THE C’LLR INTERVIEW

Louise Casey on troubled families
3 Forward look
Tony Ball of the importance of brand
Andy Sawford on not forcing people to vote

4 Chris Game’s
A-Z of local
government
Reality Check – Dave Wilcox

5 LGiU Update
Andy Sawford on the LGiU’s activity

6 Ten things you need to know...
...City Deal

7 Media Watch
David Brindle – managing the media

8 Wheeler’s World
Heather Wheeler’s notebook takes in adult social care and the Queen’s Speech

9 Finance
Carol Grant – when the money runs out

10 Food poverty
Dave Wilcox on food banks

11 Social services
Mark D’Arcy talks to Simon Danczuk about the Rochdale ‘grooming’ case

13 Profile
Mark Smulian meets the LGA’s Lib Dem leader, Gerald Vernon-Jackson

14 Members’ views
On the road with Chris Naylor

15 Troubled families
Over three pages, Patrick Kelly talks to Louise Casey and explains the new Troubled Families scheme

19 Co-production in health and social care

20 The key to service transformation

21 Swindon’s joint venture LIFE Programme

22 Citizen leaders seize the day

23 Looking for a new partnership model

24 Paul Corrigan on how patients can save the NHS

27 Community
safety
Elizabeth Thompson meets c’llr award winner Tafheen Sharif

28 Young people –
how Nottingham and Kirklees are helping young people not in employment, education or training

30 Welcome to the LGiU
the National Audit Office explains its work

31 Another View
Alan Waters thinks contractors will trump community enterprises

32 Postcard from San Francisco
Is the US falling in love with public transport?
A brand new council

Private companies know that good branding is crucial. Tony Ball argues that councils need to recognise the importance of having a defined brand that tells a clear story to local people.

In the new ‘age of austerity’ world of local government, it is more important than ever that councils work closer and harder with their communities.

And to do this, we need to be clear on what their vision and priorities are and the promises they make to local people.

This is not about a new logo, nor just changing what we are doing. It is about being clearer about what we are doing and giving more focus to our priorities.

At this year’s LGA conference, Sir Merrick Cockell warned that if something did not change, councils could be reduced to doing nothing by 2020 but collecting the rubbish and delivering adult social care.

To avoid this, we must prioritise, do it well and be very clear about it. We have to re-evaluate our relationship with local people – to make sure we work with them.

Basildon is building its brand inside out. What we say is our promise, and what we do impacts on what people say about us and therefore our brand.

Before developing a corporate vision and brand, as elected members we need to ask ourselves: What do we want to be known for?

We know we have massive challenges – the tide of funding has gone and it is unlikely to come back in for sometime, if at all. But we still need to find ways to deliver for our local areas.

Basildon has an overall vision – to create opportunity which is underpinned by five specific promises that relate to everything we will do for the next four years: providing value for money; getting the basics right; demanding better public services; supporting the local economy, and transforming our borough.

Basildon is in the heart of Essex, with a rich past of welcoming people from the East of London in search of a better life and better opportunities. That movement continues to this day and Basildon continues to be a place that offers opportunity.

We believe this is a strong story and essential for a council such as ours that wants to work with local people and do the best for its area.

The first of our promises are to provide value for money and do what we call getting the basics right. This is the day job and the minimum we are expected to do as a good local authority.

Our next promises are to support our local economy, and use our influence to see that better public services are delivered in areas such as policing, healthcare and particularly education.

Finally, we are committed to transforming our borough by regenerating town centres, using our planning powers to protect our greenbelt where possible, while ensuring the right number of new homes are built that people want to live in.

These are not empty words. We have no intention of breaking our promises and think creating opportunity and getting the basics right will pass what we call in Basildon the pub test – we think our people will get it.

By delivering on our promise local people will understand us and trust us – essential if they are to work with us and support us in the tough times ahead. And a clear story gives coherence, clarity and cuts through to everything we say, so vital in a media rich age when we are all competing just to be heard.

Tony Ball is leader of Basildon council.
Destination Europe

On a recent visit to a former war-torn corner of Eastern Europe, my sleep was disturbed by the buzz of mosquitoes. Like Spitfires and Messerschmitts they homed in on their target, leaving the surface of my skin dotted with strawberry red mounds.

Next day, as I dabbed the After Bite pen on my ankles I recalled the adage, "the pen is mightier than the sword," reflecting that in the EU today we reconcile our differences through the pen rather than investing in bombs, tanks and missiles to use on each other.

Nowadays, 50 per cent of legislation impacting on local authorities emanates from Europe. To ensure that these laws are positive for UK plc, we have to form alliances across 27 other nations.

“Put bluntly, we had our referendum on Europe 40 years ago. I voted against our joining. In retrospect I was wrong.”

In that context it’s important that we know where others stand, so we can ensure positive outcomes for our communities.

At an EU Parliamentary level, the decision of the UK Conservatives to leave the EPP (the voice of modern conservatism in Europe) weakens their collective influence.

Similarly, the strength of UKIP in the European Parliament means there’s an unpredictable and unreliable UK vote.

More troublesome for me are the recent whisperings suggesting the Labour party supports a referendum on Europe. Not, I hasten to add, on the adage, “the pen is mightier than the sword,” but on the basis of some principal, but because of the potential to split the coalition and (nod and wink) cause real problems for the Tories at the next general election.

Such posturing makes it difficult to form alliances that make a difference. Put bluntly, we had our referendum on Europe 40 years ago. I voted against our joining. In retrospect I was wrong.

Today, we are valued and valuable members of the EU. Let’s add value rather than casting it aside. Threats of referenda and walk outs do nothing to assist our cause. Better inside the tent than outside. ☝️

Chris Game is with the Institute of Local Government Studies.

www.lgiu.org.uk
The LGiU aims to keep councillors and those working in local government informed about the latest developments, writes Andy Sawford.

What’s new

LGiU at Westminster

The LGiU held its annual summer reception at the House of Commons on 16 July. It was attended by more than 200 guests – council leaders and cabinet members, MPs and representatives from the voluntary and community sector. The event also launched the report of the All Party Parliamentary Local Government Group for which the LGiU provides support; Eric Pickles MP, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government made the keynote address. The report is the result of the APPG’s inquiry which focused on adult social care. Care Now and For the Future can be downloaded from the LGiU’s website www.lgiu.org.uk/publications – and there’s summary of the recommendations on page 25.

LGiU events

An LGiU team was at the LGA conference in Birmingham. We were very pleased to have the chance to meet up with many councillors from our member authorities, who came along to our evening reception.

The LGiU’s summer seminar programme ended in mid-July, with a timely seminar on the Health and Social Care Act in. We will shortly be announcing our early autumn programme of seminars and learning and development events.

In early July we ran a seminar on neighbourhood agreements in Lancashire. The event was kindly hosted by Wyre Council. If your authority would be interested in hosting one of our seminars in return for some free places then please contact alan.waters@lgiu.org.uk.

LGiU policy development

Civil Society Innovation Network The LGiU Civil Society Innovation Network met in early July for the first event in phase two of the Network. This event brought together local authority leaders and social enterprise leaders with Rt Hon Greg Clark MP to discuss the challenges and opportunities in new models of service delivery partnerships between local authorities and social enterprise. In particular the group considered: how to deal with the mixed capacity within the social enterprise sector, how to put people at the heart of the design and delivery of services, knowing what scale to commission at and how to measure successful outcomes. For more information contact laura.wilkes@lgiu.org.uk.

LGiU reports

Future Service Partnerships This report from the LGiU, with support from John Laing, draws on new research carried out by the LGiU to examine current local authority partnership arrangements, identify barriers to community investment at a local level and highlight innovative examples of current partnership working. Report author Lauren Lucas writes about the research on page 23.

Making Social Care Personal and Local: moving from mass production to co-production LGiU policy manager Laura Wilkes is one of the editors and a contributor to this joint publication with Governance International. It brings together contributors from councils, health and social care providers, the voluntary sector and universities who look at the reality of health and social care co-production and the important difference it is making to people’s lives and service delivery. We look at some of these themes in this issue’s special feature starting on page 19.

Primary Justice Reloaded: a model for localised probation services The government is consulting on plans to reform the probation service and community sentencing. This report from the LGiU and Unison discusses the consultations and the proposed reforms and examines the case for an expanded role for local authorities, focusing on investments in primary justice.

The new reports and other LGiU publications can be downloaded as PDFs from www.lgiu.org.uk/publications.
In the beginning...
In September 2011 government accepted a Core Cities Group Amendment to the Localism Bill for the eight core cities to be given greater freedoms to drive economic growth in their areas.

Unlocking growth
In December 2011 the government announced ‘new city deals’ in its publication ‘Unlocking growth in cities’. This argued the case that cities – with 74 per cent of population and 78 per cent of jobs – were the places where national growth would be focused, and that this required dynamic city leadership teams taking decisive action.

Powers and flexibilities
The government offered the core cities a ‘deal’. They set out a menu of powers, flexibilities and resources on which they would be prepared to empower cities to lead:
- Freedoms to invest in growth – including a single capital pot, the prospect of Tax Increment Financing (TIF) schemes, business rate discount and pooled business rate retention, and increased influence over future RGF and EU Structural Funds.
- Powers to drive critical infrastructure.
- Enabling cities to boost skills and jobs – including increased influence over employment and skills.

Accountability
This offer, however, was a two-way deal – requiring cities to demonstrate “strong, visible and accountable leadership and effective decision-making”, and taking on some of the risk.

The early winners
The deal was offered in the first instance to Core Cities – Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, and Sheffield and their wider LEP areas.

Liverpool leads the way
On February 7 2012, government announced the first city deal – with Liverpool City Council. In return for Liverpool moving to elected mayor leadership, and the establishment of a Mayoral Development Corporation, the government agreed:
- A reported £130m of funding.
- A ‘Youth Contract’.
- Mayoral oversight of HCA assets.

