How to Keep it Local

Five step guide for councillors and commissioners
Summary

This practical guide for councillors and commissioners is designed to support better commissioning. Local authorities are under huge pressure from rising demand for services and ever shrinking budgets. Many see big contracts that outsource services to large national providers as the only way out. However, this is creating an environment that wastes money on inefficient contracts, discriminates against local providers, and fails to create the services we need.

There is an alternative approach, one that prioritises a simple principle: to Keep it Local. By making public service delivery ‘local by default’, commissioning can create more responsive services that reduce costs, invest in the local economy and build a stronger community.

This guide explains why a Keep it Local approach offers a better way and how to make it a reality. It busts some of the common myths about the Social Value Act and EU rules that conspire to keep local providers out the picture. It provides inspirational case studies of where councils are using Keep it Local approaches to great effect. And it sets out five principles for how councillors and commissioners can work together to create a better commissioning environment – that supports local communities, maximises the value of limited resources and inspires excellence in public service provision.

1. **Take a place-based approach**, to co-ordinate siloed services and utilise the full range of local assets.

2. **Demonstrate social value**, maximising the potential of the Social Value Act to ensure that social value is accounted for across commissioning and procurement decisions.

3. **Commit to building community capacity**, with a proactive and positive commissioning strategy that explicitly aims to support local organisations.

4. **Impose a maximum value on contracts**, to level the playing field and ensure that contracts aren’t out of reach for smaller organisations from the outset.

5. **Involve local people through co-design**, where the expertise of the professional combines with the experience of the user to create more effective services.

Join our Keep it Local Network

Locality has launched a Keep it Local network for councillors, commissioners and supporters. The network will provide an opportunity to share, learn and inspire. It will provide updates from new research Locality is conducting in six local authority areas for how local commissioning of public services can build economic resilience. We’ll also highlight case studies of successful models of procurement and commissioning, and host regular discussions to share best practice.

To join the network, sign up at locality.org.uk/keepitlocal
Commissioning now plays a role in almost every service area that local authorities are responsible for. It has the potential to support a strong local economy and deliver good local services that can tackle the big social challenges we face. However, we have seen many examples where commissioning has led to money being wasted on poor services. Often this is because good intentions have not been backed up in local authorities’ commissioning policies and practice.

This practical guide for councillors and commissioners is designed to support better commissioning. It explains why locally-commissioned and delivered services can both save money and achieve better outcomes, and sets out a five step guide for how to put a Keep it Local approach to public services into practice. It also tells you how to join our Keep it Local network of innovative councils.

Even if councils stopped filling in potholes, maintaining parks, closed all children’s centres, libraries, museums, leisure centres and turned off every street light, they will not have saved enough money to plug the financial black hole they face by 2020.

Lord Porter, LGA Chairman, November 2015

Introduction – How you can Keep it Local

The challenges facing local authorities are unprecedented, with rising demand for services, shrinking budgets and an uncertain environment for planning. Locality has been working with and talking to many local authorities and community organisations to find new ways to keep public services viable in this increasingly difficult climate.

Many councils are responding to the huge pressures they are under by going large: standardising their services, scaling them up, and outsourcing contracts to giant multinational organisations and big national charities and social enterprises. This approach, so the theory goes, is the best way to make savings. Having a smaller number of larger contracts reduces transaction costs; and wrapping together a wide range of services into one big bundle means you can sell in bulk to the lowest bidder.

Our Keep it Local campaign has shown this to be a red herring. Big public service contracts can be complex and inefficient, sucking up more resources to manage than a larger number of smaller contracts. Crucially, this approach pushes experienced local charities out of the picture, as only large, national organisations are in a position to bid for tenders – and this means we end up with the wrong kind of services.

Bigger doesn’t mean better
Scale Fail

Locality’s groundbreaking report “Saving Money By Doing the Right Thing” comprehensively assessed the demand placed on public services in the UK.¹

The report showed that the way our public services are currently delivered is extraordinarily wasteful and inefficient, and highlighted the “diseconomies of scale”.

