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Would a Conservative government **need** local government?

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The SOLACE Foundation Imprint (SFI) is local government's foremost thought leadership publication addressing the most pressing and challenging issues of public policy and public management. SFI commissions concise contributions on the major themes which are central to the concerns of senior executives, policy makers and politicians. We are resolutely non-political, though we recognise and actively address the importance of political leadership and debate in developing public services. We publish a range of voices that pose challenges to senior public executives and show how challenges might be met. We believe our strength is in the range and diversity of ideas we publish because the world is more complicated than any contrived consensus. Through SFI many flowers are encouraged to bloom.

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All change, but for the better?

by Clive Grace, Joe Simpson and Calum Macleod



As we watch and wonder at the extraordinary transition of office and power unfolding in the United States, one of the special minuets of a similar but very different (and only potential) transfer is just getting under way in the UK. From January 2009 Her Majesty's Opposition gets authorised access to the civil service to assist it in preparing itself for possible office following the election which can at latest be held in 2010.

It is in the spirit of this important process in our unwritten constitution that this pamphlet addresses the question as to whether the Conservatives would, if elected, need local government. The answer given through the insightful and highly authoritative contributions here is clearly "yes" - but not, perhaps, as we know local government today. For alongside the continuities of policy with those of the current government - and there are some, because all political parties are localist now, and committed to the place-shaping and Lyons agenda - there is also clearly an appetite to do things differently. And some things very differently indeed, including the possibility of directly elected police chiefs and the return of

major responsibilities to local government in the areas of transport, fire, and social housing.

Some apparent similarity...

Such ideas, and others set out here such as the need for a new constitutional settlement between local and central government, highlight an intriguing aspect of local government policy as it may unfold over the next few years. Some would suggest that it may not necessarily be easy to "read off" from a party label what the associated local government policies are likely to be, nor to read back to party labels from particular policies.

There is a degree of overlap now found in policies for public services reform across the political spectrum. The argument from the centre-right for a contraction of the central state is also found in some centre-left thinking, for example. That may sound a bit odd at a time when the state appears to be expanding hugely and in hitherto largely unthought of directions such as bank ownership. But the basic notion of a smaller state in public service terms, and one devoted to securing (rather

than itself delivering) greater personalisation of service using a wide range of instruments including competition and contestability, now crosses party lines.

...but actually major difference?

This does not mean, however, that there are not real and significant differences between the parties in relation to local government. Conservatives who are close to local government are passionately convinced that there is in fact a real alternative, and that there is a huge gap in terms of which party will actually deliver the Lyons agenda, and they see this difference revolving around a willingness – indeed, a preference – on the part of the Conservatives to transfer power down to local level.

SFI does not endorse policy, from any party. But we do provide a platform to give the contributors an opportunity to persuade, and our readers an opportunity to learn. It is imperative that SOLACE members and our wider readership hear what that local government policy would mean from a Conservative point of view first hand.

Need and want

So would the Conservatives need local government? Almost certainly they would, just in terms of basic service and policy delivery. But underneath that lies the even more interesting possibility that there is something beyond national government having that need. A Conservative government should actually want local government, for one special reason that goes beyond questions of ideas, ideology and policy preference, and which cuts to the chase of what is likely to be important in the early years of any new government.

If a Conservative government is elected it will enjoy – for the first two to three years of office at least – a relationship with local government which is aligned politically, with the Conservatives at a high point at local level. That alignment would be able to take advantage not only of the much greater capacity and competence of local government than was the case 10 years ago. It would also benefit from the mechanisms that connect local action and choice by local authorities and their many partners to national priorities and needs. The content and direction of policy may well undergo major change, while still benefiting from a more effective local government sector and a more effective set of relationships.

It really does look to be a no-brainer for any new government to want to reap those opportunities.

Thanks

The debate can have value whatever the outcome of the next election, for it can help to define more clearly what any government might enjoy from a revitalized local government sector.

So we thank all the contributors, and also our sponsors, for a fascinating insight into what might be.

Clive Grace is chair of SFI

Joe Simpson is director of Politics, The Leadership Centre

Calum MacLeod is head of Local Government, Capgemini UK

Introduction



by Mike Bennett, assistant director general, SOLACE

SOLACE members and politics

It is central to the world view of SOLACE members that politics is necessary for good local government. Democratic politics is about the legitimate contestation of ideas. It is about competing views of how best to distribute resources to different interest groups and giving the necessary direction to public service managers within which to operate. Of course those who manage in a political environment can sometimes get burned, but politics is the heat that fires our democracy and that moulds our public services.

While local government managers and politicians pursue different vocations with different cultures, with different forms of authority and rationality, the differences are part of the creative tension at the heart of the relationship.

For local government managers, this fundamental belief in the political process is underpinned by three related values:

- Political neutrality – in letter and in spirit.
- An empathy with politics and politicians – understanding their needs and their necessity.

● A need to anticipate and manage through political change – political leadership is always temporary in a democracy.

It is for these connected reasons that understanding the political environment is so important for local government managers.

This pamphlet serves two key purposes. First, it is an attempt to meet the widespread need and desire for greater insight into what a possible Conservative government might mean for local government. Second, it provides an opportunity for a range of Conservative politicians to write about the future role of local government if they were to take power.

In exploring the question of whether a Conservative government would need local government, this pamphlet brings together a range of different voices and perspectives which raise issues of principle, politics and practice in their contributions.

The view from the frontbench

The official, frontbench view is provided by Bob Neill MP, shadow minister for local government. Mr Neill sets out the ideological basis on which he states a

future Conservative government local policy would be based:

"A future Conservative government is committed to redefining the role of the state. In essence this means trusting people and giving them greater control over their lives. This can only be done by decentralising power away from Whitehall and reinvigorating local government by making it accountable to local people."

So what would this mean in policy terms? The much anticipated green paper will no doubt fill in more of the details in due course, but Mr Neill prefigures a number of the expected announcements including "a new constitutional settlement" which will free "local government from central control and hugely expensive burdens and giving local people more ability to determine spending priorities".

More specifically, a future Conservative government would:

- Abolish Regional Spatial Strategies.
- Return to councils powers over fire services, transport, culture, sport, social housing and environmental management.
- Abolish Whitehall-enforced capping.

The argument here is that a Conservative government would entrust people with greater decision-making power because philosophically that is the right thing to do. The potential sting in the tail is what the "reinvigoration" of local government implies. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that the Conservative frontbench and local leaders do not always share the same view of the good life. Recently we have seen a number of examples of decisions being made over the heads of council leaders, for example on bin collection and on council tax policy. For any official policy of localism to ring true, local leaders will want to

be firmly inside the policy-making tent. Otherwise, we may ask, is this about localism but not about local government? So one of the challenges for an incoming Conservative government is to prove its localist credentials by showing they have taken on board a local government point of view.

Elsewhere on the frontbench James Brokenshire MP, from the shadow home affairs team, also outlines a localist agenda. Again, local government is acknowledged as an essential element but the real reform is through new and alternative democratic structures.

Mr Brokenshire writes that "a Conservative government would make each police force accountable to an individual directly elected by the citizens of the police force area. This person would be responsible for setting the police budget; have the power of police authorities in relation to appointing (and dismissing) the chief constable".

There is nothing we have seen yet to suggest that Conservative policy thinking would lead to major institutional reform in local government - indeed they are opposed to major reorganisation. But questions remain about the nature of their localist agenda if all the decisions are taken in Westminster. The Conservatives' much anticipated green paper will enable a much more rounded judgement on whether the route to localism is through local government.

One of the challenges for an incoming Conservative government would be to establish what its form of localism means. One of the tests for local government is make sure that the Conservative frontbench are convinced that the best route to localism is through local government.

The genius of local government

From local government's point of view, the LGA's chairman, Cllr Margaret Eaton, is certainly concerned that some people are "asking dangerous questions about the value of keeping local government" and calls for a "culture change in attitudes in both national and local government". However, Cllr Eaton queries "whether ministers, shadow as well as actual, really appreciate what this means".

Cllr Eaton argues that the "the true genius of local government" lies in its ability to grow "a place's unique character":

"Not just being the deliverer of a Whitehall agenda but by being the champion of the locality - a champion that fights for the best not only at a structural level but also at the more ethereal emotional level. Pride in place is not just about good services and sound finances, critical though these are, but it is also about being the guardian of an area's character, knowing and reflecting its personality and preserving its identity."

Conservatives in power

Another perspective on whether a future Conservative government would need local government comes from the deputy leader of Bedfordshire, Richard Stay. Cllr Stay offers a dose of realpolitik in his assessment:

"The strength of a political party can be measured by its numbers in Parlia-

ment, but can also be assessed by the number of activists and elected members it has at council level. Motivated elected members at council level can make a huge difference to the ability of any government to implement its manifesto. Strategically, Whitehall needs local government, even if it is only to ensure that it has a delivery mechanism at the local level."

In recent decades the party in government has gradually lost territory in local government during their time in power. Cllr Stay argues that the time of the next General Election the Conservatives will be approaching their "zenith" in local government - unless they can extend their appeal by empowering local government: "The challenge for an incoming Conservative government will be to listen to its own party, remain true to its instincts and really drive forward a programme of devolution of delivery and resources".

Indeed the Conservatives' dominance in English local government, including the London mayoralty for the first time, also allows them to point to how they would use power. Merrick Cockell, Leader of Kensington and Chelsea and chairman of London Councils, states: "Lower taxes, fiscal responsibility, innovative public services, safer streets, more recycling - delivery of these by Conservatives at a local level helps dispel Labour's charge that voting Conservative nationally is some reckless leap into the unknown".

