



# Seizing the Moment

Building Local Bridges to the Future

Joan Munro and Ian Burbidge

# Acknowledgments

## **About the authors**

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# REALISING



# CHANGE

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We unite people and ideas to resolve  
the challenges of our time.

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**We define our ambitions as:**

## **Our vision**

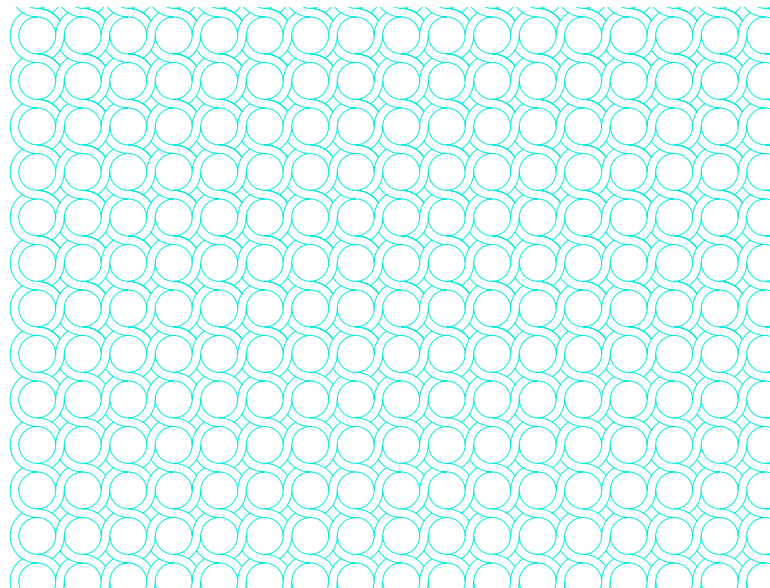
**A world where everyone is able to participate in creating a better future.**

## **Our purpose**

**Uniting people and ideas to resolve the challenges of our time.**

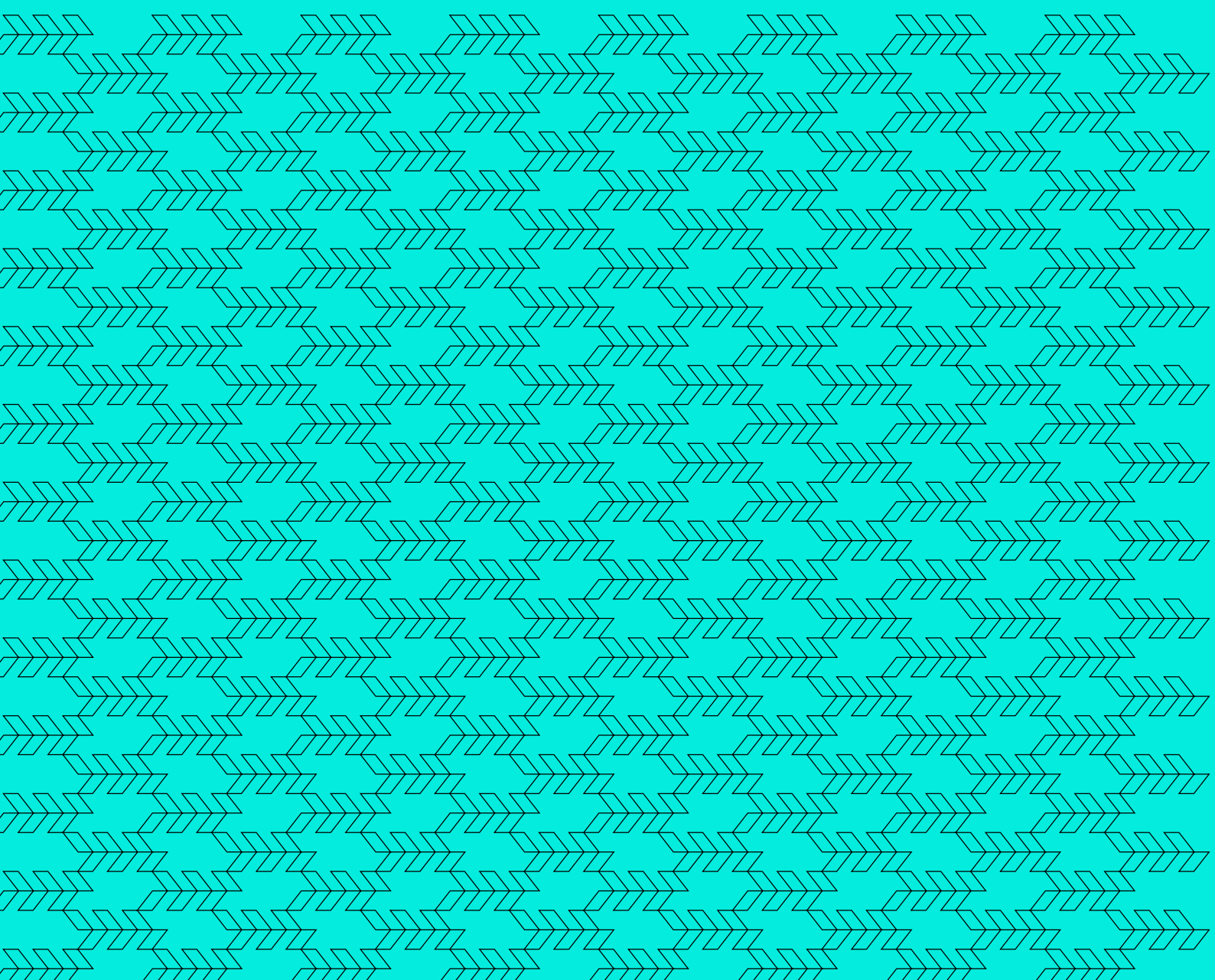
## **We are**

**A global community of proactive problem solvers.**



**Local government has stepped up in the wake of Covid-19** despite a decade of financial emasculation. A key lesson is that chronic underfunding has eroded slack in the system. Slack is essential; it is not waste, it enables resilience.

**Ian Burbidge, associate director, RSA**



**D**espite a decade of financial emasculation, local government has stepped up in the wake of Covid-19. Those of us who have ever worked in local government never doubted it would, despite resourcing and capacity already being stretched thin. Not only does local government tend to attract people who want to support others and help to make their communities better places to live in, but employees tend to be vested in their local communities as residents.

When you live somewhere and work on behalf of local people, business and communities, you step up, regardless of sector. It is why our sense of place and belonging is important to many of us. This social capital builds on that which arises naturally from the solidarity of knowing that we are all in this pandemic together. It manifests as a desire to respond effectively without regard for job descriptions or working hours or all the old trappings of hierarchical management. Into the most fluid and emergent of situations must arise an emergent and fluid response.

This is what we found in those places we reached out to for this research. A range of local authority chief executives and their counterparts from key local organisations paint a picture of significantly enhanced local working, of transformative practice, accelerated by the pandemic, and of flexible responses to local conditions. Of course, challenges remain, not least of which is the largely dysfunctional central/local government dynamic and the inadequacy of funding over the last decade.

One of the key lessons that Covid-19 should be teaching us is that chronic national underfunding and the resultant efficiency-drive for financial survival has not only eroded any slack in the system but has left people and communities more vulnerable than ever to the kind of shock that Covid is delivering. By reducing investment in prevention and raising the

bar at which support becomes available we are creating a perfect storm. A participant in a recent NHS workshop I ran expressed their concern that we are not talking about other pandemics: mental health, undiagnosed disease, children's development, health inequalities and so on.

Slack in the system is not waste, it enables resilience, and it is crucial. It offers respite when things are not quite so crazy; it enables us to absorb the regular shocks we face; it ensures our services can be high quality. An A&E department can cope with a major incident, but not continuously, night after night after night, when other incidents layer on top. We can work at a high intensity when we need to, but such levels are not sustainable. We all need a calmer period after an intense period. Such capacity is not there to be identified and cut-out by bean-counters and down-sizers, though this is what has happened. Such reductive thinking must be replaced by a systems perspective if we are to resource for resilience.

Whilst the fragility of our systems is being laid bare, the knock-on effect is that society's resilience will surely be tested. We now head into what has all the makings of a long, emotionally challenging winter. Resilience of our communities, already stretched by the impact of the pandemic and attendant loss of normality, of employment, of life. Resilience of our institutions, stretched over the last eight months to a point of brittleness in terms of funding and revenue, operations, staff well-being. Resilience of people, of individuals, living with protracted uncertainty and stress, deprived of many of the usual support mechanisms and aspects of self-care that we might usually rely on when times are tough.

