Capable Communities:

Towards Citizen-Powered Public Services

A joint programme from ippr and PwC

ippr

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Executive summary

Everyone is talking about the 'Big Society' as part of the next stage of public service reform, but much of the discussion to date has been abstract rather than practical. Getting citizens more involved in the design and delivery of public services has real promise as a way of empowering citizens, improving outcomes and providing better value for money. But we need to understand much better how this agenda can be translated into practice.

This report asks how, in practical terms, citizens can act together to improve the way public services work for them. This can involve individuals volunteering their time to help others, but it is also about empowering people to help themselves.

It builds on 7 months of in-depth deliberative research, gathering real examples in two very different towns – Reading and Darlington – where we discussed with both frontline professionals and service users how to hand over greater power and responsibility for the design and delivery of public services to ordinary citizens.

The research focused on three service areas: education, public safety and social care – and sought to find out what motivates people to get involved, asking what prevents more people from doing so and identifying what public sector leaders can do to help. We were looking for practical ways forward which can be implemented now.

Key findings include:

There is appetite from local people to get more involved in delivering public services across different communities and different service areas:

- 42% of people were willing to attend a regular meeting with their neighbourhood police team and 18% would be willing to volunteer at a police station.

- 20% of people would be willing to make a regular commitment to mentor a child struggling through the education system and 18% would be willing to become a school governor.

- 46% said they were willing to keep an eye on an elderly neighbour and 33% of people said they would regularly drive an elderly person to the shops.

- However, over 90% of people believe that the state should remain primarily responsible for delivering most key public services.

We found great examples of community action that are already improving local outcomes. For instance, in Darlington, we found a 300-strong network of 'street champions' who help the council keep their streets clean. We also found a peer-to-peer mentoring scheme for people with drugs problems, through which former users help others to get over their addictions. In Reading, we spoke to local people who use hand-held cameras to monitor the speed of passing traffic and we found a network of young people who provide mentoring and peer support for pupils attending special schools.

People would like to do more but there are some strong barriers to participation. There are barriers that affect the demand for greater participation from citizens themselves such as a lack of confidence, time and skills. There are also barriers that result from the way the state is organised and operates public services – for example, rules, professional attitudes and red tape.

The Big Society will not be achieved without Government taking action to support citizens to take on a greater role. Government can often get in people's way: the people we spoke to brought up problems with 'red tape' such as having to get public liability insurance and go through criminal records checks. Nevertheless, many of the barriers were not located within the state at all. Moreover, when we probed what would help people participate, very often people wanted more not less help from public agencies. In focus groups we developed and tested ideas that the public wanted government to take forward including addressing incentives (credits, awards for time spent helping others), introducing time banking, training champions, providing insurance and challenging professional attitudes.

There needs to be a major shift in the state's role and purpose at all levels as well as the attitudes of professionals. Addressing the barriers above is necessary but not sufficient. Government at both central and local level needs to embrace a major shift in its role and purpose and rethink the means of producing public outcomes by placing people and communities in the driving seat. A transformation in attitudes, delivery models and levers will be required. This includes a major change in the role of professionals. Many of the professionals we spoke to were sceptical about handing responsibility over to citizens. Sometimes this was for good reason because they were concerned about falling standards if 'amateurs' were to take over. But often this was because they simply saw certain tasks as being part of their professional territory. There needs to be a culture change across the professions if this agenda is to be unlocked.

In conclusion, the shift to citizen-powered public services will not happen on its own. Government needs to enable people and communities in order that they can help themselves. Government has only just started to tackle the barriers that prevent citizens taking greater power over and responsibility for public services. It has an important role to play in supporting people at the start of a journey aimed at changing and renewing the contract between citizens and the state.

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Introduction

The 'Big Society' is the Conservative Party's big idea and a key concept for the new Coalition government's programme. The Prime Minister argues that the state has grown too large and society far too dependent on it. He plans to cut back the role of government and hand greater power and responsibility to the private sector, the voluntary sector and individuals, families and communities.

In part, this is a response to Britain's budget deficit: spending in non-protected government departments will fall by an average of 19% over the next four years. But it is also rooted in a long-standing conviction among Conservative and Liberal Democrat politicians that the state has become too big, centralised and domineering and that power and responsibility should be shifted back towards the citizen.

This is not just a government agenda, however. Increasingly Labour too is re-thinking how public services should be delivered. This is because while outcomes in areas like health and education improved during Labour's time in office they did not do so at the speed the party envisaged, and after 2002 these outcomes started to plateau. A strategy of significant extra investment plus performance targets set from the centre had reached its limits by the time Labour left office. Although it promoted greater choice and individual control over public services, Labour's statecraft was largely centralist, well captured in Geoff Mulgan's phrase the "delivery state" (Mulgan 2010).

This report focuses on one element of a decentralising programme for public service reform: the empowerment of citizens. It is concerned with how to enhance the capacity of citizens and communities to take greater control over and play a greater part in the design and delivery of public services.

As a starting point we take the idea that citizens should have greater control over the services which affect the quality of their lives. It is evident that services that are designed by citizens themselves are much more likely to be responsive to their needs than ones directed from a government department in Whitehall. In some cases, greater citizen participation might even save money because citizens can contribute time, skills and material resources.

Our methodology

Over the previous 7 months, PwC and ippr have been conducting primary research in two different parts of the country, Darlington and Reading. In each town we focused on three clusters of services in which there is considerable scope for increased citizen participation: education, social care and public safety.

