

Calling Cumbria



The Local Government Association is the national voice for more than 450 local authorities in England and Wales. The LGA group comprises the LGA and five partner organisations which work together to support, promote and improve local government.



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Preface

Partnership, co-operation, collaboration are words that have slipped into the public sector lexicon with an ease that belies the challenges and complexity demanded by working across boundaries.

Exhortation, legislation, negotiation and inspection – never mind reams of flannel – will not make institutions and professions marinated in one way of working quickly embrace another. It is not that people are resistant to change or not trying to do a great job. It is that in order to think and act differently they have to unlearn, then learn again. So they see the prize but struggle to grasp it.

And what a prize it is! We can reshape local services – health, education, policing, local government – in a way which serves the public far better at much lower cost. And we can help people feel more in charge of their own lives and more able to make a difference in the place where they live. This must be the agenda of local leaders for the coming decade and beyond.

Effective work across boundaries is founded on shared enthusiasm, common information, open connections, honest relationships. This sustains the commitment and trust without which we get endless set piece meetings, forests of paper, tensions between individuals, drawbridges between organisations and conversations going nowhere. We get places that are over-governed and under-led.

It is a fantasy to think that places are not contested spaces and that effective partnerships are a panacea. Legitimate (and illegitimate) interests collide: hence the need for hard decisions and the necessity and rightness of politics. The challenge to leaders is to grow common ground and collective ambition, to defy complacency and to discover ways to make a messy and complex world a little better without leaving some feeling bitter and disenfranchised.

Calling Cumbria was the first Local Leadership programme. It demonstrates the determination of people across that county, from all walks of life, to do it better together by getting at the opportunities which lurk in the spaces between people and between organisations. It is a soft intervention to yield hard results: some right away, most over time as new bonds form and strengthen. It could not have happened if a core group there had not wanted it and if the 'Cumbria Crew' had not helped them. I salute both.

Calling Cumbria was supported by analysis to quantify the public money going into the county and find out as far as possible what happened to it. Published as *Counting Cumbria*, that companion report provides raw material for leaders in Cumbria to process with the new energy and focus they have created.

We deceive ourselves if we believe that trust and good relationships are a 'nice to have'. Without them, as the current crisis in banking shows, systems break down to devastating effect. A 'whole systems' approach, which is what *Calling Cumbria* is, does not aim for a big bang concordat. It seeks to generate recurring patterns of new behaviour which yield hundred and thousands of improvements great and small, visible and hidden, indefinitely. *Calling Cumbria* has begun to make a difference and there is no going back now.

At the time of writing Norfolk and Suffolk have embarked on their own Local Leadership programmes. Others, including cities and London boroughs, are getting ready. The places are different but the power of their ambition is the same.

Stephen Taylor
Chief Executive
Leadership Centre for Local Government
December 2008



Summary

The idea of *Calling Cumbria* emerged from a 'deep dive' on the leadership of places run by the Leadership Centre in February 2007. A group of leaders in Cumbria wanted to move on from the frustration and sometimes rancour generated by possible local government reorganisation.

Under the aegis of Peter Stybelski, Chief Executive of the County Council, they aimed to make the strategic partnership the doorway to doing more together for the people of Cumbria. The trust shown by this group encouraged the adventure of *Calling Cumbria* and made it possible.

The Leadership Centre team formed to help them became known as the Cumbria Crew and worked over about eight months from February 2008 through four phases:

- An exploration of what was wanted and what was possible, through observation and discussion with more than fifty public service partners and community leaders
- Two themed inquiries, each of which brought together forty of these partners and leaders 'out of uniform' over three days to connect at high speed on the ground with people who live and work in the county and to reflect on what they learnt
- A large group event of 150 participants from across the public, private and voluntary sectors within and beyond Cumbria which drew on the learning from the inquiries and took those ideas and their own a stage further
- Follow through support so that the new energy was neither dissipated by lack of direction nor drained away by over-engineering

In parallel, the Leadership Centre supported the Cumbria Strategic Partnership and the Public Service Board to make their own way of working more effective so they were equipped to harness the opportunities which emerged from the inquiries and large group event.

What did all this achieve? By the nature of the work, the hard results are emergent. We cannot know at the outset what they will be except in general terms of better service and lower cost. In these recessionary times the most apparent result, that people start to connect with one another in a new way, may at first look flimsy and indulgent. But without it, they are imprisoned in a cycle of doing what they've always done and getting what they've always got. The report lists examples of tangible results, almost any one of which would be regarded by some as well worth the full cost. Others are crystallising now.

But it goes much further. If the new way of connecting encourages people to ask and act on big questions such as "do we really get value from all the public money which goes into Cumbria?" the sky's the limit. Just a 1% improvement would be worth £70 million. Why shouldn't that or much more continue year after year indefinitely?

The report captures some of the changes and improvements which are already visible as a result of *Calling Cumbria*, and goes on to describe the 'living systems' approach which underlies the programme. It then describes what needs to happen next in the view of partners in order to sustain and increase the impact. This includes inquiring into areas identified through the quantitative work described in the parallel report. Last but not least an appendix captures the 'learning history'; the experience as described by individual participants which is at the core of *Calling Cumbria*.

This report is written to support dialogue and debate and to share the practice and learning more widely. We hope it is both a resource and a record of the experiences of partners working together to build a better future for people in Cumbria.

