Appendix

RENEWING NEIGHBOURHOOD DEMOCRACY

Creating powerful communities

By Joe Fyans and Callin McLinden

Appendix

Case study: New Zealand COVID-19 response[1]

New Zealand is seen to have weathered the COVID-19 storm in a truly world-beating robust and efficient manner. The country's remarkable success in eliminating COVID-19 required not only effective leadership and prompt action by central government, but also the coordinated effort of thousands of local people around New Zealand.

Inspiring Communities, which has championed New Zealand's growing community-led development since 2008, engages a network of 4,000 people, groups and organisations. Its vision is to enable effective community-led change by working with communities, councils, government and agencies to support initiatives, projects, skills and policy that improve local places. For *Inspiring Communities*, one of the key lessons to take away from the pandemic is just how much place matters and how transformational change becomes possible by building on place strengths, assets, context and wisdom.

According to this initiative, community-led development does not mean that local residents or community organisations are the sole decision makers, but rather one that acknowledges successful solutions cannot be parachuted in from the outside. Success is framed within the collective lens of a local systems approach where everyone has something to contribute to activate positive change.

In their paper *'Shaping the future – Enabling Community-led Change'*, COVID-19 is seen by Inspiring Communities as having taught many things. "High up on that list is that when it was required, people ran from their silos, stepped up, focused on shared purpose and got 's**t' done. Power was shared because it was the right thing to do.' The crisis is seen as enabling new opportunities to embed change into daily practice and use what has been learned to solve other complex challenges 'which have spent too long mired in top down mindsets and inflexible responses.' These responses involved clear messaging and expectations, a strong sense of shared purpose, enabling people to work differently and adequate resourcing. People were empowered to work differently and 'do what it takes' based on the best information at the time in order to act quickly and develop, pivot and improve as they went along.

This empowered way of working was evident from government agencies, local councils, businesses and NGOs. Resourcing was available at the level needed in fast and simplified ways, with high trust. As well as funding from government and charitable sources, new community resources were accessed, and existing resources shared. The success of local responses drew upon existing assets and strengths, including strong leadership, trusted relationships and

1 Almost the entirety of this case study is a summarised account of 'Inspiring Communities (2020) – Shaping the Future: Enabling Community-led Change'

diverse connections. Communities came together quickly and organised solutions that were generous, holistic and mobilized resources to enable an effective local systems response.

At the neighbourhood level, people informally self-organised in their streets, suburbs and towns to provide and reside in:

- Social contact, emotional support and fun activities that helped keep spirits up;
- Practical support such as grocery shopping and picking up prescription medicines, and;
- Resources, time, ideas and money to support local and nationwide efforts.

Whilst the pace and nuance at which New Zealand responded to the pandemic with locally-led solutions is admirable, much of its success can be attributed to a number of pre-COVID factors that boosted the speed and effectiveness of these holistic responses. For one, there was a notable depth and breadth of relationships and collaborative arrangements. This was complimented by strong bonds of trust and shared local knowledge of who was best fit to undertake certain responsibilities and where they were needed most. This local knowledge extended to knowing about the strengths and resources, people and capacity, that New Zealand communities already had – so these could be become activated and interconnected almost instantly when the pandemic began to creep in. Moreover, there is wide access to digital technologies that enabled organisations and agencies to connect to one another and for services to be delivered in ways that circumvented pandemic restrictions. New Zealand's governments, institutions and organisations have gone through previous training and experience with crises so were therefore equipped with pre-existing response networks and 'know how' on how best to organise. Finally, New Zealand's communities, particularly those that are rural or isolated, were used to having local autonomy and self-reliance – meaning that citizens were able to take it upon themselves to activate their own networks and the provision of necessary resources.

