Capable Communities

Public Service Reform: The next chapter - A joint programme from ippr and PricewaterhouseCoopers

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Introduction

The coming general election campaign will be marked by a renewed debate between the parties about the role of the state. David Cameron has called for a ‘big society’ to replace the ‘big state’, arguing that the expansion of the public sector under Labour has crowded out personal responsibility as well as civic and voluntary endeavour (Cameron 2009). The Liberal Democrats, too, have criticised Labour’s ‘centralist’ approach to public services and have called for reforms to devolve power much further down to the local level (Clegg 2009). The Labour Government itself has called for ‘smarter government’, to help improve the performance of public services and secure better value for money (HM Treasury 2009). All parties propose that citizens themselves, whether as individuals or communities, should participate much more than they are currently in the delivery of public services.

Over the last decade Labour has put enormous effort into trying to improve public services. In return for substantial investment, the Government has enacted a number of major reform initiatives, placing particular emphasis on top-down targets and a desire to shift to a more consumerist model of public service.

After years of under-investment, the Government’s approach did deliver some real improvements in outcomes but these improvements have now plateaued, in part because they have not been accompanied by necessary increases in productivity, but also because the investment and reform model has not proved sufficiently adept at tackling the underlying causes of social problems. We now live in a very different world from the one Beveridge lived in. Society has to address a range of complex problems which post-war institutions were not designed to fix: chronic health conditions related to lifestyle, ageing populations, climate change and anti-social behaviour. Just as the problems we face have changed over time, so too has the nature of British society. Modern technology and education mean that citizens are better informed and more assertive than ever before (Griffiths *et al* 2009).

The way our public services are organised has not kept up with these changes. A new approach to public service reform is required. The onset of a deep recession and the explosion of public debt have added a significant fiscal imperative to find one and to find one quickly. With government borrowing predicted to reach a record 12.6 per cent of GDP this year, politicians from all political parties are searching for ways to do more for less (see PwC 2009 and Oppenheim and Dolphin [eds] 2009). While the fiscal crisis undoubtedly presents a series of challenges for public services, it also provides an opportunity to rethink the way they work.

Central to this is a reappraisal of the relationship between services and the public – between the citizen and the state. Politicians across the political spectrum recognise that the next phase of public service reform needs to encourage and enable the active participation of citizens themselves in the attainment of important social goods. This will require a new partnership between citizens and public services.

The aim of PwC and ippr's Smarter State programme[1] is to explore this shifting relationship between the citizen and the state as the next chapter of public service reform evolves. Our previous work explored how it was possible to devolve power downwards to localities within our highly centralised political culture (ippr and PwC 2009). In this paper we turn our attention to the role citizens and communities can play in directly producing services, setting out the challenges that lie ahead, and identifying the questions our research will seek to answer over the coming months. We set out the case for community empowerment, before examining how this important agenda can move from the margins to the mainstream of the policy agenda.

This work is informed by a specially commissioned poll that assessed public attitudes towards greater citizen involvement in and responsibility for delivering services. This is described in the Appendix (p21).

[1] See www.ippr.org.uk/research/teams/project.asp?id=3447&tID=3571&pID=3447 and www.pwc.co.uk/eng/publications/towards_a_smarter_state.html

Empowered Communities

There is a growing political consensus that the traditional model of public service delivery, predicated on people passively consuming services whenever they need them, is neither sustainable nor desirable (see HM Treasury 2009 and Conservative Party 2007). This is firstly because this approach puts the entire burden on the service provider, wasting the potential expertise and resources of the service user. For example, a teacher is less likely to improve literacy rates if children do not read with their parents at home. Secondly, it ignores the potential of resources that are not easily visible or measurable: a care service, for example, cannot help an older person overcome isolation without the use of informal friendships and networks. Thirdly, the approach fuels demand for services as they are only used when needs arise. For instance, doctors only help people once they become ill, rather than helping them to live a healthy lifestyle and prevent illness occurring in the first place.

It is clear that on their own neither the Government nor citizens have access to all the resources necessary to deliver public goods. As the everyday examples above demonstrate, services work best when citizens are involved in producing them. The next wave of public service reform will therefore need to ensure that citizens are engaged as active partners in the process.

