



Places, people and politics:

Learning to do things differently



Contents

Foreword		2
Introduction		3
Section 0	Arguments for a new approach to public sector working in Places	6
Section 1	The origins of Total Place	14
Section 2	Project inception to the Pre-Budget Report (PBR)	20
Section 3	From the PBR to the final reports	32
Section 4	Was it worth it ? Yes, it was	42
Afterword		52
Glossary and people		60
Appendix A: The pre-history of Total Place		61
Appendix B: Learning histories information		63
Thanks and acknowledgements		64

Foreword

In Total Place we set out to see if we could fundamentally change the way that we do things. We wanted to find out how we could address some of the more challenging problems society faces at a time when pressure on our public finances is severe. We believed that to do this required us to move away from what has become a customary 'programme management' form of government and evolve a different form that radically altered the way we work for the better. It was therefore critical that we learned together as we went along.

I am really grateful to the Leadership Centre for the way in which we have done this. They have recorded countless interviews with a wide range of those who have done the work and assembled their thoughts and observations in this insightful document. As such it tells the story of what it is like to try to work in a new and evolving fashion. It captures the collective experience of where this work has taken us and points us clearly at the challenges ahead for a new government.

In particular, a new government moving towards greater local accountability, will need to address how to rapidly engage large numbers of places

and people in designing more effective public services around their customers; how to ensure that the perverse incentives that discourage investment in early interventions (because the benefits are reaped elsewhere) are overcome; how a better relationship between Whitehall and localities is embodied in local governance and how leaders, political and organisational get beyond silo-ed self-interest and into the sort of collaboration that we have shown leads to radically better outcomes for the public.

The story of our learning is a valuable start point for all those joining with this work. It is also a challenge to us all, politicians and officers, central or local, to build on the enormous achievement of the past year and help create a 'Public Service' fit for the new financial environment and the demands of the 21st Century.

Lord Bichard

Introduction

“As the old practice of community story telling, people re-experience an event together and learn its meaning collectively.”

Art Kleiner and George Roth 'How to Make Experience Your Company's Best Teacher' Harvard Business Review September-October 1997

As the public sector enters a new era, the ability to develop a collective understanding and learn quickly so that we can act effectively with wisdom is critical. At the Leadership Centre for Local Government, we believe that the process of review is important to learning, especially when working in difficult times and towards new challenges. We commissioned this learning history to give those people who participated in Total Place the space to consciously reflect on their experiences. We hope this resulting learning history gives them, and others embarking on whole area working, the opportunity to consider the experiences of others. The inductive research method, with the deliberate use of an open research question, enables the history to be free of specific hypotheses and allows us all to explore more fully the learning from this work.

What is a learning history?¹

- The learning history approach captures stories that people tell about a change endeavour and reflects them back to the participants to help them learn
- Presents the experience and understanding of participants in a way that generalises the learning and helps people to move forward effectively
- Includes reports of actions and results, descriptions of learning methods and techniques and underlying assumptions and reasoning
- Includes perspectives of a variety of people including those who did not support the work
- Tells the story in the participants' own words

How was this learning history developed?

During March 2010 we interviewed over 100 people from different parts of the system who have been involved in Total Place in local areas, national government departments and national support bodies. Interviewees self-selected, so they represent a group who have views on

Total Place which they are keen to share. Most are very positive, some are more sceptical or even negative about the experience of Total Place. This is an important element of the Learning History approach.

The interviews focused on a core question: **“Given that the Total Place approach is in its early stages, what experiences over the past 6-9 months have made you think that Total Place shows promise as a way of creating greater public value. And what experiences have made you less hopeful?”**

The research gathered and sorted through hours of taped interviews, then distilled these into recurring themes coming through the accounts of their personal experience. The interviews were designed to encourage people to talk about their concrete experiences rather than their theoretical perspectives and conclusions. They were invited and encouraged to describe the highs and lows of their time spent in Total Place work.

How is the learning history presented?

The learning history is presented as a series of sections which follow the chronology of the Total Place approach:

Section 0
Arguments for a new approach to public sector working in Places

“There’s 15/20 places they have to go to sort out benefits and this is young people without any parents, people in care. It’s an absolute mess...”

