



Exploring the Strength of Community

How to promote wellbeing for all citizens

A DISCUSSION PAPER FROM THE CENTRE FOR WELFARE REFORM

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Summary

Does community hold the key to wellbeing? It holds the assets, resources and connections required to sustain its citizens. The Covid-19 outbreak in the UK in February 2020 triggered an accelerated movement of community resilience - the like of which has not been seen since World War 2.

This discussion paper has been developed to explore ways that we can maintain the strength of community - that has gained real traction during the coronavirus pandemic - as a long-term alternative to the broken and inefficient welfare systems we currently have in place.

We explore the changes - some subtle and some more radical - which could help to shape a fair, equal and better society:

- Changes to government policy
- Changes to systems and structures
- Radical change (an upside-down picture of society and the devolution of power to communities)

We have a powerful and urgent opportunity to review the way we used to do things before Covid-19 'lockdown' came into effect. It is now time to consider the proper use of public monies to support stronger, more efficient and democratic ways of promoting and enabling wellbeing for all citizens.

I. Introduction

This paper has been developed in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic which started to take effect in the UK around February 2020. The unfolding of the Covid-19 pandemic elicited a government response which quickly led to an emergency bill (Coronavirus Act 2020) being passed. This legislation will be in place for a two year period. The most notable impact of this in England has been the ‘Care Act easements’, which allow councils to ‘opt out’ of key elements of the legislation pertaining to the rights of people who would have been entitled to support before the pandemic. The most confusing part of all this is that individual councils can adopt their own position on this, and there is no parity between Local Authority areas. Worryingly, the Local Authorities announcing the adopting of the easements (even on a temporary basis) are some of the areas with the highest incidence of deprivation and vulnerability; and where we saw a higher number of Covid-19 infection rates.¹

The impact of the emergency legislation: Coronavirus Act 2020, and the corresponding government guidance regarding social distancing requirements has been historically significant with businesses, services and communities having to learn to live life and function differently. The economic and wellbeing impact has been felt particularly by those members of society close to the poverty line and those who fall outside of the ‘protected’ government provisions.

The resulting community response has been significant; and has led many to begin reflecting on how we would like society to look when we reach the ‘other side’ of the pandemic- indeed some Local Authorities are beginning to consider adopting the ‘community hub’ models following the pandemic; and there are some innovative models being tested, such as the NDTi project on Community Led Support hubs.² According to a recent survey only 9% of people surveyed about life after the pandemic wanted to ‘return’ to the former way of doing things.³

As visual thinkers, we decided it would be helpful to organise our thoughts using a PATH (Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope) template which is often used in Person-Centred Planning.⁴

What has resulted is a logical flow of thoughts and ideas; supported by examples of great practice and innovation which we hope will provoke discussion, innovation and action for a better society.⁵

2. The Vision

At Imagineer, we spend a lot of time examining the ‘status quo’ and imagining how things could look if we decided to do things differently.

Imagineer is a values-driven organisation, and our social mission is at the heart of everything we do. Imagineer’s social mission is:

“To empower people to live their best lives through having greater choice and control of their circumstances.”

The vision question can be applied at three levels:

- 1. Person:** What makes sense to a person for them as an individual and as a citizen within their neighbourhood and wider community?
- 2. Neighbourhood:** What makes sense to a community of people sharing connections, facilities, resources and spaces?
- 3. Society:** What makes sense to a population based on the more complex and generalised systems and values embedded within law and citizen life?

The word ‘community’ can mean different things to people. We can talk about community as a group of people with a shared interest or set of beliefs, such as a faith community or a Martial Arts club. We can describe community as an identified geographic area in which people live, work and socialise. We can also use the word ‘community’ to describe a people group with a common ethnic or diversity label.

The mission for “people to live their best lives through having greater choice and control of their circumstances” relies on a number of foundational principles such as equality, inclusion, accessibility and rights which all effectively contribute to the experience of self-determination. In order to realise this vision, we must first understand some of the limiting factors which inhibit innovation and creativity.

Many of the systems, structures and processes associated with statutory provision are bureaucratic and complex. A reduction in bureaucratic processes would lead to a reduction in dependence on statutory support. Stream-lining systems and processes to make them simpler to access or replacing the systems with a community-led approach could allow more efficient use of budgets and resources to benefit a wider reach of the population.

Valuing all people as equal and recognising that being able to contribute to society promotes a sense of purpose and identity, and shared responsibility.

By removing the categories of 'need' which we often find referenced in the needs analysis (such as Market Position Statements, and Joint Strategic Needs Assessments); we can bring together themes for a common goal. Strengthening and enriching communities creates a positive life experience for all members, no matter what circumstances or stage of life they are in.

It develops resilience and interdependence amongst all members of the community; and encourages long-term sustainability and self-organisation which makes most sense at a neighbourhood level (rather than a blueprint of a 'one size fits all' strategy which is rubber-stamped by Westminster and then rolled out throughout the country).

Many neighbourhoods and smaller communities have developed Facebook and WhatsApp groups in response to the Covid-19 pandemic where people are connecting digitally to support one another, share resources and stay connected. VE Day 75th anniversary celebrations - many 'socially distant' driveway street parties were co-ordinated in this manner on 8th May 2020 to allow people to connect, and reduce the impact of loneliness during 'lockdown'.

Good stewardship of resources and shared assets prevents the overlap and duplication often seen in services linked to a particular area of need. For example, even where a Local Authority and the health authority are not 'integrated' they could still share an infrastructure and save money.

In recent history, our society has been organised and structured into 'departments' with a central governmental lead responsible for administering the resources allocated to each department; along with the 'Local Authority' devolved power and resource which is distributed to (and then by) councils. Unfortunately over time this has led to categorising people and subsequently developing services under labels of need or activity. The power stays with Local Government and is not shared with or devolved to the individuals and communities it is intended for. This type of 'silo' thinking and working has restricted and limited the 'big picture' thinking which allows creativity and recognition of what is possible.