Furthermore, he argues that current economic climate makes localism even more important to the Conservatives:

“Before the recession, local government argued for greater local policy flexibility to meet the challenges posed by success. Now greater localism is needed to meet recession’s challenges, to assist our residents struggling with repossession or unemployment, to soften the economic landing and hasten recovery.”

CLLr Cockell also argues that tough economic times necessitate tough questions about how public services are organised:

“Does every London borough need its own trading standards service? Should we be doing this at all or should we establish a pan-London consumer protection service? If there is opportunity lurking in the recession, it is that it may embolden Conservative local government to consider really radical change and take difficult decisions without losing our accountability for local public services.”

Peter Thompson, the leader of Hounslow, agrees that there is a real track record of delivery and high performance in local government but doubts that it has been fully recognised. CLLr Thompson credits Hounslow’s recent improvements to the application of “private sector methodologies” and “many long days and nights of analysis, performance comparison, innovation and determination”. Yet despite measurable savings, low tax rates and high performance he says

there is “much work still to be done to win the confidence of Whitehall and ministers of whatever political hue”.

One way of winning confidence put forward by Calum McLeod and Tony Blake from Capgemini is for local government to demonstrate its capability as a delivery partner ... “local authorities need to establish their ability to deliver quickly to ensure their role is valued. They must ensure that the really important issues and priorities are not lost in initiatives that can distract from core public service delivery. They must demonstrate that they can deliver effectively with other local providers. If they do not, the threats are there.”

Another way of winning confidence maybe to improve and to develop the calibre of politicians in local government. Christina Dykes and Jo Sylvester, who have a wealth of experience in the assessment and development of politicians, believe that we need to do more.

“Over the past 10 years the opportunities for development offered to councillors have increased exponentially. To their credit, many councillors have embraced these opportunities by actively building their knowledge and expertise in the service of local government. Yet, many more councillors have been reluctant, even resistant, to the idea that a commitment to development should form part of their responsibilities.”

They say the problem is not one just of commitment. It is also about knowing what success might look like:

"Emphasis needs to shift from simply providing support for councillors to a closer inspection of how and whether it impacts on councillor performance. To date very little attention has been paid to what we can realistically expect from elected representatives – mainly because we don't know ... without a focus on impact – on what we want excellent political leaders to be – millions of pounds can be wasted on development that it is simply assumed will lead to better politicians."

Broken Britain

Rt Hon Iain Duncan Smith MP's analysis of the state of British society has proved influential within Conservative policy circles and beyond. Writing for us here Mr Duncan Smith argues that Conservative local government need not wait for a Westminster government before implementing his Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) programme of "breakthrough Britain". A number of contributions embody this agenda already.

Cllr Millar – a councillor at Forest Heath District Council and programmes director at the CSJ – argues for new vision of local government's purpose, "to mend our broken society". Cllr Millar brings a historical perspective to his argument that "the challenge of our times, the broken society described so vividly in *Breakdown Britain* will not be resolved simply by deploying more resources. The fractured relationships, broken homes, poverty of aspiration

and an absence of hope demand a new approach. A new approach should be at the heart of a distinctive Conservative vision".

The influence of the CSJ can also be found in a community project aimed at building social inclusion in East Hampshire. Yvonne Parker Smith, Social Justice Portfolio Holder and Chairman, Social Justice Board in East Hants District Council says that political leadership was the starting point for work in this area which "is not traditional Tory territory". She describes the work as a "community taking ownership of its problems; public bodies collaborating successfully; using information, not agendas, to identify need and build solutions to the problems it faces".

Breakdown Britain's influence is central to the contribution from Brian Connell, the Cabinet Member for Communities and Economic Development at Westminster City Council. Cllr Connell argues that: "Quite simply, public services, despite plenty of goodwill, have become as dysfunctional as the families they purport to serve. It is one of the reasons that Westminster's 600 families seemed destined to a life of underachievement, exclusion and dependence on the state".

Westminster's response has been to launch a Family Recovery programme with a Family Assessment and Intervention Team (FAIT). Cllr Connell says that "The team turns the rhetoric of 'joined up' services into reality". The FAIT con-

cept involves a change in how services are organised bringing together a single team around each family that can “draw on the expertise, knowledge and local know-how of an impressive range of professionals to help them make better decisions than had previously been the case and, vitally, at an earlier stage”.

Conclusion

In conversation recently about the prospects for local government under a possible Conservative government one old hand joked: “Let me let you into secret. Not all governments do in government what they said they would do in opposition”. This, of course, is a danger. And localism is far more prevalent in politicians before they have their hands on what feel like the central levers of power. As Cllr Cockell says in his contribution, the trick is to remain localist in government.

Of course trying to predict the future is always fraught with danger and events have a habit of changing what seems politically possible over time. But from what we have heard, would a future Conservative government need local government?

Weighing up the different views we have several points to put on the “yes” side of the scale:

- First, we must put the broad philosophical position of the Conservative frontbench that supports a decentralised view of the state. The question many will ask is whether those who

espouse the litany that decisions are best taken at the lowest level do so for any more than a campaigning gesture.

- Second, is the political imperative to maintain organised activism at the local level. Weakening local government would weaken any party’s capacity to connect with its grass roots.

- Third, governments need to achieve results and local government is responsible for delivering results in many areas the Conservatives say are important. It may therefore be in a Conservative government’s interests to motivate and strengthen councils’ ability to deliver, not to weaken it.

On the other side of the scale we must note that many of our local government leaders place a question mark over whether the Conservatives would actually govern as localists if they were to win power. There seems to be some evidence to support an argument that even if the frontbench is localist, many have doubts about councils capacity to deliver a Conservative agenda.

On balance therefore we might say that a Conservative government will certainly need local government, but that the relationship may not be one of undiluted harmony.

Mike Bennett is SOLACE’S assistant director general. He is also a member of the SFI’s editorial board

Reinvigorating local government



by Bob Neill MP

A future Conservative government is committed to redefining the role of the state. In essence, this means trusting people and giving them greater control over their lives. This can only be done by decentralising power away from Whitehall and reinvigorating local government by making it accountable to local people.

Under Labour, the rise of top-down central and regional government control has undermined local councils to the point where, in reality, Britain has local administration, not local government. Conservatives want to usher in a new constitutional settlement that will put local government at the forefront of governance in this country. This means giving each council a share in local growth, freeing local government from central control and hugely expensive burdens and giving local people more ability to determine spending priorities.

A swathe of unelected regional quangos have sucked power away from local government and now take decisions that have a profound affect on our communities. The quango state is unaccountable, yet the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), which control regional spatial strategies impose target driven housing

over vast swathes of this country without consultation. If the houses that local communities know they need are to be built, local people need to be in control of that process. A Conservative government would abolish regional strategies to give house building democratic legitimacy and put local government at the heart of this process.

Since 1997 more than 20 regional quangos have been created and they have acquired powers over such aspects of policy as fire services, transport, culture, sport, social housing and environmental management, many of which were previously under local democratic control. We want to see these powers given back to local councils.

Cost of UK quangos

The new regional quangos created by the current government have made a significant contribution to the huge rise in the overall cost of UK quangos, which has soared from some £19 billion in 1997 to £31 billion in 2007, a growth in real terms of 50% according to the Taxpayers Alliance. This is money that should have gone to local communities to be invested in local priorities.

Councils lack the freedom to take decisions which deviate from central prescription but which could lead to significant improvements within local communities; actions such as stepping in to save small shops, or protecting residents from new bars and nightclubs that might bring in economic benefits, but lead to greater social costs. Not for nothing do some independent academics describe Britain as the most centralised state in the western world.

A key part of the philosophy behind decentralisation is trust. I trust local government to deliver for local people despite central government, not because of it. A number of councils are showing the way and finding innovative solutions to the problems in their areas despite the strictures of central government.

Social breakdown

Westminster Council's Family Recovery programme, for example, is all about tackling social breakdown head on, being honest about the real problems and taking early intervention to improve results for families and deliver major cost savings in the long term. It uses a combined public services team to address the needs of those families who have the most chronic and complex difficulties through a multidisciplinary approach. The team includes practitioners from children's services, adult social services, and mental health professionals as well as housing officers, the police, primary care trust and youth offending team and, crucially, the voluntary sector which has great expertise in working with vulnerable families.

Kent County Council's "Kent Card" is

an innovative way of giving individual service users the freedom to choose the way they access important services. Following a social services assessment, service users are offered cash, known as a "direct payment", as an alternative to having services provided for them. This allows them to determine for themselves when they get assistance. Crucially, if they are not satisfied with an agency they can arrange an alternative independently of Kent adult social services.

These two examples show that local government can innovate and in many instances, it delivers to those who have been left behind by central government initiatives. I want to see such innovation replicated throughout the country, but this can only be done by freeing local government from the yoke of centralised burdens and top down targeting.

The Labour government has failed to devolve power. As Sir Michael Lyons concluded in his inquiry into local government: "the government's approach has involved taking a number of directive and interventionist steps towards local government. There has been more detailed engagement in local policy decisions ... the use of inspections and targets have been expanded substantially".

Conservatives want to reinvigorate local democracy by giving more powers and freedoms to local councils, and making town halls more accountable to local people. We will abolish Whitehall enforced capping to give greater freedom over spending priorities and democratise council tax by asking councils to submit plans for large council tax rises to a referendum. We will give greater freedom and this will mean

greater responsibility for councils. People want more of say in decisions that affect their lives and the best way to do this is to devolve power to local government.

I want councils to make the profound decisions that will make a real difference to their communities, I want councils to move from administration to governance.