In both towns we engaged with both public sector professionals and ordinary citizens to ask how in practical terms communities could play a greater role. We did this through interviews with leading local professionals, focus groups involving randomly selected groups of local people and deliberative workshops in which professionals and service users discussed the barriers to and possibilities for a greater role for the public. This was supported by wider polling of national public opinion.

Report structure

The report first sets out the ways in which the public could in theory take on a different role in the design and delivery of public services. This can range from a very minimal role in informing the design of a service through to services being entirely handed over to communities to run and deliver themselves. Second, it examines general public attitudes to this agenda. Third, it sets out our findings about how citizen participation can be unlocked in the areas of education, public safety and social care. The report concludes by drawing out some of the wider implications of our research for the future of Britain's public services.

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Varieties of citizen participation

There is a broad spectrum of ways in which citizens can play a greater role in public services. These range from the minimal, such as residents acting as the 'eyes and ears' of local services on the ground and reporting problems to the authorities, to the ambitious, such as parents setting up their own schools. Here we briefly scope out the range of possibilities before exploring detailed examples in the rest of this report.

We can distinguish between two kinds of citizen participation in public services – in design and in delivery:

- **Service design** is the process through which outcomes are chosen and the means to achieve them selected. So, for example, this would include residents attending a meeting with the local police to set priorities or sitting on a school's governing body.

- **Service delivery** is the process of actually providing the service to achieve those outcomes and priorities. So, for example, this would include local people conducting joint patrols of their area with the police or parents getting involved in the classroom such as by reading to children.

Where the citizen and the professional both play a role in the design and delivery of a service, policy thinkers have typically talked about 'co-production'. 'Co-production' has been defined by the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit as 'a partnership between citizens and public services to achieve a valued outcome' (Horne and Shirley 2009).

There are also situations in which the state ceases to play a role at all, handing responsibility entirely to the citizen or the community. In the current context of 19% public spending cuts across most government departments, this form of self-provision or voluntary provision is likely to become much more widespread.

	Responsibility for service design		
	Professionals are sole service planner	Professionals and users/community as co-planners	No professional role in planning
Responsibility for delivery of services — Professionals as sole service deliverer	Traditional professional service provision	Professional provision but with communities/ users involved in design	Professionals as sole deliverers
Professionals and users/communities as co-deliverers	User co-delivery of professionally designed services	Full co-production	User/community delivery with little professional
User/communities as sole deliverers	User/community delivery of professionally planned services	User/community delivery of co-planned services	Self-organised community provision

Source: Boyle and Harris 2009, p.16.

Box 1 clarifies the different types of roles the state and the citizen might play in both designing services, on the one hand, and directly delivering them on the other. Within the box we can identify three extreme positions, running diagonally from the top-left to the bottom right hand corner:

- In the top left hand corner we find the classic professional public service model, where the professional monopolises design and delivery.

- At the centre we find a 'pure co-production' approach, in which users and professionals take more or less an equal role in both the design and delivery of the service.

- In the bottom right hand corner we find what might be called 'pure community self-provision', where the state plays no role and the community or citizen do things for themselves.

The other positions involve variations of professional and user involvement in the two phases of design and delivery. Later in the report we apply this typology to our three service areas and explore the range of innovations underway.

Public attitudes
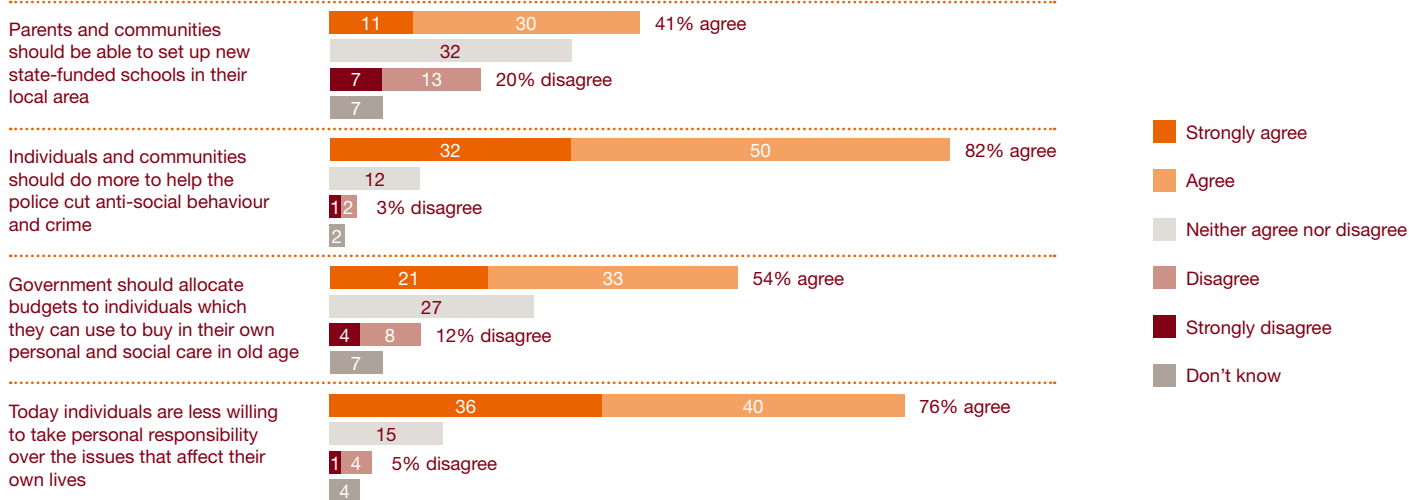
The public are positive

We found general public support for the idea that citizens should play a greater role in the design and delivery of public services. In a national opinion poll we conducted for this report, we found that 76% agreed with the statement that 'Today individuals are less willing to take personal responsibility over the issues that affect their own lives' **(see Box 2)**.

