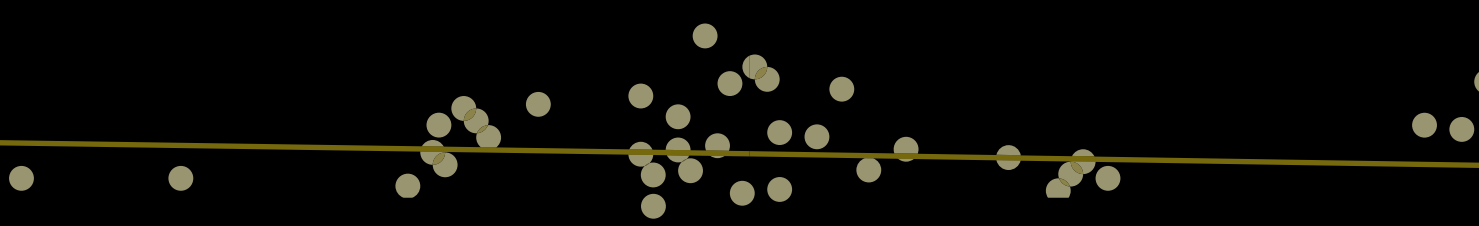


# Citizen engagement: testing policy ideas for public service reform



Prepared by

**Ipsos MORI**

## About the 2020 Public Services Trust

The **2020 Public Services Trust** is a registered charity (no. 1224095), based at the RSA. It is not aligned with any political party and operates with independence and impartiality. The Trust exists to stimulate deeper understanding of the challenges facing public services in the medium term. Through research, inquiry and discourse, it aims to develop rigorous and practical solutions, capable of sustaining support across all political parties.

In December 2008, the Trust launched a major new **Commission on 2020 Public Services**, chaired by Sir Andrew Foster, to recommend the characteristics of a new public services settlement appropriate for the future needs and aspirations of citizens, and the best practical arrangements for its implementation.

For more information on the Trust and its Commission, please visit [www.2020pst.org](http://www.2020pst.org)

To share your views on the Commission's ideas, please visit [www.your2020.org](http://www.your2020.org)

Published by the 2020 Public Services Trust, May 2010

2020 Public Services Trust at the RSA  
8 John Adam Street  
London WC2N 6EZ

ISBN 978-0-9565031-8-3 Ipsos MORI rpt PDF

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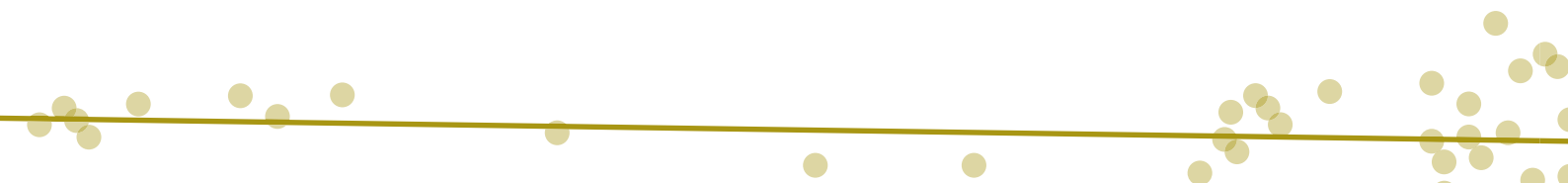
*at the* RSA

Citizen engagement: testing policy  
ideas for public service reform

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## Acknowledgements

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The 2020 Public Services Trust would like to thank the Department for Communities and Local Government for its support through the Empowerment Fund. We believe that the insights yielded by this research will contribute to the Fund's objectives of giving people real power, control and influence over the decisions that affect them and their communities.

We would also like to thank the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, who have supported this work as part of their commitment to the Trust's research into equality and social cohesion.

Our particular thanks go to the team at Ipsos MORI who worked closely with us to design the research, and then conduct the fieldwork and compose the report. At every stage they have been more flexible, professional, insightful, creative and fun to work with than we could ever reasonably have expected.

## Foreword

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This qualitative research report by Ipsos MORI gets under the skin of public attitudes to public services. We know from the evidence gathered for us by Ipsos earlier this year, and published in partnership with the RSA,<sup>1</sup> that the public value public services highly and are wary of reform which might threaten their relationship with them. In this, the second phase of the research for the 2020 Public Services Trust, we probe the values and judgments underpinning these attitudes, as well as testing responses to specific proposals.

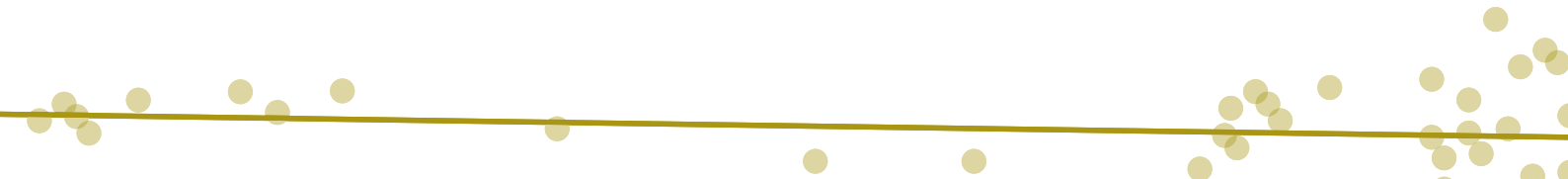
Public service reform is the flip side of the deficit and rising demand pressures. There is a £40bn black hole in public finances that will have to be filled over the next four years. Simply maintaining existing services and commitments, and caring for an aging society could add 6% to the proportion of GDP which has to be spent on public services. Unless the public is willing to accept levels of taxation at unprecedentedly high levels in the future, change must come. Yet the public has been denied the debate it deserves on what change should look like.

The banking collapse and the expenses scandal have pushed voters and politicians into a cycle of fear and loathing – with politicians afraid to broach tough choices; and the public deeply dubious about politicians' honesty and judgement. A sense of disengagement between citizens and decision makers ran through the discussion groups. Citizens feel that 'government' or 'managers' do not really understand the real needs of individuals and communities, leaving them with a sense of being removed from their own services. It seems reasonable to suppose that this lack of trust is fostering a general wariness of reform, in particular ideas that threaten uniformity and predictability.

But it needn't be this way. It's not that voters won't support reform. Rather, reform demands clear leadership that engages the public in a realistic discussion about the pros and cons of change. This research suggests the route that it could take, exploring the types of ideas which are most likely to be attractive and the conditions that the public will want to see satisfied.

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<sup>1</sup> Ipsos MORI (2010) 'What do people want, need and expect from public services?' Report prepared for the 2020 Public Services Trust, available at [www.2020pst.org](http://www.2020pst.org)



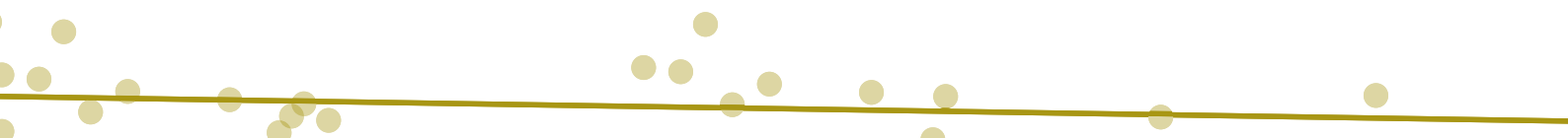
For public service changes to be acceptable to citizens they need the following attributes:

- Security and fairness – the main finding is how deeply attached voters are to the values of security and fairness which they see as underpinning public services. Politicians would undermine these at their peril. Any reform to public services will have to maintain their essential characteristics – providing a safety net and support, with processes and outcomes which are seen to be fair.
- Local control – people are receptive to changes which would increase local control over public services. However, voters want the reassurance of knowing that there are limits to localism, within a national framework of standards so that central government can step in if necessary to protect citizen's national rights.
- Citizen control and voice – Individual budgets are a popular idea; but there are fairness concerns, with people worrying that the confident middle classes might benefit, while those from lower social economic groups or marginalised groups might struggle to make this work for them.
- Supported choice - Citizen advisers are popular, partly because of their potential to offset the risk that only the most able and advantaged citizens will be able to navigate services and get the best from them.

For the 2020 Public Services Trust, the significance of these findings lies in what they show about the need to develop concrete examples of change, to build on where successful innovation is already taking place and the need to have a model of transformation which is based on consent. Working with the grain of public opinion may mean piloting change in non-core services, where our participants were less resistant to change and more willing to consider adopting a new role. The findings of this research will feed into the next stage of our work, which will move from the general to the particular, by looking at how our citizen-centred principles could be applied to reform in welfare, education, health and public safety.

**Ben Lucas**

Director, 2020 Public Services Trust



## Executive summary

### About this research

Ipsos MORI was commissioned by the 2020 Public Services Trust to carry out qualitative research to understand what people want, need and expect from public services. This report discusses the findings from the second stage of this research, which comprised 13 extended discussion groups designed to explore what people value in public services, as well as their views on several Commission-generated policy ideas. It builds on the findings of the first stage, a literature review which drew together Ipsos MORI's historical data on public attitudes to a range of public services, and which has been published in partnership with the RSA<sup>2</sup>.

### Key findings: what people value in public services

For those who make and shape policy on public services, it is important to understand 'where the public are' in their perceptions of public services. This research explores what people value in public services, examining views on a number of provisional, Commission-generated policy ideas for what they have to tell us about people's underlying preferences, values and concerns.

*...so they sort of enable society to exist - is what Public Services do. We're talking about a safety net...*  
Male, 25-39, Oxford

- **Security** is at the core of what people value in public services, and people are unwilling to trade this off against other considerations. There is certainly a desire for services to be high quality, rather than just a basic standard, and to be more flexible and responsive to our individual needs. However, the safety net that public services provide is seen as the core value of having

such services, and trumps other considerations when people are asked to trade off different aspects; they want greater flexibility, but not at the expense of the safety net.

- **Fairness** is also at the core of what people value in public services. It is very important to participants that public services are delivered fairly and provided to the 'right' people. However, there are differing views on what fairness means, and these views vary depending on the particular service or policy idea under discussion. The same person can argue that one type of fairness is appropriate for a particular service, while also feeling that a different kind of fairness is important for another service. Three types of fairness that emerge from discussions again and again are: fairness as uniform standards across the country; allowing varying standards to ensure local communities get a 'fair deal'; or being fair by allocating resources depending on how deserving different groups in society are. These different conceptions of fairness are often in tension. However, it is clear that policy ideas that fail to meet some combination of security and fairness tend to be poorly received or rejected out of hand.
- Finally, there is a common desire for public services to **recognise** and **respond** to specific citizen need, for example in local areas or for particular groups in society, and for **services to provide the best possible experience** for those people that interact with them. While achieving the core values of security and fairness may make public service arrangements acceptable to the public, responsiveness and experience of services are also hugely valuable to the public. A public service arrangement which satisfies all four of these values may not only be acceptable, but also be an arrangement to which people aspire.

<sup>2</sup> Ipsos MORI (2010) 'What do people want, need and expect from public services?' Report prepared for the 2020 Public Services Trust, available at [www.2020pst.org](http://www.2020pst.org).

## Key findings: testing policy ideas

Participants debated nine provisional policy ideas that had been generated by the Commission on 2020 Public Services. Discussion of the nine ideas provides further insight into people's underlying preferences, values and concerns about public services.

## Local decision-making

Ideas around the theme of 'Local Decision-Making' related to greater local variation and control, through giving groups of local public service users or professionals control over the services they use, whether through alternative decision-making mechanisms or by allocating specific budgets.

- Ideas relating to local control tend to be welcomed initially, for the sense of empowerment they are seen to provide for local people and frontline staff.
- There is unease, however, about interest group capture. People express concern that those who are most vocal, able to influence and most likely to make the effort to get involved – the educated middle classes – will inevitably have disproportionate influence over the local area or service at stake. It is seen as important that schemes which promote greater local variation also encourage diversity and are representative of the local community as a whole.
- Participants are often unsure about how local decision-making would work in practice; how would communities manage to reconcile differences of opinion and deal with competing preferences?
- Many participants acknowledge that they would probably not personally get involved in such schemes, and would not want the responsibility of making budgetary decisions themselves. Nonetheless, they do welcome the possibility of having some power of veto over what happens locally, enabling their voices to be heard if they do not agree with the decisions made. This fits with a key finding of Ipsos MORI's wider research into public attitudes to empowerment and responsibility, that 'feeling able to influence' is often more important to people than getting involved in practice is.
- Postcode lotteries are seen by many as a drawback of greater local variation, with some concerned that this may lead to arbitrary differences in the services people receive depending on where they live. However, views are mixed; for co-operatives, for example, there are those who feel that having decisions taken at a local level by people engaged with a service should improve equity rather than diminish it.

The issue of local decision-making receives further consideration in the 2020 Public Services Trust publication 'Delivering a Localist Future: A route-map for change.'<sup>3</sup>

## Resources and the individual

Ideas around the theme of 'Resources and the Individual' related to greater **individual control over resources**, whether information or money.

- These ideas are attractive to many because of the greater control and sense of empowerment they are seen to provide for individuals. However, there is concern that not everyone will be able to take decisions over budget allocation effectively or wisely, as well as unease around the potential for defrauding the system. Participants also note that some people, such as the educated middle classes, are better placed to exercise control over resources than others.
- Some participants express a real desire for help and guidance through information around and entitlements to public services at times of need. The desire for guidance is often underpinned by positive reactions to a 'personal touch', where guidance is given one-to-one and tailored to individual needs.
- Perhaps unsurprisingly, charging the public for using services is the most contentious of the policy ideas discussed. Most people oppose the idea on the grounds of fairness and concern for the less well-off, along with concerns about how the idea would actually work. However, some are able to see benefit in the idea, particularly those who are more affluent, already have private healthcare provision or who make only infrequent use of public services. Among these groups, there is recognition that user charging could ultimately deliver better standards of service while discouraging unnecessary service use and service dependency.

