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Discovery Report

Public Square | Calderdale Metropolitan Council

Year One, 2019

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Our Goals

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Many people are working to improve local decision making and citizen participation, but this innovative work is often dispersed in different projects, authorities and disciplines. It therefore can't realise its full potential to bring about system change.

Public Square is a two-year action research programme that responds to this by investigating what is needed to improve participation as a system. In its first year, Public Square is working with a small number of councils to develop and pilot innovative approaches to citizen participation in decision making.

Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council

There is a growing view that improving outcomes in today's climate, and in response to residents' expectations, depends on strengthening the system infrastructure that underpins services in a locality and a fundamental shift to a place-based collaborative approach.

At the start of the start of this process Calderdale Council's aim is to host a 'big conversation', a genuine dialogue with the residents of Calderdale during the Summer 2019.

The topic could cover things such as;

- What the role of the council should be going forward; recognising that the council, and local democracy, have changed and are still changing. And exploring how this links to 'place'?
- What is the informal agreement between the council and residents, what would a partnership look like?
- What role residents have in Calderdale?
- How this could work for all residents, businesses, visitors etc?
- Whether digital can enable better collaboration?

How this project works is just as important as what this project does. It's important that all methods support the Calderdale Vision, including that Calderdale is a place where you can realise your potential whoever you are, whether your voice has been heard or unheard in the past. It needs to be inclusive and ensure parity of esteem in all sectors including the engagement of young people. And it must exemplify the value of kind and resilient in the way we run the big conversation.

The approach will be co-designed and the conversational activities will be a deliberative dialogue as opposed to consultative, and utilise both on and off line methods. Dialogue will be informed by open and transparent information, which will be shared widely and

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the analysis and synthesis of the deliberations will be co-produced by residents, whilst ensuring that data is openly accessible by default.

Our Research Questions

From the discovery phase we wanted to understand more about the context we'd be working in to inform subsequent co-design activities.

1) What are the characteristics of Calderdale as a place? This would help us understand what approaches might be suitable, and consider whether findings could be applicable in other similar contexts.

2) What are the council's requirements and aspirations for this process? Including:

- What is the council's ambition for these conversations?
- What resources does the council have available for these?
- How will findings be used?
- How does this fit into the councils wider work?
- What are the barriers and enablers for creating a meaningful process?

3) What possibilities are there? What can be learnt from elsewhere? Looking at what's been done elsewhere, and the range of tools and approaches out there, would help us think creatively about how this conversation could be approached.

What We've Done

Understanding Calderdale as a place and the council's aspirations

We started with a set of basic questions to answer about Calderdale as a place, which we investigated through desk research and conversations with council staff and senior leadership to help us understand more about the council's aspirations and needs. This would then be built upon through subsequent co-design activities involving the council and residents.

At the start of the project we also attended a 'We Are Calderdale' event, which brought together a wide range of local stakeholders to celebrate the progress which had been made towards achieving Vision 2024, and recognise the challenges still faced as a place. It also provided an opportunity to hear about shared ambitions for the next 12 months. Talks at the event where a great opportunity to learn more about Calderdale and the council, and we also ran a stall asking about what's working well, and less well, about local democracy. This gave us an opportunity to talk to a range of local groups and learn more about the current reality.

What possibilities are there? What can be learnt from elsewhere?

We carried out some investigation into relevant approaches that have been used elsewhere. As part of this we interviewed Andy Paice, who has been working with Newham Borough Council to deliver neighbourhood assemblies across London, and the promising work one of Calderdale's near neighbours has done within their 'Wigan Deal' (described as a case study below).

Drawing from our wider experience we created a slide deck of different approaches, including options for using digital tools for building conversations for ideas and inspiration during the co-design workshops.

What We've Learned

Understanding Calderdale as a place

Calderdale is a metropolitan district which, for an English district is large in area, but small in population. It sits in the South Pennines and over four fifths of its area is rural. It

includes the towns of Brighouse, Elland, Hebden Bridge, Sowerby Bridge, Todmorden and Halifax, which is by far the largest with a population of 80,000 people in the 2001 census[1]. It is close to the cities of Bradford and Leeds, to which many people travel for work and leisure. Many of its towns are squeezed into the valley of the River Calder. Calderdale is in a sense a 'made-up place', a council area that covers several distinct places rather than referring to a pre-existing geography.

There is strong community spirit within many of these communities, for instance Todmorden is the home of Incredible Edible. The council has worked hard to establish pride in a different way of doing things. Their Vision 2024 is set out under the themes of Distinctiveness; Kindness and Resilience; and Talented and Enterprising. And there's a strong sense of pride in the natural beauty of this piece of Yorkshire.

There has been a recent history of severe floods in the area which was highlighted to us as something that has impacted the relationship between residents and the council as it necessitated residents taking on a greater role in order to look out for their communities.

Structure and Politics

Calderdale is a Metropolitan Borough Council and constituent council of the West Yorkshire Combined Authority. It is divided into 17 electoral wards[2].