1. Overview

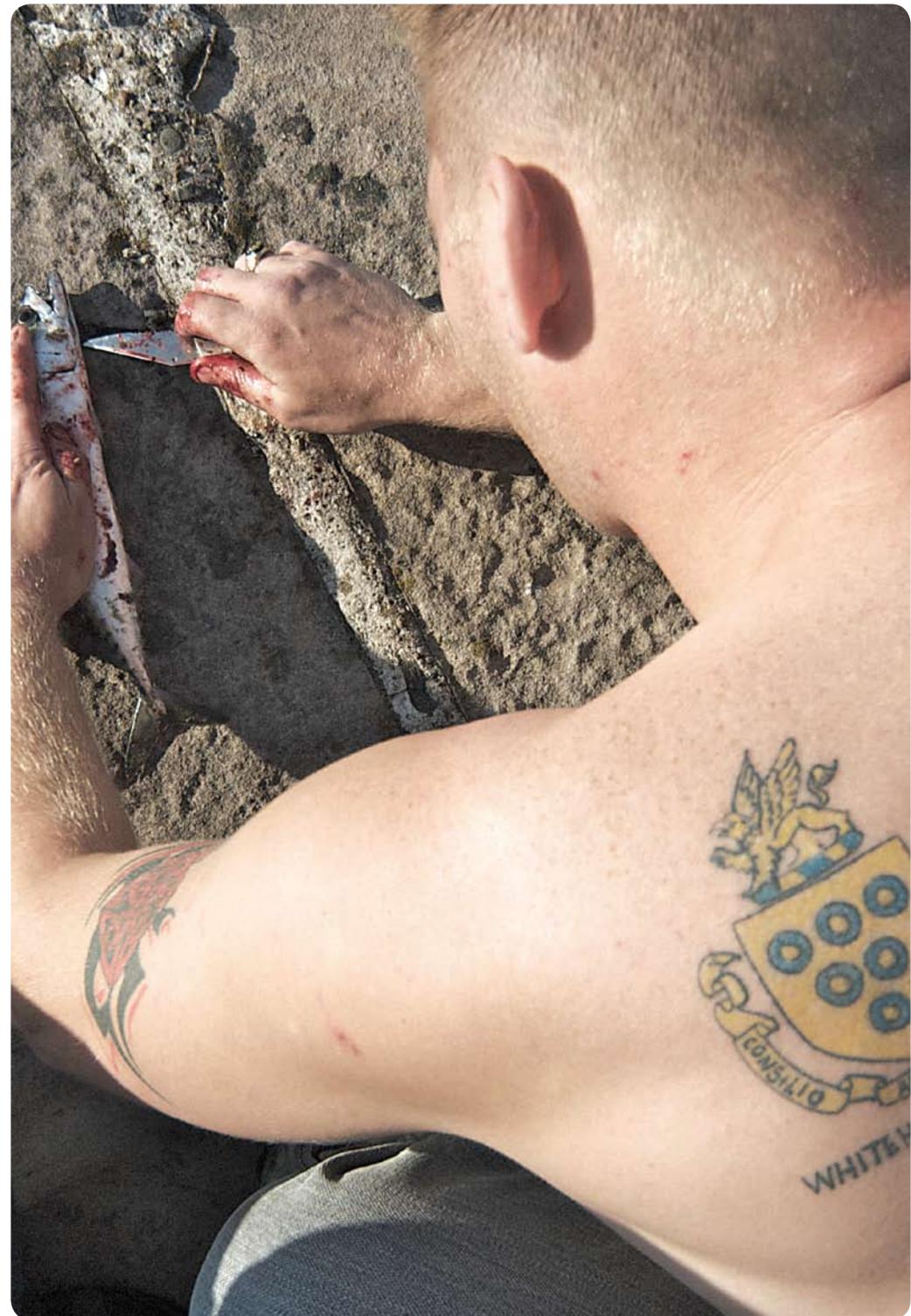
The task of the Leadership Centre is to help local leaders create great places to live. In February 2007 the Leadership Centre hosted and facilitated an event called the Deep Dive for some fifty such leaders from local government and other local public services. The purpose was to explore what was necessary to take a step forward in how local leaders worked together to succeed.

Relationships across partnerships in Cumbria around that time were frayed, not least because of fierce debate over possible unitary local government (LGR) in the county. While there was a collective desire to consign the LGR bids to history and move on, trust had been damaged and there was frustration with the bureaucratic machinery of meetings and governance. Alternatives were being proposed but partners could not reach consensus. Agreeing that they were stuck, they decided to find a radically new way forward and in January 2008 asked the Leadership Centre to assist them.

The history and topography of Cumbria make it a more disconnected place than other counties of similar size. Physically getting from one part to another – north to south, east to west – takes a long time. Some parts connect more naturally with the Scottish borders, Lancashire or the North East than with the rest of the county. Communities are rooted in different traditions: manufacturing, farming, tourism, the sea. Variations in standards of living are huge. Towns and villages have often grown up as best they can on their own two feet, proud of doing so but sometimes wary and defensive.

Centre advisers talked to fifty public service partners and community leaders to understand what was important for them and how they saw the county and its needs from their perspective. The advisers also observed how partners worked together and the kind of dialogue that generated energy.

We found passion for Cumbria and for improving outcomes for people who live there, but blockage as to how that was best achieved. There was commitment to the community strategy in principle but it did not seem to inspire action. The effort that had gone into the document itself was not apparent in beginning to implement it. There was a great deal of expertise and experience across the partnership but this was not being heard within the existing framework of meetings and boards. There was widespread recognition that partnership working could be improved, but the proposition was always that ‘they’ should do something differently.



