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Northumbria University
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# Exploring the new world:

## Practical insights for funding, commissioning and managing in complexity

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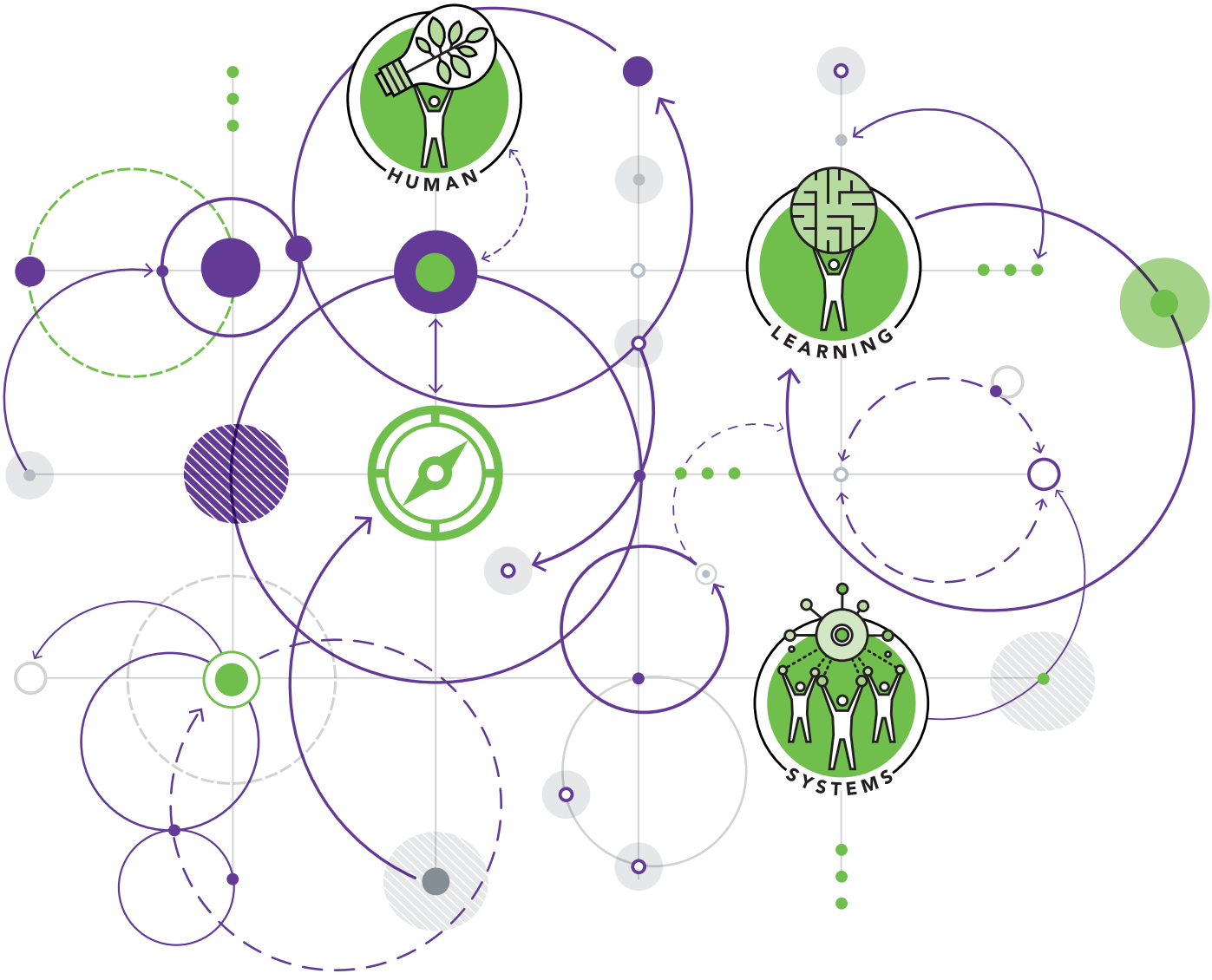


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# FOREWORD

I'm delighted to welcome this timely follow up report: *Exploring the New World: Practical insights for funding, commissioning and managing in complexity*. Our lives are complex. We are complex individuals, living in assorted communities, dealing with varied challenges – which are particular to us and yet may also be universal – and trying to navigate our way around often rigid systems.

Too often, those who hold power – and resource – can dilute these complexities. They have looked to make the challenges come to them, to fit their model and to tick their box, to define their work on the basis of what they want, rather than what's right for the community.

But we are seeing a shift. The research undertaken for this report show that funders and commissioners recognise that change is happening, and they are seeing this manifested in their own organisations. Recognition of complexity, and working with it, rather than against it, is becoming more common. At the National Lottery Community Fund we grapple with this issue ourselves and seek to engage and involve people and communities more effectively in our work.

Part of this shift is taking responsibility for our impact beyond our immediate sphere of influence, acknowledging that what we do affects not just those we have a direct relationship with, but the wider ecology as well. We are not lone rangers, and we shouldn't seek to be. Our strength lies in positive collaboration, in honesty, openness and generosity in sharing what does and doesn't work – and in hearing, acknowledging and responding to others' views on this, too.

Those who hold power should take a collaborative and generous approach to leadership – thinking about their role as part of a bigger whole. They should be willing to be flexible and take risks, to see and value the complexity of the problems they are trying to address.

Welcoming the knottiness of the world feeds into a more equitable relationship between funders and communities – valuing learning and improving, rather than proving; asking what matters, not what's the matter; and putting people in the lead, instead of prescribing the solution.

As the report explores, this isn't the easy path. It takes time to build relationships and trust. It requires us to be people-driven rather than focused on process, and to take decisions which require professional judgement and empathy, whilst creating a more community-led response to the challenges we face. This approach will raise profound challenges for those of us who assess risk and demonstrate accountability. We will need to re-calibrate our thinking for a complex 21st century world.

**Dawn Austwick**
Chief Executive National Lottery Community Fund

The Tudor Trust tries to fund in a relational way, spending time getting to know those we want to support and building an understanding of the world they are working in. We trust the groups that we fund to know what is needed in their communities and aim to build an open, straightforward relationship that helps them in their often difficult work. Some time ago our trustees decided to stop focusing on restrictive funding programmes. They wanted to recognise the complexity of peoples' lives and organisations' needs, trying to respond in a way that felt appropriate. At times we have struggled to articulate our sense that this is a useful approach to grant making: this report is now helping us to do this and challenging us to go further.

Supporting and engaging with this research helps us be more intentional about our practice and understand better what being a 'complexity friendly funder' might mean. As yet we don't have any definitive answers but being a fellow traveller in the research should open up some interesting possibilities. I hope others also find it affirming, inspiring and helpful.

**Christopher Graves**
Director, Tudor Trust

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND CONTACTS:

This report is built on the collective wisdom and innovation of an incredible set of people and organisations. Over 500 organisations in the UK alone have taken part in discussions about 'human, learning, systems' practice in the last year – far too many to acknowledge properly.

We'd specifically like to acknowledge the time, support and ideas we've received from these organisations:

**Public sector**

- Bicester Healthy New Towns
- Bristol City Council
- Devon County Council
- Gateshead Council
- Glasgow City Health and Social Care Partnership
- Healthcare Improvement Scotland
- Kirklees Council
- Middlesbrough Council
- Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust
- Orkney Scottish Health Council
- Plymouth City Council
- Scottish Government (National Adult Social Care Reform Programme)
- South Tyneside Council

**Charitable foundations and other funders**

- Ballinger Trust
- Barnwood Trust
- Blagrave Trust
- Cripplegate Foundation and Islington Giving
- Lankelly Chase Foundation
- National Lottery Community Fund
- Tudor Trust
- Whitman Institute

**Organisations working on the ground:**

- Changing Lives
- Cornerstone
- Golden Key, Bristol
- Hamoaze
- Locality
- Mayday Trust
- Shekinah
- Simon Community
- Wallsend Children's Community

We would also like to acknowledge the fellow travellers who are exploring how to effectively respond to complexity. In particular, thank you to our colleagues Max French and Melissa Hawkins at Northumbria University, Christine Elliott, Annabel Davidson Knight and the wider team at Collaborate, and Matthew Snape at Newcastle University. And thank you to Voluntary Organisations' Network North East (VONNE) and Locality for co-hosting events with us as part of this work. We have also valued the collaboration and generosity of GO Lab, at Oxford University, who kindly shared early findings from their report 'Rallying Together', which will be published at the end of March 2019. We would also like to give special thanks to the funders of the work that fed into this report, the National Lottery Community Fund and the Tudor Trust.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**The world is complex. If we want to contribute to creating positive social outcomes, we must learn to embrace this complexity. This is the *New World* that funders and commissioners are discovering:**

- **People** are complex: everyone's life is different, everyone's strengths and needs are different.
- The **issues** we care about are complex: issues – like homelessness – are tangled and interdependent.
- The **systems** that respond to these issues are complex: the range of people and organisations involved in creating 'outcomes' in the world are beyond the management control of any person or organisation.

Building on the findings from our previous report, A Whole New World, we have spent the last 12 months working with a growing movement of funders, public sector commissioners, and organisations working on the ground[1] to begin to explore this New World: to find examples of practice that will help people to navigate it effectively.

This report explores the key features of their response: working in a way that is **human**, prioritises **learning** and takes a **systems** approach.

The purpose of this report is to share emerging practice by providing practical examples of what it looks like, and to explore the changes funders, commissioners and organisations working on the ground. have made to work in this way. This is what we have found a **Human, Learning, Systems (HLS)** approach entails:

## HUMAN

People who work in a way that is informed by complexity use the language of 'being **human**' to describe what they do.

This means recognising the variety of human need and experience, building empathy between people so that they can form effective relationships, understanding the strengths that each person brings, and deliberately working to create trust between people.

Managers talk about 'liberating' workers from attempts to proceduralise what happens in good human relationships, and instead focus on the capabilities and contexts which help enable these relationships. They talk about providing support that is bespoke.

For funders and commissioners, being human means creating trust with and between the organisations they fund. Trust is what enables funders and commissioners to let go of the idea that they must be in control of the support that is provided using their resource.

[1] Through this work we've found that language needs to change in line with practice. This language is yet to emerge, but we've tried where possible to avoid terms that do not reflect a 'human' approach such as 'frontline.'

**"IT'S ABOUT BEING HUMAN. IT'S ABOUT LEARNING. IT'S ABOUT UNDERSTANDING YOUR PLACE IN THE SYSTEM"**

Public sector change leader

## LEARNING

People working in this way also speak about **learning** and adaptation. They describe how their work is not about delivering a standardised service, but rather that it is a continuous process of learning which allows them to adapt to the changing strengths and needs of each person with whom they work.

This has enormous implications for funding and commissioning. We have seen that funders and commissioners use their resources to enable organisations to learn and improve. They are not purchasing services with particular specifications, they are funding the capacity to learn and adapt to continuously improve outcomes in different contexts.

This challenges traditional, narrow forms of accountability based on targets and tick boxes. To meet this challenge, organisations are recognising the multiple dimensions of accountability, and exploring who needs to provide what kind of account to whom. This process involves dialogue, not just data.

## SYSTEMS

Finally, people working in this way recognise that the outcomes they care about are produced by whole **systems** rather than individuals, organisations or programmes. Consequently, to improve outcomes, they work to create 'healthy' systems in which people are able to co-ordinate and collaborate more effectively.

From these organisations, we have learnt some of the characteristics of the 'healthy' systems that produce good outcomes, and the System Behaviours that actors exhibit.

We have learnt that the behaviour of funders and commissioners is crucial to how relationships in the system are framed and understood. Funders and commissioners enable a collective, systemic response by reframing their relationships with providers. They no longer see a purchaser/provider split, they see a collective responsibility for creating the conditions for people to achieve better outcomes. They are stewards of a system of care and support.

## What does this way of working achieve?

While the effects of working in a HLS way are only beginning to emerge, there are signs that:

- For people accessing support, it can result in better experiences, better outcomes and them being better equipped for life.
- For organisations and systems, it has potential to increase collaboration, enable innovation, build employee motivation, and deliver cost savings.

## How change happens

We have learnt about the process of change organisations and collaborations have gone through to develop HLS approaches to funding, commissioning and providing support. We have identified the steps of change that different organisations have used to bring about HLS working.

Interestingly, the process of change seems to be an example of HLS practice itself. Organisations have created change by an iterative process of:

- Starting with purpose
- Understanding the system
  - Making the system visible
  - Building relationships and trust
  - Establishing shared purpose
  - Developing principles, values and behaviours
- Co-designing
- Experimentation, reflection and redesign
- Putting learning at the heart of governance
- Embedding and influencing

These processes of change may provide some navigational aids for the 'system stewards' seeking to enable change.

## Building a movement

The next phase of work is to embed HLS practice as the norm in complex environments that aim to support people. To do that, all those who want to work in this way need to work together to test, learn and support each other to build a movement for change. We look forward to your company on this journey!

## Examples and tools

At the end of this report we include a number of case studies, examples and tools to provide insights and guidance for people who want to begin working in a HLS way.

# INTRODUCTION

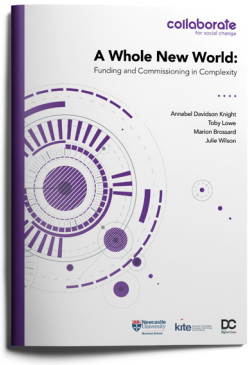
## PURPOSE OF REPORT

### This report is designed to do two things:

- **Increase our understanding of what a complexity–informed approach looks like in practice, from the perspective of funders, public sector commissioners and those who work on ground**
- **Provide some practical examples and tools to support organisations that want to adopt this way of working**

## BACKGROUND

This report builds on our previous work which outlined an emerging complexity–informed 'paradigm' for funding and commissioning of social interventions. We called that report '*A Whole New World*' because it represented a new way of thinking about, and responding to complex social challenges.




*A Whole New World* outlined the high–level principles, cultures and processes by which funders and commissioners respond to the complexity of the world they are seeking to change. It outlined how those with resources to distribute to achieve social good could better contribute to desired social change. Its key message was that the outcomes that we seek are created by complex systems, not particular organisations. And so the ideas and methods of New Public Management – Markets, Managers and Metrics[2] – don't work, and can't be made to work in this context. Instead, it described an alternative approach based on:

- Recognition of intrinsic motivation
- Learning as the driver for performance improvement
- Funders and commissioners taking responsibility for the overall health of the system

## EXPLORING THE NEW WORLD

Over the last 12 months we have spent time with organisations who have been developing approaches to funding, commissioning and delivering social interventions that better respond to the complexity of the world we live in. We have sought to connect and enable organisations that are, or would like to, work in this way, to share ideas and experiences with one another. In addition, we have begun a programme of action–research, working with organisations who are adopting HLS approaches, documenting their practice and helping them to reflect on their work.

Our explorations started with a focus on how funders and commissioners are responding differently to complexity. We are now developing understanding of the relationship between organisations that work in a HLS way to support people, and how funders and commissioners who allocate resources in a HLS way can enable this.

[2] Ewan Ferlie, Lynn Ashburner, Louise Fitzgerald, and Andrew Pettigrew, The New Public Management in Action, 1996. Oxford: Oxford University Press

## "I THINK IT'S JUST ABOUT BEING OPEN TO BEING HUMAN ACTUALLY"

Provider

This report shares what we have learnt from these incredible people. It highlights practice from a number of the areas and organisations (that we are aware of) who are most advanced, and is informed by wider conversations with the hundreds of organisations who are interested in working in a HLS way. We think that their knowledge can help others to navigate this complex New World more effectively. But there is still much more to learn.

In this report we try to tread a fine line. Many of the organisations we have spoken to ask for 'how to' guides, and so we have identified examples and practices which show how the approach is working in different contexts. But our exploration is just beginning – a definitive map does not yet exist. Each organisation featured in this report is at a different point in its own journey, and working in a HLS way is highly context specific. The examples featured in this report can therefore provide inspiration and ideas for how it may work in other contexts, but they are not recipes to follow.

### The role of complexity

One of the key things we have learnt concerns the role of complexity and when a complexity-informed approach is required.

We know we are in complex, New World, territory when:

- there are a variety of strengths and needs, and these look different from different perspectives
- when outcomes are being produced by many factors interacting together in an ever changing way
- when people are working in systems that are beyond the control of any one of the actors in the system

In these complex contexts, old world ideas are less useful. In the old world, we told ourselves that social interventions were simple and linear in order to make them easier to manage. We told ourselves that we could measure what was meaningful to people, and that we could use those measures to manage the work. We told ourselves that the outcomes we desired could be delivered by organisations, projects or programmes. We told ourselves that we could learn 'what works', and then simply scale that up, and replicate it in other places.

But by seeking to make work easier to manage, we made it harder to achieve positive change. When we pre–defined outcome targets and managed performance against these, we constrained workers' ability to respond to lived reality: the needs and strengths of the people they support.[3] When we identified 'what works' and tried to scale it up, we found that what worked in one place, at one time, didn't work in other places, or at other times.[4]

Understanding that many of things we care about function as complex systems, explains why old world thinking is not useful in this context. It explains why a *'Whole New World'* is needed; – not just new tools, processes and practices, but a change in the way we think about how effective social change happens and what it takes to enable this.

We have learnt that working in complexity requires the following:

- The capacity to **respond to variety** – each person's strengths and needs are different, and so standardised services don't adequately meet these needs.
- The ability to **adapt to change** – the context in which social interventions are undertaken constantly changes, from micro–scale changes in personal circumstances to large scale social change. This means that the nature of the challenges and 'what works' to meet those challenges is continually shifting. Social interventions must be able to continually adapt to reflect these changes.
- The ability **to shape systems whose behaviour can't be reliably predicted, and which no one controls**. This demands collaboration and influencing, rather than command and control.

