Think piece

Community Anchors

What Works Scotland Research Associate James Henderson reflects on the potential for community anchors to provide locally-led Scottish public service reform.

What Works Scotland aims to improve the way local areas in Scotland use evidence to make decisions about public service development and reform.

What Works Scotland is working with Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) and stakeholder partners to achieve its aims, namely to:

• Identify and better understand what is working and not working in public service delivery in Scotland, and how we can translate knowledge from setting to setting.

• Contribute to the development of a Scottish model of service delivery that brings about transformational change for people living in different places across Scotland.

What Works Scotland (2014-2017) is a collaborative between The Scottish Government, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the University of Edinburgh and the University of Glasgow.

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This Think Piece is one of a series of papers that What Works Scotland is publishing to share evidence, learning and ideas about public service reform. This paper relates in particular to the WWS **Community Engagement and Capacity Building** work stream.

James Henderson is a Research Associate for What Works Scotland, based at the University of Edinburgh.

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Summary points

- Public policy-making across the UK has sought to engage the community sector in public service reform. In Scotland, the Christie Commission links this to tackling the root causes of inequality and anticipates that the sector will be able to support highly-localised service design, delivery and accountability.

- Multiple-purpose, community-led organisations or community anchors – such as community development trusts and community housing associations – have considerable experience of: providing local services and advice and working with the public sector; generating local economic and community development activities; and of advocacy for community interests, needs and plans.

- The public sector – including Community Planning Partnerships – has a crucial long-term role in the development of effective community anchors across Scotland through: establishing ongoing and open dialogue with the community sector on an 'equal-footing'; transferring relevant public assets into community ownership to establish financially viable organisations; and recognising the leadership, advocacy and planning roles of anchors within their communities.

- To sustain an empowered local democratic space able to work for and reflect on progress in tackling economic and social inequalities, community anchors working within working class and marginalised communities need to be at the forefront of developments within Scottish public service reform.

Introduction

The 2011 'Christie Commission' report argues for the roles of 'community' and third sector to be central to public service reform in Scotland, and illustrates a range of the 'hows' as to what this could be like. This paper considers one such 'how': the potential of multi-purpose, independent community-led organisations, often called **community anchors**, to lead on 'highly localised' service design and delivery, and related local economic, social and democratic developments.

The first sections of this paper describe a common understanding of a community anchor 'model' as developing in Scotland and the UK, including the roles anchors play in practice and their position within policy-making. Their relevance to the Christie Commission public reform agenda is then explored, and the opportunities that anchors offer Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) for joint-working and leading local development are illustrated. The crucial shift needed in the approach of CPPs to working with and supporting the community sector is then considered. The paper concludes by pointing to the potential for community anchors to support the development of a distinctively local democratic approach to public service reform – a 'Scottish approach', for instance.

Understanding community anchors through policy and practice

Thinking on the role of multi-purpose, community-led organisations dates back at least to John Pearce's (1993, 2003) advocacy for a 'community economy'. Pearce draws from across a range of Scottish and UK community sector developments to write of a 'core community enterprise' that is locally controlled and leads local economic and social development. Stephen Thake (2001), in a report for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, later coins the term 'local anchor' – then 'community anchor' – for neighbourhood regeneration organisations that enable local community development, represent community interests, and work in partnership with the public sector.[1]

Thake's work proved influential on New Labour UK Government (1997-2010) policy and the concept of community anchors entered into their lexicon; initially through community development policy (Home Office, 2004) and later through emphasis on community ownership (Thake, 2006; Making Assets Work, 2007). The term, however, has fallen into disuse under the UK Coalition Government (2010-15) despite their own interest in localism.

Whereas in Scotland, the SNP Scottish Government has continued to assert the role of community anchors since its 2009 Community Empowerment Action Plan (Scottish Government & COSLA, 2009). Its 2011 regeneration policy (Scottish Government, 2011a) advocates for a community-led regeneration where anchors provide and build capacity for local leadership, local development and provision of services and activity. **Community development trusts** (CDTs) and **community-based housing associations** – also known as community-controlled housing associations (CCHAs) – are recognised as the most likely sources of community anchors.[2] Other potential sources of anchor organisations are recognised too including **community councils, community social enterprises, community food groups and community-led health projects**.

