Valuing Social Infrastructure

Early Action Task Force

COMMUNITY
LINKS

Executive Summary

What makes a place a good place to live and prosper in? This discussion document highlights the importance of recognising and valuing social infrastructure and making sure that it is as preventative as possible.

Section 1

Section 1 defines the three dimensions of social infrastructure – buildings, facilities and the built environment; services and organisations; and strong and healthy communities – and lists essential ingredients and examples. Britain has a proud history of creating a rich social infrastructure, compared to many other countries. But recently there has been significant disinvestment in the physical assets and preventative services that are an important part of social infrastructure, potentially leading to a further downward spiral. Although the existence of universal public services helps to iron out disparities between communities, some communities are more deprived in terms of social infrastructure than others. But this remains insufficiently recognised and recorded by the current ONS measure of deprivation.

Section 2

Section 2 looks at the role of social infrastructure in early action. Much of social infrastructure supports prevention and early action, helping to create the resourcefulness and resilience that prevent problems in the first place and providing support networks, services and activities that stop any problems from getting worse. It's important to think of early action in the round: too often, it is seen only in terms of services or specific interventions, ignoring the potential of other dimensions of social infrastructure to make a difference. Regeneration initiatives, conversely, tend to focus too narrowly on capital projects. Community based initiatives add value but would be more effective if all dimensions of social infrastructure are deployed and aligned, including public services. At the same time, efforts should be made to ensure social infrastructure is as geared toward early action as possible: it will

rightly always contain some acute services, but it can also become more preventative - for example, health services can do more to promote public health. Like other forms of early action, social infrastructure can be better supported by adopting long term planning, being more transparent about the future costs and benefits of changes, and taking steps to break down silos. Greater investment in social infrastructure in deprived areas is required alongside investment in jobs, skills physical infrastructure and existing capital funds should be used for this purpose. This should be seen as a complementary way to increase well-being and prosperity, bringing economic and social benefits and saving money downstream.

Section 3

Finally, section 3 looks at what works in developing preventative social infrastructure locally, based on lessons learnt from place-based initiatives, giving a potential checklist for practitioners to use and discuss, with examples. This includes mapping existing social infrastructure and making better use of the resources that already exist, developing strong collaborative partnerships with shared goals, empowering communities to determine priorities and take more control of assets and developing pooled budgets.

Valuing social infrastructure

What is social infrastructure?

Strong social infrastructure makes a place somewhere where people want to live, businesses want to trade and investors wish to invest. We all know it when we see it, and know how communities appear when it is not in place. The prosperity of the people who live in a community – including their access to good jobs and life opportunities – is of course part of this. But also important is the fabric of the community, its social infrastructure, and if that is poor a negative spiral of decline may result. Nonetheless, good social infrastructure is given little priority and remains relatively invisible in policy terms, which makes it vulnerable to disinvestment, neglect and piecemeal approaches.

As the diagram below illustrates, social infrastructure consists of three different, interdependent dimensions.

Social infrastructure

Buildings, facilities and the built environment

Services and organisations
(public, private and voluntary)

Strong and healthy communities
(social capital; social norms; influence and control; partnership working)

The first is buildings, facilities and the built environment. This includes not just good quality places in which to live, but also open spaces, playgrounds and sports facilities in which people can exercise and have fun and buildings in which people are educated and looked after when they are frail or unwell. And places in which to meet, from cafes and pubs, community halls and places of worship. Good transport infrastructure is also important.

The second aspect of social infrastructure is services and organisations. These will not just be publicly funded through taxation, such as health, education and training, childcare centres and youth services, the police and environmental services such as refuse collection. They also include services that are largely delivered through the private sector and paid for individually, such as broadband, gyms, sports clubs and bingo. Charities, faith and community and self-help groups and housing associations add a further vital dimension to healthy infrastructure, helping to bring people together and provide support networks.

Finally, social infrastructure consists of strong and healthy communities in the broadest sense. This is not just what is sometimes called social capital – social interaction, including friendship groups, and positive relationships across different parts of the community. Social norms are an important part of any strong, healthy community and are created by the community itself. For example, intolerance toward graffiti, litter, noise and crime helps make a community more cohesive and happy.[1] Control and influence over services, buildings and facilities also ensures that these serve the community well and genuinely meet its needs, and helps create communities where local people are agents, not victims, of change and are able to shape the course of their own lives. Healthy communities also depend on strong partnerships between different organisations and services so that services are properly co-ordinated and targeted.

These three elements are mutually supportive. Good health is harder to maintain without facilities such as parks, sports grounds and leisure centres.

Strong communities are harder to create without physical places to meet, interact and have fun or worship. If local buildings and facilities do not exist, local people face travel and cost barriers to accessing services. If they are poorly maintained, buildings may be unwelcoming, and if they are not inclusive then social barriers may be erected and communities may become divided. If roads are unsafe and not well lit, people may not want to leave their homes.

What are the ingredients of social infrastructure?

Every community needs a basic level of social infrastructure to thrive. A list of essential ingredients is given in the next page along with some examples.