Section 1
The origins of Total Place

“Actually it isn’t our money, it’s their money.”

Section 2
Project inception to the Pre-Budget Report (PBR)

“I think dancing down the corridor was how he felt in that we couldn’t believe that we’d been selected to be a Total Place theme.”

Section 3
From the PBR to the final reports

“We were getting massive investment in time and resources from a lot of agencies that we previously hadn’t worked with before.”

Section 4
Was it worth it? Yes, it was

“There are some iconic stories that people tell about very senior people going and sitting on the floor eating pie with deprived families and just listening to their stories”.

Each section includes:

- An introductory paragraph giving a brief picture of what was happening in the programme during that phase and drawing attention to the issues that the section will highlight
- The main section has a narrative commentary on the left hand side of the page and quotes of the interviewees on the right. The commentary (left) is the story of what is happening and has been drawn out of the data the interviews produced. The quotes (right) are to support and bring alive the experience in the voices of those involved and ground the story in real practice
- A final paragraph suggests some questions that the learning history team feel the section may provoke. This is designed to assist readers to digest the story and to prompt their own reflections

The quotations include many acronyms and a few individuals' names so we have included a glossary and people page at the back for reference.

The Learning History deliberately does not offer conclusions or prescriptions for the future. It is a history not a blueprint. The power of the Learning History lies in the opportunity for reflection about the experiences of the participants, which in turn are intended to stimulate the reader's own experiences of the Total Place way of working in public services.

To further stimulate reflections and discussions, we have included an Afterword which picks up some of the key challenges tackled in Total Place pilots – challenges which seem to reflect the reality of politics and public service in the wake of the May 2010 General Election.

¹ For more information go to www.harthill.co.uk or contact Jane Allen on +44 1594 530 223.

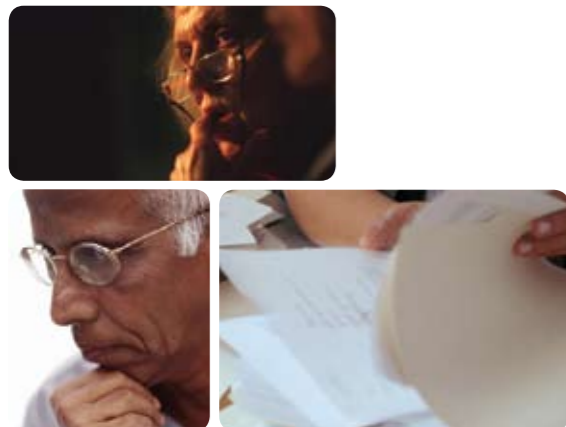
How to use the learning history

This document describes the learning and reflections of the people who were interviewed and you can use it very practically to reflect on your own experience.

The history provides a platform for the learning of you and others in the system in the way that it challenges or affirms assumptions.

It is usual for a learning history of this kind to be used in meetings and workshops to support the changes you wish to make. It can be used to both consider if you could have behaved differently and, going forward, what changes, however small, could be made with people who receive services or partners with whom you deliver services to create those services differently and more effectively.

You may have plans for going forward and this narrative can help to think through some of the dilemmas or blocks you may face in making things work the way you intend. It adds texture and a reality base of the twists and turns you may face.



Section 0

Arguments for a new approach to public sector working in places

“There’s never any such thing as a user pathway from a user perspective, the pathway is always something the provider invents. What the user experiences is bombardment on the one hand or bemusement when you fail to get through to anybody on the other hand, but it doesn’t ever feel like a pathway.”

“I think that they see that as each organisation struggles year after year to cut off more of its fingers and toes and then its arms and its legs as it salami slices to meet efficiency targets, eventually you’re down to the bleeding stumps and it’s very hard to go further. I think that they can see through the power of the collaboration we achieved in Total Place, that the future is all about how we can get the big savings out on cross cuts, across organisations, it can only be through collaboration and sharing locally, regionally and indeed nationally, that the big savings for the public sector can come”

In this section, we have pulled out some of the main themes that came out when interviewees were considering why Total Place was important to them in the first place.

