

THE COMMUNITY PARADIGM

N L G N

WHY PUBLIC SERVICES NEED RADICAL CHANGE AND HOW IT CAN BE ACHIEVED



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With power comes responsibility. This is the essential truth at the heart of this paper. We contend that if public services are to move towards a more preventative approach then individual citizens, and particularly their communities and networks, must take on much greater responsibility for their own lives. However, that flourishing of responsibility will only occur if citizens and communities are given the power to exercise it. This means fundamentally challenging the strong tendency of public services to hoard power rather than share it.

This tendency is not inevitable. It was developed over many years by three successive paradigms of public service delivery:

- **CIVIC PARADIGM:** Lasting from the sixteenth to the early twentieth century, this was based on an evolving patchwork of independent bodies delivering limited public services funded by voluntary contributions and, increasingly, some tax.
- **STATE PARADIGM:** This transformed public services from the 1940s through to the early 1980s. They were unified under central government and entirely tax-funded with the goal of providing universal, comprehensive and free-at-the-point-of-use provision. The State Paradigm extended the hierarchical systems already evident under the Civic Paradigm, based on the firm belief that officials and experts knew best how to care for the wider public. Service users and communities were widely regarded as passive recipients.
- **MARKET PARADIGM:** This developed in the 1980s and is now reaching the end of its era of influence. It sought to improve the cost and efficiency of public services and to widen the choices available to users by marketising provision and involving the private sector in delivery. It did not, however, effectively dismantle the hierarchical practices of the previous paradigms. Rather, it introduced a strongly transactional element into the relationship between service and user.

None of these paradigms foresaw the major challenge facing public services today: rising demand. As a result, they do not provide the mindset or tools to meet that challenge. The hierarchy of the State Paradigm leaves it unable to build the collaborative, egalitarian relationships with individuals and communities that are necessary to create the preventative approach that can stem rising demand. The transactionalism of the Market Paradigm is equally ill-equipped for a collaborative approach. It insists on dealing with separate issues or symptoms on their own terms rather than addressing the more complex whole.

As a consequence, these paradigms trap public services in an approach that is obsessively focused on delivering a response to acute problems in the short-term, rather than focused on addressing the root causes which generate them in the first place.

In addition, at a time when people are increasingly clamouring for a say over the big decisions that affect their lives, paradigms that enshrine hierarchy or see citizens only as atomised consumers will add to a growing sense of alienation and frustration with public services and the state. This need not be inevitable.

Rather than lead to alienation, the popular desire for influence could be employed to build the more collaborative relationship with citizens necessary for a shift to prevention. It can be a force to mobilise communities around public good.

To this end, we argue that there is an urgent need for a new model of public service delivery: the Community Paradigm. The fundamental principle underpinning this paradigm is to place the design and delivery of public services in the hands of the communities they serve. In this way, a new, egalitarian relationship can be built between public servants and citizens: one that enables the collaboration necessary to shift to prevention; one that requires communities to take more responsibility for their own well-being; and one that means citizens and communities can genuinely ‘take back control’.

Three broad principles underpin the Community Paradigm, based on emerging practice:

- **EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES:** Shifting decision-making power out of public service institutions into communities with consequent changes to governance arrangements. We can see early efforts at such an approach led by Wigan, Gateshead and Cambridgeshire councils. It is also present in the New Care Models launched by the NHS, some social enterprises, the rise of community businesses and emerging models of education.
- **RESOURCING COMMUNITIES:** Placing control of public service funding in the hands of communities to ensure that power and responsibility are genuinely transferred. This is increasingly happening with ‘discretionary’ spend but there is a need to transfer core, strategic budgets as well. The promise of this exists in some local government initiatives and in the Big Local scheme funded by the Big Lottery.
- **CREATING A CULTURE OF COMMUNITY COLLABORATION:** A wholesale shift to prevention can only occur when public service organisations and communities break the hold of hierarchical and transactional mindsets and embody a more collaborative set of behavioural norms. This must start with the culture of public service organisations themselves. Highly effective efforts at such change are well established in Wigan and Rutland councils and the Bromley by Bow model amongst many others, and can be seen in the spread of ‘asset-based’ approaches.