Manchester’s big deal
On 20 March 2012, the government announced a much larger deal with Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), “with the full support of the LEP”. The deal includes:
- Establishment of a £1.2bn Infrastructure Fund with an ‘Earn Back’ mechanism of up to £30m pa over 30 years.
- A Business Growth Hub – with £4.4m transitional government funding.
- A City Apprenticeship and Skills Hub delivering 6000 new apprentices to SMEs over two years.

Six more deals
Deals with the remaining six ‘Wave 1’ cities and an extension of the Liverpool deal to the city region were announced on July 5 2012. With forecast benefits/results of 175,000 jobs over 20 years and 37,000 new apprentices. The deals potentially cover a footprint of 14 million population, 6.2 million jobs, around £250bn a year, GVA, and over 350,000 VAT-registered businesses.

Deals for all?
City deals are not just for cities. Greg Clark has made it clear that he is open to other councils putting forward a case for similar deals involving extra powers and responsibilities and that each case will be considered on its merits.

The future
Understanding the city deal proposition – both its strengths and areas for further development – is extremely important. It is probably not an overstatement to suggest that making a success of city deals may hold the key to the local government sector achieving both enhanced devolution and to increasing local growth in our cities and communities over this parliament and in the longer term. 

Ten things you need to know about city deals

1. In the beginning...
   - In September 2011 government accepted a Core Cities Group Amendment to the Localism Bill for the eight core cities to be given greater freedoms to drive economic growth in their areas.

2. Unlocking growth
   - In December 2011 the government announced ‘new city deals’ in its publication ‘Unlocking growth in cities’. This argued the case that cities – with 74 per cent of population and 78 per cent of jobs – were the places where national growth would be focused, and that this required dynamic city leadership teams taking decisive action.

3. Powers and flexibilities
   - The government offered the core cities a ‘deal’. They set out a menu of powers, flexibilities and resources on which they would be prepared to empower cities to lead:
     - Freedoms to invest in growth – including a single capital pot, the prospect of Tax Increment Financing (TIF) schemes, business rate discount and pooled business rate retention, and increased influence over future RGF and EU Structural Funds.
     - Powers to drive critical infrastructure.
     - Enabling cities to boost skills and jobs – including increased influence over employment and skills.

4. Accountability
   - This offer, however, was a two-way deal – requiring cities to demonstrate “strong, visible and accountable leadership and effective decision-making”, and taking on some of the risk.

5. The early winners
   - The deal was offered in the first instance to Core Cities – Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, and Sheffield and their wider LEP areas.

6. Liverpool leads the way
   - On February 7 2012, government announced the first city deal – with Liverpool City Council. In return for Liverpool moving to elected mayor leadership, and the establishment of a Mayoral Development Corporation, the government agreed:
     - A reported £130m of funding.
     - A ‘Youth Contract’.
     - Mayoral oversight of HCA assets.

7. Manchester’s big deal
   - On 20 March 2012, the government announced a much larger deal with Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), “with the full support of the LEP”. The deal includes:
     - Establishment of a £1.2bn Infrastructure Fund with an ‘Earn Back’ mechanism of up to £30m pa over 30 years.
     - A Business Growth Hub – with £4.4m transitional government funding.
     - A City Apprenticeship and Skills Hub delivering 6000 new apprentices to SMEs over two years.

8. Six more deals
   - Deals with the remaining six ‘Wave 1’ cities and an extension of the Liverpool deal to the city region were announced on July 5 2012. With forecast benefits/results of 175,000 jobs over 20 years and 37,000 new apprentices. The deals potentially cover a footprint of 14 million population, 6.2 million jobs, around £250bn a year, GVA, and over 350,000 VAT-registered businesses.

9. Deals for all?
   - City deals are not just for cities. Greg Clark has made it clear that he is open to other councils putting forward a case for similar deals involving extra powers and responsibilities and that each case will be considered on its merits.

10. The future
    - Understanding the city deal proposition – both its strengths and areas for further development – is extremely important. It is probably not an overstatement to suggest that making a success of city deals may hold the key to the local government sector achieving both enhanced devolution and to increasing local growth in our cities and communities over this parliament and in the longer term.

Jonathan Carr-West is a director at the LGiU. Based on a briefing by David Marlow.
Managing the media

McMahon is the 31-year-old leader of Oldham borough council. The profile discussed his meteoric rise, his unconventional leadership style and – his plans for radical devolution of the authority’s decision-making and budget. The event, which occurred after the profile had gone to press, was the explosion in the village of Shaw, part of the borough, which killed a two-year-old boy and caused widespread damage to local housing.

Within an hour of the explosion, the first TV trucks arrived. Many national journalists were to stay for three days, with regional television remaining even longer. Media interest continued for weeks afterwards.

“My overriding image of the media is that they were very respectful and helpful,” says McMahon. “Obviously it was difficult because they were hungry for news and for immediate responses. In a fast-moving situation like that, it’s hard to give accurate information that is not going to be out of date within an hour.”

There were tensions. The council had set up a rest centre for families forced to leave their homes – as many as 175 houses were evacuated initially – and had declared it out of bounds to the media. “Some people were in their pyjamas,” McMahon explains. Most journalists accepted the restriction, if reluctantly, but there were at least two instances of photographers being caught trying to sneak in.

More seriously, and on the theme of working together that runs through this issue of c’llr, the experience highlighted significant differences between the council and the police in terms of media management. “I would say that the council is far more adept at dealing with journalists in an informal way, whereas the police are very, very official,” says McMahon. “Their priority was to secure the site; ours was to tell people what was going on.”

One incident sums up what he calls this “disconnect”. The council had arranged for a Greater Manchester Radio reporter to be escorted into the inner cordon the day after the explosion, to give a vivid account of the scale of destruction. McMahon had himself been inside the cordon the night before. But as soon as the police learned of the plan, it was vetoed.

“We wanted people to be informed and to get the story out,” says McMahon. “It was hard to get across why so many people had been forced out of their properties if you weren’t able to demonstrate just how extensive the damage had been. But the police would have none of it.”

The explosion, and its aftermath, also tested the council’s good relations with the Oldham Chronicle, the local daily. The authority set up a distress fund for people affected by the incident, and within two weeks it stood at more than £250,000. Almost inevitably, people claimed they were not getting a rightful share and the paper reported their complaints. McMahon, who says this was based on a misunderstanding, swiftly arranged a meeting to clear the air.

He values the Chronicle highly, ensuring it has routine early access under embargo to all key council documents. “It’s fair to say it’s not universally liked by council officials,” he says. “But from my point of view, and that of the press office, a local daily paper is invaluable in getting the message out.”

Having said that, McMahon is an enthusiastic adopter of new media. He blogs weekly and has introduced live streaming of full council meetings, the last one watched by some 400 people. This has also enabled citizens to post questions live on Twitter and Facebook, relayed on to a large screen in the council chamber. At the April meeting, there were 36 questions – more than the total received under the old system (in writing and vetted by the borough solicitor) over the previous five years.

“The criticism is that the questions are about quite localised issues, such as: ‘I reported a pothole in my street and it hasn’t been repaired’, ” says McMahon. “The issue for us is not the pothole, but the fact that it was reported but not sorted out.”

David Brindle is public services editor for the Guardian
Iain Duncan Smith, Secretary of State for the Department of Work and Pensions, came to my constituency to see the Burton and South Derbyshire College’s innovative ‘Learn it Build it, Live it’ project.

Heather Wheeler, chair of the All Party Parliamentary Local Government Group tells us what’s been catching her imagination in Parliament and her constituency over the last couple of months.

Wheeler’s World

There’s been good news for a couple of companies in my constituency

In the last issue I wrote about my concerns about the imposition of VAT tax on static homes/caravans. Two local companies, Mercia Marina, a leisure venue and Truma, maker of fittings for static and other caravans, told me that 20 per cent of their business could be wiped out overnight, should the tax come into force. So it is excellent news that the Chancellor looked again at the cost benefit analysis that I and others argued showed the extra income would come at the cost of jobs and reduced the rate to five per cent. The local companies are over the moon!

And there was good news for local government with the decision last week to freeze fuel duty until the end of the year.

The government inherited a series of Fuel Duty rises from the last Labour government planned for last year and this year, which it has now scrapped or delayed. The Chancellor has now cancelled Labour’s 3p per litre rise planned for August this year.

It’s not just good news for motorists, families and businesses coping with tight finances, it will be a massive help to local government which was facing a substantial increase in fuel bills. That means that although the exchequer may miss out on around £550 million, there’s a bit more money in people’s pockets and a bit of relief for hard pressed councils.

I’m delighted to see that the government has given the go-ahead for the electrification of the East Midlands railway line.

We can now look forward to the day when trains from London to Sheffield are no longer pulled by CO2 pumping diesel engines. East Midlands MPs have been pressuring ministers for this decision. Electrification will improve journey times and make the journey much greener. And, of course, it could offer a boost to Bombardier, a major employer for my constituents, who should be in line for any contract to convert the locomotives.

We have the slowest speeds to and from London of any inter-city route. Nottingham and Sheffield are the last two of the eight ‘core cities’ with no electrified line in place or promised. The project will be good for businesses and our regional economies.

Local businesses will benefit from the FSA’s ruling on the scandal of the interest rate swap agreements.

Interest rate swap agreements were designed to reduce businesses vulnerability to interest rate fluctuations. However, they have been sold by high street banks such as NatWest, Lloyds TSB and RBS without fully explaining that they come with costly break clauses. The high level of these break costs have locked businesses into the deal which have been clearly detrimental to their business.

During the debate I highlighted how these agreements have affected several businesses in South Derbyshire, including a firm who entered into an interest swap agreement back in 2007, but when interest rates fell in 2009 he was told he couldn’t break the agreement unless he paid a break cost which totalled 19.4 per cent of his original loan value. He was also informed that even if he sold his property to repay the loan in full, the IRSA would still exist as the interest rate swap agreement was a separate product to the loan he originally received and that this agreement would last for ten years, even though the loan was for five years.

I think the FSA ruling that banks must cancel these agreements and make sure that where they have been mis-sold, companies are compensated, is the best thing the regulator has done since I’ve been in Parliament.

