

Total Place

Luton and Central Bedfordshire Pilot

‘From Dependence to Self Reliance’
Final report to the Secretary of State for Communities
and Local Government, February 2010

Access to
benefits
integrated
offender
management

i. Foreword

From the outset, both Central Bedfordshire and Luton Councils have welcomed Total Place. In each authority, there has been unequivocal cross-party support and, amongst all project partners, palpable enthusiasm and significant, demonstrable commitment to making it a success. We have all welcomed the chance to develop a 'whole area' approach to identifying new ways of delivering better for less.

When the Secretary of State presented the opportunity last summer to "push at an open door for reform" and "rewrite the future of public services", we were keen to achieve radical change. We wanted service re-modelling that would improve the experience of local residents and deliver better value.

We also wanted to demonstrate clearly the cost-effectiveness of *local* partnership working. We firmly believed that improved collaboration between central and local government agencies, together with a better alignment between community needs and all available resources, could indeed transform public services.

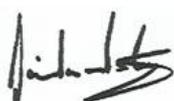
We believe our Total Place pilot has achieved this. From a considerable amount of research data and evidence, including the views of service users themselves, we have identified over 50 improvements that will have a significant impact in dealing with crime, cutting re-offending rates, improving access to benefits and removing barriers that discourage a return to work. At the same time, we have pinpointed significant cost-savings and improved value for money.

The project has embraced a new way for central government, local authority and voluntary agencies to address key community issues. We are confident it can be a forerunner for the way all public authorities will do business in the future.

The devil, as they say, is in the detail. Our recommendations pose challenges, not only for the project partner agencies involved, but for Whitehall – particularly with the very real prospect of serious financial constraints over the next few years. Some of our proposals will be solutions we can make locally; others will be a matter for central government decision or even legislative change. Some solutions proposed will be fairly easy to administer, others will require further investment.

But, having pinpointed the cause of so many problems within the system, we are duty bound to find solutions. What is clear to all Total Place partners in this area is that we cannot now just sit back and preside over the same old ways of working. This report outlines a considered way ahead.

As the sponsors of this pilot in Central Bedfordshire, Luton and Whitehall, we are indebted to the team engaged on this project who have, with enthusiasm and dedication, risen to the challenge we set, against a very tight time frame, and delivered what we consider to be a sound evidential case for change.



Cllr Richard Stay
Deputy leader, Central
Bedfordshire Council



Cllr Robin Harris
Deputy leader, Luton Borough
Council



Bill Stow
Director General, Head of
Policy and Support, Defra

ii. Executive Summary

Our theme

This Total Place pilot addresses some major challenges for Central Bedfordshire and Luton. Our choice of theme, *from dependence to self reliance*, has been informed by a number of key local factors. The sub-themes - integrated offender management and access to benefits - reflect some major concerns for residents. They also reflect opportunities to make a palpable, positive impact.

The area is one of striking contrasts. Some parts are relatively prosperous; others are amongst the most deprived in the country. Poverty is not confined to densely populated towns: Central Bedfordshire's rural environs also have, dispersed through them, low income groups who face the additional problems of poor public transport, isolation and problematic access to services. Throughout the area, and in line with national predictions, unemployment is expected to rise. There will be a sharp rise too in the elderly population, particularly amongst the over 75 age group. A considerable rise in demand for benefits is forecast - placing a further strain upon an already creaking system. In addition, increased poverty is likely to have an adverse impact upon crime levels. Although crime rates have fallen in recent years, fear of crime remains high.

Our findings

The benefits system is a complex, expensive behemoth, spreading across central and local government. There are over 50 benefits. The majority are complicated, require lengthy calculations and often overlap. Each has its own form, its own rules and its own costly administrative machinery.

Customers are baffled, frustrated and often unaware of the benefits they might be entitled to. Administering authorities must work within extensive legislation, with the DWP having to issue no fewer than 14 lengthy advice manuals for employees. Guidance on housing and council tax benefits runs to over 1,200 pages. There is no easily understood roadmap for benefits staff, far less customers. This complexity consumes the resources of a vast array of other agencies: nearly a third of Citizen's Advice Bureau time is spent helping people understand and claim their entitlements.

