



Kirklees Democracy Commission

Summary notes from the meeting held on 26 September 2016

Present:

Cllr Andrew Marchington

Cllr Gemma Wilson

In Attendance:

Carl Whistlecraft, Spencer Wilson, Diane Sims and Jenny Bryce-Chan

Witness:

Roger has spent over 35 years working in an alongside local authorities and schools and in support of national programmes. His early career was in teaching and educational psychology. He progressed to lead and manage a wide range of services for children and young people. He is currently working with a number of local authorities to help embed the SEND reforms set out in the Children and Families Act and secure the kind of organisation and cultural change required to make a real difference to the lives of children and young people with SEND and their families.

Roger was a member of the Leadership Consortium that oversaw the early design and development of national leadership programmes for serving and aspirant Directors of Children's Services, adviser to the DCS provision design group and national coordinator for succession planning in children's services in the south of England.

Until July 2014 Roger was a NCTL College Associate in the South West facilitating the development of a school-led model for school improvement and, on behalf of the Staff College, supported a National College leadership development initiative for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Summary of Discussion

Background to the Research

By way of introductory context Roger provided the Commission with an overview of the research paper [Changing the Narrative: A New Conversation Between the Citizen and the State](#). Roger explained that a number of years ago Staff College had undertaken some research on system leadership which recognised that in terms of public services it is a very complex series of systems which if changed in one area

makes it difficult to predict the impact on another part of the system. This poses difficulties for leaders trying to make changes to improve the wellbeing of communities and citizens and would therefore need to develop a common purpose beyond where their authority lies through influence. This formed the context for the research.

Roger explained that the research developed the notion of “permanent white water”. In times of austerity, increasing demand for public service and significant structural changes in democratic processes the sector now finds itself in a permanent storm-like situation.

Whilst in the past challenges of such type required “exceptional leadership for exceptional times”, these times are no longer exceptional and therefore exceptional leadership has now become the new reality, the new norm, hence the notion of “permanent white water.” “Exceptional leadership is our new norm” and such leaders need to operate in an environment of volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA).

Roger explained that traditionally public services have responded to financial challenges and austerity through programmes of incremental cuts. Given the scale of the current challenges this approach is no longer sustainable and requires a rethink about what public value is and the relationship between citizens and communities. The Commission noted that there has, by necessity, been a shift from the maxim of “doing more for less.” We are now in a place where we are doing “less with less” and trying to shape relationships, rethink expectations, change the narrative and start a new set of conversation with citizens.

Roger explained that the research had been supplemented with focus group, seminar work drawing on work of RSA also did some academic work looking internationally and nationally to explore wider learning. Roger confirmed that this revealed a noticeable shift from public management driven by targets from the centre to a model of “new public governance” which is more democratic, participative and localised. In this context public sector leaders work as enablers with communities to understand what is valuable.

The research revealed a sequence of steps (**see diagram in the research paper on page 27**) which illustrates the “pathways” to new public governance which is characterised by a mover from a centrally driven approach to one that is increasingly driven by citizens and communities. Roger explained that whilst there is a need for need expertise from the centre, the idea that the state is the lead in the service delivery model, is shifting to looking at ways to do things differently. Roger focussed on the following pathways as part of his evidence giving:

- A move to a “**call on citizens**” and examples where the state has a role in stimulating philanthropy and volunteering. See the West London Zone case study on page 29.
- Having a “**contract with citizens**”. See the Wigan City Deal case study on page 33.

- **“Striking a deal with citizens”**, which involves gaining approval from citizens on how they are going to use their tax. See the Cincinnati Public Schools example on page 34.
- **“Building capability within communities”** whereby citizens are supported to give and receive help, thus becoming “community champions.”
- **“Delegating authorities”** whereby citizens agree to trade-offs and solutions in their communities. See the case study from Holland on page 43 which involved the creation of an expert citizen’s panel that identified a range of ideas for saving money.
- **“Person to person social justice”**, whereby the state is a platform and the citizens is the designer. This involves active communities with the state / council becoming more of an enabler, creating the platform to make things happen.

Roger explained that this is emergent work, mostly happening on the margins. Moving along the continuum is likely to be riskier, messier and will need courage from organisations. Roger emphasised the importance of the whole notion of place. It is place centric and is about reconfiguring the totality of resource which includes what the council has control of and can influence and how it is used in a holistic way to improve citizen and community outcomes.

Representative and Participatory Democracy

Roger discussed the tensions and opportunities in the context of representative and participative democracy with regards to the research findings. Roger observed that accountability mechanisms for councillors are intermittent through the local election process. By its nature this process involves the councillors / candidates selling a prospectus of “what is good” and what the representative will help to do for the community. Participatory democracy requires the representative to cede a lot of control and feeling comfortable in losing some of that control. This involves being open to finding different solutions to things which may not always be comfortable for the representative.

The notion not to retain control can be difficult as it is easier to be in control as councillors, however it is unrealistic for councillors to have and be the solution to all problems and challenges. Local councillors have a crucial role in knitting together what is happening across their patch as they are the ones who have the reach within communities.

The Role of the Councillor

In terms of the implications for the councillor role Roger explained that it is important to think in terms of an enabling role as part of representative democracy. An important issue is that communities do not define themselves by administrative boundaries. Councillors have a reach into those communities and therefore play an important role in defining and enabling that community.

Roger explained that the councillor role is very fluid and dynamic. Having regard to the diagram in the report, Councillors will be operating at different points on that continuum at different times which will require a range of different skills. Councillors are still elected with statutory as well as moral responsibilities and will act as arbiters where social justice is not happening.

Roger discussed the representative role and the expectations that the public have in terms of decision making and an expectation that this is why politicians are elected. Changing this situation will require courage and providing greater opportunities for people to be involved in those processes.

Governance, Accountability and Decision Making

The Commission explored the governance implications in circumstances where the council and its councillors begin to give up control. Roger emphasised that there is no fixed solution and the process will be messy. Roger confirmed that public money still needs proper governance around it and this will need to be a continuing feature although the scale may change. Accountability up to now has been focussed on process, inspection regimes and compliance. The challenge is to move to an outcomes based approach to accountability. Outcomes based approaches often lead to more imaginative and creative governance arrangements e.g. West London Zones.