Iain Duncan Smith came to my constituency to see the Burton and South Derbyshire Colleges innovative ‘Learn it Build it, Live it’ project.
What happens when the money runs out?

As Joni Mitchell once sang “you don’t know what you’ve got till it’s gone”. The song was Big Yellow Taxi and if you’d been driving one in Aberystwyth over the last year, you could have parked it anywhere you liked. The town became the motorists’ favourite spot when Dyfed-Powys Police laid off its traffic wardens in June 2011, a year before a council-run service was due to start.

It sounds like a Jeremy Clarkson dream come true, yet it soon deteriorated into chaos with traffic jams, road rage, and gridlock. A survey by car park operator NCP dubbed Aberystwyth as the worst town in Britain to find a parking space.

When the wardens returned, they were no reports of residents kissing them, but most people were very glad to see them back. A representative from the Chamber of Commerce said: “Most people will welcome the fact that order is restored. You don’t realise the value of things until they’re gone.”

“It sounds like a Jeremy Clarkson dream come true, yet it soon deteriorated into chaos with traffic jams, road rage, and gridlock”

Often the absence of a service is highlighted by a strike. Then the issue gets complicated by questions of relative value – pay, pensions, terms and conditions. It’s unusual to get such a pure illustration, as in Aberystwyth, of what happens when you remove an important public service for a period and then restore it.

So should councils forget all the cuddly positive publicity about wellbeing and enabling in favour of a more dystopian picture of what life would be like without them? Towns where traffic is gridlocked, people roll around vomiting from food poisoning from unregulated establishments, rubbish piles up in the street?

For a really bleak version of the future of public services, look no further than California. In July, San Bernardino became the third Californian city, after Stockton and Mammoth Lakes, to file for bankruptcy protection. The reasons are complex but unmentionable, falling tax revenues, problems in the mortgage market and financial mismanagement have all been issues.

In the past three years, before going bankrupt, Stockton dealt with its financial deficit by cutting a quarter of the city’s police officers, a third of fire fighters and 40 per cent of other employees, as well as slashing wages and benefits. No wonder Stockton had the dubious distinction of being rated America’s Most Miserable City in a Forbes Magazine list in 2010. Its unemployne and violent crime rates are now amongst the highest in America.

One UK authority is now sending out some stark messages about the choices facing councils. Barnet Council’s Graph of Doom is a Powerpoint slide which shows that demographic change (increases in the number of children and vulnerable older people) will soak up all council funding within 15 years. As the council’s cabinet member of resources Gareth Thomas said in a video posted on YouTube last year, “that means no libraries, no rubbish collection, no street cleaning.”

The slide was originally produced as part of Barnet’s budget consultation with residents, but is now doing the rounds. It was shown at the LGA Conference this year and is apparently regularly used by Sir Bob Kerslake, permanent secretary at the Department for Communities and Local Government and head of the civil service.

Some people have questioned the assumptions behind the graph but there’s no denying that it focuses the mind wonderfully. It’s message was also confirmed by the Office of Budget Responsibility’s Annual Fiscal Sustainability Report, published in July. This sets out how the rising cost of health and social care for an ageing population will put the public finances on an unsustainable path without further tax rises or spending cuts elsewhere.

Again, these projections can’t be viewed too simplistically, as huge savings are being made from the overhauls of public sector pensions for example. But it’s clear that the difficult conversation with citizens, currently delivered in muted tones, needs to get a lot louder. No council likes to shout about what it’s not doing, but the dystopian financial reality is coming closer every day.

You can see the Barnet video at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ziew3V3nMSI sept 2011

Carol Grant is a director of Grant Riches
A community safety net

Recently, a constituent told me that his bank had been closed. He'd been with the bank for 15 years.

Having shattered both his heels, he'd gone to the bank to explain that his benefits were delayed. He asked them to defer a few standing orders to avoid an overdraft.

The cashier told him that he could have purchased income insurance. If he'd done so he wouldn't face the difficulties he was now experiencing.

He told her he wasn't interested, but the bank was persistent and suggested they'd find out how much it would cost to have insurance. He nodded his agreement although he told me he had no intention of taking out the insurance.

Following the discussion, his bank contacted him to say that they were closing his account because of his bad debt record.

He admitted that he has a poor credit history, but that he wasn't seeking any credit from the bank, and indeed in all his 15 years with them, he had never been overdrawn.

This made no difference to the bank, which has now closed the account. As a consequence, if someone pays him by cheque in future, his only source of conversion into cash is a money lender or payday loan operator. As soon as he hands the cheque over he loses between £2.50 and £5.00, depending on the size of the cheque.

When I was first asked to consider the establishment of a food bank in the valley of 30,000 people for which I'm a council member, I had doubts about its viability and its necessity. But this constituent’s case was one of several that convinced me that there's a need for a safety net in communities where more and more people are operating close to the edge.

We know about the squeezed middle and people who’ve had to tighten their belts, but we are increasingly finding that there are people, who faced with paying the gas bill, repairing the fridge or shopping for food, are sacrificing the latter.

Fortunately, lots of volunteers who want to help those in less fortunate circumstances than themselves have come forward. Additionally plenty of places in the valley have offered to house donation bins. Together with local schools, who’ve run no-uniform days for their kids we also have local libraries doing a great job. The PCT is engaged and there are discussions under way with the police.

Both the County Council and the Borough Council are on board as is the local Co-op and other smaller shops. The volunteer bureau has helped identify people able to assist with the collection and distribution of food and local churches and the local press have been helpful too.

Basically, the food bank offers families and individuals food to last three days and will make a similar offer no more than three times. Once referred, recipients are given some help with signposting to other sources of help.

We’ve adopted a name - Bare Necessities Glossopdale - and are in the process of establishing a constitution and applying for charitable status. We’re part of a network of 12 food banks which are now operating in Derbyshire alone.

According to the national voice for food banks the Trussel Trust, “In 2011-12 food banks fed 128,687 people nationwide, 100% more than the previous year. Rising costs of food and fuel combined with static income, high unemployment and changes to benefits are causing more and more people to come to foodbanks for help.”

With significant changes to benefits now planned, Bare Necessities Glossopdale is anticipating rising demand over the next couple of years, so sustainability is crucial. Once started, there’s no turning off the tap.

Dave Wilcox is chair of the LGiU
Rochdale MP Simon Danczuk has been prominent in making sure his local council, other agencies and the government pay proper attention to the street grooming of young girls. Mark D’Arcy talked to him.

In the wake of a horrific sexual grooming and child abuse case, Rochdale is under the microscope – both the community, and its Borough Council. The recent trial which saw nine men convicted of 21 counts of sexual abuse against young girls, has raised serious questions over the way social services dealt with the victims. There have been questions to the Prime Minister, a debate in the Commons and an inquiry into child exploitation has been launched by the Home Affairs Select Committee.

As the aftershocks continue, the MP for Rochdale, Simon Danczuk, has emerged as an important voice. He took part in the Commons debate – seeing the Speaker wince at some of the details of the case – and he has held meetings with the key ministers involved. Now, he says his job is to be a candid friend to his local authority (both are Labour) as it seeks to understand how it failed for so long to respond to warning signs about “street grooming.”

The phenomenon of young girls, mostly white, being exploited by older men, mostly of Pakistani descent, is not new to Danczuk. He recalls a very similar case emerging in Blackburn with Darwen, when he was a councillor there, 15 years ago. For him, one of the most surprising facets of the Rochdale case is that it was treated as something new and novel, for which the Police told him they needed new Home Office guidance.

In the Commons debate which followed the criminal case, Danczuk scorned the excuses that had been made by social services, and the underlying attitudes which, he says, were revealed. He said the victims, some as young as 13, were regarded as having made a “lifestyle choice” to go into prostitution – completely wrong-headed, he says. It was claimed that they came from children’s homes and chaotic families, when neither was true of most of the victims. And above all, he says, it is a mistake to ignore the racial dimension.

Here Danczuk chooses his words carefully. He emphasises that “race is a factor but not the factor,” in the abuse, but insists that “street grooming” cannot be properly understood if it is ignored. He fears local authorities and the local police are nervous of addressing this, because of fears that they could undermine community cohesion in the process. “If you deny it, you can’t target the problem properly,” he adds, “and the vacuum is filled by the far right. The public knows race is part of the issue, so it’s risible to deny it. But you also have to look at the nature of the night-time economy in poor areas and the attitudes inside some communities.”

Danczuk quotes academic research which found that young white girls in Rochdale often encountered racial discrimination and “lewd remarks” from Asian men. “I think there are a small group of men within the Pakistani-Asian community who have a very warped, unhealthy perspective in terms of women,” he said.

The Borough Council is now examining its handling of the case. Danczuk has spoken to NHS staff, who were rebuffed when they tried to get children who presented with multiple sexual infections, taken into care. In the Commons he quoted some of the excuses offered by Social Services for failing to do so – one girl was supposedly “too disruptive” and would “cost too much.” The abuse continued and young lives were ruined, he says. He pins his hope of an effective response on the new Chief Executive, Jim Taylor, formerly Tameside’s Director of Children’s Services.

A couple of other points emerge: first, Danzuk is concerned that local agencies don’t seem to realise that they already have extensive powers to share data in order to protect children. It is the culture of the local agencies, not the law, which needs to change, he believes.

And he is also worried about the practice of local councillors, often community leaders, writing letters to the courts to support defendants. This, he regards as quite inappropriate. “We’re talking about people accused of serious offences,” he says, “the community may expect the councillors to do this, but that has to change.”
Gerald Vernon-Jackson

The tale of Councillor Vernon-Jackson’s involvement with bananas dates from 2008 when he led the council’s purchase of fruit importer Mainland Market Deliveries, which was in danger of going under taking with it the £1.9m of port fees the council receives each year for the handling of some 60 million bananas.

Buying the firm safeguarded both 200 jobs and an income stream that is part of the £7m a year the council earns from owning its port, enough to cushion some impact of spending cuts.

Among Portsmouth’s other unusual possessions arising from its interventionism is the M275 motorway, which the authority built to link the city to the national network.