<sup>3</sup> Public Services Trust 2020 at the RSA. Report prepared by Shared Intelligence (2010) 'Delivering a Localist Future: A route-map for change, available at: [http://clients.squareeye.com/uploads/2020/documents/localist\\_future.pdf](http://clients.squareeye.com/uploads/2020/documents/localist_future.pdf)

## Service planning and provision

Ideas around the theme of 'Service Planning and Provision' focused on **alternative models of public service provision and different types of provider**.

- While there are some participants who perceive that the private sector may be more efficient than the public sector in delivering public services, there is concern about the profit motive and plurality of providers. Participants point to cases where privatisation of services is seen to have resulted in greater fragmentation and services becoming more difficult to navigate, such as rail privatisation. In general, participants express a sense of wanting the public sector to be good at delivering services, rather than perceiving significant value in switching to alternative providers.
- Awareness of the voluntary sector's role in delivering public services is low; participants struggle to see what the sector's role would be, and question its reliability.
- In general, participants express a sense of wanting the public sector to be good at delivering services, rather than perceiving significant value in switching to alternative providers.

## Key findings: attitudes to change

**The public are very attached to 'our' public services, despite their perceived flaws.** People can and do criticise the state of public services in Britain. However, there often emerges a sense of pride in public services - particularly around core services such as schools, emergency services and the NHS, and especially amongst groups who are heavier users of services - and a feeling that people often take 'our' public services for granted.

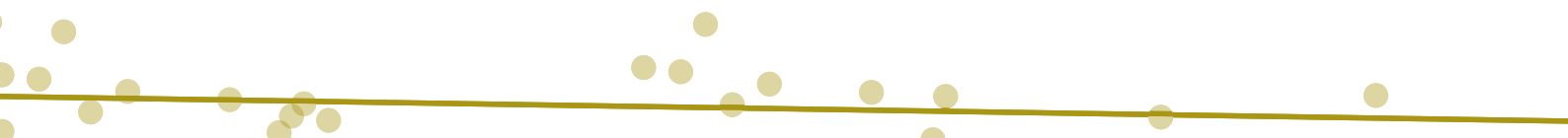
The role of key influencers - popular media representations and anecdotes from friends, family and colleagues - is significant in shaping popular perceptions of public services. This is often particularly pronounced when people do not use the service in question, instead relying on other narratives to fill the gap.

**When evaluating new policy ideas, people tend to focus on the present and the short-term.** There is a tendency to value public services for what they can do now, rather than in the future. For example, people find it hard to see clear benefit in a social insurance approach, unless the relevance to their lives now is clear and the benefits of such a scheme are differentiated from other ways of preparing financially for the future. Moreover, while the 'gut reaction' of most participants is to oppose the idea of user charging for some services, there are those who feel it becomes more acceptable if it results in quick and visible service improvements.

**If services have to change, people prefer gradual, small-scale change to radical change.** This is allied to the short-term focus already mentioned, but also relates to public concern about putting core services such as health and education in jeopardy, as well as a wider sense of loss aversion and fear of change ('better the devil you know'). Nonetheless, with difficult times ahead for public services, the lack of public appetite for change is an important challenge for those suggesting radical policy solutions to bear in mind.

**While attitudes to change in public services are conservative for the most part, our evidence suggests that people may be more willing to accept reforms in the following situations:**

- **When non-core rather than core services are at stake.** There is more willingness for experimentation with public service arrangements for what people see as non-core services, such as parks or leisure centres, than for core services such as health or education. As would be expected, the idea of changes to core services gives rise to real concern among the public. For example, while some recognise that in principle user charging for leisure services could be of benefit to them personally, since they would be able to get a better deal from the service, opposition to user charging for core services such as GP appointments is strong.
- **Where there is evidence that an alternative approach is likely to work.** This can be summed up as an 'empirical streak' in people's thinking about public services; if new service arrangements are to be put in place, people are keen to see evidence that similar arrangements have worked elsewhere, for example through piloting, or examples of success in other countries.
- **Where the benefits are clearly framed and personally relevant.** In debating the merits and drawbacks of local variation, for example, our research suggests that people are more willing to make trade-offs if they are both able to see a good case for new arrangements and able to imagine how they would work in practice. For example, some are able to see the case for local variation in services such as Children's Centres, where they feel local communities are best placed to know what is best for them; although concern is still expressed about interest group capture, nonetheless local variation in this case is not dismissed out of hand.



# Introduction

## Background and objectives

### Background and objectives

#### Background

This report presents findings from stage two of a two-stage research project commissioned by the 2020 Public Services Trust to understand what people want, need and expect from public services. It builds upon the findings of stage one – a literature review which drew together Ipsos MORI's recent historical data across all key public service areas, and which has been published in partnership with the RSA<sup>4</sup>.

Stage two of the research used extended discussion groups to give insights into the type of public service arrangements that citizens would accept or aspire to. The groups also capture responses to specific proposals used to stimulate discussion and illuminate the public's general preferences, values and concerns.

#### Objectives

The research was designed to meet the following objectives:

- Explore what help people want to live their lives in ways they value (in terms of health, security, education etc) at different times;
- Explore what the public value in their relationships with public services – why do they feel public services matter; and what do services mean to them;
- Investigate public views on several Commission-generated policy ideas, within three broad themes of importance to the Commission:
  - o Resources and the individual;
  - o Service planning and provision; and,
  - o Local decision-making.

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<sup>4</sup> Ipsos MORI (2010) 'What do people want, need and expect from public services?' Report prepared for the 2020 Public Services Trust, available at [www.2020pst.org](http://www.2020pst.org).

## Our approach

To aid discussions and provide structure, Ipsos MORI worked closely with the Trust and Commissioners to develop a discussion guide and stimulus posters (included in the Appendix of this report). The posters included an introduction to each of the ideas to be tested and examples of how the idea might be applied. These were read out to participants as well as given to them as handouts to consider in more detail.

The examples were used to enable participants to engage with the overall nature of the proposals by making them tangible, as well as to get feedback on the specific ideas presented. Moderators used these examples as a mechanism to illustrate the general themes being discussed.

Topics covered in the groups included:

- What people in Britain need to live a good life, to get participants thinking about what they value;
- What people value about public services;
- Testing of several Commission-generated policy ideas.

For the policy ideas testing, participants were briefly introduced to nine ideas, which were then placed on posters around the wall of the room. They were given three stickers each: two green, which they were asked to allocate to the ideas they most preferred, and one red, which they were asked to allocate to the idea they felt was the most contentious. The most preferred and most contentious ideas, as voted for by each group, were then discussed. In later groups, the moderators then played a 'joker' to discuss a third idea, in order to ensure each of the nine ideas was discussed by more than one group.

## Methodology: sampling and recruitment

Because of the complex nature of the ideas, and the level of background information members of the public would require to be able to respond to them effectively, a deliberative research approach was deemed most appropriate for this study.

An extended discussion group allows experienced moderators to explain different aspects of the issues for discussion and challenge participants on their responses where appropriate. It gives participants time to come to a considered view which will also take into consideration the views of others in the group, which can include a cross-section of the population. Giving people the time and space to consider proposals is particularly important when the topics of discussion may be new or complex or things that people may not have thought about in a particular way previously. The group enables a cross-section of people to participate in an informal and interactive discussion and allows time for the complex issues and options for change to be explored in some detail. It enables researchers to shed light on why people have particular views, and to test the strength of people's opinions. It also enables us to provide participants with a range of stimulus materials, examples and activities to help them understand the ideas under discussion.

By contrast, a standard survey approach would not have allowed us to ensure that respondents understood the ideas or had the basic knowledge required to give opinions on the ideas in a considered manner. Additionally, a survey would not have enabled the research to drill down into the complexities of views, looking at what was driving attitudes and perceptions.

The Ipsos MORI research team considered a number of different approaches (for example, deliberative workshops involving a larger number of people and over a longer period). The final recommended approach that was adopted, however, comprised **a series of 10 extended (two-hour) discussion groups and three mini-groups**. By conducting a larger number of discussion groups and mini-groups with harder to reach audiences, rather than fewer workshops with more participants, the research team had greater flexibility to cover a range of different locations and backgrounds. By running discussions that are slightly longer than standard focus groups (which are usually around an hour and a half) we allowed more time to cover both the broad discussion about public services and more detailed discussion of particular ideas within this context.

We spoke to participants from a range of ages, social grades and ethnic groups by conducting **13 discussion groups** across the country. Groups with Asian and Afro-Caribbean participants were conducted in addition to having a representative mix in the other groups. This was to ensure that any differences in views relating to ethnicity could be captured. Where verbatim comments from these groups appear in the report, they are identified with the ethnicity of the participant. Where the participant was in one of the representative groups, it is not possible to identify the ethnicity of the participant, although the majority were white British.

The first four groups on 19th and 20th January 2010 were treated as a pilot, where we tested the approach and stimulus materials. Minor amendments were made to the discussion guide for the main stage groups, which were carried out from the 3rd to the 9th February 2010.

All groups included a mix of men and women, except for two mini-groups with first generation Pakistani and Bangladeshi participants in Tower Hamlets, where one group was all-male and the other all-female. The breakdown of the groups by age, location, social grade, ethnicity and other quotas was as follows:

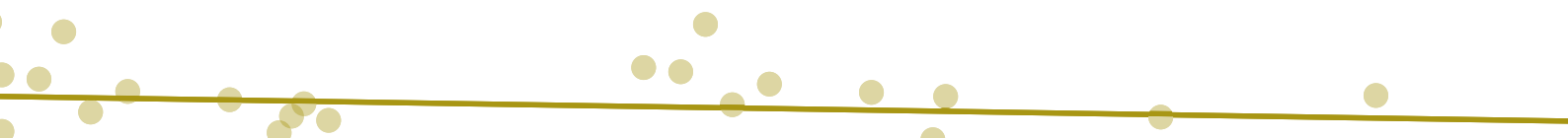
- **Ashford, Kent: three discussion groups** with participants drawn from different age groups (25-39, 40-64, 65+) and social grades (ABC1, C2DE and ABC1 respectively), all white British. To ensure that we spoke to people with a range of experience of public services, the oldest group included some disabled public service users, the middle-aged group included some participants with chronic health conditions and some parents with children still at home, and the youngest group included some parents with young children;
- **Stockport: two discussion groups** with C2DE participants, drawn from different age groups (40-64, 65+). Most were white British, although the middle-aged group also included some Afro-Caribbean participants. Some participants had chronic health conditions;
- **Oxford: two discussion groups** with participants drawn from different age groups (25-39, 40-64) and social grades (ABC1 and C2DE respectively). Most were white British, although both groups also included some Indian participants. The middle-aged group included some disabled service-users and some parents with children still at home, while the youngest group included some parents with young children;
- **Birmingham: two discussion groups with 18-30 year olds**, one with second generation Afro-Caribbean participants and the other with second generation Pakistani and Bangladeshi participants. Participants were drawn from a mix of social grades and included some heavy public service users, whether themselves or their family members.

- **London: one discussion group with young people** aged 16-24, drawn from a mix of social grades and including some heavy users of public services. **Three mini-groups** were also carried out, one with working-age high earners who were net contributors to the tax and welfare system, and the remaining two with first generation Pakistani and Bangladeshi migrants in Tower Hamlets. In the Tower Hamlets groups, some participants with a disability or chronic health condition were included.

## Interpreting qualitative research

Unlike quantitative surveys, qualitative research does not aim to provide statistically reliable data on which generalisations of public opinion can be made but instead aims to drill down into explanations of why people think the way they do. It is illustrative rather than statistically reliable and therefore does not allow conclusions to be drawn about the extent to which something is happening. Where we have used qualifiers such as 'few', 'many' and 'most', these are reflective of those who participated in the groups only.

The analysis in this report reflects the balance of views across the discussions. Verbatim comments from the discussions have been included within this report. These should not be interpreted as defining the views of every member of the discussion groups but have been selected to give a snapshot of the kinds of views expressed by individuals when different topics were discussed.



# 2

## What people value in public services

A key aim of this research is to explore what the public value in their relationships with public services. Why do people feel public services matter; and what do services mean to them? This section of the report explores what participants felt they needed in order to live a 'good life'. It then examines how this fits with what they value in public services. We also examine the importance of life-stage in shaping the meanings people attach to public services.

### What do people feel they need in order to live a 'good life'?

We first explored what people felt they needed for a 'good life'. This was designed as a broadly-drawn warm-up discussion to elicit their views, before exploring what help or assistance they felt they needed to live their lives and where public services fit into their lives in general. The exercise was not intended to draw out every single requirement for a good life, which would not have been possible within the timescales. Nor was it an in-depth discussion, since the main focus of this study is on citizens' views of public services rather than replicating work which has been done elsewhere to draw up a capabilities set – a list of citizen's central and valuable freedoms.<sup>5</sup>

#### Values for a 'good life'



6

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, the Equality and Human Rights Commission's capabilities framework, available for download at <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/fairer-britain/equality-measurement-framework/equality-statistics/>.

<sup>6</sup> Red indicates 'core qualities' for a good life and orange indicates 'additional qualities' for a good life. See pp10-11 below.

## Requirements for a 'good life'

For most, what is needed for a good life' falls into two categories. First, there are certain core requirements that people believe need to be met before the possibility of a 'good life' can even be considered. Secondly, there are many additional capabilities that enable us to move from an acceptable or tolerable life to having a good life. These should be thought of as complementary: we need to experience both basic and additional support in order to lead a 'good life', but the core requirements are seen as enabling and supporting the additional requirements.

### Core qualities for a good life

The first, and perhaps most important, capability required to lead a good life is **security**. This is a broad concept, understood to relate to protection from shocks, emergencies and misfortune, but also more positively to having comfort, peace of mind and physical and mental wellbeing. Indeed, the idea of physical and mental wellbeing is closely related to another core requirement for a good life: health. The idea of security also extends further, to being confident that you will have 'help when you need it', particularly in reference to unforeseen shocks (for example financial insecurity, illness and physical harm).