As you will see from the rest of this document, our interviewees represented a wide range of views and opinions about Total Place, how it worked, the effects it had and what they learned during the process. However, one theme came through loud and clear in the vast majority of the interviews. Prior to getting involved in Total Place, almost all the interviewees had lost faith in existing attempts to change public service in this country and were looking for a new way of doing things. Total Place seemed (and for most still seems) to offer a completely new way of working collaboratively to make our systems better.

The process showed that the sheer energy that Places and Whitehall colleagues put into the Total Place exercise is testament to a confluence of three factors. Those who are 'converts' to the approach would probably argue that:

- The incremental changes to the way we deliver public services in the UK have gradually built a 'system' which, in some areas, has become byzantine and unwieldy and which creates unintentional absurdities for citizens and workers
- The cost of managing this overly complex system with its myriad agencies, pathways and sub-systems far outweighs the actual felt benefit to the tax payer
- Continued efforts to improve the system from within the paradigm that created it, may actually be making things more complicated and costly as we try to do the opposite!

It's all so absurd...

There are many different perspectives in this report but everyone agrees on one thing – the way we deliver public services at the moment can be unintentionally absurd and even seemingly cruel at times.

Total Place has sparked a frank review of current processes...

"Total Place has given a place with customer journeys to draw it to the attention of people in authority to say 'look, what you're doing is absurd, and I'm quite right in telling you that it's absurd' because this is the customer journey and you need to do something different about it, you've got to challenge that department that you've got downstairs that's got 300 different heads of different bits and pieces. You're wasting money and it isn't doing very well for your community you're trying to help."

Local Place, Manager

including the degrading lifestyle the welfare system can create.

"The Leadership Group spent a day out in the six areas of highest need in mixed groups so for example the Chief Constable went off with Housing Association Chief Executive and had a look at one of our towns. They came back appalled about the way in which the state welfare system was supporting what they saw - a degrading lifestyle for the people who lived there. So that prompted a big debate around how we shift from benefits for nothing to benefit for something but to do that in a way that supports people to get into the system and get on rather than using a big stick to beat them with."

Local Place, Senior Officer

Some people are faced with a maze...

"There's 15/20 places they have to go to sort out benefits and this is young people without any parents, people in care. It's an absolute mess, offices in hundreds of different places and it's taken me ages to understand what the benefits are. It could be made a lot simpler."

Programme Lead

"There's never any such thing as a user pathway from a user perspective, the pathway is always something the provider invents. What the user experiences is bombardment on the one hand or bemusement when you fail to get through to anybody on the other hand, but it doesn't ever feel like a pathway."

Programme Lead

"A mum didn't turn up for parents' evening so she didn't care about her children. The fact that she had to do so many other things for the other children wasn't seen by the school. She would have loved nothing better than to come to a parents' evening or a school concert, but there were so many other demands on her from other agencies, do this, do that. Health service; you've got one clinic there, one clinic there, and one clinic there and your child of that age has got to go here and your child of that age go there ... we just make things a mess and then we expect people to deal with it. The more problems you've got the harder we make it for you to get help."

Local Place, Manager

others just go around in circles –

"People are sent on a treatment programme, eight weeks, ten weeks, whatever, which detoxes them. But because nothing happens either side of that, when they come out of the treatment programme, they just go straight back into the situation that they were in, in the first place, that led to the alcohol or drug misuse, into the home that's abusive or homelessness or whatever it is. There's no connectivity between this programme for which there's resource and anything to look at housing problems, or look at family problems or look at cause, so there's nothing that holds people clean. We discovered from talking to the professionals about this case, that somebody would go through one of these treatment programmes up to eight times, over and over but there was never anything to break them out of it."

Programme Lead

"At every point, the agencies that we spend an enormous amount of money on, failed just when they were needed, the benefits were closed, he couldn't get into the benefits system for three weeks. The probation service was unaware that he was coming out of the prison system, because it was a relatively short prison sentence, he wasn't passed onto probation. He walked out the door, he was arrested the following Sunday and was back in prison."

Politician



often comically!

"I'll never forget is the 53 year old career criminal who'd been on the Positive Thinking course four times during his career - he was quite entrepreneurial and didn't need positive thinking at all really!"

Local Place, Senior Officer

We unintentionally trap people in the benefit system...