Local authorities award contracts to deliver public services – such as social care, child care, hospitals, refuse and recycling – to large national companies. These companies take a standardised, one-size-fits-all approach. This tick-box approach:

Fails to address people’s complex and individual needs

Creates artificial increased demand on services, as people come back time and again for help when their needs aren’t met

Massively increases costs, with endless assessments, repeat referrals and red tape

There is a growing list of poor practices by large private companies delivering public services. G4S, for example, has been fined at least 100 times for breaching its contracts to run prisons since 2010.² Other recent examples of “scale fail” are:

• The Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC), which is owned by MTCnovo, provides probation services in north London. A report published in December 2016 by Dame Glenys Stacey, the chief inspector of probation, outlines her findings that the work of the CRC is poor, with some cases of exposing the public to undue risk of harm. Some service users were not seen for months, with others entirely lost in the system. It was concluded that there was little or no impact on reducing reoffending, due to inexperienced officers, extremely large caseloads, and a lack of senior management focus.³

• Amey is a large national company which hold a 25-year private finance initiative (PFI) contract to manage Sheffield’s roads, which involves managing the 36,000 trees across the city’s road network. As older, larger trees cost more to maintain, it is reportedly cheaper to chop them down rather than maintain them.⁴ Despite an independent review finding that only 1,000 need replacing, campaigners claim Amey have cut down 4,000 trees as of November 2016.⁵ The value of mature trees in terms of air quality, flood alleviation, climate change and property prices has not been taken into consideration.

We have seen throughout the country many local authorities unwittingly creating an environment which:

• Wastes money on inefficient contracts
• Discriminates against local businesses and charities, transporting local jobs and economic benefits out of the area
• Creates services that fail to support local people, loading additional costs onto the local authority and other services by failing to focus on prevention

As the Lloyds Bank Foundation report “Commissioning in Crisis” puts it: “Driven by a desire for assumed economies of scale or even arbitrary targets to reduce the number of contracts, commissioners risk missing out on the long term value delivered by small and medium-sized charities that will meet local needs and budget constraints. Bigger contracts do not in themselves lead to better services and can instead see those with the skills and expertise to deliver services marginalised from the process.”⁶

¹ Locality (2014). “Saving money by doing the right thing: Why ‘local by default’ must replace ‘diseconomies of scale’.
Available at: http://locality.org.uk/our-work/campaigns/keep-it-local/

Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/apr/15/g4s-fined-100-times-since-2010-prison-contracts

Available at: http://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/inspections/northoflondon/

Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/nov/21/dawn-raid-war-on-trees-sheffield

Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/dec/01/the-guardian-view-on-sheffield-trees-decline-and-fall

Community Anchor Organisations

Community anchor organisations are independent community-led organisations operating in a local area, firmly rooted in a sense of place, and committed to positive economic, social or environmental change.

They act as “anchors” because they are there for the long term, providing stability as the external environment changes, and finding new ways of working as circumstances change around them. Although independent organisations, they work interdependently with other agencies and organisations operating in the local area in the public, private and voluntary and community sectors.

Community anchor organisations come in different forms, as they are tailored to respond to local needs and priorities. But what unites them is a common approach. Rooted in the local community, community anchors are flexible and innovative, so can respond and evolve as people’s requirements change, building trusted relationships that strengthen over time. They also weave any public service contracts into the programme of services and activities that they are already providing, meaning that they can provide holistic and tailored support.

Community anchor organisations provide added social value in their services through involving volunteers, bringing in inward investment, using local suppliers and creating local jobs and through making best use of local assets.

Because we are local, we have all of those wider connections to people and that’s what makes a difference.

Andrew Forrest, Great Yarmouth Community Trust

Our trustees are local people, our volunteers are local people, are employees are local people – locality is very much in our DNA.

Malcolm Bailey, Murray Hall

A number of Calderdale Community Anchor Organisations have been working together with Locality and our local authority, looking at ways we could use integrated service approaches in differing communities to help improve the lives of vulnerable, lonely and elderly residents.