This support for the idea that citizens should take greater personal responsibility also came out strongly from PwC's recent Citizens Jury on the Spending Review (PwC 2010).

We found that most people we polled favoured the public doing more in a range of areas: 82% believe that communities should do more to help police tackle anti-social behaviour and crime, 54% support the use of personal budgets whereby people can purchase their social care and 41% support the idea that parents should be able to set up new schools.

Box 2: Support for the Big Society agenda

Responses to opinions about responsibility

Parents and communities should be able to set up new state-funded schools in their local area

11	30	41% agree
32		
7	13	20% disagree
7		

Individuals and communities should do more to help the police cut anti-social behaviour and crime

32	50	82% agree
12		
1 2		3% disagree
2		

Government should allocate budgets to individuals which they can use to buy in their own personal and social care in old age

21	33	54% agree
27		
4	8	12% disagree
7		

Today individuals are less willing to take personal responsibility over the issues that affect their own lives

36	40	76% agree
15		
1 4		5% disagree
4		

- ■ Strongly agree
- ■ Agree
- ■ Neither agree nor disagree
- ■ Disagree
- ■ Strongly disagree
- ■ Don't know

However, it is also true that significant numbers (12%, 27% and 32% respectively) neither agreed nor disagreed with these proposals, showing that there is a considerable way to go towards improving public understanding of what these reforms mean in practice.

These findings were echoed in our focus group work, where in general the public found the notion of people contributing more in their communities appealing:

'I think it's a good idea to get the community more involved.'

'You can't really complain when things are going wrong if you haven't done anything.'

'Lack of community involvement means that the people who need the services don't have a say in how and where and when they are run.'

The public believe that the state should primarily be responsible for delivering most important services

While there is support for the public to take more of a role, people nevertheless believe that the state should remain primarily responsibility for delivering most public services **(Box 3)**. 94% believe that national or local government or public service providers should be mainly responsible for providing health care. Similarly, 93% believe that different state agencies should be mainly responsible for running local schools. 93% believe that national or local government or public professionals should be primarily responsible for keeping the streets safe. Only with improving children's behaviour, attending GPs surgeries, getting fit and finding a job do the majority of people think that individuals and families should take the primary responsibility.

Box 3: **Who should be responsible for different services?**

Who should be responsible for…?	Providing health care	Finding a job if unemployed	Running the local school	Improving the behaviour of children	Caring for older people	Paying for the care needs of elderly people	Ensuring your street is a safe place to live	Ensuring people have enough to live on in retirement	Helping couples with relationship problems	Ensuring people attend GP appointments	Recycling	Getting fit
The Government	76%	24%	9%	5%	27%	68%	24%	69%	3%	4%	10%	3%
The local council	3%	10%	58%	5%	26%	17%	43%	2%	3%	6%	47%	2%
Service providers (e.g. teachers, doctors, police etc)	15%	2%	26%	9%	13%	1%	26%	1%	17%	23%	1%	3%
Employers	2%	7%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	3%	1%	1%	0%	1%
Community groups (e.g. local charities or voluntary organisations)	0%	1%	1%	1%	7%	1%	1%	1%	39%	2%	1%	2%
Individuals and families	1%	50%	1%	76%	24%	8%	2%	20%	23%	58%	37%	81%
Someone else	0%	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%	1%	0%	6%	1%	0%	2%
Don't know	3%	5%	4%	3%	3%	4%	3%	4%	8%	5%	3%	5%

Source: on-line interviews with 2,019 adults conducted by Opinium Research between the 8th and 11th of January 2010.

Barriers to greater involvement

We also asked the public about how they felt about volunteering to help others. Our poll found that a quarter of the population volunteer at least once a month at a local organisation in their community **(Box 4)**.

When we asked people what prevented them from volunteering more, lack of time was their overwhelming response **(see Box 5)**.

Lack of time also came out as a barrier to participation in our focus group research:

'Many people are too busy looking after their own family – they've got elderly relations, a child with a handicap or whatever.'

'The assumption is that everybody has just got this massive amount of time and resources on their hands. But just think of the pressures on your time. People aren't going to have these huge banks of time and effort.'

Related to this is the idea that people are discouraged from coming forward for fearing of making too much of a commitment:

'There are a lot of people who don't want to be tied down in anyway, they don't want to commit themselves.'

While time is an important constraint, we found that when we asked people about very specific and practical things that they could do, very considerable numbers of people said they would be willing to come forward. We set out this potential in the thematic chapters that follow.

Box 5: What are your reasons for not volunteering more?

Time constraints	36%
Work commitments	13%
Family commitments	12%
Health reasons	8%
Lack of inclination	6%
Disability	5%
Never been asked/no opportunity	3%

Source: online survey of 2041 UK adults from 18+ 9th-13th September 2010 carried out by Opinium for PwC and ippr.