There are many different forms of citizen participation in service design and delivery. For example, individuals can be empowered directly through being allocated personal budgets to choose between service providers. This is now beginning to happen in social care. Alternatively, communities as a whole could be empowered to get more involved in delivering services: for example the Conservative Party has outlined its plans for a 'post bureaucratic state' in which communities can come together to run local services such as schools (Conservative Party 2007).

Another option is to change models of ownership, so citizens and communities actually have a stake in the way a service is run. Tessa Jowell recently launched a Commission on Ownership to see how business models such as the John Lewis Partnership and The Co-operative can be applied to schools, hospitals, housing and other services (Jowell 2009).

These approaches have been developed into a philosophy of 'co-production', which aims to collapse the divide between service provider and service user even further:

> *Co-production means delivering public services in an equal and reciprocal relationship between professionals, people using services, their families and their neighbourhoods.* (Boyle and Harris 2009: 11)

When citizens work in partnership with service providers there are a number of benefits, including:

- Improved service outcomes for the citizen: co-production allows the resources that citizens can contribute (time, energy, social networks, knowledge and skills) to be brought together with those resources that the Government can provide (money, regulation, technical expertise, leadership, service professionals). This leads to better results for users. (Cabinet Office 2009a)

- Empowered and more satisfied citizens: when citizens are involved in producing a service they are usually more satisfied with it. It also helps them to feel more confident, connected and able to influence decisions.
- Better value for money: by mobilizing resources that do not cost the state, better outcomes can be produced for no extra cost.

Despite the small scale and informal nature of many experiments with 'co-production', there is a growing body of empirical evidence that shows the benefits of these programmes. The case studies below provide evidence of the benefits of co-production in two areas: health and justice.

Self-care (Health)

By training patients with chronic conditions to provide themselves with a certain level of care, the NHS can both save considerable resources and enable patients to fit in their care at more convenient times. For the cost of a handful of classes and a booklet, one self-care skills training course for adults with asthma saw significant improvements in lung function, inhaler technique, asthma knowledge, and patients' self-rating of their asthma. It also led to a 69 per cent decline in GP visits (Department of Health 2007).

Youth courts (Justice)

Youth courts are a way for communities to become more directly involved in justice. Instead of being tried in formal courts, young people committing non-violent offences for the first time appear before a panel of other young people who have a range of non-custodial sanctions at their disposal. In Washington DC, where the courts were first introduced, the recidivism rate of those 'tried' in a youth court is now 9 per cent, compared with 30 per cent for young people processed in the mainstream juvenile system (see www.tdyc.org). Similar schemes have recently been introduced in parts of the UK (Rogers 2006).

As well as delivering significant improvements in outcomes and cost reductions, engaging citizens and communities in producing services can help build social capital and a sense of empowerment. A recent review found strong evidence that it can 'improve satisfaction with services, the degree to which residents feel they can influence decisions and their confidence and capacity' (Young Foundation 2009: 3).

Citizens and communities could therefore be considered the 'missing link' in public service reform over recent decades. As a recent discussion paper urged the Government:

> *… [C]o-production should be central to the government's agenda for improving public services because of emerging evidence of its impact*

