

Total Place: Next Steps

We've known for decades that the way we provide public services costs a colossal sum and doesn't deliver. Keir Starmer say our public services are on their knees. People who want to do a good job are frustrated to the point where they bypass the system to get things done, boiling with anger at its stupidities, or resign in dismay and cynicism. Little wonder public trust in government is at a record low.

So what to do? Not a load more money: there isn't any. Not an efficiency drive: that won't cut it. Not depend on great leaders if their organisations revert to type when they move on. Not glue the latest gizmo about partnership onto the carcass of what we've got. Not tighten the noose on public sector staff already micro-managed.

We have to create and embed a different system. Total Place is as good a name for that as any. Its heart is a shift from vertical fragmentation to horizontal collaboration. We already know its elements. The challenge is less to describe it than to get to it. It's not a sprinkle of fairy dust but a long haul to the point where the system can't default back to now. It requires change in Westminster and Whitehall as much as in local authorities and the NHS.

There are *three fundamental problems*. First, when the interest of a particular public sector body differs from the collective interest, the particular prevails. Hence low investment in prevention because the benefit, though often multiples of the cost, accrues elsewhere in the public sector. Hence dealing with just one aspect of a person, family or community, because that is what your organisation is about, rather than addressing the whole.

This happens not because people are stupid or evil but because they do the right thing for their organisation, not for the best social result. The solution - easy in concept, difficult in practice - is to align the two.

The *second fundamental problem* is what has been accurately dubbed 'management by compliance': the forest of rules, procedures, measures, inspection and reporting which says to public sector staff 'we don't trust you' and discards as worthless their ideas, initiative and daily experience. It reaches its acme in the NHS culture of fear. As Douglas McGregor would say, it's a Theory X not Theory Y view of employees. We have learnt the wrong lesson from the private sector. Great leaders comprehend the apparent paradox that if you want to hold on you must learn to let go.

The *third fundamental problem* is that our public services do things *to not with* the public. So we lose not only their goodwill and local insight but also, frankly, their free labour. Yes, we consult and involve at the margin, but our heart's not in it. This is expensive because less is done, less well and at greater cost. And it's alienating, because people feel they are only on the receiving end. Hence the basic Total Place question: if the people who live here decided how the public money was spent, would they spend it differently?

The core of the way forward is to demolish the walls inside and between public sector organisations and between the public sector and the public. Easy to say, less easy to do. It requires change in skills, incentives and behaviour more than in budgets, mechanics and technology. It means dropping the gameable objectives of New Public Management and holding council, NHS and civil service officials to account in a new way. It means reshaping the role of councillors. It means making it not just safe but essential to engage and experiment continuously across boundaries and consolidate what is learnt as 'the way we do things round here', as good a definition as any of culture.

Why make the effort? Because the payback is better quality of life at less cost. Stupendous savings from: more prevention, less cure; social support based on sustained relationships not episodic interventions; smarter use of public buildings and social transport; sharing services and procurement; volunteers and charities in co-production with paid staff; people not being expensively in hospital or prison when they needn't; faster local economic growth and better jobs; communities more self-reliant so less needy; lower public sector staff turnover (currently more than half as much again as the private sector); from removing irrelevance, duplication and the ingrained overhead of feeding the present system.

Paradoxically it can be easier to save 50% rather than 5%. A small saving may be wrung out of current services in the familiar painful ways. A big saving can spring from looking across the whole system and asking 'If we were starting afresh, what would we do?'

There's a prize even more important than money: agency. Total Place means people, households and places recognised as living entities with ambitions and strengths that can be built upon, not as things with faulty parts to be fixed by government. Assets, not liabilities. And it means that my community has more of a hand in shaping how public money is spent there and using it well. On the pitch, not in the stand. A new relationship between citizen and state.

Although the full benefit of Total Place will take time there are early prizes. The journey has begun despite the system. We can prove fast financial payback that even the most sceptical Treasury minister would recognise. Councils as varied as Leeds, Camden, Gateshead, Greater Manchester and Barking & Dagenham

are leaving their service silos behind and reframing their relationship with their communities. Productive change will accelerate when this expands across the system as a whole.

So what to do? The 3Ds plan is to get a better shared understanding of what good stuff is already going on out there, expand it and spread it, learn from that more about how the system most needs to change, and begin to change it as you go. That's cheap as chips in relation to the potential gain. We don't need to go to the Treasury with a big bucks begging bowl. It could even pay for itself. Of course ministerial support, practical and financial, will help but why wait for it?

The national political timetable demands speed. The plan says an initial six months, probably followed by intense engagement in a small number of locations. That's possible because we already know much of what is needed. And that's necessary because otherwise government may look for quick results via yet more command and control. Deliverology will not stop loneliness, start small businesses or treat me as a person rather than a case of shingles.

We can show ministers that delivery of national missions, and hence their own success, is not only compatible with building a new system but only possible if there *is* a new system. We know how to do that and we can provide the road map. The right people are us. Not precisely us but a group which will naturally evolve. That's why we talk of a network not a project group. The role is to be a learning and advocating community, accelerating change which is already underway and going with the grain of what this government aims to achieve.

There are three immediate tasks. The first is to state the intent. The second is to say how we'll work together across our own organisational, occupational and financial boundaries to achieve it. If we can't collaborate how can we help others to? The third is to design the generic Total Place intervention, to be tailored to the circumstances of a particular council, NHS body or government department.

Many have volunteered to contribute to these tasks, so the next step should be to form a team to take each one forward. And at some stage, as part of building wider involvement, we need to decide whether to declare the existence of the network.

There is a bigger opportunity for system change now than there has been for many years. We can grasp it.