Removing the administrative costs, barriers and 'silos' which inhibit innovation opens up the possibility for better connections, more efficient use of resources and places citizens on an equal footing in their communities.

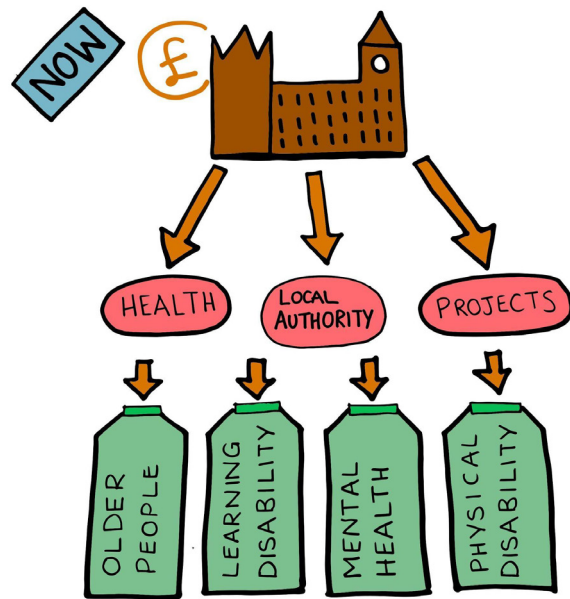


Figure 1. Silos

3. Now

Currently we experience a social care system that is broken. The impact of many years of austerity and a succession of budget cuts has reduced local government statutory structures and processes to a clunky and unwieldy system which often gets stuck at critical points; and can often have a detrimental impact on individuals and families. Response from the system is weighted towards crisis and critical need with very little resource being directed to the often lower-cost, proactive and preventative work that can make significant budget savings long-term.

Where people would have previously found the preventative support services they needed from within the community sector we are now finding these community services and provisions closed or cut due to austerity.

Those experiencing some of the most significant challenges in our communities feel let down and forgotten about, often feeling invisible until they reach a point of crisis. Administrative infrastructures and technical systems are expensive, and the gate-keeping of budgets and resources provide many hoops for people to jump through before they are able to access what they need; sometimes being declined help or support altogether at the end of these long processes whilst their personal crisis situation is escalating.

The number of people needing support in our communities is growing, as medical advances help people with complex health needs to live longer; and we have an ever increasing population of older people.

We are becoming ever-more reliant on unpaid family carers to prop up our system. The administration of the support for those with assessed needs often sits with personnel in Local Authority roles who have no prior knowledge of the person or their life circumstances; and do not have the time to build a relationship with them as a foundation for understanding what support makes most sense for them.

Power sits heavily weighted within these statutory structures and not with the individuals or their communities; and there is a reluctance to share power and control.

There are many positive iterations of good ideas and approaches which work well at a small neighbourhood or community level but local areas often lack acknowledgement, support and guidance for these to be established well and become sustainable. These innovations are most powerful and meaningful when they remain self-managed and are not adopted or controlled by the statutory infrastructures and the unnecessary bureaucracy accompanying these; so that the innovation and momentum remains at the local level and in the hands of those who understand it best.

Areas have adopted and developed Community Circles. A Community Circle is an open group of people who meet together to learn and share. There is no criteria to join, and often the common theme which brings everyone together is their connection to a given neighbourhood area. People have an opportunity to share what is happening for them and to listen as others share. There is an opportunity to express needs, wants and ideas and to exchange gifts, skills and assets with one another. Community Circles are sometimes facilitated by an independent person, and captured in graphic format. The meetings often end with a shared community meal which everyone is free to contribute to and participate in.

There is some growing evidence to support these approaches; but in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, we now have a prime opportunity for collection and analysis of the data (both qualitative and quantitative) to enable a robust comparison between traditional commissioning approaches and the community-led approaches we are discussing here.

In some cases, innovation is recognised but quickly ‘blue-printed’ or standardised as a ‘service model’ which then becomes part of a tendering and commissioning process to roll out the idea (with an underlying assumption that this will work for everybody as a universal concept). This immediately dilutes the value it was created for; promoting a competitive environment between providers in the marketplace who are motivated by financially sustaining their organisation and generating surplus. We are still seeing many more examples of the ‘Professional Gift model’ in action: “as a professional, I will decide what is best for you and what you need” rather than the ‘Citizenship model’: “I am a citizen who pays into my local economy. I can access the support of professionals and services if I need it; but I can determine what support makes best sense for me as a citizen within my local community”.⁶