Case study: Wigan Council

For the past 9 years, and more significantly over the past 6, Wigan Council has deeply embedded community empowerment into their strategy and practice, taking on a 'community partnership' approach. Their 'Deal for Communities' is informed by an underlying sense of purpose of providing for communities, as well as a commitment to listen to Wigan's communities and deliver tangible results as a result of that. Wigan Council's Deal for Communities is comprised of; an investment fund, dedicated to community groups who have potential ideas on how to make a real difference in the borough; an accessible community asset transfer strategy[2]. This ran alongside a commitment to helping communities navigate the tricky bureaucracy of local governance whilst virulently propagated a wealth of useful information on how communities can get involved in local initiatives, what local services are available, what volunteering opportunities Wigan has to offer, and what community events are taking placing. Since this strategy has taken hold, there are many more social enterprises in the area[3], a

2 Wigan Council (2019) – The Deal 2030

3 Greater Manchester Social Enterprise Network (2020) – Social Enterprises: Wigan

surge in those wanting to volunteer for an array of community initiatives as well as surprising progress made in crime and inequality as a result[4]. Wigan Council understands its communities on a neighbourhood level, in terms of between 30,000-50,000 residents. At this level, the council has integrated teams working alongside communities on the ground, whilst investing in community groups on this neighbourhood basis[5].

Wigan Council are open about undergoing a significant cultural change and how that has been critical to their successes – made possible by a broad outreach programme designed to produce strong partnerships between the council and its communities. This means that through and through, no matter the department, there is community buy-in – there is a deeply embedded sense of duty to serve Wigan's communities that reverberates through the council's entire structure. This is exemplified by their 'community infrastructure groups' who function as support networks[6]. Whether it is bid writing, issues of governance, funding applications, or just generally struggling to bring an idea to fruition collectively – these infrastructure groups are there to be the interface for communities to better understand and engage with the undeniable inaccessible bureaucracy. On the other, the council is firmly committed to listening to their communities and put in the time and effort to ensure that:

- these opportunities for communities to be heard are accessible and broadcast across the borough, and;
- that the outcome of these listening activities is taken into account, eventually being reflected in the strategy and delivery of the council going forward.

In 2018, they spoke to more than 6,000 residents in 83 locations across Wigan as part of their 'Big Listening Project' – the ideas from this initiative went on to greatly inform the vision and priorities of the council's new 'Deal 2030'[7]. A few years prior the council did a 'Listening to Action' initiative that was done on a ward by ward basis through weeks of listening sessions, which were presented as an open invite for residents to come forward and have that dialogue.

One community success story of this approach from Wigan Council is *Wigan Men's Sheds*[8]; a start-up business that allows men the opportunity to reduce their social isolation through learning new skills by making products that are needed by the community, received start-up investment from the council in 2018. Another is the *Beehive Community Centre*[9] in Mosley Common; an anchor to social infrastructure in the area, that received a small investment and stands as the result of a successful community asset transfer in partnership with the council. The council takes immense pride in facilitating community empowerment at a neighbourhood level, illustrated by the list of 'Deal for Communities' case studies found on their website[10].

4 The King's Fund (2019) – A citizen-led approach to health and care: Lessons from the Wigan Deal
5 Wigan Council (2020) – Wigan Statement of Community Involvement
6 Locality (2019) – Power Partnerships: learning from Wigan
7 Wigan Council – Big Listening Project [webpage]
8 Community Book – Wigan Men's Sheds [webpage]
9 Community Book – Beehive Community Centre [webpage]
10 Wigan Council – Deal for Communities: Case studies [webpage]

Case study: Big Local

In 2012, the National Lottery Community Fund (NLCF) established Local Trust with a £217m endowment to deliver the Big Local programme over a 15-year period[11]. NLCF had identified 150 areas that had historically 'missed out' on lottery and other funding – typically these were areas which had low levels of civic capital, missing out on funding in part because there were no organisations locally applying for support[12]. Each of the areas was allocated £1m of Big Local funding.