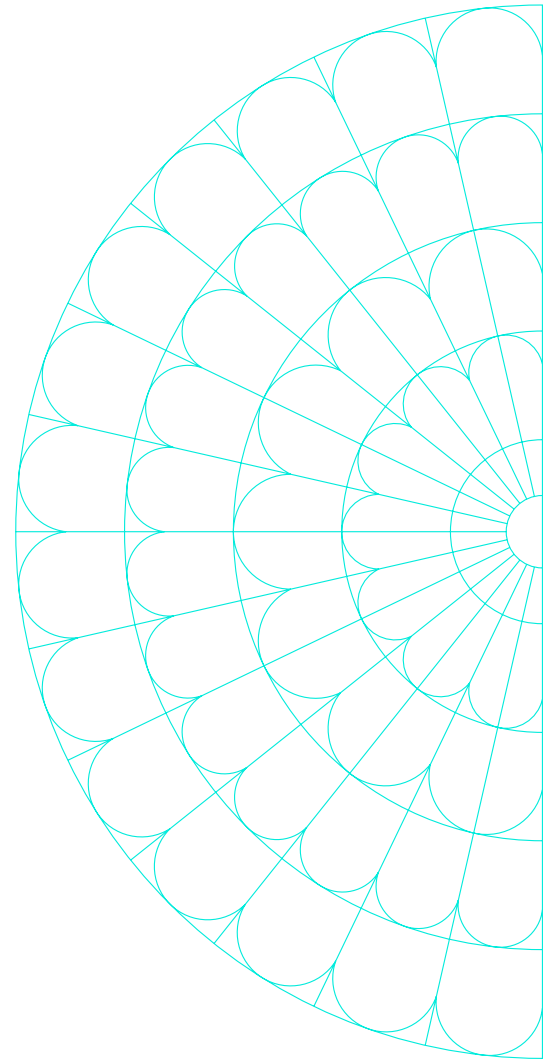
Perhaps communities will demand the opportunity for just such a debate at an appropriate point in the future; this is certainly something that has been called for in sessions I have run with communities



using the future change framework I developed earlier in the pandemic.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, this framework, in turn, forms the structure for the interviews that comprise this report, posing questions around the changes that have been made and the actions that might follow: the temporary crisis response, the innovations that show promise, the obsolete practice to let go of.

Are our leaders flexible enough and equipped with the skills to navigate such uncertainty and complexity, the competencies required by persons of tomorrow? It is apparent from this set of interviews that many of those operating at the local level do indeed have them. They are responding in ways that are not prescribed because they are facing situations that have not arisen before. They know linear approaches and reductionist thinking are not fit for this purpose. A post-linear world needs leaders like those we spoke to in this report.

**Ian Burbidge, associate director,  
RSA**



<sup>1</sup> Burbidge, I (2020) How to create real, lasting change after Covid. RSA Blog. Available at [www.thersa.org/blog/2020/04/change-covid19-response](http://www.thersa.org/blog/2020/04/change-covid19-response)



# SUMMARY

# EXECUTIVE

**We explored the extent to which local public sector leaders see the Covid-19 crisis and its repercussions as an opportunity to fundamentally change the way their services operate.** We found that the relationships between leaders had been greatly strengthened and that there was a huge interest in using the moment to rethink the way that public services operate.

## Executive summary

**T**o what extent do local public sector leaders see the Covid crisis and its repercussions as an opportunity to fundamentally change the way their services operate? Over the last few weeks we have been exploring this question with a range of UK council chief executives and their key public sector partners. In doing so we have built on previous work we have undertaken around innovation and partnership working across public services.<sup>2</sup> We framed our interviews using the future change framework that has proven to be helpful for those trying to make sense of the Covid response and the opportunities for change that might arise.<sup>3</sup>

### Findings

Universally the people we talked to were proud of what had been achieved locally in the initial phase of the crisis. Most reported significant changes had already been made in the way their organisations operated, and how they collaborated with partners: other public services, community and voluntary organisations, arts bodies and businesses.

In many locations public service transformation had taken a major leap forward. In some, completely new ways of working were being adopted. Most had shared data much more; fully embraced digital approaches; taken bold initiatives; engaged their workforces and worked across sub-regions.

### Future implications

Everywhere relationships between local public sector leaders had been strengthened, providing a much more solid foundation for collaborative innovation. There was a huge interest in using this moment to rethink the way public services operate, individually and together.

Most were committed to working more closely together to address the critical issues that the virus has exposed or exacerbated, particularly the impact of poverty, inequality, health and race. Many were developing cross sector plans to address the repercussions of the pandemic, including the recession, and youth unemployment. And most were collaborating around climate change.

The key elements of this new approach included: adopting a place-based approach; formalising the new connections; integrating services; developing evidence-based strategies and investing in longer term ones; exploiting digital technology; working with and through community groups, volunteers and citizens.

### Challenges

Some local leaders were highly optimistic about the possibilities for making more substantial changes to the way their services operate. However, a number were not convinced that all the potential opportunities would be fully realised because of the many challenges that might inhibit success.

Most said that the national context was unhelpful, particularly the way that governments behaved. They also cited many future uncertainties, financial pressures and fatigue, as well as people who want to return to the past. Some

2 Munro, J; Robson, J; Burbidge, I (2017) Transforming together: leading for people and place. RSA research report

3 Burbidge, I (2020) How to create real, lasting change after Covid. RSA Blog. Available at: [www.thersa.org/blog/2020/04/change-covid19-response](http://www.thersa.org/blog/2020/04/change-covid19-response)

also raised the difficulties caused by other bodies' different organisational cultures, priorities and performance regimes. And, in several areas, leaders were wrestling with complex public sector structures, looming elections, or other specific local circumstances.

## Key leadership actions

The interviewees highlighted a number of key leadership actions as contributing to achieving cross public sector innovations. These included: nurturing relationships with partners; making time to reflect, analyse and think creatively together; taking a systems approach; agreeing clear objectives; ensuring local politicians are centrally involved; being brave and bold, challenging and persuasive; fostering the right organisational cultures; developing the right workforces and encouraging leadership at all levels.

## Conclusion

Despite all the challenges, the crisis appears to have heightened the appetite of local public sector leaders for making fundamental changes to the way their services operate individually and together. Nearly everywhere the relationships between these local leaders have been strengthened, providing a robust foundation for collaborative innovation.

National governments, particularly the UK government, could do much more to encourage and support local cross public sector collaboration. They could adopt a cross-cutting systemic approach nationally, provide an integrated national performance framework, increase the incentives for local collaborative innovation and devolve much more power at regional and local levels.

If both national and local leaders seize this moment, local public services would be much better placed to play their full part in addressing the Covid crisis and its repercussions, and in tackling the UK's

critical 21st century social challenges.

## Recommendations

### **For governments**

- Adopt a cross-cutting systems approach to addressing the UK's critical 21st century social challenges.
- Provide a coherent light touch national performance framework for local public services that reflects the above.
- Incentivise and encourage local cross-public sector collaboration much more and reflect this across national government.
- Devolve much more power to regional and local levels.

### **For local public sector leaders**

Continue to:

- Build strong positive relationships with each other.
- Work closely together on common issues, taking time to reflect, learn and analyse issues together, employing a systems approach.
- Agree clear, joint long-term ambitions and evidence-based strategies, supported by local politicians.
- Draw in other relevant local stakeholders such as voluntary and community groups, educational institutions, arts organisations, and businesses.
- Develop organisational cultures that support collaboration, including recruiting and developing the right workforces, and encouraging leadership at all levels.
- Work positively with national governments, offering them solutions, and being explicit about what they need to do, do more of, or stop doing to enhance local public sector systems.

# INTRODUCTION

**Universally leaders were proud of what they had achieved** in the first six months of the crisis. Most had already made significant changes in the way their organisations operated, and how they collaborated with partners. Everywhere there was huge interest in using this moment to rethink how local public services operate, individually and together.

# Introduction

**T**o what extent do local public sector leaders see the Covid crisis and its repercussions as an opportunity to fundamentally change the way their services operate? Over the last few weeks we have been exploring this question with a range of UK council chief executives and their key public sector partners.

We framed our interviews using the future change framework that has proved helpful for those trying to make sense of the Covid response and the opportunities for change that might arise.<sup>4</sup> Through it practitioners are invited to track what’s changing and what the most appropriate next actions might be.

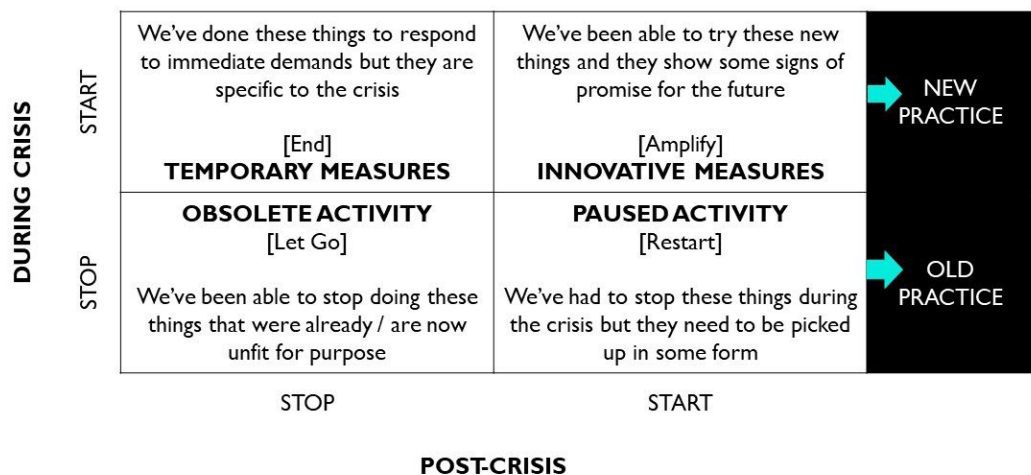
We spoke to 10 council chief executives and the key partners they nominated: five senior police officers, four senior health leaders, two voluntary sector leaders, one university principal and one theatre director.

Universally the people we talked to were proud of what had been achieved locally in the first six months of the crisis. Most reported that significant changes had already been made in the way their organisations operated, and how they collaborated with partners — other public services, as well as community and voluntary organisations, arts bodies and businesses.

Everywhere there was a huge interest in using this moment to rethink the way public services operate, individually and together. For example, BJ Harrington, Essex Police’s chief constable declared: “We have

**Figure 1:** The RSA’s future change framework

## Future change framework



<sup>3</sup> Burbidge, I (2020) How to Create real, lasting change after Covid. RSA Blog. Available at: [www.thersa.org/blog/2020/04/change-covid19-response](http://www.thersa.org/blog/2020/04/change-covid19-response)

## Introduction

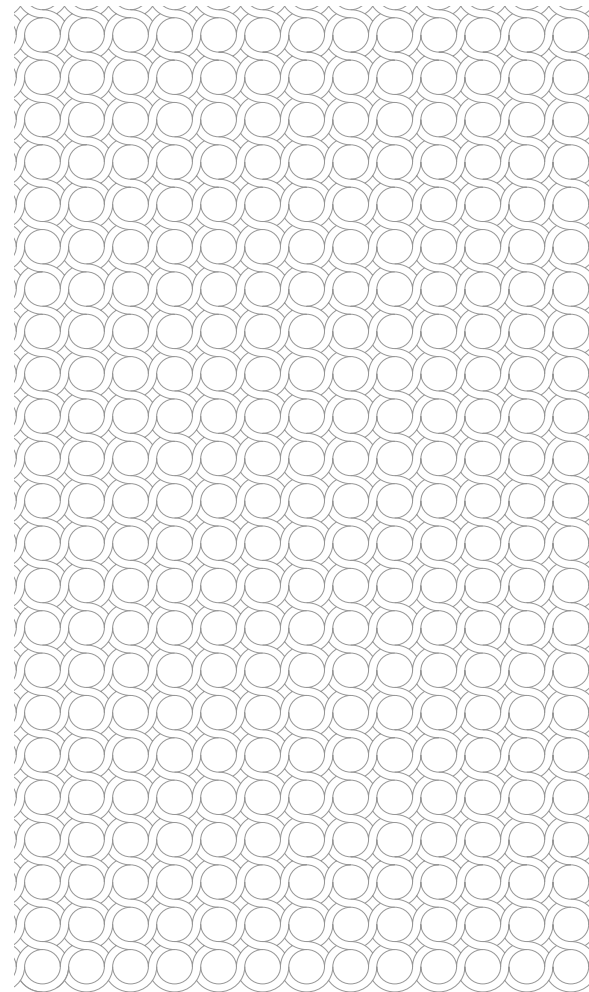
got to make sure the new normal, the way we work, will be different.” And Andrew Kerr, Edinburgh council’s chief executive asserted: “We need to keep thinking about what our future is going to be shaped like and look like before we rush back to what was.”

In many areas public service transformation plans have taken a major leap forward. As Professor Craig Harris, managing director of Wigan’s Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), reported: “Before we were quite restricted by organisational boundaries, and the history of how health was created. Covid has almost blown that away, allowed us to rewrite, focus on what Wigan needs.” Or as Kamran Rashid, a voluntary sector chief executive in Bradford said: “There will be significant changes. There is a recognition that local authority alone is not in a position to deliver services to communities without the collaboration other public services and, more importantly, the voluntary and community sector.”

In some areas completely new ways of working are being adopted. As Hounslow council’s chief executive, Niall Bolger declared: “We are rethinking public services across boundaries. It’s rebooted our ambition. We could easily be in the tactical, but we are in the strategic.”

Some local leaders were highly optimistic about the possibilities for making more substantial changes to the way public services operate locally in the future. However, because of the many challenges, others were less convinced that all the opportunities would be fully realised. For example, Bradford’s Institute for Health Research’s Professor John Wright responded: “The crisis has created a rare opportunity — maybe the first in modern history. The issue is how can we make the most of it? How do we avoid slipping back into old habits?” And Police Scotland’s deputy chief constable, Will Kerr, observed: “I’m worried we won’t maximise

change because a range of other pressures will intrude, not least funding challenges that make organisations very introspective. Change requires conscious design, as well as willingness.”



**WAVE  
OF THE  
CRISIS**

**ACHIEVE-  
MENTS IN  
THE FIRST**

**Local public sector leaders have built much stronger relationships with each other, rapidly transformed services, maximised digital approaches, shared data much more, worked closely with voluntary and community groups, and engaged their workforces.**



## Achievements in the first wave of the crisis

**A**lmost everyone was upbeat about how well the crisis had been handled in their locations, and the benefits that had flowed from that success. The main achievements discussed by interviewees are outlined below.

### Building much stronger cross public service relationships

Nearly everyone described the way relationships between public sector leaders had been enhanced by the crisis. Almost all said that being forced to work closely together locally had increased mutual understanding and trust, providing a strong foundation for future collaborative innovations.

For example, Edinburgh University's principal professor Peter Mathieson explained: "The city council's chief executive and I and the police and the NHS and the other universities in Edinburgh already had good communication mechanisms. In the last few months they have got better. We are all in this as a city. It is really strong and really empowering. And that is one of the silver linings that will come out of this." And Brent council's chief executive Carolyn Downs said: "We've worked absolutely brilliantly with our health partners because we have had a common purpose."

### Transforming services at an extraordinary pace

Numerous examples were provided of new ways of operating created at breakneck speed. For example, in Gwent partners created a prototype digital track and trace service in 24 hours, contributing to Monmouthshire's current success rate of reaching over 90 percent of positive

cases and their contacts within a day. In Bradford partners created five locality central hubs and 50 linked community sites within a week. They also established their own testing site for the care sector over a weekend. In Essex the plan had been to gradually adopt video enabled justice over a three year period. Because of the crisis it happened "almost instantaneously." And in Wigan most GP practices switched to operating digitally within a week.

### Working closely with voluntary and community groups

Everywhere councils and their partners have worked closely with voluntary and community groups. As Surrey county council's chief executive Joanna Killian related: "It has been the most compellingly brilliant experience working with communities where they have set up their own systems to support vulnerable people."

Gavin Jones, the county council's chief executive recounted similar experiences in Essex. "One of the big successes is how we have been able to move quickly around things like shielding by connecting with voluntary groups and local community volunteers. We created a whole new service from scratch manned by hundreds of volunteers in a very short time scale. That has empowered us to realise how much we can do quickly if we set the right environment with volunteers."

And North West London CCG's health and care partnership director, Juliet Brown, extolled the benefits of engaging a range of people in joint problem solving. "We ran a workshop on zoom about digital exclusion. That was a phenomenal success. We had 97 people from the voluntary sector, from health, from the council and from local residents. It really demonstrated that when you bring the variety of people together, and research, and lived experiences, and professionalism you get a much better solutions."

### **Involving diverse organisations**

Many councils have involved a range of organisations in planning how to address the Covid crisis and the longer-term repercussions. For example, in Hounslow the council has involved many different organisations in planning the borough's recovery. As chief executive, Niall Bolger related: "At our borough conference on the recovery plan we had universities, we had Heathrow Airport, we had major developers, community representatives, people from the Greater London Authority, the Centre for London, thinktanks, and so on. A huge coalition. Doing work together in a very innovative and creative way, in really quick order. And coming up with meaningful, deliverable, realistic and ambitious programmes for change."

In Bradford local employers like Morrisons, local engineering firms and local Asian food businesses were all involved in working with the council and other public sector bodies in addressing the crisis. Some local firms contributed practical help, such as making masks. As the council's chief executive explained: "We were breaking down the barriers that say they are private sector, we are voluntary sector. We are all of this place, with a commitment to this place, and we can all bring different things to it."

One of her partners, the CCG's Helen Hirst, was initially surprised about the breadth of the gold command group. "I thought blooming heck! It was enormous - but it was a great group. It brought everybody together on an equal footing. It put the voluntary and community sector in there as equals. It brought businesses, it brought communities and faith organisations, it brought housing, university, police, and fire. All round the table, all united around a very clear objective - to minimise the impact of Covid on our population."

In Leeds the council's chief executive Tom Riordan explained: "The collaborative nature of the city is very powerful, and it's a sort of soft power that we have had in place for a while. And when you manage to deliver things with people and then they want to get more involved. We have a lot of people who want to work with us these days." For example, James Brining, the Playhouse's artistic director sits on the outbreak control group. "Already because of the crisis, as theatre people we have had much more contact across sectors, information sharing, working collaboratively, mutual support, and making sure that narrative is coherent. Much more joined up, tackling key city issues together."

### **Sharing data much more**

In most areas there has been much greater sharing of the data held by different agencies to help to pinpoint and target services.

For example, Bradford council established a Covid scientific advisory group with clinicians, academics and practitioners which systematically studied the impact of the virus quantitatively and qualitatively. As chief executive, Kersten England recounted: "It meant we were a step ahead of the government mostly in understanding vulnerabilities in our districts, and particular communities."

And Police Scotland's Will Kerr observed: "Sharing data seems like a tactical issues but it's got strategic importance. Before the pandemic we were all institutionally fixated on GDPR and why GDPR didn't allow us to share data and information. Whereas the last six months have shown us that GDPR is more permissive than most people realise. It shown us that we can and we should, particularly as to how we protect vulnerable people."

### Maximising digital approaches

Everyone we spoke to enthused about the critical role of digital technology. As Monmouthshire council's chief executive Paul Matthews commented: "Commercially Microsoft have played a blinder with Teams. Public service UK is now on Teams pretty much. It's not just great for calls. The real power is in the analytics, and in the SharePoint online and the communities you can create around that."

Many leaders highlighted the way technology is changing service provision. For example, Surrey county council's chief executive Joanna Killian explained: "There has been a fundamental shift already in terms of some of what we do. The application of digital technologies has made it possible to have a different interaction with looked after children, and older people. Which is compelling and something we have got to hang onto. We have been able to see more children, in a more timely fashion. We are achieving better."

Essex council's Gavin Jones recounted how they were using the internet to communicate with local residents. "Every village in Essex has got a local Facebook group. We've been working with the administrators of those sites on a whole series of public health programmes. It's been stunningly successful. We have been able to reach far more people through those channels that we ever could through the more traditional channels." Similarly, with 140 languages spoken locally, Bradford made extensive use of WhatsApp groups to communicate with local residents in their own languages.

### Being bold, taking the initiative

Many leaders discussed the way they had moved forward decisively, spurred on and supported by their partners, as well as their understanding of their locality. For example, Bradford council spent £10m buying PPE equipment from China on behalf of the West Yorkshire consortium

of authorities. As chief executive Kersten England explained: "What drove that was a sense of responsibility for place and willingness to think about what will achieve the outcome, not just passively waiting to be told what to do."

In Wigan, chief executive Alison McKenzie-Folan described the council "putting squads of our own staff into care homes to keep them going, to prop them up." And in Monmouthshire the council's Paul Matthews declared: "We have been prepared to take very local decisions. Based on a deep understanding of the place. We had the absolute confidence to do what we felt to be right, rather than what others felt to be right, because we had the support of our partners."

### Accelerating transformation

Many interviewees discussed how the crisis had dramatically speeded up the implementation of their transformation plans. For example, Bradford council's Kersten England explained: "The crisis has renewed the push for things we were trying to achieve before Covid. It's forced us to move ahead on things we had been talking about but were not working on as effectively." And Kim Shutler, chief executive of The Cellar Trust, a local voluntary organisation, added: "There was already an ambition to work very differently across public services and the voluntary and community sector pre-Covid, and we already had well established partnerships. The pandemic has given an opportunity to accelerate some of this further." And in Wigan, the CCG's Professor Craig Harris stated: "We put our foot on the accelerator with stuff that we were already doing."

### Taking a fresh approach

In some areas old plans were being abandoned and completely new ways of operating embraced. As Surrey council's Joanna Killian enthused: "We are tearing

## Achievements in the first wave of the crisis

stuff up: proposals we had a year ago. Now it's about how do we do more co-design with our residents and partners. Now there is the technology, the behaviours and more than anything the confidence to do some radical stuff."

In Hounslow the council's Niall Bolger explained: "The crisis has caused us to completely rethink our community engagement involvement, completely reconfigure the way we engage with vulnerable people, really look at our digital offer, integrate our services around a model called community solutions which is really rethinking public services within neighbourhoods."

In Edinburgh the council has decided to make dramatic changes to its plans. As Andrew Kerr recounted: "We are restructuring the council on the basis of the lessons we have learnt. We will have a much less departmentally-based, hierarchically-based structure. What has worked best is multi-disciplinary local teams based on the needs of the public. We will have more project-based and programme-based working."

Edinburgh university's Professor Mathieson told a similar story. "The crisis changes everything. It has caused us to call into question everything we do. Some of the things that we were forced to do were things that we probably should have been doing anyway. External events have accelerated and shaped some of our activities."

### **Engaging the workforce**

Almost everyone talked about how well their workforces had responded to the crisis. For example, Hounslow council's Niall Bolger, declared: "You have seen the public service ethos in spades. Staff going mile after mile in the service of very vulnerable people. It has been extraordinary; a call to arms. It has been extraordinarily humbling to see it. And this is a moment when we need to capture it."

And Monmouthshire council's Paul Matthews described: "Talking to 2,500 colleagues in March I said 'our time is now. If you can't do your job then we will find you another job. We cannot opt out. Our time, our call, a test for vocational public services.'"

Bradford district and Craven CCG's chief officer, Helen Hirst referred to staff taking on completely new roles. "Many of us have stepped out of what you would traditionally expect us to do. So, in the CCG we are running local testing. It's a bit of an odd thing for a CCG, but it's been quite good for people to experience something different and show we can turn our hand to other things."

### **Working across sub-regions**

In many areas authorities and their partners did far more with others on a sub-regional basis. For example, the North West London councils had little history of working together, but during the crisis many new bonds were formed. As the local CCGs' partnership lead Juliet Brown describes: "They have realised there is a benefit in working together across North West London. For example, on care homes they didn't want to take admissions of people from hospital in case they had Covid so they set up a halfway house together. A real demonstration of the benefit of coming together."

# FUTURE

# PRIORITIES

**The crisis and its repercussions have prompted many local leaders to rethink their priorities.** Most are now paying much more attention to addressing poverty, health inequalities and racial injustices. All are taking action to address the rising economic issues, including creating more routes into employment for young people. And most are increasing their efforts around climate change.

## Future priorities

**T**he crisis, and its repercussions, is causing many leaders to rethink their future ambitions and priorities, with the issues outlined below attracting much more attention than in the past.

### Addressing issues of poverty, inequality and race

In many areas issues around poverty, race and inequality have been brought to the fore. As Wigan CCG's Professor Craig Harris observed: "The crisis has highlighted a larger inequality gap. It's pushing us to work on inclusivity at scale and pace. No more navel-gazing we need to really drive the equality agenda home." In Bradford public sector leaders are creating a new commission to look at social justice, equality and diversity, chaired by a university professor.

And in Brent council's Carolyn Downs explained: "We have been talking about health inequalities for years. So many people have died in Brent. How do we get communities to take more control over these issues, rather than clinicians, social workers and so on?" One of the options being considered is placing community champions and advocates in GP's surgeries to work on wellbeing issues. In addition, during the crisis the council funded poorer families installation and running costs for WiFi. They also put funds into the local Credit Unit to prevent so many people going to loan sharks. And their recent Poverty Commission has put forward many recommendations for action.

### Addressing local economic issues

All the councils and their partners were developing and implementing local economic recovery plans, taking a range of approaches appropriate to the issues and opportunities in their particular settings.

For example, Belfast council has established both an Innovation and

Inclusive Growth Commission and a City Deal partnership. Both involve local public sector organisations, as well as business organisations and businesses. As the council's chief executive Suzanne Wylie explained: "The City Deal is focusing on research and development, innovation, digital investment and longer-term tourism. It involves real money, real projects. So it has become a catalyst for so many other things. This isn't just a project, it is actually something that will create an innovation research and development ecosystem. It's a very joined up approach."

In several areas, such as Wigan, North West London and Leeds, councils and their health partners aim to contribute to "community wealth building" by rethinking the way they recruit staff, as well as the way they purchase services. As Leeds council's Tom Riordan explained: "We have this anchor institutions programme that works with the hospital trust, the universities, some businesses, and other public sector partners to look at the economic impact of their own activities, as major employers and procurers of services. Some have doubled the amount of local suppliers that they have, and the hospital trust is taking on a large number of new staff from the very deprived area locally that they are based in." And in Brent most of the workers in the outsourced home care services are women from the local Somali community. The council is looking at how it might support them so that they would be in a position to bid for contracts themselves in the future.

### Addressing climate change

In many areas, leaders were planning to do much more on the green agenda. Many were intending to create more cycling and walking routes, often turning temporary measures into permanent ones, as well as making much more use of electronic vehicles.



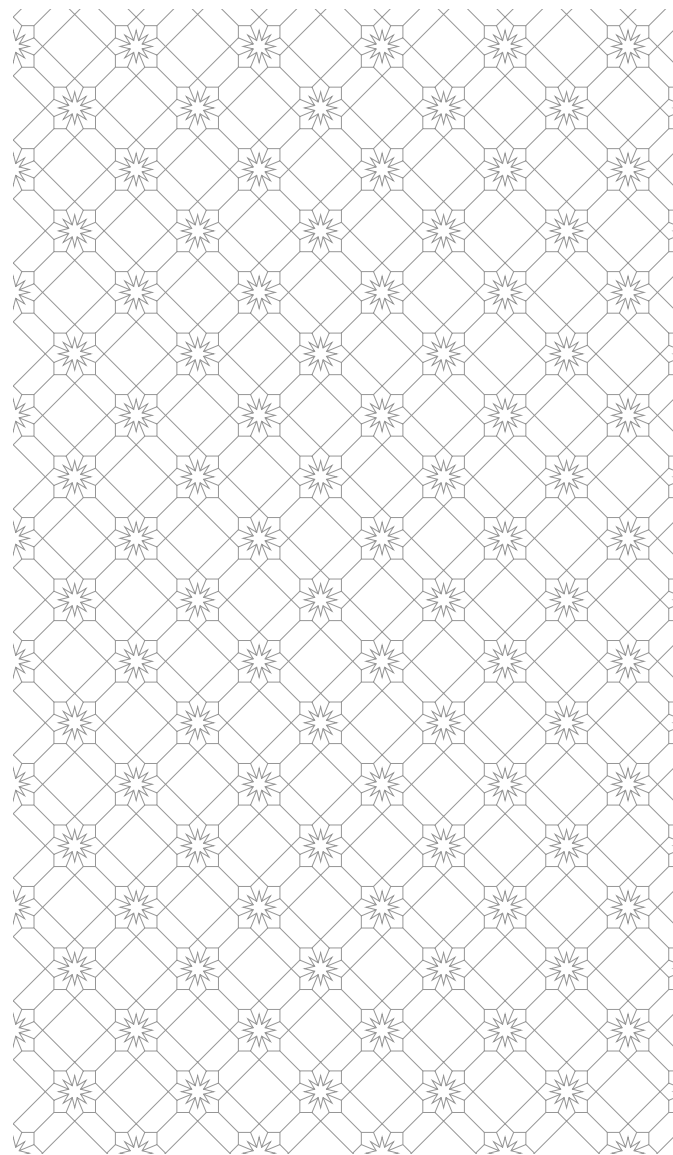
Belfast council has created a Climate Commission, working with Queen's and Ulster Universities. Edinburgh council has done the same, funded by the UK government and Climate-KIC. They also aim to reduce the carbon footprint of everything they do, using a new tool developed by Edinburgh University. And they are moving to locality working, so that most staff will be able to work from an office within a 20 minute walk from where they live. Hounslow council is setting up green enterprise zone, working with local enterprises, other public services and universities. They are also working with councils across London on creating a much bigger green economy.