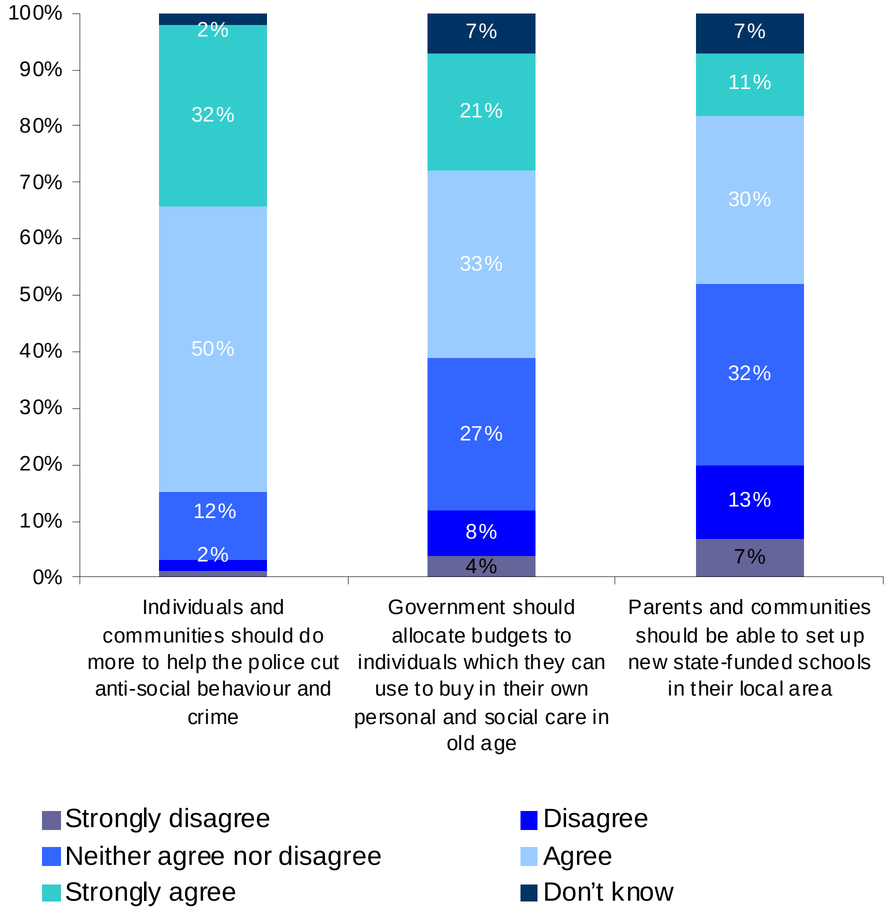
on outcomes and value for money, its potential economic and social value and its popularity. (Cabinet Office 2009a: 3)

An opinion poll undertaken for this paper by PwC and ippr found that there is public support for this agenda (see Chart 1). Specifically:

- 82% believe that communities should do more to help policy tackle anti-social behaviour and crime
- 53% support the use of personal budgets in social care
- 41% support the idea that parents should be able to set up new schools

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 would mean in practice.

Chart1. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



From the margins to the mainstream

So where are we in the attempt to empower citizens and communities to produce services? Central and local government have begun to implement these ideas in the UK, most notably through personal budgets in social care. These require the service user to identify their needs, decide how money should be spent and choose which provider to spend it on.

Law and order has also seen increased citizen involvement, with citizens conducting joint patrols with the police, manning speed cameras, and community courts being introduced to try minor offenders outside of the criminal justice system.[2]

In health, too, citizens are becoming increasingly involved in preventative projects such as Family-Nurse Partnerships, which help to coach first-time mothers over a two-year period and build networks of support (Cabinet Office 2009a). Sure Start Children's Centres, to give another example, now actively involve parents in designing the services they offer.

In the third sector, which has a long tradition of promoting community participation, charities such as CSV have pioneered schemes where citizens are involved both in producing and consuming a service. For example, older people can take part in a 'telephone tree', where they phone other isolated older people. This helps both the caller and the person they call to develop social contacts and friendships.[3]

There is therefore good reason for believing that individuals and communities should play a greater role. Policy-makers are right to point to the transformative potential of the resources held by individuals and communities. But achieving such a shift is not straightforward. A number of challenges stand in the way of making this approach a mainstream reality. Identifying these challenges, and finding ways to overcome them, is the next aim of PwC and ippr's *Smarter State* programme of work.

Community capacity

If community resources (such as social capital, energy, time and public engagement) are to play a greater role in producing services, then we must be confident that communities have the capacity to respond. It is widely believed that Britain's communities are much more fragmented than they used to be and consequently that people are much less willing to involve themselves actively in civic and community life. Commentators from the left have tended to blame this on the social dislocations caused by increased global competition, the decline of heavy industry and rising income inequality (Beck 1992). Critics on the right have argued that blame rests with the rise of the welfare state and overly liberal family policies that have weakened the

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[2] Following the successful introduction of the Community Justice Centre in North Liverpool and the Salford Community Justice Initiative, 11 more community justice initiatives were established in 2006. See www.communityjustice.gov.uk.
[3] See McCormick *et al* (2009) for a more detailed description of such schemes.

intermediary institutions that are the bedrock of an active civil society (Blond 2009).

