

ONE STORY

councils, covid and better futures



Changing the narrative with stories and magical objects



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GOOD INVESTMENT





ONE STORY

councils, covid and better futures

Curated by Dawn Reeves, Fran Collingham,
Paul Masterman and Darren Caveney

With original illustrations by Dawn Reeves



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Thanks to our sponsors CCLA who believed in the project, who share our values and love of local government. And to our brilliant production team.

Finally, thanks to W. Eric Jackson, whose niche work of 1945 – *Local Government in England and Wales* has been such an inspiration.



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FOREWORD

In the decades we've been working with councils to help them manage their investments, we've seen them adapt and transform to meet each new challenge. This year, the pandemic has been a test of a different order. From the emergency measures that kept us safe and supported the vulnerable, to the frontline services that held society together, and the longer-term actions taken on health and the economy – we've seen local government step up once again.

We are all learning to live in a new world. The virus has meant councils have to had to work differently with self-organising groups of local people, voluntary and charitable organisations. They've co-ordinated responses to the crisis at speed, collaborating creatively with other public agencies to find new local solutions. Elected representatives have rolled up their sleeves, jumped online and bought a democratic legitimacy to the effort. All this in the context of continuing reductions in resources, the need to plan for the challenges of the climate crisis and tackling structural inequalities.

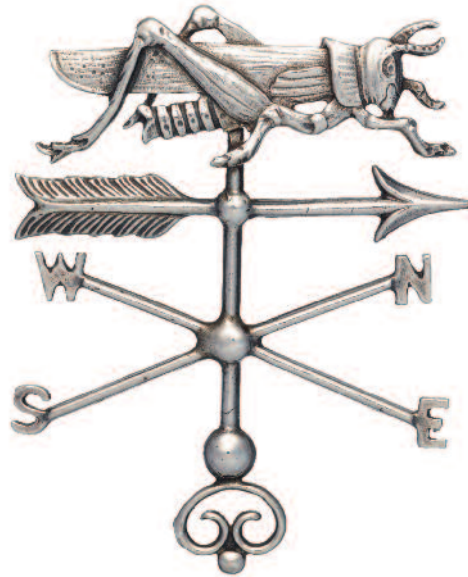
The stories in this book celebrate the achievements of people across the country, in councils large and small. They are about pride, passion, and the public sector ethos of making a difference. The book is an illustration of purpose and endeavour, of what supports society and how we under-value it at our peril.

We are delighted to be sponsoring this book and have played an active part in helping to develop this new story for local government. The stories here resonate and connect with the work we do with councils. We believe in the power of narrative and story to change perceptions and have thought hard about our own story, and how we're making a difference – you can read more about this in the final chapter of the book.

CCLA is more than an investment manager; we were established in partnership with local government and we are owned by funds managed on behalf of local government, charities, and faith-based organisations, as well as our employees.

We are proud to be part of the collective effort to recover and to re-imagine better futures.

Peter Hugh Smith
Chief Executive CCLA



*Grasshopper on a weather-vane brooch designed by Cini 1930s.
Thanks to Joanna Sterling, The Casket of Fictional Delights.
Photo – Mark Colliton*

INTRODUCTION

2020 and the arrival of COVID-19 have shone a new light on the reality of what local government does for, and, with our communities, and how together we make the world a better place. As councils stepped up to the challenge of keeping frontline services going when the world locked down during the pandemic, people began to notice. They thanked our binmen. They clapped for our care workers. They saw our critical expertise in public health. And they were cross if our parks were closed. Our unique connections with our communities – often unnoticed and usually taken for granted – have been playing a vital role in the nation’s response to the pandemic.

And there’s so much that’s unseen; services that make life safer and fairer for everyone, bold action and advocacy to make our neighbourhoods, towns and cities the best they can be; quiet work that plans for and prevents the worst; complex caring work with individuals; and long-term supportive action with communities. The partnerships with amazing local people and self-organising groups you’ll read about are part of the new way councils are already operating.

We know why we’re here and we know we are trusted to knit together our social fabric. Today this matters more than ever before.

This collection is a celebration of the true grit that public servants in local government have shown during the pandemic and before. It’s an illustration of what holds society together, what absolutely matters and what resources we’ll need to face future challenges – be they health-based, triggered by the climate crisis or about tackling structural inequalities. After years of coping with reductions in resources, these stories represent a powerful and compelling case for local government: that with investment and the freedom to do what’s needed, local solutions work best. Together – communities, councils and the other public organisations that operate on our patches – we make a difference.

WHY WE NEED A NEW NARRATIVE AND WHY WE THINK THIS IS DIFFERENT

Councils have always struggled to get their message across. It can seem that no-one loves us. But actually, that's not important. Our focus is on the people we serve. The ability to make a difference though depends on a clear, compelling, and shared narrative about why local democracy and local councils are fundamental to society. We allow this to be undermined at our peril.

At times, it seemed like a crazy task to try and draw out a uniform essence from the glorious diversity of councils with thousands of stories. But without a coherent overview of why we're here, our best work suffers. The entrenched negatives remain unchallenged and we reduce our collective ability to deliver what's possible: the better futures we all want. These stories present an invitation to look again.

Working with public servants, local politicians and community activists – all creative people with a passion for what they do – what we hope we've got here are the narrative threads that we can knit and pull together, weave and adapt locally, embroider and multiply across our communities. They are spun from true stories creatively told.

Narratives emerge and evolve. That's a good thing. When they live, they can get under the skin, they resonate. This work has the power to change perceptions; narrative communicates the big picture, stories help us empathise, make sense of our worlds, and imagine new possibilities

This book shares both one story – our sector narrative creatively written – and the local stories that inform, support, and illuminate it. It tells of committed public servants, politicians and leaders at all levels holding it together with truth and stoicism. The essence builds from a confident base of knowing who we are and where we've come from. Our narrative focuses on the "we". It aims to build connection.

We invited our contributors to nominate a magical object to illustrate each story. Sometimes the objects appear in the story, in others the objects are the story itself, everyday and extraordinary. The magic comes from both the meaning the objects hold and the beauty of the pieces themselves. Many of the objects are very personal, we glimpse bigger stories, we see the inherent values. We take another look, are curious and put our own imaginations to work.

This connects the story to different parts of the brain. It deepens the impact and encourages us to see the human, which matters because a central part of our narrative is that councils are run by people like us, people who care.

We'd love to hear what you think and to continue the conversation so that the narrative gets out into the world. At the end of the book you can read more about how you can use these ideas practically. We're delighted that the Local Government Association has supported a set of practical resources for councils to sit alongside this book. Together, with the fantastic engagement of our contributors and an informal guerrilla-style communications network, this commitment will help make the narrative live.

We hope that many more of us working in or with local government will share these ideas and stories as we learn to live in a vastly new landscape.

THE PULSE OF OUR NARRATIVE

– WHAT WE ARE SAYING

We are run by people like you, who care. We understand what's needed, know how to support people, and help everyone have a better quality of life. We aren't a faceless bureaucracy; you'll probably know people who work with and for us. That means you can call us out when we get things wrong and you can trust us.

We stand up for you and we stand alongside you. We're democratic and accountable. We hear all voices in our communities, not just the loudest. Even when there are disagreements, we acknowledge and respect your experiences. We represent and stand up for each other by communicating what's important to wider audiences. We have local legitimacy.

We are here in the tough times and the good. We are always here, even when others aren't – by law. We know life is more uncertain and complex as individuals, families and communities. You are lucky if you don't need us but we are here to protect you if you do. We are a rock for our communities, doing what we can to make a difference. And you'd miss us if we weren't here.

We make change happen in our common interest. Like you, we want our areas to be the best they can be. Why wouldn't we? We live here too. We are bold. And we'll ensure we all play fair and work in our common interest because we all benefit from a civilised society. We believe society can be better when we work together. We generate possibilities and influence change.

ONE STORY – IT’S IN THE BLOOD

The pages feel like precious parchment. The historic typeface projects solidity. *Local Government in England and Wales*, by W. Eric Jackson: 1945. It’s not exactly a best-seller. On the back cover Eric is wearing a serious three-piece suit and circular glasses. He looks out at us, making strong eye contact.

From the first page, Eric’s story draws us in.

His father, mother and grandfathers were public servants. An early multi-tasker, Eric wrote his book in the evenings while working in the legal department of a council. In a quiet, practical way, putting their hands to anything and everything after World War Two, Eric and his colleagues did what mattered.

We can’t know what Eric would make of public service in today’s complex world; where our local is getting smaller and the global is here in our hands. There are flashes of magical possibilities, new technology and a nagging sense of fragility, which might throw him. Instant access constantly, emails on Christmas day and the on-going battle for resources notwithstanding, the experience of loss and the challenge of re-building and imagining would be instantly recognisable.

He wrote:

“What councils have to do is to keep the place tidy and fit to live in, to see that the streets are swept, that the houses are properly built, to provide parks and gardens for the recreation of young and old, to educate children, to tend to the sick, and to care for the poor and the aged. It is a fine job, necessary, and one well worth doing. Without it, no civilised country can carry on, or call itself civilised.”

Simple and powerful, his words hold true today. Opening a book like this, fingers tingling, reminds us where we’ve come from

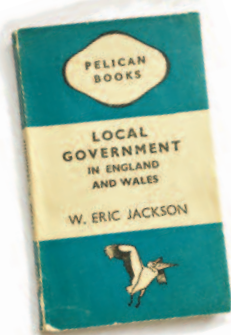
and of our enduring role. Today, local government's response to the COVID crisis across so many services marks a new chapter in our history. Now, local government is the story of Erika, a descendent of Eric.

We all know someone like Erika, a public servant who understands what it's like round here, what we and our communities need. A rainbow lanyard around her neck and a small turquoise pelican brooch – a gift from her daughter – pinned to her jacket, she's someone we can rely on. She's aware that her council isn't perfect, that she's not perfect, who can be? She just wants to do her job, to do better.

Like the local councillors at our democratic core who stand up for us, she's not in it for the applause. Kindness and compassion run through her veins.

Put Eric and Erika's jobs side by side and they are the same. It's the mix and methods that evolve, flexible for the future. Like Eric with his integrity and selflessness, in Erika's heart is a belief in society. Erika won't have time to write a book, but what she might say is this:

“We're here to support you, to tackle the tough stuff with you, side by side, pandemics included. We hear your fears and your joys. We lead and consult. We use our energy and resources to make this a great place to live. Because we live here too. Our council keeps the lights on, the roads clear and our communities safe. We're practical with a heart and an eye to the future. Our work is necessary and worthwhile. Together we are writing a new story of us.”



CHAPTER ONE

WE ARE RUN BY PEOPLE LIKE YOU, WHO CARE

We understand what's needed, know how to support people, and help everyone have a better quality of life. We aren't a faceless bureaucracy; you'll probably know people who work with and for us. That means you can call us out when we get things wrong and you can trust us.

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Jack, the manager of our library at Long Melford, noticed she hadn't heard from an elderly lady in the community for a couple of days. She put out the word through the library network. The lady had taken a nasty fall, hit her head and been admitted into hospital. Jack organised to have her carpet cleaned so that when she came out she wouldn't have to see the blood or try to clean it up herself.

This isn't a COVID story and it's not something we ask our colleagues to do. In our libraries we are constantly innovating, high skill levels are required, and we engage creatively with friends' groups and generate income – it's already a big ask and I'm consistently amazed by how brilliant staff are. So when the BBC picked up another story of library excellence, Charmaine, our Ipswich manager, found it hard to see what the fuss was about.

During lockdown, staff in Ipswich had been phoning Doris, a 102-year-old library member, to see if she was alright. Doris told them about a book her dad used to read to her when she was young. It was published in the late 1920's and took some tracking down. Turns out it's not available as an audiobook, so Charmaine and her colleagues have been reading and recording it for her.

Staff do this work because they believe in it. No-one asked permission first. They are the local experts. We give them a framework to operate within and they decide how to use their resources. As a successful charity set up in 2012 to run Suffolk's libraries – we have a contract with the County Council until 2022 – it's not all plain sailing, but we have honest conversations about what we can and can't do.

In an increasingly digital world, there's a sense that you must have a smart phone, devices and email to live well. It's harder and harder to find and maintain places that aren't about what's in your wallet. In our libraries, we try to remove the weight of expectation

on people, so that you can just be. You can feel uninhibited, free to explore, to read for betterment or enjoyment. It's an escape. It's not a romantic notion, and I'm not a romantic, but I feel this in my bones.

My husband gave me a framed postcard that says, "You have been in every line I've ever read." It's a quote from Dickens (he's a book worm too.) But it's not just me and him and our family, it's all of us.

In libraries, you can be and connect.

Krystal Vittles – Head of Service Delivery, Suffolk Libraries

“No-one asked permission... staff do this because they believe in it”



Dickens dream
Artist Robert William Buss
1875

REGISTRARS REGISTER

Opening the door after work to see my family, I realise how lucky I am.

Other people have lost their loved ones. Not able to hug them or say goodbye.

Arranging funerals they cannot attend.

We register death after death.

Our world is changed.

By [Angela Rummey](#)

We're a strong and supportive team; we've had to be. It's never just another death to us. For the time we spend with families registering the death of a loved one, we are part of their bereavement journey. It's so humbling. Even though I've been doing the job for 18 years, I still find the death of a teenager can leave an ache in my throat. Or if the death is the result of an accident, somehow my mind can keep returning to it.

As professionals we listen well and we're resilient for the family, but once we've said goodbye and the door closes, sometimes you can't help crying. The job's taught me that we've only got one life and we have to make the most of it.

During the pandemic, making Feltham Lodge safe was a priority, as well as reassuring the team, dealing with all our anxieties, long shifts, and major legal changes. And we've had to support hundreds of "almost" brides. I hear them taking deep breaths, trying not to let their frustrations show as their wedding plans change. We've missed the joyous occasions in our work.

By summer I can already see how far we've come. We adapt and evolve. As a new manager and a culture change champion, I've had to learn fast and become part of the wider collaborative effort, working with public health, contingency planning, enforcement, and communications. People have been helpful and kind, we lead with our hearts; it's the way we do things in Hounslow. It's one of our values.

Like Angela and some of the other team members, I wrote a poem to help make sense of our experience.

**We fit together like bricks in a wall.
Our individual strengths are the bricks, the cement is our
kindness
Bonding us together in a common goal.
As the wall builds, so does our attachment and over time,
endures.**

I see our team as a family, linking to other families and communities, to everyone in the council and the borough. We are now working on the backlog of 1,400 births to register.

It's the circle of life.

**Julie Gillies – Superintendent Registrar, Nationality and
Cemeteries Manager, Hounslow Council.**

*“... our team IS a family, linking to other
families and communities”*



***Mourner with black headdress**
– representation of artefact from
Tang Dynasty, China, British
Museum*

TAKING THE LID OFF

My favourite COVID story is about the delivery of a food parcel to an isolated elderly and housebound gentleman. George was delighted as he had not had a proper meal for days and had run out of provisions entirely. When Sarah, a young member of staff, called him back later to check all was well, he started by saying how grateful he was.

As a trustee of CVLife, the community sports and leisure charity who delivered the vital supplies, I've been incredibly proud of the team at moments like this. With the onset of COVID-19, sports centres closed, community sport dried up and CVLife had no choice but to furlough most of its workforce. It felt wretched.

But then something special happened. Staff volunteered en masse to partner with Coventry City Council to be the delivery arm of Operation Shield, its scheme for protecting and supporting the vulnerable during lockdown. Within five days sports centres had become depots for the distribution of food parcels supplied by the council and other partners. Sports coaches, lifeguards and cleaners we repurposed as call centre operatives, food parcel and medication deliverers, and virtual friends contacting over 7,000 people and growing.

The council had the wisdom to see the real power of our charity, delivering outcomes it couldn't achieve by itself at a grassroots level. They built and installed an entire online call system with a separate reporting and monitoring portal. It was absolutely extraordinary.

While Sarah and George kept talking on the phone, he eventually let slip that there was a major problem with his delivery. Many of the items in the food parcel were tinned and he hadn't got a tin opener. Sarah literally got on her bike, sourced a spare tin opener, and took it to him.

Sarah's was a simple act of human kindness but crucial. It illustrates how councils, community groups and ordinary people can work together to make a difference. It is already clear that this cooperation is driving benefits for communities that will outlive the crisis.

I don't know what the future will hold for CVLife. It will not get back to its old business any time soon, if at all. Our finances are under huge pressure, even with staff furloughed. But with the commitment of its staff and the credibility we have built, I am optimistic for the future whatever that might bring. It's just another can to take the lid off.

Chris West – Former Director of Finance and consultant in local government finance, Coventry

“It is already clear that the benefit to communities will outlive the crisis.”



APPROVAL PROCESS

It's getting dark. He should really get up and switch on the light. One more application to finish and then he'll knock off. Maybe even have time to go downstairs and sit with Lizzy for a bit. Watch that show she likes.

Alan's getting through them more quickly now, still methodical though, checking everything's been provided. He hopes this one will have everything in order so he can approve it, not have to go back and ask for more evidence. He can imagine Lizzy scoffing: "Finished for the day? It's practically bedtime Alan! All you do is work. Fourteen hours yesterday. Lucky I have the dog to talk to."

Tina wonders when she'll hear. She submitted everything days ago: the business rates reference and the accounts. What if it wasn't enough? They'd have had thousands of applications. What if it takes too long? The rent's due on the shop on Friday. Maybe she can beg the landlord for an extension. And there's still stock to be paid for. She refreshes the screen. No new emails. Her fingers on the mouse look alien. Older. Nails bitten. She clicks again. Nothing new.

Alan works his way through the list, cross-checking the documents with the council's records. He had one yesterday that used a fake reference number, trying to claim for an address that didn't exist. "Bloody chancers!" Lizzy said.

