knowledge-base/what/deliberative-public-engagement> (accessed 13/01/21).

⁷³ For more detail and further examples of deliberative methods see: <https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/methods> (accessed 13/01/21).

⁷⁴ ‘Public Participation’. Involve. <https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/knowledge-base/what/public-participation> (accessed 13/01/21).

⁷⁵ Arnstein, S.R. (1969). ‘A ladder of citizen participation.’ Journal of the American Institute of Planners.

⁷⁶ Wilson, R. et al (2005) *People and Participation: Putting citizens at the heart of decision-making*. Involve.

the higher end of the spectrum, which involve, collaborate with and empower citizens around public decision-making.

The benefits of deliberative and participatory methods can be realised when carried out locally

While there have been a number of high-profile national deliberative events,⁷⁷ deliberative and participatory activities are most likely to have impact at a local level. There is appetite for more influence at a local level – the 2019/2020 Community Life Survey reported that only 27 per cent of respondents definitely or tended to agree that they personally can influence local decisions, and that 53 per cent would like that to change.⁷⁸

Practically, physical proximity makes it easier for people to participate in local activities than in national ones. Issues are also more likely to be relevant to people at this level, with any outcomes being seen tangibly. Locally, there are more opportunities to meaningfully engage with people beyond those immediately involved in a decision-making activity. This is key if deliberation is to mobilise wider communities, rather than just the direct participants.⁷⁹

Deliberative methods enable people to focus on complex issues and trade-offs, helping to build consensus and increase the legitimacy of decisions

Recently there has been growing interest in the potential of deliberative methods to involve communities in local decision-making.⁸⁰ The cross-departmental Innovation in Democracy Programme supported and evaluated deliberative exercises in Greater Cambridge, Test Valley and Dudley.⁸¹ A team at UCL also recently produced an evaluation of the

⁷⁷ There have also been two high-profile national assemblies on adult social care and on climate change, both hosted by House of Commons Select Committees.

⁷⁸ Community Life Survey 2018-19. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/community-life-survey-2018-19> (accessed 13/01/21).

⁷⁹ Pratchett, L. et al. (2009). *Empowering communities to influence local decision-making: A systematic review of the evidence*. Communities and Local Government.

⁸⁰ Involve's tracker on citizens' assemblies and juries being held in the UK has more details. See: <https://www.involve.org.uk/citizens-assembly-tracker> (accessed 13/01/21).

⁸¹ The Innovation in Democracy Programme. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/innovation-in-democracy-programme-launch> (accessed 13/01/21).

London Borough of Camden's citizens' assembly on the climate crisis (see case study 6 on page 54).⁸² With these examples in the UK and more, the potential impact of deliberation is starting to be realised.

Deliberative approaches have helped to forge consensus around complex issues. In Greater Cambridge, a **citizens' assembly** helped build legitimacy on congestion, air quality and public transport – with participants eventually coming together to endorse a clear plan of action, including recommending road closures.⁸³ Similarly, following an assembly in Test Valley, council officers spoke about how recommendations gave them “clear ideas to use as a foundation for these changes”, demonstrating how consensus and legitimacy emerge from deliberation.⁸⁴

Deliberative tools have also helped unlock more productive ways to solve local challenges and improve relations between communities and frontline professionals. In Peterhead in Scotland, there was tension between the community and local services over the safety of an annual bonfire. The local police were supported by What Works Scotland to set up a **citizens' jury**, where residents took the lead in looking at the problem and putting forward solutions. The police found that this approach was constructive and helped improve relations with the community.⁸⁵

Deliberative methods can help develop people's knowledge and ability to weigh up information and trade-offs around policy challenges. Giving people the opportunity to develop their knowledge around both processes and policy issues and how they can be resolved, is important for building trust in the political system. Participants in Camden Council's **citizens' assembly** on the climate crisis (see case study 6 on page 54) developed their understanding on the ways the council could respond to the crisis, as well as their confidence to discuss climate

⁸² Cain, I and Moore, G. (2019). *Evaluation of Camden Council's Citizens' assembly on the Climate Crisis*. UCL Culture.

⁸³ *Innovation in Democracy Programme Case Studies*. (2020). Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Breckon, J. and Hopkins, A. (2019). *Evidence vs. Democracy: How 'mini-publics' can traverse the gap between citizens, experts and evidence*. Alliance for Useful Evidence.

issues.⁸⁶ In Greater Cambridge, participants reported they were more confident being involved in decision-making following the **citizens' assembly**.⁸⁷

The OECD has gathered a wide range of international deliberative case studies showing real potential to improve trust and legitimacy around decision-making. An important aspect of trust is believing that your views will be heard. In La Plata, Argentina, a **deliberative poll** was held on traffic issues. Surveys of participants before and after the event, showed a substantial shift in beliefs that public officials would listen to their views.⁸⁸

To feel a process has been legitimate, it needs to be taken seriously by public institutions and be seen to have impact. The OECD highlights good practice from Noosa Shire in Australia where following a **citizens' jury** on organic waste, the council continued to engage with participants through workshops on implementation. Demonstrating evidence of impact, the OECD identifies a **citizens' jury** in South Australia on how road users can share space safely. It identified measures which ended up having a significant impact on bicycle safety and led to a reduction in serious and fatal injuries.⁸⁹

Trust in decision-making can be improved through embedding deliberative and participatory practices into our institutions

These ad hoc examples demonstrate the potential of deliberative methods on specific complex or politically thorny issues. The OECD has made the case for developing this further, by 'institutionalising' deliberation, in other words embedding it culturally and using it frequently, as well as legally constituting it into decision-making structures. This approach could have a real impact on enhancing public trust in government and policymakers as many more people

⁸⁶ Cain, L and Moore, G. (2019). *Evaluation of Camden Council's Citizens' assembly on the Climate Crisis*. UCL Culture.

⁸⁷ Brammall, S. and Sisy, K. (2020). *Innovation in Democracy Programme Evaluation*. Renaisi; 72 per cent of citizen assembly participants agreed or strongly agreed that they were more confident engaging in political decision-making having been involved in the citizens' assembly.

⁸⁸ *Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the deliberative wave*. (2020). OECD.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

have the opportunity to get closer to decision-making.⁹⁰ Such a shift would bring about a more fundamental realignment in the relationship between citizens and the state.

In Belgium, the Ostbelgien region's **permanent citizens' council** (see case study 5 on page 53) is a good example of what institutionalisation begins to look like in practice. This permanent citizens' council has the power to set its own agenda and initiate citizens' panels on specific topics.⁹¹ Other cities and regions have also experimented with more permanent deliberative and participatory forums – for example Toronto has had two iterations of a **planning review panel**, made up of residents, and embedded in the city's planning department.⁹² Panel members participate in sessions where they learn about planning issues in the city, have informed discussions and input their views to the planning department.⁹³

Citizens' assemblies in Gdansk, Poland, show how deliberative practices become more embedded and begin to set the agenda themselves. From an initial assembly held in response to flooding, further assemblies have now been held on issues including air pollution and how LGBT people are treated. What is particularly significant about these assemblies is their powers to direct policy and funds in the city.⁹⁴ Additionally, in Gdansk, as well as in the cities of Kraków, Lublin and Poznań, citizens can collect signatures in order to initiate a participatory or deliberative process.⁹⁵ This is a step on from citizens assemblies responding to a predetermined issue, and shows how opening up the process can create even more efficacy and a route towards citizens exercising more tangible power.

In the UK, there is an emerging focus on the specific potential of deliberative and participatory approaches to help improve trust and legitimacy around decision-making. The RSA's Economic Council and Economic Inclusion Roadshow highlighted the potential for

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ See Toronto Planning Review Panel: About the Panel. <https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/planning-development/outreach-engagement/toronto-planning-review-panel/toronto-planning-review-panel-about/> (accessed 02/02/21).

⁹⁴ Gazivoda, T. (2017). 'How the Poles are making democracy work again in Gdansk'. Resilience.org.

⁹⁵ *Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the deliberative wave.* (2020). OECD.

deliberative and participatory approaches to provide an avenue for citizens to feel heard and genuinely involved in how decisions are made. While people felt low levels of trust in politics, the media and decision-making, they were enthusiastic to be actively involved in economic discussions. This project showed both public appetite and the potential to build legitimacy if deliberative and participatory practices were used less as one-off events, and instead more fundamentally embedded into public decision-making institutions.⁹⁶

The first UK **standing citizens assembly** has been announced in Newham in London. This follows a commission in the borough tasked with improving participation, and one of its core recommendations was a standing assembly. This assembly has a year-long trial from May 2021. This builds on existing practice within the borough – for example its **citizens' assembly** on the climate crisis and wider neighbourhood engagement practices.⁹⁷

Participatory methods create routes for people to get involved in shaping priorities that directly affect them, increasing relevance of decisions

A wide range of participatory methods are increasingly being employed to decide how local resources are used. In Barking and Dagenham, citizens are involved in a **participatory grant making panel**. This panel decides how a pot of money raised from the Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy should be spent on local community projects. Panel members were involved in everything from learning about challenges in the borough, designing criteria to guide decision-making, and reviewing applications and listening to pitches.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Patel, R. and Gibbon, K. (2017). *Citizens, Participation and the Economy: Interim report of the RSA Citizens' Economic Council*. RSA

⁹⁷ *Newham Democracy and Civic Participation Commission: Final Report*. (2020). Newham Democracy and Civic Participation Commission; see also 'New era of 'people power' in Newham to boost democracy and participation' (22 October 2020). <https://www.newham.gov.uk/news/article/526/new-era-of-people-power-in-newham-to-boost-democracy-and-participation> (accessed 13/01/21).

⁹⁸ Needs, M. (2019). 'Sparking Civic Activism: How Barking and Dagenham Council have redefined their relationship with local people and placed residents at the heart of their work'. Nesta. <https://www.nesta.org.uk/blog/sparking-civic-activism/> (accessed 13/01/21); Participation and Engagement Team, Barking and Dagenham Council. (2019). 'What is a citizen for: participatory grant making in Barking and Dagenham'. Involve. <https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/blog/opinion/what-citizen-participatory-grant-making-barking-and-dagenham> (accessed 13/01/21).

In Scotland a particular model of participatory workshop called a **design charrette**,⁹⁹ brings community members together to involve them in the decision-making and design processes to support the development of their local area. The Scottish Government has encouraged wider use of these participatory approaches through *The Charrette Mainstreaming Programme* and *The Making Places initiative*. This evaluation looked at a range design events – some led by community groups others by local authorities. Facilitators played important roles in the design of events and encouraging members of the community to attend. In some areas creative arts or theatre activities were used to engage people prior to the event; in another area primary school children developed ideas and shared these with the community. Evaluators found where the approach worked well, initiatives gave communities a “strong voice” in design decisions and more deeply embedded community engagement into local planning processes.¹⁰⁰

The Big Local Programme shows how a more participative approach is being developed in the community sector – its very model is based on handing power and resources directly to 150 communities nationwide (see case study 4 on page 41). Residents receive some background organisational support, but in large part they decide how £1.1 million worth of investment should be used. At the centre of decision-making is the Big Local Partnership which is required to have at least eight members, of which over half should be residents of the area. Big Local areas are showing that while it takes time for decision-making skills and processes to develop, **resident-led decision-making** can be achieved. The programme has charted how Big Local groups have developed decision-making skills and worked through conflict and disagreement. Many areas are using more traditional decision-making processes, but some have started to adopt approaches to engage the wider community such as **citizens’ juries** and **participatory budgeting**.¹⁰¹

Participatory budgeting is a method for involving citizens in decision-making about how public money is spent. In the UK, participatory

⁹⁹ For more details see: ‘Design Charrettes’. Involve. <https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/methods/design-charrettes> (accessed 13/01/21).

¹⁰⁰ *Evaluation of Community-Led Design Initiatives: impacts and outcomes of the Charrettes and Making Places funds*. (2019). Scottish Government.

¹⁰¹ *Power in our hands: An inquiry into resident-led decision-making in the Big Local Programme*. (2020). Local Trust.

budgeting has generally been used in relatively small-scale ways. A 2011 evaluation of participatory budgeting in England identified a number of ways it was positively impacting public services and local communities. For services, the method can help gather more information about how to engage different groups in the community and provide appropriate services. The evaluation also found that these engagement activities may improve community confidence in public services. In terms of communities themselves, the evaluation found participatory budgeting may encourage greater involvement in community activities and the growth of community organisations.¹⁰²

Internationally, **participatory budgeting** has been used more ambitiously, and many countries are adopting the practice particularly at a local or regional level. For example, participatory budgeting was introduced in Paris in 2014. Residents are now able to propose and vote on ideas for the city – with 5 per cent of the city’s total investment budget dedicated to this.¹⁰³ In Madrid, an online platform is used to facilitate participatory budgeting. This platform allows citizens to propose and vote on projects for the city – these projects can be up to a budget of 100 million euros.¹⁰⁴ In 2014 in Melbourne, Australia, citizens joined a people’s panel participatory budgeting exercise to look at the city’s ten year financial plan – the council accepted ten of the eleven recommendations.¹⁰⁵

Drawing on evidence internationally and from the community sector in the UK, there is clearly further potential for these kinds of participatory processes to be used on a more ambitious scale and embedded in democratic institutions. Indeed, the UK government’s evaluation of **participatory budgeting** found that these approaches had most impact on “culture and practices of those in positions of authority” where

¹⁰² *Communities in the Driving Seat: A study of participatory budgeting in England*. (2011). Department for Communities and Local Government.

¹⁰³ Veron, P. (2018). ‘Participatory Paris: Home to the largest participatory budget in the world’. RSA Journal. There are further plans to develop Paris’s participatory budget, see: Peter Yeung. ‘How Paris’s participatory budget is reinvigorating democracy’. City Monitor (8 January 2021). <https://citymonitor.ai/government/civic-engagement/how-paris-participatory-budget-is-reinvigorating-democracy> (accessed 02/02/21).

¹⁰⁴ ‘Decide Madrid’, Involve. <https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/case-studies/decide-madrid> (accessed 13/01/21).

¹⁰⁵ City of Melbourne People’s Panel, Participedia. <https://participedia.net/case/4372> (accessed 13/01/21); ‘Melbourne’s People Panel’, Involve. <https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/case-studies/melbourne-peoples-panel> (accessed 13/01/21).

activities covered a larger area and budget.¹⁰⁶ Activities like small-scale participatory budgeting could be a stepping-stone for a wider culture shift in the public sector towards handing more power and resources to communities.

This section has set out how deliberative and participatory approaches are complementary and critical tools to help rebuild trust, confidence and engagement with democratic institutions and decision-making. International evidence demonstrates the wider and more ambitious potential of deliberative and participatory tools to really transform public trust in our institutions. In the UK, we are beginning to see how these approaches can meaningfully change and reinvigorate the landscape of local decision-making. The shift required now is from ad hoc deliberation and participation on specific issues to mainstreamed practice which shifts the culture of democratic institutions to openness and continual dialogue.



¹⁰⁶ *Communities in the Driving Seat: A study of participatory budgeting in England.* (2011). Department for Communities and Local Government.



