

UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM

# ‘WHEN TOMORROW COMES’

The future of local public services

University of Birmingham Policy Commission  
Summary report

In collaboration with Demos  
DEMOS

# University of Birmingham

## Policy Commissions

University of Birmingham Policy Commissions bring together leading figures from the public, private and third sectors with Birmingham academics to generate new thinking on contemporary issues of global, national and civic concern.

Public service reform is an obvious focus for the first University of Birmingham Policy Commission because of the immediate priority given to it by the Coalition Government following the 2010 General Election, and because of its significance for service users, communities, and the public, private and third sectors.

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### Members of the Policy Commission (The future of local public services)

- Deborah Cadman OBE (Chair and Chief Executive, East of England Development Agency)

- Professor Pete Alcock (Professor of Social Policy and Administration, and Director of the Third Sector Research Centre, University of Birmingham)
- Derrick Anderson CBE (Chief Executive, Lambeth Council)
- Professor Tony Bovaird (Professor of Public Management and Policy, Institute of Local Government Studies and the Third Sector Research Centre, University of Birmingham)
- Rt Hon. Liam Byrne (Labour MP, Birmingham Hodge Hill)
- Tiger de Souza, (Knowledge and Innovation Manager v The National Young Volunteers' Service)
- Andrew Dick (Chief Executive, Envision – youth charity)
- Professor Kathryn Ecclestone (Professor of Education and Social Inclusion, University of Birmingham)

A full copy of the report and references can be found here [www.birmingham.ac.uk/policycommissions](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/policycommissions)

- Sam Monaghan (Barnardo's Regional Director in the Midlands)
- Rt Hon. James Morris (Conservative MP, Halesowen and Rowley Regis)
- Nick Sharman (Director of Local Government, A4e)
- Jane Slowey CBE (Chief Executive, Foyer Federation)

### Support to the University of Birmingham Policy Commission

- Professor Helen Sullivan (Professor of Government and Society, University of Birmingham)
- Audrey Nganwa (Policy Commissions Research Associate, University of Birmingham)
- Kay Withers (Senior Associate, Demos)
- Carrie Bennett (University of Birmingham)
- Ben Hill (University of Birmingham)

# Foreword

I am delighted to Chair the first University of Birmingham Policy Commission exploring the future of local public services.

Our existing blueprints for designing public services do not meet the challenges ahead of us and we need to draw on all available resources to find a way forward. The Policy Commission is an important attempt to bring together evidence of past attempts at reform with new research and thinking to generate a set of policy options for the future of local public services in England.

Guided by its expert Commissioners from the worlds of academia, policy and practice, the Policy Commission focused on what local state, civic and private actors can do, want to do and need to do in order to meet the challenges of designing and delivering local public services in a society that supports individual and collective action, social justice and local democracy.

I am particularly proud that the Commission has championed the voices of young people in its work. So often, policy reformers and thinkers ignore this untapped resource of creativity and enthusiasm. Their ideas and views have helped shape a proposal for a new system of Local Public Support to replace the fragmented public service arrangements currently in place.

This system of Local Public Support is built on a framework that is robust yet flexible to allow for local diversity and continued adaptation as circumstances change.

The Commissioners and I would like to acknowledge the intellect, patience, diplomacy and skill deployed by Helen Sullivan, ably



assisted by Audrey Nganwa, in distilling hours of discussion and lively debate into a report we can all be proud of.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Deborah Cadman'. The signature is fluid and stylized, with a long horizontal line extending from the end.

**Deborah Cadman OBE**  
Policy Commission Chair

# Reform and a new approach to public services

Building on the work of previous Governments, the Coalition has set about a bold programme of public service reform.

From free schools to neighbourhood planning, service commissioning and the involvement of private and third sector providers, no citizen is immune to the Coalition's agenda. Driven by Localism and the devolution of power the reform programme promises a dramatically different system of public services.

Reform on this scale compels us to review our assumptions about public services and, crucially, who should influence them or has a right to them. At the same time increasing demands on public services and finances challenge us to rethink and reshape what we deliver and how.

Immediate action is needed. The Policy Commission proposes a system of Local Public Support founded on an active state. New kinds

of resources and services are necessary to meet individual and community aspirations, now and in the future, regardless of the political context. This includes active contributions from the public, private and third sectors. It also requires citizen and community action. A new system of Local Public Support will mean new roles and skills for all public servants, and will place local government and, more importantly, local democracy at its centre.

Young people's views and voices are often overlooked in debates about public services and yet they will be affected in the long term by changes that are happening now. The Policy Commission drew directly on young people's views about local services, about their involvement in decision making, and about the Big Society, to help shape future public policy.