While governance arrangements had become a focus and concern for partners, it became clear that dissatisfaction with the existing structures was a symptom of the fragile relationships that partners had described. The bureaucracy was increasing the distance between the good intent of leaders and the residents of Cumbria they were there to serve.

What people were describing was a classic systems issue: no one person or organisation was to blame (convenient though that would have been), no-one wanted to go on like this, everyone was trapped. The collective wisdom lay in recognising this and agreeing to try to move on.

A prescriptive 'diagnosis and recommendation' approach would not create a sustainable shift. The approach needed to invite widespread participation in creating the conditions for effective partnership from which success on the ground could flow. Other organisations outside the county joined with the Leadership Centre in wanting this to succeed and made both a financial and professional input to the work; they are listed in the appendix. In particular the involvement of the chief executives of the various public sector leadership organisations under the banner of the Public Service Leaders Alliance, demonstrated a national interest in wanting to contribute to and learn from Cumbria's experience.

Building on this desire for change we designed a programme which invited people to take part in one of two themed 'inquiries' each running over three days, leading to a large scale event on 11 July at the Rheged Centre in Penrith involving 150 participants from across the public, private and voluntary sectors within and beyond the county. In addition, we provided support and challenge by facilitating Cumbria Strategic Partnership and Public Service Board meetings and continuing to meet individuals to engender the conditions for change. After the July event the Cumbria Strategic Partnership, now working much more effectively, resumed its overall leadership role. The Leadership Centre's subsequent contribution has been to stay connected, encourage and unblock where possible.

How did it all look from a participant's perspective? The box opposite describes one person's experience of an inquiry. The learning history appendix glimpses that of others.

You had to be there

At the briefing day, which started with the film about real people in Cumbria, we decided what we wanted to work on together. Those of us who chose the economy set off pretty early the next morning in the minibus from Rheged with a packed lunch. The plan was that our group of eight would visit at least six businesses all over the county before the end of the day and talk informally to the people running them. Since I knew that precisely one such visit had been arranged beforehand I was pretty doubtful. But we split up and more than did it. I was worried that the business people we met would be too busy or cautious to really open up. As it turned out, we couldn't stop them talking.

The businesses I went to included a bed and breakfast, a manufacturing park, a big shop and a firm of accountants. We didn't get to a farmer but I will. What was interesting was not just what we heard but that we all pitched in and forgot which of us was a council officer, a headteacher, an elected member, from a charity and so forth. I think I learnt most from the hospital anaesthetist.

The discussions went on vigorously in the bus, ranging over cycleways or rather the lack of them in Carlisle, the need to train more agricultural engineers and fewer hairdressers, how we could get more from the experience of successful companies headquartered in the county like Eddie Stobart and whether 'Made in Cumbria' was focusing on the best opportunities. Someone from the council said he learnt more about business in the county that day than he had in all of the last five years.

When we got back to Rheged we found the teams looking at other things like transport and the elderly had had a similar experience. We had tons of stuff to take to the 11 July event. There I chose which questions I wanted to work on and mixed in with lots of people I'd never met before to get to some answers. I met new people at Rheged and we have kept in touch since to support each other on issues we all care about.



2. What difference did it make?

Calling Cumbria was not about driving through one big immediate visible success but about creating the conditions for hundreds of unforeseen improvements to evolve unstoppably over time. Just five months on from the large group event, many of those are still surfacing. Here are some that are well underway:

Partnership

Unsatisfactory partnership governance was one of the symptoms that led to *Calling Cumbria*. At the event on 11 July, partners worked together to redesign the governance arrangements for the Cumbria Strategic Partnership (CSP) and community strategy and LAA delivery. They have since refined that further and gained agreement from others. The new arrangements provide a clear distinction in the role of members and managers. A stream of actions called 'Just do it!' has been put in place, the first on volunteering, with light touch overview to monitor results.

CSP meetings will be based on single themes to allow deeper discussion. 'Focus on....' events will bring partners together for a countywide debate on important strategic issues, leading to commitment to do things differently. This first of these focused on climate change and work is now in hand to integrate its recommendations into an action plan.

New inquiries

Multi-agency inquiries will take place with a diagonal slice of participating partners to focus on areas of underperformance in the LAA such as worklessness. These will take a systemic view of the issues and intervene rapidly in ways that will make a difference.

An informal group of partners called 'Network Cumbria' is sustaining the new connections made on 11 July and ensuring the ideas and initiatives which flowed from that are not lost.

Cross-council collaboration

Despite extensive discussions, Cumbrian local authorities had not made progress on efficiency through shared services. That was because of different starting points, lack of agreement on what might be gained and, indeed, sovereignty issues. Now Barrow Borough Council and Cumbria County Council are moving rapidly forward on sharing ICT services, Carlisle and Allerdale Councils are developing options for integrating functions, and productive discussions are

developing across a number of councils on sharing revenues and benefits and legal and democratic services. *Counting Cumbria* indicates the scale of the opportunity here.

Improved relationships have led to resource sharing between the County Council and one of the district councils to address short term pressures on financial management. The County Council has delegated programme management of key policy initiatives in local areas to a district chief executive to encourage devolution of decisions and get closer to the ground.