Box 4: Levels of participation

- 15% volunteer at a local organisation which benefits their community at least once a week
- 11% do so at least once per month
- 8% help out once a quarter
- 9% volunteer at least once a year
- 21% do so rarely (less often than once a year)
- 37% have never volunteered with a local organisation

Source: online survey of 2041 UK adults from 18+ 9th-13th September 2010 carried out by Opinium for PwC and ippr.

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Education

Education has always been a service that has been co-produced by the state, parents and young people. Indeed in our poll we found significant appetite for greater public involvement in the educational system **(see Box 6)**. Although only 2% of people would be willing to set up their own school, 20% of people are willing to mentor a child at risk and 18% would be happy to become a school governor.

In our case study research we decided to focus on early years services, in which the role and invovlement of parents is crucial. Child development in the early years depends on changing behaviours and building relationships between professionals, parents and children. This is a service which will only be successfully provided if parents 'buy in' and are actively engaged in it.

In order to investigate the potential for greater parental participation in early years settings, we conducted in depth research with parents and providers in Reading.

Box 6: **What would you be willing to do to help local schools?**

As part of our research we also asked the general public in our national opinion poll what they would be willing to do more broadly to support the education system. A significant minority were willing to do something, often something quite active. Nevertheless traditional options like becoming a school governor were much more popular than setting up a 'free school'.

- 20% would like to mentor a child at risk (24% of females would like to be a mentor, compared to 15% of males).
- 18% would be happy to be a school governor (21% of males, compared to 16% of females).
- 18% would be willing to organise one-off events
- 17% would help supervise after-school clubs
- 16% would volunteer as a classroom assistant (24% of females say they would do this, compared to 9% of males).
- 12% would donate money for equipment
- But only 2% would be willing set up their own school
- 48% of people would not be willing to do any of these things to support local schools (52% among males, 45% among females).

Source: online survey of 2041 UK adults from 18+ 9th-13th September 2010 carried out by Opinium for PwC and ippr.

Box 7: Current opportunities for parental engagement

Design of service	• Parent and community governors
	• Parent forums e.g. 'check it out group'
	• Parents' evenings
	• Suggestions box
	• Parent surveys
	• Face to face communication at school gates or home visits
	• Contact staff by letter or phone
	• Can complain to council, Ofsted or ombudsmen
Delivery of service	• Parent-child classes and activities (at Children's Centres)
	• Parents invited to settling-in time
	• Recruit assistants and lunchtime controllers from local community (paid positions)
	• Assist with extra activities e.g. gardening, fundraising
	• Peer support e.g. breast feeding support, 'Home Start'

We spoke to a number of professionals working in Children's Centres and nurseries, parents who use these providers and staff from Reading Borough Council. We then conducted a deliberative workshop with representatives from all these groups to try and identify how the public can be more involved in delivering the service.

Current situation

Interviews with professionals working in Children's Centres and nurseries revealed that there is already a good deal of parental engagement going on. This is especially the case in Children's Centres, which deliberately target parents to attend the service, but is less evident in nurseries where parents tend to leave their children during the day. A review of how parents can engage with their Early Years providers **(see Box 7)** demonstrates that there are plenty of opportunities for parents to influence the design of the service and some opportunities to be involved in the delivery of the service.

When looking at the ways that are *available* for parents to get involved, a picture therefore emerges of a service that involves plenty of co-production between the service professionals and the service users. But when examining how parents *actually* get involved, a less positive picture emerges. When we asked people taking part in our workshop 'is lack of community involvement a problem in your provider?' all but one of the participants responded 'yes'.

Many of the parents in the group complained that they were not aware of some of the ways to give feedback and did not feel that they could shape the service. On the other side, many of the professionals complained that parents do not have the time or desire to get involved.

Problems and barriers

We found that there are a number of barriers to participation that are a result of how the system is designed. First there is a **lack of information**: many parents are simply not aware of the ways in which they could be more involved in their setting. As one parent told us, *'I find it hard when coming to Sure Start to find out anything – it is quite hard if you're a parent'.* When we asked parents to identify who they would contact about the running of their Early Years service we heard a confusing array of answers – including the child's key worker; class teacher; head teacher; family support worker; family information service; health visitor; and local council. Having so many different points of contact made it hard for parents to navigate the system and get involved.

Bureaucracy also got in the way: the cost and paperwork involved in signing somebody up as a volunteer in many cases made it unworkable. Because of this the majority of maintained providers did not use volunteers to deliver their services.

Parents often cannot give the **level of commitment** required by formal committees and governing bodies. The process of being nominated and elected to committees was described by one participant as *'very scary'*. Others felt that the timing and location of meetings were a problem, for example clashing with work commitments or children's feeding times. People preferred to give feedback in immediate and personal ways, rather than completing surveys or attending meetings.

The providers that were best at engaging parents put considerable **resources** towards it, for example by paying outreach workers, training community mentors and coaching parents to play more of a role. These facilities were repeatedly described as essential and some lacked the resources to provide them.

Many parents do not have any **incentives** to get involved. As one respondent told us, people want to get something out of it. Similarly there are few sanctions when parents fail to get involved, for example there is no consequence if they fail to attend a class they have registered for. Professionals too have few incentives to get them working with parents. Performance criteria tend to be more focused on management and teaching tasks and parental engagement is not pursued systematically.

Some of the barriers lay outside of the design of the service itself. Parents and professionals regularly cited **work commitments** and people being too busy to get involved. This was especially a problem in private day care. Parents preferred to leave complex things such as regulations, legal and financial matters to the professionals.