When the world is complex, this is what is required of us.

What focusing on complexity doesn't do is tell us what a new approach looks like. From listening to the people doing this work, we've evolved the language of 'complexity–informed practice' into something that better describes how this new approach works. This is the language of:

**Human | Learning | Systems**

[3] See for example, Lowe, T., and Wilson, R. (2017) Playing the Game of Outcomes-based Performance Management. Is Gamesmanship Inevitable? Evidence from Theory and Practice. Social Policy & Administration, 51: 981–1001

[4] See, for example, May, C. Johnson, M and Finch, T. Implementation, context and complexity, (2016) Implementation Science 11:141

# THE PRACTICE: HUMAN, LEARNING SYSTEMS

## HUMAN: Variety, Empathy, Strengths, and Trust (VEST)

**HUMAN:**
**Variety, Empathy, Strengths, and Trust (VEST)**

Being more human means that people who work in this way:

- recognise the Variety of human strengths, needs and experiences
- build Empathy between people – so that they recognise, and seek to act on, the emotional and physical needs of others
- use Strengths–based approaches – recognising and building on the assets (rather than deficits) of people and places
- are Trusted to act on their intrinsic motivation to help others and get better at what they do.

We will now explore what these features look like in practice, before examining the implications for funders and commissioners who want to enable this way of working. In each section we identify the questions we think are helpful for leaders who want to work in this way to consider.

### RESPONDING TO VARIETY: BESPOKE BY DEFAULT

Everyone's strengths and needs are different. In order to help create positive social outcomes, those doing work on the ground said they needed to be able to recognise and respond to those differences – to recognise each and every person's own way of being human. Those managing this work described 'liberating' staff to enable them to respond in a bespoke way to each and every person with whom they work.

#### Enabling relational practice:

One of the most important ways in which this freedom manifested was a shift towards relational practice on behalf of those working with clients. Rather than having to deliver a prescribed 'intervention,' workers were able to form meaningful relationships with those with whom they work and respond to whatever strengths and needs they found through that relationship.

> "Relationships solve problems, not services."
> Public sector change leader

> "We threw out the old way of working. We ditched the paperwork and designed a person–led not process–led approach."
> Provider

> "We aim to put the person at the centre of everything. Lots of social care organisations say this is what they do, but in reality corporate policies and processes divert staff from focusing on the best outcomes for people."
> Provider

### RESPONDING WITH EMPATHY

This relational practice manifests in all layers of the system – between workers on the ground and the people they support, between those workers and staff at other levels of the organisations with which they work.

To build relationships across and between levels requires that people are able to understand the reality of the lives of others. Kirklees Council have adopted a Restorative Practice approach to Children's Services as an improvement method to address this point:

> "We just need to be decent human beings to the people we deal with. This is about how we deal with one another as staff, as well as with citizens. We want to encourage people to challenge and learn from one another. To do that, we need to recognise the things that people have that are going on in their lives which affect their relationships."
>
> Public sector change leader

## RESPONDING TO STRENGTHS

Shifting the focus from deficits to strengths is core component of human approaches. Rather than treating people as a list of problems to be solved, those working in a human way seek to understand people's hopes and aspirations, they ask people 'what does a good life look like for you?'

Mayday Trust talks powerfully about how 'deficit' based approaches strip away people's sense of self-worth and 'trap' them in the system. They have set out to adopt a new strengths-based approach that instead supports people to make positive transitions:

> "When we really listened to what people said (not just what we wanted to hear) we heard that the process once someone became homeless was humiliating, dehumanising and at worst, institutionalising. People were becoming trapped in homeless services."
>
> "…[Instead we developed a] way in which people could genuinely take back control, build on their strengths to find a new self-identity, find good networks and a purpose, by-pass the sausage machine of services and get on with their lives in the real world."
>
> Provider

## RESPONDING WITH TRUST: DEVOLVED POWER AND DECISION MAKING

To enable this relational practice, managers of those working on the ground need to give significant decision–making authority to those doing the work. This means that decisions can be taken rapidly, and in response to detailed knowledge of specific people's contexts:

> "Most of the specific things that were done that helped people were small and unspectacular. A coffee, a chat, a food shop whilst benefits were being processed, a bus pass to aid a job search (and just to get people out of the house), some basic clothes… They didn't need supplying for and assessing for, but were decisions made by the workers in the work based upon the specific context of the person and their situation."
>
> Public sector change leader

Freeing workers to do the right things seems to be based on establishing a sense of shared humanity – on trusting well–informed workers to use their knowledge to respond authentically to the needs of other human beings:

> "...We know and actually we need to again balance the power of intuitive knowledge and understanding… let's openly acknowledge that we know the powerful impact for ourselves personally [of] feeling cared about, not done to… We know what makes people feel alright but… we've masked that away from ourselves. I think it's just about being open to being human actually?"
> Provider

> "How do we all get together to embrace the mess and do what's best for people rather than what's comfortable?"
> Provider

As part of this, there is a recognition that metric–based performance management makes it harder to do the work that is important in complex environments[5]. Organisations are freed from externally imposed targets, set by people who are disconnected from the work. Instead, workers are allowed to focus on what matters to the people in front of them.

> "We do whatever people need."
> Public sector change leader

> "As an individual, I feel accountable to my patients and to the staff that I manage but that's that human element of what do I think is important in my role. So, if I've got two emails, one's from the [regulator] chasing up a bit of paper, one's from a member of staff struggling with a patient, I'll ignore [the regulator]… I'll ignore that bit and focus on the patient directed stuff."
> Provider

Importantly, devolved decision making does not mean individuals are left to work unsupervised or unsupported. Workers still operate within clear boundaries that reflect what is safe and legal, and peer support and peer accountability is key in enabling sharing of learning and informed, fair decision making.

> "Our teams work within safe parameters and regulatory guidelines – it's not anarchy!"
> Provider

**QUESTION FOR LEADERS:**

How can you give your staff the freedom and authority to respond to the particular strengths and needs of each person they work with?

## FUNDERS AND COMMISSIONERS: TRUST–BASED FUNDING

Organisations providing 'human' support told us that this way of working needs to be supported by new ways of funding and commissioning:

> "For strengths–based work we need strengths–based contracts. We must allow people to transition as they see fit, not fix what we think [is wrong]."
> Provider

To do so, funders and commissioners need to give up the illusion of control. From their position in the system, funders and commissioners cannot prescribe what a good outcome looks like (because they're different for each person, and will change over time) and cannot know what bespoke support each person needs.

[5] Interestingly, this set of experiences from public sector leaders fits with the current evidence from the private sector concerning the inability of pre–determined performance targets to create effective performance in complex environments: Melnyka, S et al (2014) Is performance measurement and management fit for the future? Management Accounting Research 25 (2014) 173–186

Consequently, those who fund and commission in a 'human' way view their funding as supporting those organisations who have the quality of relationships to know their clients best. This approach is exemplified by the US– based Whitman Institute's attitude to those organisations they fund. They describe what they do as '**trust–based philanthropy**' and say that they 'partner in a spirit of service' to those organisations:

> "We enter collaborations with humility by listening first and responding directly to the needs of our partners. Universally, they have much more knowledge of their work, fields and challenges than we do. We place ourselves shoulder to shoulder, not ahead of, our grantee partners as we iterate and learn, together."
>
> Charitable Funder

One of the key ways this manifests in the practice of funders is that they offer multi–year, core funding to organisations. They do this because they have learnt to trust that the organisations they support have a mission and values which are aligned with their own. There is a recognition that this significant shift must start with those who control how the money works. Those with resources to allocate must display the leadership to do things differently:

> "I have an obligation to come through on the things I said I would and they were about transparency and openness and fairness and creating a climate of safety for people. I think that's the thing that only us commissioners can do. Only we can make the climate safe for people to change. So sometimes in other areas, services will be really up for a change, there's nothing they can do about it because the commissioners are not prepared to give up some of their power".
>
> Public sector commissioner

The simplest way that funders and commissioners express this is practice is to allocate resources that do not come with performance measures or other Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) which focus on either process or pre–defined results.

> "Many funders attempt to put in place tightly defined project parameters to help them measure and identify impact in the hope that that will create more impact for people. But we've increasingly come to realise that the hoops that funders make organisations jump through to get funding do not create impact, in fact they are slowing down the organisations we want to help".
>
> Charitable funder

> "Humans are social and this is essentially quite a social way of negotiating service provision and systems, isn't it? So yes, there isn't really any magic to it. It's a very human process."
>
> Public sector commissioner

Funding allocated and administered in this way enables organisations to respond effectively to change in the wider world. Children England tell a powerful story about how 'unconditional pounds are worth more — core funding from the Tudor Trust, given without preconditions or KPIs, enables them to respond rapidly to the changing policy environment for young people, and influence more meaningful change as a result.

**QUESTIONS FOR LEADERS:**

What would it take for you to fund without seeking control?

How would you decide who you could trust?

## LEARNING:
## Learning drives adaptation to improve outcomes

Trust is the starting point for working effectively in complex environments, but it is not in itself sufficient. Trust is earned by those people and organisations who learn and improve, and in turn, trust frees those people and organisations to adapt their practice based on their learning.

One of the most powerful and significant refrains we have heard from those who are delivering activity in complex environments is that standardised services don't work. This radically changes the nature of what is required to deliver high quality, effective social interventions.

We have become used to the idea that learning and experimenting is a phase within the social innovation cycle: people undertake research to find the 'right' answer to social problems, and they test out different options. When the testing is complete, we know 'what works'. The task is then to implement these 'evidence–based' approaches at scale.

Our research strongly suggests that this is not an effective strategy for responding to complexity.

What worked for one person may not work for another. What worked in one place in one time may not work in other places. What worked at one time may stop working as the context changes.

Consequently, people working effectively in complex environments undertake a continuous process of learning and adaptation. This requires on-going experimentation.

This experimentation builds an understanding of the ways of working which are more likely to be effective in particular contexts. This in turn gives valuable insight as to where to begin the next set of experiments.

For providers this means:

### An iterative, experimental approach to working with people

The move to relational and tailored 'human' approaches means that each. encounter with people who access support is an opportunity to learn and improve. For example, Gateshead Council has created protected spaces for learning in the form of 'prototypes' which are framed as learning environments. The team had no preconceived programme of support to provide: they are testing different approaches and collecting information about what happens as a way to learn and improve.

> "The reality that leaders in public service of any kind must learn to embrace is that the yearned for efficiencies seen in the repeatable processes of manufacturing do not work for people and their inevitable variation."
>
> Public sector change leader

For those deploying resource to achieve social change, this means:

### Funding and commissioning for learning, not services

To enable the experimental approach outlined above, some of those who fund and commission work in complex environments are beginning to do so on the basis that they are 'purchasing' the capacity for people and organisations to learn and adapt to deliver relevant support, rather than buying services.

One of the most advanced examples we have seen of this approach in action is Plymouth City Council's commissioning of a system to support vulnerable adults, in partnership with the local Clinical Commissioning Group.

In Plymouth, the contract for provision of support to vulnerable adults does not specify outputs or outcomes to be achieved. Instead, it uses a set of agreed principles as the basis for how the system will function, including ongoing adaptation to support provision based on shared learning. Peer accountability is an important part of this, with alliance members responsible for learning together.

A provider from Plymouth described the commissioning process in the following way:

> "I think we were used to expecting ourselves to have solutions and answers to things without necessarily realising that often we didn't. The only way we were going to get solutions and answers or ideas or thoughts was to sit down and talk very honestly about the kinds of things that we were being asked, and to try and find our way through. Some of that would not be a nice polished answer but it might be some ideas about what we might do to try and get to that answer about who we might involve and who we might ask and how we might do it?"
>
> Provider

Similarly, a commissioner in York has tendered for provision relating to substance abuse that evolves based on learning over seven years. Co-production in year one of the contract will provide the basis for testing new ways of working in year two. The providers and commissioners will then jointly write a specification for years three to seven of the contract.

> "[The commissioner] didn't specify activities, staffing, where we had to deliver from. Instead they said, 'let's see how we can do this together.'… It's about working together to work out where people are coming from, why things are the way they are, developing new models. It's about all learning together?"
>
> Provider

Charitable foundations also provide examples of funding for learning, rather than services. The Lankelly Chase Foundation now frames all of its work as inquiries:

> "An inquiry approach allows us space to learn, adapt and grow as the work develops and it means learning becomes a core part of the way we work?"
>
> Lankelly Chase

**QUESTIONS FOR LEADERS:**

As a commissioner, how can you commission on–going explorations of how best to serve people, rather than pre–specified services?

## WHAT ARE THE FEATURES OF A LEARNING APPROACH?

To enable the new practices described above, we have seen providers, funders and commissioners:

- Using data to learn
- Creating a learning culture

### Using data to learn

Measurement plays an important role in HLS approaches, but for the purpose of enabling learning, rather than control.

Providers working in this way gather and reflect on a wide range of data, to enable teams on the ground to continuously improve their work based on a fully rounded understanding of an individual's context, strengths and experiences.

For example, the transitions organisation, Mayday Trust, works with people experiencing tough times to offer personalised support that removes systemic barriers and develops individual assets.

While they continue to gather data on traditional metrics such as sustained accommodation, their focus is on understanding the development of people's assets and strengths and encouraging people to gather evidence that they can build their own internal motivation to sustain positive life changes, rather than meeting pre–defined standardised KPIs.

In Gateshead, their public service reform work is drawing on measures from multiple perspectives to enable them to reflect on, learn from and improve their prototypes.

**Gateshead measures**

| What do we really want to know? | The focus of the measures? | What measures should we learn how to develop and use? |
|---|---|---|
| **Is it effective?** | **Citizens** | • 'What matters to me?'<br>• 'Is this helping me to lead a better life?' |
| **Is it efficient?** | **Employees**<br>**Volunteers** | How easy/difficult was it for me to do the right thing for the person I am trying to help?<br>• % First time solves<br>• # handoffs, # assessments, # people involved, # IT systems<br>• % actions that were value/non–value work?<br>• Morale |
| **Is it sustainable?** | **System resources** | • Costs – history and trajectory<br>• Costs – new trajectory and intervention costs<br>• Demand – from the person we helped<br>• Demand – implications for whole borough/ whole system |

Some funders and commissioners are recognising the need for this more flexible rounded approach to measurement. Commissioners in Plymouth provide an example of this:

> "A person [client] will say these are the six things I want to do... We will measure their progress towards those things individually. But what we will aggregate together is this percentage of people that achieved this percentage of their goals. We won't have fixed [measures]: everyone has got to get a house, everyone's got to have a dog. We won't do that because that's not asset based. So, it will be a bespoke self–assessed thing."
>
> Public sector commissioner

Increasing the use of qualitative data is an important feature of using data to learn. Providers identified that using narrative data is helpful for understanding the nuance of cases, so that people can learn well:

> "So that was when we looked back to try and... basically you had to read the cases and then you had to phone up the person who's running the case and say, "How are things now?" It is a narrative form of data."
>
> Provider

The use of stories as data is an important tool for matching the learning aspect of HLS practice to the human aspect. For example, as part of their adoption of self-organising teams, the social care charity Cornerstone now gathers and processes much of the data required for audit purposes using technology. This frees up staff time to focus on the quality of the support it provides through exploring people's stories and experiences of Cornerstone, and using these insights to continuously improve support for individuals as well as the team's overall offer.

Similarly, in Plymouth they found that stories create a much more rounded picture of the people that organisations are seeking to serve.

> "…the obesity thing… We did some appreciative inquiry with some of the families… and what you realise is that families don't talk about obesity at all, they talk about abuse and poverty, mental health. Everybody who hears any of those stories immediately understands it's not about obesity, it's about something else and we need to be addressing the something else because as human beings, I think we are designed to engage with stories."
>
> Public sector commissioner

**QUESTION FOR LEADERS:**

How would you support people/ organisations to find out what they need to measure in order to reflect on their practice?

How can you help people/organisations in the system use data well to learn?

## Creating a learning culture

We have also discovered more about how organisations create a culture which promotes and enables continuous learning:

### Removing competition enables sharing learning between organisations

In Plymouth and Bristol, they have found that when conversations about resources are separated from conversations about learning, this seems to create the trust that enables those doing the work to share authentically with one another, even across organisations.

"In the old style, the competitive style, people were the keepers of secrets. In this [HLS approach] they are the sharers of knowledge. We didn't ask them to do that, it's the mental change that people make. They don't have to protect their knowledge because they're worried you're going to steal their contract."

Public sector commissioner

"Systems change is hard to pin down especially when wanting people to lead the system for themselves. Us taking credit is counterproductive and leads to confusion if we try to claim who is responsible for what outcome. Instead we send our funder quarterly reports on what's happened that's of interest, and they visit and spend time with us to feel reassured that they're funding something that will help clients."

Provider

## Formal and informal spaces for learning – creating trust and connectivity

Organisations working in this way have created a system–wide learning culture by developing a sense of trust and connectivity across people in different organisations. In Plymouth commissioners developed specific forums for joint problem solving:

"We put in place the systematic things, feedback loops and things, but I would say most of the really amazing things that have happened, we didn't know they would happen. They just emerged. The Creative Solutions Forum, it's just become this astonishing thing. I mean when I set it up, I set it up to solve complex cases, I didn't realise all this other stuff would happen that was amazing."