	Essential ingredients	Examples
Building, facilities and built environment	Good housing and facilities for the residential care of older people Good childcare, nursery and education buildings Accessible health care Recreational facilities and spaces for children and people of all ages Accessible buildings where everyone in the community can meet Accessible shops, cafes, pubs Safe streets A welcoming and well maintained built environment Accessible waste disposal facilities	Mixed housing developments Children's centres, Schools and FE colleges, libraries Health centres/GP surgeries and hospitals Parks, climbing frames and children's playgrounds, sports grounds, leisure centres and swimming pools Community halls, places of worship Trees and planting, benches and places to sit in public spaces
Services and organisations	Well maintained, safe and affordable social housing Affordable, good quality childcare Good quality education, including early years, and youth services Good healthcare and public health education Affordable, reliable broadband and mobile phone signals Safe, reliable public and other transport Enforced health and safety and environmental regulations Environmental services Affordable shopping and banking services Effective policing Educational, recreational, arts and socialising activities A thriving voluntary sector	Housing associations and other forms of properly resourced social housing Wardens Sure Start Access to lifelong learning, youth services Health centres which provide wider health promotion services Easy access by public transport to all other forms of social infrastructure Cycle tracks Safe housing Clean air and measures to reduce traffic pollution near nurseries and schools Regular refuse collection, street cleaning and recycling Access to local shops and food outlets that sell healthy, affordable food Accessible supermarkets, Community cafes, pubs, village shops Community policing and preventative measures Libraries, arts centres and museums Gyms, yoga, sports groups, choirs, associative charities Lunch clubs, self-help groups, community based organisations, services to support vulnerable groups
Strong and healthy communities	Positive relationships and interaction, trust and cohesion within the community (social capital) Social norms which help ensure a well-maintained and safe environment Influence and control over services, building and facilities and wide civic participation Strong partnerships within and between sectors	Strong friendship groups, social networks and interaction across communities, Faith groups that are involved in wider community building across the whole community Neighbourhood watch, regular litter collection and graffiti removal schemes, drug prevention and addiction support Ownership of community assets, participatory budgeting, neighbourhood management, Tenant Management Associations, effective consultation mechanisms Place based initiatives that have partnership working between organisations and sectors and with communities at their heart

What is most important?

Each community should expect a minimum level of social infrastructure, and should therefore aspire to all of the essential ingredients above. But precisely how these standards are met may be different because they will be tailored to specific needs.

Communities should have a say in what is most important to them when it comes to investing in or maintaining specific examples of social infrastructure. Their ability to determine priorities and have some control over the running of services is part of the empowerment of that community.

What is most valuable to a community will vary but we do know from a LSE ten year longitudinal study[2] of over 200 families living in areas of concentrated poverty and social problems that these things are especially valued by those families in those kinds of areas: Sure Start; decent homes; neighbourhood management; wardens; community policing, crime prevention and safety, including tighter controls on drugs; mixed housing development; open space; sport; schools; training; youth provision; public transport; community activity; and effective consultation.

There may not be a single view within a community about what is important and there will sometimes be conflicting views. Local communities may, for example, resist settlements by travellers and gypsies. Mediation and brokerage by local government or an anchor agency may be necessary.

❝ Communities should have a say in what is most important to them when it comes to investing in or maintaining specific examples of social infrastructure. ❞

Disinvestment in social infrastructure

Britain remains relatively rich, compared to many other developed countries, in its social infrastructure. Many people still benefit from an earlier, golden age of investment in it, both by local authorities and, nationally, through the welfare state. Many schools, hospitals, sewers, libraries, public parks and sports facilities originate from that period and helped not just create greater prosperity and well-being but to ensure that wealth, health and opportunities were more equally shared. Many of these were effectively common goods, held in public ownership for the benefit of the public. The welfare state, which was also designed to reduce poverty and illness, provided another, national expression of the belief that collective investment in mutual health and well-being is to everyone's benefit.

But this is changing. Harold Macmillan famously compared the privatisations of national industries to selling off 'the family silver,' commenting that 'the sale of assets is common with individuals and the state when they have run into financial difficulties. First the Georgian silver goes...' Similarly, over the last decade, there has been a quiet reduction in social infrastructure assets either from closure, sales or poor maintenance. Here are some examples:

- There were 5.5 million social homes in 1981 in England, compared to 4 million in 2014, according to the NAO.[3] This has helped create the current crisis in housing.
- 603 youth centres closed between 2012 and 2016 and services were cut by £387m between 2010 and 2016[4].
- More than 350 children's centres have closed since 2010, with only 8 new centres opening[5].
- 214 children's playgrounds closed in the year to 2015/16 and a further 234 were expected to close in the following year[6].
- The amount of school playing field land earmarked for sell-off has increased dramatically to a seven year high, according to a 2017 investigation by the Times Education Supplement, and areas with high obesity levels are selling the most[7].
- 380 libraries have already closed by the end of 2016 and a further 340 are under threat of closure over the next five years[8].
- At a time when park use is rising, there has been a decline in the condition of parks due to budget cuts and this is set to continue[9].
- Cultural venues like museums and arts facilities have also had their budgets dramatically reduced.

This overall disinvestment is the subject of very little public debate partly because of the relative invisibility of social infrastructure as a whole. It is being driven by cuts in spending. However, it is a short-term strategy that will undermine future well-being and prosperity and bring higher public expenditure in the long run on health and social problems.

As well as a loss of assets, our collective sense of the value of commonly owned social infrastructure has arguably reduced. For example, the proportion of people who believe that unemployment benefits are too high and discourage work has risen from around 30 per cent in the late nineteen 80s to nearly 60 per cent now[10].

The one initiative that has been swimming against this tide has been the right to buy community assets, with an increase in community ownership of things like shops, pubs and meeting spaces. As public funds have been withdrawn from libraries, some communities have also taken them over. This can be very positive but it can also bring onerous and unwelcome responsibilities, such as the cost of maintenance, that community groups find hard to meet.

Some communities are poor in social infrastructure

Despite the existence of many universal services, such as education and health, locally there will be significant disparities across different communities across the UK.

We know, for example, that people in the highest socio economic groups and living in the most affluent communities are far more likely than those in the lowest to feel people in their neighbourhood can be trusted, to agree that people pull together, to want to be involved in local decision making and feel they have influence. They are more than twice as satisfied with the present system of governing and they are twice as likely to take action to influence decisions, laws and policies[11].