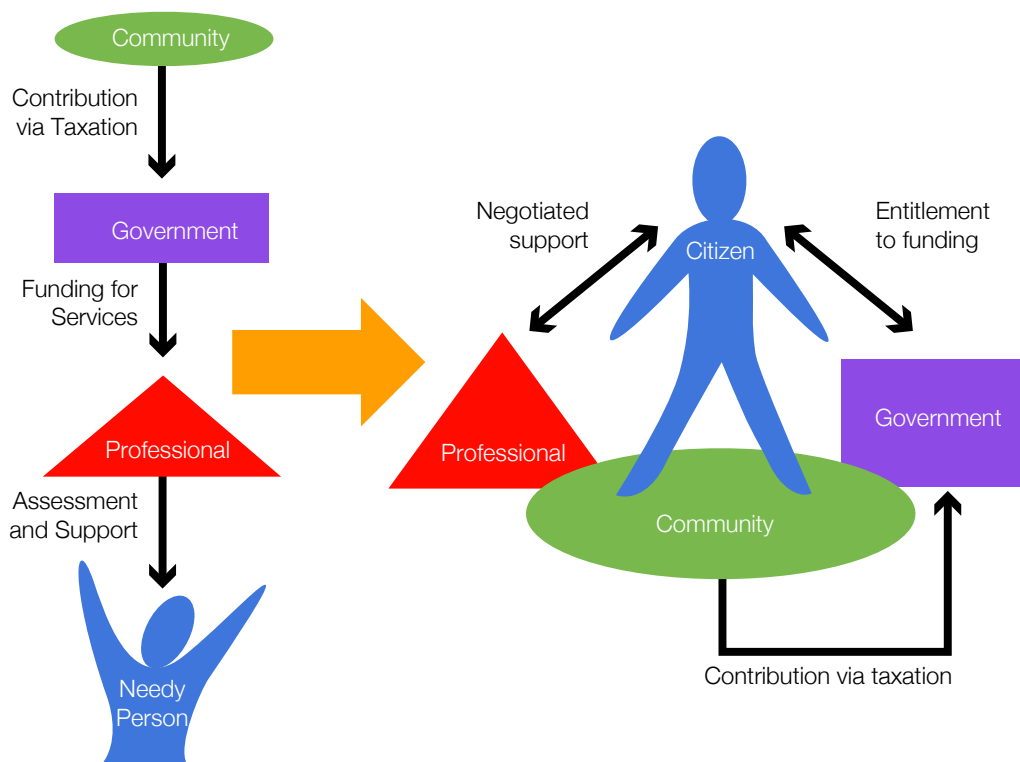


Figure 2. Professional Gift Model and Citizenship Model

Over the recent decades, we have observed a re-hashing of the system: seemingly to drive improvements and efficiencies, to continue delivery under austerity and often in response to changes in government policy. The personnel structures, workspaces, IT systems, training and the policies are updated or restructured. Unfortunately, we often see that the resulting impact on the individual and the community is still the same and that they still hold no power or control over the resources which are designated for their support. It is simply the structures and administration which change.

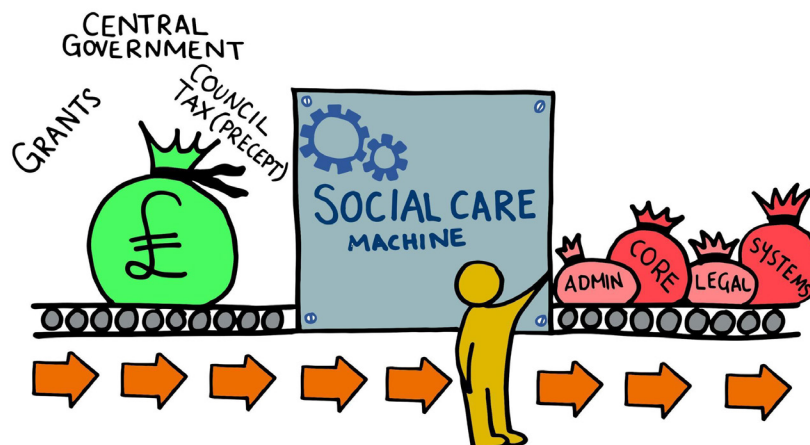


Figure 3. The social care machine

We have reached a point in society due to Covid-19 and the redirection of resources for immediate response to the pandemic; where the support and the resources available from local authorities to meet the needs, is now insufficient. The ideal of community that has been discussed for many years has now become real, and the resulting local response has become the glue which is holding families and neighbourhoods together during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Organisations and resources that were previously overlooked are now being embraced and placed at the centre of meeting local need. This includes churches and faith groups; associations and clubs without formal membership structures and even neighbours on the same street who have become connected. Many of these responses have been 'digital' and the rapid development of online communities is increasing with each week of 'lockdown' as people are having to find new ways to stay connected to the world outside of their household.

In these unprecedented times, the entity of community is strengthening; and it is opening up new and more efficient, imaginative ways of connecting and being resilient. If we begin to explore freeing up the resources that are currently tied up in costly infrastructure could we unlock our potential to emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic as a stronger, more connected and equal society?

Is there an opportunity for us to start addressing the gap between the richest and the poorest, those with the most advantage and those who are marginalised, by creating a far more level platform of asset exchange, sharing, giving and connection?

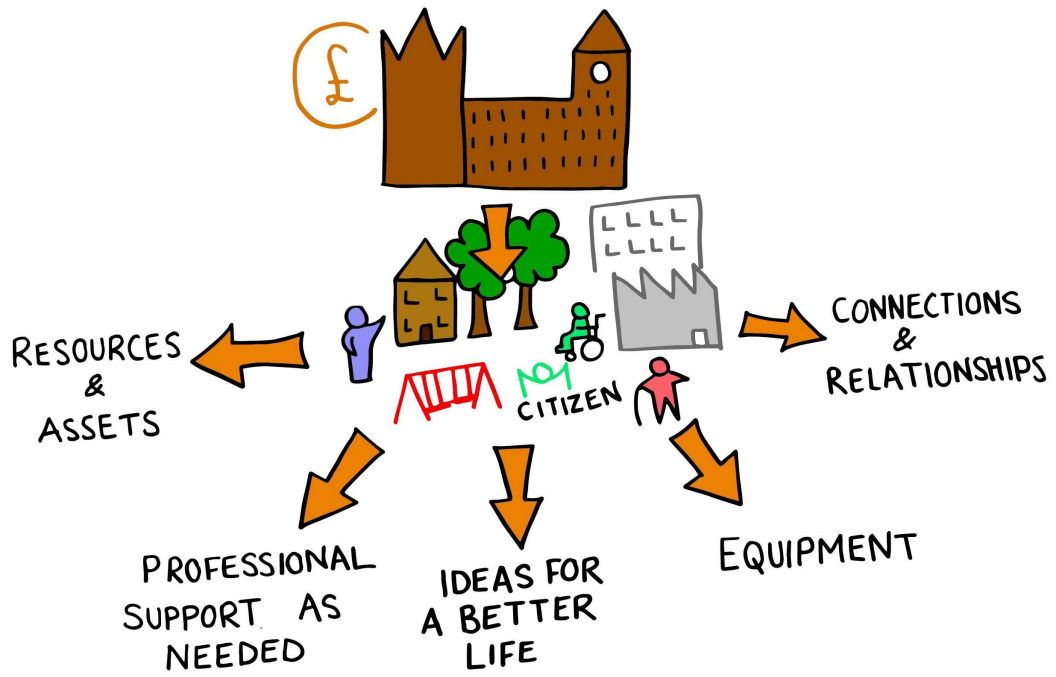


Figure 4. Community Strength

3. Tension between the ‘now’ and the ‘vision’

We’ve explored the vision of a better society, and we’ve summarised the current situation; but currently there is a vast gap, and a ‘pull’ between the two positions.