*I had - not an accident, but a kind of incident - in my car a few weeks ago, something that had never happened before. And I was lucky that, obviously, I was insured and the support I got from the company made it easier to deal with. When unexpected things come up, something that's out of your hands, you need help. You need to know that the support, the guidance, the help is there when you need it most.*

Male, 25-39, Oxford

Closely related to a feeling of security, the second core quality is **support**. This tends to be conceived of in terms of social relationships and networks of help, particularly with reference to family, friends, neighbours and local communities. This kind of support is social and even 'emotional' in character. Support is also closely related to other help that may not necessarily be available from social and family relationships.

Younger participants perceived that security and support were likely to become more important to them as they get older, but also recognised the importance of support at every stage of life. Some explicitly acknowledged and expressed gratitude for that support, whether from informal sources like families or more formal sources such as public services.

*If you want to fulfil all of your needs you need some sort of support, you need a social life. Family is important, they're your security... if you can't get it from the government you can at least get it from your family.*

Female, 18-30, Asian, Birmingham

## Additional qualities for a good life

Many participants indicated that having a good life is linked to a sense of **worth**, both in terms of self-worth and engaging in worthwhile and meaningful activities, either through work or in other ways. Self-worth is felt to stem from feeling recognised, valued and being treated with respect whether in the domestic environment, the workplace or in relation to (public) services. Self-worth also derives from feeling effective and feeling some level of influence in work and life. Further to this, some participants feel that there is a need for people to have aspirations or goals in order to have a good life.

Participants also suggested that **freedom** is a vital requirement of living a good life. Freedoms spontaneously mentioned as important include freedom of speech, movement, assembly and choice. Another important and perhaps distinct type of freedom is that of freedom from interference by other people or state intervention in the life of the individual. While the state may be part of the system that provides security and support to individuals, there are contested limits to how involved the state should be in people's lives. Overall, participants tended to prioritise a more defensive approach to freedom prioritising 'negative' freedoms (freedom from) over 'positive' freedoms (freedom to).

Many participants mentioned the importance of **education** as a means of personal improvement and development as an important component of a good life. Some also tied the idea of personal development to self-worth and engaging in valuable and useful activities. Both groups of first generation Pakistani and Bangladeshi migrants in Tower Hamlets considered education to be a core requirement – the backbone - for a 'good life'. Participants linked the idea of education very closely to social mobility and improving their current situation. For many, a good life entails leading a better life – by which they mean a good job and more money - than they currently lead, and education is seen as the primary means to achieve that end.

While all groups recognise education as important, older participants tend to reflect on the importance of education across one's life as a means to facilitate personal development and establish self-worth. Some participants, particularly those with children, stress the importance of a good education from an early age in transforming people's lives.

Finally, many participants mentioned the importance of physical space and **environment** (both aesthetically and functionally) for a good life. This was seen as particularly important in terms of accessibility and mobility, but being able to enjoy their surroundings was also thought to be vital by some. Older participants tend to emphasise the importance of a functional environment in enabling and aiding their mobility.

## What people value about public services

In the groups, the extreme scenario of no longer having public services was used in order to stimulate debate about the role that public services play in society and in the lives of individuals. Their reactions reveal just how important services are to people. A common reaction to the idea of public services no longer being there is that society would lapse into 'chaos'. The importance of public services providing order is a recurring theme mentioned across the groups; in this view, society would descend into anarchy without the structure that public services provide. No longer having public services is seen as likely to result in a lack of cohesion in society, with people 'at each other's throats' and taken closer to its extreme, even resorting to vigilantism.

Much of what people say they value about public services fits with what they see as important for living a good life overall. As we saw in the previous section, core values such as support, health and security are seen as prerequisites to being able to live our lives in Britain today. Public services are important to people in helping them to **feel secure**, providing a safety net at times in their life when they are vulnerable, for example when they are unwell, old, financially less secure or out of work. This is a core aspect that participants across the groups value about public services, and is seen as the most fundamental part of what public services are there to do. Security is also related closely to trust, in particular trust in political decision-makers to look after the most vulnerable in society.

*Public services are a safety net... you cannot get too comfortable if you do not have a safety net.*

Male, 65+, Kent

*They [the government] have the main say, so if they're the top people playing the strings, then we need to trust in them that they're going to look after us because we're the people at the bottom.*

Female, 18-30, Afro-Caribbean, Birmingham

Public services are also seen as fulfilling a **unique role**. While there are those who feel that the provision of services should be left to market forces and that the private sector should take more of a role than it does at present, there is a general sense among most that other sources of assistance and help, such as family, friends, local communities and private businesses, are not able to fulfil the same role as public services do.

*I think fundamentally there's no money in what public services do. There's nobody in the private sector that's going to take over... so they sort of enable society to exist.*

Male, 25-39, Oxford

Allied to this is a strong perception that **we take services for granted**, which emerges during the course of discussions. While participants cite both positive and negative direct experiences of different public services, the belief is nonetheless expressed that while we may complain about the state of our public services, in the main they are actually reasonably good. Many express a **sense of pride in public services**, particularly the emergency services, since these

services are seen as vital in a crisis and embody the kind of 'reactive security' people tend to value above all else.

*It's maybe because we take them for granted, and we've never really sat down and thought about why they are important... what would we do if they weren't there? It's because we know they'll always be there so we just take it for granted and sit and moan about them.*

Female, 18-30, Asian, Birmingham

*I think Britain is great for emergency medicine. I think it's fantastic the ambulances are there on the scene, they take you straight in, great surgeons, you know if there is something deathly wrong with you, they're really great. But if you are talking like mental health problems... my personal experience of friends going through mental health services, there's a lack of what's needed.*

Female, 16-24, London

While awareness of how public services work in other countries is limited, there are those who draw comparisons based on their perceptions of service standards elsewhere. For example, one participant compares the system in this country with New Zealand, perceiving the situation in Britain to be better since people do not have to pay to see a doctor. Others in the high net worth group in Hampstead, who had lived elsewhere in Europe, felt that standards in Britain were worse than those in Germany and Belgium, mentioning the cleanliness of hospital wards as a particular issue for services in this country.

*It is nothing like as good in New Zealand as it is here, that is what I found. You have to pay to go into the waiting room at the doctor's surgery.*

Male, 65+, Kent

**Equity and fairness** are also core aspects of what people value about public services, but are contested, meaning different things to different participants. Many express the need for fairness in public services in its negative sense of feeling it is not fair if others in society receive more or better public services than they themselves and their families do. This is especially the case when it comes to those groups who are perceived as less deserving of help, such as those from less wealthy backgrounds getting more assistance.

*Why can't they just make all schools the same? It doesn't matter what area you come from or what background your child has got... that way, parents wouldn't mind where they sent their children.*

Female, 18-30, Afro-Caribbean, Birmingham

As Ipsos MORI commonly finds in exploring public perceptions of services, there is a recurrent tension between the belief that more help should be provided for those with greater need and the desire that many express for those perceived as 'undeserving' not to benefit more than others from public services. Groups such as those who don't save or work, asylum seekers and immigrants and young mothers with council flats are typically identified as those who are less deserving of help.

*Public services are for people who are less fortunate as well, to help them.*

Female, 18-30, Asian, Birmingham

*I think everyone goes to the doctor for a reason. Just because they earn more money, well, well done to them, why should they have to pay more?*

Male, 16-24, London

In the next section, we examine participants' views on several Commission-generated policy ideas and how these fit with the aspects of public services they say they value.

Mobility and accessibility were key issues for the youngest and older participants in regard to fairness. The younger people we spoke to in Birmingham, for example, knew that people of their age in London were able to apply for a Freedom Pass allowing them free travel on public transport, and felt that it was unfair to have this in London but not in Birmingham. Older participants in Oxford also saw being able to get around easily on public transport as very important.

Another role for public services is in providing **guidance**. This comes out particularly strongly among the group of high-earning individuals in Hampstead, where the role that public services can play in helping people to navigate their increasingly complex lives was seen as valuable.

It is instructive to look at the fit between what participants say they value in public services and the Commission on 2020 Public Services' statement of values:

*2020 public services help us to achieve – for ourselves and each other – things that we value and can only achieve together. They help us to become the people that we want to be, living within a society we want to be part of. They put us in control of our own lives, making us more secure in the present, and more confident about the future.*

The statement of values resonates well with participants' core value for public services, the security that they provide. However, when people talk about public services the emphasis is very clearly on security in the present rather than confidence in the future, and rarely considers public services helping people to achieve their future aspirations. The sense of aspiration and collective achievement expressed in the values statement are not mentioned by participants spontaneously as things they value in public services, which may indicate that there is not currently a strong link in the public mind between public services and achieving individual and collective aspirations.

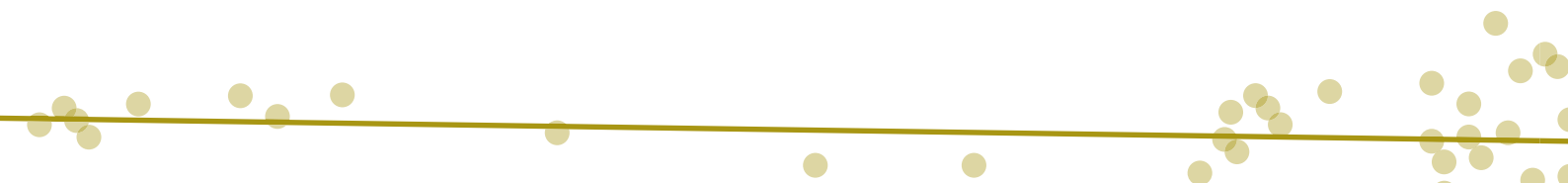
Moreover, while participants focus on security as a core value, they do not mention a role for public services in increasing their confidence about the future. The security that public services deliver is seen as a safety net providing support for people at times in their lives when they are vulnerable, rather than as a source of future confidence. This may relate to the current time of economic uncertainty and a general reluctance among participants to contemplate any major changes to public services, which we explore later in this report.

# 3

## Testing policy ideas

A key objective of this research is to gauge public responses to several policy ideas generated by the Commission on 2020 Public Services. We explore people's views on specific proposals in order to shed light on their general preferences, values and concerns regarding public services. For example, how do people view greater local variation? What are their perceptions of alternative ways of providing services, such as the private sector taking a greater role in service delivery?

In this section, we discuss each idea in turn, looking at how positively or negatively participants viewed each one, how achievable they felt it would be in practice and how equitable they saw it as being for different groups in society. For each idea, we then sum up the fit between participants' responses and what they say they value about public services overall; what do their reactions to specific proposals reveal about their underlying values and preferences?



The Commission on 2020 Public Services put forward nine ideas for discussion with citizens, which were grouped into three main themes as follows:

### **Theme A: Resources and the individual**

Idea 1: Individuals with budgets – giving service users control of money assigned for services, to allow them to decide what services they want to receive.

Idea 2: User charging – charging users of public services (either paying the full cost or part subsidised by Government) but protecting the poorest through means testing.

Idea 3: Social insurance – public service users take part in a scheme that requires them to put away a 'nest egg' to protect against life risks. The scheme pays back at a level related to the amount paid in and would be flexible enough to allow users to draw support at suitable times.

Idea 4: Citizen advisors – giving people access to advisors who provide information allowing users to access the services that best meet their needs.

### **Theme B: Service planning and provision**

Idea 5: Areas with budgets – enabling communities to take control of existing budgets to make decisions about what to fund.

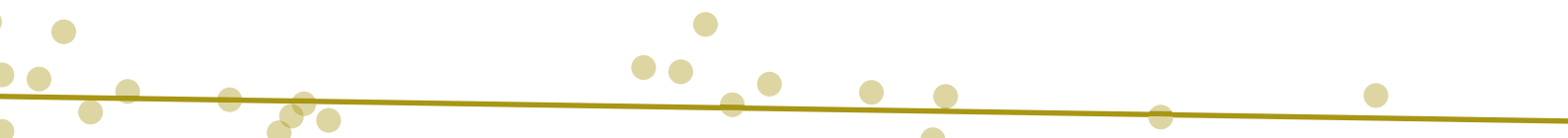
Idea 6: Cooperative ownership and control of services – giving control of public services to people who work in them, the people who use them or some combination of both.

Idea 7: Alternative service providers – allowing services traditionally done by the public sector to be done by other providers (either voluntary sector or private companies).

### **Theme C: Local decision-making**

Idea 8: Electing leaders of public services - electing heads of local public services (e.g. NHS, Police) in local elections in order to make more public services accountable and responsive.

Idea 9: Local elections, local standards – giving local areas choice about the services they provide, with less emphasis on national standards.



## Discussing the policy ideas

Participants were briefly introduced to each of the nine Commission-generated ideas by the moderator, who gave a brief description of each idea, together with relevant examples of how each might work for specific public services. The ideas were then placed on posters around the walls of the room, and individual participants allocated stickers to the two ideas they most preferred and the one idea they felt was the most contentious. As a group, participants selected two ideas for in-depth discussion – their preferred idea and the most contentious idea in their view. The moderator also selected a third ‘joker’ idea in order to ensure coverage of all ideas across the groups.

The groups discussed the selected ideas in depth around three core areas: desirability, achievability and equity. The conversation around desirability aimed to reveal why participants thought an idea was good or bad; the conversation around achievability aimed to reveal whether the idea would actually work in practice; and the conversation around equity aimed to reveal which groups in society a given idea might benefit or discriminate against.

Each group varied in the extent to which they engaged with the policy ideas under discussion. This tended to depend on participants’ familiarity with particular services and on how important they felt the services used as examples were to them. Because many of the policy ideas presented to participants were unfamiliar to participants (especially younger groups, who tended to have less direct contact with public services), some participants struggled to engage with the ideas, at least initially.

The rest of this section looks at each of the nine policy ideas in turn, setting out the key findings from our conversations with participants around the three core concepts of desirability, achievability and equity.

## Theme A: Resources and the individual

Four of the Commission’s policy ideas relate to the broad theme of resources and the individual. All four of these ideas are concerned to some extent with the effective recognition of individual need and enhancing the autonomy, control and sometimes the experience of the individual service user:

- **Idea 1: Individuals with budgets** – giving service users control of money assigned for services to allow them to decide what services they want to receive.
- **Idea 2: User charging** – charging users of public services (either paying the full cost or part subsidised by Government) but protecting the poorest through means testing.
- **Idea 3: Social insurance** – public service users take part in a scheme that requires them to put away a ‘nest egg’ to protect against life risks. The scheme pays back at a level related to the amount paid in and would be flexible enough to allow users to draw support at suitable times.
- **Idea 4: Citizen advisors** – giving people access to advisors who provide information, allowing users to access the services that best meet their needs.