A study of voluntary sector activity has also found that affluent areas often have far more voluntary and community activity than deprived ones, and those that do exist in deprived areas are often involved in the delivery of 'safety net' social welfare services and are more dependent on state funding, much of which has recently been cut[12]. At the same time, it is important to recognise that there may be a different picture for so-called 'below the radar activity' of small informal social connections and mutual support networks. People who live in deprived areas may still love where they live and have a strong sense of place and community.

A negative cycle of social infrastructure deprivation

If social infrastructure declines, it potentially creates a negative spiral, with people who can moving out, leaving many vacant properties, reducing rental income, and the level of private retail businesses and facilities may further fall as a result. Empty social housing is often then used as temporary accommodation for transient people, reducing the existing cohesion of communities. Run down communities can result in less clear social norms, leading to vandalism, fly-tipping and increased litter, and an increase in drug-dealing and crime.

Basic services and facilities inadequate, people disempowered, social capital low

Increase in housing, unemployment, relationship, health and other social problems

Voluntary sector forced deeper into crisis management rather than preventative role

Shops, businesses and people start to leave the area, reducing attractiveness further

Increase in social isolation and social instability leads to vandalism and crime and reduces preventative effect of community

Cycle of community deprivation

Measuring and mapping social infrastructure

The UK's current measure of affluence and deprivation, the Office of National Statistics' Index of Deprivation, comes closest to measuring social infrastructure, but it does so only partially. Of its seven domains, four are relevant. Barriers to Housing and Services measures the physical accessibility to some local services (post office; primary school; general store or supermarket; GP surgery) and the affordability of housing. Living Environment Deprivation measures the quality of the local environment, including the quality of housing and outdoors environment through measures of air quality and road traffic accidents. The Health Deprivation and Disability domain measures the risk of premature death and the impairment of quality of life through poor physical or mental health. The domain measures morbidity, disability and premature mortality but not aspects of behaviour or environment that may be predictive of future health deprivation. The Crime domain measures the risk of personal and material victimisation at local level[13].

However, its domain on services is partial, not recording key preventative services, such as recreational facilities, children's centres or social care, or the quality of services. Nor does the Index record any measures of community strength or cohesion or voluntary and community sector activity.

Starting with the information in the Index, it will be valuable to map existing social infrastructure in different areas and understand relative strengths and weaknesses. The draft new London Plan, for example, says that Boroughs should undertake a needs assessment of social infrastructure to ensure it meets the needs of London's diverse population; and says that planning for major redevelopment or regeneration projects must ensure that social infrastructure is built in. It also proposes that if one part of social infrastructure is closed down due to redevelopment, it should be replaced by another form of social infrastructure[14].

Social infrastructure and early action

Social infrastructure and early action are closely intertwined. Early action – building a fence at the top of the cliff rather than running an ambulance underneath –is a term used to capture all forms of preventative activity, not just investment in the early years, but also actions taken, for example, to avoid diabetes, prevent re-offending or avoidable frailty or dependency in old age.

Most social infrastructure supports early action. It helps build the individual and social resourcefulness that helps avoid problems in the first place and also provides the social networks, facilities and services that can help nip any problems that do arise in the bud. Strong, preventative social infrastructure, including social support networks, can make all the difference.

An important lesson for early action is to think of prevention holistically, bringing in all three dimensions of social infrastructure. Early action initiatives could be more effective if they deploy and build on all of the resources available in social infrastructure. But, often, they tend to focus on one dimension only or one sector:

- Initiatives that involve only **public services** disregard the fact that many other voluntary, community and private sector organisations and services in an area, as well as buildings and facilities, can make a difference. A public health initiative, for example, will be less successful if it ignores the fact that access to healthy food is restricted by lack of shops or the presence of multiple fast food outlets. For example, in Southwark, Healthy High Streets works with authorities and local communities to help to change the high street to make it healthier[15].

- **Economic regeneration initiatives** have often been carried out with buildings, facilities and the built environment most in mind. But if social norms in a community are bad, new investment may still end up being trashed and people may feel unsafe. If people lack a say about how to improve their community, physical investment in 'slum clearance' schemes may destroy or displace communities; or 'white elephant' inves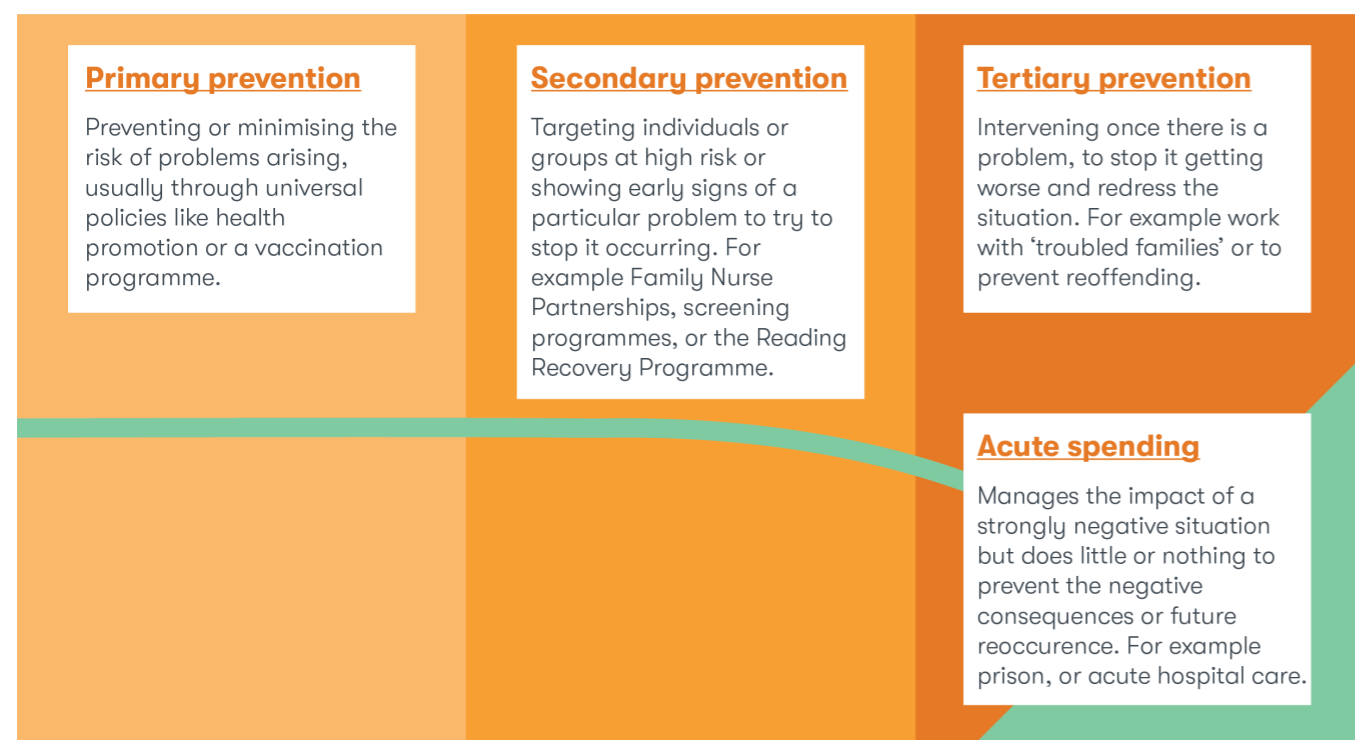tments may be made. If buildings are refurbished but the services run in them remain poorly designed, targeted or even non-existent due to lack of funds, little will actually change. There is a danger that areas will become gentrified and that the people who originally lived in them will simply be displaced.