The solutions were not difficult for us. They are based on first listening then understanding and then responding by weaving together a new tailor-made offer that fits into the vast resource we have already created.

Barbara Harbinson, Halifax Opportunities Trust
Why **Keep it Local?**

There is an alternative approach, one that prioritises a simple principle: to Keep it Local. Commissioning should aim to make public service delivery ‘local by default’. This means active support for local providers and more tailored services for local people. Here’s why a Keep it Local approach to public services offers a better way:

1. **Better Services**

The goal of public services should be to support people to live happy, healthy and active lives in their own communities. To do this effectively, they need to respond to a wide range of often very complex needs, from long-term chronic conditions and mental illness to social isolation and loneliness.

Big, centralised, provider-led public services are incapable of responding to the subtle nuances of everyday life or building the communities of care that are central to long-term wellbeing. They are too distant, too bureaucratic and only capable of fixing the problems that come through the door – they can’t prevent them ending up there in the first place. The only way to stem the tide of rising demand is to act early, in the community.

A Keep it Local approach means services that are for the community, by the community. This leads to more responsive services that are tailored to the distinct needs of every person.

2. **Saving Money**

It seems an obvious logic that if we had fewer people reaching crisis points in their lives, we wouldn’t need to spend so much money in response. But our public services have struggled to square this circle and shift resources ‘upstream’ to tackle problems at source. Indeed, this task is especially challenging at a time when demand for crisis services has never been higher and there is scarce funding available to deliver them.

However, much of the demand on our public services is ‘failure demand’: problems which have mounted up over time, having not been properly addressed when they were first reported, with people re-presenting at multiple services for the same problem. During Locality’s research project with Vanguard which led to the “Saving Money by Doing the Right Thing” report, a study of eight people with drug or alcohol dependency found they presented to GPs a total of 124 times. The “system” carried out 4,300 activities, creating 800 documents – but only 10% of these activities actually related to helping the people, with the remaining 90% relating to approvals, reporting against targets and accounting for performance to commissioners. None of the cases actually experienced an improvement in their circumstances.

This means we end up paying dedicated and skilled public service professionals to act as gatekeepers and assessors, whose primary aim is to find reasons why people shouldn’t access services. When the system is focused on endlessly referring people to other services and not tackling the problems upfront, we are paying for failure, not for success.

A Keep it Local approach can reduce these costs with smaller, more targeted investments, and services delivered by people who are able to address the real problems our communities face and work with them side by side. Local charities are also in a position to leverage additional external resources for community services from trusts, businesses and individuals, which other providers are unable to access.

---

6 How to Keep it Local

3. Stronger Communities and Economies

It is particularly important in times when money is tight that we get the maximum possible benefit from spending on public services. Commissioning and procurement should not be seen in narrow terms of achieving a particular target for a particular service, but as a crucial contribution to the wider success of the local community.

So while an argument might be able to be made for commissioning a large organisation to deliver a specific service in isolation, it fails to realise any wider benefits for the community. Commissioning local, community-led organisations is one of the most tangible ways that local authorities can build a strong civil society, in particular by ensuring communities are economically resilient. Community anchor organisations do this by acting as local economic multipliers: they ensure that the wealth they generate is re-distributed in their neighbourhoods, by employing local people, promoting local businesses, and supporting people to become economically active.

The Social Value Act provides an important means to support the local community. It allows local authorities to deploy their commissioning resources to target local unemployment, generate opportunities for the hardest to reach, focus on reducing environmental impacts, and shape employment practices – all as a part of what they would be buying anyway.
How to Keep it Local –
Our Five Step Guide

A Keep it Local approach means you can create better services, save money, support your local economy and build a strong community. Here’s how to do it in practice.

STEP 1.

Take a place-based approach

Too often, our services exist in ‘silos’. This means they are narrowly targeted on one aspect of a person’s needs and work to their own internal logic and organisational priorities, creating a disjointed service landscape that can be hard to navigate. A Keep it Local approach cuts through the silos by starting with the place and the people who live there, utilising the full range of local assets and joining up services to support the ‘whole person’.