The funding is provided to each community on the basis that it can be spent over a long-term period at the discretion and chosen pace of the community – allowing them to provide certainty and facilitate the space and support communities need to strategise, plan and deliver services and solutions to their local areas. Big Local is also notable for its deliberately broad set of desired outcomes that it strives towards in its practices; improving the ability of communities to identify local issues and take action, increasing the relevant skills and confidence of residents to respond to local needs, communities making a difference in the needs it has prioritised itself, and communities feeling as their local area has become a better place to live.

Big Local stands in contrast to ordinary top-down, short-term funding regimes by design and was put together with a set of unique features[13];

- Funding is given long-term, allowing communities to feel assured in 10-15 years of quality investment.
- The scheme makes a point of working directly with individuals within a community and hyperlocal groups, rather than through the 'usual suspects' of community-based organisations and funding regimes. This builds confidence and the ability
- They do not seek to impose rules or instructions. Communities are encouraged to spend on their own terms and at their own pace.
- The support they provide is notably light touch and non-judgemental. This allows communities to reflect on what works locally and learn from inevitable mistakes whilst still facilitating empowerment and the capacity of the community to be autonomous.

Whilst partnership members do mostly regard their experiences of being involved in Big Local as challenging (67%), a majority also regard the scheme as satisfying (59%), a learning experience (58%) and, ultimately, 'worth it' (58%)[14]. There have also been substantial positive impacts for residents of Big Local areas as well as self-reports of new, effective services and facilities being used often, improved community spirit and improved perceptions of how nice areas have become since the involvement of Big Local[15]. Local Trust policy, research and influencing programmes connect the experience, insights and evidence coming from Big Local communities to the national debate with the aim of nurturing the conditions for change more broadly[16].

11 Local Trust (2019) – Left behind?: Understanding communities on the edge

12 Ibid

13 Local Trust (2012) – Early learning from Big Local: An overview of evidence from the first 50 areas, July 2011 to March 2012

14 Local Trust (2020) – The partnership members survey 2020: what's the point?

15 Local Trust (2019) – The halfway point: Reflections on Big Local

16 Local Trust (2013) – Big Local theory of change

Case study: Frome Town Council

Frome Town Council appears to tick all the boxes when considering an outstanding English council which not only serves and represents its community in an efficient and effective manner but in a way that combines genuine creativity and innovation. The poster boy for 'Flatpack Democracy', the town has rethought the role of a town council and has inspired other town councils through its example and practice and boosted the confidence of the sector, gaining national and international renown in the process[17]. Now in the third generation of independence, the model of local democracy renews itself every four years but allows for some continuity, but each iteration of the council brings in a different constituency of the town, whether it be the local football club or local musicians providing a bridge to the local arts community.

From its town strategy for 2020 to 2024, Frome Town Council sets out a vision for itself as a place that is 'proudly independent and puts local solutions first' while remaining 'outward looking, building and maintaining connections both nationally and internationally'[18].

From these foundations the desire is to build:

- A positive and inclusive town where no-one gets left behind;
- A clean, healthy and happy town;
- A thriving and resilient community and local economy;
- A town that actively encourages local people to participate in and feel ownership over ideas, spaces and assets;
- A town which embraces innovation, takes risks, celebrates its successes and learns from its experiences.

Working with its community, Frome Town Council has already taken action in relation to climate change, austerity, political uncertainty and severe reductions in public sector funding and has pledged to continue developing ways to increase local resilience across a wide variety of community fronts as a creative response to future contingencies[19].

Frome Town Council has led and supported a wide variety of community projects to better understand the needs of the community to support them in what they deliver in the town. As part of an earlier work programme, Frome commissioned a baseline study at street level to understand what role the town council could play in creating more opportunities for citizen participation, improved communication and inclusion[20].