Over recent decades Calderdale has experienced many periods of no overall control, and has been held by both the Conservatives and Labour. The last period of no overall control stretched from 2002- 2019. In the 2nd May 2019 local elections, while we were already working with Calderdale, the council became Labour controlled, following a gain of four seats.

In the 2018 local elections the average turnout across wards in Calderdale was the second highest of the UK's 36 Metropolitan Districts (40% - behind Trafford on 43%).[3] Turnout varied between 53.6% in Calder ward and 29.7% in Town ward.

Budget

To achieve a balanced budget the council requires savings of at least £980,000 in 2019/20 in addition to those agreed in previous years. Government funding for local authorities over the next few years has not been confirmed, but it's anticipated that

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[1] https://www.calderdale.gov.uk/v2/residents/health-and-social-care/joint-strategic-needs-assessment/calderdale-demographic-information

[2] https://dataworks.calderdale.gov.uk/wards-datasets/

[3] *Electoral data - Local-Elections - May 2018* Dataset available to download at: https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/who-we-are-and-what-we-do/elections-and-referendums/past-elections-and-referendums/england-local-council-elections/results-and-turnout-2018-may-england-local-elections

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further savings of £4.8million will be required in 2020/21 and £5.3 million in 2021/22[4]. During the period of this project the council has been undergoing restructuring.

Demographics

Calderdale was estimated to have a population of 210,100 in 2018[5] and is one of the smallest metropolitan boroughs by population.

To understand how Calderdale compares to others areas we have examined how aspects of Calderdale's demographic data compare to the average across the wider set of Local Authorities.

> **Age -** Compared to all other local authorities[6], the most pronounced difference in the spread of ages within Calderdale is the smaller proportion of people in their 20s (16% less for men and 18% for women). In general Calderdale has a greater proportion of people aged from 0-19 and from 40-70, and fewer than typical in the range between these groups. There are also fewer people than expected aged 80 and over (though this is solely due to smaller proportions of women in these age groups). Compared to the other metropolitan districts[7], there are less than expected of everyone below 40, and more than expected of most age groups above 40.

> **Ethnicity -** According to the 2011 census 86.7% of people within Calderdale describe themselves as White British. 8.3% of the population describe their ethnicity as Asian/Asian British ethnicity, the majority of whom (6.8% of the total population) as Pakistani.

> **Deprivation and Employment -** The Index of Multiple Deprivation measures deprivation of areas within England. The following description of this measure is taken from the official guide to these statistics:

>> The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2015 is the official measure of relative deprivation for small areas1 (or neighbourhoods) in England.

>> The Index of Multiple Deprivation ranks every small area in England from 1 (most deprived area) to 32,844 (least deprived area).

>> It is common to describe how relatively deprived a small area is by saying whether it falls among the most deprived 10 per cent, 20 per cent or 30

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[4] https://www.calderdale.gov.uk/v2/council/budgets-and-spending/approved-budget-2019
[5] https://www.calderdale.gov.uk/v2/residents/health-and-social-care/joint-strategic-needs-assessment/calderdale-demographic-information
[6] https://research.mysociety.org/sites/explorer/la/local_auth/item/calderdale/demographics/
[7] https://research.mysociety.org/sites/explorer/la/local_auth_md/item/calderdale/demographics/

per cent of small areas in England (although there is no definitive cut-off at which an area is described as 'deprived').

To help with this, deprivation 'deciles' are published alongside ranks. Deciles are calculated by ranking the 32,844 small areas in England from most deprived to least deprived and dividing them into 10 equal groups. These range from the most deprived 10 per cent of small areas nationally to the least deprived 10 per cent of small areas nationally.

You can use this information to describe the relative level of deprivation in an area.[8]

Calderdale has a relatively even spread across these deprivation deciles. Compared to all local authorities decile 6 is atypically high and decile 10 (least deprived) atypically low[9]. Compared to all metropolitan districts, deciles 6 and 7 are untypically high with no other significant differences[10].

Figures for 2018-2019 show 4% of Calderdale as unemployed, which closely mirrors the average for Great Britain[11].

Understanding the council's requirements and aspirations

This project started with a quite broad and unformed ambition for a conversation between the council and its constituents about the future of Calderdale, which would allow an exploration of how the council and citizens could work together better in the future. There were several strands that were explored to reach a clarity of purpose for the project whilst remaining explorative and experimental.

- There is a requirement that the council consults on its budget, and it is facing difficult decisions about what can be afforded. At the same time there was a desire to explore the relationship between residents and the council from a more positive perspective - thinking about what could be achieved by the council and residents working together differently. There was a risk that this would be lost if the conversation was approached from a starting point of the cuts being faced.

