Policy and Practice Briefing

Public services built around people and communities:
exploring the roles of community anchor organisations in public service reform and social change

This briefing is for people tackling the challenges of reforming Scotland's public services. It outlines the key learning from What Works Scotland's report: *Transforming communities? Exploring the roles of community anchor organisations in public service reform, local democracy, community resilience and social change.*

Introduction

The Christie Commission's vision for public service reform puts empowerment of people, communities and staff at the heart of this process of changes across public service partnerships and society. Our research explores six community organisations through the lens of a community anchor 'model'. It illustrates the potential of community anchors to engage with, lead and challenge reform in Scotland, and to work with wider social challenges of local democracy, sustainable development and inequalities.

> **Community anchors organisations** share three broad characteristics, in that they are or aspire to be:
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> - **community-led or controlled** - with robust local community governance and community networks/ connections; and financial self-sufficiency for core work sustained through community ownership.
> - **holistic, multi-purpose or 'inherently complex'** - concerned for local economy and social capital; local services and partnerships; local environment and sustainable development; community sector development; local leadership and advocacy.
> - **responsive and committed to local community and its context -** responding to that context whether urban, rural, remote and experiences of poverty, deprivation and inequality, and committed for the long-term – a credible local 'brand'.
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> This is not a one-size-fits-all definition but a broad 'model' that can support dialogue on the development of anchors. In Scotland, the community anchor role has most often been developed by *community development trusts* and *community-controlled housing associations*. However, other local community organisations can also undertake or aspire to the role, potentially working jointly as a 'local eco-system'.

Research process and focus

We used interviews, desk research and stakeholder dialogue to build a picture of six community anchor exemplars that illustrate relevant (good) practice in varied contexts – urban, rural and remote. The exemplars were Ardenglen Housing Association, East Castlemilk, Glasgow; Glenboig Neighbourhood House, North Lanarkshire; Govanhill Housing Association and Community Development Trust, Glasgow; Greener Kirkcaldy, Fife; Huntly and District Development Trust, Aberdeenshire; Stòras Uibhist (South Uist), Western Isles. They are explored in more depth in Section 2 of the full report.

An Advisory Group, and discussions and consultation with other stakeholders, supported the developing analysis which informs the research and this policy and practice briefing.

Key areas of learning for policy and practice

Community anchors and the Christie Commission agenda for public service reform

The Christie Commission argues broadly for public service reform in which **partnership** and **participation** improve **performance** by focusing on **preventing** negative outcomes, particularly inequalities. By reducing demand on services, the dilemmas of working with spending constraints (austerity) while aspiring to a fairer society may be resolved. Community anchors, when suitably resourced, are well-placed to contribute to this agenda through their local participatory governance, multi-purpose-ness and commitment, which support:

1 Complex networks of local partnership working and participation

Anchors are built around an ethos of community governance, inherently complex (multiple) roles and long-term commitment.

In practice this means they build myriad networks of both *local partnerships* with a diversity of public services and other third sector bodies, and *local participation* across a diversity of local organisations, groups, residents, service-users and citizens, and of activity, e.g. environment, equalities.

Partnerships - public services

Local community planning team

Health and social care team

Regeneration + inequalities

Local schools + young people

Housing + community safety

Participation - diverse community networks

Community organisations and groups

Diversity and equalities groups

Local community/third sector networks

Community councils + local politicians

Neighbouring anchor organisations

community anchor organisations

Community-led: members, working groups, board

Community-owned: resources, hub, projects

Trading networks - community enterprises, local business

Funding bodies – local, national

Community resilience – renewables, local leadership, anti-poverty,

Local democracy – community plans, histories

Cross sector collaborations

The complexity of partnership working and participation networks

2 Community-led place-making to prevent negative outcomes and mitigate local inequalities

The exemplars illustrate a wealth and range of local economic, social and environmental development activity. They are well placed, when suitably resourced, to lead and facilitate actions that include:

- supporting access to public and welfare services; anti-poverty work and related income maximisation; and, building local leadership and social capital for groups facing discrimination.[1]
- local economic, social and environmental developments that can support local employment, environmental improvement and sustainability e.g. training, infrastructure, housing, renewables.

Their work can support local partnership working focused on mitigating *some* of the worst impacts of local inequalities and contribute to upstream, whole population, preventative strategies to inequality.[2]

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[1] For example: in relation to age, employment/unemployment, mental health, disability, ethnicity etc.
[2] NHS Health Scotland's (Craig, 2014) review of evidence argues for upstream, whole population, preventative approaches engaging with social determinants of health as best placed to reduce inequality and create savings.