## I. Individuals with budgets

### Description

Enable more citizens to take control of money assigned for their services, so that they make their own decisions about what services they want to receive.

### Example(s)

(a) Every parent has vouchers that they can 'spend' on the state school of their choice. The value of the voucher is higher if the child is from a poor family, and is boosted if the parent uses it in a school where a high proportion of pupils are from poor backgrounds.

(b) Because my child has special educational needs I have been given control of a budget to cover the cost of his / her education that I can spend in whatever way I decide (e.g. home tuition, additional learning equipment, special school, extra support within a mainstream school).

### Desirable?

Participants recognise that the policy idea of individual budgets could provide individual public service users with more control over a specific service, while also providing a better way to address the complexity of individual circumstance. While the idea is attractive to many in principle, participants perceive that it varies in desirability depending on which public service individual budgets are applied to and how able the individual service user is to make decisions effectively. In summary, there is a general perception that this policy idea would work best when the individuals making the budget decisions are responsible for deciding about their own service priorities, and capable of navigating services well; for example, where they are already familiar with the service.

### Achievable?

Individual budgets are felt to be appropriate for some public services, but are seen as impractical for others, in particular the emergency services or some other core services such as the police. This relates to these services being seen as 'reactive' core services, where the service often has to be provided at short notice in response to unexpected circumstances.

*You've got your core things...there are core areas you need to have in place.*

**Female, 40-64, Kent**

For services where usage can be planned effectively in advance, such as education services, most participants do feel that individual budgets are achievable in practice. However, it is seen as essential that the people holding the budgets must be well-informed enough

to be able to make the 'right' spending decisions, which some feel may require considerable familiarity with a particular service.

*The difficulty is in informed choice. I mean, how do you inform people of the choices that they have?*

**Female, 40-64, Kent**

*There's loads of things that you can access but it's just parents knowing about them. If you know about it, you're all right but when you don't, you don't.*

**Female, 18-30, Afro-Caribbean, Birmingham**

The sense prevails among participants that this idea is most appropriate for public service users who are more easily able to navigate public services, in particular more educated and vocal service users.

*It sounds as though people that are educated, that are prepared to stand up and push things through, will stand up and be counted, whereas you'll get people that won't. It's like anything, it's like the voting system isn't it? People that believe in the voting system, they will vote, other people won't.*

**Female, 40-64, Kent**

Participants point out that without appropriate support, this policy idea is likely to be practicable for only the more experienced service users. There is also concern that it may be difficult for those people who currently lack the capacity to budget effectively, for example those who are unable to read and write, or those who do not speak English well.

*I think it's basic things, like literacy and language, being able to understand English and things like that.*

**Male, 40-64, Kent**

Some participants point out that most people would probably need some sort of guidance and advice if this policy idea were to be put into practice more widely. One suggestion was that the idea could work well in conjunction with some form of Citizen Advisor (see policy idea 4, discussed later in this report). The Citizen Advisor would be well-placed to provide the kind of support that many public service users are perceived to need in order to take advantage of their individual budget effectively.

Without effective guidance around how to make informed spending decisions, there is some feeling that individual budgets would not be spent in the best way. Participants feel the problem of effective budget allocation may become more pronounced when one person is responsible for allocating the individual budget of another service user, for example parents making decisions about their children's education, or carers for the person they care for.

*Your parents don't necessarily know what help you need... [it should be] down to the school or whatever service you're using because they know what you need on the basis of your education.*

**Female, 18-30, Afro-Caribbean, Birmingham**

Concern is also expressed about the possibility of fraud, based both on personal experience and general perceptions that not all individuals would spend the money as it is intended.

*I know a little girl who gets direct payments and I know her father doesn't use that money, I know all these things are audited and that, but he doesn't use that money... He goes to a separate company to get the care, but he also pays somebody privately... It's a bit of a dodgy grey area.*

**Female, 40-64, Kent**

*Now if they put that cash in their hands, responsible parents will spend it, others may not. Others may just waste it on a Playstation or whatever, you know.*

**Male, 40-64, Kent**

## Equitable?

Of the two examples put to participants, the second is seen as a more acceptable manifestation of the individual budgets idea. Participants see it as reasonably equitable, since it is simply concerned with giving greater control over existing resources to an individual user of public services, without any suggestion that the individual receives more or less money than anyone else. They also deem a child with Special Educational Needs (SEN) as 'deserving' of support and feel it is appropriate in this case for a parent to make decisions on their child's behalf.

*I think if the child has special needs they should have more money, because it's going to cost more, but I don't think the socio-economic group should make any difference, because each child should have equal opportunity.*

**Female, 40-64, Kent**

The first example is more contested, for two reasons. Firstly, the suggestion that more money would be made available to those from poorer families or if the voucher was used in a school with a higher proportion of pupils from poorer backgrounds is perceived by many as unfair. In this instance, the fact that a child may come from a poorer background is not considered a sufficiently good reason for different treatment; participants tend to see less well-off children as not necessarily deserving greater support. There are also those who point out that more money is not necessarily the key to improving school performance, since other factors such as leadership and discipline are likely to play a greater role in driving up standards.

## Summary

The idea of individuals with budgets is an attempt to enhance the control of individual service users in order to better meet individuals' needs. How desirable participants perceived the idea to be varied across the two examples they were presented with. When the issue is about better allocation of existing resources to 'deserving' users of services, as in the example of a budget for a child with SEN, the idea is relatively uncontroversial. When the idea is about

the allocation of different levels of resources, as in the first example of vouchers for school provision, with those from less affluent backgrounds receiving more, it is seen to be more problematic. Here, the attempt to recognise and cater for individual needs better is perceived to be in conflict with public services being 'fair' to everyone, which is an important value for the British public. In trading off these values, 'fairness' prevails, and this leads most participants to reject the idea.

Participants feel individual budgets would be much more effective when appropriate guidance and information is available to enable people from all backgrounds to make informed decisions about how to allocate the money. There is also a sense that the benefits of individual budgets are clearer where they are directly relevant to individual users of services, as in the example of an individual budget for a child with SEN.

## 2. User Charging

### Description

Introduce more user charging (either paying the full cost or part subsidised by Government) in services, protecting the poorest through means testing.

### Example

- I have to pay an appointment fee to see my GP.
- I have to pay for the Fire Service to provide me with non-emergency help, like pumping out my home after a flood.
- I have to pay to drive on most major roads, and the amount is calculated on how many miles I travel.

### Desirable?

User charging is the most contentious of the ideas tested during the discussions. Many are strongly opposed to the idea, almost to the extent of being unwilling to listen to any arguments in favour of the idea. The example of user charging for GPs tends to dominate discussion, and the suggestion that this 'core' service might be changed significantly may help explain the strong reactions to this idea.

However, while the idea is generally unpopular, some participants are able to see the advantages of this approach, particularly those who pay more tax and those who are not frequent users of public services. As such, wealthier participants and those who are younger tend to be more willing to accept user charging than others, but almost all agree that the idea of user charging on top of an existing tax burden is unacceptable.

*At the end of the day I work, I pay my taxes, so I have a right to go. But if people go just because they are bored and have nothing to do then no, I am sorry, pay for it, I am not going to pay for you. I feel like I have earned, I have paid my way to be there.*

Female, 16-24, London

*User charging could work if we were paying less tax. I personally am quite sick of paying 40% at the higher end and watching other people pay nothing and just live off the government. I don't see why I have to pay all of that tax. I'm happy to pay higher, a lot higher, when I use it on a one off. But I'm not going to pay my taxes and then have user charging, that's ridiculous.*

Male, Net contributor to public services, London

## Achievable?

As well as this often strongly negative reaction, many participants express concern about the unintended consequences of introducing user charging. Those who reject the idea out of hand suggest that user charging could prompt an 'exodus' from public services. Others feel that people who are already reluctant to use services may simply avoid them because of the prospect of having to pay. For example, older people may not attend necessary GP appointments for this reason.

Many participants are uncertain about how user charging would actually be delivered in practice. For those prepared to engage with the idea of charging users for services, most do not feel people should have to pay for every visit (particularly for GP services). A common sentiment is that charges should only be applied if an individual is deemed to be abusing the service in some way, but there is little agreement as to how that level might be decided.

*I would be all in favour of saying, you know what, if you go more than five times a year and it's not for a specific problem, you need to charge for that.*

Female, 16-24, London

*It wouldn't be feeling threatened, feeling like I'd better not use it up. But literally like an upper limit so you are not going 20 times a year.*

Female, 16-24, London

Some participants suggest that user charging might be delivered through a combination of means testing (to ensure those who cannot afford to pay do not have to) and variable charges (depending on the number times people use a service). However, this kind of discussion leads to concerns that user charging would create a considerable administrative burden.

For many, the idea of user charging becomes more acceptable if the public service user misses an appointment and is deemed to have wasted the time of the doctor. However, participants again suggest that proving a service user had deliberately missed an appointment might also prove difficult.

Many participants feel that if public services are to charge users, those users demand something back from the service in question. The kind of benefit participants want to see is usually tied to 'visible improvements' to the specific service in question, or a reduction in the taxes they have to pay.

Furthermore, some participants also argue that user charging may benefit them in their current circumstances as they do not use many public services. Some think that user charging could actually improve the deal they get if it could be made to work in practice. Furthermore, some believe that charging people for using services could be 'fairer' for individuals who do not currently get a good deal from services.

*I don't think I've ever used the Fire Service to do anything, touch wood; I've never had to call them. I've called the police about three times in my entire life. I don't drive, I don't intend to drive. So, in theory, this sounds kind of good for my lifestyle.*

Female, 25-39, Oxford

*I use a lot of services so I'm not saying this for myself but I do think it would be, in theory, a fairer way of looking at it. But I agree you've got to have enough money to make those services operational...*

Female, 25-39, Oxford

## Equitable?

The often negative response to the idea of user charging particularly in response to the example of paying for a GP appointment is perhaps not surprising.

Despite the suggestion that user charging would be accompanied by means testing to protect the poorest, the idea is still perceived to discriminate against those who are less able to pay. This reaction tends to be particularly strong amongst those from poorer backgrounds and those more reliant on public services. Participants are also concerned that not everyone would be exempt from paying as a result of means testing. They worry that many who would not receive help with paying would deserve support but still struggle to afford to use the service.

Some of the examples of user charging used to describe the idea (GPs and Fire Service) would undermine free access to core public services that participants feel should act as a 'safety net' for everyone. This loss of security is felt particularly keenly in relation to health, both because health is perceived as a primary requirement for a 'good life' and because of support for the NHS and the principle of free healthcare at the point of use. For some, this extends to a very personal conception of their own identity and what it means to be British.

*If you don't have your health you don't have anything.*

Female, 25-39, Kent

*It's like the NHS and the Union Jack, they're the same thing*

Female, 25-39, Kent

The third example is a less controversial example of user charging because road users are perceived to have much greater control over the amount they drive. Participants tend to view the idea of charges for situations in which they have little control and in which they need professional help unfair to some extent.

## Summary

User charging is a particularly contentious idea because it often clashes with the importance people place on public services acting as a safety net. In addition, losing the right to free GP visits is experienced as a serious loss of entitlement. The idea of user charging for services is clearly most worrying to those who rely most on services, particularly core service like the NHS. These worries are unlikely to be assuaged by reassurances about means testing which for many participants, in particular those older participants who have experience of state pension arrangements, 'doesn't work.'

Many recognise the worth in the principle behind user charging and some feel it would provide benefits to them because they do not currently rely on services to any great extent. However, any support for user charging is based on the understanding that it would not be an 'extra' charge on top of an existing tax burden.

## 3. Social Insurance

### Description

A social insurance scheme is introduced that makes everyone put away a nest egg against some of life's major financial risks, like getting old or being unemployed. The scheme would pay people back at a level related to the amount they have paid in, and would be flexible enough to let people draw this support at times which suited them.

### Example

I choose when I take my state pension: I get more if I wait and keep paying in, and less if I stop work and retire early.

### Desirable?

Social insurance is not an idea that provokes strong reactions among participants. In fact, none of the groups selected this idea as either their favourite idea or the most contentious idea. While many can see the general benefits of preparing financially for the future, they struggle to pinpoint how social insurance is different from other products already available (whether savings products, such as ISAs, or insurance products).

Some participants are more receptive to the idea, as they feel that social insurance might provide a flexible financial solution for them and their family. This is particularly the case for those who are worried about the future or who currently feel unable to make sufficient financial provision. These participants would welcome the reassurance of a government-backed scheme that they could have confidence in to be 'safe' and enable them to readily access their money should they need it.

*You can guarantee you can get that money when you want. Usually you have to fight to get your money back [from insurance], but with this one, you put it in, you can get it when you want, you don't have to wait.*

Female, 18-30, Afro-Caribbean, Birmingham

Many participants are unclear about whether social insurance would offer anything different from what is already provided by the private sector and, in light of this, are sceptical that government should or could provide this kind of service at all. Some participants also express concerns that a government-backed scheme could be unfair to banks and other financial services providers.

*It just seems a bit vague... I think it would be quite similar to what the banks offer already. What incentive is there for the government to introduce something like this?*

Male, 18-30, Pakistani/Bangladeshi, Birmingham

*There's no niche in the market for this.*

Female, 18-30, Pakistani/Bangladeshi, Birmingham

If government is to provide social insurance, participants suggest that the product would need to differ significantly from what is already available. Three features that they feel might make social insurance a more distinctive and more attractive proposition include:

- Flexibility: Sufficient flexibility to allow people to have a great deal of control over how the money they have saved is used.
- Recognition: Participants are keen on allowing people to make contributions through behaviours others than regular salaried employment, such as volunteering or care in the community. Participants suggest that this type of recognition or 'social credit' might be especially beneficial for those on low incomes, while also providing a clear point of distinction from other products.