This pragmatic tradition characterises perhaps Vernon-Jackson’s Liberal Democrat administration.

While many of the party’s councillors went down like ninepins in May’s local elections, Portsmouth Lib Dems actually gained three seats, tightening their control on the council to 26, against 12 Tories and four for Labour.

Councillor Vernon-Jackson says he cannot give colleagues elsewhere any magic formula for bucking recent political trends. It is all, he says, a matter of getting the basics right.

“We’ve tried to do all the commonsense things a council should, not act in an ideological way, and people have, I think, seen we’ve done a good job,” he says.

“I think we have been very driven by the need to provide really good services for local people, basic things like allotments – it’s important to people that they work well, and unlike some councils we are opening libraries and extending opening hours at others.”

Getting the finances right “has been hugely important”, he says and having been startled at his first meeting as leader to be advised of a £1.7m overspend in social care he put in place a mechanism where directors and assistant directors and their cabinet members meet the leader every month to warn of potential overspends and agree how to stop them. “Now we do not do overspends at all.”

He advises Lib Dems elsewhere simply to “keep to local issues and enjoy going out and talking to people and recruiting interesting people who want to stand for the council; we’ve found just getting the basics right has been enough”.

Vernon-Jackson can find his advice sought, as he is a well-known party figure from his earlier career.

His mother was a Liberal councillor in Lymington, Hampshire, which was how he first became involved in politics, and he was first elected to New Forest District Council in 1991.

In 1995 he left for Newbury to work for the seat’s then Lib Dem MP David Rendel, during which time he also became deputy leader of West Berkshire Council.

After that, he worked at his party’s London headquarters and was in charge of its 2001 general election campaign in southern England.

“I decided to move to be nearer to my family but I wanted to live in a city. I looked at Bournemouth but decided I liked Portsmouth better and moved here,” he recalls.

It was then a meteoric rise. He was elected a councillor in 2003, within six months of moving to Portsmouth, and after 18 months was leader of a minority administration.
unlike many Lib Dem councils there has been no decentralisation.

“I don’t think we need decentralisation because Portsmouth’s a very small densely populated place, its 15 square miles so everything sits pretty close,” he says.

He describes Portsmouth as “mostly an island with 200,000 people on it”, many living in pre-1919 terraced housing built for dockyard jobs.

Portsmouth developed to serve Royal Navy and 17,000 jobs remain in the dockyards, though it also has IBM’s UK headquarters, and is the centre of the UK satellite industry.

“There are pockets of extreme deprivation and traditionally low educational attainment,” he says.

“The city creates a great deal of wealth but most of it drives out to the countryside every night and the top paid people tend not to live in Portsmouth.

“While many of the party’s councillors went down like ninepins in May’s local elections, Portsmouth Lib Dems actually gained three seats”

“It’s a reputational issue, because the public sees a densely populated city and people are always surprised once they get to know it.”

One way in which the council is trying to turn round the city’s economic fortunes is working with 10 neighbouring authorities in Partnership for South Hampshire (PUSH).

“PUSH works really well, and we never had a vote despite political differences,” he says.

“It focuses on growth because this region does not do as well as the rest of the south east, and it is a really good example of what councils can do without the need to go through local government reorganisation.”

Vernon-Jackson is also leader of his party’s Local Government Association group.

“It’s difficult to see how the LGA could come under majority control again so it’s different from a council, you have to work across party lines,” he says.

thought across local government of additional devolution, and Vernon-Jackson has his eyes on the Department for Work and Pensions.

“I think councils could take over everything it does except pensions,” he says.

“There is a greater feeling among cabinet members that they accept our case now that local government is the most efficient part of the public sector, and we could offer them financial savings because the DWP is very lax and our systems are better for controlling payments.

“Also, we have a strong incentive to help people back into work because it promotes local economic growth and I think we would do that better, not least as we are more approachable for people than is the DWP.”

Might he one day find himself on the other side of the political fence, as part of central government?

“Few people involved in politics would not be interested if an opportunity to stand for parliament came up, but it would be here in Portsmouth as I’m settled and very happy here,” he says.

There’s already a Lib Dem parliamentary seat in Portsmouth. Who knows?

Mark Smulian is a freelance journalist
Members’ views

We’re delighted to welcome four new members since the last issue of c’llr magazine in June: Kent County Council, South Hams District Council, West Devon Borough Council, and Wigan Council. This brings the total of new county members to three and of districts to ten this year. I hope either I or someone else from LGiU will be getting to all these councils soon – we offer quick pre-council updates for members, strategic meets with CEOs and Leaders or Heads of Policy/Member services, or more general briefings for other colleagues.

The LGiU Members’ Reception at the LGA conference provided a great opportunity for colleagues to meet up from across the country: Blackpool discussed starting a free trial, Southampton wanted to meet to refresh their membership, Taunton Deane decided to raise membership with their Cabinet and CEO. Following this we are also discussing membership and/or setting up introductory trials with Blackpool, Coventry, Redbridge amongst others – we’re delighted that there’s continuing interest.

Visits in recent weeks have included East Hampshire, Kent County Council, LB Sutton, Surrey Heath. In Kent, colleagues were very positive about our briefings, and particularly the ability to navigate from them to other key documents and indeed past LGiU briefings; East Hampshire was very positive about the briefings too and keen to see the implications for districts highlighted more.

In Surrey Heath we discussed the challenges of the current government’s Localism agenda – how far and how fast was it really moving, how best to stay abreast of how other councils were responding. There was also uncertainty – as with many other councils – about how the new Police and Crime Commissioner post would work locally, and how to ensure the postholder would play constructively into the existing context. With major armed forces bases locally, Surrey Heath was pleased that it had developed an important new Community Covenant which the Royal British Legion had recognised for its forthcoming best practice guide. 

Chris Naylor reports back on what he’s heard from LGiU members in the last couple of months.

Chris Naylor is LGiU’s Partnerships Lead chris.naylor@lgiu.org.uk

SEPTEMBER SEMINARS FROM THE LGIU

4 September Understanding Community Engagement
25 September Advice Services: using commissioning to get a good deal for your citizens and for your local authority
26 September Neighbourhood Agreements: building communities amidst austerity
27 September: Localism and Community Leadership

Details of forthcoming LGiU seminars can be found at www.lgiu.org.uk/events
Louise Casey

Outspoken and occasionally brash, Louise Casey is absolutely dedicated to the most disadvantaged sections of society. From deputy director of Shelter through to Tony Blair’s point woman on anti-social behaviour, to commissioner for the victims of crime, Casey has deliberately chosen to front the unpopular causes and defend the hardest cases in social policy. Despite her New Labour roots, successive Tory ministers, right up to the PM, have been impressed by her willingness to take on the Whitehall establishment to get the right deal for the groups she works for.

In return, she’s clear that she sees local government as a “key partner” in making a success of the Troubled Families Programme. “But not only that, local authorities have a strong leadership role in this initiative and it was strategic decision to make them so,” she says.

Putting local government in the driving seat also made sense because the scheme “had learned a lot from the various family intervention programmes up and down the country,” says Casey. “The Troubled Families Programme shows that the government can come behind issues that local authorities are already worrying about.”

She cites examples of local councils whose innovative work she admires – like Bradford’s Family Intervention Project or the Leeds City Region’s decision to make NEETs a priority area. “But they are small scale and not yet part of the mainstream. The intention of the programme is that it becomes mainstream and the natural way of doing things.”

But Casey points out that the concept of targeting the most troubled families is not a new one. “In a sense this all goes back to the ‘Respect era’ when the Blair government set up a task force, headed by Casey, to deal with anti-social behaviour and problematic young people and families. Many of the projects that came out of that were given to local authorities to run.”

Responding to the criticism that some parts of Whitehall have traditionally been less engaged than others in getting behind cross departmental initiatives like this one, she says, “Look, the Department of Health has dug deep in its pockets – £60m is a lot of money and the DWP are allowing access to information and records – that shows they are behind this.”

And she is adamant that government backing, though it does “come with strings attached” will not be result in more bureaucracy. “I will not be out with a clipboard checking that councils are doing this that or the other – that’s not the way it’s going to work.”

Local authorities will be free to choose who co-ordinates their local projects and which families they work with, she said. “We will start with what is already known at local level. I have consistently made it clear that not I am going to come from on high and say these are the people you must work with. If you want to use your own people, then that’s fine.”

Patrick Kelly is a freelance journalist

Louise Casey is the director general of the Troubled Families Unit. No-one is more anxious to ensure that the dreaded word ‘czar’ doesn’t appear anywhere on her title – the epithet has dogged her since her days in charge of the Labour government’s Rough Sleepers Unit. Patrick Kelly talked to her about her new role.
Looking for trouble?

Many councillors will be familiar with the families that everyone complains about – kids out of control, always fighting with neighbours, in trouble with the law, in massive rent arrears, out of work and seemingly out of reach of any of the services designed to help them.

Variously described as “troubled”, “at risk” “with complex needs” or simply “chaotic”, these families have soaked up an enormous amount of time, effort and public funds and yet their problems seem as intractable as ever. Official figures suggest they number about 120,000 across the country and cost the taxpayer about £9bn every year as they bounce between health services, police, courts, social services and schools.

The issue shot to the top of the agenda after the riots in London and some other cities last summer. As poor parenting became a culprit and some other cities last summer. As poor parenting became a culprit and some other cities last summer.

They might welcome the fact that the Troubled Families Programme puts local authorities in a position of “strong leadership”, according to the programme’s director general Louise Casey. And they might also be pleased to hear that the “payment by results” scheme promises them up to £4,000 per family – 80 per cent of which will be paid upfront as an ‘attachment fee’. They will no doubt also be encouraged by the words of praise for existing “family intervention” programmes, some of which are already being funded out of community budgets, [the experiment which is aimed at pooling the budgets of various local services in order to target their work better]. The DCLG has cited Westminster, Barnet and Blackburn with Darwen as exemplars of the turnarounds they expect from highly targeted interventions with problem families. Indeed, Barnet’s director of childrens’ services, Robert McCulloch Graham, has been seconded to the DCLG’s Troubled Families Unit to oversee the programme.