He knows people are desperate. No winners in this game. No problems with this one though. Check. Check. All fine so far. Check. Every time he hits send on an approval, he feels a shiver of satisfaction. He's made a tiny dent in the avalanche of need. It's what has kept him going when his shoulders were sore and his eyes started to throb.

"These are people's lives, Liz," he'd protested gently. "People's jobs and businesses. They need this cash quick, or they won't survive."

"You need to take a break, or you won't survive," Lizzy had replied.

Thinking about the rent reminds Tina of her own bills. Mortgage. Electricity. The boys stuck in the house, eating everything in sight. Good job the weather's been warm. That'll save on the heating. And she got the furlough sorted for the shop girls, so she doesn't need to let them go. Not yet. Let's hope there's a shop for them to come back to. Click refresh. No new emails. Of course not. The council's not going to be processing applications at this time of night, is it?

All done. Email sent. Another happy customer, hopefully.

"Brought you a cup of tea, love."

"Ah, thanks, Liz. Just what I need."

"You're a good man." She smiles, giving his aching back a rub.

Tina can't resist one last check before she turns the computer off.

A new email! Subject heading: Emergency Business Grant Application. Approved.

Ruth Fry – Corporate Communications Manager Perth and Kinross Council

"He's made a tiny dent in the avalanche of need. It's what kept him going"



TIME TOGETHER IS PRECIOUS

I've thought a lot about how much a hug means, especially as we get older. Family connections and shared memories matter to me, to all of us.

Seeing people in our care homes, distanced from families and friends, reminds me that human relationships aren't measured in miles, but in affection. It's vital to stay in touch with those who truly matter to you.

Christian Whiteley-Mason is one of our managers at Thornhill House care home in Darfield, Barnsley. Back in March when lockdown started, he offered residents his own mobile phone to help them contact their families. Using social media, they could see each other's faces as well as hear their voices. None of the residents had ever used a mobile phone or an iPad or a laptop to speak to their families. His phone was in demand.

When I heard about it, I asked our IT teams whether we had any old laptop or iPad stock we could send to other care homes. They worked over the Easter weekend to refurbish over 100 devices and install video systems and user guides. Then we mobilised the Adult Social Care teams to distribute the kit – in a socially distanced way – across the borough. We had to work through worries around security and permission – is this allowed, what if... x...or y happens? But it worked brilliantly.

I've been proud to work alongside our care homes. Families and friends were connected. Christian got his phone back. And homes can build on this start and use technology more, for example to hold online discussions with GPs and other appointments. It's vital for the future.

I imagine what it will be like during winter, residents sitting in front of a glowing fire, a thick blanket around their legs on a cold evening, watching their grandchildren on the screen tell them

about their day. I know it'll be similar for my mum too. Our time together is precious.

Local government has such an important role in creating togetherness – that's what helps to tackle some of the most challenging issues that face modern day society: loneliness, mental and physical health, community cohesion and empowerment. The council has a rich tapestry of relationships and it can bring people together meaningfully, to make our connections matter. I see this as part of our civic purpose.

**Wendy Lowder – Executive Director – Communities,
Barnsley Council**

*“The council’s rich tapestry of relationships
can bring people together meaningfully”*



MAGIC MRS SMITH AND THE APPOINTMENT SLOT

She was not always Magic Mrs Smith; she was normal Miss Brown. Born between the wars, she was the first of her family to go to University. She was not Magic at this stage; she was scientific. She practiced the philosophy of cause and effect. When she put things in, she could confidently predict what was likely to come out.

In time Doctor Brown (to give her full title) began to experience attraction to Doctor Smith. Over time they formed a strong bond, found a home together and quiet academic success. Wind the clock fast-forward and busy lives soon had them contemplating retirement.

A short illness broke the Smith-Brown bond and Mrs Smith (she found the use of her academic title outside of her professional activities pompous) was alone again. She suddenly found she had fewer and fewer interactions with others. It was at this stage that she began to experience the magic of appointments.

Initially her meetings were with the registrar, and later with the GP, the social worker, and the carer. They began to control her life. Their unusual power was that what she expected going in, and what she received coming away, became increasingly disconnected. “I wanted some help shopping and I got meals on wheels,” she says. “I mentioned I found it increasingly hard to enjoy my garden. I got a walking frame I hadn’t asked for and wouldn’t use.”

“It was a strange sort of magic,” she continues. “There was someone with a smart outfit on, who went through a routine, which on the face of it made sense, then they would produce a solution out of thin air, and I had no idea where it had come from. Complete magic – but, not always as exhilarating as I remembered tricks being.”

Then something happened. Someone rang Mrs Smith and didn't ask her their questions. Instead they asked Mrs Smith what her questions were. "The conversation to begin with was about food and medicine and they helped with a few things, but the real magic was when they asked me if I was OK, if I had the support I needed," she recalls. "At first, I said 'yes' because I am British and that's what we do. But they did not accept my first answer and they called back and asked again. They asked what I was interested in and I told them. The third time they called me, they mentioned a social group in a neighbouring village that shared some of my interests."

However, Magic Mrs Smith notes that "the real magic was that there was no magic. They simply asked me things. I answered honestly and they tried to help me achieve what I wanted. Now I do far more of the things I enjoy. A neighbour who has become a friend helps me shop and I no longer feel so alone. When I need something, I ring a friend rather than worry about it. I feel magic." She pauses. "Who would have thought that true magic would be so simple? It's almost scientific."

Oliver Morley – Corporate Director, Huntingdonshire Council

“They just listened and tried to help me achieve what I wanted”



"I'm not reclaiming my youth, skating was a real pleasure in my life and here it is again. I don't skate backwards anymore." Representation of new boots c/o **Barbara King** Aged 72.

TUESDAY IS A BIG DAY IN OUR HOUSE

In our home, Tuesdays are special. Especially for our four year old son, Fox. In summer, we're up as soon as the sun peaks over the horizon. In winter, it still feels like about midnight when we peel back the duvet.

Then, we listen out, with one bleary eye open, waiting for the flashes of orange light to diffuse against the window blinds. Sometimes they arrive right away. Sometimes we've already had breakfast and we're getting worried if they'll ever appear.

But they do. They never let us down.

Tuesday is bin day. It's the much-anticipated highlight of Fox's week.

Here in Liverpool, we have three wheelie bins. Green (for garden waste), blue (for recycling) and the iconic purple (for everything else).

Why purple? Well, this is Liverpool, so they can't be either red or blue...

We've got to know our bin men. Many have come and gone over Fox's four years. But two have been ever present. Ged and Richie. The Purple Bin Men. They always have a wave for us. Ged in particular is a talker.

So, when the lockdown came round, we knew we must say a special thanks to them. Fox made a "Thank You" sign and stuck it on the bin. I tweeted the sign on the Monday night (as we put the bin out, obviously).

The morning after, Liverpool City Council's comms team got in touch and Jen their videographer came round to interview Fox about why he'd made the sign. That night, the video appeared

on the council's Twitter feed. About 49,000 views later (and with a helping hand from a retweet by local football legend Jamie Carragher) Fox was Liverpool's most famous four year-old for a week.

It was a ray of light in a dark time. And that's what great local government comms can do. It gave a young citizen the opportunity to show how appreciated our key workers are. It brightened up a scary time. It spread a bit of happiness. And it was creative, fleet-footed, and human. It made our year.

It turned out that we didn't see Ged or Richie for the whole pandemic. We were getting worried about them. But they were back yesterday after five months. Back with a smile, a wave, and a friendly chat.

Apparently, Ged had seen the video back in March. It was good to know that he knows how appreciated he is.

Ben Capper – Director Grey Fox Communications Liverpool

“(The council's work) ... was a ray of light in a dark time”



WE CAN MEND THIS

Alesha sits on the plastic chair and looks ahead. She rocks slowly backwards and forwards, eyes blazing, body tense. She clutches a drawstring purse tight to her chest. Inside are the pieces of the coloured glass heart her mother gave her the day she was taken away.

When she threw it this morning at Dawn, her foster carer, it missed and smashed against the wall.

A final act. Dawn called time.

Alesha heard her ring the council, "... I can't cope...too much for me...she needs help."

Dawn had been crying. Alesha can't. She stares at the wall, waiting.

Later Elaine, her senior social worker, speaks quietly on her mobile to her colleague.

"What are we going to do with her? There are no placements left anywhere tonight and no room in any of our group homes. With no court discharges, we've reached the end of the road. This f**king virus has finally got us. She's nine years old for f**k's sake."

Above the silence, just the clock ticking.

Alesha paces next door.

"Are you sure Dawn won't take her back?" Elaine's colleague asks. "She's had time to calm down now. Does she know we have no other options tonight?"

"She's adamant she can't take any more. I'm really worried we'll lose her as a foster carer forever if we push this."

Elaine can hear her heart thumping, feel her stress rising. She closes her eyes and breathes in. She must go in and see Alesha soon....

Alesha casts a disdainful glance in Elaine's direction but it's clear she's scared.

Elaine pulls up a plastic chair. “I’m afraid you can’t go back to Dawn.”

Alesha does not look up. She kneads her purse.

Elaine continues: “Tomorrow, we will find you a new home. My colleague Clare and I will stay with you tonight. We are going to open up a house especially for you. Some of the people I work with are already making your bedroom as nice as we can. We will sleep there too.”

Alesha stares downwards, tears falling slowly.

“It’s going to be OK,” Elaine tries a smile. “We will get you the right home and the help you need. I promise. Come on, let’s go.”

Later, as Alesha climbs into bed, Elaine notices that she’s still clutching the drawstring purse. “Is that your glass heart that broke?”

Alesha nods sadly but doesn’t look up.

“Can I have a look? Please?”

Alesha pours out the pieces into Elaine’s hands.

“I think we can put this back together.” Elaine examines the pieces. “Not tonight, but I think I know a way. Would you like that?”

Alesha looks up and nods again.

Jon Rouse – CEX Stoke Council

***“We will get you...
the help you need.
I promise”***



SUPPORTING JUSTICE

File note 18th May 2020:

FA woman is referred to our Adult Social Care Mental Health team by a tenancy support worker. She had been given notice to quit because of significant damage to the property. The woman told the team that she had fled domestic violence after her ex-partner stamped on her head and caused damage to her brain tissue. She suffers from anxiety and depression, possible bipolar disorder, has three children in care and a history of crack cocaine and heroin abuse.

We knew this case would need a partnership approach but everyone was working flat out as mental health referrals continue to rise. I hoped that no one would dismiss her because of her past.

File note 4th June 2020:

I visit the woman face to face. She disclosed that her ex-partner, a suspected major drug dealer, was currently in custody and due to appear in court (date TBC). The woman was struggling with the idea of having to attend herself and fearful of seeing the perpetrator, giving evidence and of the possible repercussions.

I was a bit anxious meeting in person but when she told me she wouldn't forgive herself if she didn't make it to court, and she didn't want to give her daughter the message that it was acceptable for men to abuse women, I was glad I had.

File note 6th June 2020:

I assess that although she did not meet the criteria for safeguarding, the council's mental health team would offer her professional support (several extended phone calls are noted separately). Strong support was also provided by the housing department, which has allowed her to reside longer in the flat, and a substance mis-use support worker. The police will physically

accompany her to court to allay her fears about getting there and going alone. The joint approach enabled the woman to feel safe and confident to give evidence.

I see our collaboration as a chain of people holding hands. It's virtual of course; we've all adapted to the new technology. We never give up hope, we take risks together and are flexible. Our chain doesn't break.

In the end I found a social worker for the woman's children in another borough and arranged transport so they could meet. She told me she doesn't feel worthless anymore.

Kwai Mo – Head of Service Mental Health and Disability,
Barnsley Council

“I see our collaboration as a chain of people holding hands”



UP A GEAR

Three baby chicks joined our menagerie during lockdown: Stabilo, named after a zingy yellow highlighter pen, Coco-Nib, a reference to chocolate making and our holiday last year, and Kiev (hopefully in not too poor taste). Mealtimes have been hectic with eight of us in the house for the last few months. But they do represent a real break from work. That's what's kept me going.

It's been 24/7. Under the emergency measures, I've chaired the Gold Command response to the pandemic. When the hospital needed gowns, I asked the partners and the police stepped in to provide 50 forensic suits. We thought we'd need temporary accommodation for key workers to stay over near the hospital and the university offered to make a student block available. To support those on our shielding list, volunteers and community groups came together at speed to join our hub.

When you chair Gold Group you need to see the big picture and the detail to coordinate solutions fast. I sat in the hot seat for the first three months to root our response in public health. Plus, I'd experienced both the swine flu epidemic and a WW2 bomb emergency incident last year when 1,500 homes were evacuated. I still do my day job, alongside my tireless, amazing teams, organising the public health response, and working through the national government briefings, making sense of them for our area. The lines of communication-into-action and data flows from central government for local delivery have been a challenge and because we work together so well locally, the disconnect has been all the more noticeable.

At our Silver Command the focus is on the operational and Kingston's Resilience Forum partners have taken the lead. We kept our councillors briefed and decision-making has been quick.

Our partnership working has always been strong, but it's gone up a gear. It's not about who provides what, it's about what's needed and how quickly it can be provided.

The kids looked after our baby chicks, they kept the cheery bundles of fluff alive and watched them grow (and of course mum ended up cleaning the coop.) It's my small metaphor for why we're here. As a partnership, a group of people and organisations, we care, and we aren't going away. So many of us have helped in so many ways. That desire is part of being human and it's rewarding. It showed we're stronger together whatever might happen.

Iona Lidington – Director of Public Health Royal Borough of Kingston Council

“...we're stronger together whatever might happen.”



RADICAL – BUT NOT

Right from the start of the pandemic everybody understood the need to support the hospital to free up acute beds. When the Hospital Social Work Team were no longer able to get into the wards to see patients, there was no choice but to work differently. Wherever possible, we needed to discharge people to their homes rather than a care home, which meant identifying the interventions needed earlier, new processes and new relationships.

Not only were we changing how we worked with the reablement and adult social care teams, but also therapists and other health colleagues who could help coordinate equipment and medicine management. This new model needed to be able to provide support seven days per week from 8am to 8pm and we depended upon our staff to step up.

Quickly changing the culture across our services was a challenge, and in particular trusting other professionals and their decision-making. We saw it as an opportunity to improve our joined-up working across the council and the wider health system. It might sound like the obvious thing to do but to be able to deliver this kind of coordination at scale is so complex. Everyone pulled together. We all care.

There's been lots of positive feedback already from health colleagues on the changes in working practice. Lots of collaboration and less travel time have added to productivity. We worked remotely to develop this model and the technology has proved to be really beneficial. The pressure of the virus means we've gone further and faster in partnership. All services are experiencing much better communication and information sharing. It's something we are excited to build upon for the future.

We're so proud to see the Home First approach realised. It's better for people and their families. At its heart is a strengths-based approach. We consider what people can do, what already exists within their communities, and build it alongside the reablement service so that as far as possible people remain independent.

Staying independent is vital for all of us; it's something we as professionals want for ourselves and our loved ones. Our new approach is significantly different but it's something we've always been striving for. We're working hard to make sure it goes from strength to strength.

Linda Middlewood – Head of Service for Older People and Physical Disabilities, Barnsley Council

“The crisis has meant we've gone further and faster, in partnership”



THE PHOTO

Elsie sits in her comfy worn chair staring at the black and white photo of her and Bert looking so happy. Nearly fifty-five years ago to the day since it was taken on their wedding day. It was a small affair at the local registry office but she remembers being so deliriously happy when they said, “I do.”

She wonders how different life might have been if Bert hadn't been taken from her early. “A heart attack,” the police said, when they knocked on her door. He'd been found on the street walking back from the shops. “He didn't suffer.”

And now just Elsie. Oh there were the children – grown up now – with their own kids. But they live miles away and simply don't have the time to see her. And she doesn't like to ask.

There used to be friends too but so many have passed on. Elsie knows there is nothing she could have done about it – it is the cycle of life and getting to this age is an achievement really. She just wishes it wasn't so lonely. If only her legs were more reliable, then she could get out more and would be able to see more friendly faces at the shopping parade down the way.

Dring, dring. Elsie jumps. “Hello,” she answers tentatively. It's been a long time since someone phoned her. She feels nervous as she sometimes gets calls from people she doesn't know who want her to give them her pension. She never really knows what to say to them and it scares her.

It's a nice woman called Lucy. “I work for the council,” she explains. “I'm phoning to see if you're OK and that you've got all you need. We're helping lots of older people like yourself who can't get out so easily during the lockdown.”

Lucy normally works at the museum but it's been shut during the pandemic. Instead, the council has asked her to make phone calls to residents in the neighbourhood who may need help.

Lucy and Elsie talk. Lucy arranges for a food parcel to be delivered to Elsie the next day with all the provisions she needs. She also organises for Elsie's medicines to be dropped in to her a week later. Elsie had been worried about how she'd get her prescription. It's a relief. Lucy said she'd ring again to see how she is. And she keeps her word.

Every week, the phone rings and it's Lucy. They chat and Lucy asks how Elsie is and whether she has everything she needs. Lucy also arranges for the local befriending service to call Elsie twice a week. It makes Elsie feel safe and happy. She has something to look forward to after so long. Nothing is too much trouble and they share some laughs and stories too.

Elsie even tells Lucy about Bert and their wedding all those years ago, all the while looking at the photo on the side. "You don't know what a difference you've made to a lonely old woman, Lucy. I really wish my Bert could have met you."

Emma Rodgers – Strategic Manager Communications Stoke Council

"You don't know what a difference you've made..."



KERSTEN ENGLAND

This coffee grinder has been a constant companion throughout lockdown. I've ground the beans for a fresh coffee every day with it while working at home, a treat normally reserved for weekends. Made in about 1937 in Belgium, I inherited the grinder from my father and stepmother when they died within weeks of each other in 2006 due to alcoholism.

As I place my hand on it, I can feel my father's hand and presence ingrained in the wood over the many years of use. I remember his warm generosity and compassion for others, his sharp intellect, and his volatility; all of which profoundly shaped the person I am today.