The full report provides a valuable insight into their perspectives including their desire to be taken seriously by decision makers and their willingness to get involved in designing and running local services in the future.

**'Almost half the young people we surveyed were willing to be actively involved in improving public services'**

*Policy Commission Survey undertaken by LVQ Research Ltd, April 2011*

# A new approach to local public support

Systems of Local Public Support will be as diverse as the localities they operate in.

The Policy Commission advocates a system of Local Public Support that directs all available resources – whether they are public, private, civic or personal, to help deliver the outcomes local communities most value.

## Systems of Local Public Support should offer:

- Democratically determined rights and entitlements to local public support
- Local priority setting in a democratic framework
- Outcome based commissioning
- Co-production in the design and delivery of support
- Dedicated resources for citizen/community action
- Preventative and responsive activity
- Plural provision where this supports outcomes

- Local public support budget
- Real power to local politicians
- Systematic and shared learning

## Democratically determined rights and entitlements to local public support

In a system of Local Public Support rights and entitlements to support are decided and determined through democratic deliberation involving the whole community. This needs to be based on the principles of social justice and sustainability. Public authorities, particularly local government have a responsibility to ensure that weaker/unpopular 'voices' are not marginalised in these deliberations.

## Local priority setting in a democratic framework

The system of Local Public Support is driven by local community priorities negotiated and agreed within a democratic framework

'It feels like everyone makes decisions for us and don't really ask what we think or what we'd like.'

*Quote from young person interviewed for the Policy Commission*

anchored in the representative institution of local government but shaped by wider participation and deliberation.

## Outcome based commissioning

Outcome based commissioning plays a key role as it determines the range of support to be offered. It challenges commissioners and providers, from whatever sector, to work differently to achieve better results with and for communities.

## Co-production in the design and delivery of support

This is a way of saving scarce resources, by supporting individuals and communities to make more of a contribution to their own and possibly others' well-being, eg. using less and recycling more.

The experiences of some of the young people who gave evidence to the Commission suggested that engaging in co-production with service providers not only helped to create a better system of support but also enhanced their sense of being independent and responsible individuals, attributes they prized.

#### **Dedicated resources for citizen/ community action**

A system of Local Public Support makes resources (human, physical or financial) available for citizens and communities to take action on their own behalf.

#### **Preventative and responsive activity**

A system of Local Public Support focuses on preventative activity as this provides a more direct route to achieving positive outcomes for individuals and communities.

Preventative interventions are more likely to be effective when commissioners and providers work with users to explore what they are willing and able to do or contribute.

#### **Plural provision where this supports outcomes**

Form follows function in a system of Local Public Support. Who supplies support, of what type, in what way and how funded are all questions that are answered by considering what offers the best outcome for individuals and the wider community. There are opportunities here for new kinds of supply arrangements involving public, private, third sector and community bodies.

#### **Local public support budget**

A local public support budget makes use of the full range of financial resources available from public, private, charitable and philanthropic sources to improve local outcomes.

There are opportunities for experiments in new kinds of funding for local public support including payment by results, social impact

bonds, Tax Increment Financing, new local government fees and charges and more joined-up central government funding.

#### **Real power to local politicians**

A system of Local Public Support needs powerful local politicians able to shape and guide the system in ways that reflect local community priorities. They need to represent the views of those with limited resource power in decision making; and provide a robust framework for local accountability.

#### **Systematic and shared learning**

Regular and inclusive review and learning will ensure that support programmes and projects can be revised or replaced if they are not contributing to individual and community well-being.

## Conditions for success

‘THE COMMISSION HEARD FROM MANY  
PUBLIC SERVICE PROVIDERS WHO WERE

**DESIGNING NEW  
APPROACHES**

TO THEIR SERVICES BASED ON

**‘ACTIVE  
CITIZENSHIP’**

BUT IT HEARD RELATIVELY LITTLE EVIDENCE  
ABOUT THE LOCAL PUBLIC’S PREPAREDNESS  
TO BE ENGAGED IN THIS WAY.’

The Policy Commission identifies four conditions  
for a successful system of Local Public Support.



# 1 Citizens as genuine co-authors of their well-being

A system of Local Public Support is based on the idea that citizens are genuine co-authors of their well-being. By this we mean that citizens are active contributors to creating and sustaining the good outcomes that they wish for themselves and their wider communities, but crucially, that they do not do so alone, but in conjunction with family, friends, state, private and third sectors.