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought into sharp focus the reality of challenge and deprivation which many people are facing; and it has stripped us of many of the mechanisms, support structures and avenues we would ordinarily have harnessed in order to reach the vision.

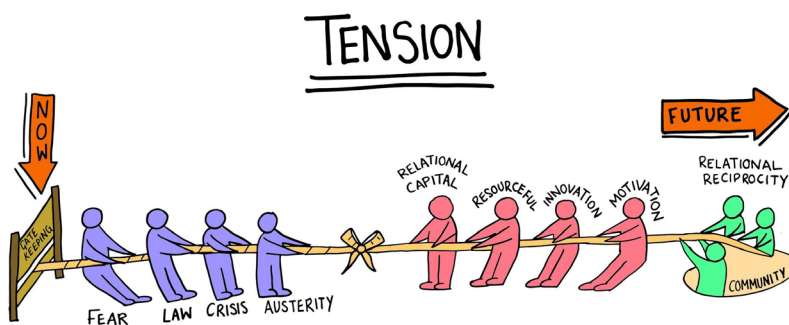


Figure 5. Tension

J is a young adult who lives at home with his parents. He has a learning disability. At the start of lockdown he was waiting to start a new supported work placement. This all ground to a halt when lockdown commenced. All of J’s usual activities, natural networks of friends and ‘safe’ people who could support him to access social and community activities stopped due to people being isolated in their own households. A short breaks provider had been identified to allow J and his parents to have regular time apart and to assist him with developing his independence skills. The short breaks provider

was unable to confirm the placement due to the Covid-19 circumstances. J grew very anxious with the lack of routine and the loss of his usual activities and connections in the community, feeling unable to cope at home. This eventually led to hospital admission and J becoming sectioned under the Mental Health Act, followed by many assessment, intervention and planning meetings. The loss of J's usual support structures and connections resulted in him entering the Mental Health system - something he had previously not encountered.

After years of austerity, we are used to budgetary tensions - being expected to achieve more with less money. During times like this explorative conversations involving the local authority about engaging, connecting and being open are less likely to happen. Those employed by local authorities are often resistant to these types of conversation because they may take on implied responsibility by engaging with the discussion.

We often observe an insular response. In recent years and especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, adult social care funding is being funnelled toward crisis response. We have an increase in our ageing population and those with complex needs, meaning that there isn't enough money to support everyone. The King's Fund have recently provided figures on the increased social care need in the UK.⁷

We are experiencing system exhaustion - both from within the social care system and outside of it. Unpaid carers with no respite support provision, overloaded professionals, social workers carrying out assessment and budget allocation functions rather than actual social work; all demonstrating an under-resourced, inefficiently administered and over-stretched system.

We are also anticipating a system overwhelm following the Covid-19 pandemic, when Local Authorities resume assessment, re-assessment and review of those who require support. There is a risk that the smaller, locally-based organisations who have been restricted from providing their usual offers of support will lose their position in the market and be replaced by larger corporate provider organisations who have been able to financially withstand the economic pressures of the pandemic.

The local interpretation of legal structures sometimes holds back innovation; such as the conflict between commissioning rules and Direct Payment guidance and the arrangements which are made for Individual Service Funds. This can vary between each Local Authority area due to the agenda of individuals in specific leadership roles. Continued gatekeeping of local authority resources would stifle the drive to move forward towards

the vision; and those doing the gate-keeping could experience a real conflict between their job role and their value-base.

Gate-keeping also means that the skills and knowledge of local authority personnel is not being put to best use to drive innovation because they are wrapped up in a statutory function which is no longer effective. Innovations and proposals to try doing things differently are often met with fear, anxiety of the unknown and a risk-averse response. Alternatively they may be reduced to a watered-down 'safer' version which decision-makers feel more comfortable with (in keeping with what they are accustomed to) and resulting in no change to what we have seen previously.

Situations which occur on such a large scale as the global Covid-19 pandemic and the floods which hit the UK in late 2019 and early 2020 highlight to us how resourceful and motivated people can be when they are forced to look at responding in a different way. We have seen this in the way that people living on the same street who did not know each other before the Covid-19 pandemic are now connecting through neighbourhood support groups online; help and support cards; WhatsApp chat groups and many other ways of connecting and relating.

Imagineer has developed and circulated an online resource pack called 'Support Your Street' for people who want to be helpful, but need some ideas to get started.⁸



Figure 6. Support Your Street

What we are now witnessing is an evolution of relational reciprocity (one-anothering) and the building of relational capital which makes the activities of community resilience meaningful; and with everyone involved being personally invested.



Figure 7. Sharing - Swap - Give

People in a community share, swap, give and receive resources. They build trust with each other and over time they build relational capital as they journey together. We see the most powerful examples of this type of relational activity when it is in action at a small local neighbourhood level.

Examples:

- Local joiner offers to fix a neighbour's garden gate
- Offering to walk a neighbour's dog
- Going shopping and collecting prescriptions for people who are 'shielding' and unable to leave their home
- Sharing of old mobiles or devices so that isolated people can access online connection such as Skype; Zoom; WhatsApp

The community is viewed and embraced by its members as a 'whole', rather than a collection of labels and categories of need. People seem to be instinctively subscribed to the value of inclusion "together we are better", and "everyone matters".

