

Learning update:

We are already learning a lot about how Total Place is going but it's not always easy to know what it is that we're learning! Or to share that learning across all the players...

The purpose of these updates is to act as a gathering place for some specific aspects of learning from Total Place :

- **Systemic learning** - what are we noticing about how the different parts of the Total Place system interact, differ and collide?
- **Skills learning** - what sorts of new knowledge and skills are being used and developed as a result of a focus on Total Place?
- **Leadership learning** - how are individual leaders in Places and in Whitehall making sense of Total Place and their role in it?

Thinking about
difference



Leading on learning

One of the roles the Leadership Centre for Local Government is playing in Total Place is to offer some co-ordination of learning across the places as the projects move forward. In each Learning Update, we will choose a theme which has arisen in those conversations and produce an editorial for you on that subject.

This issue's theme is:

'The learning from difference'

Total Place – vive les differences!

Total Place sponsors, programme managers and advisers get asked a lot of questions – the most popular being “What is this Total Place thing anyway?” And one of their own frustrations has been that this is, in fact, a very difficult question to answer! Of course, there is already something political (small ‘p’) in the way each person chooses to answer – we tend to focus on those aspects of Total Place that suit our perspective and passions and ‘forget’ the other aspects. Hence, a somewhat bewildering diversity of view if you happen to be on the outside of the current Total Place community.

Besides, you will already have noticed that there is no tightly defined partyline on what Total Place is – and this is deliberate. The whole idea of Total

Place is to set up an environment for innovation where each Place gets the chance to define its own thematic thrust and specific approach within a set of broad parameters. There are significant differences of starting point and approach across the 13 pilots, so a one-size-fits-all methodology would be entirely inappropriate.

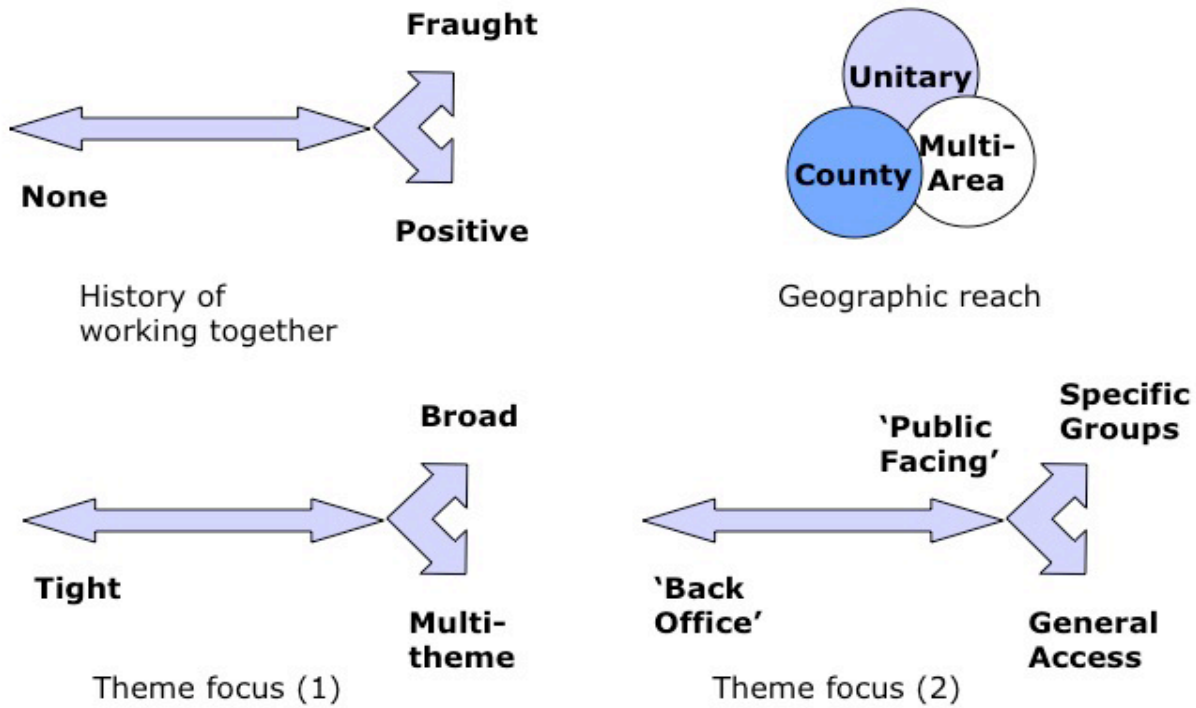
This diversity of approach gives us a unique opportunity to look at what works (and what doesn't) in terms of innovation and change in the civic arena. It will also help us to notice which types of approach work best in which settings and for what sort of problems. And the Leadership Centre will be working with you along the way to try to distil and disseminate as much learning from the variety as we can.