- **Community based approaches** to place based change are based on the belief that if communities are strengthened and empowered, they will become more resourceful and resilient. However, simply seeking to build social capital within neighbourhoods and institutions, although important, will never be sufficient to turn round a whole community, especially if at the same time public services such as youth clubs and childcare centres are being closed. If there are no buildings or facilities in which to meet, then it is hard to build relationships, and if meeting spaces are not welcoming and inclusive, then cohesion will not exist. If public services are cut back in the hope that communities will substitute for them, communities will end up impoverished rather than empowered.

It is also important to ensure that the potential of social infrastructure to support early action is used to the full. Social infrastructure inevitably and rightly contains a mix of acute services and preventative activities but can be made more preventative.

The Early Action Task Force (EATF) breaks early action into three elements. Most upstream is primary prevention. This includes not just vaccination programmes but universal services and facilities, such as education, sports and libraries, and strong communities. These all help form resourceful and resilient individuals, with prevention hard-wired in. Secondary and tertiary prevention occur as a risk of problems become more evident, or problems themselves first arise. Initiatives aim to intervene to reduce their negative impact. Again, strong, preventative social infrastructure, including social support networks, can make all the difference.

Definition of early action, focusing here on services

Primary prevention

Preventing or minimising the risk of problems arising, usually through universal policies like health promotion or a vaccination programme.

Secondary prevention

Targeting individuals or groups at high risk or showing early signs of a particular problem to try to stop it occurring. For example Family Nurse Partnerships, screening programmes, or the Reading Recovery Programme.

Tertiary prevention

Intervening once there is a problem, to stop it getting worse and redress the situation. For example work with 'troubled families' or to prevent reoffending.

Acute spending

Manages the impact of a strongly negative situation but does little or nothing to prevent the negative consequences or future reoccurence. For example prison, or acute hospital care.

As a society, we will always need acute services and facilities. People will always get ill, for example, and all communities benefit from GPs surgeries and hospitals as well as facilities, such as leisure activities, which promote good health. But it is possible for health centres, hospitals and other services which provide some acute services to work in a more preventative way - for example by providing a range of well-being services from stopping smoking, counselling, physiotherapy and mutual support groups - and to work with communities, rather than simply for them, for example through social prescribing. Similarly, housing associations can support and build communities, not just provide housing. Places of worship can reach out beyond their immediate communities to provide facilities for everyone in the area in ways that build new relationships and social capital.

The aim should be to build and strengthen preventative social infrastructure that is geared as far as possible toward early action.

Barriers to early action

Early action saves money and promotes both prosperity and well-being, yielding a 'triple dividend' which:

- Creates happy and prosperous people and communities who are ready for everything and can contribute fully, both economically and socially.
- Reduces the costs of social failure, minimising the need for state intervention and maximizing the potential for it to invest in the future.
- Builds sustainable human, economic and social capital.

And yet it is systemically underfunded and is often cut back perversely in order to fund short term pressures. Why?

There are many barriers that prevent early action from being put into effect and these affect social infrastructure too. The first is short term planning. When success is judged only on the short term,

it is inevitable that investment in the future will be crowded out or cuts may be made in services and facilities that only bring long term benefits. The relative longer term costs and benefits of existing acute and preventative policies are often not considered when decisions are taken. Even basic information on what is being spent on acute versus preventative expenditure is often missing. Silo working is another important barrier to effective early action, creating poor incentives for creating or maintaining early action, as costs and benefits often fall to different budgets. 'Dual running', or finding new funds to invest in early action alongside acute budgets (which may remain high in the short term before the benefits of preventative action kick in), is often a serious difficulty.

❞ The relative longer term costs and benefits of existing acute and preventative policies are often not considered when decisions are taken. ❞

To tackle these, the Early Action Task Force advocates:

Longer-term planning

Long-term planning which takes into account the relative costs and benefits of the status quo or a change. Public bodies should apply a Ten Year Test to all new spending and decisions on cuts. This would involve a ten year impact assessment of any policy or change, including the impact on other areas of public spending and other departments. Indeed, ten year impact assessments in the Treasury's spending reviews were advocated by the National Audit Office in its *Early Action Landscape Review* in 2013.[16] Capital projects are already planned on a ten year basis, and social infrastructure and early action should be considered on the same timescale. To give some planning stability, firm budgets should be set for as long as possible, ideally five years, with impact assessments looking a further five years beyond that.