Case Study 5: Embedding deliberation into local decision-making – Citizens’ Council in Ostbelgien, Belgium

The Ostbelgien region of Belgium has recently made significant progress in more deeply institutionalising deliberation into decision-making structures. In 2019, the parliament voted to establish in legislation a permanent citizens’ council, accompanying citizens’ panels, and a secretariat to support them.¹⁰⁷ The citizens’ council is unusual in that it can set its own agenda and initiate three citizens’ panels a term to investigate issues. It also has a role to play in monitoring how recommendations from the panels are responded to by parliament.¹⁰⁸

One of the important features of this approach is the number of people who will be involved. Members of the citizens’ council are randomly selected and serve for one-and-a-half years. More members of the public will serve on the citizens panels. The idea is that, within a few years, every resident will have been invited to participate in the council or one of the panels.¹⁰⁹

The remit, resourcing and reach of the citizens’ council means there is real potential here to build new ways of working between citizens and public institutions, develop people’s civic skills, and potentially impact more widely on public trust in decision-making.

One of the developments so far, has been reaching out for proposals for the first ad hoc citizens’ panel. In total about 20 proposals were made. Citizens were then able to vote on proposals – two topics received sufficient support to be discussed. The first will be a panel on the working conditions of people employed in healthcare.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ *Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the deliberative wave.* (2020). OECD.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Newham Democracy and Civic Participation Commission: Final Report.* (2020). Newham Democracy and Civic Participation Commission.

¹¹⁰ Cesnulaityte, I. (2020). ‘How Ostbelgien became a trailblazer in deliberative democracy: An interview with Yves Dejaeghere’. OECD Participo Series. *New Democratic Institutions: Interviews with Practitioners.* <https://medium.com/participo/how-ostbelgien-became-a-trailblazer-in-deliberative-democracy-62c3bb1fa560> (accessed 02/02/21).



Case Study 6: Using deliberative methods to address complex challenges – Camden Climate Assembly

In July 2019, Camden Council ran a citizens' assembly on how the borough should be addressing the climate crisis. This assembly was informed by the council's previous experience in using deliberative and participatory approaches.¹¹¹

Over 50 residents were randomly selected to take part in the assembly which took place over three sessions. The council looked at ways to engage others, beyond residents involved in the assembly, in discussions about climate action. For example, the council held engagement events with schools to gather ideas, and used an online platform for residents to post ideas – these were then considered by the assembly.¹¹²

In terms of outcomes, the assembly produced a series of recommendations for actions that need to be taken by people at home, in the neighbourhood, and by the council.

In October 2019, these recommendations were presented to a full council meeting and have gone on to shape Camden's Climate Action Plan to achieve a zero-carbon borough in five years which was published in the summer of 2020.¹¹³

Camden has focused on making the assembly a catalyst for wider citizen involvement on climate action, rather than just a one-off event. For example, following the assembly the council set up a six-week pop-up 'think and do' space to keep the energy of the process going. This allowed both participants and the wider

¹¹¹ Cain, L and Moore, G. (2019). *Evaluation of Camden Council's Citizens' assembly on the Climate Crisis*. UCL Culture.

¹¹² 'What can Camden do to address the climate crisis: Camden Climate Assembly'. Involve. <https://www.involve.org.uk/our-work/our-projects/practice/what-can-camden-do-address-climate-crisis> (accessed 13/01/21).

¹¹³ Ibid.

community to be engaged in environmental policy in an ongoing way.¹¹⁴ Also, based on one of the assembly's recommendations, the council has set up a climate citizen panel to continue residents' involvement in the borough's action on climate change.¹¹⁵

This assembly was evaluated by researchers at UCL, to help the council develop its thinking on using assemblies and other deliberative and participatory tools to support community engagement and action.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ 'Pop-up Think & Do community space for climate and eco action. London Borough of Camden. <https://www.camden.gov.uk/pop-up-think-do-community-space-for-climate-and-eco-action> (accessed 13/01/21).

¹¹⁵ 'Climate crisis'. London Borough of Camden. <https://www.camden.gov.uk/climate-crisis#wukv> (accessed 13/01/21). To date the panel has met twice virtually, and will meet on a quarterly basis.

¹¹⁶ Cain, L and Moore, G. (2019). *Evaluation of Camden Council's Citizens' assembly on the Climate Crisis*. UCL Culture.



4. COMMUNITY POWER CAN BUILD COMMUNITY COHESION

A cohesive community is one in which people feel a sense of belonging, where differences are valued, where relationships between residents are rich, and opportunities are shared.¹¹⁷ Cohesion in this context can be characterised “by the absence of underlying social conflict and the presence of strong social bonds.”¹¹⁸

The cost, both social and financial, of communities having low levels of cohesion has been recognised at a national level. The Government’s 2016 Casey Review found a lack of cohesion and integration in Britain was costing the country £6 billion a year, through knock-on effects on outcomes in areas such as health and employment.¹¹⁹ While this figure demonstrates the scale and recognition of the problem nationally, the solutions to addressing it – actively building community cohesion – are inherently local and community power endeavours.

This section explores the evidence for effective responses with a practical focus on building cohesion where it has broken down. Through these examples, this section sets out why **community-led action** and the principles of community power are integral to building more cohesive communities.

¹¹⁷ *Guidance on Community Cohesion*. (2002). Local Government Association.

¹¹⁸ Fitzsimons, S. (2020). *Resilient Communities*. The Young Foundation and Cumberland Lodge.

¹¹⁹ Casey, L. (2016). *The Casey Review*. Department for Communities and Local Government.

Building new social connections within neighbourhoods can help communities recover after crises

Community cohesion as a concept rose up the agenda of British policymakers following the summer 2001 riots in places including Bradford and Oldham. In the wake of this, the government established a Community Cohesion Review Team, led by Ted Cantele. The report of the review team found that a lack of shared values and civic pride, as well as the fragmentation of geographic communities along lines of competing racial and religious identities, were key factors fuelling the tension.¹²⁰

Cantele recommended a focus on initiatives designed to build community cohesion as the best way to support these areas to recover.¹²¹ This policy response has also been applied to similar crises since. These initiatives have a common focus on strengthening and expanding social networks and using local assets to provide opportunities for people to come together in shared spaces. In this sense, these approaches to building cohesion are inherently local and underpinned by an ethos of building space and opportunity for person-to-person contact and developing wider community capacity.

Responding to the 2001 riots, The Linking Network in Bradford fosters relationships between faith schools so that pupils from different religious backgrounds get to know one another and build new social ties through attending shared events and engaging in group activities.¹²² The idea behind this is to help build communities across divides and bind together people who share neighbourhoods but otherwise have limited interactions with one another. An evaluation of The Linking Network found that their model of cohesive community building has positive impacts on pupils' "skills, attitudes, perceptions and behaviours", as well as increasing the breadth of their social groups and the depth of community bonds.

¹²⁰ *Community Cohesion: A report of the Independent Review Team*. (2001). Home Office. See <https://tedcantele.co.uk/publications/publication-and-downloads/> (accessed 02/02/21).

¹²¹ *ibid.*

¹²² 'The Linking Network'. <https://thelinkingnetwork.org.uk/> (accessed 14/01/21).

A decade later in London, following the 2011 riots, the borough of Croydon began a series of cohesion-building initiatives in wards that had experienced the most trouble. Here, an **asset building approach** saw the council attempt to map existing assets, build new connections, and provide funding so that communities could flourish – ensuring more social connectivity and less fragmentation. The initiative created over 70 new community projects in the borough, developing social capital and cohesion by engaging residents in a broad range of community building activities.¹²³

There is international evidence similarly pointing to the importance of building ties across neighbourhoods, in order to strengthen cohesion and help communities recover from divisive episodes. A project in Rostock, Germany offers a particularly good illustration of the value of this kind of **community-led response** as the community sought to rebuild following a racially motivated arson attack (see case study 8, page 62). This involved a range of cultural and educational activities to rebuild community cohesion.

Creating space for face-to-face dialogue can help communities respond constructively to change

Cohesion can be weakened when communities are in flux or experiencing demographic change. Research from Hope Not Hate identifies two specific circumstances where this can become an especially acute problem. The first relates to change happening *within* an area at great speed (indeed the speed of the change is often more significant than the scale). The second relates to negative responses which can emerge in areas *neighbouring* those experiencing rapid change. Despite a relative lack of change in the neighbouring areas, the proximity of change can induce concern.¹²⁴

‘The National Conversation on Immigration’, an initiative run by British Future and Hope Not Hate, demonstrated the value of face-to-face

¹²³ Croydon Asset-based Community Development Pilot Project Report. (2014). Croydon Council.

¹²⁴ Clarke, C. et al. (2020). *Understanding Community Resilience in Our Towns*. HopeNotHate. In particular they refer to Kidderminster as an example of a place in the UK that has suffered from this ‘halo effect’ of being nearby to, but largely unaffected directly by, demographic change.

interactions in helping communities respond to demographic change. The initiative had several overlapping objectives, including looking at how consensus can be built on immigration policy and showing the value of “deeper, on-going public engagement”. In practice, the programme involved 60 visits to towns and cities across the UK to hold **citizens’ panels** in each area. An important observation from this initiative was that debate in the citizens’ panels was more “moderate and balancing” than that generally seen online. British Future and Hope Not Hate recommended the value of continuing this kind of public engagement work as it shows that “it is possible to build consensus” even around highly divisive policy issues.¹²⁵ Critically, this kind of response does not focus on national top-down interventions or abstract policies, but on creating space within communities themselves for people to come together to share and discuss their views.

A further initiative aimed at giving people space to come together and meet and speak with people outside of their networks comes from the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. Here, new residents’ and refugees’ forums help people from these groups that are new to the area build networks and establish community bonds with existing residents. Through these forums, the borough aims to create communities that are “more engaged, resilient and cohesive”, with residents from different backgrounds building connections.¹²⁶ The approach seeks to ensure that cohesion is a two-way-street, rather than a demand for assimilation from one group to another.

Community-led activities can help to address issues which undermine cohesion

Issues like anti-social behaviour and hate crime cause significant distress and can damage cohesion in communities – they can also prove to be particularly difficult issues for local services to address. While there is clearly an important role for public services, including the police and councils, in tackling these issues, community-led activities have also been shown to be an essential part of the response.

¹²⁵ Rutter, J. and Carter, R. (2018). *National Conversation on Immigration*. British Future and HopeNotHate.

¹²⁶ ‘Tower Hamlets Social Integration Projects’. London Councils. <https://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/our-key-themes/leadership-devolution-and-democracy/social-integration/tower-hamlets-social> (accessed 14/01/21).

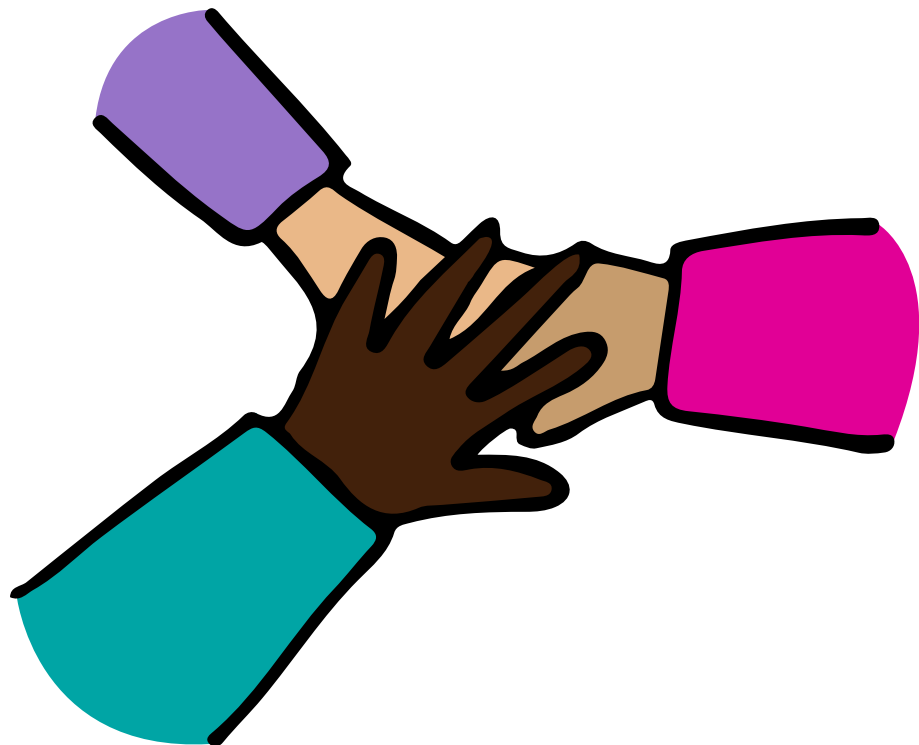


Physical space for people to meet and activities that support interaction and dialogue are vital components of these kinds of local responses.

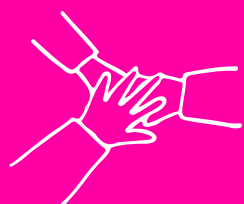
The LGA highlights good practice in Rotherham where community activities have been an important part of improving hate crime reporting.¹²⁷ The council worked with local voluntary organisations to better understand people's experiences of hate crime and potential barriers to reporting it. Activities arising from this included a project to equip women from ethnic minority communities with the tools and support networks to confidently report hate crime – this group has helped those involved to feel more empowered around this issue. Rotherham has seen a marked increase in satisfaction with how hate crime is dealt with.

In Gateshead, the Edberts House project (see case study 7 on page 61) demonstrates the potential of **community-led activities** to respond to complex issues such as antisocial behaviour, in turn improving cohesion and the sense of community in a local area.

This section has demonstrated that national concern about community cohesion ultimately requires community-led, local solutions attuned to the particular source of friction and breakdown. Physical space for people to meet and activities that support interaction and dialogue are vital components of these kinds of local responses. The examples explored here are not top-down interventions, but rather initiatives that focus on empowering and facilitating communities to come together, build greater shared understanding, and create new social ties across neighbourhoods.



¹²⁷ *Building cohesive communities*. (2019). LGA.



Case Study 7: Community activities to improve cohesion – Edberts House, Gateshead

Edberts House is a group of projects in Gateshead which are focused on improving community life and cohesion through activities designed and delivered by local people.¹²⁸ The initiative began with a single community project, Edberts House, and has since expanded to Pattinson House – which is part of the People’s Health Trust’s Local Conversations programme – and Larkspur House which is connected to a community primary school.

These community spaces host a huge range of activities. At Larkspur House people can attend drop-ins with local services including the police, the council and Citizens Advice. At Pattinson House people can join the steering group and share their ideas developed from community activities. Edberts House supports a range of activities for young people and learning opportunities to help people to achieve qualifications and access employment.

Since Edberts House began, there have been improvements in community cohesion in the local High Lanes estate. This was marked by a significant decline in antisocial behaviour – from 14.6 antisocial behaviour incidents per hundred tenants in 2010, to 0.7 incidents per hundred in 2016.

¹²⁸ This case study is drawn from Edberts House website: <http://edbertshouse.org/> (accessed 17/02/21); and Marmot, M. et al (2020). *Health equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 years on*. London: Institute of Health Equity.