Patrick Kelly explains the government’s new Troubled Families programme and talks to some of the councils who have been leading the way.

“Having a single individual with the specific task of dealing with each family allows them to build up trust rather than having to go in lots of different directions to seek help”

Councillor Andrew Harper, cabinet member for education, children and families at Barnet, said the secondment should provide “reassurance” for other authorities that “the experience and perspective from local authorities” was part of the DCLG thinking.

He adds, “Although the programme is still relatively new, the results in Barnet are tangible.” Barnet has invested £1m in a three year Intensive Family Focus (IFF) programme.

After a year, 12 children from the initial cohort of 18 families are no longer under child protection orders while 12 adults are back into work and there’s been a reduction in anti-social behaviour amongst 13 of the families. So far the council has recruited 13 IFF workers and has referred 50 families with complex needs onto the programme.

Councillor Harper said that having a single individual with the specific task of dealing with each family allows them to build up trust rather than having to go in lots of different directions to seek help. “It’s expensive initially but we are making major savings. It’s reducing costs of social care which means that money can be used to help other families who are in real difficulties.”

He admits that the council had to take the lead with other partners and as cabinet member, he chairs the panel overseeing the IFF. “We decided not to wait for all the details to be worked out – it was too good an idea so we have got to crack on with it.”

There is still a suggestion that some partner agencies, although willing to support family intervention schemes in principle, have been less willing to align their budgets to cover the costs of such schemes. Even the £448m from central coffers will cover only 40 per cent of costs, and councils will still have to agree to fund the other 60 per cent themselves.

Some local government critics point to the savings made: - every A&E attendance avoided saves around £52; a domestic violence incident costs £18,730; every child who doesn’t enter care saves £43,500; every anti-social behaviour incident costs up to £630 etc.

Councillor Nickie Aiken, Westminster’s cabinet member for children, young people and community protection, says that her council’s Family Recovery Programme, now in its fourth year, saves nearly £3 for every £1 invested but typically, local authorities get only 42 per cent of that saving back, the other savings accrue to government departments and the NHS. The new government initiative will go some way to recognise local government’s financial contribution, she says, but she remains critical of some other agencies unwillingness to put the real weight behind this type of scheme. “The NHS is a particular problem...”
even now – as neither the existing structures nor the GP commissioning bodies seem to know who will take responsibility for this area.”

There are other criticisms. Academics have suggested that the DCLG figure of 120,000 is one of those factoids that sounds plausible but is based on a misreading of the background research on which it is based, conflating families experiencing multiple disadvantage and families that cause trouble. The former figure could be much higher.

Children’s charities have predicted that welfare cuts are driving more families into the poorest categories. Their analysis shows that families with six or more disadvantages, carry the biggest burden of the budget cuts.

Councillor Maureen Bates, executive member for children and families at Blackburn with Darwen, says the council’s Think Family project has been taking a therapeutic approach to a group of 40 families in the “troubled” category.

“One of the most important things we have identified is the importance of early intervention – when children are very young. While we welcome the government’s programme, there is a concern that some of the outcomes they are looking at – reduction in exclusions, ASBOS etc – are skewed towards families with older children.”

In Norfolk, which has the ninth highest number of troubled families, programme co-ordinator Nicky Dawson admits that the recession will make the task harder. Although it has five existing Family Intervention Projects (FIP), which have led to an average annual saving of £88,480 per family, they feel the extra government cash will be needed to address new levels of crisis experienced by the poorest and most vulnerable families.

Dawson said: “People are coming in with even more substantial problems. Those problems are even more severe than they were even just 18 months ago.” This extra help would push savings up to £140,000 per family per year.

But she also wants the families themselves to determine what changes need to be made and decide where the money should be spent, so they should be involved in designing, or redesigning, the services.

The ultimate aim will be to create a network of services that will not only help the 1,700 families linked to this programme but will also ensure the support and early intervention needed in future. “Once we have helped those 1,700 families, we don’t want more to come through and fill that gap,” said Dawson.

“Westminster’s Family Recovery Programme saves nearly £3 for every £1 invested”

Academics have suggested that the figure of 120,000 is based on a misreading of the background research”
The LGiU has wide experience in delivering training to both councillors and officers. We can bring that experience to you and provide in-house training for one local authority or a small number of neighbouring councils.

For many councils this is a cost effective way of enabling many more councillors and employees to benefit from learning and development opportunities than if they were to send delegates to workshops and seminars. Available programmes include:

- An introduction to local government finance
- Participatory appraisal
- Neighbourhood Agreements
- An introduction to the Localism Act
- Speed reading and retention
- Chairing skills
- Facilitation skills
- Community engagement

Each of these programmes can be delivered over a day, or in many cases, elements of the programmes can be combined to deliver a more bespoke training package over one or more days.

To discuss your council’s particular requirements please contact the LGiU’s learning and development manager, Alan Waters: alan.waters@lgiu.org.uk 07825 745620.
Co-production

Citizen-centred transformation

The LGiU and Governance International have published a book on co-production. It considers co-production in the context of the changes we are experiencing. This special feature looks at different aspects of this way of delivering services. Andy Sawford and Laura Wilkes set the scene by looking at co-production in health and social care.

Three powerful forces are coming together to fundamentally change how public services are provided in the UK. The first is the drive towards ‘localism’ to devolve power and decision making from central government to local government and communities. The second is the fiscal context and the unprecedented scale and pace of public sector funding reductions. The third is the wider and longer term changes in our society, such as demographic, technological and scientific change, coupled with people’s changing expectations.

Public service providers, including local authorities, know that they must find significant savings in current expenditure, and as they look down the road, they can see cost pressures and demands are rising – particularly when it comes to providing social care and health related services. Shaping a positive future, in a challenging context, involves new ways of working, effective partnerships, and engaged communities.

In UK local government there is much talk of different approaches, from the ‘commissioning council’ to the ‘co-operative council’, or even the ‘e-bay council’. These different models and approaches to service delivery all assume the need for a new relationship between citizens and the state, with an emphasis on co-production. Whether it’s through personalisation approaches, such as personal budgets, ‘nudging’ or perhaps the ‘big society’, the idea is that service users should be enabled to take on a greater role in shaping their own services. Some will say these ideas are not new, but what is noticeable in the current debate is the extent to which the emphasis is shifting from having a greater say to taking a greater role.

Co-production is the word many are using to describe this new relationship, which involves service users and communities giving their time and skills in a new collaborative relationship with public service providers. Our studies show that co-production can encourage innovation, ease pressure on the public purse and enable citizens and service users to take greater responsibility for their own lives. Local authorities have a huge opportunity to transform their services – with citizens at the centre as real innovation can come directly from the service user, who has the in depth knowledge of what their requirements are and the best way to meet them.

“there is much talk of different approaches, from the ‘commissioning council’ to the ‘co-operative council’, or even the ‘e-bay council’”

Taking co-production forward as an approach to service delivery will require local authorities – and particularly councillors – to work differently. We know that many are already doing this. Councillors are fundamental to the process of co-production and can play a vital role in taking it forward. More and more, councillors are becoming community facilitators and leaders of place; people who have the access and ability to bring together diverse sections of their communities to understand priorities and concerns. Councillors are the direct link between the local authority and community and as such are ideally placed to coordinate and facilitate opportunities for communities to have meaningful involvement in the process of co-production.

There are a series of tools available to communities to facilitate co-production which councillors can encourage the use of. Powers that are now on-stream through the Localism Act provide many of these, such as: the General Power of Competence, Community Right to Challenge and Community Right to Bid. Councillors can also influence the commissioning process so that it considers social value, and push adopting a community budgeting approach as a way to involve communities, provide opportunities for them to participate and shape the priorities that are set.

Councillors, come with a deep understanding of their own patch, so they have a vital role in making sure that the opportunities available to communities for co-production are suitable; activities that they want to get involved in and care about locally, and at times and places that are accessible. Councillors are also in an ideal position to facilitate a two-way communication between councils and communities. Unless communities and service users know what their options are to get involved in co-production, including examples of where involvement has led to something worthwhile, it may be difficult for people to fully understand the opportunities that involvement in co-production may bring.

To find out more about co-production and what it means for councillors and your communities, take a look at the book. ‘Making Health and Social Care Personal and Local: Moving from Mass Production to Co-production’ is available to download free from the LGiU website.

Andy Sawford is LGiU chief executive. Laura Wilkes is an LGiU policy manager
In the light of current financial austerity and demographic changes, co-production is no longer just a good idea - it has become a necessity say Elke Loeffler and Frankie Hine-Hughes.

"Involving service users and communities in public services is still sporadic rather than standard"

The Co-Production Star gives a clear visual portrayal of these four ‘Cos’ of co-production.

**Co-commissioning public services** – shifting the focus from services that councils think people need to outcomes that local people believe to be priorities, for example through neighbourhood budgeting.

**Co-designing public services** – using the customer journey approach to look at how the service process can be improved from the user’s point of view.

**Co-delivering public services** – identifying who is willing to do what and how, for example through capability assessments (as we are currently piloting with Walsall Council) and community asset surveys.

**Co-assessing public services** – training citizens to carry out service inspections and scrutiny, often through the use of social media or online ratings.

Collaborative ways of working, based on mutual respect, power-sharing and a focus on outcomes, requires courage and risk-taking. Many councils are now at the stage where they have recognised this. But that is not enough. To make the transformation real, investment in training and change management is necessary.

In any case, what are the alternatives? If councils do not start now on the path of co-production, their only way to tackle the current financial pressures will be significant cuts to local services. Then they will find that service users and citizens REALLY want to get involved – but usually in a negative, destructive way.

We said we had a five step model towards co-production of public services and outcomes – but actually this was not quite the whole truth. There is a sixth step, probably most important of all – just start!

Elke Loeffler is CEO and Frankie Hine-Hughes is project manager, Governance International
The LIFE Programme in Swindon has run for three years, and is a joint venture between Swindon public sector partners and Participle, a social enterprise. Swindon’s leader, Rod Bluh explains.