In Wales, there is a statutory duty toward Future Generations with which all public bodies must comply, requiring them to take into account

longer term consequences in all decisions they take; and an Office for Future Generations has been established to monitor the success of public bodies in meeting this duty.[17]

This kind of approach would better support all forms of early action and would help protect and enhance vital social infrastructure.

Better information

Lack of transparency and accountability for early action is a major barrier to change. Where preventative spending is not properly tracked or protected, for example, on social care, a shift away from prevention toward crisis care may happen almost invisibly. To strengthen transparency and accountability, a consistent definition for early action should be put in place across all public agencies so that such spending can be measured, monitored and incrementally increased. Again, this was advocated by the *NAO's Early Action Landscape Review*. This approach has been put into practice by the Early Intervention Foundation in its publication *Spending on Late Intervention*, which estimated that about £17 billion a year is being spent in England and Wales on acute interventions for children and young people, some of which could be better deployed.

Incentives to break down silos

Many social problems need concerted action across budget and institutional boundaries yet it is often very hard to persuade another public body to find the funding to take action that benefits another, or to consider costs that may result from its own actions where these fall to another's budget. The Early Action Task Force therefore advocates a number of tools to try and shift the incentives.

The first is mapping to understand what resources exist, which bodies are responsible for them and how different agencies can better work together to deliver more effective early action.

Treating early action as an investment

Once early action spending has been identified, ring-fencing of early action budgets should be considered, in the same way that capital budgets have been separated from current budgets in government planning. Expenditure that brings long term benefits in terms of increased revenue and reduced costs should be prioritised and not raided to fund short-term pressures.

Capital and current expenditure on social infrastructure is an investment in the future and is especially important where simultaneous efforts are being made to improve economic opportunities for disadvantaged communities, as it will make these areas more attractive to investors and better equip local people to take up

new jobs. The RSA's Inclusive Growth Commission in its final report argued that investment in social infrastructure should no longer be seen as affordable only once growth has been created but should be seen as a way of creating inclusive growth. The shift in economic thinking it seeks is captured by the two diagrams below from the report.[18]

The key to unlocking investment in social infrastructure is to recognise that it is a driver for future prosperity and well-being, alongside other forms of investment.

Over the medium term, greater investment within a total budget might be achieved by spending more of the available budget on early action rather than on acute services – and targets
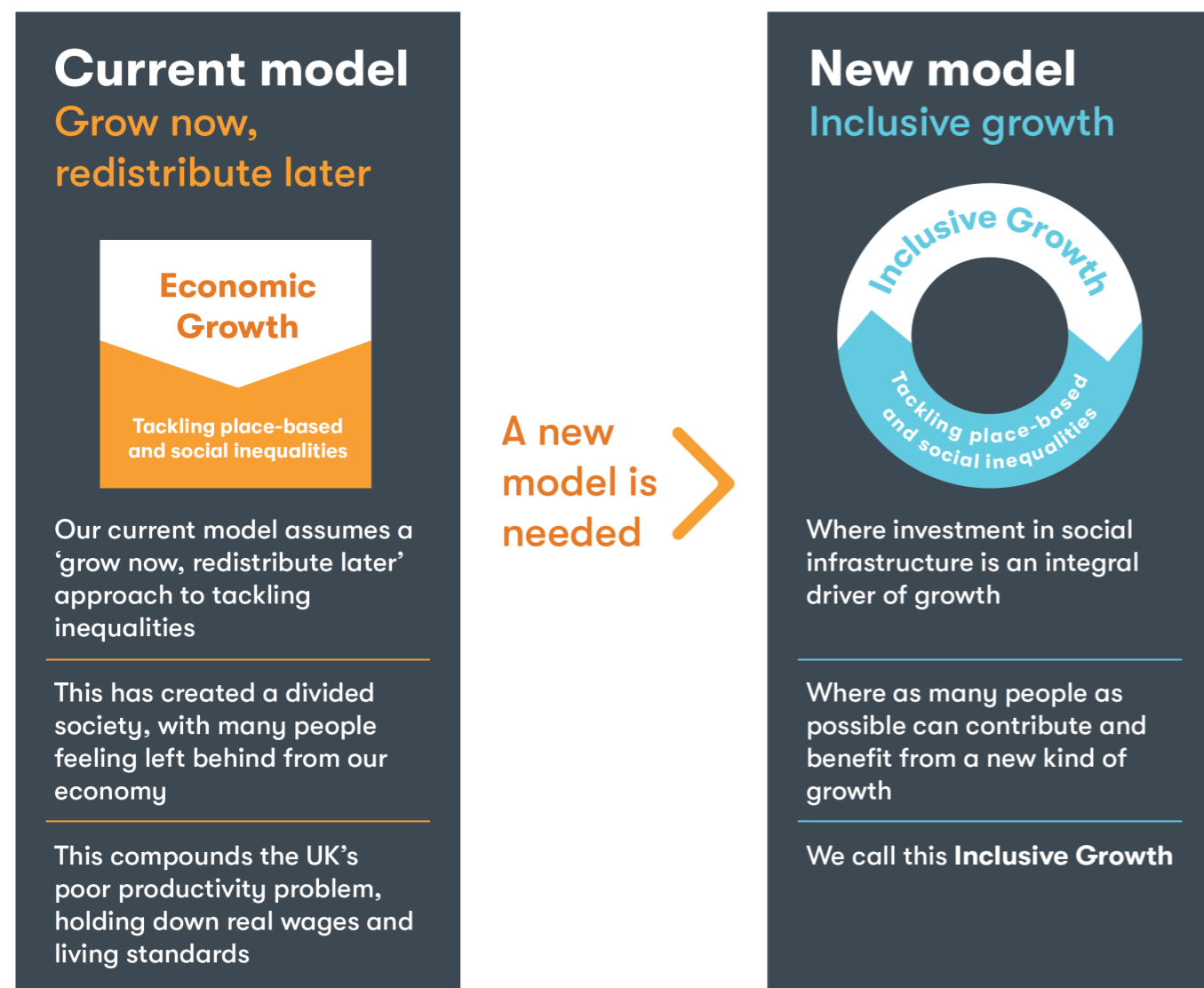
could be set accordingly. The Early Action Task Force has been encouraging budget holders in the both the public and voluntary sectors a) to invest a greater proportion of their available budgets in early rather than acute action b) to move more of their existing investment in early action 'upstream'. A similar approach should be adopted on social infrastructure.