Different starting points

Across the 13 places we have a very heterogenous mix of geographical areas, histories and chosen themes. These different start points will inevitably lead to differences in how the work shows up in that place – the pre-judgements that players and the public have about work of this sort. Some places have an excellent history of working together across agencies, others have

had bad relationships in the past or are just starting out as a new geographic mix. They all have different demographics, social strengths and problem areas, economic situations. As we go on in the Total Place endeavour, we will start to notice how history and situation affect each programme, its level of success and the necessary approaches that fit that situation.

Figure 1. Different starting points



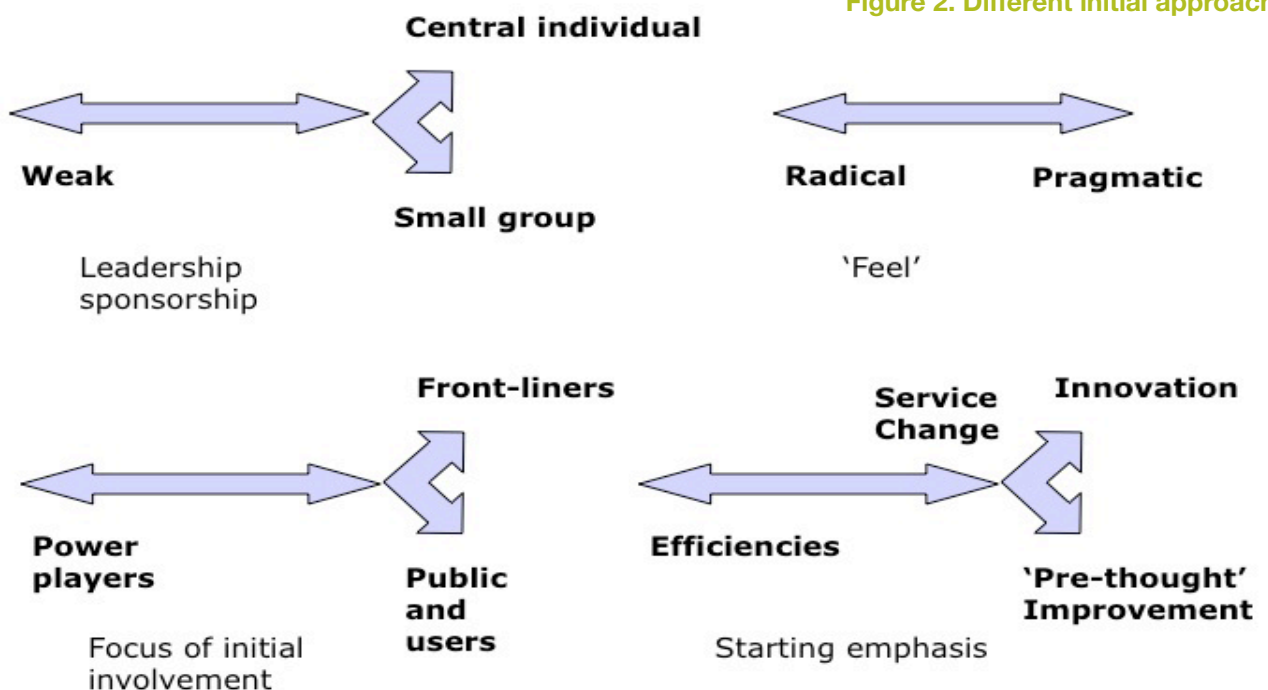
Different approaches

Inevitably, given the ring-fenced budgets and tight timescales of Total Place, choices are having to be made by each place about how they conduct their work. Differences are showing up between places around :

- Type and level of sponsorship
- Approach to involvement
- Level innovation and radicalism.