The programme aims to transform the lives of families with complex needs so that life chances of family members increase. These families demonstrate up to ten or more risk indicators, including: children on child protection plans, children in need (supported by a social worker), poor achievement at school, exclusions, poor attendance, young offenders, looked after children, domestic violence, parental mental health, special educational needs/disability, anti social behaviour and substance misuse.

The aim was co-creation of a new way of working based on the values of compassion, creating independence and empowerment, using the expertise of families directly affected in designing a new way of working, led by them.

To understand the reality of the lives of the families, a team from Participle rented a council house in Swindon for six months and lived alongside them.

The initial learning was that families in their relationship with current services felt:
- oppressed
- as if they were treated as the “child” in the relationship
- isolated
- exhausted with fighting the system
- that there is no safe space to ask for help
- that there was a lack of trust, honesty, and transparency
- hopeless, believing that change is not possible

Professionals felt:
- they were only working to the agencies’ agendas and not the families’ agendas
- they were forced by the system to act like a parent holding power and control
- actions they took were based on enforcement
- they were forced by the system to adopt a particular professional stance and that their professional language often alienated families
- they were in the role of rescuing families and not empowering
- there was a lack of trust, honesty, transparency

The new approach

Twelve families were invited by Swindon partners (out of 400 identified families) to join the LIFE Programme. It focused on:
- building something radically different that would produce outcomes wanted by families, their neighbours and the wider community
- providing greater chances for long term sustainable outcomes in health, education, future prospects and stability for families
- finding a way of using government resources as an investment in people’s lives, rather than as a risk management system.

The hallmarks of the new way of working are: building deeper relationships and collaborating in setting priorities and shaping solutions. In 2010, £760,000 was notionally saved across the public sector, of which £485,000 represented expected costs which were prevented. The main financial benefits of the LIFE team approach will accrue over the longer term as families cease to represent significant financial burdens on public sector agencies.

LIFE, together with the learning from integration of services and Family Nurse Partnership has acted as a catalyst for a fundamental shift in the way public services are delivered in Swindon.

Outcomes, performance indicators, costs and savings

As of July 2011 the data, based on 55 family members, shows:
- 73% improvement in mental health conditions for those reporting this as a risk factor
- 86% of children where school attendance was an issue reported improvements
- 70% of children re-engaged with education where this was an issue
- 69% adults are seeking/in employment or training
- 86% of families have a rent payment plan in place where this had been an issue
- 92% of family members building positive relationships between themselves
- 80% reduction in police call outs
- 10 children not taken into care
- 13 children no longer have a child protection plan
- 6 eviction orders were stopped
- 2 individuals are seeking help for drug and alcohol abuse

Data to July 2012 was still being collated and analysed as this article went to press.
Citizens take the lead

Through Citizen Leadership, John Jennings has been involved in service transformation. He says others should grasp the opportunity.

Citizen Leadership in some form has been around for over 200 years, it is however a relatively new concept for social care in the UK. It was born out of the Department of Health Academies held in 2007, which coincided with the end of the pilots for Personal Budgets. Over 150 people were trained and left the academies with the title Citizen Leader.

It gave service users the opportunity to be involved in transformation of services – no longer sidelined as a silent voice but a chance to build on their own experiences and share them constructively. We are all experts by our own experience.

East Midlands Citizen Leaders used some funding from the Department of Health to explore the possibility of setting up a social enterprise. Although this didn’t work out, as a previous business owner, I knew that there was an opportunity to develop my own social enterprise, which I did with the help of an Unltd start up grant, This evolved in 2010 into a Community Interest Company – a non-profit organization to benefit communities and service users.

At the company’s core is the involvement of service users and carers: the directors of the company are a service user and a carer. Our first year enabled us to donate over £3,500 in goods and services back to the community, with the help of In Kind Direct (In Kind Direct redistributes surplus goods from manufacturers and retailers to UK charities working at home and abroad). We have built on this and now offer other low level services, all of which fit into promoting independent living. This has created part time employment and volunteering opportunities for hard-to-reach groups within communities and enhanced community cohesion.

During the development stage and from early 2008 I started to work with Derbyshire County Council on its new Stakeholder Engagement Board. From this I progressed to being on several project boards – one in particular was a DVD project on ‘Making Care Personal’ – Derbyshire County Council’s name and vision for personalisation within the county.

The initial transformation grant ended in 2011 and Derbyshire County Council has expressed its commitment to work with Citizen Leaders and Stakeholders to continue to co-production with staff at all levels and there are plans to develop regional forums as well as the existing Stakeholder Board.

Citizen Leaders both individually and collectively act as a voice across the county, and are seen as vital conduits for service users to enable positive changes within service delivery, planning and commissioning. We have representation from the mental health sector, older people, carers and physical disability as well as Citizen Leaders within the learning disability sector.

We have recently been involved in co-producing an engagement policy with the county council’s social care service. This will ensure that a core set of rules for engagement is created by service users and council officers. This should, ensure that the skills and good practice that has been created continues not only within the county but can be used throughout the country to show what true co-production looks like and the positive results it brings.

“Our first year enabled us to donate over £3,500 in goods and services back to the community”

In all, co-production and the involvement of people such as myself has proved to be a success. It has been a steady journey to get to the highly productive stage we are now at. There have been many obstacles to overcome but through working together constructively we have created something that many people ‘including me’ thought impossible.

There is a mutual respect and understanding that previously didn’t exist. Working relationships that are productive not only for the end user but also staff whom themselves have to undergo this change to a new way of working.

John Jennings is a service user and Director, Citizen Leaders CIC.
Future Service Partnerships

At the same time there are real questions about whether communities have the desire or the capacity to deliver services at any scale. Many councils are more focused on generating the savings they need by exploring shared services, or the efficiencies of scale that can be realised by contracting out services to a third party provider, often a large private organisation. These approaches should not be seen as exclusive alternatives: bottom up localism versus strategic commissioning. Instead we need to find new models of partnership [and commissioning processes to support them] that engage the private and community sectors and that involve real transfer of capacity between them with the creation of additional value for both. The private sector needs, therefore, to be seen as part of how civil society engagement is delivered, not as an alternative to it.

To build a better understanding of this issue, the LGiU undertook a survey of local authority representatives about their partnership arrangements. The survey received 301 responses from local government representatives, comprising 214 councils.

The main points highlighted by the research were as follows.

- **Commissioning councils.** Partnership is now a major feature of service delivery. Over 90 per cent of respondents reported that their councils had engaged with another party to deliver council services. This trend is set to continue: nearly 80 per cent of survey respondents agreed that ‘forming partnerships for the delivery of public services is a priority for my organisation’.

- **Community and voluntary sector partnerships.** 87 per cent of respondents said that partnerships with voluntary and community sector organisations would be ‘important’ or ‘very important’ in the next five years. However, when asked about the perceived barriers to better partnerships in the future, 83 per cent highlighted ‘lack of capacity within the community and voluntary sector’ as a problem.

- **Private sector partnerships.** 77.5 per cent of respondents said they worked with the private sector in order to harness ‘their expertise and innovative practice’. Nevertheless, councils were reluctant to engage this expertise to shape a tendering process. Only 18.2 per cent of respondents reported ‘regularly’ engaging with potential providers of any sector in designing a tender.

- **Awarding contracts.** Investment in community capacity is not regarded as a priority when awarding a contract. We asked respondents to rank criteria in order of importance in a tender process. ‘Cost/value for money’ was the most popular response, while ‘community engagement potential of the bid’ was lowest on the agenda.

Based on these findings, Future Service Partnerships makes a number of recommendations:

- Make investment in communities a political priority.
- Ensure investment in community capacity is a meaningful part of the procurement process.
- Establish a lead member for community investment.
- Engage with ward councillors.
- Invest in council contract management skills.
- Develop forums for local innovation.

For some, large integrated contracts are incompatible with approaches that engage the community sector. We argue that they are not mutually exclusive and can offer complimentary responses to the same problem: how to deliver efficient, responsive services adapted to the needs of the local community.

Go to www.lgiu.org.uk/publications to read the full report. For more information, please contact Lauren Lucas at lauren.lucas@lgiu.org.uk

John Laing is a specialist investor and operator of public sector infrastructure. Lauren Lucas is an LGiU policy analyst

---

**“There are real questions about whether communities have the desire or the capacity to deliver services at any scale”**
The long term economics for health services in developed countries is gloomy. The great news is that more of us will live longer. But the bad news is that as we live longer in our older years we are likely to suffer from long term conditions and that, says Paul Corrigan, is where co-production can save the day.

The other good news is that medicine will succeed year on year in ensuring that more and more people will survive such killers as heart disease and cancer.

These successes have already turned coronary heart disease into a long term condition and increasing year on year the same will happen to different cancers.

But the good news of our survival adds to demand for health care that will be come from people with long term conditions, as more of us survive in the future. It is this that leads to the three to four per cent annual increase in demand for health care. In the next five years the NHS will be lucky if the increase in resource is about one per cent. In the rest of this decade it is likely that both of these figures will get worse (or better, for those of us living longer). The demand will grow faster and the resources will stay about the same.

At the moment 70 per cent of NHS spend is on long term conditions. This means that the game changing innovation we need to save the NHS, will have to come from this area.

What other industries and services do when confronted with this dynamic is develop innovations which significantly improve the outcomes for the same or slightly fewer resources.

Most game changing innovations in business models from other industries or services come about by finding new sources of value that can contribute to the necessary increase in outcomes. In the past and in the present, health care in developed countries has a value equation that has been simple.

Value for health care systems has only come from medical staff, their kits and from drugs. The patients’ role in this value equation is to receive the value created by the medical staff, their kit and drugs. Within this model they are a sponge which just sucks up value.

In other services, the new source of value has been realised by involving the consumer of that service in the production of value.

In health systems, we have the opportunity of uncovering value, which at the moment is not seen as value, through harnessing the work of patients in managing their own health care. If you have a long term condition, you are living with that condition for about 5,800 waking hours a year. You may see an NHS professional for five hours in that year. During the rest of the time you are in charge of your own care.