"[Total Place] made me realise how the benefits system gets in the way of lots of things, the employer there said, 'I've got opportunities, I've got some part time jobs that you could have ... or temporary jobs'. The young people say, 'we can't take them because we can't stop our benefit claim', and it just made you realise how ridiculous it is, that you can't test out somebody's ability to work or try that job if you're hooked into a benefits system that's so inflexible. This lad was saying, 'I want to work but I can't afford to be off ... make a mistake or have a temporary job and then try and start my claim again'."

Local Place, Manager

and yet many of them fall through the gaps.

"Families ping in and out of services... a child who is two and somebody realising that there are some issues with the child but by the time they've got the referral in the service the child is three and a half. Gaps which maybe don't sound so big when they're written down on paper but when you see them in the lifetime of the child you suddenly think gosh. And obvious early warning signs not being responded to. So a very, very young mum with a child who has got significant behavioural problems you'd have thought would be ringing somebody's alarms bells - this might be a family needing more support, going unnoticed. There might be all sorts of people who are aware of a family but nobody actually taking control and generating a holistic, timely response. I've personally found those stories very moving and if ever there was a reason to need to change the system it's when you see the stories like that."

Programme Lead

Of course, you'd never design an absurd system.

"What you're doing at a local level is trying to get around deficiencies in the system. At the moment you've got a very fragmented public sector, you've got lots of different organisations at different tiers; national, regional, local, all with different funding models and performance management regimes. At a local level you're trying to pool budgets and join fragmented central and regional government initiatives together. The problem is not so much lack of joining up at a local level but the fact the whole system needs to be joined together in the first place, the government need to do something at a national level. A lot of partnership working involves papering over the cracks and it's all sub optimal."

Local Place, Manager

"I've been quite astounded by some of the things that the pilots are saying, in their interim reports when they first came up with some of the figures like 47 funding streams in Durham for housing and 9000 pages of manual from DWP on benefits, 50 odd benefits in one place. You can't believe that this is how it is now because if you'd started from the beginning, you'd never design it like that would you?"

National Body

It's ended up this way because we just keep adding new bits on...

"All of those hundreds of reports, from Maria Colwell and Jasmine Beckford, right down to Baby P and the kid in Birmingham. So what do we do every time that happens? We create long and complex procedures, such that each professional has to go through n. more steps and do y. more things, when they're already pressured. We do that because we think that if we keep writing in you must share this, you must fill in that form, you must tell somebody that, you must record this, that somehow it will help."

Senior Civil Servant

when what we really need to do is concentrate on professional relationships rather than complex processes.

"The only thing that helps, is people having the kinds of relationships that allow them to make the phone calls that say, 'do you know Kid X? We had a referral about him a few weeks ago. You know what? I'm still a bit worried. What do you think? I've got all these notes and stuff, but they don't actually tell me anything, and the mum's not letting me into see him. Do you think we should take the police round and go and have a look, or do you think we've just got a slightly paranoid mum here?'"

Senior Civil Servant

"The biggest thing I heard is we have all these opportunities in the public sector to pick up signals of people going into problems and dealing with them a lot earlier. One of the very simple basic ones is that if you have a family that paid their council tax on time for years, and then suddenly go into arrears, that's a huge signal there's a problem. We do nothing. We just send them bills, and we send them a demand and then we send them legal letters. Yet we're creating a problem for ourselves, because we're trying to send the bailiffs in, and then we'll have them coming to our housing benefit office and we'll have to try and support them."

Local Place, Manager

Make no mistake, the status quo is costing us a fortune

It would be easy to argue that Total Place is only about better services for people. However, what most of our participants also pointed out is that the 'clunky' way we do things also generates huge costs of transaction – costs that are of no benefit to the public.

There's a human cost but there's also a financial cost

"This human is struggling with this problem and we the public services are designing it in a way that's just failing to support them effectively and wasting tons of money in the process."

Local Place, Senior Officer

"Basically what we're saying is over the last 40 years, the cost of gang related violence for criminal justice costs, for 10 families, is about £187m. So that causes us to pause and draw breath...everybody that heard that information drew breath thinking "I can't believe it's cost this much and how have we got to that point?"

Local Place, Manager

and it's not our money, it's the taxpayers.

"Every penny, every cup of coffee, new line in the car park, is paid for out of taxpayers' money, there is no other. It's not public money, it's taxpayers' money. It's your money."