Public sector commissioner

The sense of trust and connectivity across organisations sometimes manifests in informal, ad hoc spaces for learning:

"When somebody encounters something, they know they can pick up the phone [even if they work in a different organisation]. So there's a lot of knowledge and skills transfer that's happening through that. I mean you couldn't make that up, you couldn't structure it. You couldn't say, "This is the procedure to do that." It's just organically... again, it's another emergent property of this way of thinking about our service provision."

Provider

## Creating a 'positive error culture': enabling honesty

When working in complex environments, people will necessarily feel uncertain about their practice, and they are bound to make decisions which sometimes lead to poor outcomes for people – because of the way in which other factors beyond their control interact with those decisions. Consequently, if learning is to drive performance improvement, those working in complex environments must have spaces in which they can talk about mistakes and uncertainty without fear of adverse consequences:

"I guess for me it's about the honesty bit, isn't it? [To say] It's okay not to know, actually be able to voice that – before you wouldn't probably say that, certainly with the commissioners around. Whereas now you can actually say, "No, actually it hasn't worked, I don't know."

Provider

This is called a 'positive error culture'. Organisations have explored new ways create this culture – safe spaces where people can talk about their mistakes and uncertainties. The 'Learning Communities' approach is one way to create such spaces.

**QUESTION FOR LEADERS:**

How can you create a learning culture across the system?

How will you create a 'positive error culture'?

## LEARNING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

As briefly explored in the 'Human' section, when funders and commissioners provide resources to organisations in order to enable them to learn and adapt (rather than to provide specified services) it challenges traditional, narrow accountability mechanisms. These traditional mechanisms involve commissioners specifying, or asking providers to specify, targets for the outputs or outcomes they will 'deliver' and holding them to account for whether those targets are met.

Unfortunately, in complex environments, we know that a focus on this narrow form of accountability is counter-productive and wasteful, and succeeds in creating 'gaming' of figures rather than supporting the achievement of positive outcomes. As Campbell's Law[6] states: *'The more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor.'* We see this in teachers teaching to the test and hospitals managing emergency admissions to narrowly meet threshold targets.

In response to this challenge, organisations working in an HLS way have begun to broaden their thinking about accountability, attempting to shift the focus beyond a narrow target-based accountability relationship between commissioners and providers (which is then frequently replicated in hierarchical performance management relationships throughout provider organisations).

These organisations are in the early stages of exploring what HLS accountability involves, but it seems to start from a recognition of the multiple dimensions of accountability. People at all levels are required to account for their decisions in different ways to different stakeholders. They may be required to account for spending decisions to auditors, for practice decisions to the people whom they serve, and to their peers. They may need to provide an account of how they prioritise their time to their managers. Regulators want an account of how the practice is safe and of appropriate quality. The Gateshead measures detailed earlier in this section are one example of this approach to accountability.

Ultimately, those working in a HLS way seek to achieve a balance between these multiple dimensions. This typically involves increasing accountability to people accessing support, and to workers providing support—perspectives that are often overlooked in traditional accountability mechanisms, but are key to achieving positive outcomes.

[6] Campbell, Donald T (1979). 'Assessing the impact of planned social change'. Evaluation and Program Planning. 2 (1): 67–90. doi:10.1016/0149-7189(79)90048-X

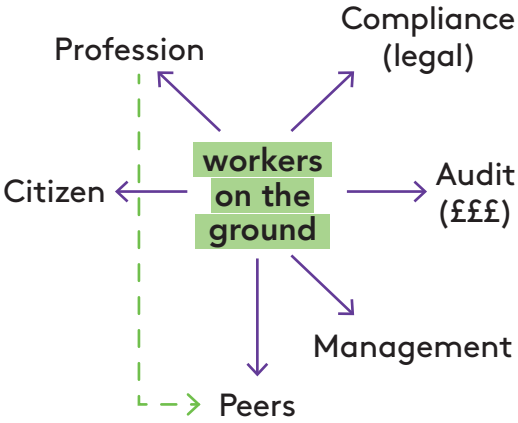
An approach that draws on these multiple dimensions requires more than just counting. Providing an account for your actions and judgements – explaining why you acted in the way that you did – requires different forms of data, and frequently requires a dialogue between those who are seeking an account, and those who provide it. For example, between workers who hold each other to account for the decisions they make, and for continuously improving their practice. Accountability in complex environments can rarely be satisfied by one set of people sending a set of figures, or a set of ticked boxes, to another. This is reflected in the practice of commissioners in Plymouth:

> "It will be about experiential learning for commissioners and vice versa, services spending time in other services to gain a more rounded view about what services do and what their value is and what good looks like. The other thing for us is obviously we still have to collect all the outcomes [measures – for Central Government]. We're not going to performance manage those. We will just use them as interesting things to learn from."
>
> Public sector commissioner

As with all aspects of HLS practice, finding appropriate mechanisms for achieving genuine accountability requires experimentation and learning. Interestingly, some regulators seem to have recognised this, and have expressed a desire to participate in explorations of new forms of accountability.

> "The Care Inspectorate has sought to support the pioneering work that Cornerstone are advancing, by promoting an enabling regulatory environment that supports innovation and improvement and allows new ways of working to be explored and new ideas and approaches to be tested. Our approach seeks to support Cornerstone to achieve their aim of delivering better outcomes and improving the wellbeing of the people they work with."
>
> Scottish Care Inspectorate

**The many different dimensions of accountability**




**QUESTIONS FOR LEADERS:**

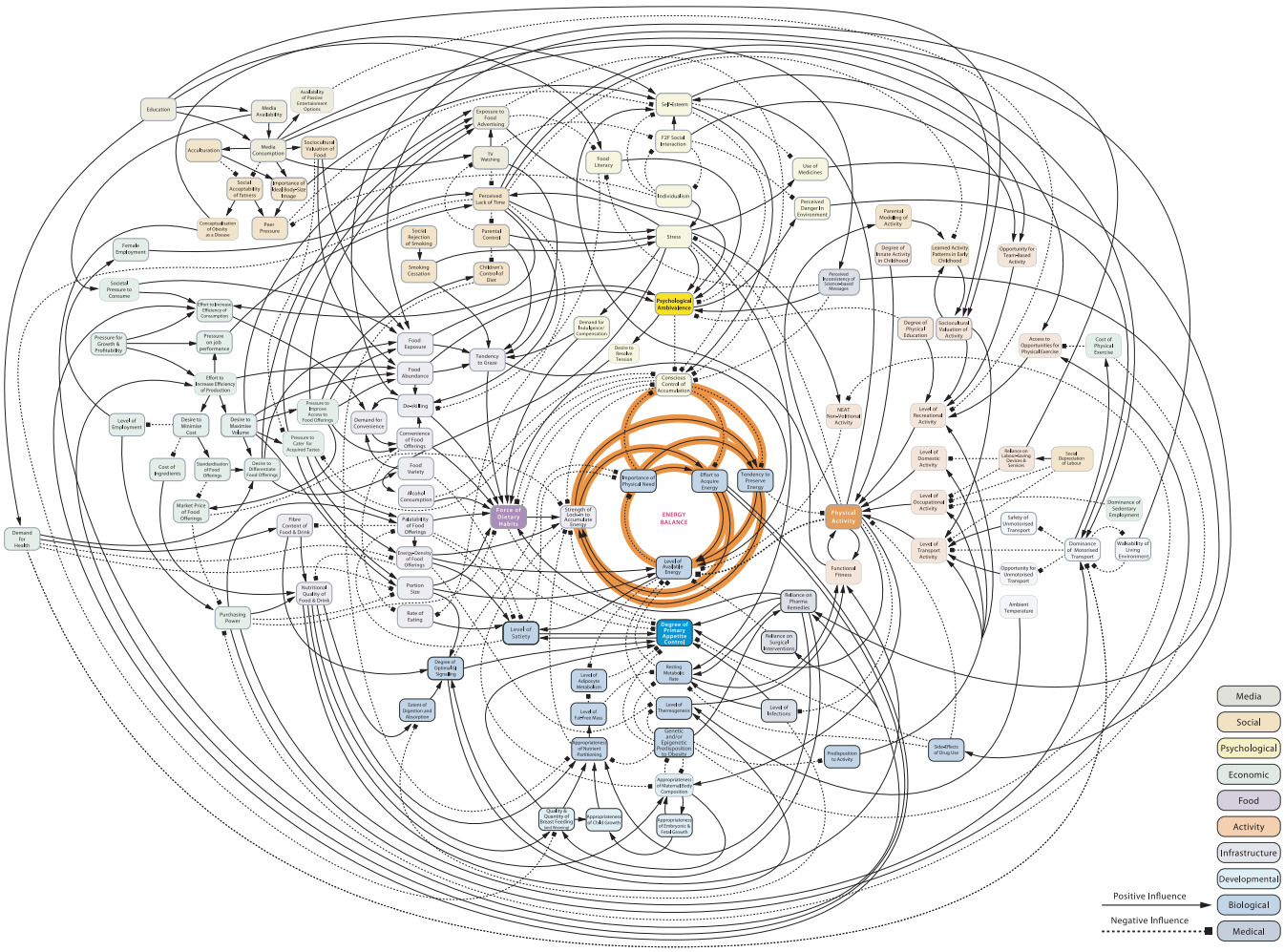
How can you shift from a narrow target-based form of accountability to an approach that brings together multiple perspectives with a focus on improving outcomes?

How will you change your performance management system to fit with this?

## SYSTEMS:
## Taking responsibility for the health of the system

Organisations who work in a HLS way understand that outcomes are produced by systems, not by single projects, programmes or organisations.

This is illustrated by exploring the many factors that contribute to obesity. The system which leads to the outcome of obesity was mapped by the UK Government in 2007.




Vandenbroeck, P., Goossens, J. and Clemens, M. (2007), Foresight Tackling Obesities: Future Choices – Building the Obesity System Map, London: Government Office for Science, www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/295153/07–1177–obesity–system–atlas.pdf

It is the interactions of all 108 factors identified in this system which leads to obesity (or not).

To create better outcomes, we need the system to function better – for the different elements of the system to work together more effectively.

The question for those interested in creating positive outcomes is therefore: how can we enable the systems that produce such outcomes to work better, so that they produce desirable outcomes more often? We have begun to learn about how funders, commissioners and organisations that work on the ground do this.

## WHAT DOES A HEALTHY SYSTEM LOOK LIKE?

If healthy systems produce good outcomes, it becomes important to understand what a healthy system might look like. Fully understanding what makes a system more likely to produce positive outcomes will require a considerable amount of further work, and there are many different approaches which can be explored. One approach that many organisations working in a HLS way have used is to identify desired behaviours and/or principles that guide the work of people within a system.

An example of this has been developed by the Lankelly Chase Foundation (LCF), working with a range of systems–thinkers, and people and organisations they have supported to undertake systems–change work. This work has begun to provide a set of potential answers to the question: what does a healthy system look like? LCF has identified nine System Behaviours which are exhibited when a place is functioning effectively as a system to meet the needs, and recognise the strengths, of people who experience severe and multiple disadvantage. When a place is working well as a system, these desired behaviours are exhibited by actors across the system, across all the relationships between people in a place:

**Perspective**

- People view themselves as part of an interconnected whole
- People are viewed as resourceful and bringing strengths
- People share a vision

**Power**

- Power is shared, and equality of voice actively promoted
- Decision–making is devolved
- Accountability is mutual

**Participation**

- Open, trusting relationships enable effective dialogue
- Leadership is collaborative and promoted at every level
- Feedback and collective learning drive adaptation

### System Stewards

From existing research in this area, it seems to be important that someone (or a group of people) take responsibility for the health of the system. This role has been called 'System Steward' – people who create the conditions in which others can work effectively.

In Plymouth, Systems Stewards have created a set of principles which govern how their system works.

**PLYMOUTH'S PRINCIPLES:**

These are the principles adopted by organisations in Plymouth who have decided to work together as a system serving vulnerable adults:

**Alliance Principles**

All of us commit to working to Alliance Principles which are:

a) to assume collective responsibility for all of the risks involved in providing services under this agreement;

b) to make decisions on a 'Best for People using Services' basis;

c) to commit to unanimous, principle and value based–decision making on all key issues;

d) to adopt a culture of 'no fault, no blame' between the Alliance Participants and to seek to avoid all disputes and litigation (except in very limited cases of willful default);

e) to adopt open book accounting and transparency in all matters;

f) to appoint and select key roles on a best person basis; and

g) to act in accordance with the Alliance Values and Behaviours at all times.

LCF has also explored the question of who takes responsibility for ensuring that the System Behaviours exist a place. They have identified a potential role called 'Steward of Place'[7] – the person (or people) whose job it is to understand whether the desired System Behaviours exist in a place, and take action to promote and encourage them. This provides a starting point for thinking about what a healthy system could look like, and how they can be promoted.

A healthy system does not require that everyone in a system plays this role – although everyone has responsibility to uphold System Behaviours. Crucially, however, each person and organisation should understand their place in the system. They should be able to answer the question: 'how does my work fit with the work of others to help the system achieve its overall purpose?'

## Funders and commissioners' behaviour frames how relationships in the system are viewed

While it may not always be a funder or commissioner that takes on a lead role as 'system steward' (other local actors may take on this role based on sources of legitimacy other than distributing resources e.g. trust and local networks), their behaviour is crucial to the health of a system.

In a HLS approach, commissioners are not purchasers of services that deliver outcomes, commissioners are people who frame how the eco–system of relationships operates. This frames the relationship between commissioner and providers differently:

> "We're not in opposition. They're not our enemy. We all want the same thing. We're not [in] a purchaser/provider [relationship]. We're a collective…"
>
> Public service commissioner

[7] Toby Lowe and Max French, Place Action Inquiry: Our learning to date, Lankelly Chase Foundation, 2018

> "[We now have a] richer understanding of partners. [When it was] a commissioner game of competition and chucking money in room and watching us have a fight, we didn't like many people we used to work with – we saw them as a threat, [thought they] would steal our ideas and get a funding application in before we did. I had to learn their difficulties were my difficulties."
>
> Provider

When commissioners behave in this way, when they set expectations around collective behaviour, which are matched by how they distribute and manage resources, it creates the space for a systemic perspective to develop:

> "I think, one of the first big things that we ever learnt as an alliance, that this is what an alliance is all about: it isn't about one person doing it. It's about all of us sitting down and coming up with the best way of doing that with the people using the services at the heart of every decision that we made."
>
> Provider

One of the crucial things that funders and commissioners can do in order to improve the health of systems is investing in developing relationships between actors in the system. This is crucial across actors at all levels. Increased trust between funders/commissioners and delivery organisations in turn enables delivery organisations to develop trusting relationships with the people they support.

> "We start from a place of developing relationships with partners so they can in turn build relationships with the young people they're supporting. Relationships based on trust are essential."
>
> Charitable funder

## LEADERSHIP

Creating a healthy system requires brave leadership, as it involves giving up a significant amount of control, while still maintaining responsibility (for example, meeting regulatory requirements). Leaders are required to work at a systemic level – creating the conditions, and solving the problems that enable people on the ground to be more effective in providing responsive, personalised support.

> "We dismantled the bureaucracy and established a leadership team of key players across the system. The emphasis was on how we want to work together – principles, not the action of doing the work… Trust levels have gone up significantly especially at a decision making level. Relationships have improved and we have a better understanding of complexity. Our role is not to have the answers, but to create the right conditions for the system to flourish."
>
> Public service leader

People who are leading the development and delivery of HLS approaches highlight the rewards of working in a way that better responds to the reality of people's lives, but also the level of personal challenge and professional risk it brings for them as leaders.

> "Have I got the bravery to call things out, the energy and capacity to carry on and carry the system through to a new set of relationships?"
>
> Public service commissioner

Typically, new approaches involve fundamentally rethinking the why, how and what of managing social interventions. This can make it a scary and lonely journey at times to battle against dominant mindsets and practice. Many people have articulated their fear that they will lose their jobs if the new way of working does not work out. They identify the toll it takes on personal resilience to constantly 'fight battles' and hold high levels of uncertainty and risk over prolonged periods.

Peer support often plays a crucial role in giving leaders a sense of 'collective bravery' to develop and persevere with HLS approaches. This includes support from peers within the system you are trying to change—it is often much easier to develop a systems approach when leaders across the system are engaged. Engagement with peers from beyond the system (from other sectors and places) is also valuable in developing ideas, and providing challenge and moral support.

**QUESTION FOR LEADERS:**

What would it take for you to share power, but maintain responsibility?

## SYSTEM CHANGE – STEPS TOWARDS HEALTHY SYSTEMS

From speaking with a range of organisations working to create healthy systems, we can begin to build a picture of the steps that System Stewards undertake to do this. Some different ways in which this change may be achieved are outlined in the section How change happens.

**QUESTIONS FOR LEADERS:**

Do you understand the health of your system?

Could you use the System Behaviours (or other principles/behaviours) to check the health of your system?

Who (person or people) is playing the role of System Steward/Steward of Place?

What support do they need to play this role well?

# WHAT DOES THIS WAY OF WORKING ACHIEVE?

The practice described in this report is recent and emergent. Our understanding of the impact of HLS approaches on outcomes for people who access support, and for the organisations and places working in this way is nascent and requires further study. Here we summarise some of the emerging themes based on feedback from people accessing support, delivery organisations, funders and commissioners.

## What difference does it make to people?

The aim of working in a HLS way is to improve outcomes for people accessing support through liberating organisations to respond flexibly to their specific needs, strengths and context.

Organisations and places that have begun working in an HLS way have observed and received feedback on the benefits of this practice for the people they work with, and are developing more systematic ways of understanding this as their work develops (using the approaches described in the 'learning' section above). Many of these benefits closely reflect the features described in the 'human' section earlier in the report.

