Whole place reform vital if government to deliver ambitious national missions, Localis report urges

Thursday 12 September, 2024

- *New Localis report calls on the government to make it easier for local leaders to adopt proactive and preventative approaches to service provision and encourage collaborative partnership working across the public and private sector.*
- *The report suggests that the government could do this by restoring stability to council finances as a foundation from which to deliver on national renewal missions.*

Switching now to a 'whole place' model of local public service reform would support the new government's ambitious national missions and offer a unique opportunity to enact lasting change after a decade of decline among English councils, a new report published today by Localis argues.

In a report entitled **'Heart of the matter – getting to grips with whole place transformation'**, independent think-tank Localis recommends the new government should restore stability to council finances with an immediate cash injection to steady the ship for frontline service delivery before charting a course to long-term financial sustainability. The study further recommends council workforce capacity also be addressed as among the first steps to long-term radical improvements.

The report authors call for a transformative renewal of place policy that balances the optimism of devolution and community empowerment with the stark realities of fiscal constraints and persistent economic challenges. Looking back to previous attempts at place-based reform, the paper advocates a whole place approach to improving local service outcomes that focuses on:

- **empowering local leadership**
  with long-term, stable funding to make meaningful changes.
- **embedding preventative approaches** by investing in upstream prevention to tackle issues at their source in a way that reduces demand on frontline services and leads to better outcomes.
- **developing collaborative cultures** across public, private and third sectors to create user-centred service provision.
- **practicing community co-design**
  with meaningful engagement to meet the needs of local residents.

Localis chief executive, Jonathan Werran, said: "As we stand on the brink of a major shift in how we deliver public services, this report offers a roadmap for change where it counts, that is both ambitious and grounded in the practical realities faced by local government.

"**'Heart of the matter'** is a call to action for both local leaders and central government to work together to deliver the high-quality, sustainable public services our communities deserve.

"A transformative whole-place approach can deliver high-quality, efficient local services we all wish to see. Realising the prize will require both radical reform from central government and continued innovative action from local leaders if we are to get the improvements that can build a new and secure era for people and place."

Sean Hanson, chief executive, IMPOWER, said: "Heart of the Matter puts beyond doubt what many local leaders already know –lasting social change and inclusive economic growth is only possible if we turn the promise of whole-place transformation into a reality."

"The report's findings look back on what has worked in the past, including investment in prevention, collaborative partnership working, and community empowerment. The report's proposals look ahead to an exciting age of opportunity in which place leaders have the powers and resources to deliver growth that works for everyone and for the long term."

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“We look forward to working with and supporting leaders to ensure their places are primed for growth.”

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Notes to Editors:

1. **An advance copy of the report is available for download**

Online report launch | Heart of the matter – the foundational case for whole place transformation | Thursday 12 September from 11.00 to 12.00

We will debate the report and ask why radical whole place transformation is back on the agenda for placemaking and service provision and what this might deliver for communities and localities in the new political cycle.

Join us for from **11.00 to 12.00 for the online report launch of ‘Heart of the Matter’ on Thursday 12 September.**

Speakers will include:

- Cllr Abi Brown, Chair, LGA Improvement and Innovation Board
- Sean Hanson, Chief Executive, IMPOWER
- Professor Colin Copus, Localis Fellow
- Kate Martin, Executive Director, City Futures, Sheffield City Council

For more details and to register – please click here:

1. **About Localis**

Localis is an independent think-tank dedicated to issues related to politics, public service reform and localism. We carry out innovative research, hold events and facilitate an ever-growing network of members to stimulate and challenge the current orthodoxy of the governance of the UK.

www.localis.org.uk

About IMPOWER

Founded in 2000 by a local authority Chief Executive, IMPOWER brings together public and private sector experts to address complex challenges. We have partnered with over 150 UK councils, improving performance, enriching lives, and strengthening public services. This year, we are expanding our Place sector work to help more clients create thriving, sustainable communities.

Impower.co.uk

1. Key report recommendations

The recommendations of this report represent an attempt to balance two imperatives, as informed by the research and engagement carried out over the course of the project. On the one hand, there is the need for radical, structural reformulation of the settlement between central and local government.

On the other, there is the need for councils to continue to find ways to deliver strategically and intelligently, in spite of a system which all too often works against such activity. The goal is to outline the principles which must undergird systemic reform whilst also highlighting the best practice and pragmatic action taken by councils managing to innovate in the system as it currently exists.

Local government recommendations

To continue to deliver for residents even under considerable pressure, the use of partnership models centring on upstream prevention will be crucial. An examination of best and emerging practices in this area informs the following recommendations:

1. **Plan to transform**.

To help foster a collaborative culture, **councils should produce transformational whole place service delivery plans, in collaboration with other agencies**, to give a clear overview of the efficiency and quality of service delivery across an area.

1. **Model to prevent.**

Councils should develop internal models for valuing prevention and review spending accordingly, to help ensure that they can adopt an outcomes-focused approach to reducing demand on frontline services.

1. **Prime for good growth.**

Being primed for good growth will be key to sustaining long-term transformation. **Councils should set out what good growth looks like over the immediate, medium and long-term** as part of the forthcoming statutory local growth plans.

1. **Work in partnership.**

Councils should **form partnerships and pool resources with local partners** across the public, private and third sectors. Operating with severely restricted capacity that is mostly outside of their control, it is more important than ever that councils lead collaboratively.

1. **Deliver through innovation**.

Councils should work with private and third sector partners to establish innovative vehicles for regeneration, with explicit mandates to use procurement and other strategic functions to promote local economic growth.

1. **Empower people.**

Local partnerships should **embed a culture of community engagement and empowerment**. This means adopting an asset-led and strengths-based approach, focusing on trust building, and develop different channels of communication with diverse communities. Mechanisms for collaboration should be built into the process of formulating strategy and devising policy across all policy areas.

Central government recommendations

To lay the groundwork for this transformation and equip local authorities to deliver on national priorities by providing high quality, sustainable public services and strategic, dynamic placemaking for economic development, a new deal for local government must meet the following requirements:

1. **Steady the ship**.

As an interim measure, central government must **make an immediate cash injection into local authorities for frontline service delivery**, to restore sustainability to core services and halt decline in neighbourhood service provision. The immediate focus of spend could be on the improvement of the built and natural environment to deliver a visible uplift, followed by investment in community services, longer-term housing improvements and preventative measures at neighbourhood level.

1. **Chart a course to sustainability.**

Looking to the future, there must be an **examination of local government revenue sources,** including fiscal devolution, to chart a course to longer-term sustainability.

1. **Fill the capacity gap.**

To accelerate efforts to fill the local government capacity gap and ensure the workforce is properly equipped to address the service challenges of the future, government must **work with the Local Government Association (LGA) to further develop and scale-up employment and training programmes.**

1. **Invest in prevention.**

The new funding settlement must **commit to the value of upstream prevention**
and look to move beyond the ‘discretionary’ categorisation of non-statutory services, recognising the value of these services in reducing frontline demand.

1. **Value outcomes.**

The success of local growth plans **should be evaluated on public service outcomes as well as economic indicators.**

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