Case Study 8: Building cohesion from crisis – Rostock, Germany

In Rostock, Germany, a local approach has successfully rebuilt the social fabric of the area after a crisis.¹²⁹ Following a horrific instance of a racially motivated arson attack in the town in 1992, a community-based organisation called *Bunt Statt Braun* ('Colourful Instead of Brown') started work to try and build community cohesion and promote tolerance in the area. This has included holding a range of activities, including hosting cultural events (ranging from international cooking courses to movie nights), and running education programmes which promote tolerance among young people.

The organisation has also engaged in community building campaigns aimed at creating solidarity between neighbours of all backgrounds. An example of such a campaign involved encouraging residents to display stickers on their doors to signal their willingness to provide emergency aid to others if they are experiencing a crisis of some kind. Through this work, they have been able to “counteract the negativity emanating from the far right” in that area and build a more cohesive and inclusive community.

¹²⁹ This case study is drawn from Painter, A. (2013). *Democratic stress, the populist signal and extremist threat*. Policy Network.

5. COMMUNITY POWER CAN EMBED PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION IN PUBLIC SERVICES

The importance of prevention and early intervention – stopping problems emerging in the first place, and if they do, catching them before they get worse – is hardly controversial. The need for more ‘preventative’ approaches is discussed across public policy and referenced in numerous public service strategic plans.¹³⁰ The real challenge is around what prevention and early intervention look like in practice and how they can be embedded within public services to shift the centre of gravity away from crisis reaction.

Demographic changes and constrained resources mean that demand on public services is rising, and the status quo is not viable.¹³¹ Services that are only capable of responding to demand, rather than getting ahead of it, will become increasingly unsustainable. Austerity creates significant pressures, but it is important to recognise long term demographic trends mean new ways of working are also required in addition to sufficient resource.¹³²

Across the public sector, there is growing evidence indicating what a truly preventative approach would need to look like in practice.¹³³ For example, the Marmot Review and its more recent ten-year progress update sets out extensive evidence on addressing health inequalities

¹³⁰ See for example the NHS Long Term Plan. <https://www.longtermplan.nhs.uk/> (accessed 14/01/21).

¹³¹ For a wider discussion on this see: Lent, A. and Studdert, J. (2019). *The Community Paradigm: Why public services need radical change and how it can be achieved*. New Local.

¹³² See for example The OBR’s 2020 Fiscal Sustainability report which projects government expenditure taking up a rising share of GDP. Fiscal Sustainability Report – July 2020. OBR. <https://obr.uk/fsr/fiscal-sustainability-report-july-2020/> (accessed 02/02/21).

¹³³ The discussion on social prescribing (see page 27) is also relevant here.

and the social determinants of health through improvements in a diverse range of policy areas including education, employment, housing, the built environment and communities.¹³⁴ In local government, the Upstream Collaborative project led by Nesta and Collaborate has recently been supporting councils to “move attention and resources upstream” – in other words beyond service delivery to focusing on equipping communities with what they need to “thrive”.¹³⁵

It is clear that this cannot be done without communities at the core of a more sustainable approach. As *The Community Paradigm* set out, public services are held back by two paradigms which became dominant when the challenges and opportunities for these services were very different to those that exist today.¹³⁶ The state paradigm, which came about in the post-war era, instils hierarchy, creates professionally dominated siloes and treats people as largely passive service users. The market paradigm, which came into being from the 1980s onwards, injects a focus on efficiency and cost, reducing interactions to transactions and viewing the individual as a customer. Public services today are stuck in a state-market hybrid paradigm which is incapable of leveraging people’s insights into their own situation so as to create more sustainable solutions to challenges and reduce pressure on public services.

Yet in some parts of the public sector, individuals and services are operating against this system-logic and pioneering new models and practices which do seek to make the most of the capabilities and capacity of communities. These approaches have in common a desire to be more than a sticking plaster over a broken system. The examples explored in this section include **asset-based approaches**, **co-production**, **community ownership** models and wider **community mobilisation**. Taken separately, they indicate the new ways in which innovative approaches are sharing power and using the insight of communities directly. Taken together, they demonstrate the route to

¹³⁴ See: The Marmot Review (2010). *Fair Society, Healthy Lives: Strategic review of health inequalities in England post-2010*; Marmot, M. et al (2020). *Health equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 years on*. London: Institute of Health Equity; and Marmot, M. et al. (2020). *Build Back Fairer: The Covid-19 Marmot Review: The pandemic, socioeconomic and health inequalities in England*. London: Institute for Health Equity.

¹³⁵ Lloyd, J. and Randle, A. (2020). *Introducing New Operating Models for Local Government*. Nesta and Collaborate.

¹³⁶ Lent, A. and Studdert, J. (2019). *The Community Paradigm: Why public services need radical change and how it can be achieved*. New Local.



It is clear that this cannot be done without communities at the core of a more sustainable approach.

creating a more sustainable system overall, if they can be turned from ad hoc practice to mainstream operation. As it stands, their impact locally is significant, yet will always be limited given the wider confines of a system that does not institutionally always recognise their value.

Asset-based approaches are helping organisations shift how they work with communities by coming to see them as equal partners

There is a growing movement in the public sector of organisations adopting **strengths- or asset-based approaches**.¹³⁷ These approaches originated from the work of John Kretzman and John Mcknight in America in the late 1980s.¹³⁸ What is distinct about these approaches is their focus on people's 'assets' rather than their problems. These approaches aim to build on the assets and networks within communities in order for people to support each other.¹³⁹ Some public sector organisations have been adopting asset-based approaches both to inform how they deliver services and how they invest in and support communities.

A number of councils have been exploring and sharing the potential of **asset-based community development**, as part of Nesta's Upstream Collaborative Programme. Nesta argues that for local authorities, the strategic benefit of investing in communities is that it allows people to "flourish", and therefore over time reduce crisis demand on services.¹⁴⁰ For example Leeds Council has been supporting asset-based approaches across the city in a variety of ways. Leeds has made use of community builders who are employed in local community organisations and work with communities at neighbourhood level.

¹³⁷ Nature Development who are specialists in this approach have worked in areas including Leeds, Thurrock, Fife and Birmingham; Nesta's Upstream Collaborative explored the use of asset-based community development with council's involved in the project, see: Lloyd, J. and Reynolds, E. (2020). *Asset-Based Community Development for Local Authorities: How to rebuild relationships with communities through asset-based approaches*. Nesta.

¹³⁸ For a good overview of asset-based community development and the significance of Kretzman and Mcknight's work see 'A potted history of asset-based community development'. Nurture Development. <https://www.nurturedevelopment.org/blog/a-potted-early-history-of-asset-based-community-development/> (accessed 14/01/21).

¹³⁹ 'Asset based approaches'. A Better Way Network. <https://www.betterway.network/asset-based-approaches> (accessed 14/01/21).

¹⁴⁰ Lloyd, J. and Reynolds, E. (2020). *Asset-Based Community Development for Local Authorities: How to rebuild relationships with communities through asset-based approaches*. Nesta.

Qualitative accounts of impact, such as people coming together to clean up local parks or people feeling safer through knowing more people in their area, are helping make the case for the community builder approach.¹⁴¹

Asset-based working is at the heart of the Wigan Deal (see case study 9 on page 73). This asset-based approach grew in the council over time. Its early roots were in ethnographic training given to frontline care staff to help them have more open-ended conversations with the people they supported. These staff members incorporated this training into their own practice and started to have different kinds of conversations with service users which were about trying to understand them as a whole person. These practices were developed into sessions which became known as deal training. In time, this training was rolled out across the council, for both frontline and back-office staff, as well as for council partners.¹⁴² This training embodies how the council has changed the way it works with communities through seeing them as equal partners with vital insights to solve local challenges.

The Centre for Welfare Reform has described how Barnsley Council is similarly working towards a “conscious and fundamental shift in its own culture and organisation”. Central to this is a shift from the council as simply a service provider to an organisation that supports people through building on “the community’s own capacities”. To reflect this, the council redesigned its governance arrangements to support more **place-based working** with communities. These new structures are supported by area teams whose role includes community mapping as well as connecting local community groups, helping people access community resources and facilitating groups to look at how to solve problems. This study of Barnsley concludes, that while the changes are still relatively new, they are contributing to the council’s efforts to focus on “upstream”, working with citizens and “[solving] problems in communities”.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Naylor, C and Wellings, D. (2019). *A Citizens-led Approach to Health and Care: Lessons from the Wigan Deal*. The Kings Fund.

¹⁴³ Duffy, S. (2017). *Heading Upstream: Barnsley’s innovations for social justice*. Centre for Welfare Reform.

Co-production actively involves communities in the design and delivery of services which are genuinely responsive to their needs

Co-production is one of the main methods through which public services actively collaborate with communities. It provides a meaningful way for communities of both place and interest to contribute their expertise, alongside that of professionals, to design and deliver services that genuinely address people's needs. In this developing area of practice, The New Economics Foundation has set out six principles of good co-production – these include embedding reciprocal relationships, breaking down some of the distinctions between professionals and service users, and making use of facilitative, asset-based approaches.¹⁴⁴ In this way, co-production can embody the principles of community power through building the capacity and confidence of communities to inform and shape the services they access.

These principles are being put into practice in many localities. In the field of mental health, the Lambeth Living Well Collaborative has shaped services which are responsive, timely and help prevent people reaching crisis point. The Collaborative has brought together commissioners, providers and people with lived experience to design services with a focus on working through primary and community care to identify and build on people's assets and strengths. Ongoing **co-production** is embodied through activities like a monthly breakfast where people come together to share ideas and learning.¹⁴⁵

The Living Well Hub Network emerged from the work of the Collaborative. Through this hub, people can access both medical and social support which is **asset-based**. In other words, this approach is asset-based because it is focused on the importance of relationships and supporting people through their wider personal networks.¹⁴⁶ An evaluation of the hub in 2017 found benefits including a 25 per cent reduction in referrals to secondary care mental health teams since its introduction.¹⁴⁷ This

¹⁴⁴ Slay, J and Stephens, L. (2013). *Co-production in Mental Health: A literature review*. NEF. (commissioned by Mind).

¹⁴⁵ 'The Collaborative'. <https://www.lambethcollaborative.org.uk/> (accessed 14/01/21).

¹⁴⁶ A three-year National Lottery Funded programme is now looking to scale Lambeth's approach in Edinburgh, Luton, Salford, and Tameside and Glossop. See 'The Programme'. Living Well UK. <https://www.livingwellsystems.uk/theprogramme> (accessed 14/01/21).

¹⁴⁷ See 'Lambeth Living Well Hub'. Living Well UK. <https://www.livingwellsystems.uk/lambethlivingwell> (accessed 14/01/21).

collaboration helped move the services involved towards being better able to intervene at the point people first need support.

There is evidence that **co-production**, by leveraging wider community networks, can directly reduce demand on acute services. The Croydon Service User Network (SUN) Service, a mental health support service, was **co-designed** by psychiatrists and service users. People using the service were involved in running the network, **peer-support**, providing feedback, and the SUN steering group. After six months of members being part of the network, the SUN programme showed a 30 per cent reduction in use of A&E services.¹⁴⁸

Community ownership allows communities to take more direct responsibility for local assets and services

Community ownership offers a route to more direct community responsibility and control by enabling them to take on an asset or play a more active role in actually running a service. **Community asset transfer** is a route through which many councils facilitate community ownership – it is a process whereby a building or piece of land is moved to community ownership, for below market value.¹⁴⁹ For example, members of the Co-operative Councils Innovation Network, such as Lambeth and Telford and Wrekin, have pursued asset transfer as a way to ensure services continue and more widely that capacity and resilience are built in communities.¹⁵⁰ In Telford and Wrekin, the council has transferred five community centres to community ownership. The council has supported this process through a ‘partnership development fund’, grants and long leases. The centres now provide community space but also services like information and advice and holiday activities.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Slay, J and Stephens, L. (2013). *Co-production in Mental Health: A literature review*. NEF. (commissioned by Mind).

¹⁴⁹ *Places and Spaces: The future of community ownership*. (2016). Locality; See also page 33 for a discussion on this.

¹⁵⁰ See Lambeth Council’s policy on community asset transfer here: <https://www.lambeth.gov.uk/elections-and-council/about-lambeth/community-asset-transfer-policy> (accessed 14/01/21); see also ‘Transfer of Community Centres – Telford and Wrekin Council’. (2019). Co-operative Councils Innovation Network. <https://www.councils.coop/case-studies/transfer-community-centres-telford/> (accessed 14/01/21).

¹⁵¹ ‘Transfer of Community Centres – Telford and Wrekin Council’. (2019). Co-operative Councils Innovation Network. <https://www.councils.coop/case-studies/transfer-community-centres-telford/> (accessed 14/01/21).

Community hubs are often owned or leased and run by communities themselves. These hubs are often at the centre of community life – providing a wide range of services, activities and support, directly shaped by communities’ priorities. For example, the Charles Burrell Centre in Thetford, Norfolk, is a former school on a long lease from the council. It provides space for local businesses and employment opportunities. It also hosts other services including a food bank and toy library. Residents can become members which gives them voting rights for the board of the hub.¹⁵² This kind of community ownership allows the creation of services which are specific and responsive to local needs while also investing in and strengthening the community.

Co-operative models can be applied to a range of different services to provide more direct community ownership. One interesting example of this in practice is **co-op childcare**. This form of childcare is more common in the USA, New Zealand and Canada, with some beginning to set up in the UK. Parents often form a childcare group and then bring in professional support but continue to stay involved in running and managing the group. Bannockburn in Washington DC has been a co-op since the 1970s. Parents help with maintenance and in the classroom, and many also sit on the board. Qualitative evidence indicates that this model better aligns with parental needs, as well as building their confidence and widening their networks of support. Some parents also gain new employment skills through their involvement.¹⁵³ The model provides wider support to parents and children beyond just the childcare setting and builds a wider web of families in a local area who can support one another.

A focus on networks and social ties helps services mobilise communities, enabling people to offer support to one another

Networks and social ties can play an important role in supporting people’s health and wellbeing.¹⁵⁴ Some services are building family and wider community networks into the centre of their delivery model. These

¹⁵² ‘Charles Burrell Centre’. Power to Change. <https://www.powertochange.org.uk/what-is-community-business/stories/charles-burrell-centre/> (accessed 14/01/21).

¹⁵³ Parker, S. Stephens, L. and Lownsborough, H. (2015). *Co-produced childcare: An alternative route to affordable, high quality provision in the UK*. NEF.

¹⁵⁴ See also page 24 for discussion on the importance of networks and social ties.

approaches are drawing on family and community networks so as to develop services which respond to and understand the challenges in people's lives, and so are inherently asset-based. But more fundamentally, these services are adopting new ways of working which enable community power through mobilising and building capacity for families and communities to support one another beyond the confines of formal services.

Shared Lives is a model based on caring for people within a family setting as a way to help them achieve and sustain independent lives and protect against future crisis. The approach draws on the power of supporting people within a home, and often within a family and wider network of friends and people within the community.¹⁵⁵ Some of the boundaries between the 'professional carer' and the 'person being cared for' are broken down through matching people on factors like shared interests.¹⁵⁶

The flexible support offered through Shared Lives can help people sustainably work towards their vision of a 'good life' in a way conventional services may find challenging. One woman described how, following a personal crisis, she moved in with a Shared Lives carer, and within six months she had achieved goals such as stopping smoking, exercising more and reducing her medication.¹⁵⁷ Data collected from people using the service shows the impact of Shared Lives carers in helping people to build their network of friends and social connections and in having more choice around their daily life. People also reported improvements in both their physical and emotional health.¹⁵⁸

Family Group Conferencing (FGC) actively involves a family and its wider network in decision-making about a child. In this way it extends a process which would traditionally have been left to the children's services team and other professionals. This involvement is intended to help foster better relationships between a family and professionals.

¹⁵⁵ Shared Lives carers are trained and paid to welcome someone into their home either for a short or longer period of time. Shared Lives carers could support an older person, someone experiencing mental illness, a person with learning disabilities, or a young care leaver. See: <https://sharedlivesplus.org.uk/> (accessed 14/01/21).

¹⁵⁶ Fox, A (2018). *A New Health and Care System: Escaping the invisible asylum*. Policy Press.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Data up until November 2020. See <https://sharedlivesplus.org.uk/the-difference-shared-lives-make/> (accessed 14/01/21).

It can also mobilise support around a family to help them deal with challenges and improve outcomes for the child.¹⁵⁹

In Leeds, alongside wider changes to children's services, FGC has produced good outcomes both from the perspective of families and the service.¹⁶⁰ Leeds adopted a restorative approach which at its heart is about *working with* a family rather than *doing to them*.¹⁶¹ Families have reported that their experiences of FGC left them feeling both involved and respected – 99 per cent felt FGC had helped to address their problem and 91 per cent felt the service was appropriate to their needs.¹⁶² Overall, the wider model of change in Leeds has shown promising results, with statistically significant reductions in the number of looked-after children and the number of child protection plans.¹⁶³

Local Area Coordination (see case study 10 on page 74) is an asset-based approach where coordinators work to support people through community networks and activities – the aim is to both sustainably support people while reducing demand on statutory services.¹⁶⁴ In Haringey evaluators brought together a group of service managers from adult social care and the NHS to consider seven case studies based on the real Local Area Coordinator caseload. Participants were asked the question “If the LAC service had not been available what do you think would have happened to this person and what impact might this have had on health and care services?” In all the examples, participants agreed that the involvement of Local Area Coordinators would have delayed or prevented a person's need to access a statutory service.¹⁶⁵

¹⁵⁹ 'Family Group Conferencing: Study Review'. (2020). What Works Centre for Children's Social Care. This summary is drawn for a systematic review see: Nurmatov, B.U. et al (2020). *Impact of shared decision-making on children's out-of-home care, family empowerment, and satisfaction: A systematic Review*. [https://whatworks-csc.org.uk/evidence/evidence-store/intervention/family-group-conferencing/#:~:text=A%20Family%20Group%20Conference%20\(FGC,at%20achieving%20the%20evaluated%20outcome](https://whatworks-csc.org.uk/evidence/evidence-store/intervention/family-group-conferencing/#:~:text=A%20Family%20Group%20Conference%20(FGC,at%20achieving%20the%20evaluated%20outcome) (accessed 14/01/21).

¹⁶⁰ This is part of Leeds City Council's Family Valued which was a system-change programme supported by the DfE Social Care Innovation Programme. It ran between March 2015 to December 2016.

¹⁶¹ Mason, P et al. (2017). *Leeds Family Valued: Evaluation Report*. Department for Education.

¹⁶² 54 families who participated in FGC were interviewed. 100% felt involved in the process; 100% felt their values had been respected.

¹⁶³ From 16 months into the programme; Mason, P et al. (2017). *Leeds Family Valued: Evaluation Report*. Department for Education.

¹⁶⁴ 'Local Area Coordination'. Local Area Coordination Network. <https://lacnetwork.org/local-area-coordination/> (accessed 14/01/21).

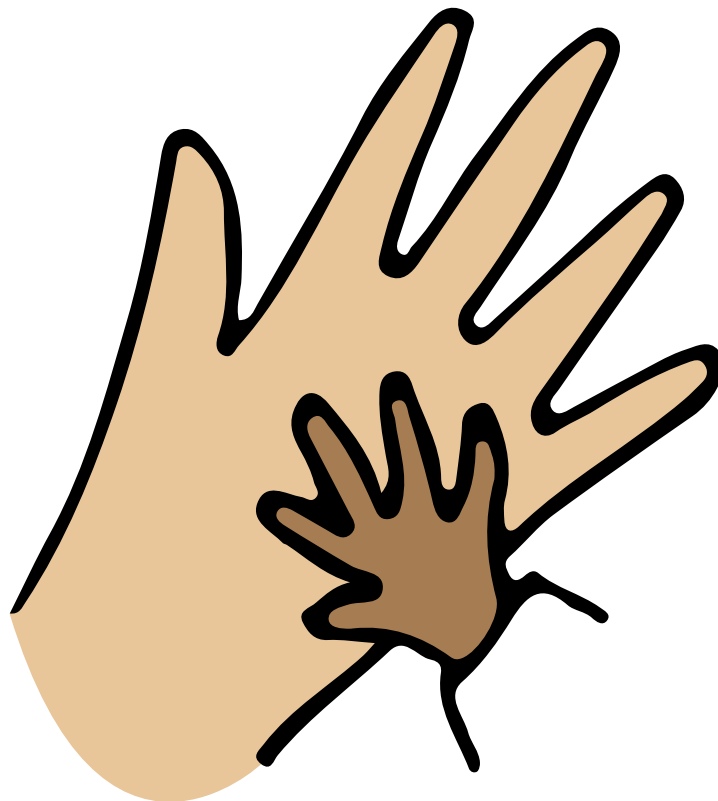
¹⁶⁵ Gamsu, M. and Rippon, S. (2019). *Haringey Local Area Coordination Programme – A formative evaluation of implementation*. Leeds Beckett University.



...these innovative pockets of practice in the public sector are demonstrating the potential to mobilise and work with communities as essential partners for local action.

Overall then, these innovative pockets of practice in the public sector are demonstrating the potential to mobilise and work with communities as essential partners for local action. Where such approaches have been adopted, there has been a shift in the behaviours and mindsets of professionals within those organisations. Placing communities at the heart of an approach requires letting go of traditional, more controlled and predictable ways of working, but shows how the wider use of family and community networks can result in more sustainable outcomes.

As we have demonstrated, in some areas and services these collaborative approaches are starting to be brought into the mainstream. But, more widely they still operate against the grain of a system which funds that which is easily identifiable and measurable, and so tends towards a focus on short-term results within a particular service silo. Within this model of public services, it is hard to justify investment in longer-term preventative approaches, since it is hard to rigorously quantify what by definition has not happened as a result of an early intervention. The next section explores evidence that does exist of hard cost recovery from such community power approaches. Yet as we go on to consider in the final section, the full potential and impact of these community power approaches will only be realised as part of a wider paradigm shift.





Case Study 9: Asset-based working to create a new relationship between the council and communities – The Wigan Deal

The Wigan Deal can best be described as the forging of a new contract, relationships and ways of working between the council, its partners and the community.¹⁶⁶

In practice the Deal has a number of different dimensions – and continues to develop and evolve. There has been a big emphasis on supporting community groups, for example through The Deal for Communities Investment Fund. This recognises that community groups are vital for supporting people to look after their own health and wellbeing.

There has also been a focus on citizen-led public health, which in practice has involved initiatives such as training and supporting community health champions. These health champions are able to support others in the community to access information and opportunities to improve their health and wellbeing.

Since the implementation of the Deal, Wigan has seen promising improvements particularly around both health and social care. In terms of health, particularly of note is the fact that Wigan saw an increase in healthy life expectancy between 2009–11 to 2015–17. In social care, Wigan fares better than England as whole on a number of measures. For example, in 2017/18, Wigan had a high rate of people remaining in their homes after being discharged from hospital. Improvements in areas such as these will benefit both communities and public services. Wigan was also able to achieve these improved outcomes while making required savings in areas such as adult social care.

¹⁶⁶ This case study is drawn from the King's Fund's study of Wigan. For further details see: Naylor, C and Wellings, D. (2019). *A Citizens-led Approach to Health and Care: Lessons from the Wigan Deal*. The Kings Fund.



Case Study 10: Local Area Coordination connects people to networks of support in their community

Local Area Coordination originated in Western Australia and has increasingly been adopted by councils in England and Wales. Here, local coordinators are rooted within neighbourhoods of around 8,000 to 12,000 people, where anyone can refer themselves for support, in addition to introductions which can be made by local people, service partners, and community-based organisations.¹⁶⁷

Local Area Coordination is an asset-based approach, drawing on people's skills, strengths and interests to identify their goals and vision for a 'good life'. Coordinators "walk alongside" a person to identify how friends, family and wider networks can help achieve their goals, before considering the role of statutory or commissioned services.¹⁶⁸

The aim of all this is to build individual, family, community and service capacity through strengthening and supporting existing community assets. For example, in Haringey a coordinator connected people from a local trust and a community centre to set up 'Big up my street' – a project supporting residents to help each other with tasks like shopping or mowing the lawn.¹⁶⁹

Local Area Coordination also aims to bring about wider system change through highlighting stories and data that demonstrates the impact of the approach and its wider potential. For example, this has helped increase appetite in Derby for Local Area Coordination values to play a part in shaping culture shift in the local authority and VCS.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷ 'Local Area Coordination'. Local Area Coordination Network. <https://lacnetwork.org/local-area-coordination/> (accessed 14/01/21).

¹⁶⁸ *ibid*; and *Which Way Next: How Local Area Coordination can help us beyond this crisis towards a better future for all.* (2020). Local Area Coordination Network and Community Catalysts.

¹⁶⁹ Gamsu, M. and Rippon, S. (2019). *Haringey Local Area Coordination Programme – A formative evaluation of implementation.* Leeds Beckett University.

¹⁷⁰ *Which Way Next: How Local Area Coordination can help us beyond this crisis towards a better future for all.* (2020). Local Area Coordination Network and Community Catalysts.

Evaluations of Local Area Coordination show both improvements for individuals and communities, as well as the potential wider impact on public services. In Derby, individuals felt they had built trust with their coordinator and in turn improved their confidence and outlook. Many also felt less socially isolated and had participated in community activities. People had been helped with specific issues like clearing items to reduce fire risk in their home, claiming benefits, and finding support with depression. Positivity about Local Area Coordinator support was echoed by family members.¹⁷¹

In Derby, public services teams were positive about the impact of Local Area Coordination. Feedback was gathered from services including the CCG, Adult Social Care, Public Health Teams and the Fire and Rescue Service. While the number of people being supported by Local Area Coordinators is still too small to have a significant impact on services, it is clear that the approach is helping individuals reduce their reliance on services and find more community-based support.¹⁷² Reducing dependency on statutory services is a theme echoed in other evaluations, such as in Waltham Forest.¹⁷³

Derby City Council has expanded its local area coordination work to support young people who have recently left care. This expansion was supported by the Department for Education's Children's Social Care Innovation Programme (2017–2020). The small sample limited the ability to understand impact on formal services and cost reductions. But qualitative case studies pointed to the role of Coordinators in building young people's knowledge and confidence to address issues such as accommodation, education and finance.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷¹ *Social Value of Local Area Coordination: a forecast social return on investment analysis for Derby City Council.* (2016). Kingfishers for Derby City Council.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ See: Gamsu, M and Rippon, S. (2018). *Local Area Co-ordination in Waltham Forest: A formative evaluation.* Leeds Beckett University.

¹⁷⁴ Mollitor, C. et al (2020). *Evaluation of the Derby Local Area Coordination Approach.* Ipsos Mori for the Department for Education.



6. COMMUNITY POWER CAN GENERATE FINANCIAL SAVINGS

In addition to the health, wellbeing, democratic, cohesion and social impacts of community power, there is also a strong financial case for giving communities more influence over how decisions are made. Despite the fact that community power approaches do not fit neatly into the silos that dominate public services and have impacts beyond annual budget cycles, there is nonetheless evidence of their financial impact within existing budgets. The challenge of turning these ad hoc cost savings or costs averted into a more sustainable system overall will be considered in the following section. Here we turn to the evidence that supports the value of community power even within current constraints.

Several prominent government programmes have demonstrated the value of place-based budgeting approaches

The most at-scale evidence of community power approaches generating cost savings comes from national place-based budget programmes. Several ambitious initiatives in recent decades have had detailed evaluations which show the positive impact of focussing on whole communities and attempting to structure budgets around places rather than public institutions.

The New Deal for Communities (NDC) was a ten-year strategic area-based programme between 2001–2010 which aimed to transform deprived neighbourhoods. Thirty-nine areas were given approximately £50 million of government investment. What was particularly significant

about this programme was the central role communities themselves played in it. For example, each area had a partnership board which community members sat on.¹⁷⁵ Modelling for NDC demonstrated the programme had a net financial benefit to society of between approximately £3.65bn and £6.98bn – which amounts to either three times or five times the funding that went into the programme. The methods used in this modelling aimed to generate monetary figures for benefits associated with ‘place’ and ‘quality of life’. The cost-benefit analysis for this concluded that it was good value for money.¹⁷⁶

In 2011, the Whole Place Community Budget pilots involved the pooling of budgets across the public sector within four pilot areas of the country – West Cheshire, Essex, Greater Manchester, and the West London tri-borough area.¹⁷⁷ The central idea behind the initiative was to pool budgets across public sector organisations so as to try and move away from siloed ways of working.¹⁷⁸ Each area concentrated on particular issues such as families with complex needs, the economy and work, and health and wellbeing.¹⁷⁹ The National Audit Office (NAO) evaluation of the programme identified that each area had been able to estimate significant overall savings (generally over five years) – for example Greater Manchester estimated net savings of around £270 million.¹⁸⁰

Some approaches have demonstrated the benefit of working intensively with specific groups, like families, to reduce their demand on services and in turn realise savings

The second iteration of the Troubled Families Programme has been running between 2015–2020. This high-profile programme is focused on working intensively with families who have complex and multiple needs and so significant interaction with public services. While not directly an

¹⁷⁵ *The New Deal for Communities National Evaluation Phase 2: Technical report*. (2015). Department for Communities and Local Government.

¹⁷⁶ *The New Deal for Communities Programme: Assessing impact and value for money. The New Deal for Communities National Evaluation: Final report – Volume 6*. (2010). Department for Communities and Local Government.

¹⁷⁷ The initiative under the Coalition Government had roots in the *Total Place* approach under the previous government, which had begun in 2009 to identify and better understand how local public services are funded, designed, joined up and delivered with the purpose of seeking better services at less cost overall.

¹⁷⁸ Sandford, M. (2015). *Community budgets and city deals*. House of Commons Library.

¹⁷⁹ *Whole-place community budgets*. (2013). LGiU.

¹⁸⁰ *Case Study on Integration: Measuring the costs and benefits of Whole-Place Community Budgets*. (2013). National Audit Office.

example of community power, by adopting a more holistic, non-siloed approach to working with families it can be seen as a step towards working more relationally with families.

The Troubled Families Programme has been managed and delivered locally, where a lead worker supports a whole family to address the challenges they are facing in the round. The aims of the programme have been to improve outcomes for families and in turn reduce their demand on public services – in other words spending money on these families in a more targeted way.¹⁸¹ A cost-benefit analysis of the 2015–2020 Troubled Families Programme showed a positive net impact – every £1 spent on the initiative delivered £1.94 of benefits, with a fiscal benefit of £1.29, therefore suggesting a saving to the public purse.¹⁸²

A number of smaller-scale community power initiatives have also focused on working intensively with families to improve outcomes and reduce their demand on services. A cost-benefit analysis of **Family Group Conferencing** in Leeds found savings made through less time spent in the social care system which were estimated at £755 per family. As this was an early evaluation, it only looked at service delivery rather than outcomes data. The evaluators noted that savings would grow significantly if longer-term intended outcomes were achieved and then sustained.¹⁸³

There are several financial methods for quantifying the value of community power, which help give us an insight into their wider impact throughout the system

The value of community power approaches is innately contextual, relational and qualitative yet they operate within a system that is more geared towards uniformity, process and quantifiable metrics. Despite this, there are important tools available for assessing their value – albeit on the terms of the system rather than on the terms of the practice and approach of community power.

¹⁸¹ *National Evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015–2020: Findings. Evaluation Overview Policy Report.*

¹⁸² *National Evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015–2020: Family Outcomes – National and Local Datasets, Part 4.* (2019). Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government.

¹⁸³ Mason, P et al. (2017). *Leeds Family Valued: Evaluation Report.* Department for Education.

Cost-benefit analysis, as mentioned above, is one of the common tools used to assess whether a policy intervention is considered to be good value for money. The basic principle of the method is to understand whether the benefits of an intervention outweigh the costs. The challenge is in deciding what costs and benefits to include in the calculation, which can tend towards focus on economic benefits that are more easily measured than social or other benefits which are harder to quantify.¹⁸⁴

Social return on investment (SROI) is a method which aims to express the wider benefits of an approach. SROI aims to add more nuance by trying to account for factors which matter to the people affected by an intervention, for example through looking at factors like wellbeing.¹⁸⁵ SROI seeks to incorporate a measure of what is important to people, and in turn capture the wider and longer-term impact that an approach may have. The measure is imperfect since it requires the complex task of attempting to assign monetary value to these wider factors¹⁸⁶ and the returns are only indicative, not necessarily translating into cashable savings.¹⁸⁷

Nonetheless, SROI is another tool to attempt to understand the value, particularly of holistic, prevention-focused approaches. For example, a number of SROIs have been carried out in order to understand the value of **Local Area Coordination** (see case study 10 on page 74). There is some variation, but they approximately show that for every £1 invested into Local Area Coordination there is a £4 return.¹⁸⁸

Another way to demonstrate value is to look at diverted costs – in other words money not spent in other services because of an intervention. In the context of **Local Area Coordination** both Derby and Leicestershire have been able to demonstrate impact using this approach (see case study 10 on page 74).¹⁸⁹ Understanding diverted costs is a useful way to express the savings for other services: in other words the actions of one part of the system saved actions (and expense) in another part. But this

¹⁸⁴ *Economics in Policy-making 4: Social CBA and SROI*. (2013). Nef Consulting.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ *How Should We Think About Value in Health and Care?* (2015). Realising the Value Consortium.

¹⁸⁸ Lunt, N., Bainbridge, L and Rippon, S. (2020). 'Strengths, Assets and Place – The emergence of Local Area Coordination initiatives in England and Wales'. *Journal of Social Work*.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

means little for accounting purposes within our current public services framework, where the focus remains on savings made within a particular service rather than across the system as a whole.

Some community power approaches have demonstrated savings within a public body or service

In Wigan (see case study 9 on page 73) the council was able to make savings while achieving some promising improvements in outcomes. Wigan Council took an innovative approach in responding to the financial pressures of austerity. One of the key ways the council responded was to focus on measures that meant “local people required less in terms of formal services”. One way this happened in practice was ‘The Deal for Communities Investment Fund’, through which Wigan decided to invest in and support rather than cut funding to grassroots groups. In its study of Wigan, the King’s Fund concluded that the council showed how savings could be made, and the council’s budget could be balanced, “while protecting or improving outcomes” – this was possible due to the investments made and new ways of working that were embedded.¹⁹⁰ This example from Wigan is particularly powerful because it demonstrates actual savings which were realised from upfront investment to support community action.

Nesta’s People Powered Health Programme drew on a range of evidence sources to set out the potential savings to the health system of adopting its approach.¹⁹¹ People Powered Health relates to the adoption of practices into the health system including **peer-support, co-production**, and developing an array of relationships, networks and partnerships. Nesta used the most robust parts of the evidence base to estimate that there could be a seven per cent reduction in the commissioning budget. This would save an estimated £4.4 billion to the NHS across England. This reduction would come from factors including reduced A&E visits and reduced hospital admissions. This projection demonstrates the potential savings if these approaches were used on a wider scale.

¹⁹⁰ Naylor, C and Wellings, D. (2019). *A Citizens-led Approach to Health and Care: Lessons from the Wigan Deal*. The Kings Fund; the report looks at Wigan’s financial position between 2010/11 and 2019/20; for further details of savings see Appendix B: Overview of financial savings made by Wigan Council; see also page 79–80 for a discussion of the Wigan Deal within the context of austerity.

¹⁹¹ *The Business Case for People Powered Health*. (2013). Nesta.

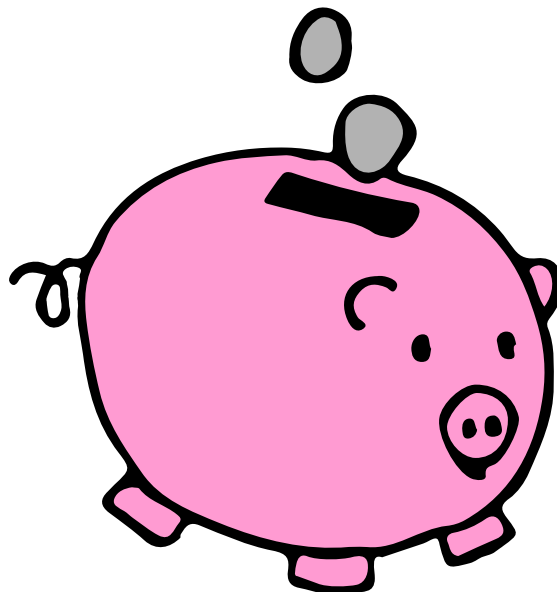
Another way to demonstrate value for money is to compare the cost of a model with comparable models – The Shared Lives Programme has done this with comparable care services. For people in long-term Shared Lives arrangements this amounted to Shared Lives costing on average £26,000 less per year for people with learning disabilities and £8,000 less for people with mental ill health.¹⁹² This example demonstrates how a community power approach may cost less than another service. For this to be realised, those other services would need to be reduced and the uptake of this approach increased.

There are ways to demonstrate the value of community power approaches, but the real impact of these approaches is difficult to realise within the confines of the current system



this potential will only be realised as part of a more fundamental shift in how we think about value, evidence and impact.

Overall then, in a range of ways community power practice demonstrates value and savings within the existing system. But there are challenges here. Not every example of community power has gone through the equivalent evaluation of national level programmes which exhibit a degree of uniformity. Methodologically there is clearly need for further work on how best to capture the value of long-term prevention-focused approaches. But the examples in this section begin to indicate the potential of community power approaches. Yet, as we set out in the next section, this potential will only be realised as part of a more fundamental shift in how we think about value, evidence and impact. This is the issue to which we now turn.



¹⁹² Todd, R. and Williams, B. (2013). *Investing in Shared Lives*. London: Social Finance.

PART 2

REALISING THE POTENTIAL OF COMMUNITY POWER

The evidence base for community power demonstrates that it can contribute to better individual health and wellbeing, improve community wellbeing and resilience, enhance democratic participation and boost trust, build community cohesion, embed prevention and early intervention, and generate financial savings.

Taken together, this evidence demonstrates that the foundations of a community paradigm are rooted in practices and models that already exist and are impacting positively on people, communities and public services. Considering the range of community power approaches as a whole, there are three main ways power and resources are being transferred to communities:

- **Community decision-making:** Deliberative and participatory decision-making approaches are giving communities influence over local priorities and agenda setting.
- **Collaboration with communities:** These practices are helping public services shift from hierarchical and siloed ways of working to more collaborative approaches where communities are equal partners with essential insights.
- **Building community capacity and assets:** These activities are ensuring people have the resources and skills to genuinely participate and shape local action.

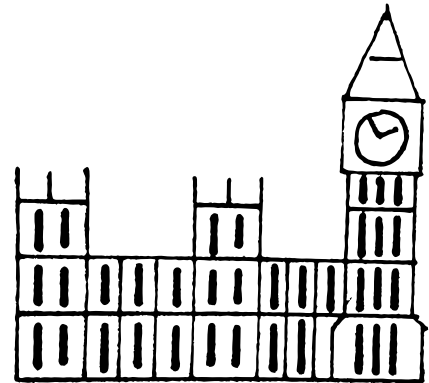
These community power features have the potential to shift the centre of gravity of the system away from the institutions and big providers of the state-market hybrid paradigm that dominates our public services, and towards people themselves. So, what is stopping this wider potential being reached? This section will explore the perverse incentives inherent in the current model of public services which reinforce the status quo, by determining the very nature of 'evidence'. This in turn, influences what constitutes 'success' by ascribing it within the narrow confines of a service silo rather than benefit to the wider community.

Community power operates against the prevailing logic of the current system

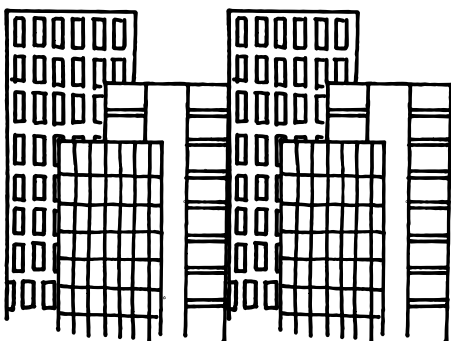


Community power approaches are often small-scale, bespoke and anchored to a particular set of individuals and circumstances. They often operate at the edge of formal provision, and in this way sit outside the logic of the system that surrounds them. As such, their impact is real but has limitations. Only within the context of a wider paradigm shift, which supports and nurtures community power rather than works against it, would their wider value be realised.

The state-market hybrid paradigm dominates our existing public services model. Through its financial architecture, regulatory regimes and accountability frameworks, it sets the incentives, reinforces practices and drives behaviours throughout the system. The state paradigm manifests itself in the enduring hierarchies shaping a system characterised by service silos and professional domains and answerable to Whitehall departments. This upward accountability means power is centralised and the initiative is kept within institutions. The model reinforces deficit-led interactions with people which start with their “problems” and offer predetermined solutions decided by professionals based on their expertise.



When it first emerged in the 1980s, the market paradigm was seen as a disruptor to this paternalism since people came to be viewed as customers who can exercise a degree of choice. But it did not bring activity closer to people – if anything it has driven economies of scale for efficiency, and implementation of solutions from on-high, just with more of a role for big business than the big state alone.



By focussing on transactions which can be costed and streamlined, it never really broke through rigid service silos. The market approach is proving just as incapable of understanding or responding to people's needs beyond narrow definitions that can be stipulated in contracts.



Community power practice and models take as a starting point a person or a community, their aspirations, and their strengths.

The state-market hybrid paradigm parameters define what constitutes good value and evidence of impact

Community power practice and models take as a starting point a person or a community, their aspirations, and their strengths. In reality, this means approaches are less likely to be uniform, and more likely to be pluralistic and responding to specific context. Because they are responsive to complex circumstances and root causes, they do not easily fit within a preordained service silo or professional specialism. As such, they can struggle to demonstrate their worth within a system that has narrow notions of value and what constitutes impact.

The nature of evidence required to demonstrate efficacy within the state-market hybrid paradigm is itself shaped by how public services operate and within existing remits of what constitutes “success”. Certain measures and characteristics are within the purview of the system, and others sit outside it.

Community power practice and approaches are characterised in ways which not only are undervalued by the state-market hybrid paradigm, but in many ways are actually the direct opposite of traditional public service practice. Table 1 on page 86 summarises the challenges.

TABLE 1: Community power embodies factors which are not recognised in the state-market hybrid paradigm

Evidence required by the state-market hybrid paradigm	Nature of community power
Guided by metrics	Guided by ethos
Quantitative	Qualitative
Immediate	Long-term
Large scale for efficiency	Small-scale for impact
Within a service silo	Embedded in the community
Related to a service output	Related to individual outcomes
Focused on proving	Focused on improving
Reporting data	Recalibrating relationships
Uniformity	Pluralism
Policy implementation	Human-centred design
Linear	Adaptive
Immediate cashable savings	Avoids costs occurring

Community power is trapped in an evidence paradox

When it comes to proving value in evidence-based policy-making, community power approaches are stuck in an *evidence paradox*. As the table (see page 86) shows, community power approaches are required to demonstrate their worth according to measures that are not set up to recognise their value. This leaves them operating on an ad hoc basis, on the margins of the system or as a bolt-on to traditional services. As things currently stand, although the evidence of their impact is palpable, it is not in the form required to prove a case for change according to the logic of the current system. Illustrating this requires us to dig deeper into how the logic of the current system is structured and reinforced.

The current public services model is driven by a narrow framing of 'value' and a strong focus on quantitative metrics

Under the state-market hybrid paradigm, value is understood in a narrow sense, relating to the cost of a service and its effectiveness within a specific silo. Impact is judged largely on quantitative metrics rather than qualitative measures, which as the evidence in this report has shown, often better capture where community power creates tangible improvements for people's wellbeing or relationships.

This approach is best characterised, and ultimately reinforced, by the Treasury Green Book.¹⁹³ This document is a key part of the public spending decision-making framework. Its content is highly significant for shaping how 'value' is understood and ultimately how policy decisions are made in the public sector. The Green Book sets out guidance on how to assess whether a policy intervention is good social value – meaning how a policy will improve social welfare or wellbeing. The social cost-benefit analysis is one of the main tools used to inform this.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ *The Green Book: appraisal and evaluation in central government*. HM Treasury. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-green-book-appraisal-and-evaluation-in-central-government> (accessed 13/01/2021).

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

Social cost-benefit analysis relates to social, environmental and economic impact. But there are serious shortcomings to this. Cost-benefit is more suited to scenarios where a market price can be easily identified. It is much harder to apply this to areas where assigning a value is less than straightforward – for example around health or the environment.¹⁹⁵ Ultimately then, there is a greater focus on that which can be easily understood in terms of financial cost and measured quantitatively. Less tangible factors, which are harder to express in terms of financial value and are harder to measure, sit far less easily within this framework.

Recent changes to the Green Book indicate there is a developing understanding of these weaknesses. The 2018 updated Green Book brought a greater focus on wellbeing.¹⁹⁶ The 2020 review of the Green Book recognises that a disproportionate emphasis is put on the Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR). It sets out the importance of contextualising this in the wider appraisal process and paying attention to the costs and benefits to society beyond just the economic ones. This review also brought in new guidance on place-based analysis to ensure this is given greater consideration.¹⁹⁷ This indicates a step in the right direction, but there is a risk that this amounts to tinkering around the edges rather than a more fundamental whole-system transition to an approach built on wellbeing that leaves space for communities to take more control.