Kersten England – CEX Bradford Council

“Our experiences are diverse; our values are core. They inform our leadership.”



CHAPTER TWO

WE STAND UP FOR YOU AND WE STAND ALONGSIDE YOU

We're democratic and accountable. We hear all voices in our communities, not just the loudest. Even when there are disagreements, we acknowledge and respect your experiences. We represent and stand up for each other by communicating what's important to wider audiences. We have local legitimacy.

THE SAME SEA

In 1991, I was with the Royal Air Force on tour in Belize, Central America. Diving in the clear blue sea there, I picked up a beautiful conch shell. There was nothing living in it and I was mindful of not disturbing the ecosystem. It's here in my front room now, a connection with an unspoilt world.

All these years later, like many people, I watched the *Blue Planet* TV programme and was appalled to see that same Caribbean Sea full of plastic. I like to read up on issues, to keep myself well informed on the environment. There's more awareness now. People recognise we won't tackle the climate crisis unless we all do it together.

Three years ago, when I became leader of North Kesteven District Council, I put forward the environment as one of our priorities. It's in everything we do. We're committed to becoming carbon neutral by 2030. When I get questioned about it – why would we commit to a target we're likely to fail on? – my response is, why wouldn't we? There's no point in setting targets we can easily reach. I am prepared to fail on this one, but we need to keep the focus on the challenge.

The environment matters to our communities. We're a rural area, one of England's gardens and home to proud farmers, so transporting food and people is a challenge. Air quality is important. We need people to use their God given gifts – their legs! – and to walk and cycle more. During lockdown, with the county council we've explored temporary cycle lanes to see if we can start changing behaviours to support the modal shift we want to see. We're thinking about trees, housing and townscapes, all aspects of our work. It's not about egos or logos; it's about trying to do the job.

As individuals, we sometimes struggle with the environment; it's such a big issue and how can one person make a difference? I understand that, but I think it goes to the heart of the role of local government in the future. We have the collective means to go to the next level up. We can build on the power of the collective.

I go walking a lot on the rugged east coast. I'm a proud Yorkshireman. I love the power of the sea. On a sunny day, I say to my partner, if you blink, the colour of water is like the Caribbean.

We only have one world.

Richard Wright – Conservative Leader North Kesteven
District Council

“We can build on the power of the collective”



AN ENDURING CONNECTION

I've known Sharron for over 20 years; big lady, big heart. As a community development worker she's got that essential knack of roping people in to do things and sometimes there's a rub. Residents get collared regularly, as does the council. But then, we've been in it from the start, a league of volunteers and me – the latest link in a long chain of ward councillors like Sally and Stuart, who reach back over the years.

We've watched Sharron grow strong, going to college, taking on the William Kaye Function Hall, bringing in a dizzying mix of services, facilities and small businesses. After the closure of its coalmines and textile industries, Ladybrook was among the most deprived wards in the country. Mansfield still struggles. People here look longingly to the past.

It'll never change round here, some say. Large families bind the neighbourhood. But new communities are moving in. Blame is meted out, resources are scarce and Sharron is stretched to the max. And through all this, the Ladybrook Community Centre and its engaged and committed board have helped to hold the collective loss of good employment, challenged low aspirations, and built in self-sufficiency.

My part in the journey includes supporting the transfer of the building to community ownership and insisting on a grant for repairs. A simple pump for the boiler keeps the centre warm and pays the plumber's bill. We installed publicly funded WIFI. We've come a long way since the debacle of the roof, when dance clubs dodged the buckets collecting rain and the council managed the renovation contract badly.

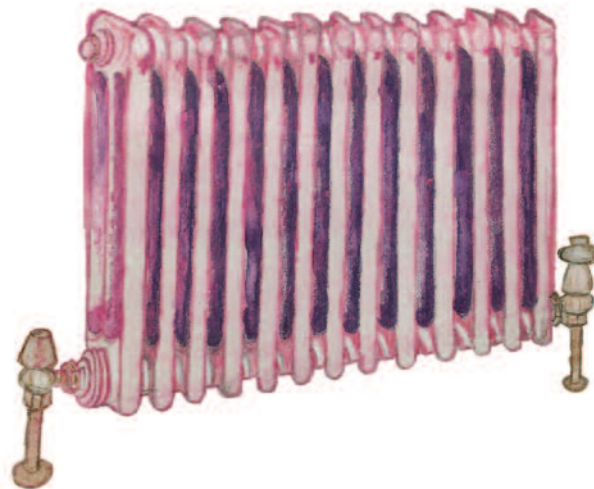
In 2018, I put Ladybrook Enterprises in for the Queen's Award for Voluntary service – it's an MBE for voluntary groups. I was delighted when the Lord Lieutenant came to present it and

Sharron got to attend a garden party at Buckingham Palace. As local elected representatives we get stuck in. We've helped the estate look outwards and get on the map.

I get a sense of self worth and purpose from work like this. It's an enduring connection that matters and it's accumulative. It's ever more important during the coronavirus crisis. As I've seen Sharron change, I know I've changed. Coming up to our seventies, Sally, Stuart and I are planning to hand over to future councillors. We'll all still be around though, and we'll remain friends.

Diana Meale – Labour Councillor, Nottinghamshire County Council

“As local elected representatives we get stuck in”



WHEN I'M 64/74/84...

For most of my life I gave little thought to people I'd labelled dismissively as "pensioners". Eating up the pavement with their mobility scooters on a Saturday morning and taking ages to get their cash out in Sainsbury's. And although I wouldn't have said this out loud, I guess I resented the drain on the country's resources and the hard-earned taxes I paid.

Then three things happened.

First, we booked one of those posh *Guardian* upmarket coach trips to Tuscany and my heart sank at the airport when I found myself surrounded by pensioners, some as old as 70. Gasp.

But over the next week it became clear that these unremarkable people with bad knees and hip replacements were, in fact, talented, clever and high-achieving individuals. One of them, Alex, who at first look seemed pretty out of it, turned out to have been a junior member of the team that developed radar during the war. I enjoyed his company.

Then my parents went, seemingly overnight, from confident, go-getting, intelligent and well-read people to two dependents wasting away, with dementia in my mother's case and kidney failure in my dad's.

For the first time, I had to dive into the dark depths of the health and social care system and saw the complexities, frustrations and dysfunction, as well as the sheer day-to-day miracles achieved by doctors, nurses and care workers getting the dirty work done. Of course, I couldn't thank them enough.

And finally, there is COVID-19. I look at the TV news, at deaths in residential homes and feel, like many others, that we have failed a generation of people who deserved more from us. I look back at myself, cheeks burning. Could older people see what I thought?

I believe that we should judge the health of any community by the way it treats its older citizens and to celebrate the strengths of people like Alex, and the everyday bravery and stoicism of my parents and their carers.

I no longer think that caring for people who are getting older is just about the money, and who does what in the council, the NHS or any of the other organisations involved. I see some practical things improving, but, for me, it's become a question of social justice. As a country we need to do better. I need to do better.

Paul Masterman – Communications Consultant, Local Government Authority Adviser

“This story is based on the new narrative work I've done with ADASS (Association of Directors of Adult Social Services). It's built on a series of conversations with passionate professionals. Local councils need the resources to make this vision a reality.”

“Our country's health is judged by the way it treats older citizens”

Many of us live with health issues to a greater or lesser extent and have a choice about whether we let it limit our lives or not. I feel we shouldn't become dependent on the public service but seek its support when we need it and get on with living.



15-MINUTE NEIGHBOURHOODS

For many people, new ways of living in lockdown meant connecting with neighbours, walking, or cycling more. I got to use my electric bike for travelling around my ward – a large rural area. Home working meant our immediate neighbourhoods took on an importance that had been forgotten in our busy lives that are too often based around travelling to other places.

It was also the time when our local shops became vital, filling the gaps left by supermarkets with their empty shelves, queues in car parks and lack of home delivery slots. And places to garden and grow your own moved right up the importance scale. I know for some people, lockdown really changed what's on their doorstep. There were unexpected treasures. I noticed these small and beautiful stones people put beside a local path. It's been a time of real change and challenge.

For those of us involved in our local planning systems, it's been particularly challenging. Planning is always the most controversial area and councillors' postbags contain the highest levels of anger and frustration. This has increased in recent months. People, some of them with more time on their hands, others with new and closer connections to their neighbourhoods, have been more bothered than ever by nearby development proposals. These are the things people are most concerned about in normal times, but they have assumed an ever-greater importance.

I see this change in culture as a huge opportunity for planning, especially for those of us who are championing a sustainable approach that puts people and their communities at the heart. It

is no coincidence that we are seeing a huge interest in the rise of “15 minute Neighbourhood” approaches, with the idea that our micro-neighbourhoods are the answer and that everyone should be able to walk to nearby shops and facilities and have quality green and communal space. It’s ambitious and vital.

Post-COVID, how we plan our places will be more important than anything.

Emily O’Brien – Cabinet Member for Planning & Infrastructure, Green Party District Councillor for Ouse Valley & Ringmer

“How we plan our places is more important than anything”

*Cadaro Acron brooch 1960s –
with thanks to Joanna Sterling,
The Casket of Fictional Delights.
Photo – Mark Colliton*



BATTERED AND BRUISED. BUT STILL DOES THE JOB

My dad died 13 years ago. He was more than a dad to me. He was also a best pal and someone who never hesitated in his encouragement of me. Anyone who has ever lost a loved one will know how I felt when he died, quite suddenly, aged 64.

But time passes and so does the grief. And now I can just look back fondly on him and his daftness. And try to aspire to his strength, his work ethic and his always supportive words.

At the time of his death, I was a head of communications in local government. He didn't really know a lot about what I did, and even less about what local government did. But that didn't stop him encouraging me, sticking up for me.

I used to think about him when communicating about council services. He would have struggled to name many council services beyond bins and fixing potholes. You know the type.

After his death I acquired his old jacket: a slightly battered and bruised 25-year old Barbour. He bought it long before they became popular on the high street.

When I picked it up, it was bit grubby and I could still smell his aftershave on it. So, I was reluctant to have it cleaned. And I still haven't to this day.

It's battered and bruised. But still does the job. Which, if you think about it, is just like local government.

I love them both.

Darren Caveney – Creator of comms2point0, Ex-Local Government Head of Communications, LGA Associate

“We all need someone to stand up for us.”



THE SPITFIRE

I can't believe they smashed my window!

Until that point I'd been quite happy in my supported accommodation with regular visits from my carers. I'd lived a full life with many friends and I'd been fortunate to have them continue to visit me as my health dwindled.

Leaving there wasn't easy, but it was the right thing to do. Moving on, downsizing and relying more on others to help is something that comes to us all, I suppose. As a younger man, I'd enjoyed the outdoors life, the sun on my face and the contrasting harsh winters. I'd smiled at my elders, telling me of times it had snowed so hard that kids could sledge down the main road. These days the cold makes me creak and groan, and the sun makes me wheeze and strain.

The broken window was the moment I knew my time there, happy though it had been, had come to an end. I'd already started to lose some of my independence, and the reliance on others to help me was increasing. In my head, I was still the fit young man, eager for adventure, and this backwards progression was painful. I hadn't expected to leave there trussed up and taken away for urgent care. My neighbours and friends stood nervously waiting and watching, not sure what to say or do. I could have cried. What would happen to my belongings, the treasures I'd gathered over a lifetime, photos and my aeroplane models, moments of a life lived well?

Sometimes, though, you have to have faith in your friends and carers, and ultimately in yourself. It's taking time to recover, and I'm enjoying the change of scene while I get back on my feet. I've been told that I can't go back to the same flat, but somewhere new has been prepared for me, in the same place, so it won't be totally unfamiliar.

There's always something gratifying about knowing your new home has been specially prepared for you.

The messages I get from my carers say I'll recognise some things in my new place: big bright windows like before, but without the harsh heat or the biting cold. They have my interests at heart. They're also planning a party for me. Of course, they'll say it's a surprise, but I know in my heart it's coming.

Abi Brown – Conservative Leader of Stoke City council

“Have faith in your friends and carers.”

“The £7 million extension of the Potteries Museum & Art Gallery in due for completion in 2022. Its star exhibit will be the city's much-loved Spitfire, designed by Reginald Mitchell and currently under restoration in Kent. We can't wait to have it back.”



BLURRING THE EDGES

When lockdown started, we set ourselves a goal of calling all our branch members and volunteers across the county just to check-in and see how they were coping.

There are about 300 of them and it took a lot of time over a couple of weeks. But people were pleasantly surprised to hear from us and I think it helped me feel more optimistic about the future. Some people hadn't found it easy, of course. I so felt for the woman who'd desperately wanted to breastfeed her newborn baby but had given up because the usual support she'd get from health professionals and so on just wasn't there to help her. On the whole, though, hearing many cheering anecdotes – like the pub that had become a real centre for a village, providing practical help in loads of ways – made me feel upbeat about what could happen next.

Back in my neighbourhood I wanted to do what I could and got in touch with my ward councillors to see if they needed any help delivering leaflets with information about support, practical information and the like. A councillor in a nearby ward was doing it and it seemed a simple way to help our community.

They weren't keen. The ward was too big, said one. It sort of felt as though they just didn't have any energy or enthusiasm for doing things anymore.

Anyway, although it made feel fed up at the time, it's also strengthened my resolve. In the past, I've stood as a council candidate in another ward, one that's smaller with an electorate that generally has a pretty traditional view of the world. Next year, I want to stand in the ward where I live even though I know the sitting councillors, and haven't, in the past, wanted to stand against them.

But it feels to me that if politics is going to change, it should do so now, with people thinking more about their community, not just individuals. And I think this goes both ways because it's about embracing the blurred edges between communities and organisations. At a community level all of us politicians and residents have responsibilities for each other and our places.

I think it's an opportunity to make a better future with more local people continuing to be involved in community organising and looking out for each other. We've all come to value care and frontline services more. I really hope that this continues.

Leisa Taylor – Worcestershire Branch Lead for the Women's Equality Party

“We have responsibilities for each other and our places”



Sculpture from ‘Four Gestures’ by Sarah Tutt.

I UNDERSTAND THAT I CAN NOT UNDERSTAND.
HOWEVER, I STAND

The words above were written on a simple homemade placard a young American white woman held up as she walked down the street. Those 10 words capture so much. They demonstrate insight into how the murder of George Floyd has evoked such a response from our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities, families, colleagues and friends across this country and all over the world. They show humility and appreciation of the pain of decades of injustice. They accept the pain felt cannot be fully understood, its roots in a deep context and lived experience for those of ethnic minority heritage. But those words also express support, and most importantly, solidarity. I stand with you.

The murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis was followed by the publication of the Public Health England report on the impact of COVID-19 that demonstrates a disproportionate impact for people of BAME heritage. I am working with colleagues in West Yorkshire to translate this research into action to tackle structural racism, the gap in outcomes for black people, and systemic racism, the everyday acts that create difference and hostility. Are we as a council doing enough for our workforce and our community to tackle injustice? Not yet.

As an employer, we have seen a transformation in the number of new staff from BAME communities coming to work at the council, reflecting the communities we serve. It's been a joy to see this. Our BAME Staff Network has reformed, supporting our brilliant recruitment team, and we've developed leadership programmes to support future leadership opportunities for BAME staff.

But coming back to that "not yet" bit. That starts with me as chief executive. This is about all of us, but I need to start by recognising my responsibility in all this. I can do more. I have not made enough time to listen, and I have not always stepped

forward to take my responsibility to be the change. I aspire to be the senior white voice in the room who doesn't wait for BAME colleagues to do the heavy lifting on calling out racial injustice seen every day in our lives, our colleagues are understandably tired of doing this; they have been doing it all their lives. I've made a detailed public commitment to act.

The book that made a huge impact upon me was Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. Speaking is better than silence. Don't be worried about saying the wrong thing. But it's equally important to listen, and after that, do, and then do again.

Our challenge is to harness this moment, to address the pandemic of racism, which has lasted for centuries. We have an opportunity to reset and rebuild better.

One of the greatest American writers of the twentieth century, James Baldwin, a gay, black man who gave voice to so many, captured the spirit of possibility in his statement: "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced".

“Our challenge is to harness this moment, to reset and rebuild better.”

Robin Tuddenham – CEX Calderdale Council



CLEAR AND TRUE

In our council chamber in Kingston, we have a beautiful ship's bell that came from a frigate called HMS *Naiad*. It was built in 1965 in Yarrow. We have a tradition of adopting ships that goes back to the First World War and this was one of the last. As a sign of friendship, the captain gifted the bell to us when his ship was decommissioned. The name Naiad comes from a Greek deity. She's a nymph that protects water and gives life to rivers. It's a good connection for us with the Thames at our heart and our commitment to tackling the climate crisis and protecting the environment.

I try to show leadership wherever I can on the climate crisis, particularly bringing people together across organisations in Kingston and by chairing a cross-party group on the "green recovery" for the Local Government Association. We can't just talk to people who already agree with us. Our future depends on reaching out, sharing ideas, and working together.

In July, I was asked to chair a LGA Green Reset Webinar session. I felt unusually nervous. As a council, we've always done some work remotely and I know it's the way ahead, no question. But it's hard to read a virtual room. Normally you can pull the discussion back if things start to wander, but when you can't see everyone you have to be hyper-alert and maybe more formal. I worry that the passion and commitment I feel might not come across or that sometimes I'm just talking to myself.

The coronavirus pandemic has seen so many changes in behaviour and attitudes, for example on cars, cycling, food and travel. Before, our commuter trains into London were packed to hell and not good for mental health. It's clear we have a massive opportunity to reset our economy in a way that will benefit our environment and help us to reach our carbon reduction goals.

Councils get a lot of flak about the environment. We have ambitious projects and targets and we're really at the beginning of influencing local economic growth plans and skills programmes.