Frome Town Council has a small grants fund for local organisations and groups looking for up to £300 and a Community Grants Fund open for bids of £300 – £2k[21]. Training is also offered to staff trustees and volunteers to meet the needs of local groups. Bespoke advice and support for new, fledgling and established organisations ranges from business planning, trustee support, budgeting and working in partnership[22]. In a version of participatory budgeting, Frome Town Council has introduced the People's Budget, a means for local residents to get to

17 The Guardian (2015) – How Flatpack Democracy beat the old parties in the People's Republic of Frome
18 Frome Town Council (2019) – Frome Town Council Strategy 2020-2024
19 Frome Town Council (2019) – Resilience, five years on – what have we achieved?
20 Frome Town Council (2016) – Building Community Connections pilot project
21 Frome Town Council (2017) – New Town Grants Scheme
22 Frome Town Council (2018) – Training to help your organisations become a dream team

make choices about how money is spent locally[23]. In the 2019/20 financial year some £35,000 of the council's budget was made available for PB for the funding and delivery of projects under the council's strategic plan[24].

In anticipation of the devolution agenda and plans to create either a unitary one council Somerset or two unitaries, Frome has vowed to engage with the debate to explore what services should be delivered best at what level of the council. In working with district and county agencies, Frome Town Council pays heed to the importance of building and maintaining working relationships with other levels of government while putting Frome first. While it sees its relationship with Mendip District Council as constructive and open, it feels itself at the periphery of thinking at county level and is keen to improve relationships on issues such as education, policing, social care and transport by working closely with other towns and parishes in the district to build a collective voice[25]. The same thinking applies to small councils in neighbouring Wiltshire and Bath and North East Somerset where many Frome residents commute to work. Frome Town Council is committed to holding a strategic overview of services and opportunities, especially in priority areas for Frome residents and to working with the county, voluntary sector and businesses to identify existing and emerging gaps in service provision and allocate the necessary resources to see these gaps accounted for[26]. This is not only to defend services currently under threat - whether social, educational, emergency or other - but also to look for alternative ways of provision with an emphasis on community-led and creative ways of providing services.

Case study: Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy 2020

The Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy 2020 is the city's plan for empowerment each of their 140 neighbourhoods to blossom and prosper[27]. Through partnerships with community groups, community businesses and other residents, the strategy lays out investments in services, facilities and projects in 31 identified Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs). The strategy's overarching mission is to accomplish even-handed opportunities across all of Toronto's neighbourhoods by empowering residents, maximising resources and enacting a set of neighbourhood friendly policies[28]. Since the beginning of the strategy in 2014, over 24,000 residents, 1,700 stakeholders and 21 City Divisions and Agencies have been involved in the planning and delivery of services in the aforementioned 31 NIAs[29].

The strategy is guided by five domains of what constitutes neighbourhood well-being – developed by a team structured according to the Urban Health Equity Assessment and Response Tool (Urban HEART), a framework that provides a structure for how collaboration and striving toward equity can drive initiatives to produce real change[30]. These domains were;

- **Economic opportunities**: includes levels of income and availability of quality job opportunities.

23 Frome Town Council (2019) – The People's Budget

24 Ibid

25 Frome Town Council (2019) – Frome Town Council Strategy 2020-2024

26 Ibid

27 City of Toronto Council (2017) – Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy 2020

28 Ibid

29 City of Toronto Council (2017) – Activating People, Resources and Policies: Progress on Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy 2020

30 Urban HEART @ Toronto (2014) – Technical Report/User Guide

- **Social development**: includes education, literacy, and access to various recreational and cultural services.
- **Participation in decision-making**: includes maximising participation in elections and working with residents when making plans and setting priorities.
- **Healthy lives**: includes good healthcare, the disabilities and illnesses residents must live with and the level of good health in the area.
- **Physical surroundings**: includes access to transportation, parks and green space, public meeting spaces, and good air quality.

Across the 31 NIAs, there are 15 'neighbourhood planning tables', essentially boards that are made up of local residents, businesses and councillors, community agencies, and public sector workers[31]. These tables meet frequently to identify the needs and priorities of the community and put forward actions to support neighbourhood well-being in accordance with the aforementioned framework. Each table is supported by a Community Development Officer (CDO) – they have the role of connecting local residents with key decision makers in the community, so that goals and priorities are rooted in local context[32]. This allows for policy to react quickly to the needs of communities whilst allowing residents to lead the way on how the area should be governed and improved. Having a figure who 'anchors' the community in such a way builds social capital and strengthens the relationships of residents with one another, as well as the community with the local authority and other community stakeholders.