### **Offering positive opportunities to young people**

Several leaders particularly emphasised the importance of supporting local younger people in finding employment. For example, Wigan council's Alison McKenzie-Folan explained: "There's the potential for a lost generation of younger people. So we are working with schools, wrapping our services around school, and looking at what more we can do more on apprenticeships and trainees."

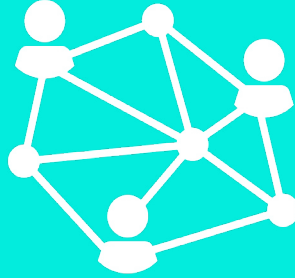
Gwent Police's chief superintendent, Ian Roberts, also discussed the importance of this: "We need to make sure that kids who are vulnerable are taken care of in the proper way. We need to make sure that they are actively engaged in education, because if they are not it is far too easy for them to fall into gang culture and deal drugs."

And Essex council's Gavin Jones highlighted this as a key priority: "What are we doing to trying to bring young people into employment? What are we doing about injecting new skills so that we can change the dynamic? We know unemployment and skills retraining are massive things now: even more relevant than they were before. Understanding who is becoming increasingly disadvantaged and how to deal with it."





**The key elements include** taking a place-based approach, formalising new connections made in the crisis and developing evidence-based joint strategies.



# Key elements of the new approach

## Key element of the new approach

**T**he key elements of the leaders' new approach are outlined below.

### Taking a place-based approach

Many leaders emphasised the importance of responding to the particular characteristics of a locality. As Bradford council's Kersten England declared: "The culture of different places is different. You have to work with the DNA, the particular characteristics and strengths of particular places. You need place leadership, bringing together the assets and capabilities of the place: understand what have you got in a place and how can you use it." And as Simon Byrne, Northern Ireland's chief constable explained: "Definitely for Northern Ireland a one size fits all approach will not work. There is a community context. Belfast is a big conurbation and the issues of mobility and deprivation are different here to maybe in the border of South Armagh."

### Building on the strong personal relationships established in the crisis

Everywhere public sector leaders were determined to continue to work closely together to address shared issues, building on the strong relationships that had been forged in the crisis.

As Gwent Police's Ian Roberts declared: "Covid is a relatively short-term challenge. Then there's the recession and climate change. We are in this for life. There is a new set of challenges to think about and we cannot afford to lose the strength in our partnerships that have been developed over the last few months."

Similarly, Edinburgh University's Professor Mathieson commented: "We will eventually arrive at a world where not everything is dominated by Covid, and we will have

learnt some important lessons. We will have made some service improvements and some operational improvements because of this joined up philosophy."

And North West London CCGs' Juliet Brown added: "We all know that the biggest influence on health outcomes comes from outside the health sector; 60 to 70 percent comes from outside. So if we are going to be a health service rather than a sickness service we have to get a lot more joined up."

### Formalising the new connections

Several leaders commented on the need to formalise the connections built in the crisis without killing them. As Surrey council's Joanna Killian put it: "The organic stuff that has happened — how do you stick all that in place so that we don't have a reversal into old ways, old patterns?"

Bradford council's Kersten England stressed the importance of creating a formal "architecture" to encompass and formalise all the new collaborative connections. She reflected: "I'm redesigning a local strategic partnership. I'm trying to do that now with a renewed 'esprit de corps' and a greater willingness to work beyond the confines of institutions." Similarly, North West London CCGs' Juliet Brown commented: "In the crisis people have been nimble, but we do need some governance around it. We need to show how decisions are made. But we don't need the huge bureaucratic oil tanker that takes four months to agree things."

### Developing evidence-based joint strategies

Universally there was a strong commitment to sharing more data, analysing it together and using it to target and evaluate joint strategies. As Essex council's Gavin Jones commented: "Data analytics is important. We have built quite a lot in Essex around predictive analytics, which has been helping us a lot with much more targeted preventive interventions.

## Key elements of the new approach

And that has become much more valued. And we will be bringing more partners on board. That will grow in its importance over time and will be quite a game-changer in moving our responses to being proactive.”

In Monmouthshire, data proved extremely valuable in tackling their February floods, allowing public services to identify those in need of the most urgent support. Now many partners including councils, the police, the fire service and Welsh Water are involved in building a common data platform. As Gwent Police’s Ian Roberts declared: “We are going to stop being so precious about data. There is a huge value in combining our data.”

Kamran Rashid, chief executive of Bradford’s Impact Hub raised the importance of collecting data carefully: “Data sharing needs to be thought out properly. It needs to be ethical. We need to make sure that people are not being made vulnerable as a result of their data being collected. But we need to address health inequalities and data is vital to help with targeted interventions.”

### **Investing in longer term strategies**

Many spoke of the importance of not just focusing on addressing immediate and medium-term issues, but of using this moment to agree long-term ambitions. For example, Professor John Wright stressed the importance of intervening early to gain long-term benefits. “Our ‘Born in Bradford’ research is showing that physical and mental health is being shaped right from pregnancy and early years. It’s a critical window for targeting help. Ill health in people’s 70s and 80s goes back to those early years. So we need to focus on children as a real source of change.”

Gwent Police’s Ian Roberts talked about the importance of police services not just reacting to immediate issues, but working with partners to address the root causes of the problems. “The police are typically

a break fix organisation, we encounter a problem, we take some action. Now we want to focus on prevention and early intervention. For example, our Early Action Together initiative. It’s about prevention and early intervention; focusing on families and young children. Preventing adverse childhood experiences, mental health problems, substance abuse, addressing social problems and employment prospects.”

Professor Mathieson of Edinburgh University agreed: “We have all spent so much of our time fire-fighting, responding to some change in circumstances. Collectively we have got to raise our eyes a bit and look at the more distant horizon.”

### **Integrating services**

It was widely recognised that many more services should be integrated around residents’ needs. As Hounslow council’s Niall Bolger remarked: “Integration with health needs to be further, deeper and faster.” North West London CCG’s Juliet Brown agreed. “How do we care for our residents that need both health and social care input? Some that health fund is free at the point of delivery, some local authorities fund, and some self-fund. Instead of putting our energy into fighting about who should pay, we need to put our energy into looking at getting best value for all our residents.”

Others emphasised the way that the voluntary sector can play into an integrated system. For example, Bradford voluntary sector’s Kim Shutler explained: “In my world of mental health we have already driven forward some brilliant innovation. We have some excellent examples of collaboration between the voluntary and community sector, the local authority, the clinical commissioning group, the acute hospitals, and the mental health trust. We want to move away from the traditional commissioner/provider conversations to one of true partnership, where we act as one team.”

### **Making the most of digital technology**

Everyone was committed to continuing to make much more use of digital technology and to realise the opportunities it offered. For example, Surrey council's Joanna Killian explained: "My hope is that we co-design services that are founded on artificial intelligence and really strong digital platforms, virtual relationships that are as fulfilling as having a social worker in your room, or a housing officer in your flat. That enables more frequent contact and quicker diagnostics of problems. So we can predict more when things are going to go wrong and have intense human interventions with the people that need it most. It will finally enable us to put very specialist resource where we need it most, and give others a good sustainable offer."

Gwent Police's Ian Roberts was a whole-hearted convert to digital approaches. "We shouldn't underestimate the power of this technology we are now using. We can now do things in a much slicker way." And Belfast council has appointed a digital innovation commissioner for the city.

Brent council's Carolyn Downs pointed out the benefits for cross-regional working, and the time it saved travelling to meetings. "Collaboration has been strong because the technology has enabled it. Now there are meetings of all the local health leaders across North West London every two weeks when we only used to talk once a year."

### **Continuing to work with and through community groups, volunteers and citizens**

All the council chief executives and many other public sector leaders were determined to build on the positive relationships that had been developed with voluntary and community organisations and with volunteers. Many stressed the

importance of taking a respectful approach to community and voluntary groups, and with volunteers, being enabling and facilitative, rather than directive.

As Monmouthshire council's Paul Matthews explained: "The core of our response has not been about public agencies, it's been about enabling the 60 Covid groups that were there before we asked them to form. And my goal over the next 12 months is to make sure they are still there, they are still doing things."

Edinburgh council's Andrew Kerr agreed: "My relationship with the third sector has got much better. Probably they would run services better in the future than we can. We need to have dialogue with them; they would resist being dictated to by local authorities and government."

Several health service leaders highlighted the importance of working with local citizens. For example, Professor John Wright argued: "We have got to really engage with our constituents, the public, our community - it's the end of the patriarchal 'we will do this'. Communities know what the solutions are. People are wise." And Bradford district and Craven CCG's Helen Hirst commented: "One of the things that Covid did was that rallying of communities. It demonstrated that you don't always need statutory services. They step in when that community infrastructure is not there, or to help that community infrastructure pull itself together."

# CHALLENGES

**One major challenge is the national context.** In addition to poorly handling the crisis, the UK government's command and control approach frustrates the local systems approaches necessary to tackle future crises.

## Challenges

**M**ost interviewees referred to the many challenges and obstacles that might prevent full realisation of the opportunities that the crisis had generated. The main issues they raised are outlined below.

### The national context

Many interviewees were critical of the way that the UK government had handled the pandemic. As Bradford council's Kersten England put it: "The longer this goes on the more it reveals the lack of real coherent policy or strategic approach by government to address the crisis. This is a national moment. We need to have a proper conversation. What are we as a nation? What are our responsibilities? How do we discharge them?"