Learning to lead

The county council, police, university, PCT, national park and a number of district councils are working together on the introduction of a 'Cumbria Fast Track' management development programme to retain and support home-grown talent. It aims to ensure that there is the capacity to achieve the ambition for Cumbria and that the thinking and working of the next generation of local leaders is cross-agency and cross-sector as a matter of course.

Park rangers

Work is in hand on the delivery of park ranger services which will put policy on apprenticeships and mental health into practice and improve access to the countryside without greater cost. Funds from the PCT, the Environment Agency and the county council will be redeployed.

There were many "aha!" moments on 11 July. The box describes one of them.

Dogs and children

A social worker had been supporting a problem family for six months but there was no improvement. There was a risk that the five children would be taken in to care. The family lived with seven dogs, one each, in a three bedroom council house. It was unclean and the children regularly failed to attend school. The social worker grasped the importance of the dogs to the family and on his next visit brought with him an officer from the RSPCA.

She told the family that the conditions the dogs were living in were unacceptable and they would be taken away if changes were not made. Worried by the impact this could have on their children, the parents reached a turning point. They accepted help to learn household hygiene. They sought out woodwork skills to make kennels. The children were sent to school every day as part of the deal. The family remain together.

A children's services professional from elsewhere was at the 11 July event, described this as "genius" and has since partnered with the RSPCA in his area.

3. The approach

It was clear from initial observations in Cumbria that a classic 'diagnose and recommend' intervention could not work. Partners needed support to create the conditions necessary to work better together and continue to develop their own solutions. This pointed to a 'living systems' approach.

Living systems theory proposes a parallel between nature and organisations: that the conditions that enable living systems to grow, adapt and survive in their environment through 'self-organisation' are also those that enable organisations to grow, adapt and survive in theirs. In this analogy 'organisations' can be single entities or, as in the case of *Calling Cumbria*, interconnected bodies and partnerships.

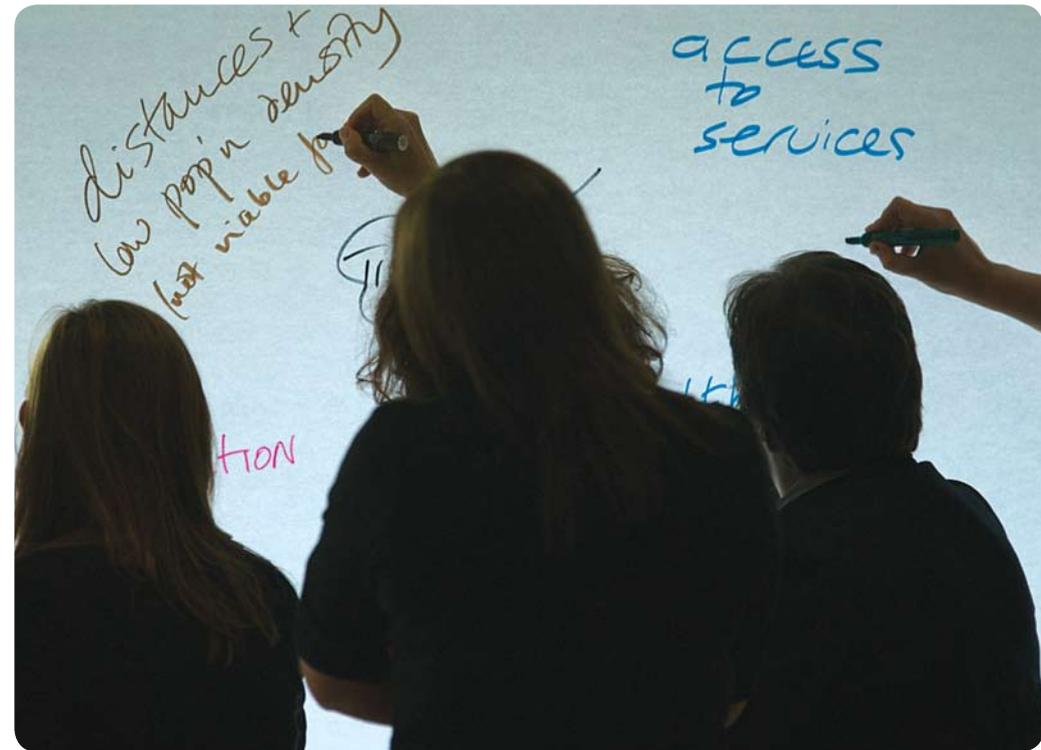
A living systems perspective suggests that an organisation cannot be directed to change. Change is a response to 'disturbance' in the climate or environment in which it exists. The ability of the organisation to respond positively depends on how far conditions of identity, relationships and information are in place.

This has challenging implications for leaders seeking change across organisational boundaries. 'Command and control' has limited and unintended effects. Instead, leaders need to attend to the way organisations perceive themselves, the nature and quality of the relationships between them and the extent to which they operate from a shared understanding of the context. As it turned out, these were the very things people wanted to talk about in the exploration phase of the work.

A little disturbing

The arrival of Leadership Centre advisers in Cumbria was the initial 'disturbance'. The advisers took a stance that was intentionally contrary to the established norms, querying the bureaucratic machinery rather than colluding with it and offering specific and tenacious challenges. They sought to model conversational and engaging relationships, inviting disagreement and encouraging discussion. And they were irritants to the status quo, the "way we do things around here". That was the point.

There is typically a language of unemotional public sector rhetoric across partnerships. It stops people truly connecting because they can repeat the standard mantras without the need to think. *Calling Cumbria* deliberately spoke a different language. Many of those taking part said they came because they had been made curious by the invitation they had received to its events. It sounded different and disturbing – but in a good way.