But the case for additional new funds should also be considered, particularly to help with "dual running' in the short term. One way of releasing funds for early action is to pool budgets. Potential profits from new investments can be shared to a pre-agreed formula or what we call social profit sharing agreements. Another idea is so-called responsibility charging to levy a charge where one public body passes on costs to other because of inaction or systems failure.

There is also a case for using funds already set aside for capital investment to boost social infrastructure. The Government is investing considerable sums in economic measures that it believes will increase prosperity and reduce regional disparities. It has established a National Productivity Investment Fund of £31bn for capital projects over six years and a £1.7bn Transforming Cities Fund to improve transport links. The Government has also pledged to create sovereign wealth funds in the form of Future Britain Funds backed by future revenues from shale gas extraction and receipts from the sale of public assets. It has also committed to a Future Prosperity Fund from the money currently spent by the EU regionally in the UK. If these funds could be used for social as well as capital infrastructure that would be a good first step.

Wider thinking is beginning to develop in this area on how to create significant funding and assets for the common good, including through public ownership. The New Economics Foundation has developed the concept of the 'social commons'.[19] Steve Schifferes at City of London University, with support from the Friends Provident Foundation, is developing the case for national and local social wealth funds. The RSA is also exploring ideas in this field. The Early Action Task Force proposed last year a Next Generation Fund to invest in early action to support community activity and

better services to help children failing at school. In the autumn of 2017, the NCVO also called on the Chancellor 'to use dormant asset to support local communities for a generation to come'. Locality has suggested that communities be allowed to use dormant asset money to purchase assets of community value.[20]

Current model
Grow now, redistribute later

Economic Growth

Tackling place-based and social inequalities

A new model is needed

Our current model assumes a 'grow now, redistribute later' approach to tackling inequalities

This has created a divided society, with many people feeling left behind from our economy

This compounds the UK's poor productivity problem, holding down real wages and living standards

New model
Inclusive growth

Inclusive Growth

Tackling place-based and social inequalities

Where investment in social infrastructure is an integral driver of growth

Where as many people as possible can contribute and benefit from a new kind of growth

We call this **Inclusive Growth**

Learning from past and existing practice

There have been many place based initiatives in this and other countries which have tried to work on one or more aspects of social infrastructure, with the aim of turning lives and communities around. This section looks at the lessons that have emerged and tries to identify some learning points for local practitioners with social infrastructure specifically in mind.

General lessons

As set out in the previous sections, investment is important but one of the lessons from evaluations of place-based initiatives is that relationships, time, clarity of purpose and using existing resources well all matter too. This is the message from *Historical Review of Place Based Approaches*, published in 2017 by the Lankelly Chase Foundation and carried out by the Institute of Voluntary Action Research. Looking at evaluations of such approaches over the last 50 years – both government and foundation sponsored - in the UK and also in the US, Europe, Canada and Australia,[21] the review found:

- That place based approaches take time.
- Clarity about roles and focus are all important.
- It is important to link the very local with the wider system.
- Relationships are critical, including between partners and local people.
- Change needs to be embedded in the whole local system, not just depending on one or two people.

The study suggests that it is valuable to start by building relationships rather than leading with money, as it can create unrealistic expectations or even generate competition rather than collaboration locally.

It is useful to establish a clear set of values and principles for the initiative and to show leadership that encourages collaboration. It is easy to spend time establishing formal structures but it is informal ways of working together that form the glue and creates essential trust. Time spent here is time well spent and it is also necessary to be clear about the levels of commitment required and mechanisms for accountability.

Local authorities and other statutory agencies are essential partners; and change needs to permeate throughout – at political as well as operational level - if it is to last rather than relying on a few statutory champions, who may move on. There is a need for capacity building within the public sector to help them to make wider links within the public sector, and develop relationships with the community and with other organisations.

A common agenda, shared and aligned measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities; continuous communications and the presence of a lead organisation can ensure collective impact.

Any structures for collaboration need to work for local residents, not just the professionals. Community engagement is important and it takes time and patience to understand and know a community and its assets. Reaching all parts of the community may be difficult at first, and communities may be divided, so it may be necessary to start with the usual suspects and work outwards. Expect emotions and conflict and deal with them, rather than try and smooth over or ignoring them, the review warns. It is often important to find community intermediaries, which can come from people inside the community, though sometimes this will involve setting up a new organisation or building on an existing one.

Defining what changes you want at the outset is important. It will all take time and long term goals and milestones are important. Sustainability needs to be built in from the start and there should be exit strategies. Evaluation of how change is created as much as what changes resulted is recognised as increasingly valuable.

One problem highlighted by the Lankelly Chase study is that certain communities may be better endowed with social infrastructure than others and communities rich in social infrastructure are likely to find it easier to implement successful place based strategies. This may lead to perverse effects ie less needy areas being chosen for funding or some initiatives thriving because of well developed social infrastructure where,

actually, the initiatives need to work in the most deprived, not relatively affluent areas. The more needy the area, the more time is needed to build capacity.