It was also noted that families with a chaotic lifestyle, despite wanting the best outcomes for their children, generally **lacked the skills** required to 'co-produce' outcomes. They need additional support and coaching to be able to engage with the service.

Lack of information sharing can prevent professionals using other community members to provide necessary support – for example asking a coping family to support a chaotic family to participate. It can also prevent professionals from other services, such as health, engaging Early Years professionals as part of the solution to deep rooted problems.

Parents are not involved in the assessment of early years providers which is currently carried out by Ofsted and the local authority. These assessments have been criticised for reflecting top down national priorities rather than local needs. Parents could be much more involved in the local assessment system.

Broadly speaking there should be three stages:

1. Each setting could form their own assessment team consisting of parents, staff, community representatives and an advisory teacher from the local council.

2. The assessment team should identify problems and their report should form the basis of all subsequent management responses, targets, improvement plans and council ratings. Ofsted could be used much more sparingly to guarantee minimum national standards are being met. The improvement plan could be presented regularly at parents evenings to ensure it received the buy-in of all parents.

3. Providers in an area could build a network to help each other improve. Management, staff and parents could visit each other, discuss their improvement plans and share ideas. The major barrier to making this work at the moment is that the government wants services to compete with each other to attract users. Competing providers should not be placed in a network as it is unlikely they will co-operate and support each other.

This move towards bottom-up assessment of providers should save money, simply because the local council would no longer need to fully resource the assessment process.

Ways forward

As part of our research, we asked participants for examples of where parents and professionals already share responsibility for tasks. We tried to understand why these activities worked well in an attempt to learn from good practice. We found that a number of common themes emerged:

- **Co-locating services helps engage parents.** Parental participation can often 'fall through the cracks' between different service areas. Locating health services alongside Children's Centres has made it much easier for parents to use them and has reduced the stigma of attending them.

- **Start small.** Many parents are nervous of engaging with professionals and the ways available for them to get involved are too formal. They prefer to 'dip their toe' first and gradually build-up their involvement.

- **Peer support can be better than professional support.** It is less intimidating and can help build social capital.

- **Personal contact is key.** Face-to-face conversations help to break down the barriers between service providers and service users.

- **Public participation can depend on a role model or key figure within the community.** Many people described how public participation flourished when there was a key figure in the community that could inspire others to become involved and effectively act as the hub of a social network.

- **'Check it out groups'.** These are more informal meetings over a cup of tea where parents can ask questions and work with staff to help improve the way the setting is run. Parents have also embraced the introduction of parents' evenings.

- **Employing and training parents allows a setting to reflect the local community.** All the providers we saw had recruited staff from the local neighbourhood and many of them were parents who had sent their children to the same setting.

- **Involvement must tap into parents' desires, skills and interests.** Parents are more likely to take part if they are confident they have the skills to do a good job.

One area where parents could take on a more active role is in the assessment of early years services. We set out how this could be done in detail in **Box 8**.

5

Public safety

People want to live in safe, clean and attractive places. We know the maintenance and cleanliness of the local public realm is intimately connected to public concern about crime. There is considerable evidence for the claims of 'broken windows theory' which argues that vandalised and poorly maintained public spaces tend to amplify crime and anti-social behaviour.

Over recent years we have seen success on both fronts with falling crime rates and a quiet renaissance in the quality of the urban environment (HM Government 2009). This has in large part been due to significant injections of public funds, which have now come to an end. With public services under huge pressure they will increasingly find themselves turning to the public to play a greater role in tackling crime and maintaining the local public realm.

But what does the public make of all this? Are they willing to play a greater role or do they think these things are the job of the council and the police? What prevents people from getting involved? This chapter explores these issues, drawing on interviews, focus groups and deliberative workshops in Darlington and Reading.

Current situation

All societies rely on informal processes of self-policing to maintain order and safety in the public realm. At the most minimal level this involves local residents watching their streets and reporting acts of crime or disorder (Shapland and Vagg 1988). In Darlington officers from the council's Street Scene service told us that they depend on the public as a matter of routine to act as their 'eyes and ears'. Indeed the council has sought to formalise this through the recruitment of a 300-strong network of 'street champions' who take on responsibility for looking after their street and reporting any environmental issues to the council.

In Reading the police told us that there was an extensive network of local Neighbourhood Watch schemes, although one senior police officer commented that 'neighbourhood watch is quite a passive form of engagement' with residents largely passing information back to the police and then expecting them to take action.

Beyond simply watching and reporting, the public can also of course directly intervene to prevent a crime from taking place. However, residents we spoke to in both towns expressed extreme unease about doing this.

'We have no authority. You can only ask politely, they'll tell you where to go.'

'I have attempted to go over and say to them 'come on kids, enough's enough, let people go through'. But it's not worth it. I can't run away from them and they frighten me now. They made it obvious if I went over again I wouldn't be walking home. So now I just phone the police because I physically can't do anything.'

People are more willing to get involved in formal and less direct ways, both in setting local priorities for the police and actually co-delivering policing and environmental services.

So for example, neighbourhood policing teams now regularly meet with local residents in a formal way to set local priorities. In Reading these groups are called Neighbourhood Action Groups (NAGs), administered by the council and the police and chaired by a local resident. These are essentially reporting back and information sharing sessions, with no real expectation that citizens will get involved in the delivery of police work.

There were examples of residents going further and getting involved in actually co-delivering services with the authorities.