Governments of the 'centre-left' across the UK have then seemingly sought to significantly develop the role of the community sector and wider third sector to support their economic, social and welfare reform programmes. Thus, community anchor organisations have received a certain level of increasing state support and policy attention. Given this relationship to government, and the current policy environment of public spending constraint, some have also pointed to the risks of third and community sectors, and civil society more generally, in implementing and sustaining policies that are unlikely to challenge the inequalities that so many communities face. For

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[1]There is potential for confusion here between UK usage and US usage of the term 'community anchors'; the latter is diverse and can include local public sector, private sector and 'non-profit' organisations – with larger bodies sometimes termed 'anchor institutions' – involved in local regeneration and development.

[2]Most community development trusts will be well-positioned to undertake the community anchor role, given their multiple functions and local democratic ethos. Similarly, whilst not all community-controlled housing associations seek the community anchor role, many do and often have developed their own community development trust to support this way of working.

instance, their potential, if unwitting, role in supporting the UK Coalition Government austerity programme and an associated marketization of public service delivery (Coote, 2010).[3]

In parallel, the community anchor model has been actively developed and promoted by some community sector bodies. In Scotland, the Scottish Community Alliance (SCA)[4] – previously called Local People Leading – describes anchor organisations as (Local People Leading, 2008a):

• community controlled – community of place;

• having multiple functions;

• providing a community hub;

• providing and developing local leadership;

• supporting the design and delivery of local services; and

• owning and managing community assets e.g. property and other resources.

The model is understood to be relevant to urban, rural and remote communities. It focuses on community sector organisations with a long-term commitment to one particular local community of place – rather than say third sector organisations working across a number of communities. Community anchors will vary significantly in size, turnover and local context but are understood to share this same sense of local commitment and to seek multi-purpose, enabling and leadership roles. Further, shared community sector networks generate common discussions on practice, actions and challenges, and on ethos and 'directions of travel' – in effect, community sector theory and practice.[5] These networks build the sector's knowledge of the wider policy context and generate an 'outward-looking' approach to the sector's work (Henderson, 2014).

The SCA also points to an understanding of community-led regeneration where (Hardie, 2012):

• community anchors play a leadership role;

• independent income streams are created to support financially-sustainable, independent-minded local organisations; and

• there is a community plan or charter determined by local people.

It argues that the public sector has a crucial enabling – or blocking – role to play and needs to approach community-led regeneration by seeking respectful, genuine partnership and a shift away from top-down models of working.

'Christie' and the challenge of 'community' for public service reform

The Christie Commission describes the context of public service reform in Scotland as one of significant public spending constraint, changing demographics and stubborn inequalities. It argues that public services have previously prioritised coping with the consequences of such inequalities: a meeting of 'failure demand' rather than a *prevention* of inequalities in the first place. The Commission's report (Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services, 2011) therefore advocates a reform that meets these challenges through four inter-relating principles or narratives of 'participation', 'partnership', 'prevention' and 'performance' – with some discussing this as an emerging 'Scottish model' (Mitchell, 2015).

The Scottish Government (2011b) has responded to the Commission by seeking to broadly pursue such a direction-of-travel including emphasis on community empowerment and the third sector role.[6] It is enabling this currently through the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 and reform of Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs), and the Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Act 2014 and development of Health and Social Care Partnerships (HSCPs). It also continues to give emphasis to the third sector: for instance, through Public Social Partnerships between public and third sectors to design innovative services; the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014 and its sustainable procurement duty; and the development of Third Sector Interfaces (TSIs).

The Christie narratives provide a 'library' of ideas for supporting such service reform – and for seeking wider impacts on the economy and society. The 'Participation' narrative is most immediately concerned for 'community' – of place and interest – in that it asserts service-user and community empowerment to be fundamental to public service design and delivery. The Commission therefore writes of a 'co-production' between services and 'community' as taking four broad forms:

• working directly with service-users and carers;

• community engagement – local communities of place and wider communities of interests;

• partnering with third sector organisations working with users, carers and communities; and

• joint-working with **independent community organisations**, e.g. development trusts.

The expectation is that such a co-production will also deliver across the other narratives too, providing:

• **preventative** approaches including *"community-led solutions … (to) address the highly localised nature of multiple deprivation" (2011:58, 59)*;

• quality, person-centred services and related health and well-being outcomes (**partnership and performance**).