However, contrary to popular opinion, social and civic ties are generally strong. The citizenship survey shows that the percentage of people who feel they ‘belong strongly to their neighbourhood’ increased from 70 per cent in 2003 to 77 per cent in 2008–9. Rates of volunteering also remained steady over the decade, with a quarter of people formally volunteering at least once a month (CLG 2009). Surprisingly, volunteering and charitable giving have actually both increased since the onset of the recession, suggesting people do ‘pull together’ in a time of need (The Institute for Volunteering Research 2009). Other recent research found that UK citizens were more likely to regularly participate in community organisations concerned with improving the environment and community safety than citizens in France, Germany, Denmark and the Czech Republic were (Loffer *et al* 2009).

However, while these indicators suggest communities are ready to ‘step into the breech’, considerable challenges remain. In particular, political participation and involvement in official decision-making is declining. The steady decrease in the number of voters turning out at both national and local elections is now a familiar tale, with average local election turnout hovering just above 30 per cent in recent years. Feelings of influence have fallen over the decade – while in 2001 44 per cent of people felt able to influence decisions in their local area, by 2009 that figure had dropped to below 39 per cent (CLG 2009).

Politicians and public officials are regularly heard to complain that when they do open up opportunities for citizen participation, they arrive to find deserted community halls or at best a handful of the ‘usual suspects’. These observations question the extent to which communities are willing and able to take on more responsibility. They also raise real concerns about whether or not opening up new forms of participation will simply empower those who already have the loudest voices, prompting a ‘tyranny of the usual suspects’.

A second challenge for empowering communities is that involvement varies enormously depending on class and income, with those in higher managerial occupations twice as likely as those with routine occupations to feel ‘able to influence decisions’ and to feel that ‘many people in their neighbourhood can be trusted’ (CLG 2007–8). Religion and race also pose particular challenges – there are some places in the UK where community segregation might impede collective action across racial or religious lines (CLG 2009). The uneven distribution of ‘intangible’ resources such as trust and cohesion is as much of a challenge as the distribution of more obvious resources such as income and wealth. Not everywhere has the same levels of trust, social capital, and resources to contribute.

A third challenge is that identifying community capacity and resources is inevitably a hard task. Many informal and intangible resources are hard to observe, let alone measure and value (Halpern 2009). One challenge for redesigning public services is to find ways to identify and make best use of such resources. Another is to ensure that programmes build on existing community capacity, rather than ‘parachuting in’ without regard to what is already in place. This risks a zero-sum game of destroying and replacing social networks, rather than building on existing ones (Broome 2009).

It is therefore clear that although communities have the capability to play a much greater role in producing beneficial outcomes, however a number of hurdles will need to be overcome to ensure that the benefits are evenly and widely spread, and that programmes to mobilise citizen participation are effective.

Questions for further research:

- *How do we measure capability in a community?*
- *Is there a minimum level of capability needed to achieve change?*
- *How can community capacity be strengthened?*
- *Are there barriers to strengthening community capacity?*

The changing role of citizens

While there are clear benefits to increasing citizen and community involvement in public services, the extent to which people are actually willing to get involved is less clear-cut and will depend on a range of factors. Clearly, ‘co-production’ is better suited to some activities than to others (see below).

Central to the debate about citizen and community participation is an understanding of who the public thinks should be responsible for achieving improved outcomes in public services. Interestingly, while our poll found that the public supports moves to give them more control and say in areas such as crime, social care and education (see Table 1), they rarely believe that individuals, families or communities should be *primarily* responsible for delivering these (see Appendix). Indeed, when we asked the public if they believe that ‘individuals today are less willing to take personal responsibility over the issues that affect their own lives’, 76 per cent said they did and only 5 per cent did not.

- Reducing crime: while 82 per cent agreed that individuals and communities should do more to help the police tackle crime and anti-social behaviour, only 3 per cent felt that individuals/families and communities should be most responsible for ensuring that their streets were a safe place to live. In contrast, 93 per cent said that the state (comprising central and local government, and service providers) should be primarily responsible for public safety.
- Education: 41 per cent favour allowing parents to set up schools but only 2 per cent believe that individuals should be most responsible for running local schools, compared with 93 per cent who believe this should be the state’s duty (and here most – 58 per cent – felt that it should be the main responsibility of local councils).
- Caring for the elderly: 66 per cent felt that the state should be most responsible for caring for the elderly compared with 24 per cent who felt this should be left to individuals and families. It is interesting to note that for a home-based service like this, there is greater support for individual and family responsibility. However, when asked who should pay for care for the elderly 85 per cent said the Government or the local council.