Bob Neill is MP for Bromley & Chislehurst and is the shadow local government minister and deputy chair of the Conservative party. He has represented communities around London for nearly 30 years. He served as a councillor in the London Borough of Havering for 16 years, chairing the Environment and Social Services committees. He also served as London Assembly member for Bexley and Bromley from 2000 to 2008

Modern local government



by Margaret Eaton, chair,
Local Government Association

Some things have not changed. In 1908 the great constitutional historian FW Maitland wrote: "I want you to observe that every reform of local government has hitherto meant an addition to the powers of the central government". It is 100 years since those words were spoken and they have proved to be prophetic. Maitland could reflect back on the 19th century when local government was stamping the notion of civic pride on the conscience of the country. There were the great town halls of Bradford, Birmingham, Liverpool, Ealing, and Eastbourne, to name a few. These were the physical manifestation of the first blossoming of local government when mayor, alderman, councillor and official competed to bring about the civic improvements in public health, social provision, education and policing. Such were the changes that Maitland concluded "year by year the subordinate government of England is becoming more and more important".

This was not to last. The areas which local government held sway became too important to leave to city halls and in recent decades the authority of local government has been sapped. The

changes have been such that many are pessimistic about the future. They feel that local government is so hemmed in by capping, regulations, targets and inspection that there is little room for initiative and still less for freedom to operate in a way that would serve our own places. They fear that the lack of financial independence means accountability to our electorate has been compromised and confidence in that relationship has suffered accordingly. These are sentiments so well rehearsed that too many, within and without local government, are asking dangerous questions about the value of keeping local government.

Local democracy

I am not one of them. Local government has always been my home: both instinctively and philosophically. I believe in local democracy. I believe that decisions are most effective when taken at the most local level possible. It is still the case that for most people their reach for public services is through local government whether that be for housing, waste, children services, education, the street scene, parks or community

services. There are many like me within local government who are determined to ensure that they have the services most suited to their needs and that these services are determined by the people who breath the local air.

I am also aware of the great changes that have taken place over the past 20 years. Some have not been so good, but others have and we should not lose sight of these. Changes within local government have made it more competent and more aware of its ability to deliver. Working across the political divide, I see at first hand how innovative and enterprising local government can be.

Forging ahead

Barnet, for example, is forging ahead with the "Barnet bond" to raise revenue to finance a massive regeneration programme. Look at the changes that have taken place in our cities. Such has been the revival of our urban life in some of our major cities that are people who speak of an urban renaissance. The report *The State of English Cities* (CLG, 2006) concluded: "The really key message of this report is that England's cities are now better placed than at any time since the end of the nineteenth century to become motors of national advance". It also said "there is much evidence that local leadership is crucial in helping to find new economic futures for cities, their businesses and residents. This report provides many examples of entrepreneurial local leadership, often by local government". One only has to look at the advances made in Manches-

ter, Newcastle/Gateshead and Trafford for evidence of these conclusions. Indeed, in some northern cities such has been their revival that these places are better able to weather the recession than other places whose economies have been underperforming.

These transformations were not delivered by central government alone, but with local government pulling all the levers at their disposal. Councillors and staff alike have shown that local government can deliver not just better services, but on the more difficult agenda - the holistic agenda of growing a place's unique character. This is where the true genius of local government really lies. Not just being the deliverer of a Whitehall agenda but by being the champion of the locality - a champion that fights for the best not only at a structurally level but also at the more ethereal emotional level. Pride in place is not just about good services and sound finances, critical thought these are, but it is also about being the guardian of an area's character, knowing and reflecting its personality and preserving its identity. It is to protect and enhance its story and this is best achieved by those who, day by day, walk local streets, suffering with their electorate their traumas and sharing in their achievements.

We are at a tipping point. With all three main political parties speaking of a localist agenda and with local government better able to fulfil its part we should be able to realise the coming of age of modern local government. But for this to be fully realised there need to

be a culture change in attitudes in both national and local government. The former needs to let go. I query whether ministers, shadow as well as actual, really appreciate what this means. It means not micro-managing, it means not second-guessing. It means letting local government take responsibility and be accountable for the outcome at the ballot box. It means understanding the collaborative nature of national and local government. It means seeing each other as true partners.

With local government, too, there needs to be a change of attitude. Too many moans and too many grumbles echo through the council chambers of this nation which do no credit to the sector. What has gone has gone. We need to seize our opportunity now. We need to understand and appreciate what national government mean in their new language of localism. We need to be ready to seize the baton and run with vigour. For we may well not get another chance as good as this to show our worth.

Cllr Margaret Eaton is chair of the LGA. She was elected to Bradford MDC in May 1986 and became its first female leader in May 2000

After Iceland and Haringey



by Merrick Cockell, leader, RB Kensington and Chelsea

For the Conservative party, local government has played a vital role in the transformation of its electoral fortunes. The loss of so many town halls in the early 1990s foreshadowed the appalling drubbing the electorate handed to us in 1997. Just over a decade later, Conservatives dominate local government.

In May 2008, the Conservatives captured the largest prize in local government: the Mayor of London. Boris Johnson's "million vote mandate" is the most public demonstration of the party's electoral rehabilitation, leaving us poised to win the next General Election.

More importantly, winning also enables us to showcase how we will govern. Lower taxes, fiscal responsibility, innovative public services, safer streets, more recycling – delivery of these by Conservatives at a local level helps dispel Labour's charge that voting Conservative nationally is some reckless leap into the unknown.

Yet, while David Cameron's path towards No 10 is undeniably due in part to a resurgent Conservative presence in Britain's town halls, it's important to consider what relationship the next Conservative government should have

with local government – and why.

Yet, two recent events raise a question about the advisability of the party's continued commitment to greater localism: Iceland and Haringey.

Localism under fire: Iceland and Haringey

Returning powers and funding from Whitehall to Britain's town halls has long-commanded cross-party rhetorical support. But, as Tony Travers observed at London Councils' fringe meeting at this year's Conservative Conference, all oppositions are localist; the real trick is remaining localist in government.

Despite Labour's many fine words praising local decision-making, since 1997 a whole raft of new targets, inspection regimes and other measures have strait-jacketed local choice and initiative. With Labour a busted flush on localism; will localism's prospects be any better under a Conservative government?

Until autumn 2008, this was an easy "yes". The answer remains right but making the case is now a lot harder. First, there was the Icelandic banking collapse in October, risking £1bn of local authority deposits. Second, November

brought the sorry tale of Baby P, an extremely distressing child abuse case exposing egregious failures by Haringey services.

For many, the Icelandic banking collapse brought incredulity: how was it that local authorities had around £1bn of exposure, let alone the estimated £30bn on deposit at any time?

Any organisation, commercial or public, must use its resources wisely and generate income, where possible. One such source is cash flow: from the council tax and other charges it levies to the business rates and other funds it collects or administers for the government and other agencies, as well as its emergency cash reserves and capital receipts being kept to fund new projects, councils can increase income by making short-term deposits in the money markets and so secure services and keep down council tax.

Furthermore, Audit Commission rules press councils to seek the best returns for public money and penalise us through the inspection system if we do not – the infamous “Use of Resources” grading. The £1bn at risk in Iceland is just 3% of the total monies on deposit by local authorities. In commercial terms this is a prudent level of risk and potential exposure is unlikely turn into a loss of this scale. As the winding-up of the Icelandic banks proceeds, so local government creditors will be seeking to recover their deposits and that £1bn figure will come down, probably substantially.

What matters now is the policy response. If local authorities are compelled to seek risk-free investments then there could be a flight by local authorities from the money markets to

lower-yielding but 100%-safe government bonds. If councils' incomes fall, taxes will rise and/or services will be cut.

Nothing is ever risk-free. Indeed, even the Audit Commission – the government's final arbiter of the proper use of public funds – has some £10m of exposure to Iceland. What matters is that proper processes are carried out and that there is clear accountability for decisions.

Baby P's death turns the public spotlight once again upon Haringey's child care services which failed Victoria Climbié nine years ago. But Baby P challenges everyone in local government. As local politicians, we are necessarily accountable to our communities for our professional officers' judgements and decisions – be they right or wrong. What makes Baby P's case so uncomfortable for those of us in local leadership roles is that no one in Haringey seems willing to accept responsibility for these tragic events. Of course, in the end the ballot box in 2010 has the capacity to enforce public accountability.

Though this case undermines demands for greater local control, it would be wrong to pretend that Baby P's death would not have happened had child protection been a duty of central rather than local government. Indeed, by taking responsibility away from town halls and passing it to a distant minister, we would weaken still further that public accountability so vital to ensuring child protection is improved. Where central government has a rightful role is to set minimum professional standards and monitor their delivery; something that is already done.

However, the government's inspec-

tion regimes need to concentrate on those areas that are struggling or facing challenging circumstances and to cut through to performance indicators to case level where workload and professional expertise can be truly judged. As councils we deal with some of the most difficult social problems and, unfortunately, mistakes and sometimes tragedies will still occur. Our task is to reduce both their frequency and their severity.

Localism's challenge: delivering in good times and bad times

Before the recession, local government argued for greater local policy flexibility to meet the challenges posed by success. Now greater localism is needed to meet the recession's challenges, to assist our residents struggling with repossession or unemployment, to soften the economic landing and hasten recovery.

Labour will leave Britain's public finances in their worst shape for decades. The Darling-Brown borrowing binge - "to spend the country out of recession" - will only exacerbate an already parlous situation. With soaring government debt, lower tax receipts, higher unemployment and welfare bills, the next Conservative government faces extremely hard decisions on tax and services.