Lankelly Chase’s report “Hard Edges” found that two thirds of people using homeless services are also either in the criminal justice system or in drug treatment in the same year. So, rather than seeing each service in isolation, commissioning should seek to co-ordinate interventions across a defined geographical area, and focus on overarching outcomes rather than individual service outputs. For example, when commissioning a mental health service, it should be made clear that the contract outcomes are about overall wellbeing, rather than, say, the number of counselling appointments attended. And it should be closely aligned with council priorities and strategies across other key areas such as employment, homelessness and substance misuse.

PRACTICAL TIPS:

Start by looking at a place (neighbourhood, village, ward etc.) and its community rather than the service. Talk to local people and organisations about the needs AND assets in the local area. What are the underlying issues? Try and avoid commissioning very specialised services in isolation. A small number of individuals with complex needs often recycle through a range of different services, so try and develop commissioning outcomes that enable local organisations who know their communities to develop strong proposals to bring together fragmented services and tackle multiple needs.

• Talk to local people to assess local needs and assets
• Don’t commission specialised services in isolation
• Bring together services and tackle multiple needs

---

Demonstrate social value

A broader approach to commissioning is now enshrined in the Social Value Act, which places a duty on local authorities to consider social value. While the scope of the act is limited and does not require social value consideration to hold sway, it does provide a valuable tool for commissioners and councillors who want to maximise the economic, social and environmental value of their commissioning.

Innovative local authorities can and are developing their own social value strategies, which ensure that social value is accounted for across their commissioning and procurement decisions. To maximise this potential, it is important to think about how to measure social value. There is a range of measures available for doing this, such as economic or financial assessments, cost-benefit analyses, or wellbeing measures. The Office for Civil Society is seeking to strengthen the framework for measuring and evaluating social value to help embed it in the procurement process, and has recently funded the Social Value Implementation and Measurement Project, a series of case studies showing how providers apply social value.

**PRACTICAL TIPS:**

One of the mistakes public service providers are making is adding in a simple question in tender documentation asking bidders to demonstrate their social value. A better way is to be clear about the broad social value you want to see, and give local organisations the opportunity to describe the value that only they can bring.

So commissioning should set guidance and criteria for the relevant social value sought, such as impact on the local economy, strengthening local supply chains or supporting the local environment. This means local providers can demonstrate their strongest points, and can potentially avoid national providers with slick bid writing teams being able to give generalist information with no local knowledge or connections.

- Set guidance on the social value you want to see
- Give local organisations the opportunity to describe how they can achieve it
- Prioritise organisations which demonstrate local knowledge and connections

**MAXIMISING SOCIAL VALUE**

The limited scope of the Social Value Act is often misunderstood as preventing councils from going further. This is not the case – it is ‘enabling’ legislation and while it may not require social value to be considered in contracts under the OJEU procurement threshold (currently £111,676 for central government bodies and £172,514 for other bodies), it does not prevent it.

Indeed the government now actively celebrates councils whose “commitment to social value goes far beyond the requirements of the Social Value Act”, through the Social Value Awards.10 And the government’s Social Value Act Review in February 2015 emphasised that “commissioners are already permitted to consider social value as widely as they wish and it is considered good practice to consider social value, where relevant, across goods and works and below the OJEU threshold”.11

The Review also explicitly debunks the myth that EU procurement rules leave commissioners vulnerable to legal challenge. They point out:

“The obligation to accept the “Most Economically Advantageous Tender” (“MEAT”) expressly includes considerations of price, quality, and social value and the European Commission has emphasised the permissive nature of the rules and the appropriateness of their use for social policy objectives.”

The Review goes on to state that “on a practical level, commissioners working within reasonable parameters do not meet legitimate challenge, and the threat of actual legal challenge is in any case low given the difficulties and risks in mounting a challenge. Social value is a progressive and permissive concept, which may develop through effective consultation, imaginative commissioning, and creative supplier service design, and preferably a combination of the three.”

