



# **Social productivity: the future is all around us**

How social value is being successfully created at local level through new forms of relational activities between state, citizen and the voluntary sector.



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## The future is now appearing: it needs nurturing and spreading

For all the work the 2020 Public Services Commission did to understand future trends, no one in 2010 could have foreseen how dramatically different the context today would be. For the moment, Covid-19 has changed everything. The response has been unprecedented peacetime restrictions on movement, unparalleled pressures on health services, and a mobilisation of the state on a scale even greater than the collapse in private sector activity.

Empty supermarket shelves have been both caused by, and resulted in, a scramble for scarce food supplies. But the best of human nature has also been seen in neighbours looking out for neighbours; in the dedication and care of healthcare and so many other workers; and in communities self-organising to support those who are most vulnerable.

The immediate impacts of the pandemic on public services are dramatic and far-reaching, quite literally matters of life and death. What they will mean for public services in the longer-term cannot yet be known.

All of which makes assessing the impact of the Commission’s work in 2020 quite difficult. But, in an important sense, the Commission was always misnamed. It was never just about ‘public services’, and not really about a particular point in time. The canvas it drew on was much bigger, encompassing the entirety of the relationship between citizen and state, posing questions that are enduring, in times of crisis and in more ‘normal’ times.

They are questions that are for each generation to answer, responding to the context of the time: What can and should we do together that we cannot do alone? How do we manage our common life so that – through shared risk and shared endeavour – we can create a brighter future? In the things we prioritise, how do we turn intentions into outcomes that improve our lives, strengthen communities, and help our nation to prosper? And how do we ensure the resulting social contract is fair to all, affordable, and stable across time?

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Navigating between narrow political and fiscal constraints and competing visions of the good society, the Commission’s answer was significant in its conception of both means and ends. Instead of thinking only in terms of public services, the answer was to mobilise the broadest range of personal, social, private and public resources to achieve an ambitious (Amartya Sen inspired) vision of positive liberty.<sup>1</sup>

The goal was to create the means by which people can be authors of their own lives, living in communities they want to be a part of, able to take responsibility for themselves and others. The means were the three shifts – in culture, power and resources – towards a model where support was shaped by citizens for purposes they valued, and where citizens were active participants in the creation of this value.

The primary role of the state would be to stimulate the creation of social value and to ensure fairness in its distribution. Just as it makes investments to stimulate the creation of economic value and increase economic productivity, so it should do so to create social value and increase ‘social productivity’. In this vision, the citizen was at the centre, shaping the purposes of ‘public services’, having greater control over decisions affecting them, and as participants in the process of value creation. The goal was – to borrow Roberto Unger’s phrase – a “larger life for the ordinary man and woman”,<sup>2</sup> enabled not just through better services, but through a broader social mobilisation, in which the state played an active role.

1 Commission on 2020 Public Services.

2 Unger, R.M. (2009), *The Left Alternative*, Verso: London, New York, p.24.

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Looking back, this vision seems as right for the future now as it did in 2010. The question is, how much progress have we made in the last ten years? If a week is a long time in politics, then the start of the last decade feels like light years ago. The political context had already changed beyond recognition. The Commission published its final report in the weeks after the general election brought David Cameron’s coalition government to power. Since then we have had three more elections and two more prime ministers, three referendums, one Brexit.

For public services it was a painful decade of austerity, against a backdrop of anaemic private sector growth. During that time, inequality grew, poverty rose, and the growth in life expectancy stalled. The urgency of climate change has become a much more central political concern. The Union is imperilled, from the push of Scotland’s nationalism and, in Northern Ireland, from the pull of membership of a single market across the island. And this is before we consider the impact of Covid-19, on life itself today and on our way of life in the future.

In a decade where so much has changed, what is perhaps more interesting is what has stayed the same. At the start of the decade it was not clear how long austerity would last, but there were few who predicted a decade. With health and education being prioritised, other areas of social spending have been hit hard over the last ten years, especially local government.

For public services, the choice was stark: shrink or reform? Looking back, we can now see how that question was answered. For the most part austerity led to reductions in entitlements, with the rhetoric of getting “more for less” frequently translating in the reality of getting “less for less”. Instead of a model of social productivity, support for citizens was still viewed principally through a service lens, with problems narrowly defined by the (service) solutions available, and demand managed through higher thresholds and reduced entitlements. The damage of this approach to the safety net public services provide has had lasting consequences for many communities. It is seen in outcomes such as the rising tide of street homelessness, in the crisis in social care and, according to Sir Michael Marmot, on how long we can expect to live.<sup>3</sup>

But there have also been examples of where constraints on resources have led to positive change. Former Wigan Chief Executive Donna Hall argues that austerity was one key driver of change for the borough. This was the council third worst hit by austerity, with cuts of £160m or around 40% of its budget by 2020. Yet the approach they took led to improved social outcomes.

How did they do it? The ‘Wigan Deal’ that lay behind their approach was a model of social productivity: a reciprocal deal between council and residents to co-produce outcomes that could only be achieved together, building on the capabilities and strengths of residents. While residents would have to play their part, the council would too, starting with a freeze in council tax from 2014. They pursued a purposeful strategy to invest in and mobilise voluntary provision, with investments made largely on the basis of trust. Collaborative, joint commissioning with the CCG enabled provision to be redesigned more flexibly around residents rather than commissioned in organisational silos and, with the pressure to make serious budget cuts, legacy provision that was not needed or not effective was decommissioned.