“To be effective in fully using the time that people are looking after themselves needs a significant shift in how we think about the patient pathway.”

The best way of adding value would be to ensure that the very small input from the NHS is multiplied many times over as it works with and improves the efficacy of the rest of the time when the patient is looking after their own care. To be effective in fully using the time that people are looking after themselves needs a significant shift in how we think about the patient pathway.

This is what we mean by co-production in health. It does NOT mean the patients look after themselves. It means that the small amount of time the NHS has to spend with the patient is multiplied by the large amount of time the patient runs their own health care and through this combination the health care is CO-produced. That is why co-production is the only way in which sufficient value can be created to ensure that the NHS leaves this decade in as thriving a state as it entered it.

Paul Corrigan is a Management Consultant and Executive Coach
Care today, care tomorrow

Local authorities have the primary responsibility to make sure the care needs of older people are met now and in the future. The APPG inquiry into the social care system heard evidence from more than 80 organisations including local authorities, care providers and user groups.

The group believes that the key to improving care now and in the future is the systemic re-orientation of the health and social care system towards prevention. This will take out costs for both individuals and the public purse, lessen demand for care and provide better outcomes for older people.

“The Group recommends that the government divert additional resources from NHS budgets to preventative care”

In the knowledge that the government’s funding White Paper was imminent and with the backdrop of the proposals made by the Dilnot Commission, the group decided to focus on the changes that it believes can be made now to improve the care system and meet current funding challenges.

The report makes four key recommendations on what can be done between now and 2015 to reform the care system and meet current funding challenges.

Recommendation 1: Local government and the NHS must integrate services and budgets to change the focus of social care services and spending towards prevention.

There is already substantial progress towards this goal but a step change is needed. To help drive this change the report recommends that Community Budgets, which are currently being piloted by the government, are implemented across all local authority areas with a focus on health prevention.

Recommendation 2: The Group heard how Health and Wellbeing Boards are already making an impact and have great potential. To realise this, the Boards need powers to influence the NHS Commissioning Board’s plans, and the right to challenge those plans if they are not sufficiently in keeping with the joint health and wellbeing strategy. The NHS Commissioning Board should have a duty to cooperate with the Health and Wellbeing Board in the exercise of its functions and specifically in relation to the promotion of integration and collaborative working.

The Group recommends that the NHS and local authorities be required to make an annual statement that accounts for all NHS and adult social care expenditure so that members of Health and Wellbeing Boards can scrutinise and challenge the choices made. This information should also be made publicly available.

Recommendation 3: Evidence gathered in the Inquiry suggests that the funding gap is around 4.4 per cent a year, equivalent to £634m.

To close this gap, the Group recommends that the government divert additional resources from NHS budgets to preventative care. In the current year £622m of NHS money has been invested in social care. The report recommends that this is doubled in 2012/13 and 2014/15 to the end of the CSR period, using funds from NHS underspends (currently £1.5bn) ahead of savings accruing.

Recommendation 4: The role of local authorities needs to evolve to help people lead independent lives, remain financially independent and to shape social care markets. Local authorities across the country should as a matter of urgency emulate the best practice featured in this report to help people stay independent for longer; to manage and stimulate a market of care provision; and to ensure that all citizens, not just those funded by the council, receive timely and appropriate advice about their care options and about how to manage their finances effectively to meet the costs of their care.

Secretary of State Eric Pickles speaking at the launch of the report.
Localism

New community conundrums

Since May I have spent a lot of my time narrowing down the focus of this study. The biggest challenge has been knowing what not to look at. There are so many angles to think about when considering localism in new communities and how to engage new residents. For example, looking at how new financial models could make a difference, or how some of the new policy drivers, for example community budgets or the Troubled Families Initiative might be applied to localism in new communities, but I only have one year for the project and I want to concentrate on what can make a difference and what impact the role of the local ward councillor can have. For those of you interested in this award next year, I have left you plenty of scope to take this project to a different phase!

My research is now starting to take shape. I will be looking at community engagement and the extent to which different types of community engagement supports localism. What works and also what doesn’t work. I will also be looking at when that engagement takes place and how we ensure that the first residents of a new development do not feel that everything has already been decided.

Second, I am considering what impact governance arrangements have. For example, does the new development have a parish council, or neighbourhood forum and what powers does it have? At what stage in the development does it take place and what is the role of the local ward member in supporting the new body.

Finally, I will be looking at planning and design, particularly around levels of affordable housing, type of tenure and what impact the physical design can have which might lead to improved community engagement and involvement. I recently visited New Hall just outside Harlow, where garden space has been reduced in order to provide more open space in the development. It is an interesting concept and speaking to a resident she was very enthusiastic about the amount of green space in a very high density development.

“I will be looking at how we ensure that the first residents of a new development do not feel that everything has already been decided.”

So how am I doing all this? I will be starting a one year graduate diploma in urban design and place shaping in September, which will help me gain a useful understanding of the impact of design and planning. As well as the LGiU I am also being supported by the Global Sustainability Institute at Anglia Ruskin University. They are very interested in the role that environment can play in new communities and also levels of social activism and are carrying out some research on a new development to the south of Cambridge.

Over the summer I intend to visit a number of new developments to talk to officers and elected members about their experience. The final shortlist is still being drawn up, but I am aiming to look at two settlements built on a greenfield site and two that are the result of regeneration projects in order to compare and contrast experiences of each. I also want to ensure that there is a good geographic spread around the country.

In November I will be presenting an interim report to the LGiU, setting out what my visits and research has revealed so far. The end result, next year, will be a manual of good practice for local councillors to support, as a senior councillor said to me “the political will to create a quality of place”. I am working with the LGiU to see how this might best be disseminated, with the possibility of a conference on the theme of localism and certainly promoting the benefits of the Bruce-Lockhart Scholarship to other members for future years.

Shona Johnstone is a Cambridge County Councillor

In the last issue of c’llr, Shona Johnstone introduced us to her c’llr Bruce-Lockhart Member Scholarship project to explore how localism can be delivered in new communities. Here she reports on progress.
An engaging approach

Twenty-nine-year-old Tafheen Sharif has served on Luton Borough Council for just over a year, for most of which she held the portfolio for community safety. Her time in office has certainly been full-on, but her enthusiasm hasn’t been dampened. “Challenge, for me is a positive thing. With all the projects I’ve worked on it was difficult initially. There’s a lack of resources and you have to push hard to get anything done. But being a councillor has been a very positive experience for me.”

“Tafheen is certainly committed to encouraging more young people into civic life. “They do feel quite disenfranchised, certainly in my ward. At events I’ve met young people who have been impressed that someone like me could get onto the council – they imagine it’s made up of retired people. So I try to show them that our council is very diverse. Getting more young people in civic life is a passion of mine.” But Tafheen understands the pressures of juggling a civic life with a career that’s just getting off the ground. “You have to be dedicated and work hard. It has been a challenge but very enjoyable. I’d encourage anyone to get involved, if they want to make a difference, because you really can!”

Elizabeth Thompson is a freelance journalist.

Whether ejecting gangs from a local park or dealing with a march by the English Defence League, the winner of this year’s young councillor award has faced some diverse challenges. She spoke about them to Elizabeth Thompson.

Tafheen came to the council after an eight year stint as a school governor. “I knew from a young age I was passionate about education, so I did look around, wondering what I could do to help young kids. I thoroughly enjoyed being a governor but felt there must be more I could do in terms of decision making. Being on the council has enabled me to push things forward; to do things for different schools. It was good to be able to achieve even small things for local schools, from quite early on.”

Soon after becoming elected Tafheen was asked to take on the portfolio for community safety, a high profile position for a novice, but the council was keen to encourage its new blood. It wasn’t long before 30 residents had approached her with complaints that their local park had been taken over by drug dealers. Working closely with the council and police, Tafheen launched a campaign to reclaim the park. Cameras were installed, the police presence was increased and hundreds of the letters were written. The police were astounded by the number of people who called them with information. The project culminated in a picnic for families attended by 100 people. “Now the cameras have gone but the drug dealers haven’t returned. The park is packed with people and it’s wonderful to see families here again, how it should be.”

Although a lawyer by trade, grass roots community safety issues have meant new challenges for Tafheen. She needed to liaise with local people over a march by the English Defence League, to ensure Muslim communities in particular felt safe amid intense media interest. She also worked with colleagues to deflect last summer’s riots from the town. “Luton was very lucky not to have riots although we have a very young and diverse community, with many similar issues to London. Young people find it difficult to get jobs and many are not in education, so we thought it would kick-off here too.”

The council and police acted fast. Young people were targeted direct, with texts and cards in shops warning them to stay home and avoid a criminal record and Tafheen attended schools to give talks to 14 to 16-year-olds. “Being a young person myself, talking them was really important. Our message was if you have concerns tell us, don’t do anything silly that you’ll regret. But it’s all credit to Luton’s young people themselves too!”

“At events I’ve met young people who have been impressed that someone like me could get onto the council – they imagine it’s made up of retired people.”
Young people

Intervening for a better future

Young people that don’t manage to access the jobs market by the age of 24 often suffer consequences for the rest of their lives. This is why it is so alarming, both socially and economically.

What can we do? The Work Foundation argues that it is ‘transition’ from education to a first job that creates the highest hurdle. Some young people are stuck in a trap where a lack of skills means that they cannot get a job, but that lack of a job means that they cannot develop the skills they need. This is where intervention needs to be targeted.

This is why, here in Nottingham, in March 2012, 5.2 per cent of 16-18 year olds were NEET compared to a national average of 5.7 per cent.

Our efforts include:

- Funding our excellent NEET service through a company jointly owned with Nottinghamshire County Council. This company is tasked with tracking and supporting young people into education, training or employment and deploying personal advisors targeted at the most vulnerable.

- Introducing a new Nottingham Jobs fund which subsidises young people’s employment for a year. This has proved extremely successful and we have expanded the scheme on the back of high demand. £2.5m will be invested in the jobs fund over three years, supporting 400 young people into work.