The Social Value Hub has a comprehensive “Mythbuster” on how to navigate the rules to maximise social value: www.socialvaluehub.org.uk/about/mythbuster

For more on the Social Value Awards visit:


Commit to building community capacity

The foundation of a Keep it Local approach is the presence of enough vibrant community-led organisations who have the capacity to provide high quality local services. But community organisations are currently facing huge financial pressures and deeply entrenched social challenges. They are increasingly being crowded out of the public service marketplace by the trend towards scale and standardisation that favours big corporations and large national charities. NCVO research has found that small and medium-sized charities’ income from government contracts decreased by up to 37% between 2008/09 and 2012/13, while government contracts to the largest charities increased by 34% in the same time.12

So local authorities need to put clear strategies and policies in place to reverse this trend, to shape the market and build the capacity of local community organisations to deliver high quality services. Political leadership from councillors is crucial to doing this: it is important to send a clear signal that the council values small-scale commissioning and is committed to supporting local providers. This could be done by joining Locality’s Keep it Local network of councils. It could also be done by adopting the commissioning kitemark being developed by the Office for Civil Society, which commissioners will be able to use to show their commitment to commissioning small charities. Councils can also adopt a proactive and positive commissioning strategy and policies that explicitly aims to support local organisations.

PRACTICAL TIPS:

Put clear policies in place that practically support local organisations to take on services. Calderdale Council has used community hubs to bring together local organisations to provide a range of services (see case study later in this report). Calderdale is also in the process of implementing a community anchor policy to strengthen its support for community organisations.

Another way of building local capacity is to support genuinely local consortia of community organisations, to enable local delivery in instances when contracts do need to be at a larger scale. This is much more effective than having one large organisation sub-contracting to local organisations, which can be inefficient and leads to cash leaving the local area to cover national overheads. However, local authorities’ procurement processes can make consortia working challenging, so procurement policies should be reviewed to make them as consortia friendly as possible.

A good example of successful consortia working is “Arise” in Bradford, where five Locality members have come together to pool their collective experience, skills and capacity. This enables Arise to attract investment and win contracts that might have been out of reach of the organisations individually. Its first major project was to access £1.4m of DCLG Empty Homes Grant to bring 21 long-term empty homes back to use, and the consortium has since taken on a high profile research contract “Realising Community Assets” for Bradford CCGs.

- Support local organisations to take on services
- Develop a community anchor policy
- Bring organisations together to deliver a range of services – through hubs or consortia

---

STEP 4.

Impose a maximum value on contracts

At present, many of the incentive structures in the commissioning processes tend towards scale. Public-sector risk aversion, bureaucratic procurement processes, payment-by-results regimes and EU procurement rules all combine to push contracts into the arms of larger organisations with greater resources.13

So if we want to Keep it Local, we need to rewrite the rules to make it easier for smaller, local providers to compete with the nationals and multinationals. A key way local authorities can do this is to think about what an appropriate maximum contract value should be, to level the playing field and ensure that contracts aren’t out of reach for smaller organisations from the outset. Put simply, if local authorities set contracts at too high a level, they guarantee that local providers will be shut out and ensure that money flows out of the local area. So when setting a contract size, commissioners need to ask themselves: how many local organisations could bid at this level? If the answer is zero, then commissioning is excluding organisations with a proven track record of supporting local people and it is failing to grow the local economy.

One example of this can be found in the Lloyds Bank Foundation’s “Commissioning in Crisis” report, which tells of charities being cut out of bidding by rules which require them to have a turnover of double the contract value. Only 6.6% of registered charities have an income of over £500,000.14 So with many contracts valued at upwards of £1,000,000 per annum, the vast majority of organisations with particular local expertise are excluded from bidding. The report also details how large contracts attract “predatory” organisations, who have no previous expertise but recognise a business opportunity and may even bid on a “loss-leader basis” to establish themselves in a particular market.15

A maximum value also reduces risk. While it is often suggested that large organisations are a safer bet, there is no such thing as “too big to fail” when it comes to public services (see ‘Scale Fail’ box on p4). So there are often advantages for commissioners in risk management by using a larger number of service providers, as it can reduce the implications of provider failure. Ongoing evaluation can highlight any areas of risk, and give more control to the commissioner.