Spending on the benefits system - around £186.5 billion this year – accounts for nearly 28 per cent of government expenditure, outstripping the health budget by more than £67 billion...

The system is inherently inefficient, with a number of different forms usually involved, some over 50 pages long, all seeking the same or similar information. Different agencies often make different decisions based on the same data. But, from the customer's perspective, there is a clear duplication of process, for example when claiming at Jobcentre Plus and then claiming housing benefit from the local authority. Claimants often experience considerable confusion with the process and difficulties with proof of income and other verification documents. Payment delays are thus commonplace.

Crucially, from a perspective of trying to reduce dependency and encourage self-reliance, system complexity can reinforce the poverty trap. While benefit income levels may not be high, they are at least known and stable. Re-entering work can result in benefits being reduced or withdrawn, a problem compounded by having to pay income tax, usually at a high marginal rate, and national insurance. If the job

comes to an end, people have to go through further lengthy procedures to re-establish their benefit entitlement.

We have identified twelve significant opportunities to reduce the cost of delivering benefits and greatly improve customer service...

Government spending on the benefits system is likely to be around £186.5 billion this year, nearly 28 per cent of total managed government expenditure. It is in fact the biggest area of government spend, outstripping health by more than £67 billion. In Central Bedfordshire and Luton, benefits expenditure, including housing and council tax benefit, is estimated at over £1 billion a year. Labyrinthine procedures also increase the likelihood of higher costs through mistakes and abuse: the DWP identified overpayments of £2.7 billion last year due to fraud and error, while HMRC estimate tax credit overpayments of between £1.5 billion and £1.8 billion a year.

The cost of crime is also high. In addition, these costs are entirely disproportionate: local and national studies show that a high number of offences are committed by just a small number of people. The most prolific five per cent of offenders – around 250 – are likely to be responsible for a quarter of crimes committed. This ‘top tier’ were named in over 2,500 offences in this area between 2007 and 2009, costing an estimated £8 million, including criminal justice system costs of over £2.5 million. Worse, official studies have revealed that, for every reconviction, a further five unreported offences will have taken place. Thus, estimated costs rise yet further to over £13 million a year, including criminal justice costs of £5 million. Based on local case studies of self reported offending levels and extrapolating this behaviour to the 250 cohort, this figure could be as high as £112m per annum.

Our studies have tracked the typical path of such offenders through a system administered by a myriad of agencies. Our conclusion is that, in many cases, the process completely fails to break the offending/ re-offending cycle and in some cases, may actually contribute to it.

Our ‘top 250’ of persistent offenders could be costing taxpayers as much as £112 million a year...

Offenders within the five per cent top tier - and those we interviewed as part of our Total Place project - are typically heavily entrenched in their offending behaviour. Often, they will have complex needs and problems across a number of areas, drug abuse issues and homelessness being typical examples, which contribute to their re-offending. Yet, currently, less than half of this group are supervised by probation services or included in programmes for prolific, priority offenders. There are gaps too in the delivery of intervention and support services across seven distinct pathways – children and families, housing, health, employment, education and training, drugs and alcohol, finance, attitude – that can determine the propensity to offend or re-offend. In particular, there are often considerable delays in accessing benefits and problems with securing suitable accommodation.

Our proposed solutions and the advantages they offer



Our ultimate vision for the benefits system is one that is simplified, coherent, and cost-effective and supports people into work. Built around customers, it will help them receive their entitlements more easily but at the same time help tackle underlying problems and assist

self-reliance rather than dependency. It will remove many of the systemic disincentives to coming off benefits and returning to employment.

We have identified seven local improvement opportunities for the short and medium-term and five national or legislative changes that could be made in the medium or longer-term. The longer-term proposals focus upon enhancing the *Tell Us Once* approach that could pave the way towards a unified and far simpler benefits system.