In other words, while the public might support proposals for having more of a role in these areas, they still believe that the state should be most responsible for providing services.
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As one might expect, the findings from the poll demonstrate that the public's attitude towards the appropriate balance between state and individual responsibility varies from issue to issue. In addition to the crime, education and caring for the elderly examples given above, the survey also showed that the public believe that the state should take the lead in a number of other areas. Reflecting strong support for the NHS, 94 per cent said that the state should be most responsible for providing health care, compared to just 1per cent who said this should be left to individuals and families.

When it comes to paying for services, as distinct from responsibility for delivering them, the public were also adamant that this should primarily be the responsibility of the state.

- 86 per cent of the public believe that the state should be most responsible for paying for the care needs of elderly people, while 8 per cent think this should be left to individuals and families. When the British Social Attitudes Survey asked this question in 2004, 84 per cent said the Government should be most responsible for paying, suggesting that opinion has stayed the same in the intervening years.
- 72 per cent said that the state should be most responsible for ensuring that people have enough to live on in retirement, whereas 20 per cent said it should be the responsibility of individuals. This question was also asked by the BSA in its 2004 survey, where it found that 58 per cent believed that the Government should be most responsible for ensuring that people have enough to live on in retirement, suggesting that public opinion has strengthened in recent years (British Social Attitudes 2005).

Unsurprisingly, there are some areas where people do put the onus very much on individuals and families, although they tend to be areas where the individual already plays a leading role:

- 81 per cent supported the view that individuals should be most responsible for getting fit.
- 76 per cent said that individuals and families should take most responsibility for improving the behaviour of children.

In other areas opinion was more mixed. While 50 per cent believed that individuals were most responsible for finding a job, 36 per cent felt that the state should lead on this. On recycling – a classic example of individual and community co-production – 38 per cent said individuals should be most responsible, and 58 per cent said the state should take the lead.

Our own research builds on the work of others in this area. A central message that comes out of public surveys is that while there may be support for greater participation in principle, when people are asked if they would personally get more involved, very few actually volunteer. For example, Mori found that while people in London *in principle* supported community partnerships that involved greater participation (82 per cent supported expanding the scheme), they were less likely to personally get involved (26 per cent said they would be interested in getting involved but only 2 per cent actually did). To paraphrase Oscar Wilde, in our increasingly busy lives, there do not appear to be enough evenings for us to be active citizens. The challenge is therefore to convert principled support for citizen engagement into practice.

One of the most extensive and in-depth studies of empowering and involving citizens comes from the evaluation of the New Deal for Communities (NDC) programme. This evaluation distinguishes between 'influence' and 'involvement' and it found that 'influence (rather than active involvement) is what the majority of people want and influence is more related to positive outcomes than involvement' (Ipsos Mori 2008: 4). By this logic, involvement is only positive if people feel they are making a difference. Listening to people and taking account of their views may be more important for improving their perception of services than involving them in producing them. Increased citizen participation must be accompanied by increased feelings of influence if it is to be effective.

The same longitudinal research identified a 'lifecycle' of involvement and influence – people travel through this continuum with peaks, troughs and periods of inactivity. In particular, the research identified the very negative impact of lapsed involvement. This points to the importance of supporting and maintaining citizen participation: 'it is better not to raise expectations of influence at all than to initiate it then let it dissipate' (Ipsos Mori 2008: 5). Supporting citizens to sustain their activity will be essential. In a similar vein, understanding what triggers people to participate at the start of this 'lifecycle of involvement' could be useful in making the most of a community's potential. Strategies will be most effective if they target segments of the population according to their interests and motivations.

Making the best use of the resources held by citizens and communities to improve public services is important. Ultimately we need to give more responsibility back to people. But the evidence suggests that we will have to help them and persuade them to take it.

Questions for further research:

- *When are people willing and able to get involved in producing services?*
- *What triggers people to become involved in producing a service and how can their involvement be enhanced and sustained?*
- *How can people be enabled and encouraged to take a more active role in producing services?*

The changing role of the state

As our survey has shown, the public believe the state should continue to play a major role in our public services. However, a shift to services produced in relationship with citizens will not just require communities to take on more responsibility: it will also require the state to change the way it works.