Time becomes the most valuable and precious commodity with which to exchange assets, skills and help. Time is equal for and equal to all members of the community and can be fairly traded when no monetary value is attached to it. We see wonderful examples of this with models such as ‘time-banking’ and ‘skills exchange’, and other informal exchanges which are based on relational transaction.

There are many amazing examples of community resilience and innovation happening, but they’re not widely shared or recognised because they sit outside of statutory duty and provision- often treated as a ‘nice idea’ rather than a ‘right’; and a sensible and efficient way of using resources.

Commissioning processes and business cycles inhibit innovation and ‘lock in’ systems and processes (such as framework contracts); making change and creativity difficult.

4. Who would be involved?

Since 2010, Imagineer has been established and operating as a community interest company (CIC) emerging from the primary activity of delivering independent support brokerage. The functions of a support broker can be very broad; but in its simplest sense, independent support brokerage is about helping somebody to take control and have a life which makes sense to them. Since the forming of In Control and the National Brokerage Network in the UK after the introduction of the Direct Payments Act 1996, support brokerage has been primarily focused with the activity of Self-Directed Support, that is: the activity of taking control of funding allocation for health and social care support in the form of a Personal Budget, Personal Health Budget and more recently Individual Service Fund (ISF).

Support brokerage is one of a number of approaches collectively known as ‘Strengths-based approaches’ which all have the common theme of starting with exploring what is strong in a person’s life and available to them and helping them to build on that to increase resilience; and identify their future goals and aspirations and working towards them. This can be summarised using the 7 Keys to Citizenship which are: Meaning, Freedom, Money, Home, Help, Life and Love.⁹

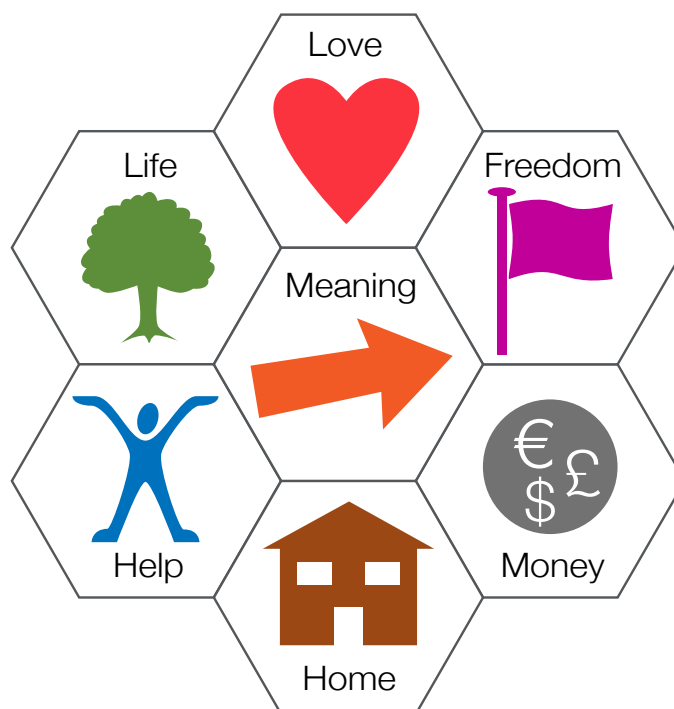


Figure 8. 7 Keys to Citizenship

The person (the citizen), is in the driving seat of their life (which is shown as a vehicle), and the support broker acts as a passenger who can assist by putting ‘fuel’ (eg. Strengths-based approaches) in the vehicle and helping the person to navigate on their journey.

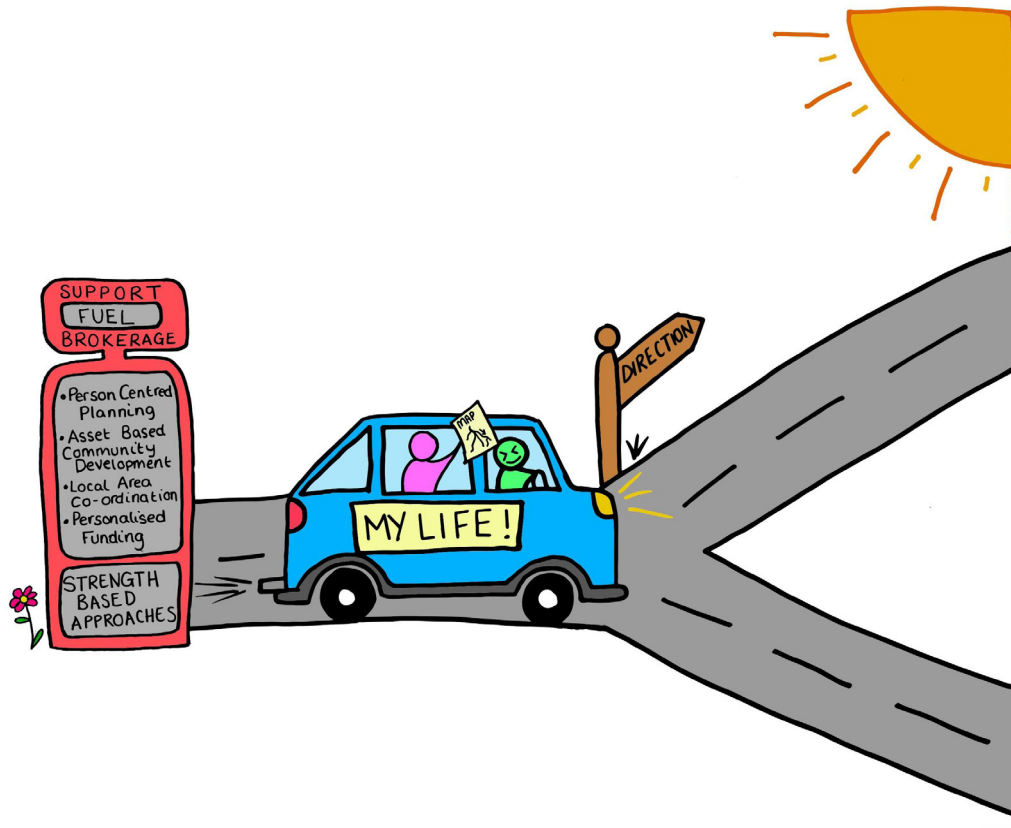


Figure 9. Life in the driving seat

One of the functions of a support broker can be to assist the person with identifying the assets in their life and in their local community. This helps to frame the discussion with the person about what is possible.