Locally, we envisage a simple, customer focused and, increasingly, a self-service process – available across all customer access channels - with a ‘triage’ service available to provide rapid access to expert help and advice whenever needed and bringing together the disparate agencies currently providing these services. This will greatly improve the customer experience and enable earlier intervention to stop problems reaching crisis point. Key factors include a shared vision and purpose, a single IT system across a range of benefits and a single system, and team, for verification and customer visits. A single, common team to counteract fraud is also proposed.

Such an improved, ‘joined up’ and more cost-effective system would share data more effectively, simplifying and speeding up the application process for the customer and reducing the incidence of payment delays. Support services could then be more proactive and responsive and better deployed to help address ‘root cause’ problems and enable a greater shift to proper self-reliance. Shared back office functions and co-location could greatly reduce administration costs. A greater number of people would come into benefits through our more proactive and responsive system. However by tackling underlying causes, promoting work and removing barriers that discourage a return to work, more would move out of benefits and into self-reliance.



From our second sub-theme, we propose a properly resourced and co-ordinated system of integrated offender management, able to work intensively with appropriate individuals. The focus would be upon the county’s most prolific and damaging offenders.

From the outset, we would stress that integrated offender management is not a soft option. We recognise fully the ongoing requirement to enforce the law and protect the public. But, in aligning, strengthening and widening current offender management activity, we see real opportunities to increase effective rehabilitation, cut crime and its costs and boost public confidence in the criminal justice system.

We propose a properly resourced and co-ordinated integrated offender management team ...

We have identified over 40 potential improvements that can be implemented relatively quickly at a local level and nearly 40 recommendations for change in the longer term, some at local level and others mainstreamed at national level. There is considerable scope to strengthen the availability, access and timing of the interventions and services required to break the cycle of re-offending and, in terms of cost-benefit analysis, there is a strong business case for this.

Proposals include the creation of an integrated offender management team, with resources provided by individual partner agencies. There are also several recommendations to improve the co-ordination and provision of welfare benefits and accommodation, including the creation of the means to pay rent if it is appropriate to keep the offender’s accommodation open while he or she is in custody.

There are recommendations too for strengthening drugs and alcohol treatment services and closer working with health and mental health services. In addition, there are proposals to create or strengthen employment and training services and facilities for positively affecting behavioural change, including the re-instatement of victim awareness courses.

There is scope, as well as a strong need, to strengthen services for the management of offenders who are not under statutory supervision. A further recommendation here is that Bedfordshire's IOM system must look to engage and enrol further priority offenders within this group.

The challenges, local and national

Staying with the integrated offender management sub-theme, the biggest challenge to Whitehall will be the legislative change required to ensure that people coming out of prison have early access to benefits. Locally, at least one major challenge will be the political will to deploy more resources towards providing suitable accommodation for offenders.

For the A2B sub-theme, customer benefits, service efficiencies and savings will also be accompanied by challenges. To deliver some of our recommendations, we will need central government backing through the DWP, its underpinning agencies and, in time, HMRC, particularly in terms of co-located services and, even more importantly, data-sharing.

Both locally and nationally, we must move away from centralism and centralist thinking. While simplifying the benefits system is a national challenge, we believe we can make a positive contribution to this huge task at local level. This challenges policy, legislation, organisational boundaries and local governance. There are also technological and logistical hurdles.

Within both sub-themes, we are confident that a high number of service improvements are available in both the short and medium term: some at little or no additional cost, others requiring further investment now to reap significant savings over the next three to five years. Yet, in the current economic climate, this could prove to be a further challenge. Total Place has proved resource intensive and dedicated, full-time resources will be needed to fully realise its full potential.

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Many key proposals could require structural change and resource pooling locally. A number would require change at central government or legislative level. However, with strategic commitment and operational support, we feel strongly that positive, cost-effective results can be achieved. Many of our recommendations could, we feel, be mainstreamed.

However, all involve a will to change difficult situations nationally and locally. Significant effort is needed to accomplish this. Our report shows what is required from both central government and local agencies. Without the political will, requisite framework and the resources to make it happen, little will change.