For example, in Reading some of the NAGs are now getting involved in 'community speed watch' initiatives, where local residents are given speed cameras which they can use to monitor the speed of passing vehicles. Some have also started to undertake local environmental audits. The council told us that it is developing a network of 'victims' champions': local people who will act as a point of information and advice for local residents about what is happening in terms of tackling anti-social behaviour. They will also liaise with the council and act as an advocate on residents' behalf.

In terms of getting the public involved in maintaining Darlington's public realm, officers reported more limited success. Many officers emphasised that a very comprehensive level of service delivery has created a culture whereby the council is expected to deal with any problem and the public expect to play very little role beyond reporting things back. Where they have tried to directly involve the public in delivery, such as through community litter picks, the levels of participation have been limited.

Problems and barriers

By far the most common response when people are asked why they would not directly intervene to prevent a crime or anti-social act from taking place was the **fear of retaliation** by the perpetrator. The following quotes from members of the public in our Reading crime group were typical:

'I saw somebody who was absolutely paralytic and he fell. And yeah, I walked by because I didn't know how he'd react if I had gone to his aid. You know, would he have kicked me out of the way and told me to f-off and all the rest of it?'

'There's plenty of stuff in the media about people getting involved and being stabbed and killed.'

This mirrors wider research which shows that when asked why they would not intervene 39% of British people say they fear being physically attacked, 14% are scared of later reprisals and 12% fear verbal assault (Margo 2008).

This fear about the physical, verbal and longer term consequences of directly intervening to prevent crime is made worse by a sense that if a person were to act, they would be on their own and would **not be supported or 'backed up'** by the community or the police. One person told us *'Our community won't stand up'*, another said he would intervene *'if you could guarantee that the police would back you up, and that society would back you up'*. If people knew that the police and community would stand with them, they might feel less vulnerable to reprisals or attacks and more able to act.

A **loss of shared norms and local social networks** was blamed for increasing this fear of intervening and this suspicion that if one did, no one else would support you for *'sticking your head above the parapet'*, as one resident described it.

As in all the service areas we examined the public believed that **'red tape'** was one of things standing between them and taking action in their community.

For one thing there is a lot of confusion over the law on when a citizen can intervene to tackle someone committing an offence. Members of the public we spoke to felt that the law really was not on the side of the *'have a go hero'*. There is a widespread perception that in taking action, one exposes oneself to litigation.

This was reinforced by **professional attitudes**: when we asked police officers in Reading whether the public should try to deal with anti-social behaviour directly rather than phoning the police, they were very nervous of the consequences. One officer told us *'The advice we normally give is not to get involved, just to make the call and be a witness'*.

Street Scene Officers in Darlington were concerned about how the **standards** of cleanliness the public expect would be maintained if there was increased dependence on the good will of local volunteers. They were concerned that dropout rates tend to be high, there is too much reliance on key individuals and there is no 'plan B' if people lose interest or move away. In other words only a paid professional infrastructure can guarantee the kind of service standards the public expect.

Box 9: **What would you be willing to do to help the police?**

We conducted an opinion poll asking people what specifically they might be willing to do to help the police tackle crime and anti-social behaviour. The results show that there is an appetite to get more involved in some aspects of police work, although more appetite on the design rather than the delivery side.

- 44% would be willing to participate in a neighbourhood watch scheme
- 42% would be willing to attend a monthly meeting with their neighbourhood policing team
- 18% would be willing to volunteer at the local police station
- 17% would be willing to receive training in how to safely intervene to prevent a crime or anti-social behaviour
- 10% would be willing to conduct joint patrols with the police in their area
- 8% would be willing to donate money for additional PCSOs
- 30% would not be willing to take up any of the suggested options.

Source: online survey of 2041 UK adults from 18+ 9th-13th September 2010 carried out by Opinium for PwC and ippr.

Ways forward

We can identify some areas for increasing public participation on the basis of our qualitative research in the case study areas and the wider polling **(see Box 9)**.

- **There is little appetite for co-payment:** In our poll only 8% of people said they were willing to pay for additional Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs), which suggests that most people feel they already pay for these services through their taxes and should not have to pay more. In our workshops people were alarmed by the prospects of poorly trained and unaccountable private security guards taking on further policing roles.

- **Training:** 17% of people told us that they would be willing to undergo training in things like how to read a situation and defuse conflicts. It was suggested in our workshop that it would be a good idea for key 'authority figures' in the community, such as park wardens or shop keepers to receive this kind of training.

- **Neighbourhood contracts:** Some areas have introduced 'contracts' between residents groups and public services such as the police and the local council to try to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour.

One called 'Operation Goodnight' in Redruth in Cornwall involved a voluntary child curfew, whereby parents agreed to keep their under-10s off the street by 8pm and their under-16s indoors by 10pm. There was some support for these kinds of contracts at our deliberative workshop, although people were concerned that the most challenging families would still not engage.

- **Peer support to reduce reoffending:** One of the most ambitious examples of service co-production in our Darlington case study was the Darlington Service User Assembly. This is a user group through which former drug users and ex-offenders work with and help mentor current drug users going through treatment programmes. This form of peer-to-peer self-help is recognised by the council's SWITCH team (an advice service for young people misusing alcohol, drugs and solvents) as crucial to the delivery of their service. This is because professionals can never 'speak from experience' which they find is crucial to helping young people quit and stay clean. The use of mentoring and peer-to-peer support is absolutely critical to delivering this service and was felt by officers and users to have made a very considerable difference.