Tough economic times necessitate radical thinking about how and what services are delivered by local or cen-

tral government but also should they be delivered? If there is opportunity lurking in the recession, it is that it may embolden Conservative local government to consider really radical change and take difficult decisions without losing our accountability for local public services.

A Conservative government, busy sorting out Whitehall, will find the innovation and cost savings delivered by Conservatives in local government a real asset in getting Britain back on the road to recovery. Councils currently weighed down by a time-consuming regulatory regime (costing over £1bn a year in compliance) that actually gets in the way of real service improvements, need to see change. Local government needs a real review of the flawed funding formulae and of alternative funding options. Our town halls need a Conservative government committed to localism and prepared to transfer risk.

And if we in local government truly want this then we are going to have to face up to the responsibility and accountability that will go with it.

Merrick Cockell has been leader of RB Kensington and Chelsea since 2000. In 2006 he became the first Conservative chair of London Councils (formerly ALG) representing all 33 London local authorities. He is also chair of the Conservative Councillors' Association

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Raising the level of performance



by Christina Dykes, special advisor, and Jo Sylvester professor of organisational psychology

Credit where credit is due – the Labour governments of 1997–2005 were responsible for a massive change in culture within local government. Sensing the need to create a vehicle which could be more responsible to central government, the Blair governments introduced a wide-reaching improvement programme with the aim of building credible local leadership.

The Audit Commission's Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) may not have been liked, nor was it always fit for purpose, but it did contribute to an overall rise in managerial performance and delivery. The Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA), equally not liked nor appreciated by many Conservatives, through peer reviews, leadership and mentoring programmes, has also made a considerable contribution to raising the level of performance in local authorities. The Centre for Public Scrutiny has played a smaller, but no less significant, part in encouraging greater accountability. Lastly the Leadership Centre for Local Government's chief contribution has been in the development of political leadership in relationship to the place shaping agenda. The

combination of these four organisations has meant that, although there is still great room for improvement, local government has been putting its house in order and it is in better shape to take on new challenges.

Respond positively

The first challenge was to improve performance, the second challenge is to achieve excellence to enable local government to respond positively to the growing localism agenda. All three parties are now localist. For the Conservatives, localism was described by Rt Hon Oliver Letwin, chairman of the Policy Review and the Conservative Research Department, as "local governments", not local government. He told an audience at the Conservative Party Conference in October 2008 that the Conservative aim was to enlarge the scope of local authorities. Local councils will be entrusted with the delivery of their local services as well as their planning and coordination. Ultra vires will go; locally-elected executive mayors will be in (where appropriate); out will also go capping and the onus will be on delivering tailored services for each individual

areas. Thus the expression "postcode lottery" will be confined to the rubbish bin, as every place will be encouraged to differ according to needs. No longer will councillors be able to excuse their performance on regulations, targets and Whitehall mumbo jumbo. Under the Conservative plan, the buck will stop with councillors. Their restraint will be democratic accountability.

Individual performance will therefore matter more than ever. But just at the time when there will be a greater need for performance improvements, the local government development industry is in "irons" suffering the curse of modern politics – a reorganisation. There is a need to rationalise resources to ensure cost-effectiveness and to avoid duplication. However, it is also important to make sure reorganization does not damage the impetus to improve, especially if local councillors are going to be pivotal to services planning in their area. So whatever the outcome of the LGA's review of its "family", we are hoping that there will be a renewed emphasis on the encouragement of political leadership.

Being prepared

Over the past 10 years the opportunities for development offered to councillors have increased exponentially. To their credit, many councillors have embraced these opportunities by actively building their knowledge and expertise in the service of local government. Yet, many more councillors have been reluctant, even resistant, to the idea that a commitment to development should form part of their responsibilities. Too often "democratic independence" or "pressure of other commitments" are voiced as a

rationale for not undertaking training that is offered or required of them. Others are quick to point out that the level of work now expected of councillors by constituents; and the extra work that they need to undertake to keep up with changes in local government is now so great that it leaves little if any time to engage the luxury of personal development. Other express concern that professional development would institutionalize a democratic role the value of which lies in it being open to any legitimate voters.

Whilst it is possible to sympathise (the role of councillors has become more complex and demanding) it is also important to recognise that a failure to learn or develop will mean that councillors lack the knowledge or skills necessary to deliver for the public. Moreover development is not about standardization – it is about understanding role and one's own individual response to it.

Committed to engaging

Like every other area of work, local government requires individuals who are committed to engaging in continual learning and development as a core aspect of their role. For example, we have found that there is still confusion over the two roles of politician and officer. Individual politicians can be too keen to manage whereas some officers do not allow for the executive that is the role of members. Problems too can arise when the skill and experience of an officer outweighs that of a politician, resulting in a loss of respect as both fight for space if not actual power. These problems are not insurmountable, but they do require the protagonists to be honest about

their abilities and open to the idea of improvement. Surely this is not too much to ask from those who claim to be in the job to help the public?

Getting it right

However, learning and development is only part of the story. Emphasis needs to shift from simply providing support for councillors to a closer inspection of how and whether it impacts on councillor performance. To date very little attention has been paid to what we can realistically expect from elected representatives - mainly because we don't know. Perhaps we are so used to criticising politicians that we have stopped thinking they could improve! Yet, without a focus on impact - on what we want excellent political leaders to be - millions of pounds can be wasted on development that it is simply assumed will lead to better politicians.

Moving forwards, there is a pressing need to raise the stakes in relation to political leadership. Clearly excellent political leaders will be needed to deliver the services required by the public. Yet without a clear idea of what excellent political leadership is, and the support that individual councillors require to achieve it, it will be difficult to raise the game of most elected representatives. If we are serious about the need to raise expectations in relation to excellent political leadership, it is time to recognise and celebrate excellence and challenge poor performers. After

all, who really wants to commit to a role that is so easy that anyone with or without training could perform it?

Christina Dykes has been special adviser to the Leadership Centre for Local Government for the last four years. She combines this with being special adviser to Dominic Grieve MP QC. She is ex director of Development and Candidates at Conservatives Campaign Headquarters

Jo Sylvester is professor of Organisational Psychology at City University London. She has worked with the IDEa, the Leadership Centre, the Centre for Public Scrutiny and the CLG

Everything in politics is local



by James Brokenshire MP

Ultimately, everything in politics is local. From the problems we face in our daily lives to the solutions needed to put them right – the issues generally stem from events that take place in our communities, our neighbourhoods or our localities. Crime and anti-social behaviour are no different. That's why strong civic leadership and active local government are essential elements to delivering crime reduction and why effective policing is neighbourhood policing – the closer to the community the better.

The advent of Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnerships (Community Safety Partnerships in Wales) was intended to provide a key leadership role for local government. Yet CDRPs haven't fulfilled their potential. Many CDRPs are police led, rather than council driven with the result that their focus is inevitably tilted towards enforcement rather than prevention and early years intervention. There is also some irony that other local authorities are choosing to implement partnership programmes intended to reduce crime and disorder outside of the CDRP structure altogether.

The potentially conflicting performance mechanisms of Public Sector

Agreement targets and Local Area Agreement targets hardly help the situation. The new Comprehensive Area Assessment framework intended to promote a more joined-up approach is still in its infancy, although its complexity raises questions about its potential effectiveness. Pooled budgeting at the local level remains a rarity and partnership working is generally focused at the strategic level, without permeating through all the delivery strands of the organisations concerned to help make the strategies happen. Yet, despite these obstacles, innovative local programmes are emerging.

Strong partnership structure

Cambridgeshire's Community Alcohol Project is bringing together parents, pupils, businesses, the police and council trading standards to cut anti-social behaviour and under-age drinking by coordinated practical measures at the local level. The approach taken by Birmingham City Council through the Broad Street Business Improvement District shows what can be achieved through civic leadership combined with a strong partnership structure and clear delivery

mechanism to manage the challenges of one of the largest night-time economy areas in the country.

Part of the challenge is providing sufficient authority to communities. Councils should be given much stronger controls over alcohol licensing in their area. We also need to improve the sharing and assessment of good local practice and focus on outcome targets and performance mechanisms which align key performance indicators (KPIs) across local agencies to encourage rather than discourage joint working.

Active communities

We also need to promote active communities and active citizens, for example through neighbourhood watch schemes, through participation in community police beat panels and by empowering the public to hold those responsible for community safety to account. Crime mapping has revolutionised the way crime is tackled in many American cities – and it can do the same here. In the US, police forces regularly publish information about crimes in their area – the type of crime, when it happened and where. Anyone can take this information and overlay it on an online map. This gives the public unprecedented information about crimes in their community and strengthens their ability to hold the police to account. It also gives local authorities, the third sector and a range of other organisations the chance to pick out hotspots, see what needs doing and transform neighbourhoods.

Public engagement will also be

strengthened by greater local accountability. Instead of being directed by, and accountable to, the home secretary, police forces should be directed by and accountable to the communities they serve. That's why a Conservative government would make each police force accountable to an individual directly elected by the citizens of the police force area. This person would be responsible for setting the police budget; have the power of police authorities in relation to appointing (and dismissing) the chief constable; setting local policing priorities; monitoring how well the police perform against local targets; and ensuring best value from the local police budget.

Chief constables would remain in place free to make decisions in accordance with their professional judgment and their oath, accountable to the elected commissioner to explain their decisions and the way their force is run. The operational independence of police forces will be strengthened, not weakened, as ministerial micro-management is scaled back. We believe that this governance arrangement with elected commissioners providing greater accountability in enforcement, working with local councils with the primary responsibility for delivering local preventative policies in their areas provides a clearer and more effective mechanism to combat crime.