Another said: "It has been utter chaos, the level of ineptitude has been breath-taking. If citizens knew..." And a third observed: "The government will make these sweeping statements and directions and national imperatives. But they are not at a local level working through it, translating it, dealing with it. Their expectation is that we have said what we want, you get on and do it."

Many felt that the UK and national governments could do much more to both deal with the ongoing crisis effectively, and, to incentivise and support more public sector innovation and a locality-based approach.

For example, Leeds council's Tom Riordan argued that Whitehall's command and control approach was likely to thwart and frustrate the local whole systems leadership necessary to tackle the UK's major future issues. He argued that the current balance of power between the UK government and local public services is completely unfit for purpose. "The 21st

century challenges facing us like inequalities, climate change, diversity, and cohesion require a whole system and a whole place approach. Whitehall just seems incapable of acting collectively in a way that we can at a local level."

Several raised the lack of coordination between government departments. As a police chief commented: "This public health approach requires joining up across housing, education, health and home office. That lack of joined up understanding of what can be achieved through a whole systems approach is a real challenge and a risk." And a council chief executive remarked: "In central government the health agenda and the local government agenda are not in the slightest bit aligned."

Others were worried that governments and regulators would restart their rigid controls and performance measures and other demands that would again constrain them from moving fast, flexibly and appropriately in responding to local conditions. As Monmouthshire council's Paul Matthews put it: "It's been a joy to be able to do anything, to act in the moment. In my world, in government circles I can already see that things are slowing down, returning to normal. Things that would take five minutes are now taking five days, sometimes two weeks."

One council chief executive suggested that the government's perceived ineptitude might provide an opportunity for local government. "It can be very depressing to think about the limiting factors, the limits of government, it is sapping sometimes, but we are getting some traction now and we have got to crack on with it. We can give them solutions. If we play it correctly it is an opportunity to consolidate that worth that has been invested in us by the prime minister during the pandemic."

Others suggested that the crisis could provide an opportunity to establish a much healthier national-local partnerships. For

example, Leeds council's Tom Riordan commented: "I think Whitehall had a crash course in economic geography over the last few months, and maybe better understands where different parts of the country are now. And we need to use that. There are some fantastic people in Whitehall, the best brains in many ways, but we have got to put them to better use, get them out of SWI. Build a much stronger, more powerful partnership of equals between local and national government. That's a big prize, if we did that we would be better all round, the country would be better."

### Financial pressures

The lack of public sector funds, after a decade of austerity, and with ever increasing public pressures was a major concern. As one said: "The local state has been hollowed out in many areas of the country." Many expected that the recession and the public sector debt would mean that they would be expected to make even more savings.

Many councils had major gaps in the current year's budget as a result of extra expenditure combined with the loss of income. Others were concerned about potential bankruptcy in the longer term because of the reduction of business rates income.

Health services were facing the challenge of addressing the backlog of operations that had been postponed during the first wave of the crisis. And some mentioned the lack of funds to invest in developing major cost saving long-term innovations, including the frustration of those with annualised budgets. For example, Simon Byrne, Northern Ireland's chief constable observed: "We all run on an annual allocation from the government. We can't carry reserves, we can't borrow. It disincentivises that long-term planning. It is almost status quo maintenance."

And in traditionally Labour voting areas some leaders felt that they were unlikely to benefit from the government's 'levelling up' agenda. As one commented: "We have large black, Asian and Romanian communities who are really seriously poor. People in government don't really care about those communities because they don't vote for them."

### Fatigue

Almost everyone described how tired people were, and how that was likely to be exacerbated by the second wave. One speculated that many senior people in public services might decide the time had come to retire, so considerable experience would be lost. Another wondered if community organisations and volunteers would maintain the same level of effort through the winter.

### Too many uncertainties

Many leaders felt that the many future uncertainties made it more difficult to make ambitious plans for innovation. These included the impact of the second wave of the virus combined with the flu and winter weather; the recession, Brexit, climate change, and the outcome of the UK government's Comprehensive Spending Review.

### People who want to return to the past

Many leaders described the challenge of convincing everyone of the benefits of organising public services differently in the future: staff, local residents and local politicians. For example, Essex Police's BJ Harrington observed: "The danger is that we revert back to what we had before. Because it's familiar, it's comfortable. But equally, we can't keep operating in an emergency mode. There is a balance there, but you can't reset it completely. In the longer term the danger is that we don't capitalise on it." And Edinburgh council's



Andrew Kerr remarked: “People often want to go back to a safer pace. Innovation is happening at a pace that people are not comfortable with.”

### **Different organisational cultures and priorities**

Some leaders referred to tensions between different public sector organisations because of their different organisational cultures, drivers, and priorities.

For example, in some areas council leaders were frustrated by the way that the NHS was nationally directed, rather than able to respond flexibly to local circumstances. On the other hand, some health leaders complained about the enormous efforts they had to make to deal with each council’s different policies and concerns separately. As one explained: “Place is everything to local government. health is much more centrally controlled. We take direction and local government pushes against national direction. We are governed centrally, that is given. But Covid has meant that health has understood that the borough is really important, the unit of focus is now the borough.”

Some health service leaders were also critical of aspects of local government’s policy making. For example, Professor John Wright of Bradford’s Institute for Health Research commented: “We need knowledge and evidence. This isn’t just going to be bungling along, let’s have a go at this, let’s try this. We need a scientific approach. The health service does try to be very evidence-based about what it does. I’m not sure if that is true in local government.”

Although the differences could be difficult to work through there was clearly a benefit if partnerships drew on the strengths of the different partners. For example, Essex Police’s BJ Harrington explained how the police’s modus operandi had contributed to helping other partners

move more swiftly in dealing with the crisis. “In policing we operate best in crisis. It’s our biggest strength and our greatest weakness. Making decisions in relatively high-risk situations with limited information scenarios is a comfortable operating place for us. I remember having a discussion with chief executives at the end of March and saying ‘we need to work together to get us all out of committee mode and into emergency mode.’”

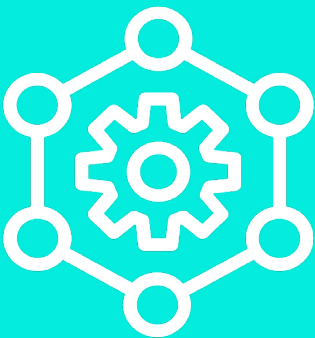
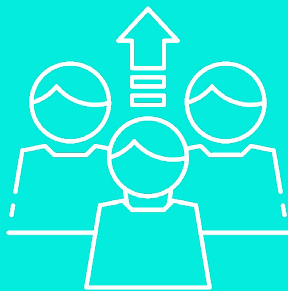
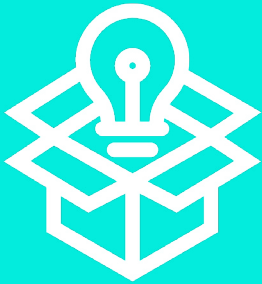
### **The complexity of some public sector structures**

In a number of places leaders were concerned that public sector structures and accountabilities were extremely complex. In some locations leaders reported difficulties in dealing with so many different local government and other public sector bodies, each with their own priorities and concerns. In these settings some also commented that there was too much ‘tribalism’ with senior managers and local politicians defending their organisations rather than contributing more positively to system wide initiatives.

And in Northern Ireland public services face a number of complex local issues, including different political parties controlling different ministries, and many services being provided by quangos or arms-length bodies.

**Interviewees highlighted the key leadership actions that help to achieve cross public sector innovation.**

These included taking a systems approach, agreeing clear objectives and priorities and making time to think and reflect creatively together.



# Key leadership actions

## Key leadership actions

**L**eaders recommended a number of key leadership actions that they thought would contribute to achieving more future cross-public sector innovations.

### Continuing to nurture relationships with partners

Many discussed the importance of continuing to nurture and grow the relationships with partners. For example, Bradford district and Craven CCG's Helen Hirst felt strongly that leaders needed to capitalise on the good will that had been established. "In the next few months we need to put energy and effort into the relationships that we have established. Keeping them going is really important. And embedding them into how we work round here." Essex Police's BJ Harrington echoed her sentiments: "Keep the relationships and the frank dialogue. And be willing to challenge each other - that's important."

### Making time to reflect and think creatively together

Several leaders advocated the importance of reflecting and learning. Essex council's Gavin Jones commented: "I am incredibly committed to deep learning. And in the next few months I am pushing my system to really look back and understand. What did we really do well? Why were we able to move things so quickly? What problems did we have, and how were they handled?" Similarly, Police Scotland's Will Kerr stressed the importance of reflecting. "In the heat of the crisis everyone is so busy. We need to find time to reflect. Design in time, and bring together senior public leaders."

A number discussed the importance of taking a creative approach to addressing issues. For example, Wigan CCG's Professor Craig Harris observed: "There is no handbook for this now. You are rewriting history as you go. There's got to be a degree of flexibility in the approach. Thinking outside of the box, rather than ticking the box." And Leeds Playhouse's James Brining argued: "We need to think creatively about how we address social challenges in a cross-sectoral way, rather than the expectation that the council deals with it. A whole range of different interventions using culture and creativity could have a positive effect on the life of the city."

### Taking a systems approach

Many interviewees emphasised the importance of leaders taking a systems approach, rather than focusing on their organisations and their traditional roles. As Professor John Wright Bradford's director of research put it: "Increasingly we recognise we live in complex systems which have unintended consequences, amplifications and tipping points. And it's that combination of approaches from across the system, whether it is housing, education, transport or health, that we hope will lead to this tipping point."