GETTING ROUND ‘THE RULES’

Alongside imposing a maximum value on contracts, there is a range of other ways we could change the rules to give smaller organisations a better chance of winning contracts:

- * Disaggregate contracts into smaller lot sizes, to open up opportunities for a wider range of providers to bid for contracts. The 2015 EU procurement directive requires contracting authorities to divide up contracts, or explain why they have not. This is a significant change which begins to make good on then Prime Minister David Cameron’s promise in 2011 to break up large contracts “whenever possible”. In spring 2016, the Public Accounts Committee heard that the Cabinet Office had saved 50% by disaggregating its IT contract.16

- * Don’t use payment by results (PbR). PbR can exclude small and medium sized organisations from delivery and create cash-flow problems meaning that upfront service costs have to be funded through reserves or other income sources. Payment outcomes can also take months, or even years, to be achieved, particularly working with groups of service users with complex needs. Use blended payment mechanisms instead, which include upfront payments and fee for service.

   - Use grants instead of contracts. Grant funding can be a much more flexible and sustainable source of funding, whereas contracts can often not fully cover the cost of providing the service, and can mean financial risks and unsustainable cash flow requirements. As the Grants for Good campaign puts it, grant funding “empowers charities and voluntary groups to identify and solve problems, and address needs in a way which is centred around people”.17

   - Break contracts into smaller lots to open them up to a range of providers
   - Don’t use payment-by-results which can exclude small and medium sized organisations
   - Use grants which are more flexible than contracts.

---


16 See the Grants for Good campaign: https://www.dsc.org.uk/grantsforgood/
Involve local people through co-design

The best public services are based on a relationship, rather than a transaction, where the expertise of the professional combines with the experience of the user. Co-design recognises that the way to create the most effective services is to work with people as partners, rather than do things to them as recipients.

As Locality’s “Our Place Guide to Co-Design” puts it, co-design means that “rather than being presented with a set of options and being asked for our views, citizens work alongside the professionals to discuss and shape what a service could look like.” This prevents us ending up with “service interventions which professionals assume will work but which may not generate the change envisaged, or which service users may fail to engage with”. Co-design is an approach where creativity and a willingness to learn – even from getting it wrong are key, and it should be underpinned by the principle that personal experience is as valued as managerial knowledge.

A good example is Rotherham Rise, a local charity which provides a range of support services for adults and children who have been affected by domestic violence and abuse. Children and families are encouraged and supported to engage as equal partners and not simply as passive recipients of services. This means local people access and use the services with more confidence, thereby reducing waste, cutting down costs to the public purse and ultimately transforming service users’ lives. Over a 10 year period, Rotherham Rise project a financial return on investment of £4.87 for every £1 spent.

HOW TO CO-DESIGN SERVICES

This guide on how to co-design services is from the “Our Place Guide to Co-design”, which can be read in full at: http://mycommunity.org.uk/resources/our-place-guide-to-co-design/

Involve service users early:

Don’t wait until you have a set of polished options to ‘present’. Have the confidence to open conversations with service users before you’ve fully developed any plans of your own for how an outcome could be achieved or a challenge addressed. In practice, this could mean starting to have different kinds of conversations with people currently using a particular service or set of services.

Create an environment where service users and service professionals can talk and work on an equal footing:

Co-design has to be more than “asking people what they think” and gathering up the feedback – the people “in charge” need to be able to work together with the potential beneficiaries of a service, side by side. In practice, this could mean one-to-one conversations with service users to help them understand their “journey” through the system, or organising workshop sessions to map out design ideas together in small groups.

Start by understanding the outcomes not just the service:

Ask open questions about what people want to achieve and change in their lives, and what gets in the way. As a result, after a series of conversations with different people, you may end up co-designing something which looks very different to the service concept we started with.