This contrasts with current government proposals which undermine local council leadership. The government proposes elected "crime and policing representatives" who would sit alongside

other elected representatives on police authorities and chair CDRPs. Putting new representatives in the chair of CDRPs looks like a recipe for confusion, chaos and division that will frustrate the role of local authorities which the government claims it wants to promote. The government is right when it says that local councils should provide the primary leadership behind CDRPs, yet it is wrong in putting in place a new block on this actually happening.

Other bureaucratic mechanisms, such as the "Councillor Call for Action", weaken the structure further. Councillors will be required by statute to respond to complaints made to them about anti-social behaviour and crime in their area within a specified time period, with issues escalated to an overview and scrutiny committee as a new parallel process to the work of CDRPs. This committee will request documents, reports and details from the police and other agencies and hold meetings to discuss the situation. Sadly, rather than a call for action, it looks like a recipe for more police time off the street in meetings than more police time out on the street dealing with problems.

Strong local partnerships

We need stronger communities, not stronger central control. More initiative-based policies micro-managed from Whitehall aren't the answer to the problem of crime. Yes, central government does have an essential role and it does need to provide the framework

to encourage strong local partnerships between the public, the police, local authorities and other local agencies. But it needs to get out of the way for innovation to take place. The problem with this government is that it just can't stop itself from being the thick insulating glove which prevents local action from taking place.

James Brokenshire is MP for Hornchurch. In November 2006, he was appointed to the Conservative front bench as a Shadow Home Affairs minister. Before entering Parliament James was a partner at a large international law firm where he advised a range of companies, businesses and financial institutions on company law, mergers and acquisitions and corporate finance deals

Conservative DNA



by Richard Stay, deputy leader,
Bedfordshire County Council

Local government does delivery and Whitehall does strategy – so does local government need Whitehall? In the days of Empire, when Britain ran most of the world, it had a small and perfectly formed civil service, a fraction of the size it is today given that it now largely a home civil service. In this context Whitehall is morbidly obese. The answer to the question is of course is that the various layers, tiers and sectors of the UK government are inter-dependent, as they should be in a mature, sophisticated democracy. But this does not mean all is well in the garden.

Local government is in its DNA

Most parts of the public sector are overweight and seek to do too much. Another simplistic (but true) statement is that (intuitively) Labour thinks the state is better at spending your money than you are, and the Conservative's instincts are towards leaving more cash in your pocket for you to decide how you spend it. Therefore the Conservatives need local government more than any other party because local government is in its DNA – not that this is always obvious from policy statements.

At the next general election (circa 2010), the Conservatives will be approaching their zenith in terms of number of councillors, therefore the way in which an incoming Conservative administration applies itself to transferring powers and resources to the local and devolved government sectors may indicate how embedded that dominant political position in local government is. Labour are under assault in their heartland cities in the north of England, it would not be impossible for opposition parties to continue making inroads into Labour territory for another two to three years after a general election, by which time large swathes of Labour's infrastructure at a local level will have been seriously impaired. How well a Conservative government would relate to and support this process will be a test.

The strength of a political party can be measured by its numbers in Parliament, but can also be assessed by the number of activists and elected members it has at council level. Motivated elected members at council level can make a huge difference to the ability of any government to implement its manifesto. Strategically, Whitehall needs

local government, even if it is only to ensure that it has a delivery mechanism at local level. If democratic control of local government was to be abolished, and delivery became a direct arm of Whitehall departments, we would see a model of governance in England that would be wholly alien to our island culture.

Under the Thatcher government a great opportunity was missed because focusing on a few "loony left" councils meant the whole sector suffered a fractious relationship with government.

The Conservative shadow local government team is changing the "mood music" and has embarked on a journey of devolution in policy statements, but it does not go far enough.

There does absolutely need to be a new constitutional agreement between Whitehall and local government and underpinning this should be the recognition that local authorities are the local democratic bodies that understand place, are responsive and increasingly efficient organisations that have the ability to truly deliver local agendas. Of course parliament is sovereign, but local government needs to be trusted and empowered to deliver at a local level. Politicians from all parties suffer the same tendency to meddle once in power and all governments are by instinct centralising.

The challenge for an incoming Conservative government will be to listen to its own party, remain true to its instincts and really drive forward a programme of devolution of delivery and resources. Once wholly unnecessary layers of regional government are stripped out and untold numbers of quangos are

abolished, we will be left with a much clearer and understandable structure of government in which local government plays a key role.

But if all this falls on stony ground there is the equally powerful argument of self-preservation. The Conservative Party needs motivated, engaged and successful councillors across the country. How better to achieve these ambitions than make local government responsible for place-shaping with proper powers and resources, thus making local government an attractive place for capable individuals to believe that this is a proper role that can really make a difference?

Richard Stay is the deputy leader and cabinet member for finance at Bedfordshire County Council. He is also the chair of Improvement East and a member of the LGA Improvement Board. A Westminster candidate in 2005 and a strong advocate for smaller, more effective government at a local level. Richard is retained as an advisor to a number of blue chip organisations that operate in the local, regional and devolved government sector

Stars are not enough



by Peter Thompson, leader, Hounslow Council

Is local government destined to finally become just another delivery arm of the Whitehall machine? Or does the next general election and the chance of a brand new government and policy approach, hold out the promise of a brighter future?

The optimist in me says no to the first question, never just a Whitehall delivery arm; the realist though sees much work still to be done to win the confidence of Whitehall and ministers of whatever political hue. A new government with a new approach to local government policy could offer much to those councils, such as the London Borough of Hounslow, that is now proving it is capable of delivering quality services.

Is there, though, a body of evidence sufficient to persuade the next government that the local government sector as a whole is worth the investment of hard-earned political capital? As a relatively new council leader I question how much, if any, reliance the Whitehall machine places on global measures of council performance (collected by government) when judging our ability to take on and do much more.

When stars are not enough

In 2006, as a backbencher, I saw my council, Hounslow, earn a 3-star rating from the Audit Commission and be classed "good and improving". The then administration was understandably pleased, though it seems residents were not! In May of that year 35 years of single party control was brought to an end. Since then, through tenacity, hard work and determination, we have been identified and eliminated some well-hidden inefficiencies and driving through performance improvements sufficient to deliver significant cash savings and increases in service quality. We were and are determined to demand top performance across the board, and to identify and act upon poor quality and inefficiency wherever found. As part of our drive for change we entered a partnership with KPMG to bring a new and different perspective on creating efficiency and to support delivery of the Hounslow performance improvement programme (PiP).

Eighteen months on from that standing start, using private sector disciplines and methodologies, and following many long days and nights of analysis, perform-

ance comparison, innovation and determination, the programme has delivered success for Hounslow and its residents, a success that we are all proud of.

Innovate to accumulate

Armed with the improvement programme we have squeezed out £53 million in cash savings; ensured we stick for a third year to our promise of zero council tax rises; protected the council's investment in frontline services and ended the destructive and still widely used practice of annual "salami slicing" of service budgets. I think that it is also worth adding that Hounslow falls within the lowest quartile for council balances in London! Against this background, the current council tax record looks all the more outstanding.

Four hundred posts have gone; a saving made possible by our new shared support services business model where the new discipline is revolutionising key support services including HR, finance, payroll and administrative support.

The money is now available to guarantee investment in the new vision for Hounslow and to help us build a new and strong sense of pride across the borough.

And yet the organisation we inherited was not failing, did some things very well and, like most councils, delivered above-average performance across the board. So how could such significant efficiencies and cash savings still be available? The answer is that what we had an absolute determination to take the council to new levels of efficiency and effectiveness.

I am encouraged by everything we have been able to achieve at Hounslow

in such a short time. I am also encouraged by the opportunity our success is giving local government as a whole. Already a number of authorities have adopted the Hounslow PiP approach, with more to follow.

The spread of innovative practice, combined with the introduction of private sector disciplines where they matter most, is a strong start on building a reliable body of evidence about local government performance and our worth, sufficient for a future government to rely on when making decisions about the role of local government.

Constructive performance assessment

The onus now should be on all of us in positions of responsibility to drill under any headlines, to put to one side scores on the doors, and to understand what is really going on in our organisations. We can then have full confidence that taxpayers' money across the sector is being used well and not abused.

Of course I know many are doing this already. Yet I am certain that there is much more evidence required and much more innovation and change needed to be delivered if we truly want to put a robust case to ministers and officials for greater freedoms, more powers and healthier local communities and local democracy.

Peter Thompson has been leader of Hounslow Council since 2006. Under his leadership Hounslow is delivering on its commitment to transform the quality of customer services within the self imposed framework of zero rises in the council tax

Delivering central government policy



by Calum Macleod and Tony Blake, leader and managing consultant, local government team, Capgemini

Ensuring consistency in the quality of delivery of central public policy at a local level has always been a significant challenge. It is a challenge that we see on a daily basis providing advice and support on the implementation of government policy initiatives, and through our work in local government.

A key element of improving the quality and delivery of government policy is to strengthen the links between local service delivery organisations and central government. Making this work lies at the heart of the “policy to delivery” challenge.

The next election may give us a Conservative government, and the promise of more local empowerment, but how can central government departments and local authorities work together to ensure the effective, efficient, sustainable delivery of central policy to citizens, at a local level? Looking at this policy to delivery challenge gives a perspective on why a new government needs local government.

Implementing policy effectively

There are multiple ways in which central government and local authorities can

work together in the design, development and delivery of central government policy. In our experience the most successful and sustainable programmes, and those that deliver measurable and tangible benefit to local citizens, have the following characteristics:

- An agreed and clear view of the desired outcome.
- A small number of pilots that demonstrate and prove the approach to implementation at ground-level.
- A centrally-managed, locally-delivered approach to implementation over a reasonably long time scale with appropriate levels of support throughout.
- Consistent, continued support and monitoring of the programme, so that the changes delivered are sustained.