Bradford district and Craven CCG's Helen Hirst recommended thinking about resources as system resources, not the resources of individual agencies. And Edinburgh University's Professor Mathieson stressed: "The important thing is the commonality no matter which part of the civic structure they are responsible for leading." Similarly, Wigan CCG's Professor Craig Harris argued that: "Leaders need to not just talk systems talk, but walk systems walk. People need to think people and place and not services. You really need to be working in collaboration, in partnership, sharing your assets."

## Key leadership actions

And North West London CCG's Juliet Brown stressed the importance of leaders thinking and behaving differently: "Recognition that you have a responsibility to your organisation but also for the organisation to be successful. Increasingly you need the system to be successful. So you need to be part of defining what that system needs to do, what is the framework that is helpful, why do we need to come together, and bring in the other players that will enable you to get there?"

### **Agreeing clear objectives and priorities**

Several interviewees commented on how the Covid crisis had given partners a clear focus to unite around, and now it was important to unite around clear shared ambitions. Belfast council's Suzanne Wylie, felt that their economic partnerships had got better at doing that. "We have become much more discerning and focused in terms of what we can actually deliver. We have had to bang our heads together. So, in the economy, what sectors are we really going to focus on?"

Monmouthshire council's Paul Matthews stressed the critical difference that clear objectives made: "We can achieve anything if we have the clarity of what we are fighting for." And Gavin Jones of Essex council agreed: "We need to be clear about what our really important priorities are. Not just restart everything in the same way that we did before. The game has changed."

### **Ensuring local politicians are centrally involved**

Many interviewees discussed the importance of ensuring local politicians were fully involved in developing and implementing future ambitions for transforming local public services.

In some areas, because of the speed at which decisions were being taken, it was suggested that politicians had felt sidelined. However, in other areas politicians

had been centrally involved. For example, in Hounslow, Niall Bolger recounted: "I put a lot of energy into briefing members. During the peak we were sending out a briefing to members every day. I talked to the leader of the council every day. We met the Cabinet once a week. We had group meetings. I did weekly briefings for the opposition group."

Going forward everyone agreed that members must be centrally involved in key decisions. For example, North West London CCG's Juliet Brown said: "We can't leave our politicians behind. Every four to six weeks we meet with every council chief executive and every political leader as a group. We recognise that not everyone might agree. But as long as we can take things to them for a debate, and they can input to them, and we can work to certain principles, it is the right forum to develop these relationships and to develop policy together."

### **Being brave and bold, challenging and persuasive**

Many interviewees stressed that this was a moment for bravery, for taking difficult decisions, for taking more carefully considered risks, as well as for persuading others to embrace more radical solutions.

As Edinburgh University's Professor Mathieson put it: "Leaders need to take responsibility, they need to take risks, they need to be prepared to communicate." And Jane Harwood, who was previously a chief officer with Surrey Police, commented: "Leaders need to be bold, and they need to be resolute." Bradford district and Craven CCG's Helen Hirst agreed: "You have got to be bold. Focus on your local population and you won't go far wrong. If it gets you into bother up the line, so be it. You will never be in trouble for doing the right thing." And Bradford's Professor John Wright highlighted that some leaders are going to have to advocate unpopular policies, such as having less cars to reduce air pollution.

The recommendation for leaders to be brave included being frank and upfront with partners. For example, one chief executive commented: "One or two organisations were not pulling their weight, so we called them out. Partnership is not about friendship, it is about more than that. It is about the ability to ask the right questions and to hold people to account for delivery."

### **Fostering the right organisational cultures**

Many leaders discussed the importance of having the right organisational cultures for the future. For example, Hounslow council has completely refreshed their values framework and their organisational development strategy, as well as reshaping their offer to communities.

In Bradford the partners have adopted the joint philosophy of 'act as one', as the CCG's Helen Hirst explained: "The public sector resources are the resources of the population, not the organisation's resources. We act as one in our decision making. We act as one in the way we approach and tackle our problems. It is a mindset that we are one."

Wigan council's Alison McKenzie-Folan stressed the importance of being future focused: "It's about looking forward with creativity and imagination. Lots of people are looking backwards with nostalgia at the moment." Wigan has also been promoting a philosophy of 'being kind', encouraging people to listen to each other, as part of healing the many current divisions in society. "We need to challenge the culture across the country of what's right and wrong, you and me, them and us. The divisive nature of society. We're promoting tolerance and debate and discussion and understanding, rather than right and wrong culture."

In Scotland the police's Will Kerr highlighted the benefits of their partnership focused mission. "Other police services have a very enforcement-based mission. Here parliamentarians decided to include responsibility for 'the safety and wellbeing of people, places and communities'. It's unique to Scotland. That builds itself into the cultural DNA of the organisation. So, I found it a lot more culturally and structurally conducive to partnership and collaborative working here."

### **Developing the right workforces**

Almost all the interviewees emphasised the importance of attracting and developing the right workforces to enable them to achieve their future ambitions.

As Wigan council's Alison McKenzie-Folan explained: "Leaders need to concentrate on getting the right culture, getting the right people. Promote and find enough good people in the council. Help them do their jobs as best they can."

Many leaders talked about the importance of allowing their workforce to continue to operate in the way they had done in the crisis. For example, Hounslow council's Niall Bolger stated: "We have released our workforce to do good. This has been a call to arms for people to stretch. Through the community solutions model I'm not going to be putting people who can do brilliant things back in a box. We want to create the opportunities for them to do more good. We want to liberate them further." And Monmouthshire council's Paul Matthews agreed: "I've seen the environment created that allowed people to stand up. I've seen the emergence of leadership. We've seen more people become comfortable with uncertainty and imprecise data."

Others talked about the importance of leaders ensuring their workforce understood what new ways of working

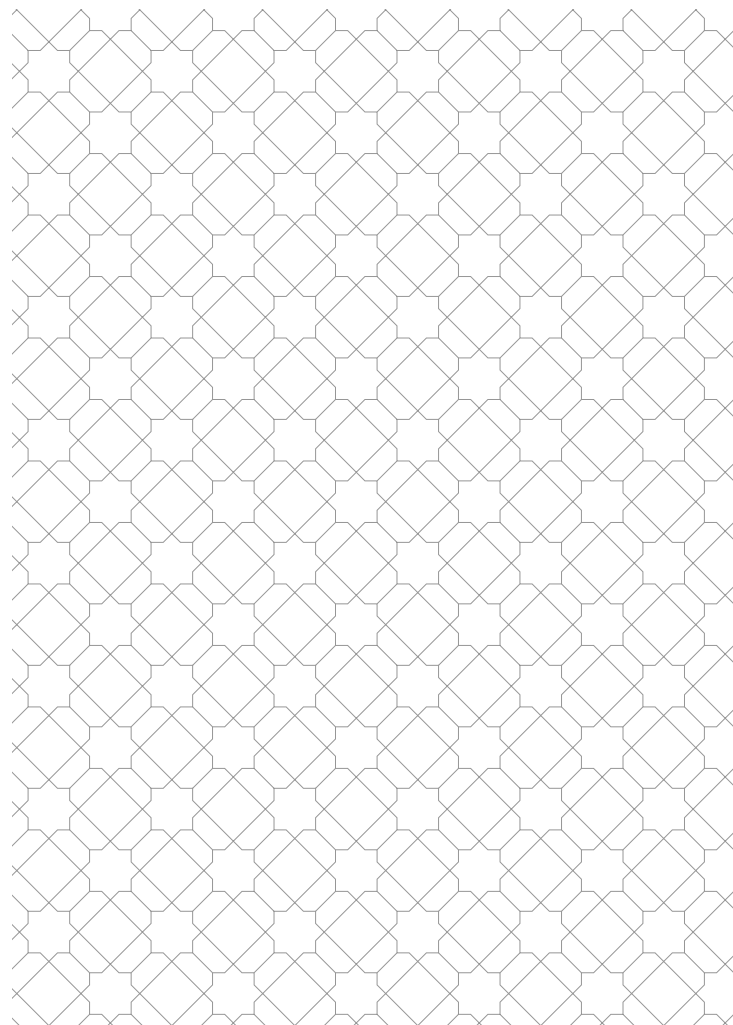
## Key leadership actions

were expected of them. For example, North West London CCGs' Juliet Brown said: "To get people coming together it has to come at every level in the organisation. So it happens with front-line staff working collectively around the resident, but it also comes from setting the direction and the culture and the importance of that. Making the time for it, leading by example, helping to move some of the bureaucracy away."

Essex Police's BJ Harrington stressed the need to be a role model. "If staff see at the top of organisations, leaders making compromises, reaching agreements, moving forward, that empowers, enables, allows those below to do the same things. And we have got to reach into our organisations and make the changes happen."

### **Encouraging leadership at all levels**

Many interviewees talked about the importance of encouraging leadership across the system, not just at the top of organisations. As Monmouthshire council's Paul Matthews put it: "It is leadership rather than leaders. Leadership involves thousands." Hounslow's Niall Bolger agreed: "I genuinely believe leadership happens across organisations and in different and unexpected places."



# THINGS WE WILL STOP DOING

**To have enough time and resources to develop new ways of working, organisations need to stop doing things that have little value.**



**C**ouncil chief executives were asked what they were going to stop doing to create the time and resources for innovation. In response many highlighted the importance of taking fresh approaches, particularly being braver as well as challenging assumptions and traditional practices.

For example, Monmouthshire's Paul Matthews said: "Organisations like mine will not be waiting for permission to do things. Local government confidence is high. Local government is about to become much more demanding for more delegation of powers and resources. So that is not so much what we are going to stop doing but it is a different set of expectations that will come from confidence."