Take an asset-based approach:

Rather than just focusing on the needs and problems, focus on the assets that people bring to a situation. This can bring to the surface different kinds of resources which can help tackle a challenge or achieve a shared goal. Asset-based approaches can build the resilience individuals by raising their self-esteem and self-confidence, as well as building the capacity of whole communities by augmenting their collective resources.

• See people as partners, not patients
• Put the service user first, what do they want to change
• Consider the resources people can bring to achieve goals

---


Conclusion

Follow the five steps to commissioning – supporting local communities and helping neighbourhoods to thrive.

Every place is different and so is every person. So we need a rich diversity of local organisations, who are embedded in the places people live and know the challenges they face, to provide the right services, in the right place, at the right time. But we are rapidly heading towards a “one size fits all” world, where community organisations are crowded out, and public services are increasingly delivered from a distance by giant corporations and big national charities.

None of this is inevitable. Commissioners and councillors can choose a different path. By implementing Locality’s Keep it Local principles and practical actions, we can create a better commissioning environment – that supports local communities, maximises the value of limited resources and inspires excellence in public service provision.

Join our Keep it Local Network

Locality has launched a Keep it Local network for councillors and commissioners of Keep it Local. The network will provide updates from our research, case studies of successful models of procurement and commissioning, and host regular discussions to share best practice.

There will also be an opportunity in the future to nominate colleagues who champion the Keep it Local approach, celebrating those who work in a Keep it Local way.

To join the network, sign up at locality.org.uk/keepitlocal
How to Keep it Local

Confronted with a £61 million budget shortfall over the next three years, Shropshire Council was faced with some tough decisions – cut back or close down their library services, or find a way to do things differently. Adopting an “invest-to-save” approach, the council has taken the bold step to hand the running of its libraries to community groups, a move it says will ensure the longevity of its library services, as well as tackle social isolation and relieve pressure on health and social care services.

Everyone who is active in Shropshire’s communities – local groups, charities, public sector services, and private enterprise – will work together to use all the local assets to create better outcomes for individuals. The adoption of a locality approach is a key strand of Shropshire Council’s commissioning strategy and the £520,000 investment into redesigning library services will enable the council to build capacity within communities, putting an emphasis on prevention and early help, and reducing the overall demand on the public sector.

Under the scheme, libraries are being transformed into Community Hubs where residents can easily get information and advice that helps them and enables them to help others. People coming into the hubs, which are managed by community-based organisations, will get what they need, when they need it.

We believe that community enterprises will be the best people to develop local services for their communities. They will be able to draw on all the knowledge, resources, skills and assets within that community and will be able to shape services to best reflect local individual circumstances. Shifting management or ownership of assets to community-based organisations will give them a platform to deliver sustainable improvements within their neighbourhoods.

Shropshire County Council

The new Community Hubs will be the first port of call for advice, information and guidance for residents and, by trusting their management to local organisations, a holistic approach will be taken, meeting people’s needs in the first instance and reducing demand on expensive, specialised services at a later date.

Co-design is an important element of the new way of working in Shropshire and the council is investing time in “community conversations” to identify the best approach for neighbourhoods. Thorough needs assessments, formal public consultations, equality and social inclusion impact assessments are all carried out, and the council is using feedback from local people in decision-making. Shropshire aims to utilise the opportunities of social value and social action to tackle health inequalities and improve health outcomes for everyone in the county. A Social Value Charter will set out how public sector commissioners, service providers, voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations and businesses can work to improve social, economic and environmental well-being.

The council plans to devolve power and resources to community organisations and town and parish councils - so people are able to take action and design their own solutions - as well as co-design services with local people and groups and support volunteering through recruitment and capacity building. It is also investing in providing support to the community sector through partnerships with parish and town councils, a Community Enablement Team, professional support and web-based resources.

Shropshire Council is commissioning services locally and local councils are responding positively to these opportunities – either by shaping commissioning outcomes through their involvement in joint local governance or taking on the delivery of services and management of assets themselves.