A further, and critical, challenge is reducing the burden of reporting, inspection and assessment that currently weigh down public services. Our Total Place project has led us to a re-examination – and costing - of the inspection frameworks that sit

across our respective administrative areas. Monitoring costs for local authority, health, police, and probation and fire services in this area total more than £4 million per annum, around half of which funds staff working in this inspection regime. This is dubious value for money and offers limited help to front-line services. It must be reviewed.

The way ahead

The project has already delivered a range of other benefits: we have a clear, robust methodology and are developing a governance framework to drive collaboration and jointly understanding and responding to our customers needs across Luton and Bedfordshire. The past seven months of this project has taught us much about redesigning and realigning services. We have deployed sound project and change-management techniques to map out, in detail, existing systems and capture all ideas for improvement in a coherent, practical way. We have used powerful social marketing research tools to ensure all recommendations are built soundly around the customer/service user's perspective.

We have learnt from other Total Place pilots and opened up stronger, more focused channels of communication with Whitehall. We have reinforced the role of both councils as effective, representative community leaders and forged profitable new coalitions. Locally, strong, new relationships have blossomed across many public services and a number of opportunities have been identified for further productive collaboration. All of which augers well for future joint working.

Total Place enjoys substantial enthusiasm, support and momentum in Central Bedfordshire and Luton. It is seen as an essential first step in the review of our business that sets out an effective methodology for future interventions. There is an appetite for service step-change and improved cost effectiveness. In the face of an impending 'perfect storm' of decreased funding and increased service demand, there is wide engagement to this agenda. Indeed, there is a complete acceptance that it is an imperative.

Thus, there is a strong desire - locally and nationally - to deliver similar projects in the future. A shortlist is already being drawn up including: tackling worklessness, integrated commissioning services and social care services with the NHS, plus support for 'high contact' families and people with disabilities alongside important initiatives to collaborate and share back-office systems. This will of course, be in addition to the challenge of delivering the benefits promised by our pilot themes. One of the first substantive challenges will be the need to secure local and national funding for the necessary resources to deliver the business cases and recommendations.

In conclusion, we are confident that Total Place has demonstrated its potential for delivering more for less and that Bedfordshire authorities and partners are highly capable of running further similar projects successfully and cost-effectively. But continued, focussed support and commitment from central government is vital. As is Whitehall's recognition, confidence and trust that local partnerships can and will continue to offer improvements, efficiencies and savings if they are given the flexibility and backing to do so.

Total Place

Luton and Central
Bedfordshire Pilot

Introduction

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1.0 Introduction

The pilot theme for this area is *from dependence to self reliance*. It embraces a range of entirely new proposals for how all public agencies, not just councils, can better address key community issues. A series of widely attended workshops last summer sharpened our focus on two distinct sub-themes: access to benefits and integrated offender management. Both reflect some major concerns for local residents, where partners felt a real, positive impact could be made.

Thus, our joint aspirations for the Total Place pilot were that it would:

- Have significant impact
- Be deliverable within time and resource constraints
- Be of interest across local organisations
- Be customer focused
- Change the way we do business
- Deliver efficiencies

We wanted to deliver early efficiencies to validate our work. In addition, we wanted to develop an approach that could be successfully mainstreamed nationally.

Above all, we wanted to highlight our collective ability to find new and better ways of doing things and to underline the necessity, when assessing community needs and the availability of resources, of looking at the *totality* of public spending and the outcomes in any given area.

The purpose of this report, therefore, is to set out in detail:

- The governance of this pilot and how we engaged and enrolled partners, stakeholders and service users
- How this project was organised as a true community partnership, with considerable input from each partner agency
- How we made a representative, collective decision on the choice of theme and sub-theme
- Our methodology, including change management and social marketing research tools
- Our rationale, data-gathering and evidenced findings

- Our recommendations and the opportunities for service improvements and efficiencies
- The benefits that could be delivered as a consequence
- The way in which we intend to deliver improvements locally and what is required to do so
- The challenges to local partners in achieving this
- Recommendations for change at national and legislative level and the potential benefits
- The challenge to central government in achieving this
- The additional benefits of conducting this project and what we have learnt from it
- How we intend to take Total Place forward and the potential hurdles that have to be overcome