So I was delighted when the LGA webinar started and I could see the numbers of participants entering the virtual room. It just rose and rose until 388 people had joined the session. We'd never have had that many people normally. By the time we got to the Q&A I could sense the energy.

Like our Naiad bell, the message rang out. Just make the change.

**Liz Green – Liberal Democrat Councillor Kingston Council
and LGA Chair of Climate Change Working Group**

“We have a massive opportunity to reset our economy”



ALWAYS HERE

I'm first in, then there's the leader of the council, his name on screen is just Paul48. I'm just Jade.

"We've not met before have we? All ok?" He's at his kitchen table, unwashed plates in a wobbly pile behind him.

"Good thanks." It's better now I'm not on my bed with the laptop.

We chat about his broken dishwasher until my manager arrives. I'm glad not to be hovering awkwardly at the back of a dull meeting room.

My boss, who I love, says, "So, as we're not going back to the town hall, we're experimenting with a what-works approach. We're doing some consultation with residents and we wanted to talk to you about the message."

"How are our residents going to feel?" Paul48 asks.

"They haven't noticed the difference so far," my boss replies. "Which is great, although I don't think people appreciate how much bloody hard work went into that. We're doing some consultation, working on the comms."

"What about, 'Business as usual'?" asks Paul48. "Something reassuring like that?"

"Not that though," I pipe up, surprising myself. "Everyone's online now. It's more like, 'we've changed', or maybe 'we've got this'."

My boss likes it. "Could be. It shows we can change; we're ready to adapt. And we've handled this; we can handle other stuff. Although we won't ever be enough for some members of the public, or staff come to that."

We all nod. No-one likes us, we don't care.

"I'm not sure we can ever totally have this, can we?" Paul48 scratches his head.

"True," my boss says. "We've got a plan for digital exclusion; some people prefer face-to-face."

“Not my face they don’t.” The leader knows he’s no picture.

“I did the staff survey,” I offer. “In it, 95 percent of us are used to working from home. About 40 percent don’t want it all the time – the ones with screaming kids or whistling dads – that’s my dad,” I say. “No one misses the commute; 75 percent feel healthier and if the kids were back at school it’d be 100 percent.”

I think how much I missed my mates at the start of lockdown, but listen to me now.

Paul48 wants to get back to the residents, wants messaging that’s true and factual. I decide I like him.

“What about, ‘here for you’, or ‘here for us’?” I think about how many people have been online for so many hours, keeping it all going. “Or maybe, just – ‘always here’.”

“That’ll do.”

Darren Caveney, Paul Masterman, Fran Collingham and Dawn Reeves – curating team

“We’ve handled this, we can handle other stuff.”

Enduring – Representation of stirrup spout bottle Peru, 900-1400 British Museum



A BETTER LIFE

Councillors raised the issue of modern slavery with a motion put forward to full council; it was on my radar but to be honest as the chief financial officer and S151 officer, there were lots of other pressing problems that we needed to act on. But as we started to look at what was happening, I found myself thinking, this is horrific. True and gut-wrenching story after story of people being trafficked hit home. It's like your worst nightmare. There were reports of specific incidents in neighbouring boroughs; thousands of migrant workers, people mainly from India and Bulgaria, controlled by organised crime gangs, sleeping up to 10 people in a room, unable to leave and unable to speak up.

So far, nothing had been reported on our patch, but I had no doubt that it was here. It's everywhere in the supply chains of so many big brands and the places where I would regularly shop. Modern slavery is hard to see and it felt like we just didn't have the powers of enforcement we needed to act to eradicate it.

We started small and set up a problem-solving team and pulled together a rational approach. It sounds bureaucratic. We reviewed our contracts and our processes and began to engage with our suppliers; we got a 50 percent response rate, which was encouraging (although typically it's not the businesses that engage that are the problem.) We joined a benchmarking group to find out what others were doing to find ways to improve. Every new contract was reviewed and changed where possible to mention it and updated some exit clauses to make sure we made extra effort to find it. Then we could stop public money being spent on the contract. We had a motion put forward by councillors to full council to support the work.

What was also encouraging was the work we did with partners; the police, housing providers, health. Local government has a major influencing role and together the public sector has the

collective means to tighten the net. Councils are also exposed to the problem through shared ownership of the companies in which they invest. In failing to harness the weight of these investments, we indirectly undermine the brilliant work that is going on elsewhere.

Although I don't work in the same council now, the issue is still on my agenda and theirs. I was shocked at the reports of people working in appalling conditions in factories getting COVID and having no access to financial or medical support.

What's important to me is to keep up the awareness of the issue, flag it up whenever I can, stand up for people who are victims of this crime, and lobby for more powers for local government.

We start to make a difference when we remember the individuals. Everyone is human.

Kelly Watson – Formerly Chief Financial Officer South Northants and Cherwell District Councils and CCLA Relationship Manager

“The public sector has the collective means to tighten the net.”

I don't care what people think when I wear these, they make me smile. There are more important things in life.



LOCAL MATTERS

Our COVID volunteers WhatsApp chat has been going since 17th March and in its own way is a fascinating record of the times that we have gone through in the last four and a half months (seems longer). There is so much positivity and generosity. And it's hard to look back without a huge lump in the throat at the (distanced!) videos of the musicians in the street playing each week before the "clap for carers". Not to mention all the times we put soft toys and messages in the windows for children's birthdays for them to see during an afternoon walk during the depths of lockdown. It really will be something for our children's grandchildren to hear about, even though it already seems unreal.

It's pretty clear to us that a WhatsApp group connecting those on the street who want to be a part of a neighbourly chat is now a piece of our community that we will want to endure.

The coronavirus pandemic is not over. The COVID-related Harpenden Cares Foodbank coordinated by the Harpenden Town Council with a local faith group and a local charity still needs help. It's unlike the normal one in that they deliver and they don't need a referral before you can get help.

And, as we have done through the pandemic so far, the town council is using the widespread network of Mutual Aid groups to understand and channel requests for help that we can't deal with at the street level, and which need town-wide volunteers, like the summer play scheme.

Having speedily handled over 40 help requests in the last few months, we haven't had any from the 150 households in our patch for a while. Anyone watching the news knows that we may get new local lockdowns, or individuals or families may be called on to quarantine or isolate and may need help. It could happen to any of us. We'll keep the help email and this channel open.

But we've set up a new WhatsApp Chat for people to join if they like. Its where the sharing of spare home grown food, discussion of local issues, peacock sightings, traffic warden sightings (less common than the peacock), rainbow art, community events, and offers of non-COVID help continue to be made.

Jonathan Flowers – Director Futuregov with Harpenden Town Council

“Connecting communities will endure”

Local councils – a universal term for community, neighbourhood, parish, and town councils – are the first tier of local government. There are 10,000 local councils in England. Together with their county associations, they have been carrying out vital work to help their communities during the coronavirus outbreak.



100 YEARS OF PUBLIC SERVICE REIMAGINED

It's 1920. Winifred purses her lips and shakes her head, turns to the council leader and says, "Every girl should be educated, but as is too often the way, the mother has another baby and the elder teenage daughter ends up looking after the young ones."

Met with silence by her fellow aldermen in the municipality of Glamorgan, she draws in slow, steady breaths and continues: "And further, poor health and awful slum housing make their mother's death more likely, and the cycle repeats itself. This must change!"

The setting sun on the fields opposite her house warms and dazzles her. In her pocket she feels a stone carved with a dandelion, a talisman if you like, an emblem of her youth, a sense of freedom. When her eyes focus, it's a shock, her heart races. The field is now a park. Her house is a large block of flats. Her skin is the colour of a chestnut.

It's 2020. The street is almost deserted.

"Are you alright?" A young woman says from a distance, "Councillor Winnie? You haven't got the virus have you?"

"I... I'm not sure... a bit dizzy."

Her head is full of work to be done: a mental health scheme for new mothers needs approval; the cost of kids in care has rocketed during the emergency; trading standards are flat out with anti-scams work; there are Zoom meetings with community and faith leaders.

"Do you remember me? From the Christmas school holiday food club? I'm Pally."

"Yes!" Winnie's surprised to find that she does remember the youngster. "Are you managing to study at home?"

"The baby isn't sleeping. WIFI's crap but we got a laptop from the family centre."

"Good, keep working hard. Education is an opportunity," Winnie gets straight to the point, "And an escape."

“I know...” Pally’s brow furrows.

She holds the girls’ gaze. “We’re not in the town hall, but we’re right here. There’s a helpline, and I’m on Facebook, if you or your mum need support.”

There’s a long way to go to before we achieve equality of outcomes, Winnie thinks. People don’t see what we do. But hope comes from the work that was done before, the work that continues, the determination to make a difference.

A smooth glass paperweight in her bag has a beautiful dandelion in it. Things are changing.

Polly Cziok – Hackney Council, Leisa Taylor – Worcestershire WEP, Paul Constable – Cornwall Council and Rob Jones – Glamorgan Council, in conversation with Dawn Reeves

“Hope comes from our determination to make a difference.”

It really is a dandelion head in a bubble. It is perfect and I have no idea how the people at Hafod Grange make them. I am not sure I want to know but they are a thing of magic and wonder. When I was given this one, I felt honoured to be entrusted with it. I have given them to others since and they always trigger the same reaction of puzzlement, disbelief and a huge grin. It makes me happy because I genuinely don’t understand it and it is beautiful.

Becky Shaw – CEX East Sussex Council



IF I WAS SITTING THERE

So much of what communities see around them doesn't seem fair and so much is subjective. There's our Nolan ethical code – standards in public life – and our individual moral codes. I regularly check-in with myself. And I am prepared to stand my ground when things just don't seem like the right thing to do. We can't slavishly follow the rules when the situation changes. Policies can ossify. I worry that in the digital age, with artificial intelligence and predictive data, we're in danger of losing our ethical stance.

We need to see the rich and varied strengths in our communities. As individuals and organisations, we need to be more creative, imagine the future, spot patterns, and make the invisible visible.

Merran McRae – CEX Wakefield Council

'Ethics are woven into the fabric of local government'

*Merran worked in collaboration with artists **Helen Thomas and Tony Wade** on this piece in 2019 for Society of Local Government Chief Executives.*



CHAPTER THREE

WE ARE HERE IN THE TOUGH TIMES AND THE GOOD

We are always here, even when others aren't – by law. We know life is more uncertain and complex (as individuals, families, and communities). You are lucky if you don't need us, but we are here to protect you if you do. We are a rock for our communities, doing what we can to make a difference. And you'd miss us if we weren't here.

TRULY BESPOKE

I'm stitching together a contemporary quilt.

There's a traditional base of mossy green representing the Calder Valley; a white grey for the granite in the Piece Hall; and a patch of blazing blue sky for the tops. On the left side is the Gathering Place, an old textile factory that is now used as a winter shelter. I've added rough sleepers and a public health worker trailing a suitcase full of support; tackling the virus, integrated sexual health support, advance scripts for methadone and benefits advice. I've embroidered a zero on the door. Not one of the homeless population has tested positive for COVID.

Top right is the glazed pyramid frontage of the 70's Cedar Court Hotel. They've been working with us on prevention, housing people whose care has broken down. There's a clutch of care homes with exhausted key workers in locally sourced PPE. Strong threads and neat stitches show we've pinpointed the details. There's no one-size fits all approach.

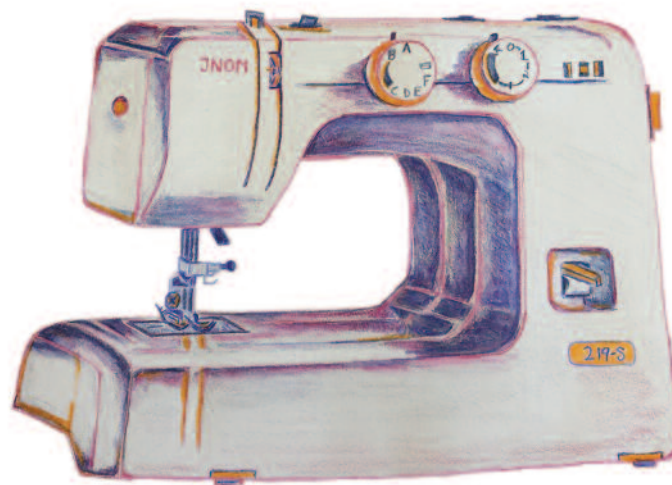
The centre of the quilt is a work in progress, a blaze of fabric strips, vibrant colours, and diverse textures. We're co-producing our public health work with the vulnerable Asian communities in Halifax, learning what the picture looks like for them. There's fear about catching the virus and about the NHS, questions about diabetes and the meds, power and racism, differing impacts for multi-generational households, challenges for local shops and taxi drivers. This quilt must be tailored to local need.

I'm piecing it all together sitting at my dining room table, staying at home. I'm high risk due to a stem cell transplant four years ago. In the bottom corner of the quilt, there's me in listening mode, my phone buzzing, my screen allowing me to join the brilliant Iftar celebration in Todmorden.

Honestly, I don't know how to put loss into the scene. It's hard, but I won't sew in a dark shadow. I look for what's in this that can help us move forward. The technical advice, translating and interpreting national guidance, and fighting the top-down commands that make no sense locally, are critical. But it's empowering people and tackling inequalities that are at the heart of my leadership. It's what energises me: giving people the tools and information to take control and not shirking our responsibility. I use my influence to build trust, to stitch together what works here.

Deborah Harkins – Director of Public Health, Calderdale Council

” I use my influence to stitch together what works here.”



NOT ALONE

There were only four volunteers at the food bank today, but they'd managed 120 parcels. No surprise then Andrew is weary. He notes the absent regulars, some shielding, many retired like him but who are maybe a mite fearful. Alone now, he walks along the racks of Dexion shelving checking supply levels. There's been a significant hike in demand and donations are down. His eyes flicker as he strives to clear his head. In three days, there will be no food left.

That evening Andrew joins the church service online. This is a strategic move. The chief executive of the council, Alison Hardy, will be there and he can use the chat function to explain the situation. The online worship has been a revelation. It's easier than making small talk with people who feel sorry for him after Morag passed.

He keeps it short: Emergency funds needed to buy food.

The council knows their independent foodbank well. It provides the premises free of charge, officers helped set up the credit union that makes referrals, there's the homelessness team, and a councillor who runs the local grocers is a big donor. That said, so many people across town contribute.

We understand. She replies. Will take the request to Gold Command.

Andrew taps his heel in front of the TV, his back rigid. Alison said she would get back to him as soon as she could, but he can't help thinking about Thursday. Children shouldn't go hungry in this day and age. And while there's a sense of community that seems to hark back to when he and Morag were first married, some attitudes – also around back then – are less charitable. If you can't afford to feed the family, you shouldn't have kids. You should stop smoking. And that old one, "It's not my problem."

Some things change and some don't.

He's glad not to be working now. Would his job in logistics even exist? Anyone could be using a foodbank these days.

On the sofa lies his granddaughter's raggedy brown rabbit sleep buddy. It looks forlorn. He bites his lip and takes a dram of malt. The night stretches ahead.

At 8am Andrew checks his phone: £10,000 grant to be transferred this morning. Will send someone over later.

He's a little light-headed. There are so many good folk to tell. He's thankful for their prudence, their reserves, their enduring connection.

Ruth Fry – Perth and Kinross Council, Councillor Diana Meale, Nottinghamshire County Council – with Dawn Reeves

“He's thankful for their prudence...their enduring connection”



BE A ROCK!

When the team falls into this speed-talking, arms going, ideas flowing, laughing vibe, Anjani feels a lightness in her chest. They could almost be singing. Work isn't like it used to be.

In the last four months, Anjani has been redeployed out into the community to work at the distribution centre physically and virtually. A sociable introvert and Acton Town resident all her life, she's proud to know the communities, who's who, who might need what, and where she might be able to source it. Sounds weird, but being in the thick of it makes her feel calm, focused.

When she's crashed out on the sofa, her Aussie housemate Cal says, "Come on Anj, what's going on?"

She gives them a clear, simple virus update, barely lifting her head. They trust her and not just because she keeps the takeaways coming - Indian, Lebanese, and Japanese (all from 5 star-rated food hygiene outfits on the Churchfield Road, of course.) She does the same for everyone, her family, the people she's got to know through the crisis, the people she's never met before. Her mum is one of those treat-people-as-like-you'd-to-be-treated-yourself people. It's taught her to max out the kindness.

And because "What's next?" has become her M.O. she's still on the sofa thinking, I don't want to go back to my old job. As a librarian, it was rewarding. She'd always wanted to be surrounded by books, studied it at uni and there are lots of projects promoting reading and literacy that give her deep satisfied breaths. Now the ghost of the "Shush!" has left the building, it's just not what she wants for her future.

Cal says, "You won't leave the council." Her friends all get it now, why she works there. "Caring for people is your thing, and the whole world needs your sort of connecting, nurturing, shape-shifting, energy."

When they were redeployed, all the job descriptions said: lead with the heart, be a rock, and pass on the power.

The values really matter. Anjani throws a cushion at Cal and decides to talk to her manager about new opportunities.

“Yes,” she replies thoughtfully. “I’m staying and not going back.”

Something new will emerge, she thinks, there’s more change to come and I’m in.

Niall Bolger – CEX Hounslow Council

*Representation of painting by artist: **Kakali***

This painting is a woman’s story. Women are thinking of their law and painting their stories. We listen and learn from our grandmothers’ culture so we can hold it strong. We paint many stories about collecting bush tucker, singing, dancing, and celebrating, family relationships, we look after the land, the people and the law.

I bought this painting in Uluru, Australia in my 20s. It makes me think about gender. As public servants we need to value these priorities, the caring and the skills, it’s vital for our future.

Niall Bolger

“...there’s more change to come and I’m in...”



EVERYBODY IN

We were told to get our rough sleepers off the streets and into places of safety and to do it now! Even though for some of the people in this group, we'd been trying to do just that for months, if not years. We set about it, partly because of the instruction – with the government eyes on us – and partly because the opportunity was there, but fundamentally it was the right thing to do. We are there to ensure the safety and welfare of those who are least equipped to help themselves and who were now especially vulnerable to the virus.