Providing more flexibility in delivery of policy

It is a particular challenge to support the consistent delivery of a programme, often dependent on continued funding, over a long period. Variations in local circumstances will always be testing. Bournemouth’s needs are different from Westminster, and both are different from Salford. Local boundaries are

artificial – geographical, public agency and democratic boundaries neither align with each other nor the specific citizen groups for whom a new policy is intended. So a local authority is, in most cases, the most visible and influential local public service organisation and therefore needs to take a leadership role in adapting delivery to local circumstances.

A Conservative government will need to understand this and ensure that the development of policy provides space for local adaptation. This is a way to empower local authorities to have a greater influence on policy delivery. However, local authorities will also need to demonstrate that they are sensitive to and able to respond to the needs of their locality across a wide range of service areas. Take, for example, the development of local green transport schemes: this requires local transport authorities to demonstrate that they understand what initiatives will work in their areas. Or the provision of services to elderly people: local authorities must show they have a clear understanding of the appropriate, shared care pathways and how these can best be implemented with their health partners.

The delivery challenge

David Cameron has said that he wishes to tackle what he calls the “broken society”. If the Conservatives want a bigger role for the voluntary and social enterprise sectors in providing personalised services, this must allow for central and local government to play roles in nurturing this market. There must be clarity about where and how local, sub-regional, regional and national organisations work together for joined-up service delivery ‘on the ground’.

Equally, local authorities need to establish their ability to deliver quickly to ensure their role is valued. They must ensure that the really important issues and priorities are not lost in initiatives that can distract from core public service delivery. They must demonstrate that they can deliver effectively with other local providers. If they do not, the threats are there: for example, directly-elected police commissioners could weaken the mandate of councils, and create the prospect of politicised police forces, at odds with the town hall.

Making the most of local experience

The government needs to be able to trust local authorities, and their partners, to help them find the balance between national design and implementation that works locally. This brings the potential for energetic and engaging policy implementation, the impact of which will far exceed mere programme management driven compliance. Local authorities must now make sure that any future government knows that they will:

1. Act as a focus for providers of local services in the design of policy

It is increasingly understood that education, health, welfare-to-work, housing and benefits are interlinked and the local authority should be the focus for co-ordinating and aligning policy development into central government. So involving local authorities in the design of the policy, or delegating it to them, and then actively supporting it in the implementation will be key.

2. Identify the right people locally with the right skills to deliver policy

Good implementation relies on good people. So effective programme design must consider whether the skilled local workforce exists that can deliver local priorities, for example, to see that housing development is sustainable and fits with local infrastructure. These skilled people may not just lie in the local authority but, by focusing local partnerships, there is an important local role in marshalling and developing skills.

3. Understand how to manage all the information required to deliver services to citizens to fulfil policy

Local information management is vital to effective matching of provision to need. This needs to be balanced against the restrictions on use of personal data. Local information needs to be at the heart of delivery and performance. Such matters are highly relevant for breaking down the barriers between health and social care, for example.

The need for local government as central government's delivery partner

Careful attention to the practical means of local delivery is vital for success. Local delivery is complex and must be informed by a complete understanding of a local area. Local public services should be involved in the development, delivery and adaptation of policy as it unfolds. The challenge for the local government community is to demonstrate quickly that it can fulfil this role of delivery partner while being accessible and accountable to local people. That is a way to show a new government that it needs local government.

Calum Macleod leads the local government team in Capgemini Consulting. He has worked with the public sector for 10 years

Tony Blake is a managing consultant in the local government team at Capgemini Consulting. He worked in the public sector for 11 years before joining Capgemini

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Nothing broken, nothing missing



by Robin Millar, chairman of scrutiny, Forest Heath District Council

A lack of vision

An old proverb says: "People without a vision will perish". Developing a clear vision for local government is imperative for the delivery of good government and the shaping of public services to tackle the problems our society faces.

Where do we start?

Over the past five decades, successive governments of all parties have responded to national need, and the excesses and poor housekeeping of town halls by reducing the scope and stature of local government. This trend to nationalise and centralise rather than rebuild betrays a lack of long-term vision for local government.

Over time, the trend appears to have become a habit that constrains the thinking of what local government might be or could do. While much has been done to improve performance and to develop effective and efficient local services a "Big Centre" model of government has developed, with councils a delivery vehicle for centrally developed policy. The resulting central audit and assessment regime is burdensome, unpopular and skewed to help weak and

failing authorities, with little to offer stronger, more ambitious ones.

In the council chamber, a typical councillor will describe their council in terms of a series of tasks or a list of services. There is rarely a directing, informing, inspiring sense of purpose.

A vision for local government and a case for reform cannot start with form or finance (logic says the first question should be "What does local government do?" not what shape it takes or how it is resourced). Nor can it start with improving performance: "How can we do things better?" A distinctive Conservative vision must be more than just less bureaucracy, less money and better services. It must answer the question "What should local government do?"

A purpose for local government

History shows us that significant reform comes through a combination of leadership and opportunity: a response to a problem or need.

David Cameron identified such a problem in the findings of his Social Justice Policy Group (Breakdown Britain). Since its publication in December 2006 he has reshaped the Conservative

Party around a commitment to welfare reform, education reform and tackling family breakdown. When he addressed the 2007 local government Association conference in Birmingham he said: "I believe that social breakdown is the greatest challenge we face as a nation ... and I want it to be the modern mission of my party".

Since then he has drawn parallels with the broken economy Britain faced in the 1980s and the reforms delivered under Margaret Thatcher's premiership. In doing so, I believe he has given us an answer to the question "What should local government do?"

It is simply stated but profound in its implications: mend our broken society.

Tackling society's problems

This is an appeal that should find a deep resonance within local government, whose origins lie in social action, particularly the administrations of the Tudor poor laws. Centuries later, the urban population growth resulting from the Industrial Revolution brought a new set of social problems. Although structural reform was tackled in various acts of parliament, it was the work of civic leaders like Joseph Chamberlain, elected mayor of Birmingham in 1873, that would raise the stature of local government and shape our understanding of its role. Chamberlain pulled down the slums, secured reliable water and gas services, improved living conditions and left the city "parked, paved, assized... and improved - all as a result of three years' active work" (see Roebuck's *The Making of Modern English Society* from 1850 published by Routledge in 1982).

More than a century later, these are

no longer the only problems facing our society. Where they do exist, well-defined solutions can be deployed. The solutions have been reduced to a matter of managing and deploying resources (money, materials, skill) effectively. Our waste is collected and removed, housing is provided, the water is clean, our roads are lit and education is available for our children.

This is an important observation, because by definition, if today's problems are different, then they are unlikely to be solved by yesterday's solutions. The challenge of our times, the broken society described so vividly in *Breakdown Britain* will not be resolved simply by deploying more resources. The fractured relationships, broken homes, poverty of aspiration and an absence of hope demand a new approach.

A new approach should be at the heart of a distinctive Conservative vision.

Is there a solution and what does it look like?

David Cameron's speech to the LGA was delivered just days before the publication of the second part of the Social Justice Policy Group's work. While *Breakdown Britain* was a wake-up call on the state of society, *Breakthrough Britain*, published in July 2007, told a story of not just dealing with the aftermath of social breakdown, but on tackling the causes. It identified five pathways to poverty:

- Family breakdown.
- Drug and alcohol addiction.
- Educational failure.
- Personal debt.
- Economic dependency.

It showcased the projects and organisations that are tackling these pathways effectively and seeing genuine reversal of social breakdown. It identified 192 policies that would help to implement these solutions and deliver savings on a wider footing.

These solutions offer hope – but come with a profound challenge to the thinking about the nature of local government. They call for local government to redefine and expand its relationship with the voluntary sector, and its relationship with Westminster. A Conservative local government would no longer be Westminster's local administrator, micro-managed and carefully constrained. The central-local relationship would be a partnership with a common vision. Central and local government have different perspectives through need and nature, but they can still complement. Different roles with the same end in sight: reversing social breakdown.

As David Cameron said in his speech to the LGA: "Local councils can do a far better job than central government, if they're given the freedom and the power".

A further key plank must be encouraging people to take responsibility and not leave it all to statutory services. The services provided by local government have become rights and a set of minimum expectations. People complain to me when they see litter lying around, much more often than they

think to thank me for the clean streets. They contact me when their housing is sub-standard, not when new windows and doors are provided. In short, they contact their local councillor when something is broken or missing.

What next?

A Conservative vision will be worked out in practice, through better relationships with the voluntary sector, Westminster and residents. After decades of being told what we must do, Councillors will have more freedom to decide what they can do. No sleight of hand, "double devolution", or conforming to the plans of un-elected bodies. This will require a leadership that will take on difficult problems, and has the ability to tackle them effectively. It will require a change of mindset to seek out and build effective relationships and solutions.

Councils will have to rethink their relationship with residents. An autonomous council cannot blame government for its ills any more. No more compulsory consultations that devalue the concept of seeking a consensus. Conservative local government would have the flexibility and autonomy to develop its own local solutions and would be held accountable by its electorate, not Whitehall.

It will require strong nerves at the centre. Some councils will fail, but the past 20 years have demonstrated that stripping councils of functions and

clawing back controls to the centre is not the solution. There must be a mechanism to step in where a council fails to deliver outside its normal electoral cycle and the exercise of voters' will.

This is no small task. There are many significant challenges that lie ahead. But the results would be worth it. Councils that are responsible for their actions and what they deliver. Lives with nothing broken and nothing missing.