The commonly reported benefits for people accessing support span better experiences of support, better outcomes, and being better equipped for life:

- **Being treated as a 'whole person':** people are able to access holistic support that address multiple, interacting factors that impact their life, rather than siloed services that each deal with a specific 'problem.' As well as being logistically easier and potentially removing major sources of stress, people are able to develop meaningful relationships with the worker that supports them and gain more tailored support, which can lead to multiple improved outcomes.
- **Increased self-esteem:** being treated with empathy and a focus on strengths and aspirations taps into people's internal motivation. This can increase self-worth (in contrast to deficit-focused approaches that can compound feelings of failure and worthlessness).
- **Building a 'good life':** approaches that seek to build people's skills, interests and networks in the community can build resilience for the long term, equipping people for a fulfilling life in the longer term rather than ongoing reliance on services.

These benefits do not always materialise and when they do it can often take time. It also requires people receiving support (as well as delivery organisations, funders and commissioners) to understand and trust in a HLS way of working that contradicts many of the behaviours incentivised by 'traditional' services.

The case studies below, from the Mayday Trust and from Gateshead, provide an insight into how HLS approaches differ from traditional services and make a difference to people's lives through a bespoke, flexible approach that builds on people's internal motivation.

## Mayday Trust – Jacob's story

### Traditional experience

Jacob* is in his mid-forties, a university graduate and trained professional. 18 years ago, Jacob became street homeless. During this time, through accessing services, Jacob was labelled as having a drink problem, depression & anxiety. He was constantly evicted or would self-evict when he saw it coming in order to retain his some of his power, resulting in Jacob having 19 different addresses within a 9 year period alongside episodes of rough sleeping. He was well known to system, the council and all services in the area as a troubled individual with 'multiple and complex needs'.

The traditional service response sent him to a counsellor to address his perceived mental health issues. Jacob was perceived as a risk to himself and others and, as a result of the continued warnings, sanctions and eviction for his 'behaviour and drinking' he felt misunderstood, isolated, humiliated and worthless.

### Personalised approach

A year ago, Jacob was offered the opportunity to voluntarily work with a Mayday Trust PTS Asset Coach.

At this time, he was again facing eviction and was in a difficult situation with a local service as a result of his behaviour. His coach took a fresh approach of non-judgement and started to work with the other agencies to fend off the action and sanctions that he was facing to give them time to start to build trust and understand each other better.

Jacob was given a choice of where and when he wanted to meet his coach and what they talked about. There were no traditional embarrassing risk assessments or forms to capture his problems in order to fix them. Looking at who he was, beyond the labels, perceived risks and diagnosis, Jacob eventually confided that he was struggling with his sexual identity and had experienced significant trauma as a result of trying to survive the system for so many years. He felt failure was a given and just a matter of time until his next eviction.

Jacob's coach listened and began to understand how living in a large hostel environment was adding to his increased anxiety and struggles with his sexual identity which were leading to him drink more, which led to his negative behaviour. Together with Jacob's housing team, they began looking into a more suitable type of accommodation away from the large hostels where Jacob felt he would feel less anxious. His coach put Jacob fully in control of

* Names have been changed.

this decision so he was responsible and could take his power back. Although empowering, this was huge psychological leap as this meant the decision was Jacob's and moving out of the hostel would mean moving away from a system, friends and processes that he had known for nearly two decades. He said he felt "uncomfortable not being punished because that's what happens".

With his coach, he found a one bedroom flat in a well networked area that he felt happy with. He finally started to feel in control. He chose to go outside more and met his coach in open spaces where he felt more able to talk about his interests and his identity outside of being 'a homeless service user' and began a taster class at a local college. This helped Jacob to reframe how he thought of himself as he now felt like just another guy going to college, not a client accessing a homeless art class.

Once Jacob started to view himself how he wanted to and felt pride in his own achievements and progress, his anxiety went down and he naturally started to drink less. Giving up alcohol was never the focus or even part of the conversation with his coach as the aim was never to fix a problem.

Within 12 months, Jacob is now living happily in his new accommodation and has just secured a bursary to enrol in a new course alongside a personal budget and is exploring ways to start his own business based on his skills and abilities. He has new friends and a network of support that he built himself in his new neighbourhood.

Fixing people doesn't work as it focuses on the problem and not person, yet listening to a Jacob's story demanded a totally different response. The Personal Transitions Service works in a way that offered Jacob the right response at the right time for him where he could develop his own identity, positive network and sense of purpose outside of services.

***"…whatever you guys are doing, it's bloody good, well done"***

## Gateshead – Mary's story

When the team first met Mary*, she was in desperate straits: no light bulbs in her flat (the only light source was the TV, and the license was out of date), no heating, broken oven, floor to ceiling mould, threadbare carpets, mould in the bath and a strong smell. There were letters from various public agencies piled up.

Mary was dressed in multiple layers. The smell of urine was obvious. She had psoriasis on her head and the wounds appeared painful. She would only look down; eye contact impossible. The team members are used to seeing poverty, but this moved them to tears. It was all they could do to hold it together.

Mary has learning difficulties and possibly PTSD. She was scared to go outside and was scared of authority, for reasons that revealed themselves as the team got to know her. The team began to suspect that she was being exploited financially. She was keen to explain what she thought was happening to her money and having DWP 'in the room' with the team meant they could check things out. The team called the police, social care, GP… They all responded quickly to Mary and positively to the fact the team were not working to a script or set of policies.

Someone has been out just about every day since. The team got the GP to visit who helped with her wounds and put her on the GP radar. They got her a microwave straight away as she was cooking frozen ready meals in a slow cooker which they thought might be making her ill. She seemed very thin. The Police are investigating potential abuse; they've been great.

The team will get to work on the oven and other things. They got the heating going (the police officer helped reactivate the boiler) and put some credit on it. They put £100 pounds on the account and £76 of it went on the accrued debt, leaving £24 worth of heating to show for it. The utility company aren't answering the phone – but the team will pursue this poverty premium problem most urgently. She's getting her benefits now. She's due some more and the team are working on that. She now has a bank account.

The team's fourth visit saw a change. They went armed with rubber gauntlets and cleaning stuff – a deep clean had been arranged for the following week but the team and Mary wanted to take the edge of it there and then. The team were pleasantly stunned when Mary answered the door and declared she'd got herself cleaned up a little, had tidied up a bit and she'd tried to vacuum. However, the state of the carpet and the amount of detritus blew the cleaner up! But this WAS progress. She looked noticeably better. The neighbours came out and said that they'd not seen her like this for years. The team cared and acted, got some great people involved and she responded.

* Names have been changed.

Now, a few weeks later, she's able to join in and untangle some of her own threads. The team are proud of Mary who now, with a slowly growing confidence, looks them in the eye. There's still confusion but this is better already. Yesterday, after six weeks of help, she walked outside to the local Tesco and topped up her fuel card. This is massive for Mary. The neighbours noticed too. Everyone's amazed.

The team hasn't done anything complicated. They've now spent about £1,600 sorting things out. Is this a good use of taxpayers' money? What might have happened if Mary was left like this? The team think Mary might well have died. What would be the social, moral and financial cost of that?

Mary still has some way to go. The team has been getting her some furniture for free, sourced from house clearances (where the stuff collected has been going to the tip even if it is new, this is now a side- project that the team is picking up). She's starting to broaden her horizons. There's every chance she is going to be ok, more than ok. There's every chance she's going to thrive.

## What difference does it make for the system and organisations?

Funders, commissioners and delivery organisations report the following benefits to them as organisations and to the wider system. Again these closely reflect the HLS features described earlier.

### Increased collaboration

When organisations develop a systems perspective, they begin to understand the role that each of them plays in supporting the people with whom they work. In Plymouth, this developed into an understanding across organisations, and a willingness to collaborate to help people:

> "Then today one of my staff comes in and says, 'A woman from [organisation x] has just called me about someone that we used to see. They're really worried about them. I'm going to go down now.' So [as a manager] I don't now go, 'Are you going to record that he's not with us? Where's the referral paperwork?' I don't do that today. I go, 'Okay, so you've got time?' 'Yes, I'll go now… I'll ring her and tell her I'm on my way'."
>
> Provider

### Enabling innovation

Liberating delivery organisations to be human and work in the best interests of people and communities rather than rigid specifications seems to be a trigger for innovation.

> "Compassion and empathy are fuel for innovation, trust is the engine that sustains it. The prototype team have been given the space to operate in whatever way they feel will help… Some of these [ways] were very inventive and were conjured up with colleagues from many departments and partner organisations as well as citizens themselves. In almost all cases, the idea started with compassion. This sounds trite, but compassion was far more likely to generate new ideas and approaches than compliance."
>
> Public sector change leader

> "[we] were flabbergasted at the level of innovation that was suggested. [We] were flabbergasted at the level of consultation that the applicants [providers] had done… Their offer had been co-designed with their staff groups in a way that none of us had ever seen before. Some of the offers they made, we had not asked for, they were not in the spec. They were just additional things that they suggested they could do because they were good things to do, they were good for the city."
>
> Public service commissioner

### Increased motivation

Delivery organisations, funders and commissioners report higher levels of staff motivation as a result of being able to work in a HLS way. This is not true for everyone and motivation across organisations might dip in the short term due to the uncertainty of major change, but once HLS approaches are embedded, staff tend to be more motivated as a result of being able to work in a way that better responds to the reality of the lives of the people they seek to support.

### Cost savings

As many HLS approaches are in their early stages, the true cost implications are still emerging. While it may take an upfront investment of resource to develop new approaches (for example, investment in workforce culture change), there is potential for savings over the longer term. People working in this way have identified the potential for and begun to demonstrate cost savings. See the Gateshead case study on page 67 for emerging examples of this.

These cost savings arise not from costcutting programmes, but from doing the right thing for people first time.

Those people who have reported the potential for cost savings have found that not helping people is expensive and wasteful. It is expensive and wasteful in three ways:

- Not helping people when they ask for help makes people's problems more entrenched and expensive to help later on.
- Not helping people itself costs money. Providing a standardised service which does not meet the strengths and needs of the people who use it mean that scarce resources are wasted providing the wrong thing. This fits with other evidence that there are significant diseconomies of scale when providing responses to human need.

> "I think the issue around money, it's again the thinking differently, it's forced it, the necessity, the working together. We can't duplicate. We have to do something different."
>
> Provider

- Turning people away from help costs money. Assessment processes which decide whether people's problems are serious enough in order to provide support themselves cost money.

However, there was also a clear message from people that whilst working in this way saves money, cost saving cannot be the primary purpose of change. Their message is that saving money comes as a by-product of doing the right thing. If you make cost-saving the focus, you won't do the right thing, and so you won't save money:

> "One of the things I found [as the result of our work], is a reduction in the use of blue lights, unplanned care, which is a massive cost pressure for the CCG. Immediately I said, "I found these big reductions in unplanned care,". [The CCG said] "We want to measure that." [My response was] "No, don't look at it. If you look at it, it will all go [wrong]. You'll only achieve it by not staring hard at it. Just stare hard at doing the right thing and then that will reduce [costs]".
>
> Public sector commissioner

# HOW CHANGE HAPPENS

This section explores how change happens. It describes the journeys of organisations, partnerships and places who are working in the way described in the first half of the report, and provides practical insights and guidance for others who are interested in doing the same.

You can see the stories of change in particular places in the case studies in the Examples & Tools section. In this section we identify some of the commonalities across the different stories of change that we have seen.

We have done this because people continually ask how change can be achieved. The material we present in this section provides a response to that question. However, in the process of creating 'how to' examples, nuance is lost. The examples we present should therefore not be read as recipes for change, but as a navigation aid for exploring the New World.

One aspect of the approach to change that we have noticed is that it seems to mirror the content of the HLS approach. It requires learning and experimentation, and a systems-change approach. Viewed in this way, the processes and examples of change in this section may provide navigational aids for System Stewards – for those people taking responsibility for the health of the systems in which they work.

Exploring how change happens is important for two key reasons:

1. It typically requires a **significant shift in existing mindsets and approaches** – rather than new practices that can be neatly adopted within existing structures. This way of working involves rethinking how social change happens, including the distribution of power and roles and responsibilities of people and organisations across whole systems.

   The 'how' of change is part of the 'what' and investment in supporting culture change is key to developing understanding, buy in and the new mindset and behaviours needed to achieve change in complex environments.

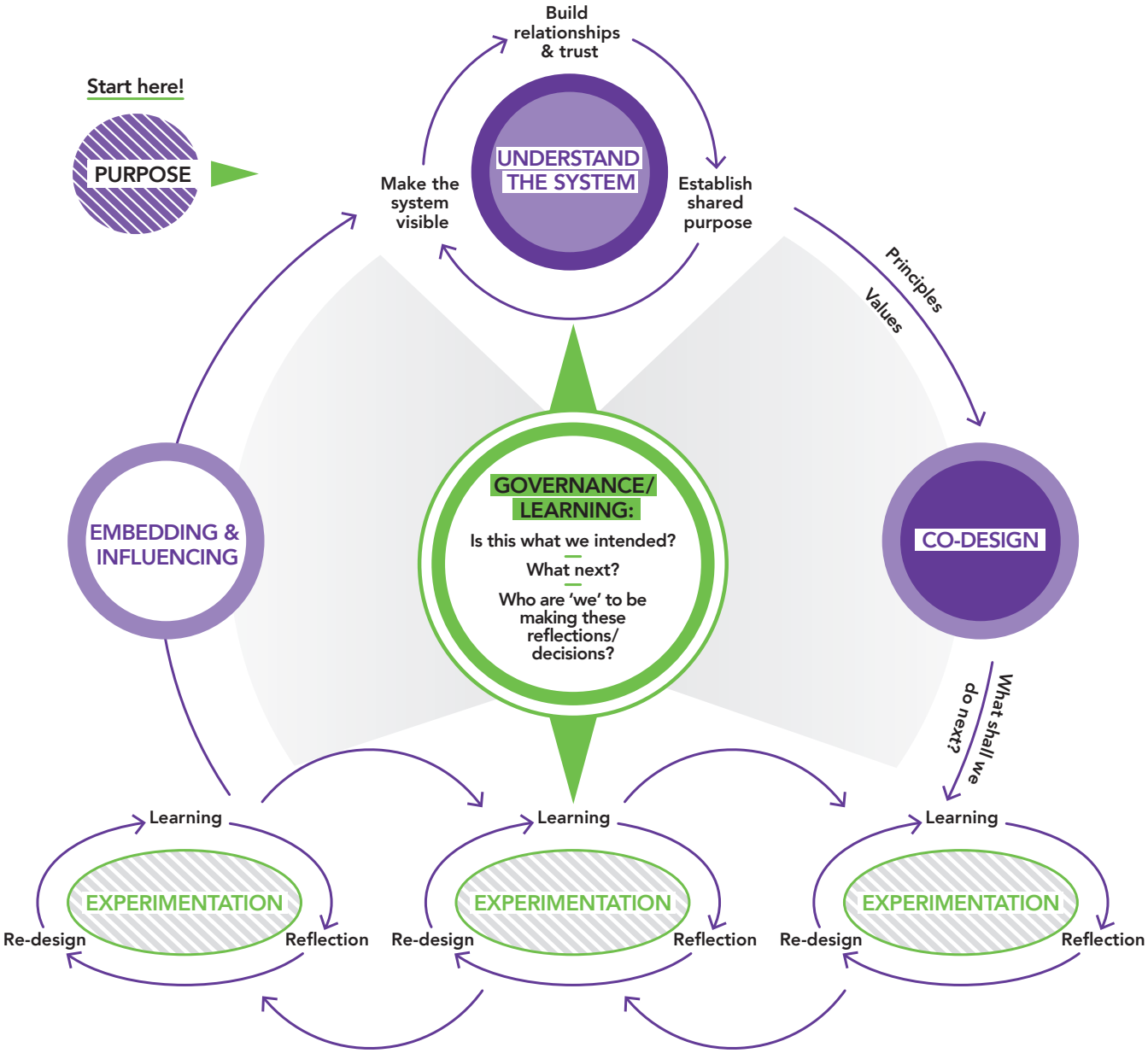
2. The how is always different depending on the **context** – the starting point, the ambition, who is involved. It is important to acknowledge this – there is no single 'how to' guide. But there are opportunities to learn together. There are examples that can serve as inspiration, highlight common barriers and enablers, and identify key archetypes that can help inform the work of others. This report aims to begin to share these examples and insights.

## THE PROCESS OF CHANGE

While change is context dependent, there are some common features across the examples we've seen. The stages identified in the diagram below happen to varying extents, in different orders and are cyclical rather than linear.

The stages apply at the multiple layers described in the first chapter – relevant to both how funders/commissioners work with delivery organisations, and how delivery organisations work with the people they support.

In the Examples & Tools section at the end of this report we give examples of what this change process can look like in practice in different contexts.



### Start with purpose

A system is identified and bounded by its purpose—the change it seeks to achieve. It is important to start with a clear articulation of what the system is for, and where the boundaries are, even if the specifics of this are refined in later stages.

Considering the purpose of a system and exploring how to be more effective at creating this change is a powerful starting point. People are able to check the purpose of the system against what is really happening. This can lead to two types of reasons/motivations for change:

- The moral case: outcomes for people aren't good enough;
- The financial case: with budget cuts and rising demand, current models are no longer viable, and (given the moral case) we can't do less of the same.

These are not mutually exclusive and often it is a combination of the two that drives change, based on a recognition that meaningfully improving outcomes is not possible within existing systems and structures (both commissioning structures and the services that result).