But it felt as if we were being expected to deliver the impossible. Who would take the rough sleepers? Nobody. They are seen as an intractable problem to society – one that many people cross the street to avoid. And where can we put them? There wasn't anywhere suitable and previous efforts to re-house them have often resulted in broken relationships and trashed properties. As a team we were anxious. Could we even persuade them to go inside? We're often dealing with a complex mix of underlying issues, drug and alcohol dependencies, mental health and offending behaviours that make them unpredictable and stigmatised. They are inherently suspicious of "the authorities," and just as likely to tell us to "F*** off!" as work with us.

Overnight we became building inspectors, contract negotiators, furniture makers, van drivers, cleaners, counsellors, advocates, community persuaders, debt advisors and so much more. The team showed courage and commitment to deliver against the odds because tackling this kind of homelessness is a cause we believe in. It's about creating the kind of society we want to live in – one that's compassionate, caring, and inclusive. So that's what we're like.

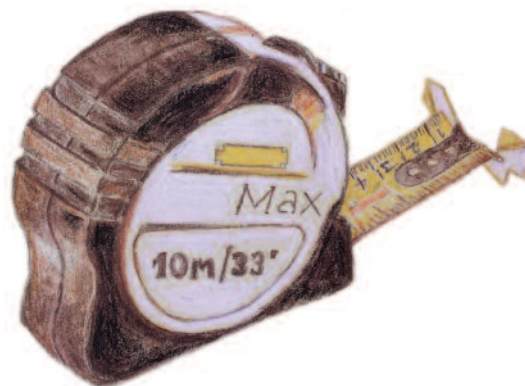
Life seems more fragile now and becoming homeless can happen to anyone. We remember this when rough sleepers seem hard to help and we go as far as needed to deliver the right results. It takes a genuine determination and dynamism to resolve what can feel like an endless list of issues.

We took 12 of our most entrenched rough sleepers off the streets and into self-contained places of safety within two weeks of the instruction, and months later we've sustained most of the tenancies.

We've made sure the most vulnerable people in our communities have far better life chances and opportunities. We've shown that the council can deliver in times of extreme pressure.

Paul Brannan – Homelessness Manager Barnsley Council

“We've shown the council can deliver in extreme times.”



IN THE VIRTUAL BUNKER

It was one of those inopportune moments when your personal and professional lives collide. I was knee deep in boxes, having moved unexpectedly a month ahead of schedule, when our council leader told us he thought he'd contracted coronavirus. It was 1st March.

"We're going to have to hold each other up through this," I said to my partner.

One of my responsibilities is emergency planning. Our team is highly experienced, stronger and resilient having worked together through the London Bridge terror attacks. I prepared myself mentally and physically as our response ramped up.

The public never see emergency planning. It's usually buried deep in the bowels of the building. The work is intense, time is compressed; you need to be calm and clear while working at lightning pace. We shift into gear in minutes and total focus is required to make sense of big picture challenges and tiny critical details.

When lockdown was announced we were ready to close our buildings, but not everyone got it. "Go home and stay home!" I stayed firm with my colleagues. "Because it's the right thing to do."

This is the first time our Silver Emergency Control Centre has been organised remotely. It's like a switch is flicked: OK, now it's like this, we need to do that. The response is everything.

What would happen with the Thames Path on Easter weekend? It's narrow, thousands of people use it every day. We got our messaging right, put social distancing measures in place before most people had heard of that term, and redeployed wardens to

work alongside the police on enforcement. It paid off. Our residents acted responsibly. We haven't had to close any of our parks or open spaces. No mean feat in a borough as densely populated as ours.

Other great responses included finding a member of staff who had a military background and had worked on Ebola to support the community hub. And a nice touch was getting a local company 'Devine Chocolate' to put an Easter egg into all the food packages sent to shielding residents. It brought back a bit of normality.

This work is core to our purpose in local government. We do what matters: helping our communities to survive and thrive. If I'm asked what we put in place to keep people safe, I can confidently say we've done all we can.

**Stephen Gaskell – Director for Response and Renewal
Southwark Council**

“We do what matters, to help our communities thrive”



SOMETHING BREWING

We've been seeing things differently during lockdown. It's like looking at a black and white photo. It's the same world, but somehow not; you see new patterns, and the picture can be fresher. We've noticed people growing their own food, enjoying nature, walking, cycling, and taking up our daily water saving challenge. Today's task is singing while showering for four minutes. Wearing bath time rubber duck earrings is optional.

Whether it's a conscious thing or not, we've seen people making choices that contribute to a positive quality of life for everyone. Our sense of local is smaller now. It's a street or a neighbourhood. That means making it a great place matters. In the face of a massive challenge, there are signs of community resilience and a sustainable social foundation emerging.

And we've also seen the opposite. People can become fearful or dependent, they worry about the future, bins being collected, the grass being cut, who will look after me, where will our energy come from, what the city will be like? People look to the council for leadership, to reassure us, to provide hope.

So we've been making sure that everything the council does contributes to positive change. The council has land and infrastructure planning; we have a design quality framework for builders that is ground breaking; we've got energy and waste services, education and neighbourhood offices; and people delivering a whole range of services that impact the environment. Plus we've started a citywide engagement programme as part of our recovery planning. The way forward must be about all of us, and our world. We want to lock in the good stuff for the future.

We're not forgetting to put the kettle on and fetch our favourite teapot. This one belonged to Sam's grandma. It's a beautiful art-deco style, although the spout is chipped, and, although it's useful, it's been bashed about over the years. As the tea brews, we take a breath. It's a pause when we remember our embarrassing failures, the things that haven't worked out. It's important to give ourselves space to connect to our past; we're part of the history of the place.

Also in the stillness, there's a chance to acknowledge that the challenges ahead are great. There's so much to deal with that the world hasn't seen before. We collect ourselves and are ready to start again.

A deep breath allows us to be brave. What's brewing is courage.

Jonathan Ward – Principal Energy Policy Officer and **Sam Preston** – Energy Behaviour Change Officer Nottingham City Council, in conversation with **Chris D Ward** and **Dawn Reeves**

“we're part of the history of the place”



AGAIN

I am sat in our council chamber on a February evening. It is raining and everyone has half an eye on it. I have been sat here for an hour already, listening to council officers and councillors talking about the most recent devastating flood to have hit our valley. The third time in 10 years.

I have been asked to attend along with my colleague who lead our community flood hubs, to describe the clean up after Storm Chiara. We have been co-ordinating services, working with the local community and hundreds of volunteers. We are all shattered and are still in mid clean-up so it feels too early to say anything groundbreaking, let alone reflect on what we need to do better. While I wait for my turn to speak, I gaze at the inscription on the ornate Victorian ceiling above me and reflect on what it means: “Delay not to do well”. And I look out at the audience of local business owners, shopkeepers, and people whose homes have flooded again, and I know we do need to do better, listen, respond and plan for the next time.

It is only the following Monday that I am back in front of an all member committee. This time describing how we can coordinate our amazing community and volunteers to support people during the coronavirus pandemic looming on the horizon. I have a moment of complete panic, worrying for myself, my friends, my colleagues, local people, everyone already reeling from the floods. I am not sure if we will be able to do it.

Amazingly by the end of the next week we had set up our virtual volunteering hub. We registered nearly 900 local people before lockdown on 23rd March. Connecting volunteers to their neighbours, shopping, picking up medicine, walking dogs and building friendships. We are giving advice and reassurance to

mutual aid groups that are springing up all over the borough. We are making things happen, cutting through issues that would previously have taken weeks or months, asking for help from other organisations, shifting resources quickly to do the things that need to be done.

Months on, we are doing okay. Someone said to me today that in emergency planning they are calling the way we deal with COVID a “slow hurry”. But I think maybe the Victorians had it right: let’s delay not to do well.

Sian Rogers – Policy and Projects Manager Calderdale Council

“We are making things happen, cutting through issues....”



TRUE GRIT

I know I'm not supposed to throw my phone across the room but sometimes I just get so mad. I try to stay off social media, especially when it snows. But I just can't help myself. He's out again, it's still dark and I shouldn't be awake, but I worry, I can't help it. And then I see the comments on my phone and I just want to shout. So I threw it.

He's been up since four getting ready. He drove our family car, the car we brought both our kids home in from the hospital right after they were born. That's the car he drove to work. Not a gritter in sight at that time. It's dark, there's settled snow and the roads are hilly and I worry he's got in safe.

Then my husband's straight out again, back on those roads in an HGV and I worry more. I couldn't imagine how difficult that must be. I hate driving when it snows. Even in the daytime. The car just doesn't feel right and that's just a car, not an HGV with a load on the back. He laughs, he's done it for years, he always tells me he'll be fine. Last year there was a big crash, a fellow driver ended up in a ditch, but my husband shrugs it off. "It's a job that needs doing," he says.

I think he's a hero, my hero.

Then there's the comments on social media. "Where are the gritters!?" and "You've not gritted!" Anger and outrage. And I know my husband's been out there for hours before these people have even got up.

You see my husband's a gritter driver and I worry about him. If only you could see him the way I see him, the way his kids see him, the way he kisses them goodbye at 4am while they're still

asleep and watches them from the door for a few seconds. I wish I could sleep through when he leaves, but I can't.

I sit here with a cup of tea watching social media as the world wakes up complaining. I ask him why he does it. He always says it's because he can. Because he can make a difference, so people can get to work and get home safely to their kids.

You may not see it, but I know what it would be like if he didn't do what he does.

And I sit here, waiting for him to come home safely to us.

Niel Stewart – Strategic Communications, Kirklees Council

“We do it because it makes a difference”



WHEN ONE DOOR CLOSES, ANOTHER OPENS

Sandra speaks so quietly, I have to lean in. “When you’re waiting for the door to be slammed in your face, for the smash of glass and the light to go out, you don’t see the new door that’s opening. It can take years and years before you even realise there’s another door there.”

It’s a tough interview. Sandra wants to tell me her story but fidgets in her chair, turning away, cheeks burning. “I didn’t think I was dying. But I was dying. I wasn’t unhappy because I thought, if somehow the baby survives, she’ll be put up for adoption. She’ll have a better life without me, safe away from that monster.”

I gulp, glad she’s not making eye contact.

“I was properly mad. I had a psychotic episode and ended up in the nut house. Broken bones and brain.” Sandra buries herself in her hoodie.

“How is baby Rose?” I ask.

Holding out her phone, Sandra shows me a picture. “I get to see her at the foster carer’s. Beautiful, isn’t she?”

I feel a tug of love and Sandra’s pain.

“What helped?” I try to take the interview forward.

“I got help from the police, the doctors, the psychologist, another social worker from your team, the nurses, the staff here at the refuge, the other women, from the volunteers, everyone. They’ve seen it all. Abuse, violence, suicide. I didn’t think I’d ever get better, never mind the virus. Not sure I am most days.”

“And what would you say to someone who finds themselves in such a difficult situation?”

“Don’t hide what’s happening. It was good that outsiders got involved. There were massive files on me. People knew what happened in my life, they couldn’t stop me from going back to him, from being a fuck-up, but it was all written down. They believed me. They listened. When your brain shuts down, it’s for a reason.”

I want to say what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger, to remind her she’s a survivor, to give her a hug. But I know touching can be tricky.

“One of the girls here told me this quote. ‘There comes a time when you have to choose between turning the page and closing the book.’ Sandra pauses, then says more clearly. “I’m working my way up to a new door.”

Anonymous Support Worker at Bexley Council

“You have to choose between turning the page and closing the book”

The council is using stories like this to raise awareness and support its priority of parental mental health.



GOING STRONG

We were immediately worried about the businesses on our patch. From Bankside in the centre of London to Peckham in the south of the borough and everything in between, how would our companies survive the crisis? Longer-term would they end up going to the wall?

The financial help for businesses from the government was very welcome but we knew there were around 11,000 that wouldn't be eligible for the support on offer. Working from home, messages came flooding in, accounts of people losing their livelihoods, feeling frustrated and powerless. It was overwhelming.

Pre-COVID, the council had approved £2 million worth of support for small businesses to generate social value, creating opportunities for local people. Without hesitation, members agreed to repurpose the fund and to create a dynamic approach to relieve business hardship. We'd never done anything on this scale this quickly.

The fund had to be targeted at those who most needed it and giving grants from public money requires a robust process. Most importantly we had to get the money out of the door fast to support those requiring help the most. It was seriously challenging, but we know our businesses well. We had the information and networks and, working all hours, we had a fund up and running in days.

In little over a week we had 550 applications. This was on top of the 1,800 enquiries from businesses to our Southwark Business Desk. We always knew our fund wouldn't be enough, and we were right as it was massively over-subscribed. Our team were amazing. So was the cabinet member who worked with great integrity to support the engagement with businesses. No one wants to say no in these circumstances.

We knew we were on the right track when government saw the gap and set up a similar Discretionary Business Fund. Our scheme received an additional £3.4 million and we hardly had to make any changes. To our relief it meant we were able to support another 500 businesses.

It shows that with the right culture councils can move super-fast, innovate, and make an impact. We've had so many thank-you emails, including stories of how businesses had been saved. It felt great to be able to provide that lifeline to so many.

My lifeline has been my dog Miller, a Jack Russell, who's now 16 years old and still going strong. My dogs are a source of strength. When you're working remotely you need to stay connected and to get away from the computer screen and breathe.

Danny Edwards – Business Support Manager Southwark Council

“...councils can move super-fast, innovate, and make an impact”



RAISING STANDARDS

Niamh jumped when the doorbell rang. Her stomach churned. It was her first time doing underage test purchases with Trading Standards. She had volunteered after they had visited her school two weeks ago and was determined to ensure that what happened to her father didn't happen to anyone else.

"I'm off now, Mum," she called.

Kerry, her mother, heard the door bang shut. She sat in her favourite place on the settee looking at the dip in the cushion next to her. David had died five months ago from lung cancer. They had been together since they were 14. She remembered innocent long hot summer nights, smoking and drinking on the playing fields. Thinking big, pushing boundaries, so self-assured, they thought they would live forever. She missed him desperately, but something else gnawed at her insides.

Niamh thought about her father as she sat in the back of the car. She knew that he regretted that first cigarette and used to rant about the lack of rules around tobacco sales when he was a kid. As his cancer progressed, he became more bitter not towards the person who sold him cigarettes when he was a boy, but towards the shop owners still doing so now. Attitudes had changed for the better, he said. There were no excuses. Young children just don't make good decisions, he used to say. "Look at me."

The streetlight cast an eerie glow over a puddle and she was sure that she saw her father's face in the reflection. The Trading Standards Officer gave her some money and last-minute instructions. She steeled herself and headed towards the shop, hoping they wouldn't sell. She knew younger kids from school who lived around here.

Minutes later Niamh returned with a pack of 20 cigarettes. She felt both angry and sad as she handed them over to the TSO.

“Thanks,” the officer said, “you’ve done your bit. Now it’s our turn.”

They headed off into the shop as Niamh returned to the warmth of the car.

“I’m back.”

Kerry savoured her daughter’s hug. “How did it go?”

“Terrible, Mum. Two shops sold.”

“Are you hungry, love?”

“No thanks, I had a hotdog with extra onions. I’m going to ask Kelvin if he’ll help Trading Standards, when he’s old enough.”

As the door closed Kerry’s gnawing feeling returned. How was she going to tell them about her own cancer?

**Bob Charnley – Central England Trading Standards Adviser,
Warwickshire County Council**

“...you have done your bit now it’s our turn.”

*These are my late father's
watch and pen. I always
admired his writing as he had
such a good hand, especially
being educated by Jesuits!*



MUTUAL AID IS MARVELLOUS AND MIXED

The text said: Can someone in the group help me? I've only got £3.50 left on my electric meter. You can put it directly on my key fob. Thks Karen.

As the volunteer coordinator for our local Mutual Aid Group, I called her back. "How're you doing?"

"So-so," Karen says. But to me, she sounds worse than last week.

"You know we don't give cash," I say. It's in our terms of reference, alongside guidance on safeguarding and data security. "And I've mentioned this before but, please, don't ask Penny for money again. She doesn't want you to contact her. Penny's vulnerable herself and she's feeling hassled. Mutual aid means respecting each other."

It's hard to stick to boundaries when you want to help, and, when you're desperate.

I continue: "I've sent you the number for the Council Community Hub. They have benefits advisers and I've spoken to them this morning. They're lovely. They're trained to help. I'm really sorry, but I'm not."

Karen's Employment Support Allowance was suspended because she'd missed an interview the day before the new restrictions came into force. Citizens Advice and the benefits office are shut. And this is week six of no income.

"OK," she says. "I understand. Thanks for all you've done so far."

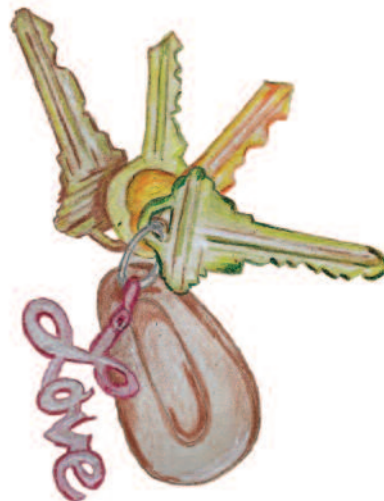
Thanks to an amazing support network across the town, in our small Mutual Aid cell we've been sourcing food boxes, organising drop-offs, sharing info and been there at the other end of the phone. To Karen's box I've added dog food, deodorant and shower gel. It's vital stuff but it feels marginal. The electricity problem remains.

Then comes more shocking news. After Karen's electricity ran out she went to stay with an ex-partner who beat her up badly. The police were called but Karen wouldn't contact the refuge or press charges. She's safe for now, back in her flat, but she won't phone the council either. We expect another call for help.