Probably the most heated discussions which arise during the ‘what is Total Place anyway?’ conversations centre around the degree of radicalism and innovation that each place wants to pursue. Are they content to do ‘what we’ve done before with some nice new language’ or are they looking to truly change *how* they do things as well as *what* they do?

Figure 2. Different initial approaches



Different approaches continued

- Are the power players willing to work with the public and service users in a new way (when those conversations are usually messy and often embarrassing)?
- Are we willing to start tackling contentious issues like state-sponsored (mandated?) behaviour change among citizens (when we know that any such approach will get labelled intrusion of the nanny state)?
- Are we willing to shift the funding focus from managing symptoms to prevention of the causes of problems (when the media will jump on us from a great height whenever our symptom management fails)?

We are not advocating where places should stand on these questions – they are a matter of choice and more radical options, by definition, contain

more risk. The leaders in each place will have to decide what level of risk they want to work with and what they can locally handle. What is important, however, is to make sure those conversations are had at the highest level in each place – sometimes each agency will be willing to take more of a gamble if it knows the others are willing to do so too.



‘Whitehall’ and ‘Local’ - Benefiting from our different perspectives

by David Bolger, Leadership Centre adviser

I was asked to put down some thoughts about the risk we all face of allowing ourselves to be caught in mental traps, specifically in the context of Total Place.

One of the things I’ve noticed over the years is that people develop strong opinions, often based on limited or no evidence that can be very difficult to shrug off. There are a number of reasons, but the one I notice most is that it’s altogether more convenient to stick with a long-held opinion. It simplifies your thought process and helps you feel at ease with like-minded colleagues. There are few more comforting and reliable supports than a well worn caricature.

I vividly recall that I was obliged to amend my own world view as Head of Mental Health in Scotland. More specifically; my discussions with service users exposed some fairly unpleasant prejudices lurking in my mind.

I’m hoping that we can avoid some of this kind of thinking in the context of Total Place. It can be tempting for those in localities to see ‘Whitehall’ as some kind of monolith, carefully planning and

co-ordinating every move; invariably in its own interests and always at the expense of all the other parts of the system. Even if we draw back from the image of a conspiring Whitehall, we might be inclined to assume (or hope) that it works in harmony, sharing knowledge freely and altruistically across Departments in the interests of good government, on behalf of the public.

Similarly, Whitehall Departments may misunderstand or underestimate the value of local endeavour. From London, the rest of the country may appear small, fragmented, in need of aggregation and co-ordination. The seduction of scale is considerable, particularly if it’s all you’ve ever known.

In fact, none of these easy caricatures hit the mark. Whitehall is actually made up of a number of very distinctive ‘personalities’. Each Department has its own culture and style and each Department pursues its own ends with vigour. However, there remain too few processes of joined up governance at national level to overcome the divisive effects of Departmental zeal. The national Cabinet doesn’t

function as Cabinets do at local level, for example; and processes designed to integrate policy across organisations and sectors, comparable to LSPs, are largely absent. Similarly, as we know, there are fault lines at local level too. The two tier model doesn't always work harmoniously, to say the least, and the record of cross-sector working is mixed.

I'm hopeful that Total Place can help us escape some of our mental traps. National government will need to change the way it thinks and behaves; so

too will local authorities and other elements of local governance. It may help if nationally and locally we can leave aside some of the caricatures that have developed over the years and start again.



'Us and we' - Insights from citizen engagement

by Lynne Haig, Director, TaylorHaig

Engaging with citizens helps generate new insights and inspiration; it fuels innovation and makes implementation a lot easier. Why? At one level, engaging with people brings different perspectives into the room. Often we work with people who share the same perspective on a problem and the same experiences of working with these issues. Engaging people with different perspective, mindsets and experiences brings new insights. And when these people are the ones with first-hand experience of the issues in question, they have a degree of expertise and credibility that's hard to ignore. When we suggest direct engagement with citizens, people often say, "We do that all the time". Then, when we go out and have human-being-to-human-being conversations, and they find it moving, a shift occurs.

At another level, not to be underestimated, direct engagement can be unnerving and can help create the kind of constructive disturbance necessary to create change. It seems surprising to say that public servants can be uncomfortable engaging with citizens. But without the armour of a job title and the formality of an agenda, it's a quite different experience.