Case study: Chile's Neighbourhood Recovery programme

Since the 1990s, Chile's housing policy has promoted strong subsidy programmes to provide shelter and basic services to the poorest portions of its urban population. The government provided over two million houses for the most vulnerable families in cities across the country to overcome housing deficits[33]. Presently, Chile's level of housing subsidies are some of the highest in the world. Yet this seemingly successful housing policy has also given rise to economic inequality, reinforcing social exclusion and the partition of the city according to social classes with deteriorating housing conditions, increasing crime and violence[34]. Subsequently, distrust towards the authorities has grown within underprivileged neighbourhoods[35], known as poblaciónes[36].

In 2006, the Chilean government announced the *New Quality Housing and Social Inclusion Policy* which, for the first time, set out a policy explicitly promoting social integration while promoting living conditions for the poor[37]. Designed after highly transformative governance processes in Spain and Brazil, the Neighbourhood Recovery Programme is the first targeted urban regeneration programme to be implemented in Chile's underprivileged urban areas. The programme focusses on 200 neighbourhoods across the

31 City of Toronto Council (2017) – Neighbourhood Planning Tables

32 City of Toronto Council (2017) – Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy 2020

33 Cities Alliance (2016) – A Policy to Recover Chile's Urban Neighbourhoods

34 Fernando Jimenez Cavieres (2006) – Chilean Housing Policy: A Case of Social and Spaital Exclusion?

35 Cities Alliance (2016) – A Policy to Recover Chile's Urban Neighbourhoods

36 Simon Escoffier (2017) – Policy Metaphors and Deep Local Democracy: The Case of the Chilean Neighbourhood Recovery Programme

37 Fernando Jimenez Cavieres (2006) – Chilean Housing Policy: A Case of Social and Spaital Exclusion?

country that demonstrated high levels of physical deterioration and social vulnerability, with specific objectives to re-appropriate public spaces, improve environmental conditions and socially integrate and empower neighbourhoods[38]. Neighbourhood improvement projects were designed to target the specific needs of each community by taking a multi-sectoral approach. The Programme was expected to benefit over 450,000 people over a four-year period[39].

The Neighbourhood Recovery Programme signified a crucial moment in Chile's approach to urban policy making, breaking away from Chile's traditional approach of state-led action to collaborative action between local communities and other city stakeholders.

'Neighbourhood Development Councils' empower local residents and community organisations by channelling the recovery of each neighbourhood, replacing dependency with active citizenship[40]. Distrust between people and local authorities, neighbourhoods and municipal governments, have been reduced as a dialogue between the two has been opened and encouraged in the form of feedback and debate.

The Neighbourhood Recovery Programme is deemed a success, with strengthened social networks and social integration demonstration that it is possible to contain and reverse urban deterioration and exclusion. Success factors include:

- Flexibility - governments need to be flexible in their approach to accommodate heterogeneity in neighbourhood disposition, challenges and solutions. The Chilean government's ability to adapt to differing and changing scenarios for each neighbourhood has enabled it to achieve its mission of urban regeneration.
- Active community participation – for the neighbourhood recovery process to be sustainable, local communities need to adopt and believe in recovery objectives and be involved in defining and implementing recovery strategies.
- Communication and empowerment – constant communication with resident is required for genuine participation, empowering residents to define for themselves which parts of their neighbourhood they want to recover and how while fostering the trust and solidarity that is integral to the process.
- Knowledge propagation – local actors exchange experiences and best practice with other municipalities and neighbourhood communities, ensuring success nationally.

From an initial focus on physically upgrading the neighbourhoods, the Neighbourhood Recovery Programme has evolved to confront the profound social issues of in the once vulnerable poblaciónes. The policy now actively promotes equality and people's right to their city in accessing public spaces, public goods and other infrastructure. At the second International Neighbourhood Recovery Forum in 2008, the then Minister of Housing and Urban Development (MINVU) said, "The Programme challenged us to innovate a different form of making public policy. For the first time, along with investing in physical works, MINVU dared to work on strengthening the social fabric"[41].