*I think it's good because... it doesn't mean that if we can't work, we won't get anything.*

Female, 18-30, Afro-Caribbean, Birmingham

*Say you were unemployed for six months and you're doing a voluntary scheme and you're still getting JSA, then this extra money would make a difference.*

Male, 18-30, Pakistani/Bangladeshi, Birmingham

- **Contribution:** The government making some form of contribution to increase the value of individual payments. This could be through matching contributions or by reducing taxation on money paid in to the scheme. Again, participants feel this would only work if the government's contribution is in addition to current incentives that are available.

### Achievable?

Some participants suggest that while the scheme would work, the fact that it existed might not guarantee its success. Some suggest that the scheme might be more likely to work if it is made more distinctive - for example if social credit became part of the idea - but this could in turn make the scheme difficult to administer. Other participants say they do not know how easy or not it would be to run a social insurance scheme. There are those who feel that, while it may be possible for the government to run social insurance, products of this kind are best left to the private sector.

### Equitable?

Participants have few concerns about the fairness of social insurance, as they assume it would be available to everyone who wanted to join. They are supportive of those on low incomes being encouraged to contribute in alternative ways (such as through some form of social credit).

### Summary

State backed social insurance not only offers a flexible safety net but a form of insurance that could also be used to incentivise positive behavior. This clearly relates to underlying concerns about equity, and the view that the government should help those who are willing to make a contribution (e.g. by volunteering) but not in a position to do so financially. Some participants who are more positively disposed to the idea appreciate the security of the scheme and particularly welcome the idea of social credit as a way to allow those on low incomes to build up some savings for the future. Some also suggest that social credit could act as an incentive that might result in benefits to communities through encouraging positive citizen behaviors.

However, the idea of social insurance fails to provoke any really strong reaction and there is little overall enthusiasm for the idea. Most participants do not see any need for the government to provide this service because other forms of 'insurance' are already available from alternative providers. While many people are worried about their future security, and especially their financial security, the proposed scheme does not address their concerns in a sufficiently compelling way. Participants may agree that they should make better provision for their future but the benefits of a social insurance scheme tend to be insufficiently immediate and/or personally relevant to make people keen to participate or even to see the idea in action.

## 4. Citizen Advisors

### Description

Ensure access to advisors who will help all citizens – including those from marginalised groups and those who are worse off – access the services that best meet their needs.

### Example

Every year, my local council will offer me a 'life-check' appointment with someone who can spend time with me one-on-one explaining the services that are available to me and my family and things I might be able to plan better in the future – like applying for schools or getting the training I need to do a better job.

### Desirable?

Citizen Advisors are a popular idea. Participants feel that the kind of one-to-one advice offered by the idea would be very valuable in facilitating and improving user interaction with public services. In particular, participants would welcome the opportunity to find out about entitlements they might otherwise be unaware of.

*Sometimes as people we don't know what we're entitled to. They're not going to come running to tell you...so I think having an advisor who knows all the stuff and can answer any questions... I like that idea.*

Female, 40-64, Oxford

One of the most important perceived benefits identified by participants is that individuals would be able to speak to a 'real person' rather than having to seek help and advice through other channels such as telephone or online. This is particularly the case for those participants that report having bad experiences with accessing information and advice in the past.

Participants often express uncertainty as to how this idea differs from other forms of guidance, particularly the Citizens Advice Bureau. In making a distinction between similar forms of guidance, participants suggest emphasising two elements of the idea in particular:

- **Advocacy:** The idea of Citizen Advisors as independent advocates for members of the public is particularly appealing because many participants feel they are currently not well-equipped to engage with services. They say that having an expert to advise them on how the system works - for example how to apply for services or make a complaint - would benefit them significantly.

- Frequency of access: Some participants extend the idea of advocacy, envisaging an ideal advice service that could be accessed more frequently, as and when it is needed. This flexibility is seen to be important because participants say they do not know when they might need more in-depth advice. Participants are therefore less enthusiastic about a more formal system of annual appointments but they would still welcome this as an improvement on the way advice and guidance are currently provided.

*People should be able to call on it when they need it – give them half a dozen sessions or something.*

Female, net contributor to public services, Hampstead, London

## Achievable?

Most participants think this kind of system would be achievable although some have reservations. A number worry that Citizen Advisors could not be expected to have the necessary expertise to be able to help people navigate every public service in every circumstance. Others feel limited knowledge would not be a problem, provided advisors were able to signpost people to other sources of help and guidance.

Some have concerns about a potential conflict of interest as advisors would be both working for the public sector and advocating for the public. In general, participants do not think this would be a problem, but they stress that the independence of the advisors would be crucial to the success of the service.

*I was worried that they would presumably be from the council and therefore would be working for them and would not be independent. The information should be simple and clear for the people without having to go through an intermediary.*

Male, 40-64, Oxford

A small number of participants express concerns about the additional bureaucracy they feel would be involved in running this kind of service. They wanted to be reassured that the advisors would provide something valuable that would be worth the expense of offering this kind of help to everyone.

*What I'm against is a whole swathe of advisors mushrooming up. I'm keen that the expense is kept to a minimum so the maximum goes in to the actual project... I can see a massive bureaucracy springing up on advisors and consultants and all the gobbledygook that can arise.*

Male, 40-64, Oxford

*You've got to decide how many advisors you need for how many people, if you don't get it right then people won't be able to speak to their advisor, people will be complaining and the advisor will be overworked... It's going to be very difficult for the advisor to allocate their time*

Male, net contributor to public services, Hampstead, London

## Equitable?

This idea is seen as fair, provided the service is offered to everyone. While participants acknowledge that Citizen Advisors are likely to be used more frequently by vulnerable groups, this is not viewed as a drawback. Rather, this is seen as a way of supporting those who most need assistance to access the services they are entitled to. This is based on a perception that the most vulnerable groups do not always receive the help they could, simply because they find it difficult to navigate public services.

## Summary

This idea is popular because it demonstrates many of the features that participants value in public services. Firstly, it reassures people that they are receiving everything they are entitled to from public services, something which participants feel is important.

*Most people don't know what they should be getting really. With this, you just get what you're entitled to.*

Female, Stockport

The service would also involve interacting with an independent expert who is able to respond to individual circumstances and needs. Many participants express concern that public services (and customer service generally) seldom involve this kind of interaction, and this is one of the most attractive elements of this idea.

Finally, this idea also appeals to people's sense of fairness because it is seen as particularly beneficial to those who are vulnerable and need additional help to access all the services and benefits they are entitled to claim.

## Theme B: Service planning and provision

Three of the Commission's policy ideas relate to how public services are planned and delivered. Core themes that link these ideas together are greater local and frontline control over resources and alternative modes of public service provision. This set of ideas focuses on collective or organisational responses to public service arrangements.

- **Idea 5: Areas with budgets** – enabling communities to take control of existing budgets to make decisions about what to fund.
- **Idea 6: Cooperative ownership and control of services** – giving control of public services to people who work in them, the people who use them or some combination of both.
- **Idea 7: Alternative service providers** – allowing services traditionally done by the public sector to be done by other providers (either voluntary sector or private companies)

### 5.7 Areas with budgets

#### Description

Enable communities to take control of budgets (existing money, not an additional grant) assigned to their area, so that they can make their own decisions about what to fund.

#### Example

My local council wants to make life better for families where I live, so has given us a pot of money and let us choose how to spend it. A group of residents was formed, and we decided to buy new play equipment for the park.

#### Desirable?

'Areas with budgets' tends to be a well-received idea, in part because participants often feel local people are more in tune with local need than local politicians or authorities are. Many believe, at least initially, that an area budget is exactly the sort of mechanism that will allow those most in touch with local need to act on that knowledge, which in turn could deliver significant individual and community empowerment.

Not only does the idea of area budgets make immediate sense in terms of empowering those who know most about a local area, but some also suggest the idea would improve what they perceive to be anonymous and unaccountable local government structures. Many feel they have little idea of how funds are allocated and would prefer local spending to be much more transparent.

The idea of area budgets is discussed by some in relatively idealistic terms, as trying to establish a 'voice of the people'. Indeed, many believe that the idea embodies a very important principle of people having voice in public services; 'the heart of it is really important'. However, many have serious doubts about how the idea may actually be applied and whether or not it would genuinely provide local people with a voice. Often, an initially enthusiastic response is tempered by a consideration of the practicalities of the idea, as participants become less clear on who would eventually decide how a budget is spent and on what.

#### Achievable?

Participants express concern about area budgets on three main grounds. The first of these is the extent to which the decisions taken would be representative of all in the community. Even where a 'community' can easily be identified to allocate the available budget, it is not clear to participants that the community could then be represented effectively.

*Would everybody that mattered in that community be there?*

Male, 16-24, London

There is a perceived need for an agreed way of recognising and reflecting minority interests within a community, in order that everyone's interests are represented effectively. However, participants point out that there would not necessarily be agreement on how the budget should be allocated and feel that the example provided suggests no clear process for how to decide between competing preferences.

*It's like the idea of a jury, you know, it's a nice idea but practically it is ridiculous, you don't want some... you need people who are trained in it who have a broader perspective and they represent people who can't fight for themselves.*

Female, 16-24, London

The second area of concern identified by participants is the size of the local area, since there is a sense that the more local and small a community is, the more chance this idea has of working well. Several suggest that area budgets would be more practicable if decisions were taken by small communities selected from relatively small geographical areas. This is seen to be particularly appropriate where the community in question has a clearly defined local interest, such as the example of those who live next to a local park and want to make specific improvements to the park. Smaller communities and smaller geographical areas tend to have smaller collections of interests, which, at least in theory, decrease the number of competing interests and preferences and make coming to an agreement on resource allocation easier.

*If it was a smaller area they could do a lot more, but where it is a big area I don't know because with a big area you don't know where to start.*

Male, 16-24, London

Another potential problem with the idea of areas with budgets is participation; whether or not people would actually become involved with their 'community'. Here, the size of the area that a local community covers is again felt to be important, since people are thought more likely to engage with very local issues.

Participant discussions of area budgets often contained a strong desire for evidence that the idea would work.

*If I felt there really was some kind of chance of something being affected or done and your voice could make a difference and everyone had more interest in their local area... it may be a more practical way of doing it.*

Female, 16-24, London

Where the idea can be shown to have achieved success elsewhere, participants are likely to see it as more achievable. Despite the prevailing scepticism about putting area budgets into practice, some participants from Tower Hamlets expressed confidence that that the idea would be 'practical' and 'workable' because they knew of instances of similar schemes succeeding. At the time of the discussion, the Tower Hamlets 'You Decide' campaign was being advertised in the local area.

### Equitable?

There tend to be two strands of thought around whether the idea of areas with budgets is equitable or not. A few participants can be characterised as 'engagement optimists', who say they personally would participate and also feel that others would take part. This group tends to express the view that the idea would benefit everyone because all members of the community would have a chance to say how money is allocated. Most participants, however, can be characterised as 'engagement sceptics', who feel they would not become personally involved in such ideas and do not believe most others would either. This group tends to be more pessimistic about area budgets, expressing concern that it would be prone to capture by interest groups, such as the middle classes and those who 'shout loudest'.

### Summary

For the most part, area budgets are, at least initially, a popular idea and one that people would like to see work. The idea does not threaten the safety net that people value so highly in public services; instead, it is seen as enabling different local communities to have services that are more tailored to their needs and circumstances. Participants do express concern about equity, however, feeling that it is likely to be difficult to achieve genuine representation of the views of all those in the community.

Importantly, participants feel that area budgets have a better chance of working well at a very local level, among small communities whose remit covers small geographical areas. This relates to the feeling that at a smaller scale, it becomes more likely that local communities really are best placed to know what is best for them, and the decisions taken as part of area budgets are therefore more likely

to result in positive shared outcomes for the community.

Finally, it is worth noting the power of the 'empirical streak' in public thinking about new policy ideas. During deliberation people often become increasingly sceptical of an idea, but this can shift back towards that idea being viewed more favourably where successful examples can be pointed to of how it has worked in practice.

## 6. Co-operative ownership and control of services

### Description

Make public services more like cooperatives by giving control of them to the people who work in them, the people who use them, or a combination of workers and users

### Example

A children's centre is where parents with young children can get help, advice and guidance. My local children's centre used to be run by the council, but it is now controlled by a group of governors: a third are parents with children, a third are people who work at the centre and a third are nominated members of the local community.

### Desirable?

Participants are initially positive about giving co-operatives responsibility for managing public services. They welcome an approach that includes a mix of opinions and expertise in making decisions about how services should be run. In particular, involving both front line staff and service users is seen as something public services should already be prioritising. However, as participants discuss how co-operatives might work in practice they identify a number of obstacles that mean support for this idea begins to fall away.

Co-operatives are viewed as most desirable for non-core services and for services where local variation based on an understanding of the community's needs is perceived as important. This includes the children's centre example used in the description of the idea, alongside other local services such as community centres or leisure services.

Many express concerns that 'managers' or 'government' do not really understand the specific needs of individuals and communities. Formalising the involvement of workers, users and local people through a co-operative with real decision-making power is seen as a positive step towards ensuring services are delivered with a better understanding of the needs and circumstances of local people. Having said that, other participants feel that frontline workers, users and local people should not be responsible for running services themselves, provided they have an opportunity for their views to be heard and taken into account when decisions are made.

*Personally, I would like to be able to say “well, I’m not really happy or comfortable with that”, as a suggestion, but I’m quite happy that [running the service] is not my responsibility.*

Female, 25-30, Oxford

Participants also have greater difficulty seeing how this approach would work for services that are currently provided and managed on a larger scale. This relates to the ‘security’ value in public service provision; participants are reluctant to consider radical change in services that they see themselves as relying on.

Some participants point out that giving responsibility to staff, users and other local people helps address the widely perceived problem of individuals and communities not taking enough responsibility, both for themselves as people and in the areas where they live. Indeed, a number of participants argue that they do not know how people in their community could take greater responsibility for their area even if they wanted to. They are frustrated by the way public services are currently delivered and feel that a co-operative approach could provide a mechanism for allowing staff and users (who they argue really understand how services can make a difference) to have more control over local services.