6

Social care

The provision of social care depends on very extensive patterns of self-help and co-production: across the country millions of people are involved in caring for elderly and disabled friends, neighbours and relatives. It is an area in which public provision has always been much patchier than in the other more well-funded services like education, health, and policing with the level of public provision varying considerably around the country.

We explored the scope for greater public participation in providing social care in both Reading and Darlington. We conducted interviews with professionals working in and running social care provision, and conducted deliberative workshops involving frontline professionals and service users.

Current situation

Much of the social care delivered in this country is delivered by individuals, families, neighbours and friends. In fact the professionals we spoke to pointed out that much of what goes on in the community is completely unknown to them. People are referred to the local authority when that support within the family or the community does not exist, ceases or has been stretched to breaking point. This is one of the service areas where very many British citizens are not only doing a lot on their own without public support, but often doing far too much.

In thinking about how citizens could take greater control and responsibility, we are not thinking of those existing carers who are over-stretched, but rather whether and how a wider pool of people, currently not involved, could help, as well as whether those receiving care could be given greater control over the services upon which they depend.

A flagship policy supported across the political spectrum has been the introduction of **personal budgets** for social care. These budgets mean that those receiving care are offered a budget through which they can in theory purchase their care from a range of different providers. In both Reading and Darlington personal budgets were seen to be empowering to those who had the skills to make best use of them. Some others, particularly many elderly people, were said to find the process confusing and burdensome. Partly as a response, Reading has looked at providing people with **notional budgets**, where people get the same amount of choice, but the council handles all the finance and the administration.

There were also examples of service users collectively getting together and running their own services. In Reading, the charity Ryder Cheshire have set up a **Personal Assistant Matching Scheme** (PAMS) which consists of a register of people who work as Personal Assistants for people on direct payments. The scheme will eventually be handed over to be run by service users themselves and will run training and CRB checks. The scheme should make it easier for people to find a personal assistant, and to give them some sort of safeguard that the person they employ is trustworthy.

In Darlington **Growing Old Living in Darlington** (GOLD) are a group of 600-700 elderly people who volunteer to run activities and help out other older people in the community. They put on events such as tea dances, coordinate voluntary activities and act as a reference group for the council on older people's issues.

Problems and barriers

There are legitimate concerns on behalf of both professionals and members of the public, that getting the public much more actively involved in delivering services may pose a number of risks to those receiving care. For example, individuals who may seek to take advantage of elderly people and abuse their trust.

There is also the problem of **poor quality or inconsistent care**. As one social care manager put it *'in terms of relying on someone to check that an elderly neighbour is ok or providing help with cleaning or gardening – that seems ok. But with a thing like shopping, which is a basic necessity for survival, it becomes much less comfortable to rely on volunteers.'*

One of our focus group participants pointed out that *'you might move on so that person would then slip through the net if the state were not involved. You can't be there forever for that person – you need the state overlooking'.*

Volunteers may be especially unreliable in terms of providing for the **'less popular'** cases. As one manager told us *'everyone wants to help the sweet old lady but just because you're old doesn't mean you are nice. Some clients are aggressive, abusive and frankly intolerable. The local authority has a duty to care for those people. Would volunteers continue to help them?'*

Many people pointed out that because of **weak social capital** service users might actually be very wary about accepting help from strangers: as one said, *'Some old people would think 'what's he after? He must be after money''.*

It was clear that members of the public might also be afraid of making **too much of a commitment**, for fear that they would get sucked into something very intensive, particularly if they were making a personal commitment to an older person. Linked to this there was a real concern about **'burn out'** among carers:

'Volunteers are like gold dust. If you put too much pressure on a volunteer, volunteers will collapse. I always maintain you have to handle volunteers with kid gloves. They really have to be looked after. Otherwise all that happens is that more and more responsibility is put on that person.'

Our professional interviewees pointed out that *'organisations can be a bit precious about their information and they don't want to share'*. Whether this is due to data protection, fear of competition from other providers or lack of confidence about the quality of provision elsewhere, **organisations are reluctant to refer people to others who might help**.

Insurance and liability came up in our groups, as it did in almost every group we convened. As one officer in Darlington explained: *'We need to be encouraging something like gardening to help older people who can't maintain their gardens. Even if it means having gardening equipment that could be borrowed. The barrier again is fear of something going wrong and liability, health and safety.'*

Box 10: What would you be willing to do to improve social care?

We asked the public what they would be willing to do to help improve the care of our more vulnerable members of society. We found that:

- 46% would be happy to keep an eye on old people living nearby
- A third (33%) would be willing to drive an elderly person to the shops
- 31% would not mind chatting to an isolated older person on the phone
- 29% would help out with gardening
- 13% would organise care home social activities
- 12% would be willing to cook and deliver meals
- 8% would donate money to community centres
- 27% would not be willing to do any of these things

Source: online survey of 2041 UK adults from 18+ 9th-13th September 2010 carried out by Opinium for PwC and ippr.

Ways forward

In our poll we asked the public what they would be willing to do in practical terms to improve social care services **(see Box 10)**. Our in-depth research with professionals and service users also highlighted a number of promising initiatives:

- **Time banking:** Volunteers are put off by the worry that they might end up having to make an almost life-changing level of commitment if they were to help an elderly person in the home. This is because expectations and obligations do tend to build up over time and people fear getting 'sucked in'. There was support for the idea of 'time banking', already established in some parts of the UK such as South Wales, whereby hundreds of volunteers can coordinate their time and skills to helping out as much or as little as they can. People can earn time credits by volunteering which they can then spend on some public services or exchange in return for help from others. Crucially there is a central coordinator who can make sure that needs are being met, while volunteers can just dip in and out as they are able.