Further, the Commission positions such co-production within considerable organisational and democratic change:

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[3]Coote (2010) is writing specifically in relation to the UK Coalition Government (2010-15) approach to 'austerity', the third sector, citizenship and localism. Others, for example Danson & Whittam (2011) and Moore & McKee (2014) identify the Scottish Government as seeking partnership with the third and community sectors within state and collective provision. More generally, some (for instance, Cochrane, 2007) have pointed to the focus on 'community' and the third sector by government(s) as essentially concerned to support their economic and social policy focus on extending the roles of market and private sector (termed 'neo-liberalism'). Here, the community and third sectors are to step in when and where the market and private sector is considered or found to be ineffective ('market failure') and state and public sector considered unsuitable or ineffective.

[4]View the SCA website and listing of its 18 member bodies at: http://www.localpeopleleading.co.uk/.

[5]Community sector advocates often write of a local democratic, egalitarian and 'mutualist' ethos of community ownership and local economic and social development (Pearce, 1993, 2003; Henderson, 2014).

[6]Similarly the Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy (2014) grounds its recommendations for increased local democratic control in principles that include subsidiarity, participation, transparency, inter-dependency and individual and community well-being.

We believe the debate must be broader, encompassing deeper questions about the design and delivery of public services, their values and ethos. We need to consider the responsibilities of individuals and communities alongside organisational cultures. We need to embed openness and democratic accountability and examine the means of control and authority. We believe these broader themes are at the heart of how the future delivery of public services can be improved. (Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services, 2011: 31)

A central challenge for all CPPs is, then, 'the how' of delivering on a complex public service reform where 'community' and local democratic accountability are understood to be fundamental:

… public service organisations engage with people and communities directly, acknowledging their ultimate authority in the interests of fairness and legitimacy. (Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services, 2011:33)

In highlighting the role of independent community organisations, the Commission points to the opportunity to explore the potential of community anchors to support such complex change.

Community anchors in practice

A growing body of research has considered the workings of multi-purpose, community-based organisations through a community anchor model. In Scotland, for instance, research on:

- community development trusts by the Development Trust Association Scotland – illustrating urban and rural trusts and recognising the anchor approach (Walker et al., 2010);[7]
- community housing associations as community anchors (McKee 2011, 2012; ODS Consulting 2013);
- community-led health organisations and their potential as multi-purpose, community led organisation (Community Health Exchange, 2011).[8]

The research conveys the complexity of the work of anchors and their potential to deliver local services, aid community development and champion local interests. Henderson (2014) examines the practices of three community anchors working in distinctive contexts:

- Govanhill Housing Association **(GHHA)** in an urban and multi-ethnic, working class community in Glasgow;
- Creetown Initiative **(CI)** in a socio-economically mixed village and parish in rural Dumfries & Galloway; and
- Northmavine Community Development Company **(NCDC)** in a remote island community on Shetland: 'basic costs of living' are high and accessing services and employment challenging.

Building from the SCA's initial narrative on community anchors, this research illustrates the anchor model as relevant to community sector practice in different contexts. The range of roles undertaken by the three anchors, include:

Partnership-working with the local public sector: with each organisation having sustained varied partnerships, for instance:

- *GHHA* through the development of a multi-service Govanhill Service Hub with the local authority, health services, Police, Fire & Rescue and third and community sectors – and within the local CPP operational structures;[9]
- CI working with the local authority to provide youth work, local transport planning and local economic support services/activities – and joint-working with local primary school; and
- NCDC working with the Shetland Islands Council's Economic Development Unit and Highland & Islands Enterprise to sustain local services – community shop, fuel pumps and housing.

Community governance, leadership and dialogue: each organisation worked through a Board or management committee of local people and a related local connected-ness with community organisations, groups and networks. Each illustrated a range of activity – community plans, consultations and forums – to generate diverse community dialogue. For example: NCDC worked to create and then update a Northmavine Community Plan; GHHA and (its) Community Development Trust working with other local community organisations to generate a community sector forum – Govanhill Community Action (GoCA).

Local economic development: each organisation having developed their own community enterprises through, for instance, property-management, a community shop and potentially ownership of community renewables[10]. They also provided community enterprise and local business support, such as the provision of office and workspaces and other shared facilities. CI had, for instance, worked across local community organisations and groups, the local private sector, and with the local authority to deliver on-going local economic and social development activity. This seeks to improve community (public) spaces and tourism-related income generation through: managing a community woodland; developing public spaces e.g. town square, public art, and a community hall; running community events and festivals; and currently developing a social enterprise hub.