Personal invitations to take part in one of two 'inquiries' and to participate in the large scale event on 11 July were sent out to an initial group of 70 people. Each was encouraged to extend an invitation of their own to someone they thought had the energy and enthusiasm to make a difference. Soon, the number of people invited had risen from 70 to over 700. A third of those took up the challenge, clearing the diary to give *Calling Cumbria* a full day, in many cases several days, at short notice.

The inquiries were based on themes that emerged from the exploratory phase and captured the interest of those invited to attend. The themes were unexpected but went to the heart of what participants cared about:

- "How can we work together to build the chance of a better life in Cumbria?"
- "How can we work together to surface the pride in Cumbria?"

A sense of identity

The exploratory phase showed that partners had taken fixed views on each other's motives and perspectives without really getting to know each other at a personal level. This impacted on the quality of discussions – people did not feel listened to or heard – and the levels of trust on all sides. The inquiries were designed to:

- Enable participants to know each other better
- Connect with the public they served in a fresh way
- Build trust and common purpose through shared experience



People are more likely to be listened to when they talk genuinely from their own opinions and perspectives rather than a 'party line'. *Calling Cumbria* emphasised the importance of individual participation, inviting people to come as themselves, not their job titles. This was reinforced by detail. For example, the wording of invitations was personal and participants wrote their first names only on their badges.

Shared identity matters as much as individual identity. *Calling Cumbria* was developed intentionally as a brand that signified shared identity towards a new way of working. Reinforced by colour and imagery, the brand began to represent shared values of dialogue, understanding and connection with real people and real lives. In the words of one participant it "created a non-partisan, neutral space for a better quality of discussion to take place."

As participants arrived on the first day of the inquiries, wrote their names on their badges and were welcomed and introduced to one another by advisers dressed in the *Calling Cumbria* 'uniform' of purple polo shirts, they recognised that this event was going to be different.

An emotional connection

There is great comfort in familiar ways of doing things. Even when everyone accepts that things could be better, inertia is a strong force to overcome in any organisation. Appealing to the head alone rarely makes a difference. Rather, people are motivated to act differently by an appeal to their hearts.

To get maximum impact from their time together during the inquiries, participants had to be open to the idea of doing things differently and relating to one another in new ways. This required standing away from the day-to-day noise of strategic plans, meetings, emails. It meant reminding them what they really cared about and legitimising the fact that they did.

This personal shift was encouraged by a presentation of still photography near the beginning of the first day, set to music and showing evocative portraits of people of Cumbria. The impact was amplified by a large screen, total darkness and periods of silence. The drama of this, combined with the quality of the photography, had a profound and lasting effect on many participants. Having viewed the presentation, inquiry participants came back together in plenary session ready to embark on new and different conversations.

A web of connections

The remainder of the first day:

- looked at new ways to work together based on relationships and interconnected needs
- heard personal stories from inspiring public service leaders
- learnt new techniques for deeper conversations
- developed maps of individual and community needs
- created a picture of the web of projects, partnerships and collaborations serving those needs
- identified the communities or issues that participants wanted to understand more deeply.

Day two of each inquiry took the participants out and about to engage in different and often spontaneous conversations with people who live and work in Cumbria. They visited a variety of places – anywhere people gathered – including day centres, schools, colleges, town centres and businesses.

Participants started the day with a variety of views, some up for something new and some sceptical, sure that they did this sort of thing all the time but a little nervous about how people might respond to them. However, practicing their new techniques and engaging with people as human beings, the conversations developed a new quality, providing insights into what worked and what could be better. One participant said “I had a different kind of conversation with people so that’s got to be a start. I went back to the day job and injected a dose of reality into discussions”. Participants were also drawn into different conversations with each other, developing a deeper understanding of another view of the world.

On day three participants mapped out their new understanding of the interconnected needs of individuals and communities, based on the conversations they had the previous day and the new insights they generated. They looked at the system of service delivery in which they operated and identified ways to connect and support projects and initiatives more effectively. The ideas and the insights generated were taken forward into the large scale event on 11 July.



Spreading the word

The inquiries caused buzz and excitement amongst their participants. They were energised by the new possibilities and relationships. The 11 July event focused the combined wisdom of its 150 participants hands-on in identifying the route map needed to achieve better outcomes for the people of Cumbria. They chose what they wanted to explore and took responsibility for their own inputs and the commitments they made as a result of the discussions. They each made many new connections. In particular, they resolved to leave behind defensive and unimaginative ways of working between organisations.

As the leader of the county council pointed out in his closing remarks, “today was different and remarkable because I have never seen so many smiling faces”.