- **Role of GPs:** GPs were identified as the first port of call for people and hold a huge amount of information, which if unlocked could help many more people get involved in caring for others. Many of the professionals we spoke to felt that GPs did not share information, in part because of patient confidentiality but also because they were not part of a unified computer system. It was suggested that GPs do not refer people to organisations that might help and do not display information about care that is available. GPs need to be better at getting behind a medical problem to identifying an underlying social cause.

- **Information sharing:** if people's care needs are to be met and more people brought in from the community to help, agencies need to pool information and be confident in referring people to other organisations. For example in Newcastle, door-to-door library services collect information on the needs of the housebound people they visit and hand it to the local authority. This is an approach that could be widened to include the fire service (who fit smoke detectors in the homes of older people) or private sector organisations that visit people's homes, such as supermarket delivery staff.

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Implications

In addition to setting out ways forward in each of the three service areas, our findings have further implications for policymakers and public service providers more widely if they are to unlock citizen-powered public services.

Three myths about the Big Society

Our research allows us to de-bunk three key myths about the 'Big Society' agenda.

Myth 1. People don't want to get involved.

Our research finds that actually there is a significant level of enthusiasm for getting more involved. Our poll found that 42% of people were willing to attend a regular meeting with their neighbourhood police team and that 18% would be willing to volunteer at a police station. 20% of people would be willing to make a regular commitment to mentor a child struggling through the education system and 18% would be willing to become a school governor. 46% said they were willing to

keep an eye on an elderly neighbour and a third of people said they would regularly drive an elderly person to the shops. Of course there is a difference between what people say and what people do, but even if half those figures were realised, the impact could be huge.

Myth 2. If 'Big Government' gets out of the way the 'Big Society' will flourish.

Those who claim that unlocking citizen participation is only about getting the state out of the way are also off track. While it is true that government can get in people's way (the people we spoke to consistently brought up problems such as red tape, worries about public liability insurance and criminal records checks), many of the barriers to the Big Society were not located within the state at all. For example, lack of time was the biggest barrier identified in our poll. Moreover, when we probed what would help people participate, very often people wanted more not less help from public agencies: information about the opportunities available, the material tools to do a particular task, support with unappealing or time consuming administrative and financial tasks and training to give people the skills and confidence to come forward.

The coalition is engaged in an attempt to shift power to the citizen, by building up citizens' capacity to engage, but also by devolving power down to frontline professionals. These two are not necessarily consistent, very many of the professionals we spoke to were highly sceptical about handing responsibility over to the citizen. Sometimes this was with good reason, because they were concerned about falling standards if 'amateurs' were to take over and about vulnerable citizens losing out. Often however they simply saw certain tasks as their professional territory and resented the idea that the public could do it well or better. There needs to be a culture change across the professions if this agenda is to be unlocked.

Ways forward

Earlier we set out some ways of unlocking citizen participation in the three specific service areas we looked at. Below we identify some of the key things that policymakers locally and nationally should do if greater power and responsibility is to be handed over to individuals, families and communities:

- **Ask people to come forward:** most of the people we spoke to had never been asked to get involved and so it is not very surprising that few of them had, despite being willing to when probed. When asking people it is crucial to start small and to use personal contact. Frontline professionals should be trained in some of the techniques of community organising so that they routinely ask people come to forward.

- **Let people know what opportunities are available:** people lack information about the opportunities available locally and don't know where to look. Local authorities should provide a central information point about the opportunities available in their area.

- **Set up systems to coordinate time and skills within the community:** people fear making too much of a commitment and so finding systems such as time banks to coordinate people's time and skills is critical. Time-banking whereby people can earn credits for making even small contributions offers a way of coordinating the activities of volunteers.

- **Reward contributions:** people don't want to be paid for making a contribution, but they do want to feel that their contribution has been recognised. Time-banking again offers a way of developing reciprocal relationships between citizens, putting something in and getting something out.

- **Commission for participation:** citizen participation is not typically an expectation among commissioners, but it should be made one. Camden Council, for example, now actively looks for opportunities for co-production when it commissions services.

- **Challenge professional roles and attitudes:** the way professionals see their role and that of the public needs to change. Any public organisation committed to this agenda needs to very proactively lead and train its staff in this direction.

- **Re-think risk:** red tape was consistently brought up as a problem and public agencies need to consider whether citizens might be willing to sign up to accepting more risk in return for getting more of the public involved in delivery. Agencies need to consider whether they are being over-zealous in their application of rules and interpretation of legislation and guidance. Councils should consider whether they can themselves start insuring citizens so that they can participate.

- **Training:** people very often lack the skills or the confidence to take on new tasks. Public agencies should see citizen training as a crucial part of achieving their goals, in part by using the talents and skills in the community itself.

There is public appetite for citizens taking on greater power and responsibility in both the design and delivery of public services. While some of the barriers to this agenda seem structural and entrenched, such as the pressures of work and family commitments on people's time, others are not. We have found that public services themselves can be re-designed to embed a stronger role for citizens and communities, and to foster a wider culture of participation and shared responsibility.

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