The 2020 Spending Review signalled a greater focus on outcomes and evaluation in order to understand “what truly delivers for citizens”.¹⁹⁸ While focusing on outcomes rather than outputs and gathering wider evidence is welcome, it is imperative that this is supported by a broader conversation about what is being measured and how, and if these outcomes reflect real change for people and communities.

There is growing consensus across a broad coalition of policymakers and practitioners, about the need to widen what is valued and how the

¹⁹⁵ For discussion of this see: O'Donnell, G. et al. (2014). *Wellbeing and Policy*. The Legatum Institute; and Meadway, J. (2019) *Greening the Green Book*. Common Wealth.

¹⁹⁶ MacLennan, S. (2018). 'Treasury Green Book and Wellbeing: The analysis'. What Works Centre for Wellbeing. <https://whatworkswellbeing.org/blog/treasury-green-book-and-wellbeing-the-analysis/> (accessed 13/01/20).

¹⁹⁷ *Green Book Review 2020: Findings and response*. (2020). HM Treasury. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/final-report-of-the-2020-green-book-review> (accessed 13/01/21).

¹⁹⁸ *Spending Review 2020*. (2020). HM Treasury. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/spending-review-2020-documents/spending-review-2020> (accessed 13/01/21).

evidence of this is captured to inform and shape the design, delivery and evaluation of policy.¹⁹⁹ Danny Kruger MP's report to the government, *Levelling Up Our Communities*, recommends improvements in measuring both the value and activity of civil society.²⁰⁰ Julia Unwin has emphasised the role of kindness in public services, and makes a case for the importance of focusing on people's relationships, experiences and contexts. She points out that greater emphasis on these approaches would present challenges for policy-making and "the nature of evidence and our professional boundaries".²⁰¹ Nesta's work on "people powered" activities highlights types of value which are "less visible" in the current system. From improving individual health and wellbeing, to boosting trust and legitimacy in public services and encouraging a focus on prevention – "people powered" activities generate significant value which currently is not captured.²⁰²

This failure to widen the scope of what is valued and ensure this is captured to inform policy-making, leads to undervaluing the potential of community power approaches. This reinforces the status quo rather than encouraging further experimentation.

The current system tends towards uniform, scalable policy interventions

In the current public services paradigm, the destiny of successful innovation is to be piloted, then scaled and reproduced or rolled out elsewhere. The system is uncomfortable with pluralism – so as soon as an innovation rises to the fore the instinct of the system is to replicate *that action* everywhere, rather than seek to replicate *the conditions which created that action* everywhere, so that further innovation can occur. In this way, the current system encourages scalability of single

¹⁹⁹ For example, on the challenges of measuring social capital and how the social sector contributes to it see Haldane, A. (2020). 'Social Capital: the economy's rocket fuel'. In *Civil Society Unleashed*. The Law Commission on Civil Society; on civil society and what we value see Browning, V. and Wrixon, K. (2020). 'Imagining Better: prioritising people and planet over growth'. In *Civil Society Unleashed*. The Law Commission on Civil Society; and on capturing data which is important to communities see Pennycook, L. (2020). 'From crisis to community empowerment'. Centre for Thriving Places. <https://www.centreforthrivingplaces.org/from-crisis-to-community-empowerment/> (accessed 13/01/21).

²⁰⁰ Kruger, D. (2020). *Levelling Up Our Communities: Proposals for a new social covenant*. Commissioned government report.

²⁰¹ Unwin, J. (2018). *Kindness, emotions and human relationships: the blind spot in public policy*. Carnegie UK Trust.

²⁰² Old, R. and Bibby, W. (2020). *The Value of People Power*. Nesta.



the current system encourages scalability of single models instead of enabling a diversity of small-scale models, which would more likely be attuned to the different needs of communities.

models instead of enabling a diversity of small-scale models, which would more likely be attuned to the different needs of communities.

The Treasury Magenta Book – central government’s framework for measuring impact and understanding value – plays a role in reinforcing this focus on uniform and scalable interventions. The guidance points to the importance of experimental and quasi-experimental evaluation approaches for their ability to look at the counterfactual in order to determine if a change can be attributed to a particular policy intervention.²⁰³

While there is clearly nuance here about the role of these kinds of evaluative approaches and when they should be used, they do reflect certain assumptions. Namely that evaluation should be focused on proving an approach works, is replicable and can be rolled out to other areas.²⁰⁴

Insights from the application of complexity theory to public policy provide a helpful counterbalance to these ideas. Complexity theory emphasises the importance of “context” which means that just because a particular initiative or intervention works in one area, it may not work in the same way in another area.²⁰⁵ This has strong resonance with the principles of community power.

Community power approaches tend to run counter to a uniform, scalable model of policy development. They are often small-scale, bespoke and embedded within communities since they are umbilically linked and responsive to local priorities and context. By putting people and communities at the centre, these approaches focus less on a single policy intervention. Instead they are likely to iterate and develop over time. In this way progress is unlikely to be linear, with pace and timing shaped by people in communities.

²⁰³ Magenta Book: Central Government guidance on evaluation. HM Treasury. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-magenta-book> (accessed 13/01/21).

²⁰⁴ For a wider discussion on these issues see: Cowen, N. et al. (2017). ‘Randomized Controlled Trials: How can we know “what works”?’ *A Journal of Politics and Society*. Vol. 29 (3).

²⁰⁵ Davidson Knight, A. et al. (2017). *A Whole New World: Funding and Commissioning in Complexity*. Collaborate.

The current system has a strong focus on realising cashable savings within a specific service and delivering short-term outcomes

Ultimately, success in the current public services paradigm takes the form of cutting costs while meeting demand on a particular service. This often creates an incentive to divert demand to another service or address short-term demand at the expense of solutions that would be sustainable for the whole system.

We see this play out in many parts of the public sector, not least in local government.²⁰⁶ The result of government reductions in funding to local authorities has been more pressure on statutory services and reduced investment on community-based services that provide early support to prevent crises occurring, such as youth services, community development and community-based care. This creates unmet needs that can deteriorate into more serious problems and in the end results in the need for crisis intervention. Accordingly, we then see concurrent increases in cost pressures on other frontline services for example on the NHS and on the police. Other service budgets then need to be increased, but the knock on impact between the services accountable to different Whitehall departments – in this example The Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), The Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) and the Home Office – is not adequately captured by the Treasury's framing, which focuses on costs *within* departments rather than *across* them.²⁰⁷

Recent Whitehall reforms have tried to bring a greater focus on outcomes and moving away from departmental silos. Sir Michael Barber's 2017 review introduced the Public Value Framework which aims to support government departments to have a greater focus on

²⁰⁶ Danny Kruger MP addressed this issue in his report *Levelling Up Our Communities*, recommending that Government should legislate around the purpose of public spending being to deliver social value. The idea being that this would address the issue of just looking at value in one departmental budget, rather than across all government accounts when contracts are designed and awarded. See: Kruger, D. (2020). *Levelling Up Our Communities: Proposals for a new social covenant*. Commissioned government report.

²⁰⁷ The NAO has highlighted the impact to local authorities of there not being a sufficiently "integrated" view across government departments of how funding reductions in one area have knock on implications for other areas of service delivery. See: Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General (2018). *Financial Sustainability of Local Authorities 2018*. National Audit Office.

outcomes.²⁰⁸ At the 2020 Spending Review the government developed several priority outcomes for each department. Further funding for pilot projects in the Shared Outcomes Fund were also announced at this Spending Review.²⁰⁹ While such changes may be a small step in the right direction, setting individual departmental outcomes is unlikely to catalyse a shift away from silos and galvanise the system to focus on longer-term meaningful value.²¹⁰

The public spending framework has also tended to incentivise short-term outcomes over prevention-focused work – the benefits of which are seen in the future. For example, discount rates, used to assign value to long-term payoffs, have significant implications for how the costs and benefits of interventions with longer-term outcomes are assessed – this is particularly significant for long-term preventative approaches. As Geoff Mulgan argues, the problem with discount rates when applied to standard cost-benefit analysis is that they “[render] a benefit in a generation’s time virtually worthless”.²¹¹ There is an awareness of these challenges, for example following the 2020 review of the Green Book, the Treasury is leading an expert external review into the application of discount rates for environmental impact.²¹² But to really meaningfully shift towards a greater focus on longer-term outcomes will require reviewing both the technical tools but also the wider organisational practices and cultures that inform policy decision-making.

²⁰⁸ “Public Value Framework and supplementary guidance”. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/public-value-framework-and-supplementary-guidance> (accessed 05/02/21).

²⁰⁹ *Spending Review 2020*. (2020). HM Treasury. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/spending-review-2020-documents/spending-review-2020> (accessed 13/01/21).

²¹⁰ For a recent discussion on the levelling up agenda and the need for long-term national outcomes and how these should interact with local priorities see the UK2070 Commission’s report on *Levelling Up, Chaired by Lord Kerslake. Go Big. Go Local: The UK2070 report on a new deal for levelling up the United Kingdom*. (2020). UK2070 Commission.

²¹¹ Mulgan, G. (2019). ‘Background: Searching for Value’. In Mulgan, G. et al. *Public Value: How can it be measured, managed and grown?* Nesta.

²¹² *Green Book Review 2020: Findings and response*. (2020). HM Treasury. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/final-report-of-the-2020-green-book-review> (accessed 13/01/21); See also the Independent Review on the Economics of Biodiversity led by Professor Sir Partha Dasgupta, commissioned by HM Treasury. The review sets out the need to broaden the measures of economic success to ensure that our measures of wealth captures a wider range of assets including ‘natural assets’. *The Economics of Biodiversity: The Dasgupta Review*. (2021). Commissioned for HM Treasury. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/final-report-the-economics-of-biodiversity-the-dasgupta-review> (accessed 02/02/21).

Escaping this evidence paradox requires a shift towards a new community paradigm

At present then, the evidence paradox holds community power practice back from becoming more mainstream. The system is set up to reinforce the status quo, and existing evidence will not catalyse an overnight revolution to enable community power wholesale.

So, the challenge is twofold: how can community power practice demonstrate its worth in the *current* system, while also informing a *future* paradigm shift that would enable community power to reach its potential? There is an immediate imperative to operate in the real world as we find it, alongside an awareness of the direction that needs to be taken in the future for our public services to be sustainable.

In order to bring about a new community paradigm which departs from the orthodoxies of the state-market hybrid paradigm, we identify four shifts that need to occur. Each is accompanied by a recommendation that provides a set of policy and practical measures that need to be taken in order to realise change on the scale required:

Shift One: Uniform > Pluralist practice

Shift Two: Metrics > Ethos

Shift Three: Outputs > Outcomes

Shift Four: State-market > Community

The first shift and supporting recommendation focuses on how community power practice can maximise its efficacy within the current system as it is. But, as we have argued, in parallel there is a need for a recalibration of that system away from the state-market hybrid paradigm and towards communities. So, the second, third and fourth shifts address that deeper system-level ambition to bring about a new community paradigm. The supporting recommendations focus on the changes needed both locally and nationally to achieve these substantive shifts.



FOUR SHIFTS AND FOUR RECOMMENDATIONS

Shift One: **Uniform** ➤ **Pluralist practice**



The starting point is that everywhere is different, and a particular combination of political, practical and policy circumstances led to new approaches that were developed with, and have a sense of ownership within, the communities they emanate from.

Community power approaches are by their nature rooted in people, place and circumstance. It would be neither possible nor desirable to take a model that works well on a local level in one area and scale it up and out across the system. There can be a habit in national policy-making especially, to identify innovation in one area and then seek to replicate it everywhere. Whether it is Preston's community wealth building or the Wigan Deal – when new models emerge that capture the imagination of national policy audiences there can then be a push to ask why can't everywhere be like Preston or like Wigan?

But that is the wrong question. The starting point is that everywhere is different, and a particular combination of political, practical and policy circumstances led to new approaches that were developed with, and have a sense of ownership within, the communities they emanate from.²¹³

So, the question shouldn't be how to scale up a particular model and apply it everywhere. It should relate to the deeper more challenging imperative of how to create the *conditions* for such innovation everywhere. This would open up a more fruitful direction of travel towards understanding and valuing the unique conditions and opportunities that exist in different places, and create a more responsive, relevant system overall.

Taking this starting point leads us to explore how we can create an operating context in which common goals are articulated and shared,

²¹³ For a wider discussion on decentralisation and community power see: Kaye, S. (2020). *Think Big, Act Small: Elinor Ostrom's radical vision for community power*. New Local.

while pluralistic practice is recognised and enabled. This requires normalising a diversity of small-scale, creative approaches across the system, tailored to specific circumstances. Rather than replicating successes, the focus should be on permitting the expansion of diverse local approaches which recognise and leverage community power. This would enable collaboration outside the strictures of organisational and professional silos and prove more empowering for both those who work within public services and communities themselves.

This approach also recognises the value of breaking down the hierarchies between policymakers and the frontline. Hilary Cottam captures the importance of this through the design principle of “made through practice” – essentially ensuring local solutions emerge and iterate through learning circulating between policymakers and those delivering on the frontline.²¹⁴ This should help to create a more permissive culture where frontline professionals engage and collaborate with communities in turn ensuring this ‘community intelligence’ informs policy-making.

Creating space for sharing learning is fundamental to this – but it is about sharing approaches and methods rather than transplanting and replicating neatly packaged operating models. This is based on a recognition that in any particular place, an approach is informed by the people involved, and the process of developing it through multiple feedback loops. At scale these processes break down. It also leverages the fierce loyalty and passion that is derived from a place, which underpins the collective pioneering nature of new practice shared by those who pursue it. This can be incredibly galvanising and a genuine catalyst for innovation which often gets lost as the drive to standardise loses these intrinsic qualities.

So, rather than replicating a model we need to extract the learning and principles from it.²¹⁵ Community power is very much a collection of approaches and practices, rather than a rigid model. To illustrate this, the box below sets out a series of insights derived from the evidence base explored in this report.

²¹⁴ Cottam, H. (2020). *Welfare 5.0: Why we need a social revolution and how to make it happen*. Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose, UCL.

²¹⁵ The King’s Fund highlights how leaders in Wigan particularly emphasised the importance of learning from the process they went through rather than just trying to replicate the Deal in another setting. See: Naylor, C and Wellings, D. (2019). *A Citizens-led Approach to Health and Care: Lessons from the Wigan Deal*. The Kings Fund.

Insights from community power in practice

Across the diverse range of community power approaches, some common insights emerge, which should inform local and national policy priorities.

Supporting communities takes an investment of time and resource:

There are no 'quick fixes'. Working with and mobilising communities can involve supporting them to develop the skills, confidence and capabilities to participate fully. Investment up-front can generate pay-offs further down the line. But we should be under no illusion that there is not a need for that investment up front – of both time and resource.

Meaningful involvement is ongoing rather than one-off:

This is the difference between bolting on a community power approach to traditional practice, and setting up an enduring relationship which shifts the power dynamics between individuals, communities and institutions over time.

Frontline professionals have more efficacy, not less:

Sharing power with communities does involve relinquishing a degree of control in the traditional sense, because it involves an awareness that individuals and communities outside the institution have more insight into their situation than professionals. But this leads to greater autonomy for frontline professionals who can work more creatively with people and results in a greater sense of efficacy overall.