A similar theme exists in approaches such as ‘community circles’ which can work with a local group of people collectively identifying and sharing assets (see the example on page 9).

Within the statutory funding models for adult social care, there are some mechanisms which give the person more (or complete) control over the funding which has been designated for their support. The slow uptake in personal budgets seems to be due to the poor quality information provided to people and also, (equally importantly) the perceived lack of choice of things to do with the budget.

Somerset CLS work has demonstrated increased growth of local support options and consequently they have increased Direct Payment uptake.¹⁰

This indicates that there is a three-pronged approach to promoting the increased uptake of personal budgets:

1. Build/develop/encourage growth of community based support
2. Increase the quality and depth of information provided for people considering Personal Budget options, and that in turn will encourage more people to take advantage of personal budgets.
3. Remove the 'gate-keeping' policies which prevent power and control being shared with citizens.

Individual Service Funds (ISFs) are an under-utilised but emerging approach which offers a ‘half-way’ arrangement between a commissioned service (where the Local Authority has full control) and a Direct Payment (where the person has full control).¹¹ An ISF is an approach which fully involves the person (and those important to them) in the design and delivery of their support; whilst an agreed organisation takes responsibility for the administration and management of the fund.

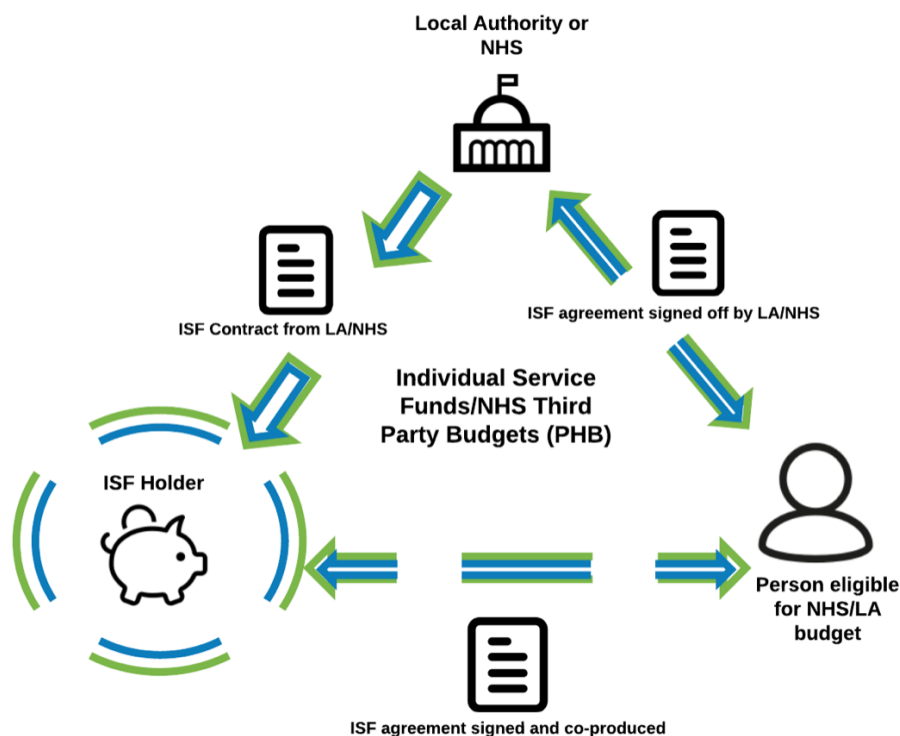


Figure 10. Individual Service Funds (ISFs)

Independent support brokerage can be applied as part of the ISF approach in helping the person to identify strengths and opportunities to develop their own plan. By their very nature, ISFs can enable people to forge community connections, develop resilience within their local communities and live as citizens within their own homes rather than being segregated in specialist services. Although ISFs are mentioned within the Care Act multiple times as a model of delivery under a commissioned service it does not appear within Care Act legislation as a statutory duty, and therefore Local Authorities are not required to have this available to people who are eligible for a social care budget.

However, the emergence of Personal Health Budgets and Integrated Personalised Commissioning guidance places a specific duty on health authorities to have an Individual Service Fund offer available; and often it is the Local Authority who acts as the lead commissioner in joint commissioning arrangements for Continuing Health Care (CHC) and Mental Health Act Section 117 funding. Therefore Individual Service Funds are becoming established within statutory guidance and are gaining momentum. (This is found in part 6a of *Personal Health Budgets-The National Health Service and Commissioning board and Clinical commissioning groups (Responsibilities and standing rules) Amendment regulations 2013*.)

So in terms of involvement, there can be a range of roles and functions involved in supporting strengths-based approaches which have been summarised into three broad categories below: (Individual and community; Unpaid; Paid skilled/professional support). The list is not exhaustive but serves to illustrate the range of roles.