Social development – community building and local services: each organisation led or supported a range of community projects – environmental, educational and cultural – as well as providing or supporting local services e.g. a community shop (NCDC), Govanhill Services Hub, community hall (CI).

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[7]Callaghan, Danson & Whittam (2011) also usefully offer case-study research on five remote (highland and island) multi-purpose, community development trusts, without referring to the community anchor model.

[8]This publication includes six case-studies of community-led health organisations, with two – Ormslie Community Association in Thurso and Kingsway Court Health and Well-being Centre in Scotstoun in Glasgow – most obviously, but potentially others too, illustrating community anchor 'type' roles.

[9]See also the Glasgow Centre for Population Health's evaluation (2010-12) of the Govanhill Equally Well test site as part of the Scottish Government Equally Well initiative (Harkins, Egan & Craig, 2011; Harkins & Egan: 2012a, 2012b). This illustrates the roles of GHHA and local community sector in working with public services and in seeking to deepen community engagement and advocacy through the community sector forum (GoCA); participatory budgeting; working with community diversity; and lobbying the Scottish Parliament.

[10]Creetown Initiative has been developing a 'micro-hydro' scheme, and other development trusts have successfully developed community renewables usually through joint-ownership (Walker et al., 2010).

Advocacy for local community interests: each anchor actively worked to influence local and wider political processes and helped to locate funding for projects – usually with other local community sector organisations, including in each case the local community council. GHHA, for instance, has continued to work with community partners to advocate for increased state investment in and regulation of the crisis-ridden private rental tenement housing in Govanhill.[11]

Using the examples above, the *potential* for community anchors to work effectively across all four Christie narratives is visible. For example:

- *Participation:* empowering communities to co-produce local services – local community plans, joint-working, consultations, leading on particular public and/or community services;

- *Partnership:* improving partnership-working through active engagement with CPPs and public sector partners and connecting to 'community' issues and knowledge;

- *Prevention:* for instance, by supporting local employment generation and provision of training and support, and improving access to public services and benefits/welfare; and

- *Performance:* using these same vehicles of participation, prevention and partnership to increase and build local democratic accountability and advocate for relevant services.

The potential for anchors to support a deepening of local democratic activity is illustrated across the range of their actions. Each anchor was, for example, well-placed to support and develop:

- *local participation:* through the governance of community organisations; the use of community networks; and support for community activism and volunteering;

- *local deliberation:* through deepening discussions over time of local community plans; public service design; and community sector development; and

- *local representation:* joint-working with community councils and local authority councillors; and by increasing the extent and diversity of participation in representative bodies.

'What works' in supporting community anchor and community sector development

Research and commentary from both Scotland (McKee, 2012; Henderson, 2014) and England (Weaver, 2009; Hutchison & Cairns, 2010), points to the receptivity of the public sector as fundamental in the development of successful independent community-led anchors and organisations. Max Weaver (2009) crystallises the working relationship between anchors

and public service bodies or service commissioners as one needing a long-term, enlightened approach from public agencies – terming this 'relational contracting' – rather than short-term 'partnership-working' based on projects alone.

If a CPP is to actively support the development of complex, multi-purpose (holistic) community anchors, then short-term thinking will be of little use in building organisations of substance. CPPs and the public sector must look to the long-term and invest the necessary resources in anchors and the community sector. The following key areas of local policy and practice are therefore crucial for CPPs to apply:

Dialogue between CPPs and the community sector: only through discussion between the public and community sectors can the necessary trust and understanding be built to generate suitable expectations and relevant joint-working. It will require a shift in the working culture of individual CPPs and other commissioning agents if they are to open themselves to serious engagement with the community sector and 'communities' (McKee, 2012).

One-size fits all won't work: as illustrated above, the sector and its anchors are highly diverse: GHHA has 40 years of experience and significant organisational resources, whilst CI and NCDC are much smaller and in early stages of development.[12] Opportunities for shared-working and local development will be specific to local contexts and organisations. It takes patience over the long-term in order to build community anchors with both the necessary financial resilience and the range of capacities relevant to local context (Weaver, 2009; Henderson, 2014).

Building a significant income-generating 'asset-base': anchors need sustainable, independent income streams to support their long-term role and local commitment (Weaver, 2009). CPPs are well-placed to support this through:

- suitable asset transfer of property from public to community ownership;

- support for developing appropriate community enterprise activity e.g. renewables; and

- *relevant* longer-term public sector contracts and partnership activity.