Experience from government-led schemes in England and Wales

Looking at major Government led initiatives in England and Wales over the last few years, one lesson stands out: they are often piecemeal in their approach to social infrastructure and it seems much easier to spend new money on specific initiatives than to utilise existing public sector funding on services and assets.

Perhaps the national initiative that has come closest to dealing with all three dimensions of social infrastructure, and trying to develop genuine partnership working, was the New Deal for Communities, which was established in 1998 and aimed to transform 39 very deprived areas through local partnerships. A lesson that emerged was that partnership working is intensive and difficult. It is said that it worked best where councils were closely involved. But even where this was the case it was difficult to engage and redeploy existing public sector (and private) resources and ensure that the priorities and targets of major national public programmes, which can be enormously important locally, are aligned to local objectives.

Total Place, under the last Labour Government, potentially came closest to trying to deploy existing resources toward prevention, rather than just spending additional money. But, sadly, it was short-lived.

Community and Neighbourhood budgets under the Coalition Government in some ways continued this experiment in breaking down silos between services and seeking to move services more upstream. A Locality evaluation of Neighbourhood Budgets in October 2016[22] is very positive about the many different initiatives that have come out of the programme but it is less sanguine about their future. It seems that

that Neighbourhood Budgets/Our Place has done little so far to transform existing public services, resulting mostly in community additions to existing services and ones which are unlikely to be funded by the state in future. As a two year initiative, unsurprisingly it also worked best where working relationships and community capacity were already well developed. Depressingly, the evaluation identifies a pattern where innovative service models, as with the NDC and Total Place, have not been mainstreamed. The public sector also seems reluctant in practice to trust public investment to small-scale community led activities.

Some more recent examples

Big Local is giving a million pounds to different communities with low levels of social infrastructure. This funding gives the communities power but there is also a heavy responsibility to use the money well. The way in which they choose to use these resources varies hugely. In Barnsley, for example, they have invested the money in buying homes, doing them up and then renting them out a fair rent. In Chatham, they have reclaimed a park overtaken by vandals and crime, which had become disused and overgrown. In St Matthews, Leicester, the partnership has funded an astro-turf pitch and a running track. One of the problems is that local authorities can withdraw their own funding on services in the knowledge that the community may be able to use the resources to fill the shortfall.[23]

The Southwark and Lambeth Early Action Commission comes closest to identifying a strategy to create preventative social infrastructure and its report, which was published in 2015, provides a template that others can use.[24] Its goal was to create:

- 'Preventative places' - places where the quality of the neighbourhood makes people feel good, and helps them lead fulfilling lives and look after themselves and each other.
- 'Resourceful communities', where people are given agency.
- Strong collaborative partnerships, where organisations work together, share knowledge

and power, and foster respectful, high trust relationships based on a shared purpose.
- Systems geared to early action, where the culture, values, priorities and practices of local institutions support early action as the new 'normal' way of working.

Key ingredients for practitioners

Based on the insights in this report, here are some initial pointers on how to add to and develop social infrastructure. We hope practitioners can add to, develop and even challenge them through their own continuing practice, sharing their experiences with others, so that learning can continue to grow.

Map existing social infrastructure and recognise and use the resources that already exist

Most communities in Britain, even the poorest, are still rich in resources, despite austerity, and new resources are currently in very short supply. There may be assets and land still in public ownership that may be better deployed. The amount of resources spent on public services either directly or through the voluntary sector will be huge, and could probably be more preventatively focused and targeted. Collaboration across services and organisations and sectors can also make them far more effective and bring in resources that hitherto were invisible or unused. Communities often have considerable informal networks and small voluntary and community organisations that are important to their strength and which may also be able to do more heavy lifting with the right assistance. Volunteering and neighbourly acts of kindness can bring huge benefits in terms of peer support.

Sometimes a relatively small amount of money can make a big difference, supporting a church hall or community group that might otherwise

close, for example, and will be repaid many times over in terms of social capital generated. Bringing communities closer together and giving them more power can unlock considerable energy and activity that would otherwise remain latent. Joining up the work of existing voluntary bodies and using them to better support public services may also need some additional funding to make it happen but can dramatically amplify the effectiveness of current public investment in services such as schools or hospitals. Some examples are explored below.

Examples of unlocking the resources of the community

In Lancashire, the police force have set up a separate company to train ex-offenders in refurbishing derelict buildings in the area to provide them and others with a home and provide ex-offenders with a future trade. Proceeds from sales are ploughed back into the company.[25]

In Lambeth, led by Lambeth AgeUK, voluntary agencies are working together to support older people through a multi-agency referral scheme, Safe and Independent Living (SAIL) designed to streamline health and social care. They offer one-to-one meetings with older people to discuss what support they might need and can refer them to whichever organisation is best placed to help.[26]

The West London Zone represents a partnership of local organisations all working towards the same goal: that the children and young people in its area grow up safe, happy and healthy. It does this by helping charities, local authorities, schools and children's centres deliver the best possible support to the children and young people who need it most. It receives funding from a number of sources which it intends to pay back through reduced costs on services achieved through prevention.[27]

Develop collaborative leadership

Collaboration across and within sectors is important and it is vital to engage local councils, who are often under huge pressure and experiencing considerable churn. Investment in capacity building is important, including in the public sector, and time needs to be devoted to building trust and genuine shared goals, as illustrated by the examples below.

Examples of developing collaborative leadership

Public Health at Plymouth City Council spent a year of systems development with service providers and users, engaging in many different conversations designed to unlock new thinking. It has pooled budgets and told its service providers that their contracts are secure to encourage more collaborative, rather than competitive leadership.[28]

The voluntary sector led Hartlepool Early Action Funders Alliance project on children's services has invested two out of its five years of project life in developing collaborative leadership, look at staffing roles, service interaction and how to develop deep relationships, before moving on to make actual changes.