Individual and community

- The person
- Family members
- Friends
- Neighbours
- Peer brokers
- Circle of support/circle of friends

Unpaid connections

- Voluntary orgs
- Resident associations
- Neighbourhood groups

- Community circles
- Independent support broker
- Charities
- Social Enterprises
- Time banks/skills exchanges
- Independent advocate

Paid skilled/professional support

- Independent support broker
- Support provider organisation
- Charities
- Social Enterprises
- Personal Assistants
- Independent advocate
- Activity based organisations
- Community businesses and services
- Social worker
- Occupational Therapist (including equipment and technological solutions)
- Speech and Language Therapist
- Physiotherapist
- Local Area Coordinator
- Social prescribing link worker
- Community Connector

The Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach fits within the range of Strengths-based approaches and is “an approach to sustainable community-driven development”.¹²

Although this approach is specifically related to the assets of a community, there are many aspects of the methodology and the philosophy which can be applied as a person-led approach to supporting individuals.

The approach can be summarised in Table 1. Note that examples given in the table are not absolute. They can be positioned in the relevant section of the table according to local context and viewed through the lense of an organisation’s culture, leadership and purpose.

SERVICE-LED	TO	FOR
	<p>Local Needs Analysis (eg. Market Position Statements and Joint Strategic Needs Assessments)</p> <p>Commissioning compliance frameworks</p> <p>Statutory services</p> <p>Functions of skilled professionals</p> <p>Services</p> <p>Medical model</p> <p>Professional gift model</p>	<p>Charities</p> <p>Faith groups</p> <p>Social impact organisations</p> <p>Crisis advocacy</p>
	I know what's best for you	I'm here to help you, but my focus is on your 'needs' and 'deficits'
PEOPLE-LED AND COLLABORATIVE	WITH	BY
	<p>Co-production</p> <p>Consultation</p> <p>Independent Support Brokerage</p> <p>Citizen advocacy</p> <p>Peer advocacy</p> <p>Appreciative Inquiry</p> <p>Social impact organisations</p>	<p>ABCD</p> <p>Independent / Peer Support Brokerage</p> <p>User-led organisations</p> <p>Community-led initiatives</p> <p>Social model of disability</p> <p>Citizenship model</p> <p>Appreciative Inquiry</p>
	Let's look at this together - what's strong?	We are strong- let's work together to do this for ourselves

Table 1. How different approaches and methodologies are applied in the context of strengthening communities

5. Building strengths

In order to build strengths which enable us to reach the vision, we need to have a clear understanding of our own values- recognising that they influence our behaviour, our interaction with others and consequently the actions we will take. Our beliefs strongly influence our behaviour because they provide the lens through which we respond. Limiting beliefs can hold us back; so it is important we are able to recognise and respond to these.

We need to be able to:

- access information, advice and guidance
- recognise our own skills and knowledge
- connect with others who can offer the knowledge and skills we need identifying we may need to develop our skills through training
- understand our legal rights as a citizen
- have an understanding of how societal systems and structures work so that we know how to access help, support and resources when we need them

The building-blocks of self-determination are formed of our basic human needs (illustrated within Maslow's hierarchy of needs). The 'scaffolding' which supports a person to self-determine is made up of a number of 'support structures' and is surrounded by the 7 Keys to Citizenship which we discussed earlier. These are illustrated within Figure 11.

Reviewing and reorganising the way in which key functions within Local Authorities work is a key consideration in building strengths- particularly roles such as social workers who are often consumed with resource allocation tasks. Recognising assets in teams could be a way of identifying and harnessing valuable skills, knowledge and experience to help build strengths. Breaking down the barriers to communication, spending time in communities and making time for exploratory conversation are ways that we could open up this thinking further.

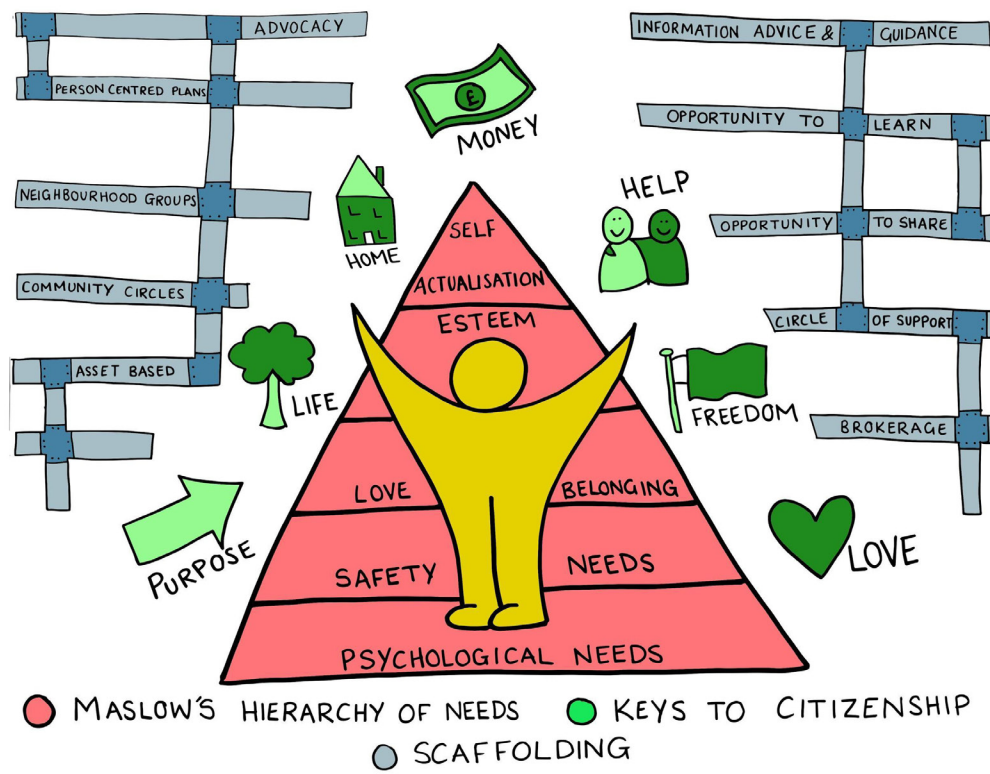


Figure 11. Scaffolding to build strengths

6. Where next?

We have explored the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on our Local Authority social care, health and welfare systems; on the economy and on wellbeing. We have identified the growing move towards better community cohesion and resilience, and we've examined some of the limitations which are inhibiting change and innovation. We now have the opportunity to examine what happens next following 'lockdown'. Most people would agree we won't ever return to the 'normal' we experienced before the pandemic. The question is: What could 'new normal' look like?