4. What next?

Section 2 summarised the immediate developments after 11 July, in particular the sharper focus of the strategic partnership and the determination of the seven Cumbria councils to work better together. These are paving changes towards better outcomes. Partners identified what they want and need to do next:

1. Keep the *Calling Cumbria* identity going. Partners have picked up the brand and have used it to signpost their own events. It will continue to be used to signify spaces and places for open dialogue.
2. Repeat the inquiries and large group event in order to reconnect and increase momentum. Consider how this could be extended to include those who use services, not just those who provide them.
3. Invite senior private sector figures who run successful Cumbria-based businesses to participate in future rounds of *Calling Cumbria*.
4. Use the data and questions in *Counting Cumbria* to create an agenda of opportunities for improving services and reducing costs.
5. Keep making time in the diary for talking to people away from the desk: at libraries, community centres, sporting events – wherever people gather.
6. Ask experts from around the UK to share their knowledge and experience: '*Cumbria Calling the UK*'.
7. Take the *Calling Cumbria* story and experience down into organisations so that it is not just those at the top or those who naturally network who 'get it'.
8. Sustain 'Network Cumbria' to promote and share examples of strong partnership working.
9. Remember the geography of Cumbria is a challenge. A great deal of travel time can be involved so use webspace/videoconferencing/Skype so that people can participate most effectively. Hold meetings in different venues around the county as an indication of positive intent to make relationships better.
10. Consciously measure the quality of relationships across organisations in the county as a lead indicator of how effectively they are likely to work together.

11. Create a 'Cumbria Leadership Academy' for Cumbria chief executives from the public, private and voluntary sectors in order that collaborative working is embedded in the way next generation of leaders works.
12. Make clear to new staff as they are inducted into public sector organisations that though they may be an employee of the police or NHS or the university, and though they may be a teacher, clerk or engineer, they are privileged to be joining the public service of the county and their first and over-riding duty is to the people of Cumbria.

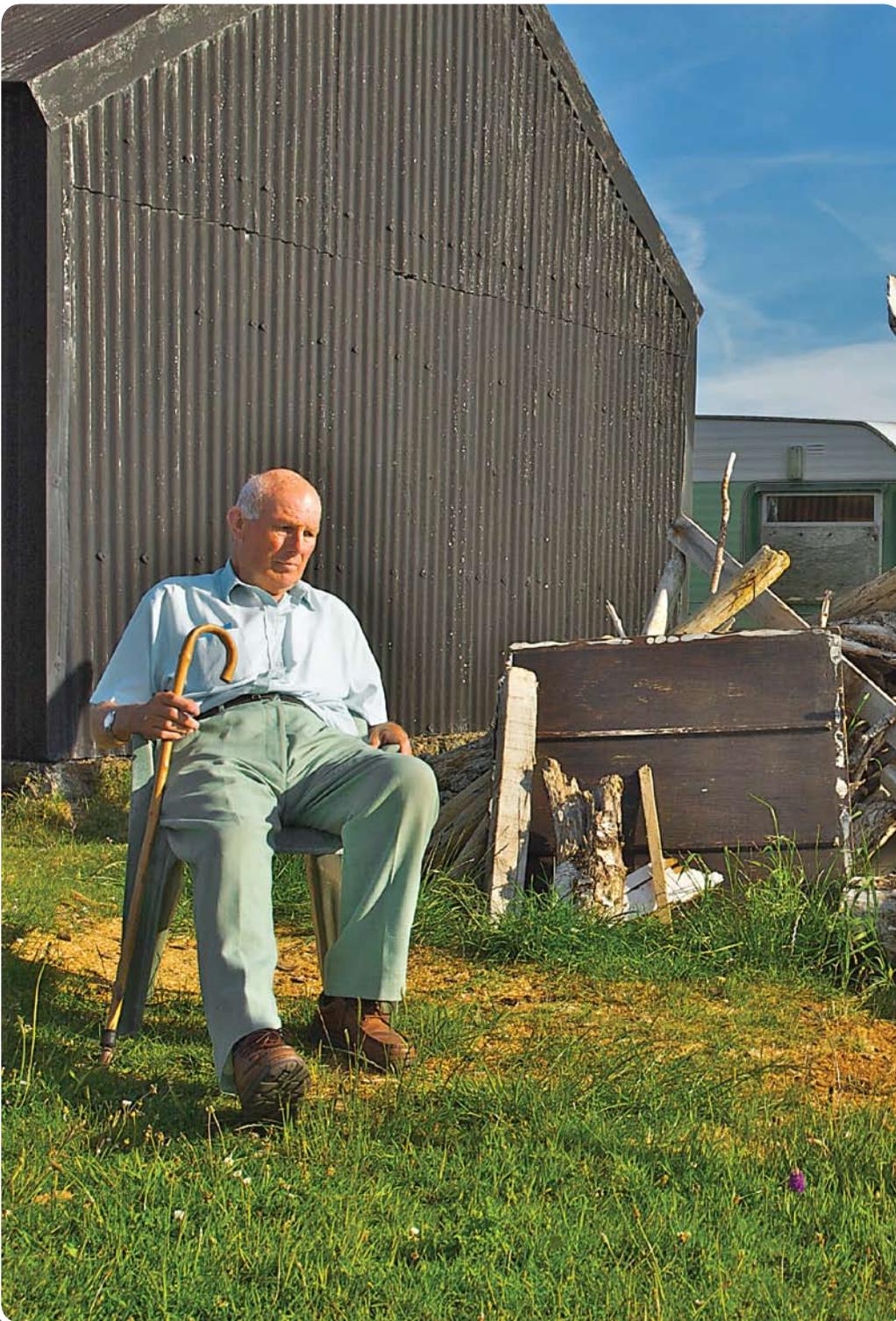
The networks and collaboration with Cumbria continue as participants in *Calling Cumbria* join the Leadership Centre in Suffolk and Norfolk to help them carry through their Local Leadership programmes.