Cllr Robin Millar is the chair of Scrutiny at Forest Heath District Council, where he also leads on forward planning, economic development and diversity agendas. He has served as mayor of Newmarket, a trustee of Relate and governor of West Suffolk College

Beating rural deprivation



by Yvonne Parker-Smith, district councillor, Linford Ward, East Hampshire

This essay is not a tale of an inner-city area rising from the ashes, but a rural housing estate built within the parish of Headley, Hampshire in 1977, on land reclaimed from landfill. It is inspiring because it is ordinary. East Hants District Council moved by the needs in the area, identified a new approach. A community taking ownership of its problems; public bodies collaborating successfully; using information, not agendas, to identify need and build solutions to the problems it faces.

About the estate

Heatherlands is a somewhat isolated community. Unlike most urban estates, it is not close to a main service centre. Its 350 dwellings are home to approximately one-fifth of the parish population. Most residents fall into one of two main groups: a relatively stable population of housing association tenants (up to three generations of the same family live on the estate) and a transient population of first-time buyers. There are also small groups of ethnic minorities within the estate. Over half of the residents on the estate are under 19 years old and 17.5% of households do not have a car.

The area has high deprivation indicators, with many residents benefit reliant (53.5%) and a large number of lone parents (10%). Excessive numbers of children have learning difficulties, the incidence of teenage pregnancy is higher than average and considerable numbers of children do not attend school regularly. There are significant health issues within the estate. This is not helped by the fact that the estate straddles the border of two primary care trusts (PCTs). A series of NHS "quit smoking" sessions at the beginning of 2006 were not well supported.

Headley Down Community Association (HDCA) was set up in 1977 to manage Woodlands Hall. The Hall is a venue for community activities and acts as a base for outreach services offered by statutory agencies and the association itself. The association has developed these services in response to surveys and consultations on the estate to identify needs.

Discovering residents' needs

In 2003, HDCA undertook a "Planning for Real" exercise to identify community needs and aspirations. This was a col-

laborative exercise, which draws in the community affected by planning decisions. It was supported by East Hants District Council (EHDC), the county and parish councils, Drum Housing Association and Community Action Hampshire. The findings clearly showed that services for children and young people were an absolute priority.

A vibrant pre-school, children's club and youth club all operate out of Woodlands Hall today. The pre-school provides quality pre-school education and care for children aged 2-5 years. The children's club provides quality child care after school and during school holidays for 6-11 year olds. The children's club has run "healthy eating" cookery courses and both organisations provide a safe and structured environment for children to learn, develop skills and play. The youth club works in partnership with the County Youth Service and aims to provide challenging, exciting and supportive opportunities for 12-16 year olds to promote learning, and personal development. The youth have also been involved in projects such as a new basketball court, helping to foster a sense of pride and ownership in these activities and facilities. Grants have funded some long-awaited football pitches and a youth pod has been installed with assistance from the district council.

Further surveys

Further surveys included a Learning Needs Survey by HDCA in January 2004. A knock on every resident's door elicited an impressive 76% response. Consultation also took place with the PCTs, police, job centre, Connexions, county council and the education authority.

Five key areas of need were identified: community development, open spaces, transport, Woodlands Hall activities and young people. This led to a multi-agency day in the summer of 2006, planned and co-ordinated by the chairman of HDCA, officers from EHDC, and the five team leaders.

The committees, which are comprised of EHDC and its partners, continue to meet on a regular basis.

Transport

A commonly quoted problem for young people on the estate was a lack of transport off the estate. In order to tackle this problem, we worked with the county council and used funds from our alternative transport fund (developers' contributions) to launch "Wheels to Work". This two-year pilot project involves leasing mopeds to people seeking full-time further education or employment.

Empowering residents

A door-to-door community survey was carried out by Drum Housing Association between January and March 2007. A third of households on the estate were successfully contacted and gave opinions on community concerns, open spaces and service provision.

A community project worker was appointed to complement the work of the staff at Woodlands Hall. The post is joint funded for three years by Drum Housing Association and EHDC. The purpose is to encourage the empowerment of residents on the estate through partnership with community organisations and agencies.

As the nearest source of debt counselling is the CAB in Bordon (the nearest

town) an outreach service is provided on the estate by Drum Housing Association.

We have not been alone in this evidence-led approach. In 2007 a new system of neighbourhood policing was introduced. This has been of great assistance as its statistical database has helped show that crime levels at Heath-erlands are not as high as perceived. The PCSO visits regularly and is known by name to all. Some of this “fear of crime” may have been caused by seeing young people “hanging out” and at present, there are no ASBOs currently on the estate.

Targeting resources effectively

EHDC's role has varied from convener and funder to co-ordinator and facilitator. It started with a commitment to tackling deprivation: Leader of the Council, Cllr Ferris Cowper, created my new Social Justice Portfolio to identify deprivation within the district and mobilise the resources needed to tackle it. This political leadership was the starting point.

Social inclusion is not traditional Tory territory and has not always enjoyed a high profile. Deprivation is often hidden, so a mapping exercise was conducted in May 2008 to identify it. The deprivation database that was created is now used to target scarce resources effectively – a key Conservative value.

This is a clear pattern that has emerged: investing in good informa-

tion, understanding the problems and targeting the resources at the heart of those problems. Just one small example of this was discovering that uptake of the Lifelink personal alarm system for the elderly was significantly lower than other districts. Did it increase?

The result is an estate that is becoming a more vibrant place to live with a more contented community. The story is not finished, and there is still more to be done. Lessons learned here are being applied to brand new estates – we are not waiting for problems to develop.

Yvonne Parker Smith is district councillor for Lindford Ward, East Hampshire District Council and portfolio holder for Social Justice. She is president of the local Women's Institute, president of the League of Friends for the local community hospital, and a hospital governor

Effective family recovery



by Brian Connell, cabinet member, Communities and Economic Development, Westminster City Council

Despite increasing public spending on services and a sprawling welfare state, the Centre for Social Justice's report *Breakdown Britain* highlighted the grim fact that hundreds of families in many, if not the majority, of local authorities are in a cycle of social decline which traditional public services seem helpless to address.

We calculated that there are around 600 families (3% of Westminster's overall population) who demonstrate several symptoms of *Breakdown Britain*'s "pathways to poverty" and who are at serious risk of social exclusion. Those pathways include family breakdown, educational failure, addiction and lack of earned work.

Using what we know effectively

In the majority of cases, public authorities are aware of the identities of these families. After all, they are responsible for a disproportionate amount of anti-social behaviour as well as taking the time and effort of a number of services such as schools and social services.

We have not used our resources in the public sector effectively enough in the past to deal with the root causes of

negative behaviour. We know that some interventions with the most vulnerable families lack coherence across the agencies. At times there are gaps or duplications in service, an incomplete appreciation of each family's needs as a whole, and ineffective responses to individual issues.

It is no wonder that family members could be the subject of many dozens of separate interventions from a variety of agencies over the course of just a few years at huge public cost but without coherence or robust solutions. A family in a cycle of deprivation not only costs the state many hundreds of thousands of pounds in services each year, but their destructive patterns of behaviour will have a huge impact on their life chances as well as on neighbours and neighbouring communities.

Dysfunctional public services

Quite simply, public services, despite plenty of goodwill, have become as dysfunctional as the families they purport to serve. It is one of the reasons that Westminster's 600 families seemed destined to a life of underachievement, exclusion and dependence on the state.

This problem is not unique to Westminster; every local area is grappling with it. But in Westminster the Conservative administration is particularly well placed to tackle the issue, because of the strength of our existing services, our partnership working, especially with the NHS and the police; and because of our belief that the council should be about encouraging opportunity for all our citizens.

The Westminster solution

Our response has been to launch our Family Recovery programme. At the heart of this is a new concept, the Family Assessment and Intervention Team (FAIT). The team turns the rhetoric of "joined up" services into reality. A single team around each family can draw on the expertise, knowledge and local know-how of an impressive range of professionals to help them make better decisions than had previously been the case and, vitally, at an earlier stage. The team is made up of:

- Social workers providing safeguarding services to families whose children might be at risk.
- Anti-social behaviour case workers.
- Police officers.
- Adult social care workers specialising in substance misuse issues, mental health problems and learning disabilities.
- A health visitor.
- Specialists in dealing with both the victims and perpetrators of domestic violence.
- A housing advisor.

- Education welfare officer.
- Child and adult mental health worker.
- Provision to bring in specialist services from the voluntary sector as and when required for individual cases.

For each family, we are devising a single care plan that captures the range of issues and sets out what that family can expect from the local authority and our partners. Crucially, the plan also acts as a contract where the consequences of a failure to co-operate are spelled out. We are under no illusions that enforcement action may be required against some families who persist in breaking the rules. As the administration we appreciate we have a duty to provide help where needed but also to ensure that the actions of a few do not blight the lives of the many.

The FAIT allows us to achieve some common sense but vital outcomes. The range of professionals involved in delivering the service, for example, means there is now a "no wrong door" policy in place and families will not be pushed from pillar to post across the gamut of public services with diminishing returns from each contact made.

A team around the family

Tailored support to each family through a single care plan also means all needs – current and anticipated – can be met. And by considering the circumstances of the whole family, and not just the individual, our chances of getting to the root of the problem are increased. The lead professional will be

familiar with the complex situation of the family. So the FAIT can also work with the strengths of the family rather than only treating negative symptoms, which means it's an intelligent, knowledge-based approach.