*If I knew that an organisation was going to get money that me and the organisation could use then I would definitely get involved... I would be prepared to try something that we feel would work.*

Female, 18-30, Afro-Caribbean, Birmingham

## Achievable?

While the co-operative approach to local public services is generally seen as a good idea in principle, most participants readily identify a number of practical concerns. For some, these mean that the idea would simply be unworkable in practice. Others see these issues as limiting the real world applications of a co-operative approach to those services they feel are less important.

The main concerns raised by participants are:

- **Interest group capture:** a perception that certain groups are more likely to have time, inclination and capability to get involved with local co-operatives. Some are comfortable with particular groups taking advantage of these opportunities, but most feel this could result in services not providing what everyone in an area needs.

*A lot of these things, whenever I’ve been involved in any committees, are hijacked by a certain power - the middle class - and they’ve got their own agenda that they push through at the expense of everybody else.*

Male, 25-30, Oxford

- **Dealing with disagreement:** a lack of certainty about how differences of opinion could be resolved without jeopardising the success of the co-operative. Some participants point out that disputed decisions (perhaps taken on the basis of a vote among co-operative members) could result in some people ‘walking away’ from the co-operative and perhaps not getting a service they need as a result.

*If I lose the vote, I’m not going to want to take part in it [the co-operative].*

Male, 18-30, Afro-Caribbean, Birmingham

- **Having a shared vision:** participants argue that without a shared vision for the service (whom it is for and what it is there to do) there would not be a clear basis for resolving disagreements. It is felt that this shared vision would be necessary to enable people to move beyond their own interests, irrespective of whether they agree about how the vision might be realized.
- **Accountability:** while many participants welcome individuals and communities taking greater responsibility for the services and the local flexibility this would offer, there is uncertainty about who would be held accountable if problems arise.
- **Providing oversight:** as a result of the other potential problems outlined above, many participants are reluctant to fully hand over control of services to co-operatives. They think some form of supervision or regulation would be important to ensure services are managed well in the interests of the whole community. However, some feel that building in oversight undermines the idea of giving real power to staff, service users and the local community.

*See, it sounds like a really good idea, but you still need someone looking over it... making sure it’s all equal. If only the pushy parents are there, what about the other people?*

Female, 25-39, Oxford

## Equitable?

Participants are most worried about the practicalities of making decisions based on the co-operative model. However, some of their practical concerns are linked to views of how fair a co-operative approach would be to different groups served by a particular service. The desire to guard against interest group capture, and the view that some form of oversight would be required, are both linked to ensuring services treat different groups fairly.

There are mixed views on whether fairness would be a problem for co-operatives, as some feel that having decisions taken at a local level by people engaged with a service should improve equity rather than diminish it. They stress that involving a wide range of voices in the co-operative should help address some of the concerns about fairness.

*If you get the group as diverse as you could you could try and cater  
[[for everyone in an area].*

Male, 18-30, Afro-Caribbean, Birmingham

- The jobs that used to be done by the Highways Agency are now done by a commercial transport company (e.g. Virgin Travel)
- The jobs that used to be done by the ambulance service are now done by non-for-profit health companies e.g. BUPA
- The jobs that used to be done by Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) are now done by private security firms.

## Summary

Initially, co-operatives are welcomed as a good way of giving control to local people and those who work in services. Participants feel it is important that both these groups are listened to when making decisions about services.

However, in common with other ideas for devolving power to local communities, a number of practical concerns emerge as participants discuss the details of the proposal. There appear to be two main concerns:

- **Security:** would this be a suitable approach for 'core' services that need to be relied on? Many participants are willing to consider allowing co-operatives to control services that are, by their nature, designed to improve local communities. There is little support for running key services (which people depend on in times of need or crisis) in this way.
- **Equity:** would some groups 'take over' and change services to meet their own needs at the expense of other groups? Some feel it would be unacceptable for those with time or interest in a service to shape what the service does at the expense of different types of people in the community. However, other participants see this as less of a concern, provided everyone is given the opportunity to have a say about the service in question.

Overall, views of this idea can be seen as a balance between support for decisions being made locally on the one hand and concerns about how decisions would be made in practice (and the implications when things go wrong) on the other.

## 7. Alternative service providers

### Description

Allow services that have been done by the public sector in the past to be done by other providers (either voluntary sector or private companies), as long as people who use the service continue to get what they need.

### Example(s)

- The jobs that used to be done by the parks department are now done by a voluntary sector gardening project

## Desirable?

The idea of alternative service providers tends to provoke mixed reactions, which in turn tend to be closely tied to attitudes towards private provision of public services. Asking about alternative modes of service provision tends to result in a conversation about the respective merits of public and private provision of public services, since there is limited awareness of the role of the voluntary sector in delivering public services. Many recognise that private providers often deliver better services but there is also a clear awareness that a private provider by no means guarantees a better quality service.

While there are those who recognise there is a role for private providers within public services, most deem alternative service provision inappropriate for core services such as health and the emergency services. In this view, the profit motive that private companies are seen as having would compromise their ability to deliver core services.

*A lot of services would obviously be better if there was competition... but there has got to be certain services that are provided no matter what and don't work for a profit, they have a conscience.*

Female, 16-24, London

## Achievable?

The idea of private provision of public services tends to be greeted with suspicion. In general, alternative service provision by the private sector is rejected by many, both because the remit of private provision is perceived to lack a public service ethos and because the profit motive is usually considered unacceptable in public services. There are also those who perceive private provision to be unreliable; it is thought that ultimately if a private provider makes no money it may simply stop delivering a service, whereas a public provider would continue to deliver services regardless of profit.

*But the whole point of a public service is that there's no money in it. They'll do the jobs that no-one will do. The private sector wouldn't take them on. The public service will take them on, because they get paid from public funds.*

Male, 40-64, Kent

Private provision is also thought by many to have the potential for reduced accountability to the public, due to fragmented provision without clear lines of responsibility. Government and public sector organisations are perceived to be an important coordinating mechanism of service provision, and there is concern that this could be lost under an arrangement with multiple different providers.

*If all of these services have been chucked out to private companies, fragmented in other words, it is not transparent any more, you do not know who to blame, who is responsible.*

**Male, 40-64, Kent**

*The trains didn't work. Not that British Rail was that much better... It's because organisations other than government are responsible, it's become fragmented. Whereas if it's centrally controlled, then it's all one homogeneous thing*

**Male, net contributor to public services, London**

Participants are generally aware that services could be delivered by alternative providers and some are able to point to examples of private provision of public services. Some even point out that private provision can lead to service improvements if change is delivered gradually, especially for non-core services such as rubbish collection. For the group of net contributors to public services we spoke to in Hampstead, for example, efficiency and good management in public services were key concerns, and some perceived that private sector approaches could work well in delivering these for public services.

*I'm sure actually that it is a private company that collects the bins where I live – Veolia or something?*

**Female, net contributor to public services, London**

*That's [rubbish collection] an example of something which is gradually becoming more and more privatized, so it can be done privately and profitably.*

**Male, net contributor to public services, London**

However, the real question for most participants is whether or not alternative provision would actually be an improvement on current public service arrangements. There is some sense that as long as the ends remain the same, the means are to an extent irrelevant; does it matter who the provider of a service is, as long as people who use the service continue to get what they need?

*"As far as I am concerned I do not care who it is or where it is, as long as they get the care that they need"*

**Male, 65+, Kent**

The prevailing sense is that participants are less interested in the idea of switching to alternative providers than in working with what is already in place to improve the performance of the public sector. For the most part, participants prioritise arrangements in which people get what they need, and most believe that still means public services delivered by the public sector. One participant gave the example of privately provided social care which delivered a poor quality service for what they considered to be exorbitant prices.

*My wife has got an aunt who is in a care home... It is privately run.... When she went in there the fees were just over £500 a week, and the place was clean, beautiful and smelt of roses. She has been there 5 years, the fees are now just over £1,000 a week and the place smells of piss...*

**Male, 65+, Kent**

The fact that private provision is not necessarily seen as guaranteeing better services than the public sector means most participants are broadly happy to work within the existing framework. Furthermore, there is a strong feeling that public service professionals are best placed to provide public services, because they have both the relevant expertise and, importantly for participants, the right motivation; in other words, public service professionals are seen as having a public service ethos, in contrast with private sector 'managers' and 'consultants'.

There is little awareness of the role voluntary providers could play in delivering services. Most participants struggle to engage with the idea of voluntary providers of public services although some mention examples such as 'the lifeboats' and the pilgrim's hospital' that act as providers of public services. Overall, some scepticism is expressed as to whether voluntary providers possess the right skills or capacity ('volunteers just aren't readily enough available') to deliver services effectively, beyond a very local level or for anything other than non-core services.

*You could not have volunteers doing the gardens. Well, who would turn up to volunteer to do it?*

**Female, 65+, Kent**

*With the best will in the world, a voluntary person is not as skilful at the job as someone who was employed and paid to do the job, we would hope anyway.*

**Male, 65+, Kent**

## Equitable?

Participants expressed concern that a system of alternative service providers might create a postcode lottery of service provision and favour those most able to navigate and/or pay for public services.

For some, the idea of having a range of alternative service providers implies an uneven provision of services nationally. There is some concern that this could result in a situation in which state-delivered public services might not exist in some areas and that alternative providers would not be able to fill the gap appropriately. Participants feel that private providers could end up discriminating against or pricing out the less well off, and while awareness of the voluntary sector providing services is low, some perceive that the voluntary sector would not be sufficiently reliable in delivering services.

There is also some concern that private providers would only be interested in service provision for the better off. Participants point out that this could potentially result in a two-tier situation where more affluent areas had a range of private provision which only

the well-off could afford, while more deprived areas ended up with inadequate services for the poor; whether delivered by the public, private or voluntary sector.

## Summary

Alternative service provision is unpopular with many participants because it is often considered to be synonymous with private provision, which is felt by some to compromise the kind of 'reactive security' which the public hold so dear in public service arrangements. It is clear that for the most part people do not want alternative service provision to result in changes to core services either. Alternative modes of service provision are likely to be seen as more acceptable if people can be reassured that the outcome will be the same as or better than services delivered by the public sector.

A crucial aspect of the conversation around alternative service providers is the motivation ascribed by participants to different type of provision. For the most part, there is an assumption that public service professionals may be better placed to deliver public services and have 'purer' motivations than those employed by private sector providers, who are seen as more motivated by profit. It is this assumption, more than any other, which drives responses to the idea of private provision; alternative provision by the private sector is seen by some as threatening the 'safety net' that is so highly valued by the public.

## Theme C: Local decision-making

The last two of the Commission's policy ideas relate to decision-making at the local level<sup>7</sup>. Both ideas present the possibility of greater local control over resources, which leads to the possibility of greater service variation according to locality. At the heart of both ideas is the principle of recognising users' different needs from public services more effectively.

- **Idea 8: Electing leaders of public services** - electing heads of local public services (e.g. NHS, Police) in local elections in order to make more public services accountable and responsive.
- **Idea 9: Local elections, local standards** – giving local areas choice about the services they provide, with less emphasis on national standards.

### 8. Electing the leaders of public services

#### Description

Elect heads of local public services (e.g. NHS, Police) in local elections to make more public services accountable and responsive.

#### Example

In my local elections, I can choose the person in charge of my local PCT (Primary Care Trust – which arranges the health care in my area).

#### Desirable?

The idea of electing the leaders of public services has considerable spontaneous appeal because people feel they are 'actually getting a choice' to influence their local services. Electing leaders for local public services tends to appeal because it holds the promise of improved accountability of public services to their users and allows users to put a human face to a particular service. However, for some, the appeal of this idea related in the main to the desire to have someone to complain to, should a particular service be deemed to be under-performing. Ultimately, discussion of the idea led many to question whether the idea was feasible, and enthusiasm tended to diminish when people engaged with what having an elected leader of a local public service might mean in practice.

<sup>7</sup> Ipsos MORI's research into 'Strengthening Local Democracy' for DCLG provides useful context to the theme of local decision making and the idea of greater local variation and control. A summary of this research is available in section iii) of the Appendix of this report.

## Achievable?

One difficulty participants note with the idea of electing leaders for local public services is that it is not clear that the candidates would be sufficiently well known for the public to make an informed voting choice.

*If there is a name there for the PCT but if you do not know the person, how do you know how to vote for the person?*

**Female, 65+, Kent**

Not only might people not know enough about prospective candidates, but people may not know enough about a particular public service in order to assess whether or not one candidate would be more suitable than another to become the 'leader' of a given service. However, some did not consider a lack of familiarity with a candidate as a problem, believing that having an elected representative is better than not having an elected representative and would represent an improvement on current arrangements.

*At least it would be better than what we have at the moment...*

**Male, First Generation Migrant, Bangladeshi, Tower Hamlets**

A key consideration participants raise about how this idea would work in practice is the process of selecting candidates. They feel that candidates would be best selected according to two main criteria: firstly, they should have extensive experience in the relevant service and, secondly, they should have a demonstrable knowledge of the local area. This group envisaged a role for central government in developing the criteria for candidate selection and approving candidates, although they are keen for this to stop short of party political influence.

Another concern with the idea of electing local public service leaders is that it might degenerate into a 'popularity contest' between candidates, which would detract from its core aim of providing greater accountability and transparency in the relationship between public services and those who use them. Participants question whether in practice, elected representatives would be voted for according to people's pre-existing party political affiliations, and express some anxiety as to the impact of this on the process.

*All the people who vote Tory who are on that council will still vote along Tory lines and all the Labour people will vote along Labour lines.*

**Male, 65+, Kent**

Participants also have further concerns about this idea, pointing out that election campaigns for public service leaders could become counter-productive if they distracted public servants from the more important business of service delivery. Moreover, there are those who worry that the role of local public service leader could easily become a largely symbolic role detached from actual service delivery. Many are sceptical about the kinds of change that an elected public service leader could actually make, and some feel that while it is important in principle to have the option to elect leaders, they would not necessarily vote themselves in practice. In addition, there is a strong sense among participants that voter apathy would be likely to mean that the elections would have poor turnout, which

would be exacerbated further if the process of electing local leaders did, as they fear it might, turn into a 'popularity contest'.