Appendix 1 – Cumbrian stories: learning histories

Calling Cumbria offered people a different way to come together and work. The stories gathered afterwards from sixteen people who attended the inquiries and the 11 July event form the 'learning histories' described here. Five themes emerged:

1. A neutral space
2. Working differently in partnership
3. A whole Cumbria view
4. Support to change
5. Learning and working together



1. A neutral space

Through *Calling Cumbria* it has been possible for a wide diversity of people to come together, have frank and meaningful conversations, reach a deeper understanding of one another's situation and generally improve relationships. Already people are reporting an improvement in partnership working and are intending that this will result in improved services and well being for the people of Cumbria. The brand is something that people can identify with and use to develop innovative partnership working.



Commentary

Cumbria has had problems in its partnership working and needed a way for people and organisations to reconnect and reacquaint themselves with their common purpose: to better the lives of people in Cumbria.

Through the *Calling Cumbria* events and activity surrounding them it has been possible to create a place where people from a wide variety of backgrounds, some of whom did not previously enjoy cordial working relations, can come together, listen, and understand one another better.

People in Cumbria are up for change. The new kind of conversation has helped people develop a common view of what needs to be addressed and can only be addressed together.

It is necessary to keep this neutral space open and available. It is this environment for working that will facilitate lasting and effective change.

Quotations

When I arrived in Rheged it looked different and interesting – the branding Calling Cumbria, the purple shirts, all created the sense that something could really happen here.

It was important that this came from an impartial source.

The three days felt like things can change if we get it right – we need to keep the conversation going.

We have all experienced a positive partnership working environment for three days where we put our differences aside to work together on issues which really matter. Coming to the events and only having a first name on the badges really helped. We spoke to others without any preconceived ideas and then later found out which organisation they came from – if we wanted to know. That was very good and helped to get people talking without agendas or history.

We need to find a way to continue the Calling Cumbria brand. People related to it because it was impartial-this is important because people were able to express thoughts and feelings without being accused of partiality. Perhaps we could continue things with a virtual space – a website for people to keep in touch, share ideas and work together on things would be very very valuable.

It is really important to have a reflective process to think about things – what has happened, what needs to happen – we need to keep the space open to do this.

2. Working differently in partnership

Working differently is important for those interviewed because the partnership meetings they attended previously felt uncomfortable and unproductive. People came to Calling Cumbria with open minds but sometimes a tinge of cynicism. They experienced a new way of working and liked it. Many left feeling invigorated by the opportunities.



Commentary

Partnership meetings have in the past been characterised by disagreements, not necessarily about what was done but about how.

Relationships in some meetings were often 'tetchy and formal' with long debates about, for example, the wording of minutes.

How CSP/PSP meetings were organised irritated people but no one would make a suggestion for doing it differently.

There were disconnects throughout in terms of systems and process and few people had an overview of how Cumbria connected up and worked. People felt stuck in their own boxes.

It was clear that people needed to work in a different way and make connections which had not previously existed and have conversations that mattered if any positive changes were to be made

Quotations

Most people in Cumbria don't care who does what, they just want good services and it's up to us to get our act together and deliver. In the past nobody has stepped forward to say "this is what we are going to do" for fear of being shouted down. Things degenerated into parochial politics, but perhaps now we can do things better.

It felt as if working in a new way had suddenly been moved to the top of the agenda and was seen as important. This is refreshing and important.

The energy and spirit of what happened must be built on because there was a real buzz – this was really good and unusual.

Having name badges with only first names was positive because we met as individuals who cared, not immediately as representing an organisation.

This was timely and important after the negative experience of the unitary bid which set Cumbria back. Lots of people are up for change.

Having got people to focus on who we are doing things for was really important – it helped us to remember what matters. Working on things together is very powerful.

I found the whole exercise very stimulating – people getting together to talk and engage and understand each other's positions and diversity of issues is really important.

The events brought people together to work on real issues and I saw people beginning to understand one another's problems...I saw people's views of issues changing.

We need to connect more, work with people and understand what people need – this is the key.

3. A whole Cumbria view

Cumbria is a very diverse county in geography, culture and social class. Communities have developed differently and often there is little communication between them. Some have felt self-sufficient, with no need to work with people from other parts. This makes it hard to get the benefits of partnership. It is necessary to show that local pride can be enhanced, not damaged, by working together.



Commentary

Cumbria is a complex place. The geography of the country is one of its most important assets but also presents problems in terms of identity and, for example, transport. Parts of the county can feel and be in reality very long distances apart, creating lots of individual and unconnected places which have developed their own cultural identities.

Whilst diversity of place is important there also needs to be an overall sense of place if people are to see the need to work together on a whole county level. Because the whole county can feel so complex it is easier to take a local view rather than see the bigger picture.

Cumbria has been stuck in a quagmire of issues which do not seem to change very much. Old ways of doing things tend to be re-enacted with some minor adjustments, as if the act of repetition will change the outcome. People know that it doesn't change anything except perhaps increasing the levels of frustration. The shift of view offered by *Calling Cumbria* enabled people to see a much wider and deeper whole, and develop the possibility to leave the quagmire and do things differently.

A realisation grew that we need to see the situation not only from the outside but also from the inside: our own personal experience of it looking out. We need to ask what is needed to sustain relationships over time so we can continue to work effectively.

Quotations

*We need to recognise that there are real geographic barriers in Cumbria – we are not accustomed to change and don't like it. It is not a place where things change quickly – we are not subject to the winds of change. *Calling Cumbria* gave us a space to see what we look like together and to see things from each other's standpoint without going. We need to keep this conversation going if we are to change in the way we need to.*

These events matter – they were energising and generated lots of ideas that we need to act upon. We need to work together on wider strategies with a whole Cumbria view, develop a consensus of what we are trying to do. Things like the alcohol strategy need integrating for example with magistrates, locality working with the county and district councils. If we had a collective dialogue built on what we have begun here to keep things going, we can fight things collectively and have a much stronger banner. We are stronger together.

Seeing the big picture but from individual perspectives was so important – we need to connect more with people and understand what people need and want. This is the key.

The myths in Cumbria feel very powerful and difficult to deconstruct effectively. I feel we need to constantly challenge the stereotypes and replace them with reality. We need to gather and spread positive stories. Let's have new stories for Cumbria.

There is a real disconnect between strategy and what is really happening. The opportunity for real conversation has helped challenge some of the myths that exist and also through talking to each other helped identify where something had happened that shouldn't have. We were able to put this right because the right people were in the room and willing and able to help. It was very powerful and positive to see people from all different places in Cumbria come together to share ideas about what needs to change and how to change them.

We need to foster a culture where we talk to one another better and interact as human beings – REALLY talk and listen. There are green shoots here. Let's nurture these.

4. Support to make the changes

The chance to really talk to people and ask “what’s that all about?” was very potent and energising at the time. But it left some people asking what was needed to keep up the new momentum and make things happen.



Commentary

Some of those who attended *Calling Cumbria* experienced a profound experience and found themselves highly motivated to make change.

When there is uncertainty and ambiguity it can feel very difficult to share priorities and resources, even when people are highly committed to partnership. Several people said they felt isolated.

Systems don't change unless people do. This takes deep personal commitment and courage. The challenge is to recognise that our behaviours have been formed through childhood and running through adult life. The patterns are so deep seated that we need the help of others to recognise unhelpful behaviours and reinforce positive ones.

The practicalities of how a partnership works – when and how it connects, for what purpose, with what resources – can help people to behave differently because they have a different experience. It is the duty of leaders to create this experience.

Quotations

Learning together through dialogue was very powerful and we need a collective dialogue to keep this work going.

Have we achieved critical mass with enough people thinking differently to make a difference? How do we do this?

What we need next is a practical application of theory and disturbance – Cumbrians doing it for themselves, working very differently and collectively celebrating different ways of working.

Maintaining the momentum is essential – we need a space to meet, virtual and real, to keep the communication open and offer support to one another.

We need to have a ‘Cumbrian Academy’ to do leadership work together. It needs to be facilitated and get people together to share common issues and imagination. Why would this not work

We need to challenge key individuals by asking “what have you learned and what are you doing differently?”.

We need to challenge ourselves and each other, this is healthy – an action learning set could help. Get key people there and get them to work through the top ten issues in Cumbria – spend money on a facilitator and things would move.

It was liberating to be able to talk frankly and in a way where everyone was involved and we shared the way forward. Keep this approach going! We should run another large event next year to share what has happened. In the meantime let's have a series of events, one every 6 months, where we bring together a large group of people to work on one issue at a time that emerged from the 11 July. We could bring in recognised leaders in their field to help us learn and work together on different issues. We'd be learning and doing together. ‘Cumbria Calling the UK’ sounds good. It opens us up to looking outside Cumbria and keeps the name that people know.

5. Learning and working together

At the first inquiry Irene Lucas, Chief Executive of South Tyneside Council, suggested a way forward she had found to be highly effective: Total Partnership. Trusting that when a partner is unable to attend a meeting others will represent them well or that if someone feels less confident in some situations they will gain the support of others is some of what Total Partnership is about. Being there for others with integrity, honesty and trustworthiness is central to excellent outputs and outcomes. Participants found this concept appealing.



Commentary

Some people have whole heartedly embraced the possibilities of working differently. Others are more reticent, looking for a more familiar way forward following a diagnostic/ recommendations model.

It's wrong to think that good partnership working means all sweetness and light. Many issues are rightly contested. Not everything can be a 'win-win'; in many cases one legitimate interest will ultimately concede to or be overborne by another. Politics is proper and necessary.

So the case for effective leadership to sustain good partnerships is not that it eliminates disagreement. It is that what can be collectively agreed in the general interest is readily agreed, and that what cannot is resolved so far as possible without rancour.

Quotations

We need to build collective trust – there has been a tendency in Cumbria for people to want to know what others are up to – being suspicious really.

It was a fantastic opportunity to come to Calling Cumbria – it has given me a real insight into how to embed health into all sorts of agendas and organisations. We all need to do this together

How we work between the different layers in Cumbria without being hierarchical is really important. What might seem to one organisation like trying to take things forward might look to another like being pushy and dominant.

We need a Cumbrian consensus of what we are trying to do – to fight things collectively will give us a much stronger banner and framework. We need to have a collective dialogue to keep this work going – working on issues together is very powerful and gets things done.

It takes a lot of commitment to get regularly to meetings and we need to accept that it takes a long time to get it right. We need to see one another on our own patch which means travelling to meet but it is very important to see each other face to face, although virtual meetings can also help but are not a substitute.

It is important that we listen to what is important to everyone and not just the most disadvantaged. Different things matter in different areas and we need to have an overview and own these collectively if we want Cumbria to be united.

We need to generate a sense that it's not only about improving the lot of people I am responsible to but asking the really big question – what kind of society do we want?

Appendix 2 – acknowledgments

Participants in the inquiries and/or the large group event on 11 July:

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