3 Local leadership that improves performance through bottom-up policymaking

The exemplars are already showing the potential of community anchors to lead and facilitate long-term local policymaking that can build local leadership, accountability and resilience, and maintain focus on improving local social and economic outcomes, through:

- *sustained, committed advocacy* for further local resourcing for deprived or disadvantaged communities or groups – that can in turn influence wider regional and national policy-making;[3]
- *community-led action plans and visions* that draw on local knowledge to generate both practical action and dialogue on our future, e.g. a fairer, more equitable, sustainable society.

Investing in infrastructure for community anchors and the community sector

If the potential of community anchors in relation to public service reform is to be taken seriously, three key areas emerge as needing cross-sector dialogue of genuine substance:

4 Bottom-up policymaking

The range of policy areas referred to in the research shows the extent of the relevance of community anchors to the world of policymaking. Anchors offer access to a depth and breadth of local knowledge and the capacity to lead bottom-up policymaking, e.g. advocacy and community-led plans, that can engage with and constructively challenge the development of services and policies. Key emerging opportunities for the state to develop and invest in include:

The breadth of roles of community anchors

- community-led/local place plans of substance – that work on an equal footing with other forms of planning e.g. community planning, spatial planning.
- 'community sector proofing' across local and national policymaking that creates spaces for dialogue with the community sector across different layers of the local and central state.

Genuine investment and resourcing of such work and its resulting actions will be needed if the community sector and communities are not simply to become over-burdened by mitigating society-wide problems generated through uneven economic and social development.

5 Resourcing the community sector

Key areas for scaling-up state investment in community anchors include:

- community ownership via suitable support for asset transfer and the 'community-right-to-buy';
- community enterprise through suitable public procurement and public service contracts;
- relevant training for staff, activists and volunteers – including a community sector-led 'change-agent' programme.[4]
- supporting activists and volunteers via citizen allowances and the welfare system.

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[3] Centre for Regional Economic Social Research's (Crisp et al., 2016) evidence review of community-led anti-poverty work argues for the role of community organisations in wider campaigning as well as practical work.

[4] A change-agent programme concerned, for instance, for facilitative leadership and local democratic practice; community resilience for local sustainable development; and community organising for social change.

Crucially, this investment must be angled towards more deprived communities so that they can build/develop community anchors capable of asserting their interests; yet must also do (social) justice to the interests of many people living on low-incomes in 'mixed communities'. The financial stability provided by a significant income-generating asset base allows anchors to give long-term commitment to communities.

6 Culture change: building relationships and improving local governance

The need for culture change in relation to public service reform has often been highlighted, yet the shift from traditional top-down, linear models of service co-ordination and development toward more fluid, collaborative processes is deeply challenging for all. Community anchors can offer both support and leadership for such change through:

- community sector-led training for public services that builds trust and dialogue.
- joint working with services to build deliberative and participatory local democratic practices.
- monitoring changes in local social and economic outcomes, e.g. inequalities, sustainable development, so that communities, state and society that can remain focused on these issues.

Community anchors as catalysts for local democracy, local resilience and social change

The Christie Commission, whilst focused on public service reform, makes connections to wider social and economic themes: a balanced (inclusive) economy; local democracy, autonomy and community resilience; environmental challenges and a fairer society. The Commission provides the 'space' for action-orientated conversations on these themes that we need to have as a society, and at all levels (local, regional, national).

Where community anchors are already working as grassroots institutions for local democracy and showing commitment to community participation and deliberation in their own governance and decision-making, then they are well placed to offer the facilitative leadership needed for these conversations. Their complex networks and leadership can build: new public participation processes; community resilience for local sustainable development; and collaborative strength across state and communities e.g. a social commons.[5]

The starting point for this shared agenda must be dialogue of genuine substance between community sector, public services and policymakers to create a step-change in investing in infrastructure for community anchors.

The full report and executive summary are available at: whatworksscotland.ac.uk/exploring-the-roles-of-community-anchor-organisations-in-public-service-reform

What Works Scotland is a Scottish Government and ESRC-funded research collaboration aiming to improve the way local areas use evidence to make decisions about public service development and reform.

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[5] The social commons (Coote, 2017) is understood as the shared development of natural, social, economic and political infrastructure through both civil society/community and the public sector/state