Where places have acted on this recognition that change is needed, there is typically a 'spark' that drives action by making the imperative to act impossible to ignore, and/or creating a sense that meaningful change is possible. Examples include:

- Deep listening to feedback from people accessing services about what they want and need that can't be ignored
- Incentives for collaboration (e.g. a funding programme or the recognition that provision won't be able to continue without increased joint working)
- New leaders and strategies
- Inspiration from elsewhere, including international examples and other disciples e.g. Cornerstone were influenced by Buurtzorg in the Netherlands (see case study), and the Mayday Trust drew on positive psychology.

To see examples of the 'drivers for change' that inspired different places and organisations, please see the Examples & Tools section.

## Understanding the system

To begin to work in an HLS way, those who are part of a system must understand that system – who is part of it, what the relationships between the different elements of it are, and how they work.

### Make the system visible

The first part of understanding the system is to make sure that the actors (people and organisations) in the system know who else is in the system, what they do, and what their perspectives on the system are.

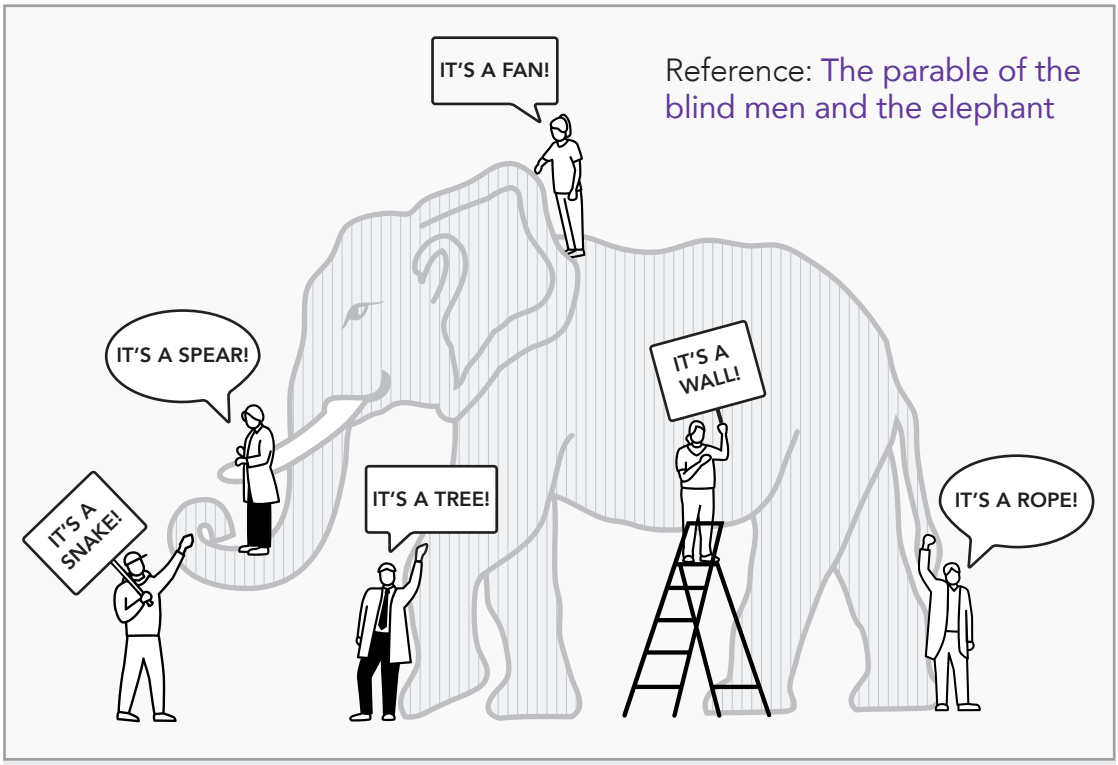
This might include system mapping. It is crucial that this stage includes the perspective of those the system aims to serve.

For example, Plymouth used a process of Appreciative Inquiry to hear the voices of different actors within their local system which supported adults with complex needs. A crucial part of this exercise was creating mechanisms which enabled 'service users' to have their voices heard:

> "I think when you hear it from service users and residents, you start to think, "Actually, that reinforces this intrinsic stuff that we're already thinking," and they're saying to you, "Look, I don't want to do this this way, I want to do it this way. This is what I would like.
>
> This is what I want." We listened to that."
>
> Commissioner, Plymouth

Ideally this stage will include the involvement of actors from across the system (beyond traditional silos), however this is not always possible when seeking to bring about particularly disruptive change (see example 2 in the Examples & Tools section section below).

An important aspect of understanding the system is recognising people's different perspectives on the purpose of the system, and the values that they bring.




Reference: The parable of the blind men and the elephant

**It is only when these different perspectives are made apparent to others in the system, and acknowledged as equally valid, that 'the system' can be genuinely understood by all the actors within it.**

### Building relationships and trust

Actors in the system must be able to trust one another. This starts with authentically hearing one another's experiences. No one perspective or voice in the system has the whole truth, but some voices will have been heard more than others and this power imbalance requires addressing. It takes time to build trusting relationships, undertake shared activities which build empathy, and help people to see different possibilities. The ambition is not to create an environment in which everyone agrees on everything, but one that enables everyone to have a voice, and trust each other enough to disagree and debate.

### Establishing shared purpose

Once people see themselves as part of a shared system, they can begin to refine what their shared purpose ought to be. This typically involves developing a vision for the system that partners can coalesce around and work towards together, rather than deciding what specific services need to be commissioned or delivered. Again the involvement of people that the system seeks to help is crucial developing this shared purpose.

Examples of shared purpose include Gateshead's focus on how to help people thrive rather than demanding immediate Council Tax payments, and Mayday Trust's shift from tackling homelessness to ensuring *'that system is personalised, transitional and works for people going through tough times'.*

### Developing principles, values and behaviours

Developing trust is an essential foundation but in itself is not enough – how people work needs to fundamentally change too, not just the strength of relationships. Many places working in this way have stressed the importance of establishing system principles or values that guide the behaviours of actors across the system – enabling people to hold themselves and each other to account for how they behave rather than the delivery of specific tasks or narrow targets.

## Culture change

At all stages, developing the new mindsets, behaviours and skills to work in a HLS way can take significant time and support. Some staff are predisposed to thinking in a 'systems' way and recognise the benefits for the people they work with, which in turn can increase motivation. However, others feel exposed and under threat when what they've done for years is questioned, and they no longer have clarity on what to do in a world that embraces relationships and flexibility rather than process and checklists. Systems thinking training, establishing systems behaviours/principles and giving people space to explore (often with peers) how what they do needs to change can help. Alongside this, a sense of permission to work differently is crucial.

*[We experienced an] "enormous ripple effect on the whole organisation… Culture had to shift so hugely when we passed power back to people – language, structure, environment, structure, process, and most importantly people…*

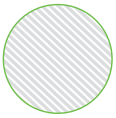
*We re-interviewed all staff and lost 50% of the workforce – they didn't want to or didn't have the right behaviours and mindset."*

Provider

## Design

Having established a shared purpose for the system, what needs to be done to work towards this? Based on the understanding of the system developed, what roles should different actors in the system play – collectively and as individual people/organisations? This can involve redesigning funding/commissioning and/or delivery approaches.

One of the key enablers for a HLS approach is devolving as much decision making as possible to the people providing and receiving support. This requires that approaches are not over-specified at the design stage.



## Experimentation, reflection, re-design

In a complex environment, work isn't a set of industrial practices to be bought and replicated. People accessing support are unique. The context is always changing. All work is therefore an exploration and an opportunity to learn.

As part of each 'exploration', there must be aspects of learning and re-design. People providing and accessing support must work together to make sense of what is happening, and how it needs to change. Each aspect of experimentation is therefore a microcosm of the overall learning and governance question: is this what we intended?

## At the Centre: Governance and Learning

Working in a complex environment means moving from managing prescribed processes to having a set of conversations which seek to govern how the system works, and how resources are distributed to enable it to fulfil its purpose.

At the heart of this is the question: is what we are doing what we intended? This involves comparing what we intended to happen (the shared purpose, values and principles) to what actually happened. Creating feedback loops enables actors across the system to see what occurred. Such feedback is partly in the form of measurement, and partly in the form of stories and experiential learning. Governance is therefore crucially a process to encourage and develop learning throughout the system. **Governance is learning about learning**.

The other aspect of governance of the system is to keep asking 'who are we to be making these reflections?' – this aspect of governance requires reflection on legitimacy, authority and ensuring that all relevant voices are actively sought out and heard.

> "We try to maintain accountability and keep dialogue open with partners – building trust through frequent conversations and involving our partners. Holding ourselves as a funder to account is important and we bring this into frequent points of monitoring from grant funded organisations – what do they think of our practice? We have commitments on our website and ask partners how we live up to that."
>
> Charitable funder

## Embedding and influencing

The first cycle of a HLS approach tends to take time and involve some big and often challenging changes. Therefore, partners tend to start with a scope that, while big enough to act as a genuine test, is not so big it involves an unacceptable level of risk. This means that once a new approach has been developed, tested, and refined throughout, there's often an imperative to build on the learning to embed and extend the approach in the second and future 'cycles'. As part of this, it is important to consider the infrastructure needed to sustainably enable and embed new ways of working, for example, IT systems and governance models.

Sometimes extending the approach is about direct delivery of the current model, in other cases it's about influencing others to adopt it, sometimes it's a combination of the two.

### Resource Allocation

Resources are required to make all aspects of the system work. It takes resources to understand the system; It takes resources to understand the system, to design well, to experiment, and to govern and learn. Those with decisions to take about resource allocation need to be able to identify where all the resources (human and financial) exist in the system, how they can be best deployed and when—it is likely different resources will be needed at different points in the cycle. For example, the formation of relationships and identification of shared purpose is a crucial stage for which delivery organisations need resource to engage in.

Commissioners are therefore required to think about resource allocation across different stages of the change cycle. Commissioners can use different resource allocation tools for different jobs, both grants and contracts. They can use whichever tools are most appropriate to enable resources to be allocated to get the relevant tasks done.

HLS approaches typically involve working across traditional silos, which has implications for where resource comes from. Pooled budgets, including place-based budgets at a neighbourhood level, can be an important enabler. Where it is not possible to pool budgets or there is a desire to test new approaches before taking this step, adopting HLS approaches typically requires a budget holder to accept that resource will be used more flexibly beyond traditional service boundaries (and manage the implications of this with other budget holders and services).

## CONDITIONS FOR CHANGE

The features listed below are positive foundations for adopting HLS approaches, and increase the chances of a new approach both starting and being sustained. The absence of one or more of these features does not mean that it is impossible to adopt a new way of working, but acknowledging and identifying if and how these features can be developed should increase the likelihood of success. These features are likely to develop and deepen over time as new ways of working are tested and embedded.

| ENABLERS: what helps to create these conditions? | FEATURE: what conditions are needed? | BARRIERS: what are the challenges that typically prevent this happening? |
|---|---|---|
| Combination of powerful data and stories that communicate the moral and/or financial case for why the current system isn't working and why change is needed. Insights from people who are failed by the current system are important, as are pointing to examples from elsewhere as inspiration and to show it's possible | A clearly articulated case for change | The necessary insights may not be available or the case for change may be implicit and not clearly communicated or understood |
| Key leaders champion a new approach and help create the necessary conditions including giving permission for new ways of working. There is buy in across multiple leaders to enable whole system working across traditional siloes, and to ensure the burden doesn't fall too heavily on a few people | Leadership support (including political leadership and trustees) | Leaders do not understand the need for change, do not feel there is a viable alternative, feel testing new approaches is too risky and counter to existing structures/ways of thinking, or do not believe they have the time and resource to make it happen |
| Partners are open to building relationships and working together to identify shared priorities. They understand and are prepared to invest the considerable time and energy it will take | Strong and diverse relationships across the system | It takes time to build relationships and trust, particularly in a context which has traditionally been competitive. Prioritising talking and building relationships can be seen as unproductive by critics |

| ENABLERS: what helps to create these conditions? | FEATURE: what conditions are needed? | BARRIERS: what are the challenges that typically prevent this happening? |
|---|---|---|
| Genuine understanding of and commitment to involving people in shaping decisions that impact them, and investment in the new ways of working needed to support this. Involving people early on helps establish what's needed to meaningfully engage people throughout | Involvement of people who the system seeks to support | Lack of track record in involving people; limited relationships, skills and resource to support this; limited opportunity or intention to act on people's input. When people are involved under these conditions, it can be tokenistic and damage trust |
| Areas that are not subject to significant external regulatory and legislative and narrow internal reporting requirements often find it easier to both make the case for and develop new approaches. It is also a question of willingness to be creative— in many cases there is room to experiment if you start with a clear understanding of the 'red lines' you can innovate within | Flexible regulation and legislation | Areas subject to significant and restrictive external reporting and compliance requirements e.g. national regulation and legislation will find it harder to develop new approaches. However, there is often some room for manoeuvre in most cases and this should be explored |
| Existing supportive relationships with enabling functions helps, and is aided by involving them early on in conversations about why a new approach is important, and developing new solutions together to enable simple rules, parameters and guidelines | Ability to influence key functions including legal, finance, procurement, audit | Historically difficult relationships and culture of 'blaming' is a key barrier, as is a lack of shared understanding of the reasons for a new approach, and involving key functions too late |

| ENABLERS: what helps to create these conditions? | FEATURE: what conditions are needed? | BARRIERS: what are the challenges that typically prevent this happening? |
|---|---|---|
| Developing HLS approaches typically involves responding to people where they are at and connecting them to opportunities in their community. Involvement of partners that are part of the community and know the local landscape helps develop more responsive approaches and provides a foundation of trust for engaging with people in a different way | Local relationships | Lack of local connections and identity often makes it more difficult to work in a more relational, systemic way |
| A culture that embraces new approaches or a willingness to invest in building the necessary culture (e.g. comfortable working in ambiguity, systems thinking, sense of permission, focus on learning) | Letting go of the illusion of control | A culture that is characterised by a desire for control, working to rigid parameters and processes focus on maintaining the status quo and discomfort with working in ambiguity will take time to change—it requires investment, new job roles and often requires staff changes |
| Sufficient resource to allow the thinking time and relationship building to enable new approaches, including the capacity and expertise to make this happen (sometimes requiring redesign alongside delivery) | Investment in change | Lack of capacity can be a blocker, as is high staff turnover which is a barrier to building the trusting relationships and buy in needed to enable a new way of working |

"THERE'S CERTAINLY SOMETHING STARTING TO BUILD AROUND TURNING COMMON SENSE INTO COMMON PRACTICE"

## WHAT SUPPORT IS NEEDED TO WORK IN THIS WAY

At events we've convened of hundreds of people (charities, funders, commissioners, procurement colleagues, researchers, public service reformers) in England and Scotland, the following have emerged as key priorities for support:

- Principles, tools and guidance: How do we get started? What practical examples from elsewhere (e.g. commissioning specifications) can act as a guide?
- Support on specific practical issues e.g. accountability, culture change, procurement, national context, regulation.
- Getting sceptics on board: who else needs to be involved and how do we convince them e.g. procurement, councillors?
- Understanding the implications for different roles in the system and how to work more collaboratively e.g. funders and commissioners sharing risk, inviting others into the conversation, such as councillors and staff working on the ground.
- Peer support: a valuable way to develop 'collective bravery' on what is often a tough and long term journey. There is interest in peer support at multiple levels, including acting and collaborating locally, while sharing and learning nationally as part of a wider network.

As one of the speakers at an event we hosted commented, "There's certainly something starting to build around turning common sense into common practice". This report aims to respond to some of the 'asks' listed above, to help contribute to developing this new version of practice.

# CONCLUSION: BUILDING A MOVEMENT

## "SYSTEMIC CHANGE WILL GENUINELY START TO HAPPEN WHEN WE CREATE THE RIGHT ENVIRONMENT THAT BRINGS TOGETHER AND EMBRACES THE FRUSTRATED"

From spending time with organisations working in this way, we have begun to learn about what HLS practice looks like, and the different roles that funders, public sector commissioners, and those who undertake work on the ground can do to bring about change.

We have also learnt that there is significant momentum for change:

- Organisations who work on the ground want to provide bespoke responses to people's strengths and circumstances;
- Public sector commissioners want to help (local) systems produce better outcomes – they want to commission differently;
- Funders want to address the systemic causes of social problems – they want to fund differently.

The *'Whole New World'* report has been downloaded over 7000 times in 18 months. Over 500 organisations in the UK alone have come to workshops and events to explore what this practice looks like.

While the barriers to adopting new practices are daunting and the journey invariably challenging, the case for change is increasingly impossible to ignore. The HLS approaches that are emerging point to a new way of working that enable better outcomes for people, more efficient use of resources and more motivated employees.

The challenge now is to make these approaches the norm for practice relating to supporting people in complex environments. There is strength in numbers.

We think this involves:

- Creating shared leadership: so that the movement engages responds to a plurality of voices across different parts of the system
- Connecting people: so that people and organisations can share experience and knowledge
- Influencing: creating a network of champions, so that those who seek change can draw on the support of others
- Building an enabling environment: working with national Governments and regulators to create the conditions where an HLS approach is possible
- Creating bespoke support for organisations to help them change: for example, by developing masterclasses, peer support networks and consultancy offers
- Generating, curating and sharing learning: developing knowledge resources to help inform practice

If you would like to join in with this work, or would simply like more information about any of these aspects, please get in touch.

Each organisation (or partnership of organisations) which adopts this way of working will be experimenting and breaking new ground. This will be both exciting and challenging. We look forward to your company on this journey.

**Toby Lowe**
**Dawn Plimmer**

# EXAMPLES & TOOLS

In this section we provide some examples and tools taken from the practice of the organisations with whom we have been working. There are also other useful examples and tools in the Library and Forum of the Complexities Knowledge Hub site.