I like Mutual Aid because it's not just about helping others in need; it's about recognising we are all in need at some point or other. Yet I suspect many people's experiences are like mine and make it crystal clear that we can only do so much. I've reflected a lot on what I'm willing and capable of doing, about putting in boundaries, when to stop and take a step back, safe in the knowledge that there are others in the council who are better placed and resourced to step-in.

Dawn Reeves – Volunteer Broxtowe Mutual Aid

“...it's about recognising we are all in need at some point or other.”



ALL OUR BEST

One day I woke up with a sense of foreboding. I knew it was going to be a different day. The sound of the new world was an upbeat Microsoft Teams remix. I hopped out of bed, pulled on my shorts and I was ready for work in 30 seconds flat!

Outside, in a world of lockdown, people needed help. Food, medication, someone to talk to. We needed to act quickly. So we set up a virtual emergency contact centre with great people from across the council willing to help. We put out a call for volunteers from the public and trained them to help. We worked with our partner organisations Barnsley Voluntary Service, the Clinical Commission Group, South West Yorkshire Foundation Trust and others. We were ready to go on 23 March. And since then, work has been a twister of a hurricane of a whirlwind. We have reached a quarter of our population.

Dickie Bird just called! He said I could use his name to officially record a compliment from him. He wants to sincerely thank all the staff helping during this time. He has received his much-needed food parcel and it has everything he needs to keep him going. He is 87, has had a stroke and suffers from other health conditions that make it impossible for him to get out and about without support. He said he is eternally grateful and appreciates each and every one of us who are working to support this effort.

As a head of service, I know that in situations where you have to bring people together, you have to dig deep and use your best leadership skills. There are always micro cultures that mean people react and behave in different ways. I learned a fine balance between using quite a directive leadership style (it's an emergency after all) and one that enables people to make their own decisions. You can't push people around just because something's urgent. To get the job done in the best way, you need to take people with you.

Most people in local government really want to help – that has come across so strongly. Local government gets bad press. We are rarely praised for what we do and easily criticised. I've worked with very talented people. These people pulled out the stops, showed they could fight on their feet, used their commonsense to make it happen and worked so hard.

Jayne Hellowell – Barnsley Council, COVID 19 Emergency Contact Centre Lead, Head of Commissioning & Healthier Communities

“Most people in local government really want to help...”

*Statue of cricket umpire
Dickie Bird by Graham
Ibbeson, photo thanks to
Tim Green*



IT CAN BE A WONDERFUL LIFE

The weight of her head, slumped low, invites Sandra to topple forward. She's on the edge of the weir. Noisy black water races downwards. In the pre-dawn darkness no one would see if she stepped out from the muddy bank. It would be a release.

For too long she's carefully controlled her tone, drawn in steady breaths, taken hit after hit for her organisation, been forced to deliver cuts, swallowed the bitter pill of "good enough" and silently screamed at the undermining from Westminster, the reorganisations and the ignorance of local potential.

She's stiff with obligation and responsibility. God knows there's been too much death this year, but for six-year-old Biddie to die of hunger – there are no words. Sandra knows her family have suffered because of her job and yes, they will miss her, but frankly they'll be free of the embarrassment and she'll be free of the failure, the shame.

As Sandra imagines her goodbyes, she's suddenly aware of a Staffy sniffing at her trouser leg.

"I need you to step away from the edge please, boss." A voice from behind.

Sandra can't face turning around.

"I want to show you something." A hand stretches out from the glow of a neighbourhood warden's high-vis jacket. "If you weren't here..."

Sandra takes the phone and watches the video clip. There's a harsh light on their normally civilised town. The things no one likes about the place are grotesquely exaggerated.

A site they'd allocated for new council housing is now a spontaneous settlement, a mix of ramshackle dwellings and buildings that look like 1950's prison blocks. The boulevard by the college looks empty and desolate; the trees are gone. The local run of shops is boarded up, the Volunteer Hub gone. In the town centre, where the theatre once was, is a casino, and there's rubbish everywhere. People stoop and shuffle in extended queues for the food bank. Hostility crackles.

“The council has supported so much over the years and you’ve played your part in that,” the warden says.

Sandra shrugs, “We still lost a child.”

“We did.” The video stops.

“Do you want to see more? The story where Biddie’s mum got training, support, a job, and the ending was different?” His voice is coaxing.

“My working life is so important to me, but it means nothing.” She wishes the warden would leave. “I can’t do the job I want to. I’ve changed nothing.”

“I can’t convince you to see life one way or another. We’re all well-intentioned, flawed and partially blind, we’re harsh narrators of our own lives – try reminding yourself, you’re not responsible for everything and remember that on a good day you might even succeed a little in a few areas.”

Sandra understands that but it’s hard to step back, to shift her thinking.

“Tell yourself a more balanced, fairer story, with compassion and insight. What happens is what happens, it’s the meaning you give it that can change.”

Dog and angel wander off as dawn approaches.

Dawn Reeves – this story is based on contested conversations with many contributors who mentioned the 1946 film directed by Frank Capra.

“You’d miss us if we weren’t here”

Representation of pendant on the mayoral chain, Wolverhampton City Council. The original pendant had the old coat of arms, the present pendant, with the new coat of arms, was presented by Mr Geoffrey Mander in 1902.



ANOTHER LENS

I refer to this as my 'personal strategic forecasting and planning tool', because who knows what the next challenges will be? However, its location is key – nestled amongst my music collection, which is so important to me as a release, a salve, a motivator as I endeavour to do my best...



Stephen Baker – CEX East Suffolk Council

My camera has been a bit of a time machine.

Past: Pics on the memory card connect me to places I've been and people I love but can't visit right now.

Present: I take it with me on my daily walks and it really helps me appreciate the Now, the changing of the seasons, the way the light looks different at different parts of the day.

Future: Thoughts of places I'll travel to and photograph remind me that there's still a big wide world out there.

Piali Das Gupta – Project co-ordinator (Local Prototypes)
Department of Health Social Care, Former Chief of Staff,
Surrey County Council

“The ability to hold different timeframes in mind is vital for where we go next.”



CHAPTER FOUR

WE MAKE CHANGE HAPPEN IN OUR COMMON INTEREST

Like you, we want our areas to be the best they can be. Why wouldn't we? We live here too. We are bold. And we'll ensure we all play fair and work in our common interest because we all benefit from a civilised society. We believe society can be better when we work together. We generate possibilities and influence change.

THE NEW VALLEY JERUSALEM

Rain smashed against the windscreen of the minibus. The 10 hardy souls who'd joined me for what I'd originally pitched as a sightseeing tour bravely ventured out. Standing at the five-bar gate we looked at a drenched field. Beneath the grass lay tonnes of North Staffordshire clay, the special stuff on which our area – the Potteries – had made its name. But on days like this it felt as if the earth itself was standing between us and the regeneration of the area.

The landowner was happy to sell, not wanting to farm it himself. But who would develop this place, with its costly troubles and issues? On the other side of the valley, there are more plots. The land makes a natural dip. It sounds more romantic than it is. There are similar problems. These sites are home to factories long since abandoned and demolished; others still holding on to their lonely buildings, giving no clue as to the bustling centres of industry they'd once been.

We scrambled back into the minibus, shaking off the wet. My guests had come from London to check out my pride and joy: six plots of land in desperate need of regeneration. I'd lived and breathed this project for a year, creating a narrative and a strategy that I had rehearsed until pitch perfect. Then I lobbied, cajoled, and pestered until the day it became an official item in the 2015 Autumn Budget. I listened to the chancellor's speech in my little office and screamed with joy.

But on this day, the cold Stoke-on-Trent rain rather took the edge off my excitement.

Heading back to the train station, I put on a brave face and turned the talk among my visitors to the future. We knew our big ideas for regeneration appeared risky despite the government

support. I worried we might seem confused about our identity; there are no more pits and very few pots, yet we were calling the project Ceramic Valley.

The doubt was suddenly broken by a voice from the back.

“Thank you for today,” it said. “I’ve never been here before and had no idea what Stoke-on-Trent was like. We read so many project plans, ideas, and pitches, but yours struck a chord with me, a story of a city rediscovering itself, a solid past and a future built on something new. When I broke my mug at work, I literally rushed out to find something in London with a Stoke-on-Trent stamp. I wanted to own something of your story. Now I’m here, I can imagine the change.”

It would take a lot more than rain to wash this plan away.

I write this reflecting, four years on and a thousand new jobs later, we still need more....

Abi Brown – Conservative Leader Stoke City Council

“A solid past and a future built on something new.”

*Representation of
ceramic from Gray’s
Pottery Stoke-on-Trent
1930s*



WARM AND WISE

I love the Siddiqui family, stars of Channel 4's *Gogglebox*. Baasit Siddiqui, who also works in education in the city, was talking at an online event, congratulating hard-working teachers and learners during lockdown. He talked about ambition, his life and passion for Derby, and he made people laugh.

On the face of it, the city has a lot going for it. We have low unemployment and average incomes are high. We're home to national and international manufacturing and engineering companies. Derby is home to "making and makers" going back 300 years. It's also a city with great heritage and beautiful buildings. The council has worked hard to unlock talent, nurture potential, and build partnerships so the city stays vibrant. There's a medium-term plan for the city centre with exciting new opportunities including a new performance venue, the restoration of our historic Market Hall, investment in digital infrastructure and more.

But that's the danger of a single story.

We know there are serious challenges ahead. The impact of the coronavirus on aerospace is massive and this will hit the local supply chain hard. There's a big student population unsure of their future. The health of our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities has been disproportionately affected. For some, Derby people can sometimes be a bit glass half-empty and there's a sense that we're second best to our neighbours. Our football team, like the political administrations, suffer changeable fortunes.

If we have one story, it's incomplete. It can lead to stereotypes and it's harder to recognise our diversity, to see ourselves as belonging here. So we're trying something new. A long-term dialogue about what it means to be a city. I say dialogue

specifically because it's about a genuine exchange of views, a flow of different ideas and what they might mean. Not a conversation or consultation; I think those words have become devalued. We want a new story for Derby, made up of multiple stories from all our communities and neighbourhoods, young and old, taxi drivers, shopworkers, inventors, clockmakers, the lot.

We got agreement to work on this dialogue before the pandemic arrived and we're taking our time, thinking creatively about how to get this right. As a council, we've had to be strong during the pandemic, but we also know we have to let go, to get out there and listen well. We're hoping that like the Siddiqui's, the stories of Derby will be funny, warm, surprising and enterprising; and as the writer Chimamanda Ngochie Adiche says, by telling many stories we empower and humanise and we regain a kind of paradise.

Rachel North – Deputy Chief Executive (Communities and Place) Derby City Council

“The council has been strong, but we also know when to let go”



NEVER GIVE UP

“Shall we walk down to the beach?”

SRachel knows it'll mean ice creams for the girls, but she doesn't care. The gentle breeze revives her after a shift on the tills. The light is pinky and warm on the beachfront buildings and beach huts the colour of boiled sweets. Her daughters lie on their backs in the sand making angel wings with their arms. Ellie will be ten tomorrow.

I was pregnant when we first moved here, she remembers. There's less of an edge now, fewer dodgy blokes around. Me and this place, we used to attract them, she thinks. Just leg it she used to tell herself, cringing about the jobs she'd messed up, the debts that took forever to sort. People said it would always be a dump.

Tonight though the sea is calm, paddle boarders are out on the water making the most of the late summer evening. Here on the beach, it feels safer than it once was. But then Rachel worries that the town's gone upmarket and she won't be able to afford the rent. That's anxiety for you. She takes a deep breath of sea air; cross that bridge when you get to it. And so what if she never eats in the posh fish restaurant on the front? Her head is above water. The school has a better reputation and there are more families now. They call it “regeneration”. It had already started when she moved here and there's talk of more to come.

Letting a hand full of sand run through her fingers, she thinks, it's not just money that's changed the place, and it's not money that's made a difference to their lives, though God knows they could do with more.

Ellie shouts, “Ewww mum, look at this.”

It's a plastic bottle washed upon the beach. Grinding her teeth, Rachel feels a snarl of irritation. People should respect this beautiful coastline. It's where she comes to sort her head out. She

knows she's over-tired because her tear ducts are prickling. Count to ten, she thinks, not everyone is a problem.

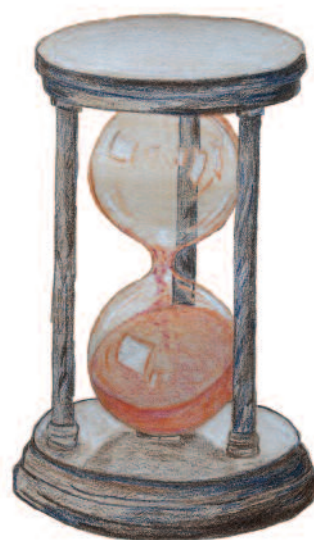
People here also helped her. Heather the health visitor, Mani a counsellor, the local communities officer and the lady in the council's housing department, Citizens Advice, the neighbours Stan and Barbara. And people she doesn't know have made something of the place, refused to give up when many others did.

The ebb and flow of the waves are like Rachel's moods. Worries are always with us. The waterline moves, wet sand dries and softens. Ellie thinks the planet is amazing; that's a glimmer of hope.

Rachel picks up the dirty bottle and takes it home to recycle.

Georgia Turner – Head of communication and marketing, Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole Councils; **David Kennedy**, Head of Media and Communications, Convention of Local Scottish Authorities; **Dawn Reeves**

“it's not money that's made a difference to our lives, we worked together”



A FINE BALANCE

The painting I'm looking at is of Maine Road, the old Manchester City ground in the 70's and 80's, it reminds me of going to watch football with my dad. It's where I'm from. It suggests family, belonging and solidarity. The stadium was a local anchor in the community. But to be honest, the team weren't that good and it was pretty tribal. There was diversity in terms of class, but the crowd was mainly white and male and there were regular fights.

When I think of the new Etihad City of Manchester Stadium, I associate it with modernisation, growth and success. We've become a big global brand. It's a symbol of what's possible, what we can become. I'm attached to both places, although each has its blind spots. They represent almost opposite poles: belonging and becoming.

In local government, our leadership challenge is about making sense of potentially polarising forces like this. In the past few months, and I would argue in the past few years, unity and fragmentation have both been in play. That COVID affects us all, albeit in different and sometimes random ways, is a unifying factor. But the differential impact of the virus is a fragmenting force, one that risks exacerbating inequality.

There's also the risk that when it's a universal problem (and unity is the goal), we jump to the idea of a national or central solution. What's been clear is that our best shot at unity and tolerance of difference is at the local level. The story for local government moving forward is one of the hyper-local. These days we're more likely to know our neighbours and our neighbourhoods better. And when someone local knocks on your door, it works. A one-size-fits-all approach doesn't have a place in our story; our places are so different.

Our future role will see us being a point of calm in the storm. It can feel like we're in a state of permanent crises: Brexit, climate, COVID, economic. Urgent demands continue and we need to work at pace, but there's a danger that we are always reacting, not standing back and seeing the long-term and planning. That's more important than ever.

We need to help create a society in balance, something that is coherent. It's not unity or diversity, or supporting the economy or keeping people safe from the virus. It's both, and. For me, the key is to focus on a broader notion of well-being, to ensure our framework for decision-making is the human.

Paul Najsarek – CEX Ealing Council

“...our best shot at unity is at the local level”



THE MOMENT IS NOW

Thirty-five years ago, my university tutor introduced me to “Atmosphere, Weather and Climate”, a dense three-hundred pager that’s still straining my bookshelf today. It explained the catastrophic consequences of global warming. Since then, I’ve been lucky to have the opportunity to travel to the Arctic and the Mediterranean exploring the challenges and potential solutions to global warming (as part of a Council of Europe programme.)

In the last 10 years at North Kesteven, we are proud to have delivered a 65 percent reduction in the council’s carbon footprint. For the next decade, we are energised by the challenge of achieving carbon neutrality. I’m still learning.

Our new Environment Strategy builds on the UN Sustainable Development Goals for 2030, and it embeds the principles of “Doughnut Economics”, a concept inspired by economist Kate Raworth, and introduced to me at a seminar at the Greenbelt Festival. The approach is used in the Netherlands and is now globally recognised. It advocates an economic model that achieves social purpose within an ecological ceiling by connecting the way we travel, the homes we live in, the way we work, and the communities we create.

We aren’t Utrecht, but we are reinvigorating our cycling strategy, reducing emissions, and achieving health benefits through active travel. We are commissioning key housing developments to Passivhaus standard. Our new investment plans are turning over every opportunity to prevent climate breakdown.

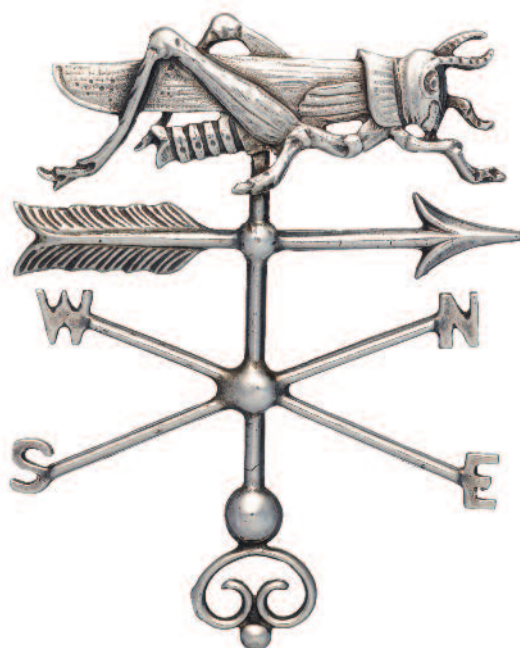
We know that carbon neutrality by 2030 is a big ask, but COVID emergency responses, financial stress and the economic downturn require something new. We’ve had to let go of our existing plans, months in the making. That’s been hard to do. During the

pandemic there were so many stories about mobilising services in new and innovative ways, it gives me hope that we will get there.