Learning and adaption are at the heart of community

power: There is not a set model for community power. It is not possible to just drop a ready-made intervention into a new area. Rather, the focus is on practice, iteration and collaborative development. This is at once both scary and incredibly empowering for those involved.

Practice should inform policy, not the other way around:

There can be a sense, ingrained within the system that policy operates on a higher plane, and the business of practitioners is to deliver decisions made in the abstract. Community power approaches close the chasm between theoretical policy and practical delivery, the latter informing the former with evidence and iteration.

Sharing learning and principles is vital for developing good practice, but is also important for continuing to strengthen the case for community power. Pooling the learning, principles and evaluations from many of these small-scale, localised approaches will help to tell the wider story of community power. This can serve to emphasise the need to pay attention to things that are less easy to, and less often, measured.

For many community power approaches, extensive formal evaluation may seem onerous or unrealistic in relation to the scale of the project. There is also a risk that evaluation requirements create a burden and detract from the positives of being involved in community power initiatives, particularly for people who are voluntarily giving up their time to help improve their community.

More fundamentally, within the confines of the current paradigm, evaluation methods will often fail to capture the full impact of community power approaches. For example, individual stories may richly demonstrate the impact of community power approaches for people and communities, but such qualitative insights cannot be captured using quantitative metrics. Another challenge is around the long-term focus of community power versus the short-term pressure to demonstrate impact. Community power practice focuses on building people's skills and capacity within communities and thereby forging trust, and leading to new ways of collaborating with frontline professionals. Realising the impact of such relational approaches will inherently take time.

But existing good practice shows how evaluative methods can both align with community power principles and generate evidence of impact. The People's Health Trust ensure its community-led approach is embedded even in its evaluation and learning stages. As part of its Local Conversations Programme (see case study 1 on page 30), the communities in the programme are supported to carry out 'self-appraisals', in other words evaluating from their perspectives what impact the programme is having and the learning that is emerging.²¹⁶

A team of researchers working with the Bromley-by-Bow Centre (see case study 2 page 31) undertook participatory research with staff and

²¹⁶ *Evaluating Local Conversations 2020*. (2020). The People's Health Trust. Evaluation led by NEF.

community members, to understand the value of the centre from their perspective and develop a framework to help capture this in future evaluations. The research identified a set of 'stretch outcomes' which can be used to further evidence the impact of Bromley-by-Bow.²¹⁷

Nesta's Realising the Value project looked at how to widen what is valued and measured in the context of health – for example including health and wellbeing outcomes alongside clinical outcomes. The project developed a set of 'value statements' to serve as a shared framework which seeks to balance the need for shared measures while leaving space for local context and variation.²¹⁸

There is clearly need for wider system change to both recognise the value of and encourage more pluralist approaches to policy-making and practice. But pragmatically, there are steps that can be taken now to continue to strengthen the case for community power while not losing sight of the wider changes required. Our first recommendation aims to support practitioners in the public sector to do just this.

Recommendation One: Practitioners should collaborate to share learning and build a stronger evidence-led case for the impact of community power approaches.

There will always be a tension in trying to prove the value of community power practice within the constraints of the state-market hybrid paradigm. Nonetheless, there is scope for practitioners to collaborate to build a stronger and more consistent evidence-led case for community power.

This collaboration will be valuable for strengthening both community power practice and evidence gathering approaches. It will also start to build a closer dialogue between policy and practice, by bringing the insights and learning together from practice in a way that enables it to influence policy.

²¹⁷ Stocks-Rankin, C., Seale, B. and Mead, N. (2018). *Unleashing Healthy Communities: Researching the Bromley by Bow model*. Bromley by Bow Insights.

²¹⁸ Khan, H. and Finnis, A. (2019). 'Realising the value in health'. In Mulgan, G. et al. *Public Value: How can it be measured, managed and grown?* Nesta.



Collaborating to identify what is common to these diverse approaches will help in making a case greater than the sum of its parts, while not detracting from the principle that community power practice is inherently rooted in bespoke, local action.

Identifying shared outcomes and drawing together common learning and principles is also an important step in making the wider case for change. At present, it is too easy for policymakers to dismiss the insights from small-scale, localised practices. Collaborating to identify what is common to these diverse approaches will help in making a case greater than the sum of its parts, while not detracting from the principle that community power practice is inherently rooted in bespoke, local action.

The three steps outlined below will support the continued development of a strong evidence-led case for community power:

Strengthen evaluation approaches: Practitioners should look to better utilise qualitative evaluation methods which lend themselves to capturing some of the complexity of community power approaches. Many of these methods – such as storytelling, making use of participatory research approaches, and collaboratively developing shared outcomes or ‘value statements’ – align with the wider principles of community involvement and the idea of measuring in order to learn and iterate. There should also be a focus here on using and refining evaluation methods which deeply involve communities in the processes of identifying outcomes which are meaningful to them, measuring impact and sharing learning.

Share learning and identify common principles: Community power approaches are often small-scale, bespoke and embedded within a community and local context. Despite this, learning and common principles can be drawn from these diverse practices. This in turn will help demonstrate commonality between approaches and build the evidence base for them, as well as more widely contributing to the case for wider system change.

Develop shared measures of value: There is need for a wider common approach to developing shared measures of value that recognise and capture the complexity and richness of community power practice. This should recognise that comparable quantitative metrics do have a role to play in evidencing impact, and that these should be contextualised with rich qualitative data which can explain local variation. Practitioners need to focus on better data capture because the data needs to be there to tell the story.²¹⁹

²¹⁹ See for example ‘Small Charities Data’, a hub which brings together data and evidence on small charities. <https://smallcharitiesdata.org/> (accessed 05/02/21).

In parallel, at a national level departmental metrics need to be supplemented with qualitative evidence, which we discuss in the next section. But there is also a role for national actors to improve data capture so as to better understand the role of civil society.²²⁰ National government could potentially create tools to support local actors, without imposing onerous reporting requirements, and in turn feeding into an imperative for Whitehall to better understand the role of civil society.

This data gathering should embody and reflect the principles of community power. Outcomes, evaluation and measurement should be relevant to communities and reflect the relational and asset-based nature of these approaches. Practitioners should also look to measure factors such as growing trust and strengthening relationships as markers of community power principles embedding within a service or local area.²²¹

Shift Two: Metrics Ethos

The potential of community power will not be realised by creating a new set of public management style targets. Community power will flourish in a system where communities, professionals and practices coalesce around shared purpose. In other words, to enable community power, the focus needs to be on developing a shared ethos or purpose in organisations, places and communities. This ethos then can guide action, rather than action being directed by the fulfilment of set metrics. Narrow metrics invariably fail to capture the richness of human life and relationships, and if they define power in the system this inevitably drives perverse incentives for certain actions over others. This in turn creates unintended consequences that the system must busy itself with resolving. And so it continues.

The need to shift from metrics to ethos driving system behaviour inherently links back to the issue of measurement and evaluation discussed in shift one. Focusing on ethos and purpose rather than a straightforward set of metrics means moving beyond only focusing on the easily measurable. What we pay attention to, and what and

²²⁰ Danny Kruger MP recommended that the government needs to focus efforts on improving the measurement of civil society activity and value. See: Kruger, D. (2020). *Levelling Up Our Communities: Proposals for a new social covenant*. Commissioned government report.

²²¹ For example, Julia Unwin's discussion on measuring kindness. See: Unwin, J. (2018). *Kindness, emotions and human relationships: the blind spot in public policy*. Carnegie UK Trust.

how we measure things can in turn shape organisational culture. Councils in Nesta's Upstream Collaborative project have been rethinking measurement to support new ways of working across their organisations, with partners and communities. They have been exploring measurement approaches which deepen understanding and help responses to "adapt and improve".²²² The ability to iteratively develop practice is fundamental to community power approaches.

Across a range of evidence, we can see the importance of community power approaches being supported by wider culture change and a strong shared ethos. The King's Fund study of the Wigan Deal (see case study 9 on page 73) emphasised the importance of the shared principles across the council and its partners.²²³ Similarly, evaluators in Leeds, identified Family Group Conferencing being a success as part of a wider culture shift of embedding restorative practices in children's services.²²⁴ In Haringey the ethos embedded in Local Area Coordination has spread, with the NHS multi-disciplinary team adopting the question "what's your vision of a good life" into their practice.²²⁵

Shifting to a focus on ethos will mean engaging in iterative processes, and being prepared to learn, develop and test continually. This can create a culture of innovation in public services, allowing for new problems to be solved, and for local approaches to be nurtured and grow. In this spirit, Alex Fox proposes learning from Research and Development (R&D) in the private sector – in other words taking initiatives, testing, evaluating and gradually developing and refining them as more evidence is generated.²²⁶ The RSA has similarly championed this kind of design-led approach, but has also highlighted "the deeper changes that are needed in institutions, policies and regulatory frameworks" to ensure the impact of this way of working is realised.²²⁷

²²² Lloyd, J. (2020). *Meaningful Measurement: How a new mindset around measurement can support a cultural of continual learning*. Nesta.

²²³ Naylor, C and Wellings, D. (2019). *A Citizens-led Approach to Health and Care: Lessons from the Wigan Deal*. The Kings Fund.

²²⁴ Scourfield, J. (2020). 'What does the international evidence tell us about the outcomes of family group conferences?' What Works Centre for Children's Social Care. <https://whatworks-csc.org.uk/blog/what-does-the-international-evidence-tell-us-about-the-outcomes-of-family-group-conferences/> (accessed 13/01/21).

²²⁵ Gamsu, M. and Rippon, S. (2019). *Haringey Local Area Coordination Programme – A formative evaluation of implementation*. Leeds Beckett University.

²²⁶ Fox, A. (2018). *A new health and social care system: escaping the invisible asylum*. Policy Press.

²²⁷ Conway, R., Masters, J. and Thorold, J. (2017). *From Design Thinking to Systems Change: How to invest in innovation for social impact*. RSA.

Moving from a culture focused on metrics to one focused on ethos is about fostering collaborative ways of working both between organisations and with communities, based around shared purpose. This ethos needs to filter through how we think about designing, delivering and evaluating local initiatives. Recommendation two aims to enable local public services to step outside of narrow service metrics and develop collaborative practices built around a shared common purpose or ethos.

Recommendation Two: There needs to be an ambitious approach to devolved, place-based budgets across local public services, as a core prerequisite for transferring more power to communities.

Shifting from a mindset of metrics to one of shared ethos is only possible within a broader framework that is actively permissive to such collaboration. At the heart of this is the interlinked factors of finance and accountability, both of which hold the power within the system to drive behaviour. The emphasis on metrics is linked to our currently heavily siloed public service framework, where lines of accountability follow budgets all the way to Whitehall. This reinforces a narrow focus on value within a service remit, rather than a wider understanding of common purpose or mission.

Place-based budgets offer an alternative way of allocating investment in public services, by doing so collectively to public bodies in a place: including health, local government, policing, employment support, skills and education. Taking a common, pooled approach to financing would be supported by horizontal (place-based) accountability, as opposed to vertical (Whitehall-led) accountability: in other words, shared collaborative governance across these bodies, involving the direct and active participation of communities.

Taking such a place-based approach to financing public services would introduce a new logic into the system. Replacing vertical

accountability to individual Whitehall departments with horizontal accountability across places means that the financial flows reinforce collaborative behaviours beyond organisations, as opposed to reinforcing territorial practice within organisations. This would support the emergence of a new ethos across public institutions that better reflects relationships and the interplay of action and reaction, than is possible through a focus on single issues in the absence of wider context. It would encourage a wider understanding of value and outcomes across a local area, rather than just a series of separate metrics within different services.

Creating a new place-based financial and accountable context for services and communities would also remove perverse incentives that inhibit a more prevention-focused approach. At the moment, too much stasis within the system comes from the fact the public body that invests in a preventative approach is not necessarily the one that realises the savings – so either they do invest and reap no financial benefit or they do not invest and shunt demand onto another service. Place-based budgeting would go a significant way to addressing this, and incentivise new approaches working directly with communities on their own terms to emerge.

This new approach to financing in places is a prerequisite to mainstreaming community power. By creating new shared investment approaches, strongly focused on prevention, the opportunities for communities to play more active roles in the design and delivery of provision multiply. Effective prevention starts with the individual and their community (as opposed to a service silo). So new investment models for prevention would produce strong incentives to collaborate with communities to identify and design new approaches. For practitioners this would involve seeing their role in the wider context of a local area rather than just a service area. This would give greater permission to cooperate across silos, to experiment, iterate and genuinely collaborate with communities.

To kick-start the lapsed place-based budgeting agenda, which showed earlier promise with the adoption of whole place community budget pilots, we recommend that a new round of pilot areas begin by pooling budgets between local partners. The respective Whitehall

departments would need to commit to top-slice existing budgets, and facilitate new joint investment agreements. This would straddle budget cycles, regulatory regimes and performance frameworks that are currently not aligned between respective departments covering health, local government, policing, employment support, skills and education. The pilots would need to pioneer a new model that could then be evaluated and rolled out more systematically. There are implications in turn for how Whitehall would need to arrange itself to enable a place-based approach to take hold. But for the system to evolve we recommend in the first instance to shift the power and behavioural incentives through the finance and accountability rules, rather than a traditional structural reorganisation which invariably leaves the finance and accountability fundamentals intact.

This approach would run concurrently with the third and fourth recommendations set out here, which are more deeply focused on reorienting the role of the centre to enable community power. Recommendation four also addresses the need to ensure communities have the investment needed to build skills, confidence and capacity to actively participate in opportunities arising from devolved power and budgets.

Shift Three: **Outputs** **Outcomes**

There is a clear role for national government to create a permissive environment for community power practice. The actions of central government have consequences throughout the system. The dominant Treasury methodology is anchored in the state-market hybrid paradigm and determines what constitutes efficacy, with a focus on inputs and narrow, measurable outputs.

By focusing on what is easily measurable, we risk not focusing on what is really valuable. A greater focus on outcomes, particularly outcomes that are meaningful to people's lived experience, would help overcome this.

Recent Whitehall reforms have attempted to drive a greater focus on outcomes.²²⁸ There have also been some modest attempts to build

²²⁸ See page 91 on Sir Michael Barber's 2017 review and the introduction of the Public Value Framework.

a focus on wellbeing outcomes as a set of measurements which are more meaningful to people's quality of life and live experience. For example, the UK was an early adopter of measuring national wellbeing – The ONS Measuring National Wellbeing Programme has been running since 2010.²²⁹

Wellbeing outcomes could be a powerful measure for refocusing public spending and creating a policy environment more focused on generating wider value rooted in prevention and resilience.²³⁰ There is growing interest in the potential of wellbeing measures in this regard. For example, the Bennett Institute for Public Policy and the What Works Centre for Wellbeing are researching how to measure wellbeing in a way that is useful for policymakers.²³¹ Former Cabinet Secretary, Lord O'Donnell has also written prominently about using wellbeing data to better inform policy-making.²³² The APPG on Wellbeing Economics recommended that departments should be required to set out, in their submissions to the Treasury the impact in terms of wellbeing.²³³ The Covid-19 Marmot Review concluded “we must accept the growing recognition worldwide, that economic growth is a limited measure of societal success” and notes New Zealand's efforts to put wellbeing at the centre of decision-making.²³⁴

The importance of measuring impact on wellbeing has begun to be recognised in government. This is reflected in amendments made to the Green Book in 2018, and further guidance expected in 2021 on the valuation of wellbeing.²³⁵ Yet its prominence in policy-making remains limited.