*Would it increase the turnout for voting, I do not think it would. The general apathy nowadays...*

**Male, 65+, Kent**

The idea only becomes convincing for some when it has 'real teeth', i.e. when the wishes of an electorate are upheld by an elected and accountable public service leader. Some suggest that the idea of electing local leaders for local public service makes more sense if combined with Idea 9, 'Local elections, local standards' (the next idea, discussed below). Local public service leaders would campaign on platforms which could then become part of a clear manifesto to which the candidate could be held accountable. This could mean a greater focus on the practicalities of service delivery, while also making the role of local public service leader less symbolic.

## Equitable?

The issue of fairness is not raised as a significant concern by participants in the course of discussing this idea. When asked directly, views tend to split between a small minority of 'engagement optimists', who feel they personally would participate and also that others would take part, and 'engagement sceptics', who do not feel they would personally vote to elect a local leader and do not believe most others would either. This divide is along similar lines to participants' discussions of the idea of area budgets (see Idea 5 above).

The engagement optimists suggest that as long as the process of electing local public service leaders is open to all, then the idea is fair; at least in the sense of a basic equality of opportunity to participate. In contrast, those who are more sceptical of engagement feel that the process of election would be likely to become dominated by a vocal minority and that not all people locally would take part, which would lead to the idea being less representative in practice.

A common feature of the discussion around who might make desirable candidates for leadership of local public services came down in some cases to people's desire for elected representatives to reflect the make-up of the communities they serve. Participants acknowledged that they were keen to see 'people like me' occupying such roles. This widespread sentiment suggests that the public do feel removed from public services to some extent, and that they feel there is more public services can do to recognise the communities they serve.

## Summary

Electing leaders of local public services provokes a similar response to the idea of area budgets (see Idea 5 above), in that the local control and accountability it proposes are intuitively appealing to participants. However, reactions to the idea are not particularly strongly felt. Like area budgets, this idea is not seen to threaten or enhance the safety net that people value most about public services.

Rather, it is seen as something of an optional extra - a 'nice to have' idea. Participants do, however, point out several perceived stumbling blocks to this idea working well in practice, such as how the process of candidate selection would work, the concern that election campaigns might distract public servants from the more important day-to-day business of delivering services, and the need for the local leader to have 'teeth', if such leaders are to bring about genuine and lasting change for local areas, rather than fulfilling a purely symbolic role.

## 9. Local elections, local standards

### Description

Enable local areas to have more choice about the services they provide, with less emphasis on national standards

### Example

- My local council has just expanded its youth service and opened new youth centres; but in the sea-side town where my sister lives the party that won their local election got rid of their youth service and invested more in day centres for the elderly, just like it said it would.
- My local health service has decided not to take part in a national programme to set up dementia clinics because it wants to use the money to tackle high levels of diabetes in its area instead.

### Desirable?

The idea of 'Local elections, local standards' provokes two very different reactions. Some feel intuitively that it makes sense to have local variation in service delivery because the needs of local areas differ dramatically, and effective allocation of resources and delivery of services are better decided at a local rather than a national level. Other participants quickly link the idea of 'local elections, local standards' to a 'postcode lottery' and become extremely wary of the idea and how it might be applied. Overall, regardless of whether or not participants are anxious about or accepting of the idea, all place strong emphasis on the importance of retaining a basic national standard before local variation is put in place.

### Achievable?

At a basic level, it does make sense to participants that money is spent on 'things relevant to that particular area', since people living in one local area will have a different set of needs from those living in another.

*Every area in the world you go is different, anywhere you go in the world is different, people you meet are different. So different circumstances will be there and different things will be wanted by the people living there.*

Male, 25-39, Oxford

Moreover, it is thought that local people themselves are best placed to know what those needs are. Some suggest that it is important for services to recognise different local needs, which is seen as inevitably entailing at least a degree of service variation between different areas. Others, however, express concern about postcode lotteries.

*I quite like the whole idea that you could have a unique community. It wouldn't necessarily segregate communities from one another, it would just give a bit of variation to everything, and being the people who live in the community, they know their community better than outsiders.*

Male, 25-39, Oxford

*On one side of the street I'm in TN23, then in TN24, TN23 can have something and TN24 can't. Now, if we are playing with a public service, the word public should be across the board.*

Male, 40-64, Kent

Participants find it more difficult to engage with the idea of 'local elections, local standards' when moving beyond the immediately appealing idea of addressing local need to the discussion of variation and fairness. While some variation is often perceived to be desirable, the key issue for most with this idea is how to negotiate the tension between providing a reliable national standard and attending to local need effectively. For almost all participants, national standards need to be in place before local variation is acceptable and local authorities must deliver 'baseline' standards before more flexible allocation of resources at local level is considered.

*They've got to have a national standard. There's got to be a baseline that they have to work to, but then councils that have this amount of money, so long as the standards are met, they can actually have the flexibility to use that money in a way that community needs.*

Male, 40-64, Kent

There is clear concern regarding the degree of autonomy that local authorities and services might actually have in practice. Participants see a need for some mechanism that ensures that local variation is carefully thought through before it is agreed and implemented. Furthermore, they feel local-level service variation would need to be justified in the light of national standards or some overarching guidelines.

*You've got to be aware of the overarching policy or the overarching strategy... because you don't want somebody to go off on a total tangent, like all of a sudden somebody decides in their own local community, we'll do it this way. Go off on a 90 degree tangent, you may not be able to come back. Let's focus on national standards, you've still got to have a standard of some sort to deviate or not deviate from.*

Male, 40-64, Kent

Following debate about their concerns, many participants come to feel that it may actually be preferable to have a relatively limited, carefully controlled amount of local service variation. In this view, proposals for service variation must be driven by a clear rationale. Without clear evidence of how local service variation has worked in practice, the idea becomes less attractive, especially if it is perceived to compromise core services such as health and education in any way.

### Equitable?

As for other ideas that involve giving local areas greater control over resources and decision-making, concern is expressed about service provision becoming a 'postcode lottery'. People also worry that this idea might ultimately benefit more vocal groups, such as the middle classes, rather than all in the community. There is tangible anxiety amongst participants about the implications of removing or placing less emphasis on baseline standards, since they perceive this may result in a lower quality of service provision in some local areas.

Some participants express concern that minority groups might lose out when it comes to local service variation. This concern is particularly pronounced in the example of decisions about local variation being tied to electoral promises, which in turn are seen to reflect majority opinion. Some suggest that a system of 'local elections, local standards' should be accompanied by safeguards protecting the interests of minority groups and ensuring that their views are heard when taking decisions about local service variation.

*Who is going to make the decisions? It may be that they're all made by the majority, so for example if there are predominantly older people in the area there'll be nothing for the younger ones*

**Male, net contributor to public services, Hampstead, London**

Furthermore, some participants suggest that voter apathy might mean that the majority opinion would in reality just be a vocal minority, with some groups, particularly younger people, being excluded as a result.

*Not enough people vote in the first place anyway, so if only 30 or 40 per cent of people are voting in a national election, how many are going to vote in local elections? So you're going to have a whole part of the community who aren't really saying what they feel anyway.*

**Male, 25-39, Oxford**

The second example participants were presented with, where local health services are empowered to make decisions according to local need, is viewed more favourably. There is some sense that local public services may be better placed to make judgements about service variation than political parties on the local council (as in the first example).

### Summary

People are often keen on the idea of greater local control in principle, since local service providers are seen as well-placed to understand the needs of a local area and take decisions over service provision accordingly. However, as we have already seen for other ideas that propose greater local variation such as area budgets, there is real concern about postcode lotteries and whether the decisions taken would be genuinely representative of all those in the community, not just those who shout the loudest.

## Conclusions

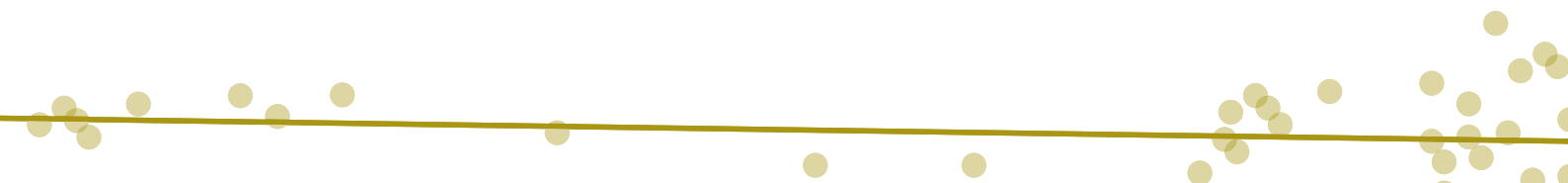
### Underlying values that impact on how policy ideas are received

When participants consider specific policy ideas, certain core values emerge again and again across the three themes. The overriding concern for almost all participants is that public services satisfy the common desire for **security** and provide **reassurance** to citizens. In terms of direct trade-offs, the desire for security or some expression of security trumps all other values.

People also want to know that delivery and provision of services will be **'fair'** and available to the 'right' people. This discussion involves differing views about what fairness means, and this varies depending on the service and the policy idea being discussed. Individuals can argue that one type of fairness is important for a particular service, while also feeling that a different kind of fairness is appropriate for another service. Some of the types of fairness that people value in public services include uniform standards across the country; allowing varying standards to ensure local communities get a 'fair deal'; or being fair by allocating resources depending on how deserving different groups in society are. These different conceptions of fairness are often in tension, and this is certainly the case as the ideas are debated. However, it is clear that policy ideas that fail to meet some combination of security and fairness tend to be poorly received or rejected out of hand.

Discussion of policy ideas also reveals other important values alongside the core values of security and fairness. There is a common desire for public services to **recognise** and **respond** to specific citizen need, for example in local areas or for particular groups in society, and for services to provide the best possible experience for those people that interact with them.

This research suggests that successful policy ideas are those that ensure security and provide reassurance and are available according to an appropriate conception of fairness (although which type of fairness is often contested). Achieving these core values may make public service arrangements acceptable. However responsiveness and experience of services are also hugely valuable to the public. A public service arrangement which satisfies all four of these values may not only be acceptable, but also be an arrangement to which people aspire.



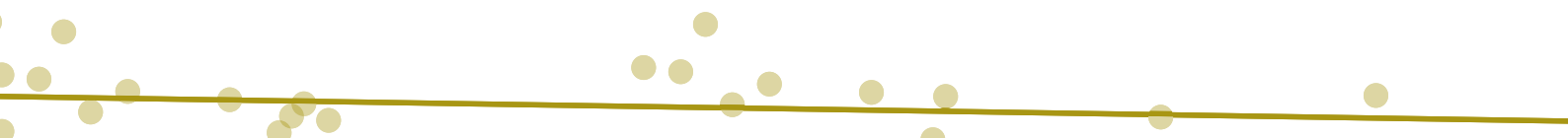
## Public attitudes to change in public services

Participants expressed strong views about changing public services. Most articulated concerns and fears about change, particularly in the context of those services seen as core to providing security and support for people in times of need. This made them reluctant to consider any change that might undermine this ability of public services to provide security, and led some to argue that change is unnecessary or should only be embarked on if absolutely essential. Concerns about services being jeopardised or made worse by change were also held by younger people who used services less, although they were able to identify problems with current service provision.

However, some of the participants who use public services the most, such as older people, were more willing to accept that services should change. Their negative experiences meant they felt services needed to be reformed, although not always in the ways described by the ideas. Those who feel that the state should have less of a role in providing services also argued for change.

Across all participants there was greater willingness to accept small-scale, gradual change, rather than carrying out many of the ideas, which were seen as radical by many participants. In general, the current recession was not yet seen as being sufficiently serious to warrant radical changes.

This aversion to change, for fear that something important will be lost, is a common feature of human behaviour. In reality, people are able to cope with a certain level of change, and ideas that do improve public services would, of course, gain acceptance in the longer term. Having said that, recognising this inbuilt desire among the public to protect the key aspects of public services is important for policymakers to bear in mind as they consider how best to bring the public with them in making changes to the services people value so highly.



## Appendix

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### i) Guides

#### 2020 Public Services Trust Citizen Engagement Workstream Deliberative Group Discussion Guide

#### Timing

Full Group (8-10 participants): 2 hours

Mini Group (4-6 participants): 1:45 hours

#### Aims

The deliberative groups will provide the 2020PST with insights into the type of public service arrangements that citizens would accept or aspire to (i.e. ideal arrangements but also pragmatic compromises / trade offs).

Responses to specific proposals will be most helpful to 2020PST in so far as these illuminate their general preferences, values and concerns.

#### Objectives

##### Objectives for first stage (35 mins)

- What help to live their lives do people value (in terms of health, security, education etc) at different times
- Explore what the public value in their relationships with public services – why do they feel public services matter; and what do services mean to them?
  - Where are there similarities and differences in what the public value for different services, and why are similar/different values attached to these services?

- How far do they feel this will change or has changed at different stages in their lives?