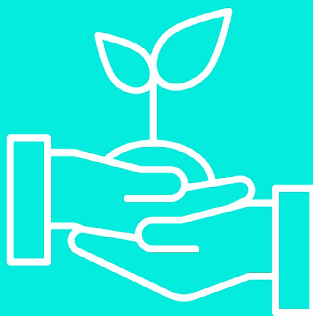
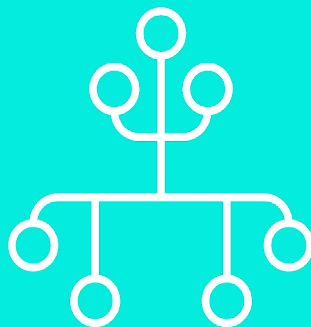
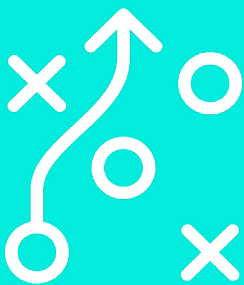
Similarly, Essex's Gavin Jones recommended more risk taking. "So much of people's time is spent being anxious about actions and covering one's backside. We need to be able to lead in ambiguity." And Surrey's Joanna Killian suggested abandoning lots of previous practices. "We should stop assuming that everyone wants to face-to-face contact. Stop assuming that certain groups in society can't use technology. Stop pretending that professionals are always good at service design. Stop investing in big technology buys."



**Stop assuming that everyone wants face to face contact. Stop assuming that certain groups in society can't use technology.**

**Joanna Killian** , chief executive, Surrey county council

**Despite all of the challenges that Covid-19 has presented,** there is an increased appetite for fundamental change in how local public services operate. Local and national leaders must seize the moment to ensure local public services can play their full part in addressing the UK's 21st century social, economic and environmental challenges.



# Conclusions

## CONCLUSIONS

In 2017 the RSA conducted research on the key leadership actions that help to achieve cross public sector innovations, including interviewing leaders from some of the locations in this study: Surrey, Wigan and Monmouthshire.<sup>5</sup> In 2019 the study sites were revisited to see what progress they had made and what they had learnt.<sup>6</sup> The findings were summarised in the 'transforming together framework'.

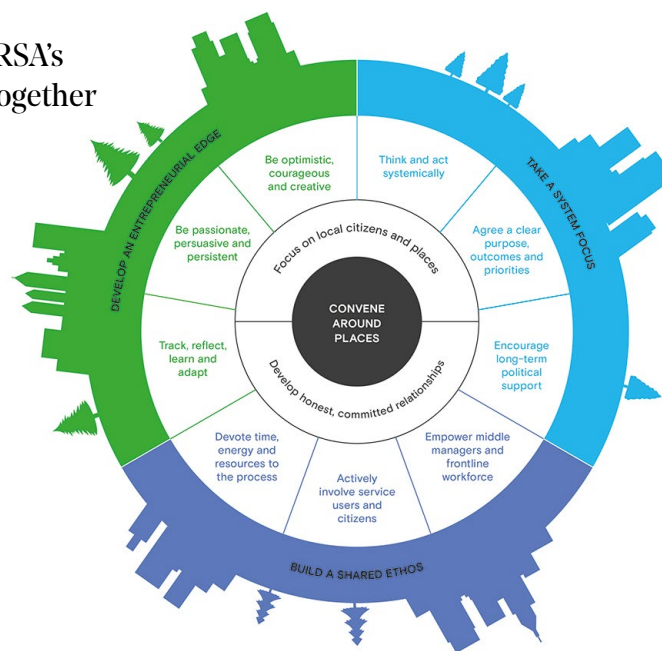
This latest study confirmed the importance of the key leadership actions highlighted in the framework. For example, it reinforced the central importance of a focus on local citizens and place, and of strong trusting relationships between the key partners. It also supported the need for a courageous and systemic approach, clear objectives, long-term political support, learning and adaptation and engaging middle managers and the workforce.

Almost all the local public sector leaders were buoyed by their success in dealing with the first wave of Covid. Most reported that they had either accelerated their previous transformation intentions, or that the crisis had enabled completely fresh approaches.

Despite all the challenges, the crisis appears to have heightened the appetite for making fundamental changes to the way local public services operate individually and together. Nearly everywhere the relationships between local public sector leaders have been strengthened, providing a robust foundation for more collaborative innovation.

National governments, particularly the UK government, could do much more to encourage and support local cross-public sector collaboration. They could adopt a cross-cutting systemic approach, provide an integrated national performance framework, increase the incentives for local collaborative innovation and devolve much more power to regional and local levels.

**Figure 2:** The RSA's transforming together framework



- 5 Munro, J, Burbidge, I and Robson, J (2017). Transforming together: Leading for people and place. Available at: [www.thersa.org/reports/transforming-together-leading-for-people-and-place](http://www.thersa.org/reports/transforming-together-leading-for-people-and-place)
- 6 Munro, J. (2020). Lessons for leading local cross public sector innovations. RSA blog. Available at: [www.thersa.org/blog/2020/03/innovation-leadership-partnership](http://www.thersa.org/blog/2020/03/innovation-leadership-partnership)

If both national and local leaders seize this moment, local public services would be much better placed to play their full part in addressing the Covid crisis and its repercussion, and in tackling the UK's other critical 21st century social challenges.

## Recommendations

### **For governments**

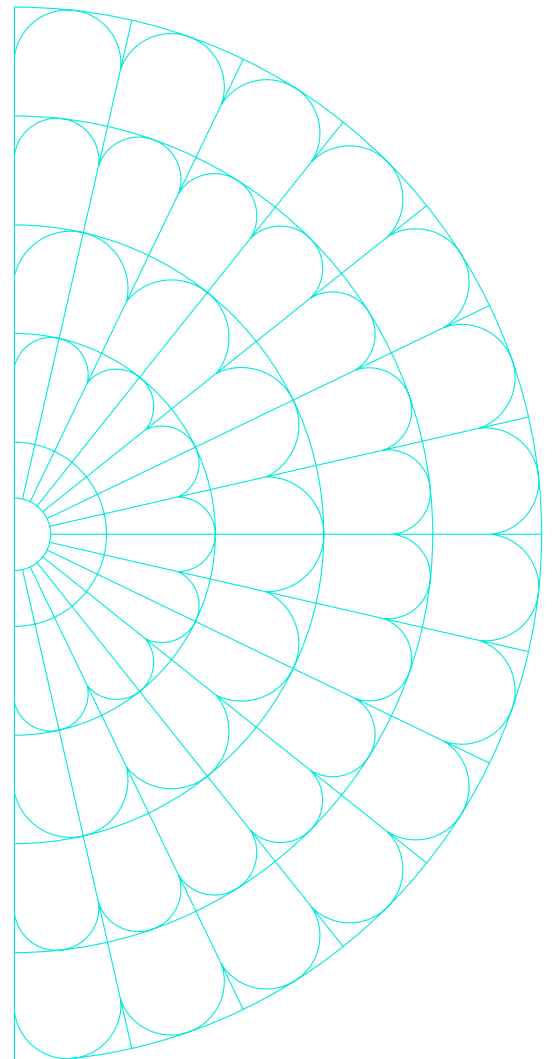
- Adopt a cross cutting systems approach to addressing the UK's critical 21st century social challenges.
- Provide a coherent light touch national performance framework for local public services that reflects the above.
- Incentivise and encourage local cross public sector collaboration much more and reflect this across national government too.
- Devolve much more power to regional and local levels.

### **For local public sector leaders**

Continue to:

- Build strong positive relationships with each other.
- Work closely together on common issues, taking time to reflect, learn and analysis issues together, employing a systems approach.
- Agree clear joint long-term ambitions and evidence-based strategies, supported by local politicians.
- Draw in other relevant local stakeholders such as voluntary and community groups, educational institutions, arts organisations, and businesses.

- Develop organisational cultures that support collaboration, including recruiting and developing the right workforces, and encouraging leadership at all levels.
- Work positively with national governments, offering them solutions, and being explicit about what they need to do, do more, or stop doing to enhance local public sector systems.



## Interviewees

The council chief executives invited to contribute to this study were selected to represent a range of different geographical and political settings across the UK. All of them lead larger councils: county councils or metropolitan authorities. Each council chief executive was invited to recommend a key partner to interview.

We are extremely grateful to everyone who made time in their busy schedules to contribute to this research.

Niall Bolger, chief executive, Hounslow council

James Brining, director, Leeds Playhouse Theatre

Juliet Brown, health and care partnership director, North West London Collaboration of Clinical Commissioning Groups

Simon Byrne, chief constable, Police Service of Northern Ireland

Carolyn Downs, chief executive, Brent council

Kersten England, chief executive, Bradford council

Jane Harwood, previously a chief officer with Surrey police

BJ Harrington, chief constable, Essex police

Professor Craig Harris, managing director, Wigan Clinical Commissioning Group

Helen Hirst, chief officer, Bradford district and Craven Clinical Commissioning Group

Gavin Jones, chief executive, Essex county council

Andrew Kerr, chief executive, City of Edinburgh council

William Kerr, deputy chief constable, Police Scotland

Joanna Killian, chief executive, Surrey county council

Alison McKenzie-Folan, chief executive, Wigan council

Professor Peter Mathieson, principal and vice chancellor, University of Edinburgh

Paul Matthews, chief executive, Monmouthshire county council

Kamran Rashid, chief executive, Bradford Impact Hub

Tom Riordan, chief executive, Leeds council

Ian Roberts, chief superintendent, Gwent police

Kim Shutler, chief executive, The Cellar Trust, Bradford

Professor John Wright, director of research, Bradford Institute for Health Research

Suzanne Wylie, chief executive, Belfast council.

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