In particular, increased citizen involvement in services should not be used as cover for the state leaving people to fend for themselves, or putting them in situations for which they are unprepared. To use the example of individual budgets, if people are simply given money and then left to their own devices this can be a disempowering and wholly negative experience. Without a sufficient range of accredited service providers to chose from, people might just spend their money on the same state service provider they would have used before they were given a personal budget. People need clear information about what services are on offer to them and support to make decisions on how to spend their budget. There will also be clear advantages in 'collective purchasing' and mutual support using personal budgets. Building community and citizen capacity therefore requires some support and framework from the state, even if it means a reduced role for it in other areas. The state, in other words, cannot simply devolve responsibility and walk away, as shown in the case study of 'Get Together' below.

Case study: Get Together

In Westminster the council has recognised that tackling social isolation and depression among older people is best done by building relationships between residents. Isolation and depression are better addressed when older people come together and form relationships than when the council provides a one-off health or care programme. It therefore developed Get Together, which links people through telephone conferencing who can then start visiting each other. The direct benefit of the service is realised when citizens contact each other, which the state does not get involved in, but the programme still requires the local council to facilitate and support it (Leadbeater 2009).

In handing power to communities and citizens, the state must also be clear about how it hands down risk and responsibility as well. In many cases, the Government has argued that citizens should not get involved in delivering public goods (often as a result of the public holding government to account when things go wrong). Increasing the number of police checks for adults driving children to extra-curricular activities, or official advice to citizens not to get involved if they see a crime taking place, are all well-meaning attempts to reduce risk, but ones that come at the cost of preventing active citizenship. Enabling citizens and communities to be more involved in producing services will require the state to accept that some risks lie outside its control, and to try to mitigate them where possible.[4]

Co-producing services therefore demands a new relationship between the state and communities, with the state supporting communities to play more of a role and working in partnership with them. It is important to contrast this position with more traditional forms of volunteerism, in which the state simply retreats and leaves civil society to take on the burden without much support.

[4] On a related theme, see the PwC and ippr report *Who's accountable?* (2009), which looks at how to decentralise power and accountability to local bodies.

Questions for further research:

- *How will the role of the state have to change to enable citizens and communities to be more involved in producing services?*
- *How can the state ensure citizens are properly supported when they take a greater role?*
- *How can the risks of increased citizen participation be mitigated and shared?*

The changing role of professionals

Greater community involvement in public services will also require professionals to change the way they work. Doctors, teachers, police officers and other public service professionals are generally trained to deliver services through a paternalistic ‘consumer’ model. As professionals, they are trained to fix a problem and deliver a service to a citizen who is in need of their help. This is not conducive to co-producing services alongside individuals and communities, which will require them to support and enable people to help themselves.

The job of a service professional will no longer simply involve providing a one-off service to a passive recipient. It will increasingly involve building a relationship with the service user, working together with them to identify how to solve a problem, managing the relationships between people and building mutual support systems. As Griffiths *et al* (2009) argue, professionals should see themselves as Sherpas, increasingly looking to provide options and guidance, rather than definitive answers. The examples below demonstrate what the new role of professionals might look like.

Personal Advisers

When boiled down, the traditional model of welfare involved little more than a Department for Social Security employee sat behind a desk, processing paperwork and handing job adverts and benefit payments to the unemployed. This impersonal and bureaucratic approach to supporting the unemployed was ineffective. In an attempt to rectify this, each job seeker is now allocated a Personal Adviser (PA). The role of the PA is not just to provide not only information to the service user, but also advice to help them make decisions. They interview the job seeker and work with them over weeks or months to develop a long-term, tailored programme of support – perhaps including training and work experience as well as job applications. By working together over an extended period, the PA and job seeker can produce much better outcomes than under the traditional model. (McNeil 2009)

Nurse-Family Partnerships

In the United States, the introduction of Nurse-Family Partnerships has fundamentally changed the role of nursing support for vulnerable new mothers. Rather than seeing their role as helping a pregnant mother to successfully give birth and then walking away, nurses regularly meet with new mothers for two years after the baby is born. This allows the nurses to get to know the particular needs of the mother, teaching them basic parenting skills and helping them develop support networks with other new mothers in the area. By changing the nurse's role from simply delivering a one-off service to building a long-term relationship and support network, the mother and child's health are improved, families become more self-sufficient and potential problems with education and crime later in life are mitigated. (www.nursefamilypartnership.org)