- There was also some discussion about how to strike the balance between open-ended conversations with residents that could explore their priorities and

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[8] The English Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2015 – Guidance. Accessed at: The English Index of Multiple Deprivation
(IMD) 2015 – Guidance
[9] https://research.mysociety.org/sites/explorer/la/local_auth/item/calderdale/english-imd/
[10] https://research.mysociety.org/sites/explorer/la/local_auth_md/item/calderdale/english-imd/
[11] https://www.calderdale.gov.uk/v2/residents/health-and-social-care/joint-strategic-needs-assessment/calderdale-demographic-information

aspirations, and engaging residents on more focussed topics that could more straightforwardly feed into the council's work.

These were important questions being grappled with about a significant piece of engagement for the council. This was a complicated context for our work to plug into. There is not currently a single place where engagement is held within the council, which added to the complexity of plugging into this context.

From the start it was decided that this project would involve co-design with residents. Timeframes around purdah for forthcoming local elections meant that our first co-design workshop happened at a very early stage in the process. At this point some of these discussions about approach were still ongoing.

Over this period we established a clearer picture of the council's aims:

-   The conversation should involve a wide range of citizens, not just those most likely to speak up.
-   Conversations about future priorities for the borough should be informed by evidence, and deliberative.
-   There should be an online aspect to reach broader numbers.
-   Conversations should be used to establish relationships and techniques that can be drawn upon in future. Including that these can be drawn on by local partners, not just the council itself.

What possibilities are there? What can be learnt from elsewhere?

Ahead of the first co-design workshop we created some slides to talk through possibilities for building this conversation.

One slide deck looked at ways of building discussion within offline spaces. Some examples are shown below. Click here to can access the complete slide deck.

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Scenario games

- Card games or other games with scenarios that depict pressures and issues for Calderdale
- Work through potential solutions and options

Community mapping

- Community records for itself the assets it has and creates a map of its own assets
- Valuable way to understand the extent of assets and where communities feel there are gaps

Calderdale goggle box

- Capturing views of different people by playing them film about Calderdale
- Film creates opportunities for people to talk afterwards
- Screenings of film across Calderdale.
- Facilitated sessions recorded as podcasts or more films.
- Shown by local news outlets/local TV as part of wider engagement activity
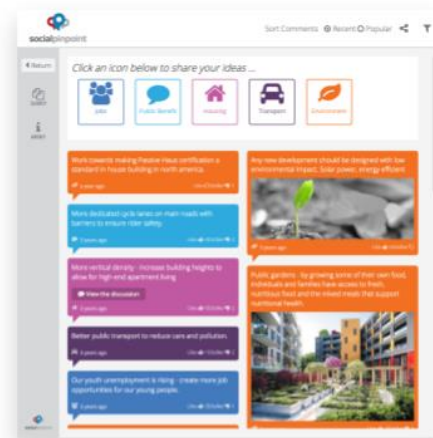
Another introduced some of the different digital tools that could be used to build discussion online. Some examples are shown below. [Click here to access the complete slide deck.](link)

We also looked into some promising examples from elsewhere. In Newham a cycle of neighbourhood assemblies and working groups have been set up to involve residents in creating strategies for local neighbourhoods. These have been promoted towards

different sectors of the population to involve a broad demographic. You can find out more about this case study through our blog post at: https://www.thepublicsquare.org.uk/2019/05/31/putting-community-neighbourhoods-in-the-driving-seat-in-newham/

Another relevant case study is the Wigan Deal, which we've written up a case study of below.

Case Study: The Wigan Deal	An example often mentioned in the context of changing relationships between council and citizens is the Wigan Deal. This label is used to cover a range of activity, but at its heart has been the shift to more exploratory 'asset-based' conversations between front-line staff and residents. This shift is about recognising people's unique desires and strengths and realising that people can often be empowered to tackle their own problems, rather than having to fit into one-size fits all services. Training in this shift in approach started with social workers but has been rolled out to all council staff and some of the council's partners. The change has been accompanied by an improvement in outcomes despite the council facing huge cuts. This change has been supported by a culture of giving staff the flexibility and permission to act on what they hear. The council has also drawn up an agreement between the council and residents to emphasise the two-way relationship that is needed to create a thriving community (shown below).

Sources:

The Kings Fund (2019) *A citizen led approach to health and social care: lessons from the Wigan Deal*. Access at: https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-07/A%20citizen-led%20report%20final%20%2819.6.19%29.pdf

Becca Heron and Kathryn Rees, *Overview of the Deal* [Presentation]. Accessed online: https://www.publicservicetransformation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/180524-PTSA-presentation.pdf

What is The Deal? [Webpage] Accessed online: https://www.wigan.gov.uk/council/the-deal/the-deal.aspx

Next Steps

The next stage of this work is a co-design process which will bring together a group of residents and participants from the council for two co-design workshops. The first of these will come up with prototypes for building Calderdale Conversations. The second will refine these and come up with plans for implementing these.

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These prototypes will then be used as part of a series of conversations the council is launching and we will provide training for those who will be delivering and evaluating these activities.

We will create a write-up of these prototypes activities, and gather feedback about how they worked from the people who've trialled them and use this feedback to reflect and share learning about the approaches used.