# DRIVERS FOR CHANGE

**A range of providers, funders and commissioners explain in their own words what led them to develop a human, learning, systems approach.**

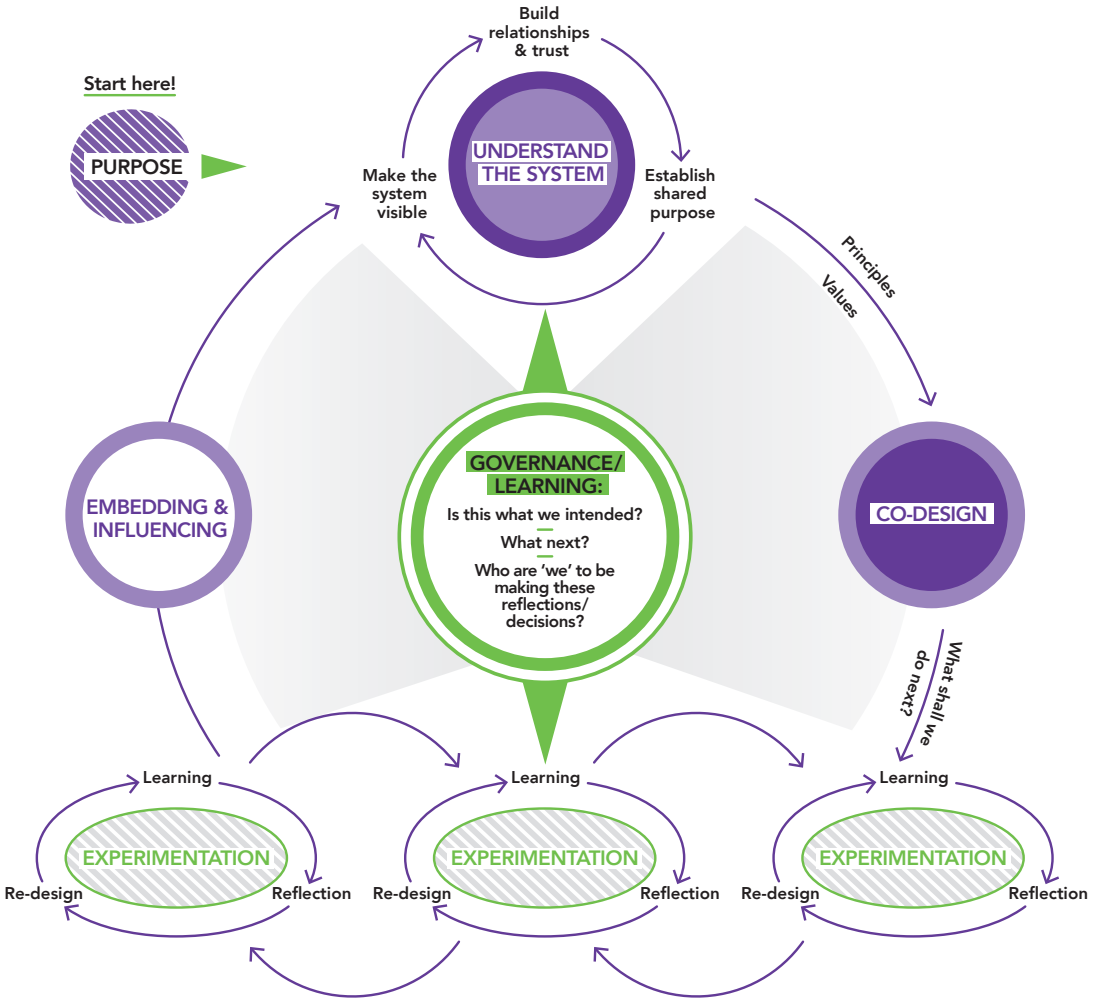
| Providers | |
|---|---|
| Mayday Trust | In 2011, prompted by austerity and driven by mission, the organisation radically transformed after carrying out an inquiry through which they listened to over one hundred individuals' experiences of homeless services.<br>They found that the process people go through when they become homeless was dehumanising and institutionalising, trapping people in a cycle of dependence. And the outcomes for people weren't good enough—people were unable to move on because services had focussed on fixing problems, rather than building purpose, connections and a life outside of a homeless identity.<br>This was a systems issue, not an individual issue and prompted Mayday to identify their responsibility as an organisation to remove systemic barriers for people.<br>*"People's voices were too loud to ignore… Tinkering around the edges of what didn't work wasn't going to be good enough, so we threw out our old way of working, and started again."* |
| Shekinah | *"I realised our organisation was not fit for purpose for the new world we're moving into which is more about co-production, collaboration and alliance. So we stopped for a year and went back to basics to rethink our purpose to become a far more flexible and responsive organisation"* |
| Cornerstone | *"There's a perfect storm situation in social care – austerity, an ageing population, challenges recruiting people into working in social care. There are lots of organisations tinkering around the edges but we don't want to do that anymore… It's about being bold not small changes. That's why it's scary."* |
| Hamoaze | *"[At] the big buzz [appreciative inquiry] event, I think there were just some horrifying things [for us to hear]. One of the things that really, really struck me is that 79% of the 600 people that we spoke to said that they wanted to go to a place where staff were smiling and warm and friendly. You think, "Shit, really, smiling and warm and friendly? Bloody hell, [we're not doing that?] what else are we getting wrong?"* |

| Funders | |
|---|---|
| Blagrave | *"From our survey of grantees in 2016 we heard a clear message that funders are putting unnecessary restrictions on organisations they partner with that are detrimental and don't recognise the complexity voluntary sector organisations are working in, and the lives of the young people they work with."* |
| Lankelly Chase | Lankelly Chase reflected on the difference between their grant-making practice and the uncertainties inherent in the complex reality of social change: *"we still gave three year £100k grants and asked for proposals setting out outcomes. We invested so much time upfront in the assessment based on an illusion of control and certainty."*<br>They recognised that *"we were part of the system whether liked it or not. The minute we came in as funders, we were part of it. If we are part of it, we need to ask questions of ourselves – how is it that we work, how do we need to change?"* |
| Tudor Trust | *"The Tudor Trust has a long history of relational funding – seeking to develop long-term relationships with organisations that they come to know and trust. They arrived at this approach because Trustees had gradually become aware of how focusing on narrow programme outcomes didn't match the complexity of real people's needs. Applicants were being encouraged to meet the Trust's criteria rather than asking for what they really needed. Trustees dropped programme criteria in 2006 and since then have tried to start from a position of trust in order to hear what applicants themselves are saying about their work and how Tudor might help them achieve their aims. Trustees are now keen to be more reflective about their own practice – asking the question, 'how can we be a better relational grant maker?"* |

| Commissioners | |
|---|---|
| South Tyneside – public health | *"In the past we'd made attempts at integration but they missed the point that it's all about the person and that people have to own the change… it became a paper-based exercise. In South Tyneside we've now realised that we're all in it together. There's finite resource. Sitting back and thinking it's ok was a false reassurance – there are holes in the boat and we are all going down."* |
| Devon County Council – domestic violence and sexual abuse | Conducted ethnographic research on domestic violence and sexual abuse to engage with the system and people's experiences of it. *"It's a really complex issue but our service system isn't set up to deal with complexity – it's set up in a really reductionist way to manage an aspect of a person's life but not the rest of it… Services aren't there to deal with the complexity and totality of people."* |
| Glasgow City Health and Social Care Partnership | *"As commissioners what we have doesn't work for us. Traditional routes don't work. We need greater flexibility and shift from competition to collaboration focusing on the best outcomes for the people in the City experiencing or at risk of homelessness."* |
| Plymouth | *"As part of a funding bid in 2012 over 400 service users, 70 services and several key individuals were consulted with, including political leaders and senior executives. The consultation uncovered the widely-held view that services are delivered in 'silos' – essentially narrow systems that do not relate to the needs of people that use services or effectively join-up with other silos of care that the person may need."* |

# WHAT DOES THE CHANGE PROCESS LOOK LIKE IN PRACTICE?

This process of change can happen in many different contexts. As highlighted throughout this report, a HLS approach can be led by different actors in different parts of the system. Below we have mapped out what the process might look like when the change starts at two different points, and is instigated by different actors. These two examples are not exhaustive or mutually exclusive. They aim to serve as illustrations NOT prescriptive steps to follow.



## Examples of what this could look like in practice

### Example 1: funder/commissioner led*

This involves bringing together insights from actors across the system to rethink its purpose and develop new ways of working that enable HLS approaches. Changing commissioning and funding approaches are typically at the heart of this, but the change is often more far reaching than the act of allocating resources alone, involving significant alteration to delivery and how organisations work together.

Examples include the Glasgow Alliance to End Homelessness, a broad Health and Social Care Partnership-led alliance that aims to collaboratively redesign how the City works together to tackle homelessness; and Plymouth, where commissioners have changed the way that they commission work which supports vulnerable adults.

**Example 1:**
(Re) commissioning a service: a City council needs to commission its support for homeless people. How might it go about this work using a HLS approach

| Stage | What this looks like |
|---|---|
| Starting with purpose | The commissioner identifies that the purpose of the system they are seeking to improve is: '*to enable people who experience homelessness to live well*' |
| Understanding the system | The commissioner undertakes system mapping work to identify who contributes to achieving this purpose. They begin by working with people who have experienced homelessness and people who work directly with those who experience homelessness.<br>They ask these groups to help map the system which serves people who experience homelessness, and supports them to 'live well'. These people are the 'actors in the system'.<br>The commissioners seek to hear the voices of all the actors in the system, particularly people who access support.<br>They spend time with people and organisations in different parts of the system. They ask:<br>• What do you want to help you to live well?<br>• What do other people do that helps people who experience homelessness to live well?<br>• What do other people do that gets in the way?<br>The commissioners collect and analyse this information, but they do not draw conclusions at this stage. |

*Note: this refers to who instigates the change. It may be that the approach becomes jointly led by additional/all layers of the system later in the process e.g. as in an alliance approach.

| Stage | What this looks like |
|---|---|
| Making the system visible<br><br>Building relationships and trust<br><br>Establishing shared purpose<br><br>Developing principles, values and behaviours | The commissioner convenes sessions that bring together the people and organisations identified by the mapping exercise to:<br>• Introduce the actors in the system to each other, enabling each person/organisation to explain what it is that they do, why it is they do it, and for whom.<br>• Play back the results of the listening exercises and enable participants to jointly make sense of what they heard.<br>• Build and refine a shared sense of purpose: what is the purpose this system? How does each person and organisation contribute to this shared purpose?<br>• Actors co-produce a set of principles, values and behaviours that will help the system achieve its purpose<br>• Identify which other actors they regularly communicate with, and by what means they communicate. (e.g. Is there a network that all people/organisations are part of? Does communication rest on particular friendships/ shared history?)<br>The commissioners convene these sessions until they detect that a shared sense of purpose has been created, and that the people and organisations have built trust.<br>By the end of these sessions, all the actors in the system have a good sense of the purpose the system, who all the other actors are, and what their particular role within the system is.<br>All the actors also have an agreed set of shared principles, values and behaviours.<br>The commissioners have an overview of who all the actors in the system are, what their roles are, and how the relationships between the actors are mediated (how they communicate with one another). |

| Stage | What this looks like |
|---|---|
| Design | The commissioners convene a set of design conversations with all the actors in the system (including the people who experience homelessness). The purpose of these sessions is to identify:<br>• How the different roles in the system fit together (how will we work together)?<br>• What data do we need in order to reflect on our work? (what information needs to be collected? how will it be analysed? who will make sense of it?)<br>• Does the system have all the assets that it needs? (e.g. Does it need new homes?)<br>• Is there anything we can stop doing?<br>• What infrastructure is required to govern how the different actors in the system continue to learn together? (do relevant networks exist? how will they communicate to reflect together? how often will they do so?) |
| Resource allocation | The commissioner allocates resources to the actors in the system to enable it to achieve its purpose.<br>The commissioners and actors in the system choose to use an 'alliance contracting' model. The actors in the system who provide services to people who experience homelessness form a single alliance – a network of organisations who have agreed to work together, and share joint responsibility and risk for service provision.<br>The commissioner contracts with this alliance to achieve the purpose of the system.<br>The contract does not specify targets to be achieved. Instead the contract identifies the governance processes by which the alliance will be held accountable for learning and adapting to change. |

| Stage | What this looks like |
|---|---|
| Experimentation | The actors in the system undertake agreed activities to enable the system to achieve its purpose. Those working directly with people who experience homelessness create Learning Communities in order to have a safe space to reflect on practice honestly together.<br>The experience and voices of all the actors in the system is captured regularly, and reflected back to relevant actors. Regular re-design sessions are held to enable actors to redesign interventions and offers in light of this feedback. |
| Governance and learning | Once the tendering process is complete, the commissioners join the alliance. Together the alliance creates a governing infrastructure, which:<br>• Allocates resources between the members of the alliance<br>• Oversees delivery – are organisations doing what they said they would do?<br>• Maintains the desired culture of principles, values and behaviour: are we acting in the way we intended?<br>• Ensures that learning processes are undertaken – that information about the service, and the people who experience it, is being regularly captured and reflected on.<br>• Regularly asks the question: is this what we intended to happen? |
| Embedding and influencing | The commissioners share their experience commissioning in this way with other commissioners in their locality, and to their peers nationally.<br>The infrastructure for learning and reflection (IT systems, networks of actors etc.) becomes recognised as part of the Council's core infrastructure requirements. |

**Example 2: delivery led**

Delivery-led change involves developing and testing new HLS approaches to delivery before looking to change and influence funding and commissioning processes that will enable these new approaches. It may be led by and involve one or more delivery organisations. While resource from some funders/commissioners is likely to be used to enable the delivery of the new approach, these funders/commissioners play an enabling role rather than proactively leading the change.

For example, Mayday Trust and Cornerstone developed new person-centred models and are now working to influence commissioners and the wider system to adopt approaches that are more supportive of this way of working. Mayday Trust describes how, when they started out, they soon realised that trying to 'collaborate within the broken system' wouldn't bring about the paradigm shift that is necessary to bring about real systemic change. Mayday's approach to collaboration is to be led by the individual and aims to broker opportunities from the wider community rather than defaulting to a sector based, service response. Their Personal Transitions Service, which is delivered by Mayday Trust and a network of Innovation Partners across the country, is modelling this new personalised, transitional system in practice and 'influencing by doing' to demonstrate that highly person-led approaches require shifting away from a traditional deficit-based system.

In Gateshead, led by the Council's Public Service Reform director, multiple services are prototyping new approaches to delivery to understand what 'different' looks like. They are generating insights to make the case for new approaches, while also developing their understanding of what commissioning approaches are needed to support this way of working.

**Model 2: delivery led**

A regional social care charity that supports older people has decided to review its strategy in response to the challenging environment in social care. How might it go about this work using a HLS approach?

| Stage | What this looks like |
|---|---|
| Starting with purpose | The charity knows from its work to date that it needs to offer more flexible, bespoke support if it is respond to people's needs, interests and circumstances. It identifies that the purpose of the system is to *'enable older people to live a fulfilling life'*. |
| Understanding the system | The charity undertakes ethnographic research to understand the experiences and aspirations of the people they support. They begin by working with older people who access support, plus their families and carers; and social care staff who work with older people (along with broader staff and trustees)<br>They work to understand how people have experienced social care in the past, and how this could change to better meet people's aspirations for a fulfilling life. The charity also works with these groups to map all the services and support people interact with so that they can identify a more joined up offer.<br>The charity speaks with other key social care providers to gauge their willingness to work collaboratively on this new approach. Some are interested, but want to wait until the new model is developed and tested before considering becoming involved.<br>The charity also engages with other actors in the system, including its commissioners and regulators, to gain their insights on how the system can work better in the current context, and what scope they have to transform existing approaches.<br>The charity collects and analyses this information, but they do not draw conclusions at this stage. |

| Stage | What this looks like |
|---|---|
| Building relationships and trust<br><br>Establishing shared purpose<br><br>Developing principles, values and behaviours | The charity establishes a working group of trustees and staff at all levels to reflect on the insights from the previous phase and begin designing and creating the conditions for a new approach. Older people and their families are involved to ensure the new model responds to their circumstances, needs and aspirations.<br><br>One of the first steps is to build a sense of shared purpose and explore what needs to change in order to work towards this. The previous phase of work reinforced the need to focus on supporting people to achieve what they consider to be a fulfilling life, rather than delivery of standardised services.<br><br>People in a range of roles and at all levels of the organisation, plus older people and their families/carers, are asked to consider their contribution to achieving this purpose.<br><br>The group then begins to consider what needs to change to enable this to happen. Based on learning from other models they've studied, they start by developing principles, values and behaviours that will guide them in working towards their shared purpose.<br><br>They aim to break down traditional hierarchies and encourage everyone to actively contribute by creating spaces where people can get to know each other and understand each other's drivers and motivations. They test out the new principles and behaviours and ask everyone to reflect on how this has impacted what they do.<br><br>By the end of these sessions, all the actors have a good sense of the purpose the system and what their role is. Everyone has an agreed set of shared principles, values and behaviours. Staff who have not been intensively involved in the process so far are regularly updated, and their feedback sought at regular points. |

| Stage | What this looks like |
|---|---|
| Design | The organisation begins design conversations to develop its new model. The purpose of this stage is to identify:<br>• How the organisation will provide support to achieve the identified purpose, in a way that fits with the principles, vision and behaviours it has identified.<br>• What this means for staff who support older people, and in turn what this means for older people, their families and carers; and other roles within the organisation from trustees and the leadership team, to HR and IT functions.<br>• What support staff will need to work in the new way<br>• How the organisation will work with other actors in the system who are still working in a traditional way, and help the people it supports to navigate this wider system of support in a way that works better for them<br>• What data it needs to reflect on its work (what information needs to be collected? how will it be analysed? who will make sense of it? How will we act on the findings?)<br>• What conversations it needs to have with its funders and regulators to gain their support and input. |
| Resource allocation | From the start of this process, the organisation has been relying on a mixture of unrestricted income plus grant funding from a charitable funder who supports the organisation in developing a new approach.<br>To resource the implementation of its new approach, the organisation gains the ongoing support of this funder, plus the agreement of a commissioner who funds its work across a number of Local Authority areas. The organisation will test its model in these three areas to begin with.<br>To enable more flexible person-centred delivery, the organisation works with the funder and commissioner to remove any KPIs which are not essential, and establish how they will communicate and learn together as the new model is adopted. |

| Stage | What this looks like |
|---|---|
| Experimentation | Staff in the Local Authority areas receive intensive support and training to develop their understanding of the new model, and build the new skills and behaviours. They are supported to learn new tools and techniques such as appreciative inquiry and action learning sets so that they are able to have strengths-based conversations with the people they support, and work to develop solutions together as teams.<br>Teams embed learning and reflection sessions in their weekly meetings to continuously adapt and improve their work. Regular re-design sessions are held to bring together teams to share learning and consider what wider support and infrastructure they need in their new roles. |
| Governance and learning | All staff are responsible for working within the principles, values and behaviours, including sharing and acting on learning in everything they do. A central governance and learning group comprising the leadership team plus people in different roles and at different levels of the organisation is established to ensure this happens. Rather than overseeing adherence to processes and procedures, the group:<br>• Oversees delivery – are teams doing what is need to achieve the shared purpose?<br>• Maintains the desired culture of principles, values and behaviour: are we acting in the way we intended?<br>• Ensures that learning processes are undertaken - that information about the service, and the people who experience it, is being regularly captured and acted on.<br>• Regularly asks the question: is this what we intended to happen? |
| Embedding and influencing | The model has been effective in improving outcomes for the people it supports and is viable operationally. The charity now aims to roll out the model across the organisation through working with staff and commissioners to gain their buy in and support them in the new way of working. They continue build and embed the organisational infrastructure (e.g. responsive IT system, learning forums) critical to enabling the new approach.<br>The organisation begins to proactively share learning and influence across the wider system, including commissioners, regulators and other providers. This takes many forms including workshops, training, reports and sharing stories. |

# WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR PROCUREMENT?

Procurement is often identified as a blocker to the adoption of HLS approaches. While regulatory and legislative change is needed, there is already scope to procure for the HLS approaches described in *Exploring the New World*.

This guide encourages commissioners, providers and service users to come together in common interest and focus on what they can do ***right now***, by:

- Developing collective understanding to overcome internal challenges
- Understanding what's possible within existing regulation and legislation

This guide is indicative and in no sense intended to replace your legal adviser. Nor is it intended to, or does it constitute legal advice. We strongly suggest that you enlist the services of a 'can do' solicitor!

**Developing collective understanding to overcome internal challenges**

Often new approaches to procurement are blocked internally, because of cultural divides between departments and/or because 'this is how we've always done it.'

Actions that can help make the case for and achieve change are:

- Build relationships and common understanding: to make HLS approaches possible requires a common view of success that bridges the often artificial divide between commissioning, procurement and finance colleagues. This requires a shift from transactional engagement, to buidling genuine relationships to develop a shared understanding of why a new approach is needed. Involve procurement, finance, legal and other relevant colleagues in discussions as early as possible so they understand the full picture and can help solve rather than raise problems. Pose questions in a positive way, 'this is what we know is needed to achieve better outcomes, how can we make it work together?'
- Get senior support: if you're facing resistance from procurement colleagues, who are your senior allies? Could they be the one championing new procurement approaches? These senior leaders are the ones who are likely to have to carry the risk, so ensure you equip them to understand and make the case for why taking a risk is worthwhile.
- Point to alternatives: there are examples in this report and more widely of public procurement operating in a different more creative way. Share these and point to the opportunities to make use of existing regulatory and legislative mechanisms and permissions.

**Understanding what's possible within existing regulation and legislation**

*2015 Public Contracts Regulations*

The thrust of the 2015 Public Contracts Regulations is to achieve broader and better social benefits for our communities. They are a licence to collaborate.

**You can:**

- Have a pre-tender market consultation on the specification and the process
- When you don't 'know the answer', use an Innovation Partnership to commission
- Use Reserved Contracts to engage with voluntary and civil society
- Embed social value considerations in the marking scheme (we saw evidence of this in Bristol)
- Get external inputs from providers and users on what social value looks and feels like; and how it should be evaluated (see 'Learning' section of the main report for examples).

The 2015 Regulations recognise the potential of public authorities to drive beneficial social change. Social care, health and education are governed by 'light touch' which means that provided the processes are clear, you can design the procurement to suit. This allows for pre-qualification and bespoke selection processes and criteria as well as competition and negotiation at key stages.

The Official Journal of The European Union (OJEU) is raised as a wraith to scarify procurement teams. The fact is that if the value of a contract is over the £750k 'threshold', you can:

- Publish a Contract Notice or a Prior Information Notice as an advisory; then a contract notice when the contract is awarded
- Follow your own processes, so long as they are reasonable and proportionate in terms of timeframes

### *Principled working*

- Apply equal treatment (information, opportunities, procedures, assessment)
- Be non-discriminatory
- Be transparent
- Be proportionate, which means doing things in a necessary and appropriate manner

### *Social value*

The Social Value Act (2012) applies when you are contracting under the 2015 Regulations. In essence, it enables you to:

- Create a socially-purposed supply chain
- Have an effective way of promoting community inclusion and targeting disadvantaged groups

### *Dealing with challenge*

To be confident of fending off legal challenges, which can be a costly nightmare, ensure that you:

- Focus on the purpose and objectives of commissioning
- Select or design a process to deliver on the objectives
- Check that the tender, specification, requirements, evaluation and selection criteria 'read-across' and are consistent
- Be comfortable that the whole process applies the 'principled working tenets' already covered
- Link social value elements objectively to the contract

### *More you can do*

- Service providers can be involved in the specification design at pre-tender stage, but do be clear about how you are going to use and share the information they provide, which should be on an equal basis
- Involve service users in decision making
- Include wider social impact in the specification or award criteria
- Create Reserved Contracts, so long as they operate under the Light Touch regime and are for a specific type of service (the new rules permit for certain light touch regime contracts

to be 'reserved' for organisations meeting certain criteria e.g. public service mutuals and social enterprises.)
- Do joint commissioning - Innovation Partnerships can be used to create innovative ways of solving societal challenges. They are not, as myth would have it, limited to three years but are defined by how long it takes to deliver on the goal
- Commission for partners with shared values
- Apply financial thresholds and risk criteria that are proportionate to what is being commissioned
- Use grants rather than contracts. See here for a good practice guide for grant making.

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# CASE STUDIES

To bring to life the practice described in this report, the four case studies below explore the Human, Learning, Systems features of an organisation working on the ground, a partnership working on the ground, a funder, and a commissioner. These are a small sample of the many organisations we've worked with, and we aim to add to this bank of examples over time.

The case studies are not comprehensive profiles of the organisations, but an exploration of how they are working in a HLS way. Each case study includes links to further reading if you would like to find out more.

## CHARITY PROVIDER: CORNERSTONE

### Overview

Cornerstone is a Scottish charity that provides care and support in the community. It works in around two thirds of local authority areas across Scotland and has approximately 2,000 staff. Prompted by the crisis in social care, in 2017 Cornerstone adopted a radical new strategy. This new strategy to 2020, Local Cornerstone, aims to put the people Cornerstone supports at the heart of everything it does. It seeks to do so through developing self-organised teams who are embedded in the community and have the autonomy to make local decisions based on their local knowledge and professional experience. Cornerstone already has 48 self-organising teams across Scotland, each made up of 4-16 people.

**How Cornerstone aims to achieve its objectives:**

- Colleagues being more involved in the direction of the organisation
- A local rather than regional focus
- A focus on team working
- Business support working together with local teams to deliver exceptional service
- Implementing a culture of empowerment and trust
- Adopting a coaching and mentoring approach rather than traditional methods of management and supervision
- Introducing fast, accessible and user friendly technology
- Establishing the Cornerstone Foundation to fundraise the resources they need to enable their new model
- Cornerstone strategic plan

### The Human Learning Systems features of Cornerstone's approach

#### Human

The Local Cornerstone model aims to put the person they support at the centre of everything. As Hazel Brown, Leader of Exceptional Service at Cornerstone, explains: "lots of social care organisations say this is what they do, but in reality corporate policies and processes divert staff from focusing on the best outcomes for people."

To deliver care and support that meets individual needs, Cornerstone devolves decision making to staff working directly with people accessing support. Staff are trusted to decide, working with the person they are supporting, what the best approach is to helping that person achieve the outcomes that are important to them. To enable this, Cornerstone has removed or stripped back their policies to give staff more autonomy. Teams are locally based and self-organising—they decide how to translate the model in their area, how to support each other as a team, and are responsible for recruitment into their team. There is no hierarchy in the team, and team members work to each other's strengths.

This has required significant cultural change – after being told for years to adhere to policies rather than using their judgement, staff are now being told to do the opposite and some believe that it's not their job to make decisions. While it is a big shift, Hazel explains that with the right tools and support it can work. Staff have lots of training and coaching and are supported by responsive technology. Staff also work within clear boundaries. Hazel explains that, "Our teams work within safe parameters and regulatory guidelines – it's not anarchy!" Leaders no longer see themselves as managers and only intervene if teams are moving away from the core Cornerstone values or strategic principles.

Cornerstone is in the process of gathering baseline data to enable them to understand how their new approach is impacting on the people they support. Based on research into approaches elsewhere, Cornerstone's ambition is that outcomes for the people they support will improve as they benefit from small staff teams that know them well, more face-to-face time (as a result of less paperwork) and flexible approaches that are tailored to their interests and needs.

#### Learning

Cornerstone's ultimate focus is on achieving the principles it has set out for its work. It is constantly reviewing how best to achieve these, adapting its approach as it goes based on learning and feedback from teams across Scotland as they test out very new ways of working. Cornerstone is seeking to develop a culture of creativity to encourage staff to feel confident working in a more flexible way, including through using action learning sets to support staff in finding solutions for themselves.

To support ongoing improvement, Cornerstone has shifted the focus of measurement. While it continues to gather data on KPIs such as customer satisfaction, complaints and care inspectorate grades to ensure a safe service and meet regulatory requirements, Cornerstone has stripped this back to what it actually needs to know rather than what it has always collected. Much of the audit data is gathered and processed using

technology, freeing up staff time to focus on the quality of the support it provides through exploring people's individual experiences of Cornerstone.

As part of this, Cornerstone captures stories to explore the difference Cornerstone is making to people's lives and whether it is achieving its ultimate ambitions through its new approach, as well as inspiring both internal and external staff working in health and social care.

### Systems

Cornerstone works to take a systemic approach on two levels. Firstly, it seeks to provide holistic support to individuals, including through advice and practical help to help them and their families navigate the social care system.

Secondly, Cornerstone is working with actors from across the system to enable their new approach. From the start they worked with partners to get their buy in and support, including the Scottish Government, Care Inspectorate, Healthcare Improvement Scotland and Scottish Social Services Council, plus the commissioners of its services.

Hazel emphasises that their work is not only about developing Cornerstone's own work: "we're trying to change the whole system, not just the organisation. We believe social care is broken and undervalued and we want to address this in the much wider sense." Cornerstone is now working to influence wider system partners to transform how social care is delivered, supported by a grant from the Big Lottery Fund which includes a focus on sharing learning across the UK. Other social care providers were initially sceptical but are now approaching Cornerstone in large numbers to learn about their new way of working.

Working with commissioners is the other key priority. While Cornerstone has made savings by flattening its management structure and reducing corporate services to enable higher wages for social care staff, their model also relies on commissioners moving away from commissioning an 'hour of care' and commissioning flexibly to enable to focus on better outcomes for people instead. Cornerstone have encountered lots of support from commissioners—some of whom are really keen and want to explore how they can change their practice to enable more self-managing teams to provide more person-centred care, and some of whom want to see how the initial phase of innovation goes before they proactively change their own practices. Cornerstone has noticed a real shift in the power dynamics in their relationship with commissioners over the past few years given the recognition that the status quo is unsustainable – they recently held a workshop attended by commissioners from some of its partnership areas which they explain never would have happened a few years ago.

## Story of change

### The starting point

The Local Cornerstone model was developed in response to the challenges in social care. Specifically, Cornerstone's board had a conversation a few years ago about whether they could afford to continue paying the Scottish living wage. To explore a model that allowed more investment in staff and improved outcomes for the people they supported, Cornerstone visited a number of different care and other organisations, including Buurtzorg in the Netherlands whose self-organising teams supported by good technology

were a strong influence. Three members of the senior management team then spent a few months developing the model, informed by lots of stakeholder interviews, feedback from customer surveys, looking at current KPIs and wider research.

## Progress and challenges

Cornerstone has made significant progress in embedding their new model so far with 48 self-organising teams already established, but they are still early on in what is a big and radical shift. Hazel reflects that, "We need to be bold – not small changes tinkering around the edges – that is why it is scary."

Communication has found one particular challenge they have faced in developing and delivering their new approach. Hazel explains that "when people know you are planning something but you can't articulate it yet, that can be challenging. Where there's a gap, people start filling it in." They've taken lessons from another Dutch organisation to help them do this as well as they can, including making uptake of the new approach voluntary initially. They've found talking to other organisations that have gone through transformational change helpful throughout. Opposition from unions to the new model has been a big and ongoing challenge and Cornerstone's advice to other organisations is to involve unions as early as possible.

## Where next

The key priority in year two of Local Cornerstone is to continue rolling out and refining the model now that it has reached a tipping point. This is likely to involve making the new approach mandatory rather than voluntary, with all Cornerstone staff across Scotland expected to adopt the model based on the learning so far. For staff who are sceptical about the new approach, Cornerstone sees teams already working in this way as key advocates who will be able to influence and support teams new to this way of working. For some staff, the new way of working just won't be for them, and managing this turnover and recruitment of new staff will be a further key priority for Cornerstone over the next year. Progressing their work with commissioners is the other key enabler to supporting uptake of the Local Cornerstone model.

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## PUBLIC SERVICE REFORM: GATESHEAD

### Overview

Gateshead's Public Service Reform (PSR) work has experimented with the creation of a bespoke public service response to the strengths and needs of individual citizens, in order to help people, thrive.

It is based on the idea that most people's lives proceed well most of the time, but that anyone can experience a particular problem, or constellation of problems, which means that their lives start to 'wobble'. The experiment is to see if a Local Authority can hear the signals of people's lives starting to wobble, or them asking for help in some way, and respond with bespoke support in order to help them to get their own lives back on track.

To learn about what might work for different people in different contexts, the Council is creating a series of prototypes, which attempt to hear different signals of people asking for help:

- People who have got into council tax arrears
- People who are seeking employment support in libraries
- People who are experiencing homelessness
- People asking for help in their neighbourhoods

The first of these prototypes – council tax arrears – is complete. It worked with 40 cases, creating tangible improvements in the lives of 30. 4 people didn't wish to engage and 6 were 'trapped' behind a dominant issue requiring of specialist input that the team could not readily access, such as mental health support.

Despite not being able to help these 6 people, the prototype uncovered new information about their context and the right help now stands a better chance of happening.

Many of the cases are ongoing so Gateshead can't cost the prevented demand quite yet, but that which we are already aware include:

- The reduction of the likelihood of a child requiring statutory care services by addressing a spiralling situation that began with huge debts (some of which was incorrectly billed due to a Council error and a resulting in a re-credit). A near crisis has become stable and improving without any intervention from acute services.
- Four people were self-harming and two had considered suicide. Two of these are still struggling but four are improving.
- Seven people had found work or better-paid and/or more sustainable work thus moving off or needing fewer benefits.
- Three had started to claim benefits when they had no income but were eligible for help, thus reducing the strain on crisis services.
- Five people related to those in the prototype but not within it themselves have also found work or maximised their income to match their entitlement such that they can better position themselves to find work.
- One person is likely to be being financially abused and living in poverty that was materially damaging their health. This trajectory has been dramatically turned around to remove the potential need for sustained acute services.

- Fourteen people are engaging in mental health and/or addiction and recovery support that were previously not engaging with any form of mental health support. Ten of them are responding positively and taking more control of their lives

This very likely compensates for the £70k cost of the prototype.

The team of people involved in this prototype drew staff from:

- The Local Authority – housing and council tax teams
- JobCentre Plus
- Citizens Advice Bureaux
- Voluntary sector mental health support

It also pulled on further specialist support from:

- Housing officers
- Social Workers
- Mental Health doctors and nurses

## Gateshead's approach

### Human

The work in Gateshead involved creating a team who had a simple brief: develop an understanding of the people who have asked for help, and use your judgement to respond in whatever way is helpful to them. On one occasion this involved buying food for families who had nothing in the cupboards, and a winter coat for another. It paid for residential rehab for one client. The team helped clients to get the right benefit payments (all of the clients had incorrect benefits initially). Mostly, what the team did was to create a relationship with people which enabled them to feel that someone was genuinely listening and on their side.

The team was entirely trusted to back their own judgement on what support people needed. The only constraints were 'stay safe, and stay legal'. By trusting the intrinsic motivation of staff, they were able to provide a flexible response to the strengths and needs of the people they worked with.