We are one local authority in one place with many stories, but we are prepared to stand for something, and to stand alongside our communities, curious, optimistic, and relentless in pursuit of a sustainable future for all. I'm excited by the possibilities.

Ian Fytche – CEX North Kesteven District Council

“We are relentless, working for a sustainable future for all.”



*Grasshopper on a weather-vane brooch designed by Cini 1930s.
Thanks to Joanna Sterling, The Casket of Fictional Delights.
Photo – Mark Colliton*

MIKE'S BIKE

The wind in his (admittedly much-thinned) hair, fresh air in his lungs, a sense of freedom and safety, Mike felt like a kid again, riding his bike full pelt down the road. A feeling of pure joy came over him.

Not to mention that due to the horrendous traffic levels in his town, it was actually quicker to get to his gym by bike now.

“Six months ago, that was me,” Mike thought to himself as he passed a stationary car with a lone, half-bored, half-annoyed looking driver, stopped behind what seemed like a thousand identical stationary cars with a single, or sometimes pairs, of blank-faced, sedentary occupants.

Mike had been a dedicated motorist. In fact, for some journeys he still is. But nowadays, Mike sometimes drives, sometimes walks, sometimes cycles. It depends on the journey. As a rule, anything under five miles each way, he'll either walk or cycle. He takes the car for longer trips if there's a need for boot space or a car share opportunity. That's normal now. He's not in the one-or-the-other camp anymore.

When they first introduced more, wider, cycle lanes and closed off the worst rat runs to motorised traffic, Mike was up in arms, like some other motorists in his area. People were protesting about the so-called new “low traffic neighbourhoods”. Drivers were livid about the extra couple of minutes these changes would add to their ride both ways.

But the council didn't back down. They kept the rat runs closed and continued spending money on making the roads suitable for all users, not just cars. Realising it meant five minutes added to his journey time caused Mike to make a decision. The trip was only four miles after all. He could still take that short cut on his

bike without worrying about the traffic. The new cycle lane meant he had the confidence to get back in the saddle even on the stretches of road he would share with cars and other vehicles.

And he loved it. He was embarrassed at having fought against the low traffic neighbourhood idea. (“I mean, who on earth DOESN'T want a low traffic neighbourhood?” He can laugh about it now). He supposed it was brave of them really, to have persevered with their goal of a carbon neutral 2030, to have not caved-in to the vocal minority, to have recreated the safe and welcoming streets of his childhood. But this wasn't his childhood. This was Mike's future, Mike's town's future. He felt like a kid again and he loved it.

**Georgia Turner – Head of Communication and Marketing
Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council**

“It was brave of the council really, to have persevered.”



DO NEW!

Having worked for Citizens Advice, I came back to local government with an absolute commitment to making the experience of working for Hounslow Council a brilliant one. Mee-Yan Cheung-Judge is my inspiration; she's one of the most influential writers on organisational development in the UK. I was lucky enough to meet her in person and I've adopted her advice, "Never stop bringing humanity into the workplace".

Leading the development of a new set of values was right up my street but to shift the way we work, we knew we'd need a different approach. There was no formal plan. We generated thousands of conversations using different techniques. It felt fresh, optimistic, and hugely ambitious. We honestly reached everyone, all of our staff, and we put feelings first – a bold move for a large bureaucracy. Yes there's efficiency and cost-consciousness, but tapping into the spirit of public service, why people want to serve and how they do it is about connecting at a deeper level.

There were tricky times, though. Some managers struggled with the language – but not the intention. And making sure that all voices were equal in the process was a challenge. Inviting officers to be open about vulnerability and lead with compassion was a big ask. What worked was committed leadership and testing our values in a practical way. So if we're tackling childhood obesity, for example, do our new values help us deliver better? The answer was, yes.

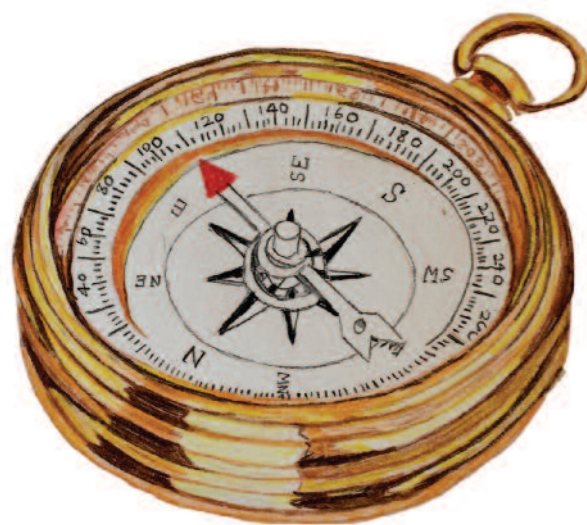
And then the virus hit. We're in the process of positive change at probably the most difficult time in our recent history, yet it's crystal clear to me that our values have enabled us to move further faster, to stretch, innovate, explore new directions.

Do new – is one of our values. Two years ago, we moved into our beautiful new building, Hounslow House. It has a library, adult education classrooms, health, and police co-located. But with the virus, many of our staff won't physically be working there in the same way in future. We know we'll have space so why not reconfigure it now, and why not offer to host our voluntary sector colleagues and small local businesses here? It's a win-win. Why wouldn't we share the asset with our communities?

It's just one example of our values guiding action. And there are literally hundreds. Our outcomes demonstrate our shared humanity.

Steve Whitehead – Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development, Hounslow Council

“Our values have enabled us to stretch and innovate.”



THE STREET WHERE I LIVE

Ours is a quiet little road – a mix of houses, some old Victorian terraced, some newer houses squashed in between where there used to be orchards and big gardens and a fair smattering of students in the bigger old houses. We've lived here 20 years and scarcely knew anyone.

For the first Thursday night clapping during the lockdown I stood on our doorstep, wondering if I'd hear anything. And there was noise! I could hear them all around me. It made me teary and cheery at the same time. There are people around us feeling the same...

A couple of days later a flier was pushed through the letterbox. We're setting up a WhatsApp group for the street, it said, do join. Blimey!

There are about 60 homes in the street and we've now got around 40 people on the group. On Thursday nights we would go right out into the road and wave at each other as well as clap. People were giving each other stuff when they did their lockdown clearouts – toys, books, spare plants. We had been wondering whose car roars noisily down the road very early every morning and sharing tips about where to get compost. We might do a street party when it's all over.

One Friday there was high drama here. A fire on the top storey of one of the big houses. Someone in the group saw the smoke billowing out of a top window and called the fire brigade who did their hero thing. The old couple who live there were shaken but okay and there wasn't too much damage. But now we all know Mrs B has dementia and Mr B is scarcely coping, despite carers and family nearby. We're keeping an eye, dropping by and ready for when he needs us.

“For you it’s temporary,” Mr B told my husband when he called round on him. “For me it’s ordinary.” He’s right, of course. Our lockdowns will end, at some point and his won’t. But maybe, thanks to a bunch of people who never knew each other before all this, he won’t feel quite so isolated.

We stopped clapping on Thursday nights, but we’re still connected – grumbling together about the boy racers speeding down the road, saving empty bottles for someone’s school project and lending each other a garden rake or a mallet when the call goes out. And we stop and chat in the street when we see each other. Small things but they make a difference.

Fran Collingham – Communications Specialist

“We all benefit from a civilised society”



This belonged to my granddad, I loved it all my life and was allowed to have it when my grandma died. We are a family who write.

THE TALE OF THE TOWN HALL CLOCK

The town hall clock was quite famous because it kept excellent time; people for miles around liked to see it and hear its chiming bells. They would depend on the clock to tell them the time. The man who wound it up was proud of his job and enjoyed it even though he had to climb 300 steps to the top of the tower every day.

Time passed and the clock fell into disrepair. The cogs started to stick, the face got dirty, the hands bent, and a chunk of the brickwork was knocked off by lightning. To make matters worse, the pendulum developed a peculiar wobble and the clock wasn't so good at keeping time any more. The man kept winding it, but his tread on those steps became weary

Later, the people in the community decided that they wanted to fix the clock. They still needed it. So they bought in some repairers - pendulum balancers, cog shifters, hand straighteners. It was chaos. Each group doing their own bit, running up and down the staircase getting in each other's way. People would laugh at them, "Are you still at it?"

The clock-winder sat down and thought until his brain was about to bleed. "STOP!!!!" he shouted. "We can't all work at once. We need an orderly plan."

But the local people said, "No, that'll take ages. As the work goes on inside the tower, we just see this tatty clock. Make the repair people work even harder."

"They are working hard as it is, " the clock-winder replied, "and the clock will start to tell the time better shortly but maybe we can make some changes to the plan so the clock will look like something we can be proud of sooner."

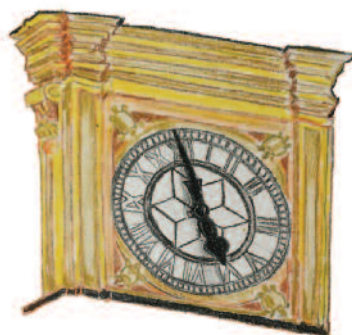
Work began the very next day.

The repair people had to think and talk to each other more. And after a few days, the clock-winder heard the repairers singing as he climbed to the top. Just as the clock was nearly fixed, the pendulum balancer said, “You know there’s a new gearing device which means you could wind the clock from the bottom? I’ll put it in tomorrow.”

The clock-winder was delighted. Word got around that the repairers knew their stuff. And the local people were happy because they had a perfectly accurate beautiful clock. And on nice days the clock-winder still climbed to the top, where he would look out over the town and countryside.

Jonathan Flowers – Director Futuregov

“Local people were happy with the results - it can take time”



LEAVE ONLY FOOTPRINTS

2 7th June: Clear as the blue sky – twitter feed **@RachelMills50**

- Councils do not have powers to close public beaches. Councils cannot close roads without advertising in advance for seven days.

- Parking fine levies are set nationally. Councils cannot change them. Money received can only be used to fund parking enforcement and no other service.

- There were no council outlets at the beach in Bournemouth selling alcohol.

- We can't stop people coming. We can only manage our finite resources as best we can in response.

- No one deserves to be spat at ever and especially not when undertaking a vital public service role. Please be kind

- Waste is everyone's responsibility to manage. Please take it home. Councils provide bins and put extra on when expecting large crowds. They are emptied more frequently too. Toilets were kept open for longer.

- We ask everyone to respect, protect and enjoy our coastline. That's it.

10th July: And with the sun set to shine @BCPCouncil

- We're ready to welcome people to our towns and beaches – but also ready to act if necessary. Respect, protect and enjoy the beaches and #EnjoySummerSafely

- We have over 40 car parks and on-street parking areas near the seafront. We have planned for car parks being full and will be providing Parking Marshalls to help.

- We'll increase enforcement right across our area to tackle illegal parking. We are actively exploring tow-away zones for fly-parked cars as a priority.

18th July: What not to be @BCPCouncil - DON'T BE TRAFFIC!

12th August: Then came the campers @BCPCouncil

- Last weekend, we saw camps and tents setup on a scale that we have not witnessed before. Our security teams moved on over 100 tents in challenging and, at times, confrontational circumstances.

- Sadly, overnight campers fail to realise that they face: Nowhere to pee or poo, visits from overnight security – so no peaceful night's sleep! And eviction notices. Noisy tractors cleaning the beaches from 2:30am – definitely no peaceful night's sleep.

- Over 100 new signs will go up to remind those who attempt to set up camp that it is not allowed.

- If you're heading to our beaches, nature reserves, heathlands, countryside, parks or open spaces this weekend, please #LeaveOnlyFootprints and dispose of your litter responsibly or take it home with you.

**Rachel Mills – PR and Communications Manager
Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council; BCP Council
Communications Team**

“We keep the place civilised for everyone”



BEN

I kiss my wife and two sleeping children goodbye and head off to my other love, my job.

The sun is rising as I'm heading towards Windsor. My mind is full of the last month, the work we have done and what we have achieved but also the toll on my workmates.

We've had to really pull together, it's been hard, horrible and difficult. One of the team died of coronavirus at the beginning of lockdown and it still feels raw. It was hard dealing with it, we had all been in a room with him, we were being told there would be redundancies as the council prepared next year's budget – so much for us all to take in.

This was life-changing, we were all at risk from catching the virus, being told we may lose our jobs but also with the pandemic we were being asked to work in the community and we didn't want to let anyone down. I was scared but I have a duty, I know what I need to do, and I know our residents needed us.

They greeted us with smiles, waves and thankyou's when we turned up with their shopping, prescriptions or just checking in on them. Many of the people we visited literally had no one else to turn to but the council during lockdown and shielding. We've cycled through parks checking that everyone is ok and walked miles through the community offering reassurance to everyone we saw.

I was relieved, I could see my children again and as a team we coped through what still is such a difficult time.

As I drive home at midnight, I reflect that this week hasn't been a normal week (but what is these days?). There was a building collapse with people trapped where we had to guide the blue lights through, look after the road closure, chat to residents and reassure them – all part of what we just get on and 'do'.

Then last night, a fire, a major fire on a common which threatened people's homes. We were back again, helping, guiding, providing information and that important reassurance again that we are there to help.

The sun is nowhere to be seen as I drive home but I know I'm lucky; happy that I do a job I love, my family are safe and I trust the residents know we are there for them.

My friends think I work for someone else because what I do doesn't sound like normal council work. But this is real council work, talking to residents, helping residents, making a difference.

Ben Higgs – Community Warden, Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead

“Nothing is normal these days, we get on and do”



The royal wedding seems such a long time ago now. My team, and so many people in the council, contributed to making the celebrations a success for the public.

Louisa Dean – Head of communications, Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead

GROWING PAINS

Like many parents I wondered how I was going to manage being in the house all day every day with my little person, Harry, aged 15 months, and, in my case, do my public health work on COVID. Harry had briefly been to nursery before lockdown but hadn't been ready for it. So now, back home, I soon realised that just letting him be and not filling every day with activities gave him the space to learn and develop in his own time.

Harry has lots of stuffed animal toys but for some reason two birds, a thrush and blue tit, became almost permanent attachments. Still crawling, he would have one in each hand, taking them out with him in the buggy and passing them to me so I could put them up in the hedge.

Things started to change as the months of lockdown passed. I was stressed juggling childcare and responding to the pandemic. Harry started getting fed up, bored with the same toys, and with me being on the laptop or phone. For his sake and mine, it was time to go back to nursery.

With one bird firmly grasped in each of his hands and me with my bravest face on, we got through the first week. By week three, Harry couldn't wait to get out of the house. The birdies gave Harry the confidence to explore at nursery, to build new relationships, and he blossomed.

The only reason that I have been able to give my very best to our work on COVID and stay focussed on what I felt was best for Harry, has been because of the flexibility and understanding shown by my employer and colleagues. I have been able to work whenever and however I was able to/needed to.

I have developed a different kind of deep and meaningful relationship with work colleagues. During Microsoft Teams meetings, I have seen them in their homes, with their families, and they have seen me with Harry. My employer and my colleagues recognise and value me as a public health manager and as a parent, which meant I could be person-centred in caring for my son.

I have worked hard to introduce and support person-centred approaches, but previous work cultures, policies and procedures have sometimes made this difficult. It's vital that employers enable us to be person-centred with our own families.

This sort of work often focuses on older people but what about our younger members of society? How can we harness and sustain the positives from COVID and make these available to everyone? The future is one of flexibility, trust and recognition of the value of person-centred approaches in both our personal and professional lives.

Jody Pritchard – Public Health Manager Dudley Council

“The future is one of flexibility and trust”



IT TAKES TWO TO TANGO

Speaking as a resident of Bradford District and as an employee of Bradford Council, I have noticed some positives and some negatives that affect me. I have worked in the reprographics unit – part of corporate services – for 30 years and the job has evolved over time. The amount of printing we do has reduced considerably over the years, in part due to awareness of the impact on the environment and also the digital progression in the way staff work in these modern times. They're gradually moving towards paperless meetings.

The local government does its best, but it needs support from the community. It is a two-way process. Whatever we do in life, there needs to be cooperation from both sides, just like it takes two to tango.

The council needs money to provide the services for the society it serves and the society needs value for money for their hard earned funds. The community needs to understand that council resources are stretched due to cutbacks on funding from the central government.

We all reside in the space Mother Nature has provided for us. So we need to look at the bigger picture beyond the petty squabbles. We need to look at what we are going to leave behind for our next generation when we are no longer here. To look after our planet, we need to put all our differences aside and collaborate towards a more sustainable society.

In an ideal world, maybe there needs to be constructive communication whereby everyone can move to a middle ground to accommodate each other's needs. This is a distant dream of a utopian society.

It is debatable if an educational project can be set up whereby individuals can learn to move forward prudently. One of the ways residents can assist is by refraining from polluting the environment by fly tipping and various other substandard habits, and instead recycle and compost regularly. I can say that I am committed to these practices. During this pandemic, the council has been giving away free masks and hand sanitisers, but what I have noticed is that the pavements are littered with broken masks. I am sure individuals could have the decency to find a dustbin in which to discard these.

Although these are difficult times, we can live in hope that there will be some progression towards cohesion. Life is about teamwork and if public services and the community they serve get together, there is no adversity that can't be conquered.

The saying 'you reap what you sow' comes to mind.

Ella Chavda – Reprographics Team Bradford Council

“Co-operation is needed from both sides, it takes two to tango”



This is fenugreek. My pride and joy this year was growing my own vegetables. It gave me something positive to do during my time of shielding.

BLAKE'S CHARM

When mum gets cross she waves her arms around and the big old charm bracelet she wears jangles noisily. Usually it's me she is cross with.

“You're eighteen, Blake, you're a bright boy and all you can manage is a few hours a week at the sports centre, showing off those awful tattoos in your swimming trunks and your lifeguard vest.”