## The conditions for this to work are:

- **Capacity.** As co-authors, citizens need the capacity to pursue their own well-being with or through others. Capacity is linked to a number of factors including capability and confidence.
- **Connectedness.** Connections with others can increase the resources that citizens have at their disposal to contribute to their well-being. Understanding how individuals are connected to each other and to wider society opens up discussions about belonging, fairness and solidarity and what it means to be a citizen 'co-author' whose actions impact both on individual and community well-being.
- **Control.** Co-authorship implies a degree of power and control. If citizens are to be active contributors to their own well-being this requires politicians, professionals and practitioners to give up control over decisions, budgets and services and help create the conditions for co-authorship to flourish.
- **Context.** Citizens' capacity to act as co-authors will be influenced by the social, cultural and economic conditions of their neighbourhoods, localities or regions. Discrimination, poverty and inequality will place significant limits on the 'scope of possibility' for some individuals and communities. Systems of Local Public Support need to act to combat this, alongside national government.





## 2 Creating twenty-first century public servants

Public services continue to be designed around professional specialisms even though the silo institutions they created have long since ceased to be useful in achieving local results. They continue to be viewed through the lens of the public sector even though voluntary and latterly private sector providers are well established in many areas of service delivery.

### The Commission outlines its proposals for a new twenty-first century public servant:

- **Who are they?** Twenty-first century public servants may be: professionals, managers and/or practitioners from across the public, private and third sectors who are working in a system of Local Public Support.
- **What do they do?** Twenty-first century public servants fulfil a combination of roles, some of which are new, some evolving and some longstanding. Key new roles include: **storyteller**, communicating stories of how new worlds of local public support might be envisioned in the absence of existing blueprints; **weaver**, making creative use of existing resources to generate something new and useful for service users and citizens; **architect**, constructing coherent

local systems of public support from the myriad of public, private, third sector and other resources; and **navigator**, guiding citizens and service users around the range of possibilities that might be available in a system of Local Public Support.

### These twenty-first century public servants need key skills including:

- Interpersonal skills specifically facilitation, empathy and political skills
- Synthesising skills, including sorting evidence from multiple sources, analysing, making judgements, offering critique and being creative
- Organising skills for group work, collaboration and peer review
- Communication skills, making more and better use of new and multi-media resources

Also crucial is a Government that publicly values and supports public service and promotes careers in public services.

Educational and training programmes for public servants at all levels including at national level will need to be redesigned to accommodate these new roles and skills and to address the existing skills gaps.



## 3 A connected and connective local government

Local government will become more important in the future. The redesigned system of Local Public Support that we envisage provides important opportunities but also presents difficult challenges.

### **In its relationships with citizens, service users and providers:**

- Local government needs to be connected directly into local communities to develop a deeper understanding of their aspirations and concerns and to be better able to connect them to appropriate resources and support. This requires credible and legitimate local politicians.
- Local government needs to be connected to the views and experiences of those accessing local public support to develop a better assessment of how the system works and to hold service and support providers to account.
- Local government needs to be connected to a range of potential providers of local public support to improve its commissioning capacity and connect existing resources together more effectively.
- Local government needs to develop a way of governing that engages individual citizens, communities and providers in building social solidarity.



## 4 A new national government/ community settlement

Flourishing systems of Local Public Support require changes in the way that central government relates to local government and other local public institutions.

Some of these actions are about the appropriate use of power to effect change that is beyond the scope of systems of Local Public Support. Other actions are about changing the culture of public debate.

Central government must acknowledge the contribution made by nationally organised public

services and systems of Local Public Support to the public who benefit directly from them and the conditions they create for a prosperous private sector and wider social cohesion. This includes acknowledging the contribution of all 'public servants', whichever sector they happen to be delivering services and support from.

Localism should result in a much clearer framework of responsibility and accountability between the centre and localities. These divisions need to be clear to the public and open to revision should circumstances change. Where responsibility and accountability is located within localities central government should respect that and not seek to intervene unless there are legal breaches or concerns about public safety.



With thanks

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The views expressed in this summary and final report reflect the discussions of the Policy Commission and the research that informed them. They do not necessarily reflect the personal opinions of the individuals involved.

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**Professor Helen Sullivan**  
University of Birmingham

## Contact

Audrey Nganwa  
University of Birmingham  
Birmingham  
B15 2TT

Email: [policycommissions@contacts.bham.ac.uk](mailto:policycommissions@contacts.bham.ac.uk)

Tel: +44 (0)121 415 1058

[www.birmingham.ac.uk/policycommissions](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/policycommissions)

# DEMOS

UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM

**College of Social Sciences**

Edgbaston, Birmingham,  
B15 2TT, United Kingdom

[www.birmingham.ac.uk](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk)