

Enabling social action

SECTION B

Making the case in the public sector



Department
for Culture
Media & Sport

NEW
ECONOMICS
FOUNDATION

This section summarises the reasons why social action is central to the future of public services. It contains several tools and resources that show why social action needs to be encouraged and supported by the public sector, and who stands to benefit.

In this section you will find the following tools:

B1 'Why do this?' diagram

A diagram summarising who stands to benefit from social action. It can be used by those looking to promote social action with different audiences

B2 The paradox of demand: Why focusing on reducing demand sometimes serves to increase it

A diagram illustrating how social action can reduce the need for more acute services, whereas simply cutting services or focusing on demand reduction can tend to increase demand

B3 Making a large difference: How the impact and scale of social action can be increased

A set of approaches to scaling social action to address large-scale problems, as well as locally specific ones

These external resources also provide useful content on the role of social action in public services:

- [Social action: Harnessing the potential discussion paper – Cabinet Office.](#) A paper discussing the opportunities that harnessing social action presents for public services – increasing resources, bringing in new expertise and knowledge, and enabling broader targeted support
- [People helping people – Nesta.](#) Using case studies and evidence, this publication describes why the public sector can and should enable social action

- [Developing a Community Based Approach in Staffordshire: 'People helping people' – Staffordshire County Council](#). A strategy outlining the principles and framework for action the council is using to enable social action across the county. It describes Staffordshire's four areas for action: leadership at all levels, capacity building, commissioning, and evidence and evaluation
- [Social action and volunteering: Discussion paper – Cornwall Council](#). A scoping paper outlining how the council can work with local people to include social action in service delivery, remove barriers to volunteering, and develop processes to evaluate volunteering and social action
- [Family 2020 – Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Board](#). A short publication explaining why and how Suffolk County Council and its partners are building social action (described as community resilience) and early help into their model for supporting children, young people, and families

1 Kirklees Council. (2016). Community partnerships: Annual newsletter 2015–16. Retrieved from: www.kirklees.gov.uk/beta/grants-and-funding/pdf/community-partnerships-annual-newsletter-1516.pdf

2 Robert Putnam, bowlingalone.com

3 Cabinet Office. (2016). Community Life Survey 2015–16. Retrieved from: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/539102/2015_16_community_life_survey_bulletin_final.pdf

4 McKinnon, E. (2015). Community First – Helping people to live fulfilling and good lives (1). Retrieved from: coanalysis.blog.gov.uk/2015/07/03/community-first-helping-people-to-live-fulfilling-and-good-lives-1

5 McKinnon, E., & Green, K. (2015). Community Organisers – Inspiring people to build bigger, stronger society. Retrieved from: coanalysis.blog.gov.uk/2015/08/11/community-organisers-inspiring-people-to-build-a-bigger-stronger-society

B1: 'Why do this?' diagram

This diagram summarises the overarching vision for social action, as well as the way in which it can meet the priorities of citizens, the public sector, and the wider community.

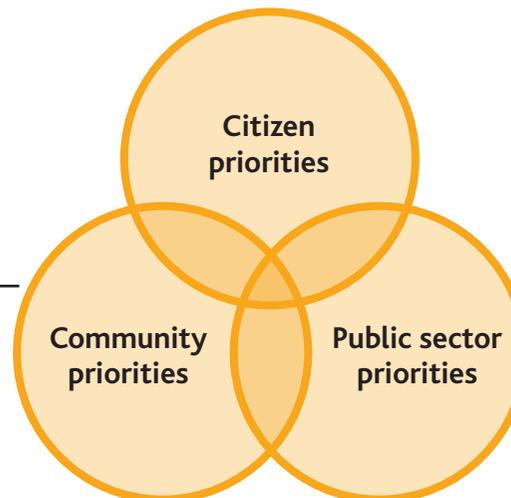
Figure 1. Overlapping priorities

Vision

Social action is about people coming together to help improve their lives and solve important problems in their communities. When the public sector works with communities to empower them – listening to citizens, growing their capacity to act, and working with them as equals – social action can become a powerful way of meeting people's needs. By bringing in untapped community resources and providing bespoke solutions to local issues, social action can achieve better outcomes than traditional models of service delivery.

Community priorities

Active communities are happier and healthier.² Lots of people already volunteer locally and many people would like to be more involved in local decision-making.³ Social action not only improves outcomes for service users and helps the public sector make savings, it is principally about people coming together, in their communities, to take action on the things they care about. By focusing on giving communities the tools they need to take action together, public sector leaders can build stronger communities with the potential to increase levels of wellbeing⁴ and social cohesion.⁵ Meanwhile, communities can focus efforts on their priorities – from improving the local park to reducing loneliness – and reap the benefits.



Citizen priorities

While public services are an essential part of a well-functioning society, they can sometimes be experienced by citizens as paternalistic and bureaucratic. Bespoke projects and local organisations that come together around a particular issue, skill, or resource identified by local citizens are more likely to be able to solve problems than top-down, one-size-fits-all services. By involving citizens in the design and delivery of public services – from libraries to healthcare – social action can provide a more person-centred experience for service users. For example, many people would rather be cared for in their own home by people in their own community than in a retirement home, which can also have better outcomes and be better value for money.¹

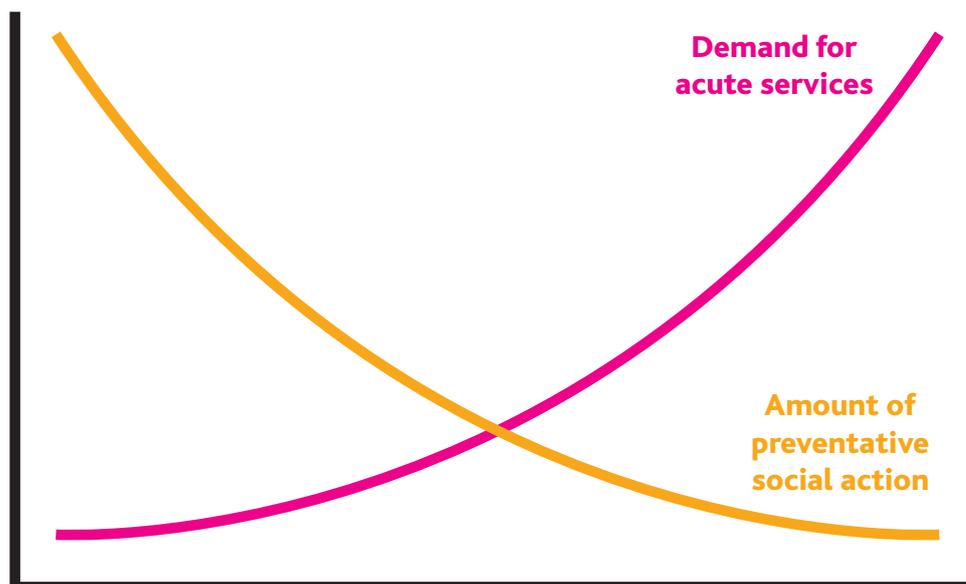
Public sector priorities

The public sector wants to improve local public services and support the flourishing of resourceful local communities. At the same time it is under significant budgetary pressures. While growing and supporting social action requires ongoing public investment, stimulating untapped community resources can help the public sector make savings and maintain outcomes. By enabling people to participate in social action, the public sector can continue to improve outcomes in its local area while making savings. Strategic social action can also help prevent people from needing more acute services, by keeping people well.

B2: The paradox of demand: Why focusing on reducing demand sometimes serves to increase it

As public sector spending is rapidly reduced, the temptation is to raise the bar to accessing public services through tighter eligibility criteria, for example by limiting social care services to people with a smaller range of support needs. Resources are also often taken out of local assets such as community centres, reducing the scope for people to come together and initiate social action. This focus on demand reduction and cost savings can actually serve to increase demand. If fewer people are able to access support early on and receive help to keep well, then it is likely that more people will need acute services later, once their problems have become harder to fix. With fewer low-cost preventative social action initiatives, there will be more need for costly acute services. This is the paradox of demand: a situation of rising demand and falling preventative social action, illustrated schematically in Figure 2.

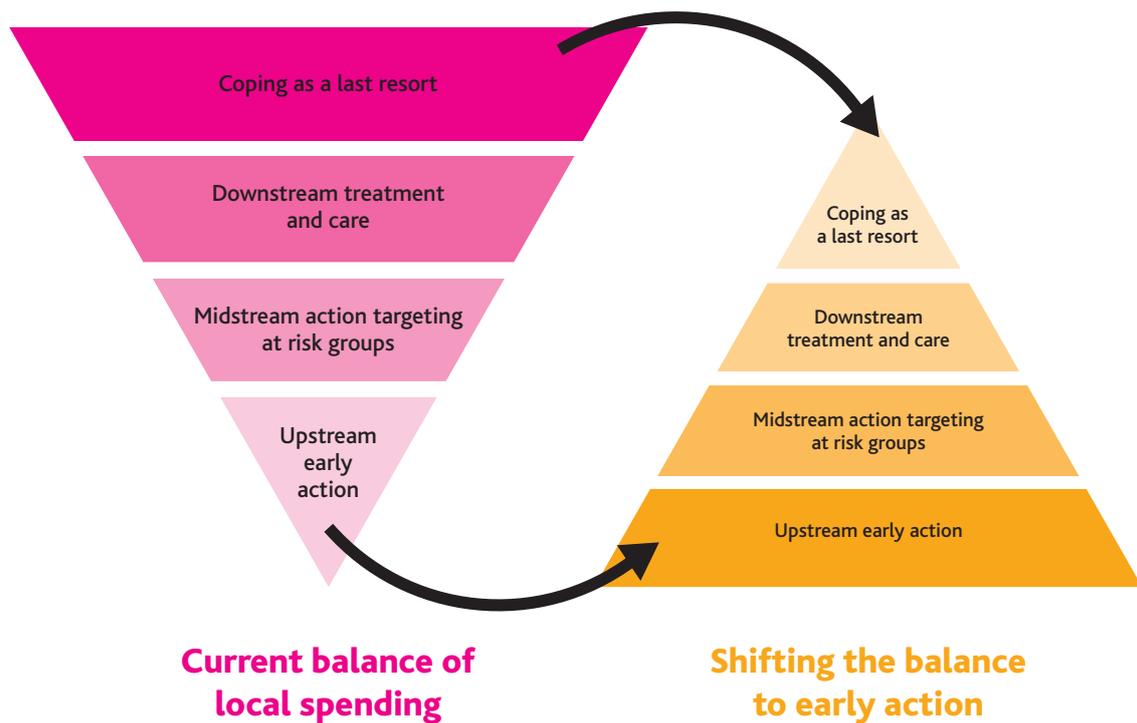
Figure 2. The paradox of demand



In the long term, therefore, focusing on demand reduction and cost savings is not necessarily the most effective way of improving outcomes and making the best use of resources. It is often wiser to invest in enabling preventative social action which can reach a wide range of people early on, promoting their health and wellbeing. This can stop people needing to fall back on expensive acute services which become more

of a last resort. As Figure 3 depicts, the aim is to flip public sector spending so the majority of resources are spent on addressing problems early on instead of curing them or coping with them once they have become intractable. When this shift is achieved, it may lead to the overall amount of spending required reducing, as shown by the smaller orange triangle.

Figure 3. Shifting the balance to social action



B3: Making a large difference: How the impact and scale of social action can be increased

Social action – whether it is a community-owned library or a local befriending scheme – is often thought of as small-scale and local. Indeed, people coming together to help improve their lives and solve the problems that are important in their communities usually happens on a small scale initially and often at a local or even hyperlocal level. However, social action can be scaled up. It can begin to transform services entirely and shift the way people get the support they need.

Part of the role of the public sector is to recognise where innovative local action can be supported to scale up and/or have an impact beyond its initial beneficiaries. This tool provides three approaches to increasing the impact and scale of social action.

1. JOINING UP LOCAL ACTIVITIES

One approach to scaling the impact of social action is to join up local activities into a coherent strategy. This does not increase the scale of specific projects, but rather increases their overall impact through coordination. By developing a framework of common outcomes sought through social action in a place, and linking people who need support to social action, the public sector can support people involved in social action to achieve greater overall impact on outcomes.

Kirklees community partnerships

A good example of this is the community partnerships programme developed by Kirklees Council. Focusing on activities which support older and disabled people to maintain their wellbeing and independence, the community partnerships team has succeeded in linking small-scale social action initiatives into a system that enables them to have a significant impact on local outcomes. Each year, it provides small to medium grants to around 130 social action projects which help people stay healthy in the community. Around half of the projects are user-led and have no paid members of staff. The investment totalled £1.5 million in 2015/2016 and was co-funded by the council and two local clinical commissioning groups.⁶

6 Kirklees Council. (2016). Community partnerships: Annual newsletter 2015–16. Retrieved from: www.kirklees.gov.uk/beta/grants-and-funding/pdf/community-partnerships-annual-newsletter-1516.pdf

The community partnerships team also provides a further 100 organisations with development support, which includes administrative and in-kind support and help to find alternative sources of funding.

In 2015/2016 a social prescribing initiative helped over 600 people find out about or access community activities for the first time, 70% of whom have high levels of need. Overall, the social action in Kirklees supported 6,245 people each week and at least 34,300 people over the whole year.⁷ In some cases, support through social action led to people turning down more acute health and social care service because they prefer the community activities they have been referred to. Over the last five years, the number of people using adult social services fell by 50% in Kirklees.⁸ While correlation cannot be assumed to imply causation, this is the same period of time in which Kirklees has strategically invested in joining up local social action.

2. REPLICATING (AND TAILORING) A GOOD IDEA

Another way in which social action can be scaled is through replication. An effective way of working can be promoted and supported to spread, as new groups take on a good idea and tailor it to their context. The public sector can play a role in understanding and sharing effective models of social action, locally or nationally. It can support the process of replication through public backing, positive publicity, in-kind support, and financial investment.

Shared Lives

Shared Lives is an example of social action which has scaled through replication. It operates as a national membership network of Shared Lives Carers who support adults with care needs in family and community-based ways. Around half of the carers in Shared Lives care for people by including them in their own family home, while the other half support people through short breaks and day visits.

7 Kirklees Council. (2016). Community partnerships: Annual newsletter 2015–16. Retrieved from: www.kirklees.gov.uk/beta/grants-and-funding/pdf/community-partnerships-annual-newsletter-1516.pdf

8 Interview with Kirklees Council's community partnerships manager, Fiona Weir.

Shared Lives began as an adult placement programme in 1992. By 2003, there were 700 members but numerous challenges with regulatory barriers.⁹ Shared Lives now has a membership of 8,460 carers, supporting 11,570 people in 131 Shared Lives schemes in England.¹⁰ It has replicated across the UK through partnerships with local authorities. Shared Lives provides support, advice, and insurance for carers, along with a rigorous training, approval, and matching process. Local authorities pay for the part-time care out of their community care budget, but at a much lower cost than traditional residential care or care homes. Helping it scale, Shared Lives has also had the backing of NHS England and the Cabinet Office. This enabled it to achieve the regulatory changes needed to support its social action model of care and the public profile that has led to it becoming a trusted partner for the majority of local authorities in England.

In 2014/2015, Shared Lives placements for people with learning disabilities cost on average £26,000 less per year than institutional care.¹¹ The vast majority (96%) of Shared Lives placements were rated good or outstanding by the Care Quality Commission in 2016 which compares favourably with other community services of which 68.6% were rated good or outstanding, and residential services of which 63.5% were. Shared Lives aims to grow rapidly over the next four years to support 37,113 more people and save local authorities an additional £145 million annually.

3. SUPPORTING A MOVEMENT

Social action can also scale through movements, which have been defined as 'voluntary collective[s] of individuals committed to promoting or resisting change through coordinated activity, to produce a lasting and self-generating effect'.¹² Movement building involves people organising around a shared concern or issue, perhaps stimulated by community organising. An idea or innovation that addresses a particular

9 Shared Lives Plus. (no date). About Shared Lives Plus. Retrieved from: sharedlivesplus.org.uk/index.php/about-shared-lives-plus

10 Shared Lives Plus. (2016). The State of Shared Lives in England. Retrieved from: sharedlivesplus.org.uk/images/1Launch_copy_Final_The_State_of_Shared_Lives_in_England_-_2016.pdf

11 Shared Lives Plus. (no date). What is Shared Lives? Retrieved from: sharedlivesplus.org.uk/faq/about-shared-lives

12 Bibby, J., Bevan, H., Carter, E., Bate, P. & Robert, G. (2009). The power of one, the power of many – bringing social movement thinking to health and healthcare improvement. NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement. Retrieved from: www.slideshare.net/NHSIQ/the-power-of-one-the-power-of-many

issue in a place can spread quickly to others with similar concerns in other locations. The public sector can play a role in helping such ideas and innovations to spread by promoting them, giving them public backing, and publicising them. This gives an added legitimacy and encourages people to implement the idea locally.

Dementia Friends

Dementia Friends is a programme started by the Alzheimer's Society with the aim of transforming the way the UK thinks, acts, and talks about dementia. It works by recruiting people to become Dementia Friends – people who go out into communities with a greater understanding of what dementia is and how they can help people with the condition. Because dementia affects so many people both directly and indirectly, the idea of Dementia Friends spread quickly and became a movement. There are currently over 1.5 million Dementia Friends in the UK; the idea is that these people spread an understanding of dementia by word of mouth, creating dementia-friendly communities in the process.

This is an example of how a simple idea can catch on and create a difference at scale. When an issue affects many people, as is the case with dementia, ideas to address the issue can spread quickly and make a huge difference. In the case of Dementia Friends, many local authorities have encouraged the spread of this movement by supporting the campaign and encouraging residents to get involved.

Part of Enabling social action – tools and resources developed by the
New Economics Foundation in collaboration with the Office for Civil Society.
Available from www.gov.uk

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