

At the frontier of collaborative and participatory governance: eight key discussions to support putting Christie into practice – reflective learning with practitioners from Aberdeenshire CPP



A summary of the eight discussions

Discussions summary

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This summary provides an overview of the eight discussions developed in Part 2 of the research report *At the frontier of collaborative and participatory governance: Eight key discussions to support putting Christie into action*. It focuses each discussion on a key question and so can be used to support group discussions and dialogue aimed at seeking to develop collaborative and participative public service policy and practice.

Read and download the full report, and an Executive Summary, on the What Works Scotland website at <https://whatworksscotland.ac.uk/publications/frontier-of-collaborative-and-participatory-governance>

Sources for quotes and references are available in the full report.

Eight discussions for developing collaborative and participatory governance

These discussions, drawn from the research material, aren't to be understood as the key discussions needed to support a developing such a governance – there is more to be said, for instance, regarding varieties of evidence use, suitable evaluation, working with social and economic outcomes. However, what the discussions do offer is a starting point for dialogue. They are presented in the full report as context, reflections from-the-field (interview material) and further material to support ongoing dialogue. In this summary, each is presented through a particular challenge, which is highlighted in order to support discussions for ongoing dialogue and research.

1. Multiple crises and challenges: inequalities; workforce insecurity; and 'austerity'

Context: the Christie Commission points to ongoing, multiple challenges and crises: stubborn inequalities; demographic change – a growing and ageing population; public spending constraint ('austerity'); and workforce insecurity.

In-the-field: partners illustrate the day-to-day realities of these crises-on-the-ground: job insecurity and stretched services; local experiences of poverty; ... and raise the crucial question of can/how can collaborative processes make the necessary impact?

Key challenge for dialogue and action: evidence (Cook, 2015) points to the long-term incremental nature of change in public service partnerships and the key role for local leadership relevant to that local context. Yet there is a challenge of sustaining such significant culture change, and limits to what formal partnership structures (alone) can achieve.

- How can 'we' sustain the necessary focus on these shared, multiple challenges and crises?

- How can long-term action research and/or social research help CPPs to do this?

2. Investing in facilitative leadership that builds a public service ethos

Context: public service reform in Scotland points to growing expectations of facilitative leadership working across layers and sectors – top-down, bottom-up and horizontally.

From-the-field: discussions illustrate the need for and value of significant organisational and individual commitment to, and suitable resourcing of, multi-layered leadership networks.

Key challenge for dialogue and action: facilitative leadership at all layers requires cultivation of skills in ‘boundary-crossing’, e.g. communication, creativity, understanding context, project management, systems change, ‘activism’, public service ethos.

- What role is there for locally-designed, cross-partnership and -sector ‘change-agent’ programmes and networks that bring together partners from across strategic, operational, community layers?

3. Inclusive structures for long-term relationship-building with local civil society

Context: the Christie Commission points to the space that the local third sector and civil society offers for creativity and accountability, and so the value of inclusive processes.

From-the-field: illustrates aspirations for deepening third/community sector participation at strategic levels; and, current opportunities and challenges at local levels – including the importance of participatory policy-making/strategy-building and suitable long-term funding.

Key challenge for dialogue and action: Collaborative and Participative Governance offers a space for re-imagining relationships with local civil society, e.g. community organisations, service-user/citizen bodies, local trades union branches.

- How can longer-term relational approaches (‘relational contracting’) be cultivated with the local third sector?
- What role is there for relational commissioning that invests in financially-resilient local organisations?

4. Negotiating complex political landscapes – what role for deliberative spaces?

Context: the political complexities of public services provision are always with ‘us’ – across services, organisations and partnerships; communities, citizens and the electorate; political structures, representative and political parties. The Christie Commission makes this explicit and so makes visible the value of greater local democracy, participation and accountability.

From-the-field: discussions illustrate these complex political landscapes, with many involved in working with political/politicised issues and processes: professionals and officers (local and central), councillors and council structures, and communities and community councils.

Key challenge for dialogue and action: there is a need to navigate these complex, changing political waters and yet also to sustain effective open dialogue on complex ‘wicked issues’ in order to make progress. Deliberative processes can create shared spaces for: recognising local complexities – including different interests and emotional commitments; bringing in evidence, expertise and insights to deepen dialogue; and facilitating deliberations to find common purpose or recognise unresolved differences – see, for instance, a [Citizens Jury in Peterhead](#)ⁱ (Bland, 2017a).

- How can deliberative processes be used creatively to unlock or prevent impasses that will likely arise in any reform process?

5. Collaborative learning and action: creative, ‘unpredictable’ spaces for change?

Context: collaborative learning and action (or action research) offers many different options for bringing together different combinations (new and old) of: (1) participatory and collaborative activity; (2) research, inquiring and reflection; and, (3) strategies for action, culture change and perhaps social change. The [Community Links Worker inquiry cycle 1 report](#)ⁱⁱ, for instance, integrates a study visit; improvement tools; desk research; and shared analysis.