38 Cities Alliance (2016) – A Policy to Recover Chile's Urban Neighbourhoods

39 Ibid

40 Ibid

41 Ibid

Case study: Participatory Budgeting in Seville, Spain

Taking inspiration from the model set by Porto Alegre in Brazil, the city council of Seville introduced participatory budgeting in 2004. The city has a populace of 713,000 and its areas are divided into three levels: neighbourhoods, districts and the city in general. It has been touted as an example *par excellence* of how participatory budgeting practices can 'deepen democracy'[42]. Each level has its own unique deliberative 'assembly'. The neighbourhood assembly is intentionally left open to all residents, who can make budgeting proposals and elect delegates to represent them at the district and city-level assemblies[43]. At these higher levels, delegates prioritise the proposals of the neighbourhood assembly in accordance with an agreed upon 'social justice criteria'[44]. This sets up a last rundown of proposals and it is incorporated into the city's budget ready for implementation.

Other than the structure of PB in Seville being, highly interactive, radically democratic and entrenched in grassroots practice, participatory budgeting campaigns in Seville are publicly advertised in local newspapers and TV channels – to maximise awareness and engagement[45]. This is a testament to the initiative's firm commitment to inclusivity and 'informative democratisation'[46]. Moreover, neighbourhood assemblies provide participants a wealth of information on participatory budgets, where funding can be directed as well as what the previous budget consisted of. It was also dedicated to 'gender mainstreaming' that ensured that half of the positions within the PB project, as well as half of the delegates elected, would be women – to better represent the city's general population[47]. All residents being targeted to participate in an inclusive and well-informed way has seen municipal funds successfully redistributed towards neighbourhoods most in need, local communities connecting more with one another and the city's administration, as well as empowering communities and inspiring a sense of civic pride across Seville.

Despite strong participation by women and an overall admirable inclusivity strategy, the initiative found it difficult to engage ethnic minorities or those from more socially deprived areas. In fact, there was a notable over-representation of association, union and political party members[48]. Citizens not regularly engaged in politics generally spoke less at assemblies or would opt not to attend at all – meaning that was an increased risk of the outcomes of PB in Seville being ideologically inclined. Furthermore, the process is long and drawn out and some citizens simply do not have the time. Due to this time-consuming process, participants that became delegates and the councillors themselves would be required to be paid a salary – making the process less efficient and more expensive to run[49]. However, since its implementation period, it has been suggested that digital means could be used to make the process more streamlined and to allow more citizens to participate without having to give up their free time[50].

---

42 Cabannes & Lipietz (2018) – Revisiting the democratic promise of participatory budgeting in light of competing political, good governance and technocratic logics

43 Font & Naverro (2013) – Personal Experience and the Evaluation of Participatory Instruments in Spanish Cities

44 Krenjova & Raudla (2013) – Participatory Budgeting at the Local Level: Challenges and Opportunities for New Democracies

45 Moir & Leyshon (2012) – The design of decision-making: participatory budgeting and the production of localism

46 Cabannes (2015) – The impact of participatory budgeting on basic services: municipal practices and evidence from the field

47 Allegretti & Falanga (2016) – Women in Budgeting: A Critical Assessment of Participatory Budgeting Experiences

48 Sintomer, Herzberg & Röcke (2008) – Participatory Budgeting in Europe: Potentials and Challenges

49 Smith (2009) – Democratic Innovations: Designing Institutions for Citizen Participation

50 Francés, Puertas & Ganuza (2018) – 20 Years of Participatory Budgeting in Spain

LOCALIS

Localis
Vox Studios, V.311
1-45 Durham St
London, SE11 5JH

0870 448 1530
info@localis.org.uk

localis.org.uk

Kindly sponsored by:

Local Trust