The make-up of the FAIT includes a wide range of professionals, but we are realistic that we will require extra expertise in dealing with some of the most challenging issues. Therefore we have allowed for a contingency fund to call on the voluntary sector to intervene in the appropriate circumstances and we will commission services accordingly. Over the coming years, we aim to make further use of the voluntary sector's expertise and integrate them fully into the team.

The pace of change has been impressive and in order to achieve that transformation, we have challenged traditions, habits and professional languages that have existed in isolation within council departments for many decades. Information sharing protocols have been devised between departments and outside agencies like the police and primary care trust and we have "walked through" hypothetical cases with the members of the FAIT sitting around the same table, such is our determination to join up service on the ground.

Political leadership

We have ensured that there are the highest possible levels of ownership and leadership of this project. The leader of the council, Colin Barrow,

plays an active role in championing the approach. My Communities and Economic Development portfolio at the council was created in part to lend the highest level of political support to the project and it is supported at director level on the operational side. In addition to leading the Family Recovery Programme, my cabinet post acts as co-coordinator for the other people services portfolios in the organisation (children's services, housing, adult services and community protection). We are serious about joining up services and co-ordinating our actions throughout the organisation and not simply on individual projects.

Family intervention is not a novel concept in tackling problems such as anti-social behaviour, but the FAIT differs from its antecedents, the family support panel and youth inclusion support panels, because its work starts before any statutory intervention is required. It is a policy of prevention and is aimed at tackling the root causes of exclusions not simply treating the symptoms.

Costs

The FAIT will be crucial to our long-term financial planning as a local authority. So far, we have invested £780,000 from a central government bid for the first three years of the project and we will also be injecting a further £600,000 in each of the next two years to enable us to make the FAIT a mainstream service for the whole of the city. When you consider

that the cost of a child coming into the care of the local authority can escalate to as much as £300,000, we believe the savings we can make through this preventative work will far outweigh the costs and will restructure budgets for years to come.

A mainstream service

As we envisage the project to represent the beginning of a new form of mainstream service, we will ensure that its benefits are robustly measured and in such a way that it gives us a detailed basis for determining what works and where the service might need to evolve into the future. We have around 20 specific performance measures in place which deal with issues such as school attendance of the children involved, persistent and lasting treatment for addiction and health related indicators.

Crucially, our performance framework also includes consideration of the effects on the programme on the wider community. Perceptions of crime and anti-social behaviour in the localities concerned, for example, will give us an insight into the benefits of the project. In addition, we have commissioned independent research to be undertaken to establish a detailed cost-benefit analysis of the project.

A new way forward

Westminster's Family Recovery programme represents a profound change in the way we tackle deprivation in

local communities. Its introduction in Westminster within a year puts paid to the notion that local government is incapable and unwilling of rapid reform. It also strikes that elusive balance between achieving long-term cost savings while simultaneously delivering improved results for families and their neighbouring communities.

Cllr Brian Connell is cabinet member for Communities and Economic Development on Westminster City Council.

He was elected to Westminster in 2002 and has served as Westminster's cabinet member for education. He is a governor of a city academy school. He works as a management consultant and stood as a parliamentary candidate for the Conservative party at the last general election

Why wait for Westminster?



by Iain Duncan Smith MP

David Cameron has clearly stated the challenge of our time and the challenge that the Conservative Party must apply itself to: "The central task I have set myself and this party is to be as radical in social reform as Margaret Thatcher was in economic reform. That's how we plan to repair our broken society".

Local government expenditure in Britain was estimated at £106bn in 2007/8 (27% of the total managed public expenditure) with the majority on welfare and education. Therefore it is vital that Conservatives offer a clear picture of the role local government will play in delivering solutions to mend our broken society. But there is another dimension to this. In July 2008, Conservatives controlled over half (216 out of 410) of the local authorities in England and Wales. The question I have is a simple one therefore: why wait for Westminster?

At the Centre for Social Justice we are clear in our commitment to policy development as a thinktank. However, we are busy developing the next phase: implementing those policies. And we have chosen to do that with local authorities - we are not waiting for Westminster.

I want to outline three broad areas in which Conservative councils have started to work so that they can be more effective in tackling social breakdown:

- Making projects and schemes more effective.
- Ensuring the council's own processes support the work of partners (not just the council).
- Reshaping the council's own structure to deliver better services.

More effective projects and schemes

Projects alone will not be effective in tackling social breakdown. How do we know which projects will work best - an after-school homework club or a sports academy? How do we up-scale or replicate the ones that do work? Over time, most projects run up against another problem: what happens when the money runs out? I have seen good work come to a halt overnight when priorities change, a new administration is elected or the new portfolio holder wants to make their own mark.

Setting these aside, however, there are two simple things councils can do to ensure projects are more effective in tackling social breakdown.

First, resources must be given to projects that really work. Spending and resources must be targeted where they are really needed, and will be used effectively – for as long as is needed. Spreading the resources thinly might be politically attractive – but it also denies the focus that is needed to tackle intractable problems and reverse deep seated social problems. A practical step is to gather good data. This will help ensure any projects are “intelligence led” – and not just satisfying a politically correct agenda.

Second, fund projects for a longer term. This is a modest move, recognising the contribution of partners and only passes on the benefits of the three year settlements that councils have received themselves from government. This step keeps things simple; it makes partners of project owners and allows them to plan more effectively, breaking the short-term focus of their work, and freeing their time from the constant struggle to raise funds.

Ensuring council processes support the work of partners

When we prepared Breakthrough Britain, we were impressed with the number of people – social entrepreneurs – who are making a big difference in the lives of a few people. But time and again, we heard stories of their frustration with processes developed for the council, by the council, that unwittingly blocked reasonable and sensible extensions to their work. This social entrepreneurship is a close cousin of the commercial and

financial initiative that has long been regarded as a traditional Conservative value. Conservative councils must find ways to foster this – not frustrate it – if they are to tackle social breakdown.

One example lies with a mismatch between need and a common mechanism for reviewing and awarding grants at ward level. We have argued that a key to reducing re-offending rates amongst prisoners is to offer them mentoring, support and secure housing to help their reintroduction into society. Only a few individuals might need this support at any one time. Averaged across all wards within a given council, this number reduces further. The result is either that the ward-based grant committees think there is no need, or that the project must make multiple applications simultaneously across all wards and try and coordinate their decision-making in order to secure the funding they need. A simple decision to change the way community grants are awarded, or bring them into a more strategic position would remedy this.

Another example is the way councils buy their goods and services. Councils following current best practice require service providers on larger contracts to provide statements about their compliance to equality, diversity and environmental sustainability standards. Simple checks or social justice incentives could be inserted into the procurement process without increasing the administrative burden on businesses.

A Conservative vision of local government is one that is free to serve

its residents first. Its processes are an important part of the unwritten culture. A Conservative council built first on service to its residents, consideration to its partners and then its own needs and those of its performance auditors will have a much greater impact than the council where those priorities are reversed.

Reshaping the council's own structure

Over the past decade, this government has targeted local government within its legislative and regulatory agendas. It has either tried to reshape it in its own image, or bypass it through unelected bodies and alternative structures, as it seeks to impose and control the delivery of central policy.

As council structures and services have come to reflect the philosophy of central government, it is inevitable that when the philosophy fails so do the services. So it follows that a different, Conservative approach to tackling social breakdown means we cannot stop with projects and processes, we must also undertake structural reform. One example of the difficulties is illustrated by one of the effective solutions we found in Breakthrough Britain – whole family fostering – which cuts across at least two traditional council directorates.

Structural change is time-consuming, costly and is never approached lightly. However, despite being the most difficult, it offers the greatest benefits.

Apart from more effective services,

aligning structures to support the delivery of those services has the potential to unlock hidden savings. This is the next big challenge – putting the values and priorities of social justice into the DNA of the council, so that it thinks, talks and walks in a Conservative way.

Local government and Conservative councils have led the public sector in responding to Gershon's efficiency agenda. Little wonder that visionary members and officers, with responsibility and a passion for local well being and local delivery, are contemplating this type of profound change in their organisations. They are looking closely at how services are delivered and asking: "What is the best way?"

One example is the way in which local government works with the voluntary sector. Conservatives do not regard this sector as evidence of a failure on the part of private and public sectors. It has proved itself energetic, capable and skilful in tackling breakdown in a way the other sectors simply cannot. As we have said in our green paper, it is not the third sector, but the first when it comes to tackling social problems.

Another example is the Conservative value of seeking a return on financial investment. The real savings of social interventions come after many years. The work we have been doing at the CSJ suggests at least 15 years will be required before the poverty cycle is broken through early years intervention, and benefits are realised. A Conservative council is comfortable with the discipline of long-term financial

planning and can start to factor this into their decision-making processes and the development of business cases.

Leaders not administrators

The few changes I have suggested here are just part of the paradigm shift that we must make to deliver Conservative local government that is effective in reversing social breakdown. We must not be stalled by arguments about funding, or wait for freedom from central control, or the return of a portion of business rates. These arguments assume the mindset of administrators and managers, not strong, innovative, local leaders.

Our country and our communities need leadership and Conservatives in local government can start making a difference, today. Leaders do what they can with what they have.

We don't have to wait for Westminster.

Rt Hon Iain Duncan Smith has been Member of Parliament for Chingford and Woodford Green since 1992. He has held Shadow Social Security and Defence portfolios and as Leader of the Opposition led the party towards a greater emphasis on public services. The Centre for Social Justice was established to continue his commitment to compassionate conservatism, forming the Secretariat for David Cameron's Social Justice Policy Group, and publishing Breakthrough Britain (December 2006) and Breakdown Britain (July 2007).

Before entering Parliament, he served in the Scots Guards for six years. He has also been a businessman in the defence and publishing sectors



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