- Developing a progression agreement between schools and colleges in Nottingham so that young people make effective transitions and are supported in further academic progress. More of our schools are offering practical skills through vocational qualifications. We have introduced strategies that will help identify young people who are at risk of becoming NEET, so that we can provide support and intervention when it’s needed.

In preparation for the national change which will increase the age when young people can leave education, Nottingham is trialling a number of projects. Nottingham’s Economic Growth Plan, supported by our new City Deal, has committed to create one team to analyse our local labour market, advertise services to local employers and develop coherent support focusing on employers’ recruitment needs. We will achieve this by combining services with those of Job Centre Plus. An account management service will offer a single point of contact.

We will encourage and support employers, particularly SMEs, to take on apprentices and offer ongoing support to employers for three months to ensure that apprentices stay in post.

Helping individuals to end their NEET status can and should form a central plank of the austerity-state’s ambitions to improve life in the UK. Individuals, society and our collective bottom line will all benefit from smart, targeted interventions that support our young people when they need that support most.

Nick McDonald is Executive Member for Jobs, Skills and Business Executive & Majority Support/Partnerships Team, Nottingham City Council

Compared to the other Core Cities, and its statistical neighbours, Nottingham has the lowest proportion of NEET 16-18 year olds. Nick McDonald describes some of the council’s work to make those figures possible.
NEET solutions

Kirklees held a NEET Summit Event in 2010 with all strategic partners to stimulate the drive to reduce number of young people NEET when the percentage of NEET young people was 10.3 per cent (about 1,300 young people). The way the government counts young people NEET has changed since that time, but using a comparable counting methodology the number of young people NEET in March 2012 is about 780 and in March 2012 stands at 7.2 per cent.

Kirklees is now developing its Raising Participation Age Strategy with 14-19 Progression Board partners to increase young people’s participation in learning and drive down NEET further. The focus of our work has been to work closely with secondary schools as part of a NEET prevention agenda. The number of young people becoming NEET at 16 years of age has reduced substantially to about three per cent. Our focus at the moment is ensuring we have appropriate progression routes and pathways, in particular relating to post-16 options so that young people remain in learning beyond 16 years of age. This fits with the Raising Participation Age agenda whereby the government has made a clear commitment to raising the participation age to 17 years of age in 2013 and to 18 by 2015.

Our Apprenticeship Strategy and Employment and Skills Strategy are key now in terms of driving forward both the NEET agenda and in reducing the number of young people who are unemployed beyond 18 years of age.

Kirklees Council understands the importance of creating the right conditions for our businesses to take on young people. Although Kirklees has an above average percentage of employers engaged in taking on apprentices than our counterparts in the Leeds City Region (out of approximately 11,760 employers in Kirklees approximately 1678 employers were known to have apprentices) we know we must continue to increase the number of apprentice opportunities and we need more businesses to take on apprentices if we are to reduce NEET.

Kirklees’ Apprenticeship Hub, established in 2010, recognises and delivers a multi-agency approach to support young people in the area into apprenticeships” in Kirklees. The Apprenticeship Hub has an above average percentage of employers engaged in taking on apprentices than our counterparts in the Leeds City Region (out of approximately 11,760 employers in Kirklees approximately 1678 employers were known to have apprentices) we know we must continue to increase the number of apprentice opportunities and we need more businesses to take on apprentices if we are to reduce NEET.

Within this, the council also aims to lead by example as an employer and is taking the opportunity to consider how its own organisational restructuring can be used to help young people in the district. As an example, currently the council is offering around ten Business Support traineeships/apprenticeships leading to entry level jobs to complement the organisation-wide review of the Business Support function. These opportunities will be promoted to NEETs.

The council also held a highly successful apprenticeship information and awareness raising event for Yr11-13 students, parents (over 350 students/parents attended) and schools, allowing students to engage with a range of employers who offer apprenticeships and to hear first hand from current apprentices what it’s like to be an apprentice and the opportunities apprenticeships can offer to progress within your chosen field—all the way up to degree level. Employers at the event were very impressed with calibre of the young people who attended.

Mehboob Khan is leader of Kirklees
We live in a time of increasing turbulence and uncertainty in the world of public and private finance.

The banking crisis in the private sector and an increasing drive for cost reduction in the public sector means that external audit and the search for value for money have never been more in the minds of the general public.

With this as the background, the National Audit Office’s role with regard to local government is developing. Following the Government’s decision to abolish the Audit Commission, we have agreed to take on responsibility for maintaining the Code of Audit Practice which sets the framework within which local auditors work. We will also be developing our programme of value for money work to consider the local government sector more explicitly. The relevant draft legislation was published on Friday 6 July and the consultation ends on 31 August for those intending to respond.

Lynda McMullan is Assistant Auditor General at the National Audit Office
Mrs. Doyle’s moment?

Mrs. Doyle’s uncertainty about the difference between cocaine and raisins and her relentless insistence on ‘having a nice cup of tea’ put me in mind of a script which has great comic potential: ‘My Community Rights’ published by an outfit called ‘Locality’ and supported by a number of third sector and charitable ‘delivery specialists’; including the National Association of Local Councils. It’s ambition, with the help of £11.5m of taxpayers’ money, is in the government’s words – to ‘support ‘communities’ who have good ideas for how they can bid for and run ‘excellent local services’.

What particularly caught my attention was the domestic setting within which this revolution in service delivery is to take place. Under an uplifting strap line is a photograph of healthy looking pensioners in a communal setting being served lunch, by a happy volunteer. I think we are being asked to imagine that this is a working lunch, well lubricated by many cups of tea to plan ‘an expression of interest’ to run some council services. But what are they planning to take over – a park, street cleaning; a spot of recycling; running a community centre? This is the impression being assiduously promoted by the government and its third sector allies.

It is a familiar narrative. Hazel Blears was plugging the same line in ‘Real People; Real Power’ – back in 2008. However that was guidance: Community Right to Challenge (CRtC), is part of the Localism Act and enshrined in statute. It is the delivery arm of the Coalition’s aspiration in the Open Public Services White Paper to end directly provided local council services and create a market of ‘diverse providers’.

Does this mean our chums in the ‘Community Rights’ website picture will be multiplied 10,000 fold and be the nuclei of ‘empowered’ communities delivering ‘excellent services’ across the nation? Well not exactly.

There’s always time for a nice cup of tea. Sure, didn’t the Lord himself pause for a nice cup of tea before giving himself up for the world?

Father Ted Crilly: No, he didn’t, Mrs Doyle!

Mrs. Doyle: Well, whatever the equivalent they had for tea in those days, cake or something. And speaking of cake, I have cake!

[She holds up a cupcake]

Father Ted Crilly: No, thanks, Mrs Doyle.

Mrs. Doyle: Are you sure, Father? There’s cocaine in it!

Father Ted Crilly: WHAT?

Mrs. Doyle: Oh, no, not cocaine. God, what am I on about? No, what d’you calls them: raisins.*

---

*From an episode of ‘Father Ted’ broadcast in 1996.

Alan Waters is the LGiU’s learning and development manager
It’s the bendy-bus of death!” cried our English visitor. We had been waiting for the No. 10 when an apparently innocent articulated vehicle trundled into view. Well, over here we think they are kinda cute, and they highlight an important trend, something rather un-American: we are finally becoming more comfortable with the idea of public transportation. Or at least the urban young are – according to a recent study their use of transit has increased by 40 per cent in the last decade.

About time too: usage began to decline in the late 1920s when America fell seriously in love with the automobile. Even so the average Joe was still taking 140 transit rides a year but over the decades that number dropped and since the 1970s we have bumped along at a mere 33. What’s more these stats hide an important fact – most Americans never use public transportation with the exception of air travel. Those who do are big-city dwellers like me.

British visitors are usually convinced that San Francisco’s sole form of transit are those funny little cable cars which, as Tony Bennett noted when he left his heart here, go halfway to the stars. Anyone who has watched Bullitt knows that we have some mighty steep hills. These proved a challenge to transportation until 1873 when an engineer developed a system of moving cables embedded in the road that a vehicle operator could grip and release with a lever, thus creating the city’s picturesque cable car system, now the last of its kind and the nation’s sole moving historical monument.

Nowadays every large American city, even that miasma of freeways Los Angeles, has a half-decent public transportation system. I know – as a non-driver I used to ride the LA buses when I first arrived in the US in 1984. When I told the driving school I was 35 years old and had never sat behind the wheel of a car they sent round an instructor who specialized in teaching the mentally disabled.

Muni, which is run by the city, is a mish-mash of buses, trolleys, trams, and yes, those cable cars. We almost lost the tram lines at the apex of car-centric thinking back in the 1960s but mercifully they were saved by an alliance of public transportation advocates and nostalgia freaks. (When I was in Le Mans last year they were digging up the roads putting tram rails back.) But if you want real nostalgia take a look at our trolley buses – I should explain to younger readers that these are electrical vehicles that draw power from a maze of overhead cables. Forget getting teary-eyed over Routemasters, I last saw trolleys in London fifty years ago.

Nostalgia gets downright glutinous with Muni’s Historic F Line that winds its way down Market Street and alongside the Bay, an area which, by a stupendous coincidence, is highly trafficked by tourists. All the streetcars are vintage vehicles like the one Judy Garland rode in Meet Me in St. Louis. Some come all the way from Milan and still carry the original adverts – a nice touch that helps visitors overlook the fact that they are rattling down the street in a sweaty tin box.

When I asked friends ‘n’ family about their Muni experiences most stories were not about the service but their wacky fellow passengers. San Francisco is nothing if not diverse in every sense, and the Muni is the one place where we literally rub together. America should do more of this – get out of the enclaves and meet face to face – it develops a sense of community by giving us all something to moan about. E Pluribus Unum – out of many, one. Although I hear the No.1 is running late this morning.

Chris Mead is recently retired as IT director of the City of Berkeley, California

As London’s mayor launches the capital’s first cable car, Chris Mead reports that the more earth bound cable car is still an integral part of San Francisco’s public transport system.