While the benefits of shifting professional practice are clear, it will not be easy to achieve. The 'new professionals' will have 'to work in ways that seem, at first sight, opposed to the prevailing culture around them' (nef 2008: 13). Training incoming professionals to work in this way will not be sufficient – there are already millions of people working in public services who will need to be helped to adapt. What is more, training is clearly not enough to enforce such a great cultural change across the professions. Public service staff, and the professional bodies that oversee them, will have to be convinced of the benefits of co-production and given incentives and rewards to work in this way.

Another challenge will be managing the boundaries between the citizen and the professional. A Cabinet Office public attitudes survey shows that while the overwhelming majority of the public (81 per cent) prefer to make choices for themselves rather than having professional experts decide for them, they also greatly value the quality of advice and knowledge of specialist staff (Cabinet Office 2009a: 21). A genuine partnership with professionals is therefore important.

Much can therefore be achieved if professionals change their role from 'fixers' to 'enablers', but such a cultural shift across the professions will not be easy to bring about.

Questions for further research:

- *How do public services professionals need to change to facilitate greater community empowerment?*
- *What can be learnt from those professionals that are leading in this sphere?*
- *What can government do to catalyse this change of culture?*
- *What is the right relationship between professionals and citizens and how should this vary across different services?*

The role of civil society

Motivated and sustained by the energy of volunteers and local activists, and with a long tradition of working collaboratively with communities, civil society has an important job to play in fostering co-production. Historically, the so-called 'third sector' has been the primary proponent of 'co-production', supporting everything from Boy Scouts' 'bob-a-job' initiatives to contemporary 'person-to-agency' time-banking (see nef 2008b). This explains why all the main political parties are keen for third sector groups to play a bigger part in the delivery of public services. Once again, however, we need to be clear about the respective roles of the different actors: civil society will flourish and make the most impact when it works most effectively with communities and government bodies.

This perhaps explains why when asked who should be most responsible for the delivery of a range of services, our survey finds little support for handing primary responsibility to charities or voluntary groups (see Appendix). Indeed, respondents assign most responsibility to such groups in only one area – helping couples with relationship problems. Interestingly, very few (1 per cent) think that community groups should be mainly responsible for running schools, which poses challenges to Conservative aspirations for parents and third sector organisations to start running schools. However, it is important to stress that these findings do not suggest that the public does not believe that civil society has any role to play, simply that they should not be in the lead.

Getting more involved in the direct delivery of the services also raises a number of challenges for third sector organisations. Many community and voluntary groups are by their nature small-scale operators, often catering for niche community needs. They lack the capacity of large bureaucracies that have the resources and processes required to deliver services effectively. If such groups do 'scale up', they risk losing their community-based and volunteer-led character, which may be one of their main assets. A balance needs to be struck between collaboration with public authorities to deliver services and complete 'co-option' of the third sector into the state.

Questions for further research:

- *What is the most appropriate role for civil society – where can it add most value?*
- *What can be learnt from historical and contemporary patterns of third sector involvement in public service delivery?*
- *How does the relationship between the state and the third sector need to change?*

Where can empowered communities make the most difference?

While empowering communities and individuals to produce services can significantly improve outcomes, it is an approach that may be better adopted in some areas of public service provision than in others. It would clearly be impossible and undesirable for criminals to be involved in how they are arrested, or for patients to assist with their own surgery (although there is considerable scope for criminals to be more involved in their sentencing and rehabilitation, and patients in their respite care and recovery). A key challenge when mainstreaming a co-production approach to public service reform will be to identify where it works effectively, where it cannot be so effective, and hence where the biggest improvements can be realised.

The benefits of empowering citizens and communities will be greatest in services that depend on a relationship between the service user and provider. So called 'relational' services include those in early years, education, long-term health conditions, social care, and parenting. Co-production is less appropriate for acute services that require the one-off use of expert knowledge, such as responding to emergencies or conducting surgery on a patient. It is also of less use in 'transactional' services, such as public transport, which do not generally require a relationship between the user and provider in order to be effective (Cabinet Office 2009a: 25).