Commissioning in this way saved £25m from adult social care alone between 2011 and 2018. Place-based working organised around seven districts with populations of 30,000–50,000 people allowed for support from a wide range of services to be provided in an integrated way. Starting with what they called ‘different conversations’, they took a relational, strengths-based approach, and focused on prevention.

3 Marmot, M., et al. (2020) *Health equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 years on*. London: Institute of Health Equity. Available at: [https://www.health.org.uk/sites/default/files/upload/publications/2020/Health%20Equity%20in%20England\\_The%20Marmot%20Review%2010%20Years%20On\\_full%20report.pdf](https://www.health.org.uk/sites/default/files/upload/publications/2020/Health%20Equity%20in%20England_The%20Marmot%20Review%2010%20Years%20On_full%20report.pdf)

Despite the extent of cuts, the outcomes have been extraordinary. Healthy life expectancy in the most deprived areas of the borough has increased by seven years. In adult social care it is the third most improved borough in the country, with 100% of directly delivered provision rated 'good' or 'outstanding' by the CQC. It is the best performing borough in the North West for hospital discharges, and the fifth best nationally.

There are many challenges in Wigan that remain, not least in levels of poverty and inequality. But the council has shown how it is possible to improve outcomes and cut costs by breaking with the old ways: through a reciprocal deal with residents, by mobilising social and community resources, and by configuring support around the lives of people.<sup>4</sup>

Through Participle, 2020 Commissioner Hilary Cottam blazed a trail of new models of support, developing relational, participatory approaches that built on the strengths people had, bringing to life many Commission ideas. From new models of employment support to family support, health, youth and social care, her work showed that these approaches can lead to better outcomes at lower cost, if only commissioners were brave enough to take the risk.<sup>5</sup>

Collaborate CIC<sup>6</sup> itself is something of a Commission legacy too. We were founded in 2012 by 2020 Commissioner Lord Victor Adebowale and run by Commission Manager Dr Henry Kippin, and our work focuses on nurturing collaborative approaches to tackling complex problems, building on the strengths that exist throughout local systems.

Through the work of our partners in different places, we see the innovative ways they are rethinking their approach to public services in line with Commission ideas. We see it, for example, in the relational approaches to support being piloted in Gateshead; in the commissioning approach in Plymouth that focuses on shared accountability and learning in an effort to find new, better and more human solutions to ongoing social problems; and in Sport England's brave approach to increasing physical activity through twelve large-scale experiments around the country to support local systems change.

We see it in the cooperative borough approach to building thriving communities, public service reform and an inclusive economy in Oldham, South Tyneside, Rochdale, Brent and Lambeth. We see it in Kirklees where, on the road to integrated place-based working, they are experimenting with how they can invest in community capacity and learn lessons from models of provision in their local voluntary sector. And we see it in Cambridgeshire where, through their Think Communities strategy, they are seeking to integrate services in places and mobilise community resources. And we see it in Barking and Dagenham where they are investing in new ways to support community initiatives.

We can see this collaborative future emerging slowly, place by place, but with growing momentum. Many of the examples are nascent and fragile, experiments that need to be nurtured and grown. They are the Commission's ideas in action, challenging the old model of public services and showing a better way: more human, more collaborative, and more effective. They are shifting the culture, the power and the resources. They show the future for public services, for 2020 and beyond.

Indeed, the lessons they point to go much further. In our recent Manifesto for a Collaborative Society<sup>7</sup> we argued that these kinds of approaches – and the values they embody – can also show the way for our economy and our society. In a world of complexity, they show the kinds of collaborative leadership and collective endeavour we need to meet the challenges of a pandemic today and climate change tomorrow.

Despite all the pressures for change – from rising demands and shrinking resources – the old model of public services has remained remarkably resilient. But, make no mistake: the future the Commission envisaged has started to arrive. It remains fragile and unevenly distributed. If it is to displace the old, it must be carefully nurtured and assiduously spread. This is the work that is urgently needed. The 2020 vision remains. The challenge is to make it a reality everywhere. ●

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4 See Wigan Council website, *The Deal*. Available at: <https://www.wigan.gov.uk/Council/The-Deal/index.aspx>  
Chris Naylor and Dan Wellings (2019), *A citizen-led approach to health and care: Lessons from the Wigan Deal*, The Kings Fund. Available at: <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-07/A%20citizen-led%20report%20final%20%2819.6.19%29.pdf>  
Jordan, E. (2019), *The Wigan Deal: Case Study*, Centre for Public Impact. Available at: <https://www.centreforpublicimpact.org/case-study/the-wigan-deal/>

5 Cottam, H. (2018), *Radical Help: How We Can Remake the Relationships Between Us and Revolutionise the Welfare State*, Virago Press: London.

6 Collaborate CIC is a social consultancy and think tank, helping organisations develop the thinking, culture and practice needed to work across organisational boundaries to improve public services and meet complex social challenges. Available at: <https://collaboratecic.com/>

7 Available at: <https://collaboratecic.com/today-we-are-pleased-to-launch-collaborates-new-manifesto-for-a-collaborative-society-f898bd0f6886>