Valuing and evidencing multi-purpose anchors: given their holistic role and local focus, community anchors must be understood to be successful in different ways to more traditional single-focus organisations. Larger third and private sector organisations providing particular services across much larger geographies will have the advantages of 'economy of scale', but lack the 'economies of scope' and local commitment of anchors (Weaver, 2009; Hutchison & Cairns, 2010). Sampson

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[11]Including petitioning the Scottish Parliament and influencing housing legislation (Harkins, Egan & Craig, 2011). GHHA also worked to attract Sistema Scotland to set up its second project in Govanhill.

[12]This is a common pattern within the third sector. For instance, the recent Social Enterprise in Scotland Census 2015 records 60% of social enterprises having a turnover of less than £100,000, and a smaller number of very much larger players, in particular housing associations – view at: http://www.socialenterprisescotland. org.uk/files/1a891c7099.pdf. Likewise the Community Ownership in Scotland 2012 study notes a similar pattern of a very few larger community asset holders and a larger number of smaller organisations with a limited asset base – view at: http://www.dtascommunityownership.org.uk/sites/default/files/Community%20 Ownership%20in%20Scotland%20-%20A%20Baseline%20Study.pdf .

& Weaver (2010) have therefore proposed an anchor evaluative and mapping model that does justice to the complexity of their contributions.

Supporting anchors as leaders and advocates: community anchors – as illustrated above – have a fundamental role in championing diverse local community interests. This will involve them in advocating on behalf of the community with the local public sector, and through local elected politicians, and on a range of relevant issues. CPPs need to explore the value of such leadership and advocacy if they are to understand its longer-term benefits rather than fear particular short-term challenges (Hutchison & Cairns, 2010; Cotterill & Richardson, 2012; McKee, 2012; Henderson, 2014).

'Complex' local community visions: the role of community anchors in the development of (very) local community plans is a key opportunity for CPPs. Anchors have complex local knowledge and networks from which to support development of 'community-led' planning which understands the fuller range of local public and community services needed – and the wider economic, social and environmental context and challenges too (Hardie, 2012; Henderson, 2014).[13]

Concluding thoughts: community anchors and seeking empowered local democratic space

Community anchors and the community sector have the potential to create a distinctive and different dynamic within community planning; one in which democratic participation, deliberation and decision-making can come to the fore. Here is the opportunity for a 're-imagining of community planning' as an empowering local democratic space in which third and community sectors have fundamental roles (Escobar, 2015). Likewise, for place-based approaches to be actively used to generate new 'spaces' for participatory decision-making and problem-solving within public service development (Bynner, forthcoming; see also Fischer, 2009).[14]

The community sector presents a crucial opportunity for generating relevant service design and provision, in part because it can do myriad things within communities – 'get things done'. Yet also, and as significantly, because it can raise the issues that need to be 'spoken of' and advocated for if preventing inequality, meeting diverse local needs and focusing on social and economic outcomes are to take centre stage. The challenges are considerable: CPPs, and the public sector more generally, will need to commit to serious dialogue with the community sector. Suitable strategies and investments for the long-term development of community anchors, alongside realistic shorter-term aspirations and expectations, will be critical too. Where these are forthcoming, a distinctively 'Scottish approach' to public service reform could indeed be revealed.

Suggested further reading

The following provide accessible discussion and/ or illustrations of the roles of community anchor organisations:

Housing Associations and the Big Society: lessons from Scotland's community housing sector by Dr Kim McKee from the Housing Research Centre at St. Andrew University provides discussion and examples of community-controlled housing associations working as community anchors … view at: https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/media/dept-of-geography-and-sustainable-development/pdf-s/gsd/McKee_Carnegie%20 Report.pdf.

Communities taking control by the Development Trust Association Scotland provides examples of the range of activities that community development trusts – in urban, rural and remote contexts – are increasingly taking on … go to: http:// www.dtascot.org.uk/content/publications0 and then download from the publications list the 'DTAS Tabloid'.

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[13]See for instance, Neilston Development Trust's work with East Renfrewshire Council on a 20 year Town Charter (plan) for the town of Neilston. This has informed Supplementary Guidance within the Local Development Plan – view: http://www.neilstontrust.co.uk/what-we-do/town-charter/renaissance-town.html.
[14]For instance Glasgow's Thriving Places initiative involves community housing associations and other community organisations.

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