Some people have reservations about working in this way. It increases complexity; many different perspectives are surfaced! There's a temptation to resist engagement and co-creation because of a perceived lack of control. It's easier to develop policy by reading reports and gathering evidence bases and too often we're trying to prove a hypothesis rather than really test it with the people who matter. Working co-creatively requires the

capacity to do so, new skills, tools and techniques. It's difficult to go from an expansive conversation to action, so a holding process or framework is needed.

I was with a fantastic, passionate team recently. A while ago I suggested some conversations with citizens to support their desired shift towards capable communities and greater social capital. They were unsure. It would raise expectations they would be unable to meet; citizens would give them a wish list or complaints they wouldn't be able to address. They couldn't just have a chat. It would generate all kinds of demands they couldn't satisfy. However, with support, they started talking with citizens and having conversations that mattered. They found that by engaging with people as people, they had constructive and creative conversations. Now they can hardly remember the time when they thought a conversation was a crazy, naive, unworkable ideal.

Informal conversations with vulnerable people have been the most profound. We stop thinking of these issues as things that happen to other people - 'them' - when we have a direct experience of the person. We start to think more of us and we when we have a relationship, direct or indirect, with the lived reality of peoples lives.



Rising to the challenge in Coventry

by Martin Reeves, Chief Executive of Coventry City Council

Coventry is in sub-regional partnership with Solihull and Warwickshire working on children's services and social care.

Leadership perspective

Total Place is an ambitious programme, with challenging timescales. It's no surprise that as a sub-region we felt this was just the kind of challenge we could rise to. Within the sub-region we are well versed in partnership working and enthusiastic about what can be achieved through collective energy. Leaders in a place should think more creatively about how to innovate and learn together; Total Place is key to driving this.

I see Total Place as a programme, which should find three kinds of solutions:

1. Those that are local and we should implement straight away.
2. Those that might need some more formal leadership to drive them through but can still be implemented locally.
3. The 'audacious asks' which need both Whitehall and public agencies on the ground to think and act differently. These will lead to a real step change in public service and drive out efficiencies whilst improving services.

In engaging our partners to think creatively about services, the discussions about the work streams, otherwise known as Deep Dives, are absolutely crucial. Partners need to feel that they are able to influence the Deep Dives so they will have some ownership in driving them forward. Although this can feel like a delay in the process and there is an understandable imperative to move on, it is time well spent. The clarity around scoping work streams has been crucial to us in the sub-region and means that partners can identify the right people to be involved, at the right time.

In mapping our Deep Dives, we want to take account of the large amounts of research that has already been completed and we are working with the IDeA and others to understand and digest what works. This will ensure that the learning that has already been done in public services is used as a platform to improve even further and crucially those interventions that do not work can be discarded, delivering efficiencies and leaving room to innovate.

Mapping the resources across the sub-region has indicated the large sums involved in public sector spend. This exercise was challenging for our finance colleagues and certainly if Total Place is to be rolled out nationally, some more support may be required for this aspect. The decision that we took to contact public agencies to provide the information, rather than using the model of Counting Cumbria which used publically available accounts, was helpful to raise awareness of the pilot. But it inevitably takes longer! Where this cannot be provided, we have tried to work on a pragmatic basis of apportioning spend and/or using the public accounts. In order to get maximum value from this exercise, a common methodology would be beneficial and allow for comparisons. Learning to accept that 'roughly right' is good enough and moving onto the Deep Dives has been a cultural challenge for us, but we're getting there; and now we need to press on.

I have been very heartened by the enthusiasm and energy that exists around the pilots. From the very beginning our pilot has been keen to work closely with Whitehall and has engaged with the Department for Children, School and Families as our lead department and our Whitehall Champion. This level of engagement will lead to much more sustainable solutions, delivered more speedily.

If we are to deliver new kinds of public services then we need to think in new ways about how to deliver them. Total Place is a cultural change. This means being open and honest with one another and mature enough to admit when things aren't going well. We are learning about ourselves throughout the journey and are keen to share our learning along the way with others; pilots and non-pilots alike. We have begun this by visiting other authorities who are considering adopting a Total Place methodology and are actively using the community of practice to share our experiences.

With thanks to Karen Ellis and the knowledge management team.