We'd like to pose some *what ifs* and we'd like to ask questions:

Changes to government policy

When the Care Act 'easements' are lifted we will be facing a new reality. At that point it would be logical to review the existing statute and to strengthen the elements which provide an opportunity for people as citizens to exercise their rights; take hold of the resources available for their support and wellbeing; and develop better connections to their local communities. Strengthening approaches such as ISFs in legislation could contribute to the realisation of the society which was alluded to in the original Care Act 2014 guidance.

We also need to think about the financial impact in a post-Covid-19 society and explore whether there are better ways to stimulate the economy using a fair mechanism such as Basic Income, replacing the inefficient Universal Credit mechanism.

Changes to systems and structures

Pooling of localised budgets and funding authority resources (such as integration of health and social care) could also lead to greater efficiency within systems- avoiding duplication of organisational structures, and making cost savings which could be passed to communities and individuals who are best placed to utilise the resource to the best effect. A realignment back to preventative work rather than crisis response, and greater focus on galvanising community assets. Moving social workers away from resource allocation and procurement tasks which require using time-consuming IT systems and back to a focus of upholding the rights and safety of the people they work with. Social workers could then focus on promoting a more

individual approach to service design, support planning and management of budgets. James Bullion, President of ADASS, in his speech at the ADASS virtual AGM 2020, puts it like this:

“We and our social workers should focus on freedom, independence, on safeguarding, on prevention, on good advice: so that we support good lives, and give dignity and respect.”

Radical change

If we are to follow the reasoning in this paper to the logical extreme; we arrive at a picture of a society where resources and power are completely devolved to local communities; with ‘Local Authority’ sitting outside of that arrangement as a resource that can be commissioned in by a local community... imagine how this upside-down version of society could dramatically change our trajectory in terms of equality and inclusion! Communities would become the primary authority concerned with determining response to their own needs. The Centre for Welfare Reform's *Neighbourhood Democracy* project is an approach that supports this.

Hilary Cottam explored some of these more radical scenarios in her project ‘participle’ and the book *Radical Help* which followed and described a range of social experiments aiming to examine, test and gather evidence about radical welfare reform.¹³

There is much more to be considered outside of the sphere of health and social care if we are to follow the vision for a society where people can “...live their best lives through having greater choice and control of their circumstances”. We need to understand the wider issues of social justice: reform of the welfare system which ensures an equal financial baseline for everyone (eg. Basic Income), challenging discrimination and a more detailed examination of how our current societal structures exclude or restrict many people.¹⁴

7. Conclusion

Community development is not a new idea, but the combination of austerity, environmental impact and the Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the movement. We have an opportunity to make changes to a system which is no longer fit for purpose and to use our resources in a far more efficient way by strengthening communities and placing power and resources into their hands. Rather than going directly to the corporate provider marketplace for solutions, there is a real opportunity for third sector and community-based organisations to offer local, creative and deeply rooted solutions by working directly alongside communities where they are based; and where strong relationships and connections exist.



Figure 12. Exploring the Strength of Community

This paper has been developed to stimulate discussion with:

- Public policy makers
- Think tanks
- Directors and commissioners of Social Care
- Directors and commissioners of Health Authorities
- Community organisations wanting to partner with others to become stronger and more effective
- Citizens

Further Reading

1. <https://www.cqc.org.uk/guidance-providers/adult-social-care/care-act-easements-it>
2. <https://www.ndti.org.uk/our-work/our-projects/community-led-support>
3. <https://www.thersa.org/about-us/media/2019/brits-see-cleaner-air-stronger-social-bonds-and-changing-food-habits-amid-lockdown>
4. PATH template: <https://inclusion.com/path-maps-and-person-centered-planning/path/>
5. A recording of a webinar exploring the themes in this paper is available at <https://citizen-network.org/resources/exploring-the-strength-of-community.html>
6. <https://www.centreforwelfarereform.org/library/unlocking-the-imagination.html>
7. <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/press/press-releases/social-care-system-crisis-point>
8. Contact Imagineer directly to request a copy of the 'Support Your Street' resource.
9. <https://www.centreforwelfarereform.org/library/keys-to-citizenship2.html>
10. <https://www.communitycatalysts.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Somerset-Year-3-report-final-public.pdf>
11. <https://www.centreforwelfarereform.org/library/growing-new-models-of-support.html>
12. <https://www.nurturedevelopment.org/asset-based-community-development/>
13. Cottam H (2018) Radical Help. London: Virago.
14. <https://www.ubilabnetwork.org>

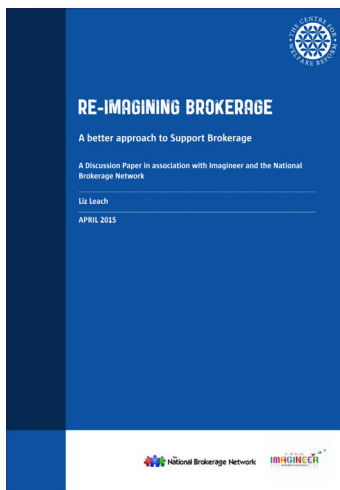
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Imagineer Development UK CIC is a social enterprise based in the North of England with a national reach, originally set up as a test bed for independent support brokerage in the UK. Imagineer is the hosting organisation for the National Brokerage Network, which is a community of practice for independent support brokers.

Imagineer provides a range of training in support brokerage, person-centred and strengths-based approaches. Liz and Sarah are both involved in delivering training, 'proof of concept' work and consultancy projects which focus on developing community resilience and embedding self-directed support across the UK.

To find out more visit: www.imagineer.org.uk

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