To achieve these principles, the Community Paradigm requires change on the part of central government, local government and the wider public sector. To that end, we outline four policy proposals:

- **UNCONDITIONAL DEVOLUTION:** Powers and resources cannot be transferred to communities if they remain centralised in Whitehall and Westminster. A precondition for the Community Paradigm is a major process of devolution, led by the principle of empowering communities rather than centred on technocratic economic concerns, complex bespoke deal-making and centrally-imposed conditions.
- **PARTICIPATORY AND DELIBERATIVE DECISION-MAKING:** Communities must have influence over the big strategic decisions which affect their services, as well as matters of implementation and delivery. This will require the adoption of more participatory and deliberative approaches to decision-making, to deepen and strengthen our representative traditions.
- **COLLABORATIVE DELIVERY:** Reformed public service delivery needs to be shaped by the notion of collaboration both between services and with users. Services need to be incentivised to work together across a place rather than within separate organisational silos. The great benefits of asset-based approaches in working with people must be accepted and enabled by central government and wider public sector policy, not undermined with an approach led by sanction and punishment.
- **COMMUNITY COMMISSIONING:** The power to commission services needs to be shared between public service organisations and communities or handed over entirely to communities with expert support from public services. Only then can the necessary transfer of powers and resources to communities occur.

Public services are in need of radical change if they are to survive the big challenges they face. Methods of change tried in recent years – top-down reform programmes, implementing long lists of worthy goals, innovation transfer – have been unable to generate the necessary depth of transformation. History reveals that radical change only comes with a major shift in the governing principle and mindset shaping decisions and behaviours across public services. That is what we propose here, in the form of the Community Paradigm. The chart opposite summarises our understanding of three public service paradigms, and how the new Community Paradigm differs from them.

We hope that by setting out this new paradigm emerging from actual public service practice, we can begin to build a coalition of the willing who are inspired by the idea of pursuing a systemic shift towards prevention and see the benefits of transferring power and responsibility from within public services to institutions.

FOUR PUBLIC SERVICE PARADIGMS



Paradigm	CIVIC	STATE	MARKET	COMMUNITY
Period	Sixteenth to mid-twentieth centuries	Mid-1940s to early 1980s	Mid-1980s to mid-2010s	Emerging late 2010s
Key organisational principle	Basic services designed and delivered by voluntary and mutual associations and limited local state	Public services designed and delivered by experts employed by the state	Public services designed and delivered to work like a business transaction and act like a market	Public services designed and delivered by and with communities
Key problems seeking to solve	Alleviating destitution and delivering basic local infrastructure	Meeting cradle to grave needs and slaying the five 'giant evils'	Operating efficiently and meeting user demand for choice	Reducing rising demand by meeting citizen appetite for participation
Ideal locus of power	The civic association and its leaders	The state and its bureaucrats and experts	The service customer	The community and the people in its network
View of service user	Passive subject	Entitled and passive citizen	Customer	Creative collaborator with public servants
View of public servant	Volunteer/enlightened bureaucrat	Cog in a machine	Cost centre	Creative collaborator with citizens
Implementation method	Charitable and mutual activity, municipal activism	Institution building	Market creation	Culture change
Iconic policies	The Poor Laws, the workhouse, slum clearance, public provision of gas and waterworks	Establishment of the NHS and welfare state; National Insurance expansion	Compulsory competitive tendering; user choice; provider/commissioner split	Unconditional devolution; participatory and deliberative democracy; collaborative delivery; community commissioning
Organisational culture	Hierarchical	Hierarchical	Transactional	Creative, collaborative
Funding model	Charitable and mutual contributions, plus limited taxes from local state	Public funds distributed and controlled by experts and bureaucrats	Public funds follow user demand and placed in hands of individual users	Funds distributed and controlled by user groups, communities and citizens
Location of governance	Decentralised: charitable and mutual boards, local state	Centralised: Whitehall and directed local councils	Centralised: Whitehall and corporate providers with shrinking local council role	Decentralised: community groups, local councils, decentralised public services
Attitude to technology	Designed to assess, monitor and control dependents	Designed to improve bureaucratic efficiency	Designed to enable faster, more diverse offer to service users	Designed to provide platforms for collaboration and community mobilisation
Political context	Laissez-faire era	Social Democratic era	New Right era	Anti-establishment era
Buzzwords	Deserving/undeserving, charity	Expert, plan, regulations	Efficiency, competition, choice	Collaboration, prevention, shifting power
Intellectual hero	Thomas Gilbert, Eighteenth century Poor Law campaigner	William Beveridge, Author of the Beveridge Report	Milton Friedman, Free market economist	Elinor Ostrom, Economist focused on community self-organisation