From-the-field: discussions illustrate from across the CPP a growing range of both formal and informal collaborative learning and action projects at work ... and across all layers: local community; local areas and operations; centrally and strategically.

Key challenge for dialogue and action: there is potential for partnerships to commit to collaborative learning and action as creative, ‘unpredictable’ spaces for learning and culture change: complex challenges (wicked issues) could be wrestled with over time through imaginative, changing processes.

- How then can confidence in and commitment to such collaborative learning and action processes be built across all CPP partners and layers?
- What evidence and advocacy is needed to win such support for such a change?

6. Constructive disruptions: the value of independent in-depth facilitation

Context: the value of facilitated processes, particularly where clearly independent from the participants and actively supported by senior management, is increasingly recognised.

In-the-field: discussions illustrated a growing sensitivity to the challenges of collaborative group-working: the need for a listening culture (‘sharing airtime’); the value of peer support for those leading groups; and, the potential use of co-working and independent facilitation.

Key challenge(s) for dialogue and action: the Beyond Action Learning report (Soutar, Warrander & Henderson, 2017); <http://whatworksscotland.ac.uk/publications/collaborative-learning-research-and-action-in-public-service-reform/> the Pioneer Collaborative Leadership report (Bland, 2017b); <http://whatworksscotland.ac.uk/publications/pioneering-collaborative-leadership-a-facilitated-approach-for-learning-in-action/> and WWS’ work with the CPP Board/Executive in Aberdeenshire (see Appendix 2 of the Full Report), all illustrate the potential of in-depth, independent facilitation to create ‘constructive disruptions’; that is finding supportive ways to ask difficult questions and provide safe spaces to reflect on them – within complex public service partnership settings.

- In what ways can such sustained, independent facilitation provide creative, longer-term challenges in support of your own partnership-working – locally or centrally?

7. Preventing inequalities and preventative spend: seeking to pool resources

Context: there are aspirations for public service partnerships to better coordinate actions, pool budgets, and work with communities/other stakeholders to shift toward preventative approaches and reduce pressure on services. But ... definite challenges in doing so, including that potential savings are likely to emerge in the longer-term, whilst pooling budgets across different management structures is tricky – see the [Multi-layered preventative partnership-working report](#)ⁱⁱⁱ.

In-the-field: discussions illustrate a variety of developing approaches to partnership and participation with ‘preventative potential’: top-down, collaborative strategies – and getting the right people around-the-table, sharing data etc.; and smaller scale pilots and initiatives aiming to coordinating services and community actions through local partnerships. Making progress on pooling resources – as Audit Scotland (2018) notes for all CPPs – is not easy.

Key challenge for dialogue and action: this is a hugely challenging area of policy and practice. There are considerable complexities, including: how to fund preventative services ‘now’ given any actual savings seem likely to arrive in the longer-term; the incremental nature of culture change in public service partnerships; convincing all partners of upstream preventative approaches; workforce insecurity that limits collaborative commitment; and whether to focus on top-down or bottom-up. Strategies to usefully explore include NHS Health Scotland’s (Craig, 2016) preventative priorities and the role of local service hubs (Watson, 2017) ... but this feels an area of developing policy and practice in its infancy rather than ready to ‘deliver’.

- Is your CPP (locally and centrally) undertaking the shared ground-work to build understanding of these challenges?
- How can a longer-term strategy that explores the realistic preventative potential of ‘pooling budgets’ (re-investment) emerge?

8. Preventing inequalities & preventative spend: local economic and social development

Context: given the need for further investment to support the transition towards preventative approaches until savings from reduced pressure on services ‘arrive’ in the longer-term, then other strategies should be explored: those relating to public and community enterprise to support local economic and social development being one option.

From-the-field: 3 community organisations (community enterprise, social enterprise, community anchor) illustrate local economic and social development via community ownership – and state, private, community investment – that can complement services.

Key challenge for dialogue and action: emerging research and practice is highlighting the potential for local economic and social development coordinated via networks of: (1) larger public bodies, enterprises and procurement; (2) community enterprises and ownership; and, (3) local facilitative hubs. They can build the local economy, complement (universal) public services and strengthen local social capital. This suggests potential preventative gains given forethought: e.g. through dialogue on spatial planning, community planning and local community action plans.

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

- What strategies for local economic and social development can your CPP development that complement public service provision and prevent inequalities?

ⁱ <http://whatworksscotland.ac.uk/sharing-our-findings-from-new-approach-to-police-community-engagement/>

ⁱⁱ <http://whatworksscotland.ac.uk/publications/learning-about-community-capacity-building-from-community-links-worker-approach-aberdeenshire/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://whatworksscotland.ac.uk/publications/inquiring-into-multi-layered-preventative-partnership/>