### Learning

The whole of the PSR work in Gateshead is built on the premise that learning drives improvement. The team had no preconceived programme of support to provide, they tried different approaches, and collected information about what happened as a way to learn and improve.

The learning cycle was envisaged in the following way:

- Learn what is effective – what support helps people to get their lives back on track?
- Learn what is efficient – what does an efficient system look like which can provide this support?
- Learn what makes it sustainable – what are the implications of working in this way in terms of future costs and demand?

### Systems

The levels of the system that this work is focusing on are:

Change in the relationship between providers of service

It sought to create change in the relationship between different providers of service by seeking to move beyond service silos and the limits of practice imposed by professional standards, and instead create a 'whole person' response which different people contributed to.

Some providers of service were able to embrace this change, and work collaboratively to support people. Others could only see things through the lens of their silos, or resisted change.

Change in the relationship between providers of service and citizens.

For those able to embrace a 'whole person' response, the work created a new relationship between providers of service and citizens. Providers of service who embraced the 'whole person' approach developed a bespoke response. They created a new version of 'public service' rather than viewing public service as a series of separate services. Those who did not embrace this change remained wedded to the idea of providing a standardised service to all 'clients'.

**Story of change:**

### Starting point

The starting point for the change was the appointment of a new Director of Public Service Reform, with a background in systems change.

### Impetus for change

There was both a moral and a financial case for change. Standardised, siloed services provide support that doesn't meet people's needs, and are wasteful of resources. Initial investigation found that such services were expending significant amounts of money not helping people.

### Progress and challenges

The first prototype is complete, and the second is just starting. Progress has been made in understanding the forms of bespoke support which meet people's needs. The key pieces of learning are:

- Relationships solve problems, not services – in the drive to make short-term financial savings, public service has moved away from relational support. But this is actually what's needed most, and its absence drives up costs.
- Liberate staff to keep learning continually – staff need support to learn and reflect on their work. Trying to performance manage by use of KPIs gets in the way of learning and adaptation.
- There are significant challenges for the remaining prototypes to address, concerning bringing more services and organisations into the approach. This requires a focus on learning and experimentation at 'higher' levels in the system.

### Where next

The second prototype, focussing on people seeking employment support via libraries, is due to start in April 2019, as is a third prototype around homelessness. The fourth prototype will focus upon an entire community. This design process will seek to involve a wider range of stakeholders from the outset, as a way to address questions about the broader health of Gateshead as a system which serves its citizens better.

The long term ambition is to understand what a system looks like that enables this more relational, bespoke approach, including new approaches to commissioning.

**References**

https://tangledandtrapped.wordpress.com/

# FUNDER: BLAGRAVE TRUST

## Overview

The Blagrave Trust ('Blagrave' or 'the trust') is an independent grant-making foundation that distributes funding totalling around £2 million per year to youth charities in Berkshire, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, Sussex and Wiltshire. In partnership with the organisations it funds, the Trust's mission is to 'bring lasting change to the lives of the most disadvantaged young people aged 14-25 to enable a positive transition to adulthood.'

Blagrave aims to 'promote and empower young people as powerful forces for change, and ensure their voices are heard in matters than affect them.' To achieve this, the Trust seeks partnerships with organisations that listen to and put young people at the heart of their work. Blagrave recognises the role it needs to play as a funder in enabling this, and is committed to shifting the power imbalance that traditionally exists in funding relationships.

Since stepping up the ambition of its grant-making and hiring director Jo Wells in 2014, The Trust has been testing and evolving its approach to be as flexible, transparent and enabling as possible. As it continues to adapt its own work, Blagrave is committed to sharing its learning, including with other funders.

### Blagrave's approach

#### Human

The Trust is committed to enabling youth organisations to be responsive to the young people they support. As director Jo Wells explains, "we want to enable positive transitions for young people, whatever that means for them, focusing not on societal notions of 'success' but on their own ambitions, quality of life, security and stability." To facilitate this, Blagrave trusts its partners to do what they are expert in and to act on feedback from young people rather than seeking control through traditional project funding Instead, it provides multi-year core funding without any prescriptive funding criteria or onerous reporting requirements.

Regional Partnerships Manager Tessa Hibbert explains that, "we've increasingly come to realise that the hoops that funders make organisations jump through to get funding do not create impact, in fact they are slowing down the organisations we want to help."

The Trust aims to foster a spirit of partnership and mutual respect through a commitment to listening and relationship building. Tessa states the Trust recognises "that local knowledge, context and creativity can't be conveyed on paper and that organisations need to be agile. We start by developing relationships with partners so they in turn can build relationships with the young people they're supporting. Relationships based on trust are essential."

The Trust views hat it has a responsibility as a funder to understand the work of their partners (and potential partners), so that organisations can focus their time and resource on supporting young people rather than on paperwork. The Trust

does not ask for information that it will not use and where possible uses information that partner organisations have already produced. Its application process involves meeting with potential partners and reviewing existing documentation, rather than applicants having to complete an application form. The Trust also visits every organisation it wishes to fund to learn more about their work and, where possible and appropriate, meets the young people they support.

Blagrave has had positive feedback from partners about how its approach enables them to support young people. One partner fed back that: "The flexibility and understanding of the Trust in terms of how we support young people has been crucial, particularly in relation to wanting to do the work in another geographical area. Knowing that we are supported without unnecessary restrictions is vital to enable us to provide the kind of personalised service that our young people so desperately need."

### Learning

Blagrave's Charter sets out the commitment to 'Critically assess what we do, adapting and innovating in response to what we learn.' The Trust has been learning and adapting at a rapid rate since 2014 to continuously improve its approach. For example, after narrowing the focus of its funding to young people in 2014, the fund then adopted specific priority funding areas within this, but soon realised this created rigid boundaries which did not reflect the reality either of young people's lives or the organisations that supported them. In 2018 it stepped up its ambition to put young people in the lead by recruiting two trustees aged under 25. The Trust's open dialogue with partners helps it to maintain accountability to them and builds trust through transparency. It posts commitments on its website and regularly asks its partners for feedback on whether and how they are living up to them.

The Trust also views learning as a priority in ensuring its partners are accountable to young people. It funds organisations who actively listen to and involve young people, and adapt and improve their work in response. In all interactions, the Trust encourages its partners to reflect and share their learning and reinforces that they have the freedom to change how they use their funding to reflect the complex and ever-changing environment they work in.

As well as promoting learning in its interactions with individual partners, the Trust enables peer learning, including through convening annual events to enable partners to connect, share, reflect and learn from each other. In 2018 the event explored the question "who holds us accountable to our missions"? Creating a collaborative rather than competitive dynamic between its partners reflects the Trust's ambition to put young people rather than organisational interests first.

## Systems

Blagrave seeks to help tackle systemic issues facing young people, rather than only addressing the symptoms, and in 2018 recruited a policy manager to develop its strategy in this area. It aims to help contribute to change beyond its immediate partners for young people aged 14-25 through:

### Addressing structural issues impacting young people

The Trust funds initiatives that give young people a stake in society and support their own social change efforts to ensure their voices are heard in matters that affect them. To maximise its potential in contributing to lasting change for disadvantaged young people, the Trust is exploring how it can influence the systems that make the biggest impact for young people – both locally and nationally. For example, in Southampton it is working with a research partner to understand more about the complex reality for young people who face multiple challenges. They are working to analyse the system, identify where the problems are, and develop an advocacy solution to take forward long term change on a local and regional level. Nationally, the trust is developing its strategy to have achieve policy change on the 'root causes' of issues faced by young people.

### Rebalancing the power dynamic in funding relationships

The Trust strongly believes that to achieve its mission it needs to address the traditional inequality in the funding relationship that prioritises funded organisations' accountability to the funder rather than the people they seek to serve. Blagrave aims to form equal partnerships with the organisations it funds, reflected in its decision to call these organisations 'partners' rather than 'grantees,' and its focus on building trust with and listening to these organisations to constantly improve its own approach. Blagrave also works to influence and encourage its partners to model these behaviours in its own work with young people.

As part of the ambition in its Charter to 'achieve social impact beyond our immediate partners in pursuit of a fair and just society,' the Trust has ambitions to bring about wider change in how the funding sector operates. Despite being a small Trust (3 staff, up from 1 in 2014), it is playing an influential role in shaping new approaches that put young people first. Based on a model used in the US, the Trust was the founding partner of a 'Listening Fund' – a collaboration of funders (Big Lottery Fund, Comic Relief, and Esmée Fairbairn Foundation) who are investing £900,000 to support youth organisations to enable young people to have their say in shaping their own support services. Already the learning from this fund is providing valuable insights that will shape what the Trust does next—feedback from the Fund's assessment tool has shown that while youth organisations are committed to listening to young people, they are not necessarily being held to account for acting on what they hear.

## Story of change

### The starting point

From 1978, the Blagrave Trust was a traditional grant-maker which provided short term, small annual grants for a range of projects operating in Berkshire, Hampshire and Wiltshire. When its trustees decided to sell the estate from which the Trust generated its income in 2009, this allowed Blagrave to increase the amount of funding it distributed. At the same time, the trustees increased their level of ambition and decided to hire a Director for the first time. Since 2014 the Trust's ambition has been to help improve the lives of young people and is seeking to help address the power imbalances in the funding sector as part of this.

As part of its focus on advancing good funding practice, in 2016 the Trust partnered with the Esmée Fairbairn foundation to conduct a listening exercise with grantees to generate insights and stimulate debate about how funders can better support the work of the social sector. The findings of the Listening for Change survey of 640 people included:

- Organisations felt that their funders are far more accountable to their own trustees than to orgs they support or people they seek to help.
- One third of respondents reported that over 30% of total organisational resource was spent managing funding contracts, with process and bureaucracy diverting attention and energy away from more meaningful discussions and focus.
- More flexible support biggest thing funders could do to improve the relationship
- The need to redesign how the funding system operates. As one survey respondent commented:

> *"There must be a better way of doing it. Us humans are a brilliant, clever, inventive lot and it must be possible to do it better. If we were designing this from scratch, I doubt we would end up with the same system."*

Along with feedback from their own grantees, the findings from this survey provided a strong reinforcement of the Trust's sense that funding practice needed to change, and prompted it to make immediate changes to its own approach.

### Progress and challenges

The Trust has moved quickly as a small and dynamic organisation, which in some cases has been challenging for partners who are not used to working with funders in this way. While it is taking time to embed the new ways of working both as a funder and for the partners it supports, overall the results have been positive. Tessa explains that removing detailed monitoring requirements has created more capacity for the team to focus on practice and learning, and developing a more meaningful relationship with and understanding of partners. The improved relationship and trust between funder and partner, and between partners themselves, has created a 'community' and presented opportunities for the Trust to use its convening power more to share learning. And, while they admit they haven't 'cracked' the act of monitoring partnerships to learn rather than measure, the focus on learning and building of trust means that partners are more likely to tell them when things go wrong, and enable them to course correct together.

### Where next

The Trust is continuously evolving its funding approach based on feedback from its partners, and is exploring ways to influence more widely, including through the system change work in Southampton and the Listening Fund, becoming youth led in everything it does and contributing to the sector's understanding of the relationship between lived experience and grassroots led change, alongside other forms of expertise in the social change arena.

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## COMMISSIONER: PLYMOUTH CITY COUNCIL

### Overview

Plymouth City Council have worked in partnership with the Clinical Commissioning Group to create a 'cradle to grave' integrated fund of £638 million to commission systemic responses across the following service areas:

- Public Health
- Leisure Services
- Housing Services
- Children's Services (including Schools Grant (DSG))
- Adult Social Care
- Primary Care
- Community Health Services
- Acute Provision

Four strategies unite the authority in a shared vision which considers: wellbeing, children and young people, community, and enhanced and specialised care. This enables an alignment of purpose through a shared vision.

A whole system, co-productive approach is taken across all work streams at Plymouth. Co-production is defined as a more collaborative, broader, deeper, and longer process than consultation. Vision is co-produced with a range of stakeholders in the system, and which uses a variety of methods and bespoke processes tailored to context. In addition, a horizontal and mutual accountability has been developed between commissioners and service providers.

This case study focuses on the commissioning of a 'whole system' of support to adults with complex needs. The key features of this commissioning process were:

- The Council and Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) created an £80m, 10 year, shared budget to commission a health and care system for vulnerable adults in Plymouth
- The tender did not specify outputs or outcomes to be delivered. Instead, it focussed on collaboration and learning together.
- This was tendered through an Alliance contract model whereby organisations in the city came together to create a shared response – where organisations are jointly liable for the performance of the contract
- Following the tender process the Council became a signatory to the Alliance, formally recognising that they are part of the system
- The tendering process was conducted as a series of design conversations between the commissioners and providers in the Alliance, from which a set of core service principles and activities emerged.
- The signed Alliance contract does not specify outputs or outcomes to achieved. Instead, it uses a set of agreed principles as the basis for how the Alliance will function. The details of the service provision are subject to continued adaptation based on shared learning.
- This commissioning process was made possible by four years of system change work, which built relationships of trust between the actors involved.

Key documents underpinning this Case Study, including the tender documents, and can be found in the 'Complexities' Knowledge Hub resource library here.

### Features of Plymouth's approach

#### Human

It is assumed that the drive 'do the right thing by people' is a collective motivation held in Plymouth and is assumed as an underlying principle to the commissioning and delivery process.

A high level of trust has been developed across Plymouth. This trust has been built at each layer of the system: between people who need support and the workers who support them, those workers and their managers, managers and commissioners, commissioners and directors.

The Council deliberately undertook exercises (such as Appreciative Inquiry) to build trust between themselves and providers, between the providers themselves, and between providers and the people they serve. The building of this trust between people and organisations has enabled the Council to create flexible contracts without detailed service specifications. Trust has created the conditions for flexibility and adaptation.

### Learning

Learning was placed at the heart of the commissioning process. The commissioning process included a series of design conversations with providers in the Alliance, in which shared challenges and responses began to emerge.

The tender specification made clear that measures were to be used for learning, for all actors in the system:

> "We want to work with provider(s) to measure and reflect on the outcomes that the system is producing, in order to help the system continuously adapt and improve, and to help organisations understand their particular contributions to these outcomes."
>
> Tender specification document

### Systems

The Council has taken on the role of Systems Steward by:

- Making the system visible to all the actors within it – through system mapping and appreciative inquiry
- Building relationships and trust between actors in the system – by convening regular facilitated systems thinking sessions
- Creating new, light-touch, system infrastructure to enable on-going governance of the system: a System Optimisation Group, and a Creative Solutions Forum.
- Framing its relationship with providers as a shared systemic endeavour to create good outcomes, rather than as a purchaser/provider split
- Allocating resources through an Alliance Contract mechanism – a way which recognises the collective responsibilities of a systemic perspective, rather than promoting competition between members of the system

### Examples of Plymouth's commissioning and delivery principles and processes

The following are principles from the tender document which underlie Plymouth's approach to commissioning:

- The person using the service is in control. This is not just about choice but the power to shape and direct their support
- Everything we do acknowledges that everyone is a citizen and we will work to enable them to make a positive contribution to their community
- We will look for opportunities in risks
- We connect ourselves, around and focused on the needs of the person
- We always recognise people's perspectives on the value held in their relationships and networks
- We invest in the priorities, energy, passions and enthusiasm of people
- We aim to increase the understanding and connectedness within a wider community to ensure we reduce isolation
- We involve people with a lived experience and people delivering the service in the ongoing development of services
- We are intelligence-led
- We intervene early where possible
- We believe people have the ability and competence to achieve great things
- We will focus on skills and assets rather than deficits and barriers.

## Story of change

### Starting point

A Lottery Bid in 2012 which was rejected ultimately had beneficial consequences for Plymouth; it had acted as an impetus for commissioners to meet every week for a year to discuss the bid and for views to be sought from a range of stakeholders which involved over 70 services, 400 people using services and their carers, elected representatives, and key decision makers.

The learning gathered from the mass consultation, and the relationships and trust developed through meetings acted as a lever for change as it shifted perspective from thinking about services to individual users, to the health of the system.

### Impetus

The overriding motivation for changing practice stemmed from the desire to 'do the right thing by people' and the realisation that the current system was not set up to achieve this aim. The prevailing commissioning approach, and over specification of contracts, created siloes and competition between service providers, and disempowered both workers and users of services. Achieving meaningful outcomes for users was lost behind bureaucracy and proxy measures.

In addition, austerity forced Plymouth to consider a different approach. Evaluation of structures and processes highlighted areas of duplication and gaps in the system. Users were remaining in the system without having their needs attended to, and not only was this detrimental to users, it was detrimental to the system, and unsustainable in times of austerity. Commissioners concluded that, paradoxically, when you stop thinking about money and outcomes and just on doing the right thing and delivering bespoke service you save money and outcomes are better.

### Progress and challenges

There has been acknowledgment that trust, and relationships took time to develop and that the course taken would be messy, involved. What seemed to hold the group together through tough times was the realisation that challenge is a healthy and necessary part of the process.

There was acceptance that not everyone will be immediately 'on-board' with a complexity-informed approach. Therefore, it was about identifying 'fellow travellers', and forming a 'coalition of the willing' to get the ball rolling. Once others could see that the approach was working then trust was further dispersed across the system.

Permission has been granted at the director level to do things differently and it is thought that without being given this freedom, it would have been extremely difficult to of had the autonomy and ability to overcome siloed structures to work collaboratively towards meaningful outcomes.

### Where next:

Plymouth City Council and partners are working to translate the Alliance principles into governance and management practices.

## References

Further information on the Plymouth case study can be found in the Complexities Knowledge Hub library.

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