Locality working is set to continue in Shropshire as the opportunities to both maintain and improve local services through devolving them to town and parish councils and communities provide an alternative to reducing or even closing services that Shropshire Council cannot afford to deliver itself.
Recognised as a leading local authority on the localism agenda, Calderdale Council is reflecting local appetite and engagement by handing the delivery of key, people-focused services to community anchor organisations. Calderdale Council has a strong track record of working with voluntary and community organisations and recognises their importance as partners with the council, as well as within their communities.

Over the past few years the existence of community anchor organisations has clearly benefitted communities within the borough, particularly in light of austerity. The council has made significant savings on its public service delivery. But instead of moving contracts to national providers, the Council looked to its local community anchor organisations to deliver better outcomes and keep money in the local economy.

For example, Halifax Opportunities Trust and North Halifax Partnership now successfully run Calderdale’s children’s centres, Cornholme Old Library and the Centre at Threeways, and other organisations host job clubs and provide a range of welfare and other advice to residents.

Cllr Susan Press, Calderdale Council’s Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods and Communities, said:

“Community anchors are multi-purpose – they do a range of different things to support their community and work with their community to come up with solutions to local problems. They play a really important role in our local towns and neighbourhoods. They act as catalysts for action and are often at the heart of positive change in their communities. They create the conditions for people to volunteer locally in activities and events, and bring people together on behalf of their local community. They often act as advocates for people struggling to be heard and their existence promotes cohesion and community resilience.”

The Staying Well project originally piloted in four areas, North Halifax, Elland, Park and Hebden Bridge is being extended to cover Calderdale. Bringing together the Council’s neighbourhood teams with the voluntary sector, Staying Well will build on the real and lasting benefits realised during the pilot and see the service made available for any adult in Calderdale.

Staying Well offers significant benefits for the people of Calderdale by providing clear navigation to the right opportunities and services to meet their needs. Supported by NHS Calderdale CCG the service also contributes to the reduction of inappropriate referrals and appointments, aiming to improve efficiency across the health and social care economy. Staying Well works with communities to make them more empowered and sustainable.

Wakefield Council, in partnership with the Clinical Commissioning Group, are investing in the community anchor organisations in the district to meet many of the challenges associated with an ageing population, including social isolation. Loneliness can have serious health implications and socially isolated people will have greater health and social care usage. Having thriving local community services and activities provided by community anchors can help to keep people healthy, prevent social isolation and ease pressures on hospitals, GP and care services. This has been progressed through Wakefield’s Connecting Care programme linked to its inclusion as a site for the national Vanguard programme focusing on Multi-disciplinary Community Providers and Care Homes.

As part of the Connecting Care programme, the district is connecting care homes and primary care facilities, with community anchor organisations to help to ensure that older people have access to appropriate care and support in their communities. A key part of this has been funding for Nova Wakefield District to invest and grow the community anchor network across the district to ensure it is capable of meeting local need. This has included mapping community anchor activity against areas of deprivation, so that developing the community infrastructure can be targeted towards these areas.

A core part of Wakefield’s Connecting Care strategy has been investing in community anchors as local advocates, able to be a voice for the community and articulate need, as well as providers of community based activities, which bring older people into contact with others in the community.

An independent evaluation of the Connecting Care programme is being funded as part of the Connecting Care programme. This includes assessing the benefits of connecting care homes and community anchors, reflecting the objectives that the work feeds into long term strategy for community anchors across the district and understanding the mix of skills which are required to support older people in the community. The programme has enabled greater dialogue between the voluntary and community sector and public sector, which has focused on the best way of achieving outcomes based on a partnership approach. There is also an emphasis on co-design with the community, service users and staff to inform future service design and delivery.
**Locality** is the national network of ambitious and enterprising community organisations, working together to help neighbourhoods thrive.

We are a membership organisation, supporting and inspiring community anchor organisations across England to develop and thrive in every neighbourhood. Our members help reduce inequalities, grow the local economy and build a sustainable future for our communities.

We use the collective voice of our members to influence policy, practice and funding both nationally and locally.

Visit [locality.org.uk/keepitlocal](http://locality.org.uk/keepitlocal) to join our network of councillors and commissioners who believe in **Keep it Local!**