Both Scotland and Wales have done more to incorporate wellbeing into national decision-making frameworks. In Scotland, the Community

²²⁹ Anderson, M. and Mossialos, E. (2019). 'Beyond gross domestic product for New Zealand's wellbeing budget'. *The Lancet*, 4(7).

²³⁰ For a discussion on why focusing on wellbeing highlights the need to focus on prevention see: Haroon, D., Hey, N. and Brunetti, S. (2020). *Wellbeing evidence at the heart of policy*. What Works for Wellbeing.

²³¹ Measuring Wellbeing Project <https://www.bennettinstitute.cam.ac.uk/research/research-projects/Many-Dimensions-of-Wellbeing/> (accessed 13/01/21).

²³² O'Donnell, G. et al. (2014). *Wellbeing and Policy*. The Legatum Institute

²³³ 'A Spending Review to Increase Wellbeing: An open letter to the Chancellor'. (2019). All Party Parliamentary Group on Wellbeing Economics.

²³⁴ Marmot, M. et al. (2020). *Build Back Fairer: The Covid-19 Marmot Review: The pandemic, socioeconomic and health inequalities in England*. London: Institute for Health Equity.

²³⁵ *Green Book Review 2020: Findings and response*. (2020). HM Treasury. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/final-report-of-the-2020-green-book-review> (accessed 13/01/21).

Empowerment Act (2015) aims to support communities doing more for themselves. This legislation supports approaches such as participatory budgeting and asset transfer, as well as providing national standards for community engagement.²³⁶ Scotland also has a National Performance Framework which reports on factors including Scotland's wellbeing.²³⁷

In Wales, The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 is ambitious in intention, if somewhat limited in reality due to a lack of concurrent enforcement powers. The Future Generations Act sets out seven wellbeing goals that public bodies should work towards. One of the centrepieces of the Act was the creation of a Future Generations Commissioner which is principally a role to advise, make recommendations and promote the Act.²³⁸ The Future Generations Report points to good practice examples of local action in Wales to improve wellbeing such as the community wellbeing team at Conwy Council running sessions to link care home residents and school pupils; and the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board's initiative with partners to support people experiencing loneliness by connecting them with others in the community who share similar interests.²³⁹

Perhaps the most prominent example internationally, is New Zealand with its Living Standards Framework (LSF) and wellbeing budgets informed by this. The framework supports the Treasury to give advice on the expected benefits of policy interventions, in terms of a range of wellbeing factors as well as fiscal cost. The framework is made up of three central elements – current wellbeing, future wellbeing, and risk and resilience. The framework was used to support New Zealand's 2019 Wellbeing Budget²⁴⁰ – thought to be the first of its kind in the world. Five priority areas were identified using the LSF, with flagship announcements to accompany them such as a new frontline mental health service.²⁴¹

²³⁶ Scotland's Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015. <https://www.gov.scot/policies/community-empowerment/> (accessed 13/01/21).

²³⁷ Scotland's National Performance Framework. <https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/> (accessed 13/01/21).

²³⁸ The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. More information here <https://www.futuregenerations.wales/about-us/future-generations-act/> (accessed 13/01/21).

²³⁹ *The Future Generations Report 2020*. Future Generations Commissioner for Wales. <https://futuregenerations2020.wales/english> (accessed 05/02/21).

²⁴⁰ 'NZ Government Creates a Wellbeing Framework'. (2019). What Works Centre for Wellbeing. <https://whatworkswellbeing.org/practice-examples/new-zealand-treasury-the-living-standards-framework-dashboard-2/> (accessed 13/01/21).

²⁴¹ The Wellbeing Budget, 30 May 2019. <https://www.treasury.govt.nz/publications/budgets/budget-2019> (accessed 13/01/21).



The Treasury sets the priorities of other Whitehall departments, who in turn set the priorities of their services, who in turn set the priorities of practitioners in places. The people on the receiving end of all of this are communities themselves.

Pivoting towards spending and public policy decisions being shaped by wellbeing outcomes is by no means easy. Each of the examples discussed above, have only been relatively recently implemented, and we will need to continue to pay attention to how national legislation or practices enable local innovation.²⁴² But wellbeing provides a powerful framework to better focus on the outcomes that really affect people and communities.

Beginning to align public spending with the pursuit of wellbeing outcomes would start to create greater permissiveness across the system to experiment, adapt and work beyond organisational boundaries.²⁴³ This would also support culture change in the public sector as communities become valued as vital partners in the pursuit of these wellbeing outcomes, and the costs of not involving them can be captured and responded to rather than bypassed and easily ignored.²⁴⁴ Recommendation three sets out the case for moving towards a wellbeing budgeting approach nationally, as a way to support and enable community power locally.

— Recommendation Three: The Treasury should adopt a wellbeing approach to budgeting.

In our highly centralised system of government finance, the Treasury holds significant power. The rules and ethos established there, set the tone throughout the system. The Treasury sets the priorities of other Whitehall departments, who in turn set the priorities of their services, who in turn set the priorities of practitioners in places. The people on the receiving end of all of this are communities themselves.

²⁴² For a wider discussion on approaches to long-term thinking and community engagement in Scotland and Wales see: Kaye, S. and Morgan, C. (2021). *Shifting the Balance: Local adaptation, innovation and collaboration during the pandemic and beyond*. New Local.

²⁴³ For a discussion of how focusing on improving wellbeing can help move beyond narrow policy goals and silos see: Haroon, D., Hey, N. and Brunetti, S. (2020). *Wellbeing evidence at the heart of policy*. What Works for Wellbeing.

²⁴⁴ Carnegie UK Trust has recently set out what a wellbeing approach in policy-making might look like with a focus on six cornerstones of wellbeing: prevention; participatory democracy; equalities; localism; integration of services; long-termism. See: Wallace, J. (2020). *Gross Domestic Wellbeing (GDWe): An alternative measure of social progress*. Carnegie UK Trust.

To further reorient the system to enable a focus on tangible outcomes rather than narrow service-based output measures, the Treasury needs to further incorporate a recognition of wellbeing outcomes as well as fiscal performance into the budgeting process. The two are not mutually exclusive.

Adopting a wellbeing approach in practice would involve identifying a series of cross-cutting outcome measures associated with tangible life circumstances such as “people live healthier for longer”. This would be designed to catalyse action and redistribute power throughout the system to support the breakdown of unhelpful silos, a significant shift in focus towards prevention, and genuine collaboration with communities.

This will require leadership and commitment from the Treasury to mainstream, strengthen and refine a wellbeing budgeting framework.

Steps to achieve this will include:

- **Make full use of updated guidance on valuing wellbeing and ensure this is embedded across departments.**
- **Align departmental priority outcomes to ensure a clear focus on wellbeing.**
- **Strengthen the evidence base and data capture on the role of communities and civil society in improving wellbeing outcomes.**
- **Support place-based budgeting (see recommendation two) as a vital enabler to local collaboration and experimentation to improve wellbeing outcomes.**

This shift in focus will in turn support wider reforms to the roles of, and relationships between the centre, localities and communities. Improving wellbeing outcomes will require an ethos of permissiveness, where local areas are encouraged to experiment, collaborate and adapt to address this priority. We need to give system-wide permission to be tight on mission, while loose on delivery, to allow a proliferation of adaptive local responses where public services work in partnership with communities to improve wellbeing outcomes.

Shift Four: State-market Community

National policy debate is still shaped very heavily by the state and market paradigms. Indeed, one of the defining distinctions between the Conservative and Labour Parties is that the former tends to favour market-based solutions to public service and social challenges while the latter favours state-based solutions. Even within the parties themselves, the extent to which a member believes in the benefits of the market or state is a key marker of where they sit on the spectrum of beliefs within the party and is likely to be a good predictor of which factions they belong to.

The extensive evidence presented in this report suggests that this dichotomy, at best, allows for a very incomplete understanding of how social challenges can be met and, at worst, promotes policy solutions which are out of date, ineffective and damaging. Certainly, the national level debate tends to bypass the very rich diversity of civil society which is neither state nor market.

While this remains the situation, national policy will not play the constructive role it could in enabling the necessary shifts outlined above. Indeed, it will remain a barrier to community power inspired change in numerous specific policy areas such as children's services, planning, employment support, skills, health care and a wide range of others.²⁴⁵

A big element of the change required at national policy level involves a simple awareness and openness on the part of ministers and others in Parliament to the potential of community power. Those politicians have enormous influence over thinking and behaviour within the public sector. Openly acknowledging the evidence base that exists for an alternative approach through speeches and more informal pronouncements would give permission for change through green and white papers and other strategy documents, and would be a major step forward.

²⁴⁵ See, for example a further discussion on the potential of community power in the policy and delivery areas of children's services – Tjoa, P. (2019). *From Tiny Acorns: Communities shaping the future of children's services*. New Local; employment support – Pollard, T. and Tjoa, P. (2020). *This Is Not Working: Reimagining employment support for people facing complex disadvantage*. New Local; and skills – Morgan, C. (2020). *No Strings Attached: How community-led devolution would transform England's skills sector*. New Local.

However, the state and market paradigms have been so deeply embedded in policy thinking for decades that a more significant measure is required to both unmistakably signal a shift to community power but also to resolve the legal and structural barriers which keep power and resource shuttered inside local and national institutions. This initiative would be a major piece of landmark legislation: a Community Power Act.

Recommendation Four: Parliament should pass a Community Power Act.

A Community Power Act would be a major piece of legislation designed to create a new operating framework from Westminster and Whitehall out and across to communities themselves. The Act would have four goals:

To enshrine community rights: This builds on and expands our understanding of rights. The Act would enshrine in law the right of local communities to a significant measure of self-determination and thus place an obligation on public bodies to engage communities in the design and delivery of the policies and services that affect them. It would also provide local communities with the legal standing to challenge the neglect or abuse of this right and other rights in the courts.²⁴⁶

To enable community-focused devolution: To fulfil its own commitment to the community right to self-determination, the Act would also legislate for the significant devolution of powers and resources currently held by Westminster to local level. This would be done in a straightforward fashion passing powers to the current structures of local government and the public sector with an obligation on the part of councils and other public bodies to develop community power approaches and collaborate closely with one another. The Act could provide for the withdrawal of devolved powers and resources should public bodies fail to engage communities fully and collaborate with each other.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁶ More detail on community rights and their place in law was outlined in an article by New Local. See: Lent A. (2020). 'Communities are being failed. It's time to enshrine their rights.' New Local. <https://www.newlocal.org.uk/articles/community-rights/> (accessed 13/01/21).

²⁴⁷ This alternative model of devolution was outlined in an article by New Local. See: Lent A. (2020). 'We urgently need a fresh approach to devolution.' New Local. <https://www.newlocal.org.uk/articles/we-urgently-need-a-fresh-approach-to-devolution/> (accessed 13/01/21).

To establish a Community Wealth Fund: The Act would include the necessary technical legislation to allow for the establishment of a Community Wealth Fund – a multi-billion pound fund drawing on dormant assets. This Fund would invest directly into the most marginalised communities over a long-term (10–15-year) period allowing residents the freedom to determine how funds are spent.²⁴⁸

To provide a permissive legislative and regulatory framework for community power: Following an audit, the Act would remove or reform any primary legislation which makes it hard for public bodies to transfer powers or resources to local communities. It would also introduce any necessary legislation to enable the transfer of power and resource and provide ministers with the power to introduce secondary legislation as necessary to allow such transfer to continue unhindered.

A Community Power Act would complement and strengthen the other shifts and recommendations set out in this report. It would herald a significant shift towards community power and ensure the right framework is in place to meaningfully enable this.

The evidence presented in the first part of this report shows the very real impact of community power approaches for people, communities and public services. But much of this value remains outside the purview of the state-market hybrid system. The failure to pay attention to and capture this value in turn leads to a failure to see how these approaches might create a deeper paradigm shift towards a more sustainable, enabling system of provision rooted in the capabilities and capacities of communities themselves. As it stands, community power has been trapped in an evidence paradox. This section has set out four shifts and accompanying recommendations to help escape this evidence paradox and chart a course towards a community paradigm. These shifts and recommendations would support the system to better capture and be informed by the value of community power approaches. While at the same time, bringing about a more fundamental shift, both nationally and locally, towards a system that enables community power to flourish.

²⁴⁸ More information about the Community Wealth Fund Alliance can be found here: <https://localtrust.org.uk/policy/community-wealth-fund-alliance/> (accessed 13/01/21).



CONCLUSION – UNLOCKING COMMUNITY POWER AND SHIFTING TO A COMMUNITY PARADIGM

The ambition of this report is twofold. Firstly, we present the diverse and compelling existing evidence base for community power. We have demonstrated that it is already producing positive results within the current public services model, unsatisfactory as the state-market hybrid paradigm is.

Secondly, we set out a vision for community power in the future. While working within the confines of the current system, we can see that the evidence shines a light on a different set of possibilities, which opens up the wider value of community power.



The case has been building for a long time, but our collective yearning to recover from a brutal pandemic better and stronger than we were before creates a new imperative to be bold.

Community power is already supporting people, communities and public services to collaborate and improve outcomes. More broadly, the pioneering examples of community power set out in this report show how we might move towards a more sustainable, enabling and prevention-focused model of public services.

But for the transformative potential of community power to be realised there needs to be a more fundamental paradigm shift in the system. This shift requires changes in values and practices within the public sector as well as rethinking the methods and metrics used to judge what ‘success’ looks like.

We are at a critical crossroads where there is a real opportunity to rebalance power and recalibrate the relationship between communities and public services. The case has been building for

a long time, but our collective yearning to recover from a brutal pandemic better and stronger than we were before creates a new imperative to be bold.

Change will be neither quick nor easy. But it will set us on the path of rebuilding trust in democracy and decision-making, supporting strong and resilient communities, and building sustainable public services. Adopting the approaches set out in this report would be a beginning.

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Local Trust is a place-based funder supporting communities to transform and improve their lives and where they live through Big Local, a resident-led funding programme providing people in 150 areas across England with £1.15m each to spend across 10–15 years.

This funding helps people to create lasting change in their neighbourhoods, many of which face social and economic challenges but have missed out on statutory and lottery funding in the past.

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Community power is an idea whose time has come. At its heart, community power is based on the principle that communities have a wealth of knowledge, skills and assets which mean they are well placed to identify and respond to any challenges that they face, and to thrive.

This report draws on extensive evidence to demonstrate how community power is already supporting people, communities and public services to collaborate and improve outcomes. Taken together this evidence informs the case for a new direction for the wider system of public services – one that is community-led rather than institution-led.

Yet at present public services are trapped in dominant model that combines a big state and market fundamentalism – both approaches to provision that arose when the challenges and opportunities for these services were very different to those that exist today. This means that the real value of community-led approaches is not fully recognised by the current system: they are trapped in an “evidence paradox” in which they are required to demonstrate their efficacy according to measures not set up to recognise their value.

For community power to reach its full potential, we need a deeper shift across the system towards a new community paradigm, capable of recognising qualitative impact and incentivising long-term value. This report sets out a series of recommendations for practitioners and policymakers to realise a paradigm shift towards community power in practice.

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