- Identify and explore where there are gaps between current experiences of public services and aspirations for these services

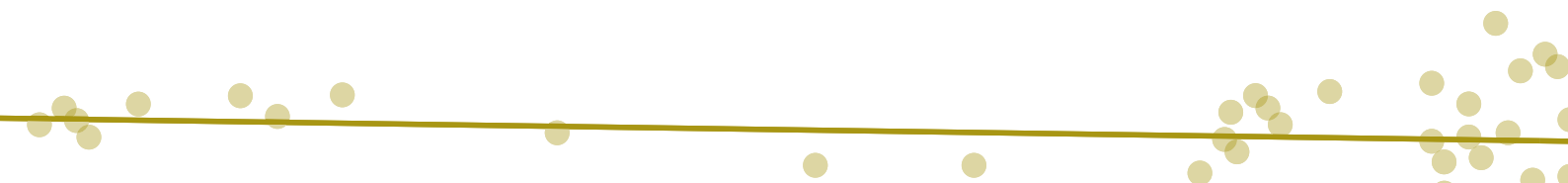
##### Agreed objectives for second and third stage (85 mins)

- Investigate public views on several Commission-generated policy ideas, within four broad themes:
  - Greater control over financial resources and decision-making
  - Navigating information about public services
  - How services are delivered
  - Accountability

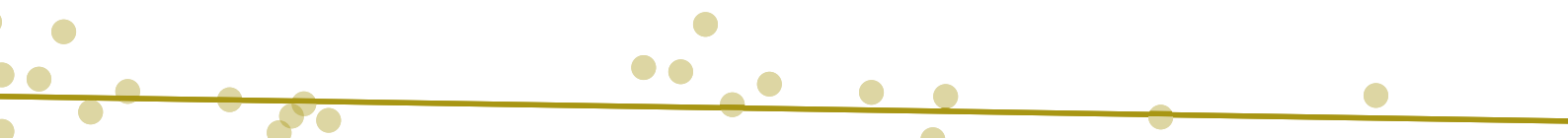
#### Note

Throughout the discussion the facilitator should be aware of how the values suggested by participants compare to the values in the Commission's mission statement.

*"2020 public services help us to achieve – for ourselves and each other – things that we value and can only achieve together. They help us to become the people that we want to be, living within a society we want to be part of. They put us in control of our own lives, making us more secure in the present, and more confident about the future."*

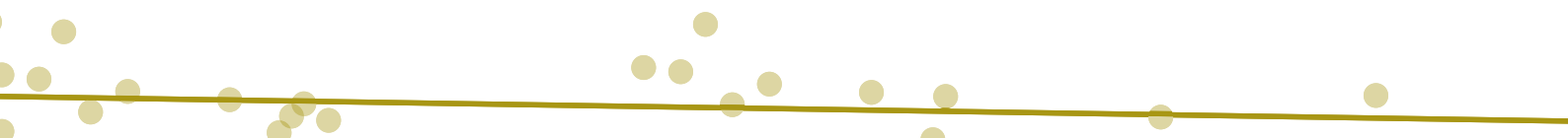


Activity	Moderator Notes	Timing
<p>Arrival (10 mins)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Welcome and thank you for coming</li> <li>Introduce broad topic area – what we value / what makes gives our lives value and how this relates to public services and specific ideas for public service provision.</li> <li>Introduce PST; mainly an interested observer but may also take part</li> <li>Permission to record</li> <li>Housekeeping</li> <li>Participant introductions - [and last interaction with a public service?]</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Stage 1: Establishing Values Capabilities</b></p> <p>What do people in this country need to have a good life? (i.e. what do you need have a fulfilling life; to flourish, attain wellbeing and/or happiness?)</p> <p>PROBE ON:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is there anything missing from this list? What?</li> <li>Is there anything you disagree with? Why?</li> <li>Are there any values which are more important than others?</li> </ul> <p>Life <b>stage</b></p> <p>Does having a good life mean different things at different life stages?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When you were younger did you need different sorts of help?</li> <li>What about in the future? Can you see yourself needing different things/different forms of assistance as you get older in order to live the life you want to live?</li> </ul> <p><b>Assistance</b></p> <p>Do you need any assistance to have a good life/life you have reason to value?</p> <p>Who can provide that assistance?</p> <p>PROBE ON:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Family/Friends?</li> <li>Community?</li> <li>Government?</li> <li>Other? (Businesses, Third sector organisations...)</li> <li>How? What role do they play? What help/assistance do they offer?</li> </ul>	<p>Briefly use <b>FLIP-CHART</b> to capture all responses.</p> <p>“These are all things which people have mentioned to us as part of this research that allow us to live good lives...”</p> <p>Provide ppt slide: Values: Emerging Findings</p> <p>Support</p> <p>Health</p> <p>Security</p> <p>Worth</p> <p>Freedom</p> <p>Education</p> <p>Environment</p>	<p>Overall: 15m</p> <p>5 min</p> <p>5 min</p> <p>5 min</p>



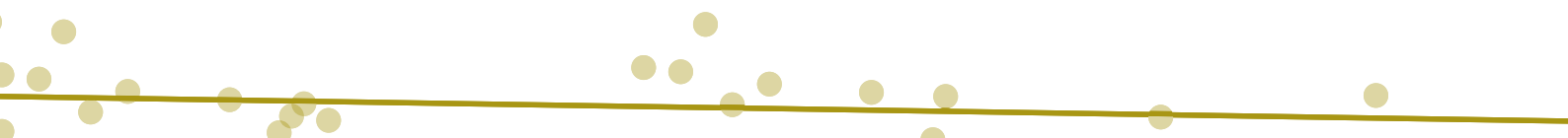
Activity	Moderator Notes	Timing
<p><b>Stage 2: Values and Public Services</b></p> <p>Why do we have public services?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What role do public services specifically play in helping us live a good life?</li> </ul> <p>What are public services there for?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What types of assistance do they provide us?</li> </ul> <p>Are public services important?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- PROBE: If so, WHY are they important? (Safety net/cushion; to build a better society; as an expression of democracy; for reassurance; they're a source of pride; as a source of guidance; for stability and order)</li> <li>- PROBE: What would happen if there were no public services?</li> <li>- PROBE: Is there anything they do that otherwise wouldn't/couldn't be done?</li> <li>- PROBE: Why is it that other sources of assistance/help (family, friends, community, businesses) can't do what public services do?</li> </ul>	<p>Use <b>FLIPCHART</b> to capture spontaneous responses</p> <p>May refer to values generated previously...</p>	<p><b>Overall: 10m</b></p> <p>5m</p> <p>5m</p>

Activity	Moderator Notes	Timing
<p><b>Stage 2: Idea Testing</b></p> <p>Note to moderator: Introduce each PST idea &amp; stick each idea sheet to the wall. Provide participants with individual hand outs after doing gallery activity.</p> <p>Select three ideas for discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- most popular (most green dots)</li> <li>- most contentious (most red dots)</li> <li>- joker (select one of the least discussed ideas so far)</li> </ul> <p><b>a) Desirability; Equity; Achievability; Buy-In</b></p> <p><b>Desirability</b></p> <p>Why did you give this idea a red/green dot?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• • What do you see as the benefits of this idea?</li> <li>• • What do you see as the drawbacks of this idea?</li> </ul> <p><b>Equity</b></p> <p>Would this idea benefit everyone in society?</p> <p>Would this idea benefit or be useful to only a particular group in society? If so, who?</p> <p>PROBE: (Where appropriate) Would it depend on...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Age</li> <li>- SEG (those with money/education, for example)</li> <li>- Ethnicity</li> <li>- Gender</li> <li>- Geography</li> </ul> <p>Does this idea have the right focus?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Is this idea going to benefit the 'right' groups in society?</li> </ul> <p><b>Achievable</b></p> <p>Is this idea realistic?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Who (what sort of people) would be interested in this idea?</li> </ul> <p>Could you see this idea taking off? Why/Why not?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Would the success of the idea depend on cost?</li> <li>- What costs would you associate with the idea e.g. Financial? Time?</li> <li>- Would you be prepared to pay for the idea in question?</li> </ul>	<p>There is a list of the ideas that have/ not been discussed on the back of the policy idea pack for each moderator.</p> <p>It may be appropriate to use the idea specific probes/what if questions during this discussion.</p> <p>Ensure sufficient focus on the question of EQUITY</p>	<p><b>Overall 25m per idea</b></p> <p>15m</p> <p>The bulk of time can be spent on section a)</p>



Activity	Moderator Notes	Timing
<p><b>Personal Buy-In</b></p> <p>Would YOU personally take part in this idea?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What would encourage/discourage you to be involved?</li> </ul> <p><b>b) Idea-specific probes/What if?</b></p> <p>Idea-specific probes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Use idea specific probes from prompt list provided for each idea.</li> </ul> <p>What If?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- If not used above, moderator can use 'what if' statements to challenge positive/negative responses. E.g. what if it cost more, what if some people found the service harder to access, etc.</li> </ul> <p>Additional PROBES:</p> <p>Values</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Which of the values already discussed would you associate with this idea? Why?</li> <li>- Does it meet the most important values suggested earlier?</li> <li>- Does this idea clash with any of the values already mentioned?</li> <li>- Does this idea trade-off certain important values against each other?</li> </ul> <p>Cross-service applicability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In the example, we suggested this idea could be used for XX service. Would it be relevant to other services too (e.g. health, education, public safety/policing, local council services etc)?</li> <li>- Why/why not?</li> <li>- Is the idea more applicable to some services than others?</li> </ul> <p>Idea Rating</p> <p>The group decides together how to rate each idea according to the following scale:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Desirable</li> <li>• Achievable</li> <li>• Equitable</li> </ul> <p><b>REPEAT SECTION FOR OTHER CHOSEN IDEA(S)</b></p>	<p>Use values generated earlier from Flipchart</p> <p>Not all ideas will have cross-service applicability. The idea of cross-service applicability may fall out according to the examples given for each idea.</p> <p>Overall spontaneous rating of the idea.</p> <p>e.g. Use a scale of 1-10 with not at all to extremely desirable.</p>	<p><b>Overall 10m</b></p> <p>5m</p> <p>5m</p>

Activity	Moderator Notes	Timing
<p><b>Stage 3: Public Services and Change</b></p> <p>How do you feel about the idea of changing or reforming public services?</p> <p>PROBE: What's your gut reaction? In favour/Opposed? Undecided? Apathetic?</p> <p>PROBE: Do you see reform of public services as something that needs to happen? Why?</p> <p>PROBE: Are some public services more in need of reform/change than others?</p> <p>PROBE: Do you see the ideas you have been presented with as providing the kind of change you'd like to see in public services?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do these ideas go too far/not far enough?</li> <li>- PROBE: Have you seen things in the news about changes to public services (e.g. due to need to reduce budget). Do you think this will need major changes or will reducing the budget and efficiency savings be enough? (What are the efficiency savings?)</li> </ul> <p><i>The 2020 Public Services Trust who commissioned this research are currently developing recommendations to government about how public services should change in the future...</i></p> <p>If you could give them one top tip / piece of advice when developing their recommendations, what would it be?</p> <p><b>FINISH</b></p>		<p>10m</p>



## ii) Contextualising 'Local Decision-Making'

Ipsos MORI's research into 'Strengthening Local Democracy' for DCLG provides useful context to the theme of local decision-making and the idea of greater local variation and control. This research suggests that people tend to agree that councils should have the authority to meet the needs of their residents, and are probably best placed to do this. However, people also express uncertainty about whether increased powers would be used effectively at a local level. People want a balance between councils having the powers they need to improve an area and there being some degree of oversight of council powers. There are three main areas of qualification for the idea of local councils having the authority to meet the needs of their residents.

### Whether councils are actually engaged in the first place

People express a lack of confidence in the ability of local councils to act decisively and effectively, based largely on direct experience or observation of poor public service delivery. Some therefore express scepticism that local councils would use extended powers more effectively.

Related to this is a widespread perception that councillors lack real engagement with the public and are therefore out of touch with local priorities. However, this view tends to be ameliorated by the perception that local councils are still better placed than central government to make local decisions and councillors are more likely to have vested interest in improving their local area.

### Whether councils are sufficiently engaged with their residents

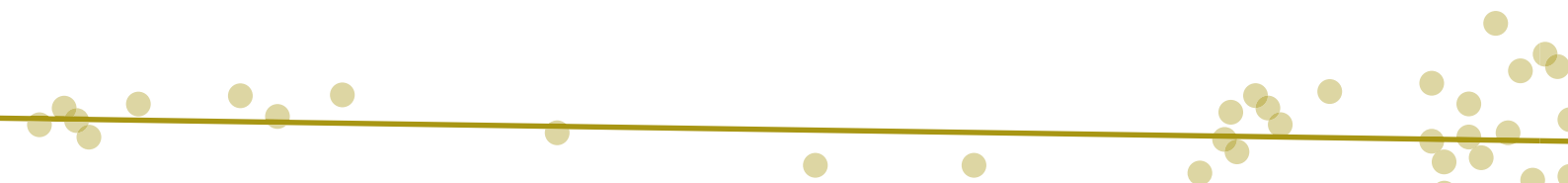
People are keen to establish that councils use their power in a way that corresponds with the needs and wishes of local residents. This is thought to be achievable through better communication with residents, specifically, providing residents with information i) about what the council can do and ii) what it is doing for the benefit of an area. In addition, some people want to put in place more specific requirements ensuring that councils consult with local residents about how to take action before they are granted extra powers

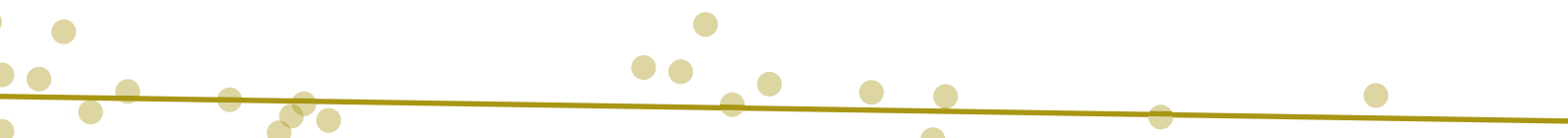
### Whether there is an appropriate level of central government oversight

People express a need for central government oversight and the possibility of central government intervention in the event that councils seriously under perform or abuse their power; an issue requires a national view, for example planning application for Kings Cross; or where there is perceived to be 'too much' variation in service provision in local areas, creating the potential for 'postcode lotteries'.

### Summary

These findings complement much of the discussion around the theme of local decision-making. The principle of greater local control is an appealing one but people require reassurance that suitable checks and balances are in place to protect their interests. Ultimately, as expressed most clearly in the discussion of 'local elections, local standards' there is seen to be a need for central government oversight in allowing variation, but not so much variation that a basic sense of fairness is compromised.







# 2020 Public Services Trust

*at the* RSA

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2020 Public Services Trust, RSA, 8 John Adam Street, London, WC2N 6EZ  
telephone: 020 7451 6962 | charity no: 1124095 | [www.2020pst.org](http://www.2020pst.org)



**JOSEPH ROWNTREE**  
FOUNDATION