Listen and engage with communities and identify their priorities

The Mayor of Seoul installed a huge statue of an ear when he was involved in trying to introduce change. Listening and engagement is important and takes time. Techniques such as participatory budgeting, and creating new spaces for discussion, can help, as illustrated by the examples below.

Examples of empowering and engaging local people in different conversations

The importance of power and control to 'communities left behind'

The Brexit referendum hightlighted the issues of so-called 'communities left behind'. But what do the people 'left behind' actually want? Being listened to, being given more power, being treated equally and given equal opportunity, with a rebuilding of trust in politicians, the media and institutions – these are the pointers emerging from a series of roadshows commissioned by the RSA in disadvantaged communities in areas like Clacton and Port Talbot, which explored views of how to create an economy that works for everyone. Participants saw a role for the voluntary sector in this, acting as intermediaries – and a number of the meetings were hosted by the community groups.[29] But it also requires a willingness to listen and cede power from those who control assets and deliver services.

Participatory budgeting

Udecide gives people in Newcastle the power to decide how to spend a pot of money so it can make the biggest difference to their lives. It engages communities in identifying their needs, discussing and agreeing priorities, and deciding about granting funding to address those needs. In each case, a steering group is recruited which plans and prepares the later phases. People who are expected to benefit from the money being spent are engaged to define issues and explore solutions, which are converted into costed project proposals, which are then voted on by the communities involved. Projects are monitored and evaluated, with learning fed back to inform new initiatives.[30]

Deeper listening

The Early Action Neighbourhood Fund Ignite Project in Coventry has been looking at ways of introducing a different kind of conversation between service providers and local residents, moving away from 'dead spaces', such as formal meetings, in which real listening is often difficult. One of these is a 'walk in the park' in which conversations are held more informally between different groups, promoting deeper engagement and more human relationships.

Common vision and values

Common vision and values should be established and these should be the starting point, rather than leaping to specific targets. Focus is valuable and a clear sense of what change you want to see.

The example of developing a common early action vision in Southwark

Following on from foundations laid by the Southwark and Lambeth and Southwark Early Action Commission, a new partnership between the Southwark Council and CCG partnership and the voluntary and community sector, *Common Purpose, Common Cause*, was launched in November 2016. The strategy puts early action at its heart and commits to a common vision and goals. It also promises changes in how public bodies work with the voluntary sector, including co-production, longer term grants and changes in commissioning.[31]

Align systems and performance measures

Systems and performance measures need to be aligned across different organisations. Identify what matters to a community through participative democracy and then measure progress against that, sharing the information with local people.

Money – pool budgets and look at ownership

New investment can be very important in impoverished communities. But leading with new money can sometimes be a mistake, as it blocks thinking about what resources already exist and prevents imaginative thinking, but resources matter. It is important to use existing budgets, not just add new ones. Pooling of funds can enable innovation and make resources go further. Ownership, or even just management, of local assets can build agency, unlock resources and build social capital, as illustrated by the Tenant Management Association case study below. Funds can be raised locally to support activity. The Hackney Giving Fund is an example of local fund-raising to increase resources for social infrastructure.[32] Islington has something similar. A realistic exit strategy for sustainable funding should be established early on. There is scope for some fresh thinking about how to use new funding to lever in public sector resources (time and money) to projects. One idea is a kind of 'match funding' – in which funders would only commit funds if the public sector also commits to devoting time to the project, with the funder offering more if, over time, the public sector actually commits more resources of its own.

❝ Ownership, or even just management, of local assets can build agency, unlock resources and build social capital… ❞

Example: taking control of community resources strengthens social infrastructure – Tenant Management Associations (TMO)

A TMO is a means by which council or housing association tenants and leaseholders can collectively take on responsibility for managing the homes they live in. Those resident members of the TMO create an independent legal body and usually elect a tenant led management committee to run the organisation. The TMO can then enter into a legal management agreement (contract) with the landlord. The TMO is paid annual management and maintenance allowances in order to carry out the management duties that are delegated to them. Independent Government sponsored research has proved the benefits of forming a TMO:

- TMOs often manage their housing more effectively than their landlord. Their performance matches the top 25% of local councils in England.
- This better performance by TMOs covers repairs, relets, rent collection, and tenant satisfaction.
- TMOs, being on the spot and with local knowledge tend to act sooner and more effectively when dealing with tenancy management problems.
- TMOs can work well in socially excluded communities.
- Many TMOs are involved in wider community activities and play an important part in neighbourhood regeneration.
- The majority of TMO tenants say the TMO helps to increase community spirit and improve the quality of life.

Because TMOs improve and care for the buildings they manage, rates of occupation increase, generating additional rents. This creates a virtuous circle, as more funds are available for improvements and repairs.

NB The so-called Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Association involved in the Grenfell Tower disaster is not in fact a TMO but an arms-length local authority body.

Take time

A long term (ten year) approach is probably essential but set milestones and look for quick wins in the early period.

Think holistically

Think holistically against the three dimensions of social infrastructure, as argued earlier, and match investment in capital infrastructure with spending on social infrastructure.

Don't neglect the small things

There is a theory that broken windows can lead to the decline of a neighbourhood, and fixing them can start to make a real difference. As David Robinson points out in his book, *Changing London: A Rough Guide for the Next London Mayor*, the Barcelonan architect Manuel de Sola Morales coined the phrase 'urban acupuncture' – using urban design and small-scale interventions in the built environment to transform the large urban context. David also talks of 'community acupuncture', advocating strategic support for local initiatives that build platforms for neighbourhood connections that can catalyse wider change. These can be very small things, from a new park bench in a housing estate, to litter bins and flower baskets.

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About the author
Caroline Slocock is a member of the Early Action Task Force, the Director of Civil Exchange and the author of *Whose Society? The Final Big Society Audit*.

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