Co-production should therefore not be seen as a panacea for all services, but simply as an effective tool for some (Griffiths *et al* 2009). Across different service areas there is varying potential for mobilizing the resources of communities and individuals to improve outcomes. The challenge is identifying which areas have the most potential. Problems that are chronic and require attention over the long term, that are complex and involve a number of causes, and that do not have a 'one size fits all' solution, will be those that can be best tackled through empowering citizens and communities to play more of a role (Cabinet Office 2009a: 26).

Questions for further research:

- *Which social problems can best be tackled through co-production?*
- *Which services stand to gain the most from involving individuals and communities more?*
- *Which problems and services do not stand to gain from co-production?*

Conclusion

At its heart community empowerment is about developing a new set of relationships between citizens, the state, service providers and actors in civil society. It is a demanding agenda since it requires citizens and public services to change the way they engage with each other. However, the benefits are considerable and policy-makers need to understand how the barriers to advancing this agenda, as outlined in this paper, can be overcome. This joint PwC/ippr research project is intended to contribute to this debate.

Capable Communities: Project details

This project will examine the potential of greater community participation in the production of public goods, such as safer communities, healthier people and better schools, as well as exploring how the barriers to greater co-production can be overcome. It will suggest ways to redesign the way services are delivered and set out new models for citizen and community participation which will unlock the realistic potential for the 'co-production' of services. And it will consider which services hold out the greatest potential for such transformation.

This project aims to address three key questions:

- What role can/will individuals, families and communities play in designing and delivering public services?
- How can citizens be enabled to take this role?
- What does this mean for public spending and the configuration of services?

To answer these we will undertake an in-depth study of current practice in two case study areas, engaging with local professionals and citizens and exploring the prospects for advancing this agenda with those working on the frontline.

We would be very interested in hearing from practitioners and other experts who would be willing to discuss this work with us. For this and further information about the project please contact us.

About PricewaterhouseCoopers

PricewaterhouseCoopers' Government & Public Sector practice has been helping government and public sector organisations locally, regionally, nationally and internationally for many years. We work with organisations across sectors as diverse as health, education, transport, home affairs, criminal justice, local government, housing, social welfare, defence and international development.

Our people combine deep specialist expertise with a genuine understanding of the public sector. Our Government and Public sector practice now comprises of approximately 1,300 people, over half of whom people work in our consulting business, with the remainder in assurance and tax.

This project forms part of our Forward Thinking programme which provides a platform for new thinking by bringing together politicians, policy makers and shapers, market experts and practitioners to share knowledge and provide new insight on the most pressing challenges being faced in the public sector today and in the future. For more information please visit our Public Sector Research Centre at: **www.psrc-pwc.com**

About ippr

The Institute for Public Policy Research is the UK's leading progressive think tank, producing cutting-edge research and innovative policy ideas for a just, democratic and sustainable world.

Since 1988, we have been at the forefront of progressive debate and policymaking in the UK. Through our independent research and analysis we define new agendas for change and provide practical solutions to challenges across the full range of public policy issues.

With offices in both London and Newcastle, we ensure our outlook is as broad-based as possible, while our Global Change programme extends our partnerships and influence beyond the UK, giving us a truly world-class reputation for high quality research.

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Appendix

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Research

PwC and ippr commissioned a short set of survey questions to help inform our *Capable Communities* project. We were interested in seeing who the public believes should be most responsible for a range of activities, as well as what support exists for a number of measures designed to give citizens a greater role in public services. The results are provided in the tables below.

These results are based on on-line interviews with a nationally representative sample of 2,019 adults conducted by Opinium Research between the 8th and 11th of January 2010.

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%

Responses to opinions about responsibility	Parents and communities should be able to set up new state-funded schools in their local area		Individuals and communities should do more to help the police cut anti-social behaviour and crime		Government should allocate budgets to individuals which they can use to buy in their own personal and social care in old age		Today individuals are less willing to take personal responsibility over the issues that affect their own lives	
Strongly agree	11%	41% agree	32%	82% agree	21%	54% agree	36%	76% agree
Agree	30%		50%		33%		40%	
Neither agree nor disagree	32%		12%		27%		15%	
Disagree	13%	19% disagree	2%	3% disagree	8%	12% disagree	4%	5% disagree
Strongly disagree	7%		1%		4%		1%	
Don’t know	7%		2%		7%		4%	

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