Nan and I roll our eyes at each other. She's always got my back, my nan. She quite liked the dolphin ink I got to celebrate getting the lifeguard's job.

Anyway, I strutted a bit around the pool, but there wasn't much to do really. And then we went into lockdown and everything changed.

Someone from the council called and asked me to help delivering stuff and check that old ladies who had to stay home were okay. I thought I might as well do it and stop mum waving her arms at me all day. There was even a bit of training – we were talked through what to do and what to expect. They made sure I was okay about getting on and doing it on my own after I'd done a few days with someone more experienced.

I was out and about across the town and met loads of people. Some old, some not so old but all stuck in their homes. I delivered food, medicine and, best of all, stopped for a chat. I heard all sorts of stories from all sorts of people and they were so pleased to see me! Even the grumpy old boys who just grunted at me. It was fine because I knew I was making a difference.

I got into a real routine but began to wonder, what next? I didn't want to go back to being a lifeguard. And I'm not! The council needs people like me to do care work and I've gone for it. There's some proper training, I can go on courses and get qualifications and I can carry on making a difference.

"I knew you had it in you," Mum says. "Underneath all those tattoos, I knew you could do something special. And good on the council for seeing that and giving you a chance. They're really looking out for us, aren't they?"

And then she put the picture of me wearing my official badge on the fridge. Pride of place. I'm not getting another tat to celebrate my job. But I might buy her a new charm for her bracelet.

Fran Collingham – Communications specialist , **Louisa Dean** – Head of Communications, Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead and **Emma Rodgers** – Strategic Manager
Communications Stoke Council

“Look what we can do given the opportunity, I can make a difference.”



LOVE AND CHANGE ACROSS TIME AND SPACE

My grandad was a street sweeper for Liverpool council. He bought this for my nana with his long service money, the only piece of jewellery she had apart from her wedding ring. My grandad died two years after he retired, when I was seven. I often think what he would make of his granddaughter becoming a council chief exec and, later, living on the other side of the world.

Jo Miller – CEX Hutt City Council, New Zealand (former CEX Doncaster Council and past President of SOLACE)



CHAPTER FIVE

NARRATIVE CHANGE – YOUR STORY AND OURS

We hope this book has inspired you to think about how you might use narratives and stories in your area. We want to keep the conversation going and would love to read your stories.

To help you tell your story and develop positive narratives that support change, we are delighted that the Local Government Association (LGA) has provided some practical resources as a companion to this book. The LGA recognises the challenges faced by local government throughout the pandemic and that communication is strategically important to meeting them.

There are tools on how to build your narrative, sharing approaches that have made an impact; together with advice on developing a new story post-covid and guidance on running workshops and focus groups, and messaging for employees, councillors and partners.

See: [local.gov.uk/our-support/guidance-and-resources/comms-hub-communications-support](https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/guidance-and-resources/comms-hub-communications-support)

The book has also been supported by Darren Caveney, creator and owner of comms2point0. comms2point.co.uk is a free online learning site and home to over 1.5k posts, case studies and free resources, from comms planning templates to social media guidelines.

We've also included our Shared Press publisher story and the story of our sponsor, CCLA, to share why we do what we do.

THE SHARED PRESS STORY

Stories that Matter

Shared Press was born with a bit of heat, personal history and a determined team spirit, despite it being largely me in my spare bedroom – as all the best business origin stories start.

I was sick of the way public services and local government in particular, are portrayed in the media, the constant negative narratives and lazy stereotypes – you know the type of thing, town hall fat cats, private sector good/public sector bad, local politicians corrupt. It's a problem that goes back decades. My frustration stemmed from my experience. I'd hear the news or see an article and think, that's not the world I recognise, that's not me or the people I worked with. Having spent a good chunk of my career working in and with councils, what I saw was good people trying to do the right thing in increasingly difficult circumstances.

I wanted to show what I saw, amazing committed public servants, work that made an impact on all our lives and I see it as critical to be open about the grit – the difficult realities, the messy boundaries and sharp edges of modern life. Shared Press publishes stories that hold both the hope and horror side by side. Without the darker side, we can become naïve, not living in the real world, and without the hope, the danger is that we become cynical and detached.

The personal history aspect was that I had always been a storyteller, a kid who wrote stories and made up plays. I believe we all have stories to tell and what we tell ourselves and others makes a difference. It's just that not all of us write our stories down. It took until my mid-40s when I started writing a local government thriller, for me to focus on something I'd always loved.

Shared Press has been a genuinely shared endeavour. By nature I'm an extrovert so it was important to me find a way of making writing a team sport. Fran Collingham, a great writer, communications expert and local government devotee, and Simon Hallion – thinker, creative and design adviser – were fundamental to getting going. We've now completed 14 book projects and engaged and empowered hundreds of public servants through story workshops, creative conversations and publishing their work.

Our production team is an amazing network of talented writers, editors, designers, artists and photographers and sponsors, people who care about ideas, about books, positive change and public life. It's a continuing joy. Join us.

Dawn Reeves – Director



*Change to Original painting by **Ben Kelly** Book cover for *We know what we are**

THE CCLA STORY

Our story begins in 1958

Primary schools are coping with the post-war ‘baby boom’ and classes of nearly fifty are common. Britain is the most industrialised country in the world and pollution levels are soaring. The era of concrete and high-rise living is in its infancy. This year just 2.4% of the population will get a degree. Homosexuality is illegal. The average price of a house in Britain is £2,390. It will be almost a decade before the world’s first cash dispenser attracts large crowds to Enfield, North London. Rock’n’roll is a new sensation.

Sundays are set aside fully for religious worship and family, and church attendance – though lower than before the war – remains strong.

Meanwhile, individual clergymen and bishops – wholly qualified to serve the spiritual needs of their communities – are also responsible for managing the significant financial assets of the Church of England. There are a “multiplicity of small separate funds” representing an infinite variety of purposes. Very British, and extremely inefficient.

It was against this socio-religious backdrop that the Church Funds Investment Measure was presented by Parliament to Her Majesty the Queen – then at the tender age of 31 – for Royal Assent. The Measure enabled the Central Board of Finance to set up authorised investment funds in which to place (or ‘pool’) the Church’s disparate investments.

As Lord Hawke told his fellow peers in the Chamber, the advantages of the Measure would be, “a wider spread of investments than can be provided at present...permitting, presumably, higher interest earnings and better protection against inflation; and...a more professional management.”

Three years later, in 1961 – the year in which a certain band play their first engagement as 'The Beatles' in Liverpool's Cavern Club – and following the Trustee Investments Act of that year, the Local Authorities' Mutual Investment Trust is also set up.

“This Trust, LAMIT as it is apparently called, is a non-profit-making body. It is...expertly advised and adapted exclusively to the requirements of local authorities.”

Much like the Church, local authorities were now able to do collectively what they had been authorised previously to do individually. By 1968, around 360 out of a total of 550 local authorities have invested in the LAMIT Funds. It was deemed to provide,

“...very great advantage to the medium and small authorities, while even the larger authorities have found it desirable to take advantage of the wide range [of investments] which this Trust provides.”

The Charity Commission followed as regulator in 1963 on behalf of the broader charity market. Thus, the humble beginnings of what is now known as CCLA (Churches, Charities and Local Authorities) has grown into a hybrid organisation that exists to manage funds for charity and non-profit clients, regardless of their size.

Modern day CCLA

On the introduction of new financial services regulation in 1987, CCLA Investment Management Limited was created. The company is owned by the investment funds of the three client groups. One trustee from each group is a CCLA non-executive director and we report on company performance each quarter to all trustees. CCLA is a customer-owned business, although our clients are owners indirectly through their investments in the pooled funds. With an ownership structure determined by its history and fully reflective of its client base, CCLA is the spirit of a mutual in the body of a commercial private limited company.

Although it is no guarantee of success, being owned by our clients brings many advantages. We are under no pressure to favour external shareholders at the expense of unitholders. We can offer highly competitive fees and pass the benefits to our customers. Perhaps most importantly, stability of ownership and purpose allows us to make investments that may be slow to pay off, but which reward handsomely over the long-term.

Today, our local authority clients range from fire, police and harbour authorities to national parks, housing associations, districts, and boroughs and even crematoriums. In total, we look after 35,000 non-profit clients, representing a wide range of missions and priorities. Yet there is one thing that unites them all; the determination to maximise their positive impact on society. Our business aims to help them by harnessing the power of investment markets. Furthermore, recognising that these markets are only as healthy as the people, communities and environment that support them, we believe firmly that we have a responsibility to build a more sustainable future.

Addressing the risks and opportunities associated with climate change and the transition to a low carbon economy is, therefore, our highest engagement priority. We also interact with companies on a broad range of other issues – determined by regular consultation with our clients – including executive remuneration, modern day slavery, mental health, inequality (including the Living Wage), health and safety, labour standards, biodiversity, gender diversity, single-use plastics and nutrition.

We don't claim to have the answers to the challenges facing society today, but we do have certain skills and an interest in social and economic justice, which sets us apart from other wealth managers. CCLA's ambition is to deliver trusted, responsibly managed and strongly performing products that are aligned with our clients' values and purpose.

www.ccla.co.uk



DINT THINK OF THAT

I'm flat on a brick wall. Fag in mouth. Havin' a smoke. Chimneys havin' a smoke too. All sorts. Any road no matter. We're all smokin' together. Steam is a gift from God, Mam says. Mining coal is easy as pie now, compared to when mi Dad was a lad. More coal means more steam, means more coal. They say oil is the new coal. More efficient, more "cost-effective". Oh, aye, though they still need coal to get at it. Lest we forget. Dint think of that did they.



L.S. Lowry, Man Lying on a Wall, 1957 (Photo City Art Gallery, Salford)

So it was; the degraded industrial environment of the post-war era illustrated so plainly in L.S. Lowry's paintings of urban Lancashire. Belching chimneys, contaminated waterways, smog-thick skies. A world away from today's clean, green, shiny renewable economy. Or so we might believe.

It wasn't until 2017 – just three years ago – that the UK was able to run a full 24 hours on coal-free electricity. Meanwhile, China, the United States and India burn more fossil fuels than the rest of the world combined. Leaving academic detail aside, two things are clear:

- i) Man-made global warming goes up roughly in proportion to the amount of carbon dioxide that we emit through, mainly, burning fossil fuels;

ii) Limiting the increase in global temperature to 2°C above pre-industrial levels may, possibly, be enough to avoid the worst environmental consequences.

In burning just the proven coal, oil and gas reserves, humankind will emit almost three trillion tonnes of carbon dioxide. How much will it warm the planet? More than 2°C, probably closer to 3°C, possibly pushing 4°C, within this century. Four degrees is the same as the increase observed since the last ice age's "last glacial maximum", when much of the northern hemisphere was under ice as thick as the world's five tallest buildings stacked on top of each other.

The result? A collapse in food production, severe storms, droughts, floods, heatwaves, fires and ice-sheet melt that could raise the sea level enough to wipe out many of the world's great cities. Around 275 million people live in areas that will be under water at 3°C of global warming.

Furthermore, every year fossil fuel companies are spending the equivalent of \$100 for every person on the planet, searching for more supplies.

How we stop climate change is simple: by leaving assets worth trillions of pounds firmly in the ground. We need to strand those assets and write them off entirely. And we need to stop searching for more.

This story can have a happy ending. We were the first country in the world to use coal to generate electricity. We are also the first in the world to commit to removing coal power generation completely, with a target date of 2025. What is more, we have proven that economic security need not suffer. By the end of 2018, we had cut emissions by more than 40 per cent since 1990, while our economy had grown by two thirds. Having led the planet in industrialisation, Britain is now leading it towards a cleaner future.

Local authorities will take centre stage in this battle. While they emit directly only a small percentage of the UK's carbon emissions, they influence around 40 percent through their roles in planning, as transport and waste authorities, and as major purchasers and commissioners of goods and services.

Encouragingly, 68 percent of the total number of UK local authorities has now declared a Climate Emergency. They are not, however, agreed on a target date for full decarbonisation. There is much to be done and much to be proud of.

However, the ability to influence global warming doesn't stop at local authorities' actions on carbon offsetting, car miles saved or sustainable procurement methods. Local authorities also have about £46.4 billion in investments, which – if positioned responsibly – can also have a tangible impact. Together with local councils, we will work to make a demonstrable difference to change the ending.

Investing for good

At CCLA, we recognise that investment markets – and the returns they deliver – are only as healthy as the people, communities, environment, and economy that support them. Unmitigated climate change will have a negative impact upon the value of nearly every investment asset over the medium to long-term. We must, therefore, push to prevent it.

Our focus is on the transition to a more sustainable future:

1. We believe that progressive legislation is essential in accelerating the energy transition. For this reason, we are working closely with the government and are members of the Institutional Investors Group on Climate Change.
2. We conduct meaningful engagement. We founded the ‘Aiming for A’ initiative, a forerunner to the \$45 trillion-backed Climate Action 100+ initiative, on whose behalf we are currently leading engagement with three major energy companies.
3. We dedicate capital to investments that will promote the energy transition, including renewable energy infrastructure (solar, wind and battery).
4. In selecting stocks, we conduct alignment tests with the Nationally Determined Commitments associated with the Paris Agreement.
5. We consider the impact on society of our actions. Many thousands of jobs are at stake in the transition to a low carbon economy. We support the Just Transition to ensure that not one of us is left behind.

We are sceptical about the prospects for many high carbon industries, believing that new legislation, tighter regulation and changing consumer taste will necessarily write-off much of the world’s proven fossil fuel reserves. Our goal, however, is not simply to wash our hands of any association with these companies; it is to play a meaningful role in aiding the transition to a sustainable way of life. Local Authorities can support us in this mission.

CHAINS OF GOLD

“...the slaves...produce for their masters’ revenues in sums defying belief, but they themselves wear out their bodies... For no respite or pause is granted them in their labours, but compelled beneath blows of the overseers to endure the severity of their plight...” – 1st Century BC

In the dry summer of 1835, two famed bankers in the City of London settled on a deal with the chancellor. The Slavery Abolition Act had been passed; now the government was taking out one of the largest loans in history to finance the compensation package for former slave owners. The sum represented 40 percent of the government’s annual income – today’s equivalent of about £300 billion.

That same loan took until 2015 – a full 180 years – to repay. Ironically, 2015 is also the year in which Dariusz became a slave. “I was paid nothing, and they controlled my life.”

He had just come out of prison: seven months and a fine for stealing two bicycles. He was deeply in debt. Approached by recruiters in a Polish shopping centre, he was promised a job in England. He would be paid £300 a week, half going toward accommodation. “It seemed like a great opportunity to pay off the money and start afresh.”

Unknown to him, Dariusz would become one of more than 400 victims of the UK’s largest known modern slavery gang; a human trafficking ring that made £2 million between 2012 and 2017 through, “callous and systematic [human] exploitation.” We may celebrate the pioneering role that Britain played in abolishing the transatlantic slave trade, yet more than 200 years on, slavery remains.

What is modern slavery? It is an umbrella term encompassing slavery, servitude, human trafficking and forced or compulsory labour. Victims are controlled by punishment, debt bondage, threats, violence, deception and coercion. There are approximately 40 million modern-day slaves in the world, twice as many as there were in the 350 years of the transatlantic slave trade and more than at any other time in history. Here in the UK, we import goods worth \$18 billion each year that, in all probability, used slave labour in their production. Estimates on the number of slaves residing here today range from 13,000 to 136,000.



Argos, Asda, Homebase, Marks & Spencer, Sainsbury's, Tesco, Travis Perkins, Waitrose, Wickes. What do these companies have in common?

Each one of them had been employing workers within the first tier of their supply chains provided by a single modern slavery gang, the same gang to which Dariusz had fallen victim. Like him, targets were told they would earn good money in the UK. Instead, they were, "crammed on filthy mattresses four to a room in vermin-infested properties... If they refused to work, they were beaten."

There is no suggestion that these companies were actively complicit; each had strong, public modern slavery policies in place. And yet, they did not know it was happening. This highlights the complexity of even domestic supply chains and the significant challenge of identifying this appalling criminal activity.

Local authorities intersect with many areas that encounter modern slavery; from their £55 billion annual procurement spend, to policing, to housing, to support and social care for victims. A huge amount of work goes into ensuring transparency in physical supply chains, yet more liquid assets are frequently overlooked.

Modern slavery exists in the supply chain of nearly every business. With £46 billion in reserves and £287 billion in pension scheme funds, local authorities are exposed to the problem through shared ownership of the companies in which they invest. In failing to harness the weight of these investments, we indirectly undermine the brilliant work that is going on elsewhere.

While we may have direct control over just the first link in the supply chain, we can take steps to extend our influence right to the very last.

“You may choose to look the other way, but you can never say again that you did not know.”

**William Wilberforce; A. Dunstan, I Osborne
(2017), The People Business**

The strongest link

“Quite simply, this is a moral case – as ‘good investors’, we don’t want to profit from slavery.”

Like Local Authorities, our direct operations are limited to the UK. However, we invest our clients’ assets in businesses that have global operations and supply chains. Consequently, our highest exposure to modern slavery is likely to be through the companies and assets held in client portfolios.

To address the problem head on, we have launched the Find It, Fix It, Prevent It initiative. It has four distinct workflows:

1. Engagement: we have an active engagement programme pushing investee businesses to proactively identify – and address – instances of modern slavery.
2. Public policy: we co-ordinate engagement with UK and overseas policy makers to encourage better regulation and improvement of the UK Modern Slavery Act.
3. Data provision: a lack of data constrains the potential for companies to act. We bring together investors, academics and NGOs to develop better datapoints and to encourage ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) data providers to include them.
4. Academia: our project partner, The University of Nottingham Rights Lab, is drawing on the engagement programme as a case study. The aim is to aid research into what is, and what is not, effective in corporate action on slavery.

**For further information, please visit
<https://www.modernslaveryccla.co.uk>**

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