Politician

"Actually it isn't our money it's their money!"

Local Place, Senior Officer

The current approach is running out of steam

Why not just fix it? Many of the people who got involved in Total Place have been trying to 'fix' their bit of the system for a while but they have noticed that many of their changes make little difference to outcomes.

We've been trying to change the system in a 'managerial' way for a while.

"There has been a loss of confidence in the proponents of New Public Management type public sector reform."

Senior Civil Servant

"We now acknowledge that there is a sense of public policy failure here. And by getting to that shared understanding ... it's not an easy thing to do in any partnership territory because there is every reason why people go, it's not my fault."

Programme Lead

"Sometimes targets are good because it focuses the mind... It's a bit like people escaping from prison, actually you think it's secure but people will find a way out, and with targets people will work out how to achieve them but actually not give the outcome that was intended. So if you look at the five GCSEs, everybody's started doing BTECs, yeah, which is great the kids felt good, but actually they only included the English and Maths. It all starts off again until we get our heads round how to beat the system or give you what you want to measure."

Local Place, Manager

But we've discovered that doesn't really work...

"New Labour swallowed its own rhetoric, I think it came to believe it could halve child poverty, it could abolish this, and it could do that for teenage pregnancy. When it found that it couldn't that the statistics remained obstinate and were only moving forward slowly, that really shocked some people. People started to look for new solutions."

Senior Civil Servant

and we need a new way of thinking.

"When we first started thinking about Total Place, we wanted to try and describe how public services have got so complicated because as one of pilots put it, nobody designed it to look like this."

Civil Servant



Time for a more systemic approach?

The advocates of Total Place, would say that the approach has differed from the usual Governmental/Public Agency approach because it took a systemic view from the start. So, whatever comes of 'Total Place' as a brand or an idea, this is the first chance people have had to really pursue, 'systems thinking' as an idea.

Total Place has emphasised the possibilities of 'systems thinking' for the public good...

"We were thinking for the first time about a system and conceiving of it as an interdependent set of relationships but a lot of it was about animating a system to get it to work for the young public sector innovators of the world and teacher equivalents at the bottom."

Senior Civil Servant

"I don't think until very recently any of us had been thinking about system redesign. We were thinking how can we do more traditional interventions and one of the things that Total Place has enabled us to do is to think a bit outside the box and just think about things in a different way."

Local Place, Senior Officer

and there's value in doing this together rather than organisation by organisation.

"We started to talk at one of the Bichard groups about whole systems and a couple of the departments said, 'ah no, we've got a whole systems approach', and Children's Services have got a whole systems approach and Health has got a whole systems approach and, from their perspective, it is!"

Programme Lead

"This requires thinking in a totally different way, so not just thinking about your own individual organisation, you need to think about things across several different organisations. Because these things are wicked problems, there is no single solution to them so you have to get a number of heads together to think about this stuff, rather than just you and your little silo bit."

National Body

"What's been unique about the Total Place approach in this sub-region is the degree to which it's enabled agencies to focus on the whole system and that hasn't happened anywhere in connection with this set of proposals before, because you never got all those senior colleagues together in one place for long enough."

Local Place, Senior Officer-

Total Place has given people permission to think differently.

"There needs to be a compelling reason for people to really examine their thinking, really examining the way that they are doing something because in isolation, individual parts of what they're doing is great, it's probably well validated by professional practice.... It's that personal experience and the compassion of wanting to do public good that seems to help people go, 'Okay that really isn't good enough, we need to do something differently'."

National Body

Some of this new thinking might have a far-reaching effect on the way we do things...

and the prize for joining up our thinking is clear.

“You start immediately to see the paucity and the lack of longevity of things like targets. You’re going to have to have a strategy that’s going to win people’s hearts and minds, it’s going to be about relationships, and it’s going to be about subtleness over time. So that type of systemic thinking which is absolutely inherent in Total Place started to become apparent.”

Senior Civil Servant

“We all know that we’ve got to completely change the way that we work and we’ve got to start making an investment in longer term preventative type work, rather than continuously reacting to things and at the moment the system isn’t set up to do that.”

Local Place, Senior Officer

“Looking at the whole system in one go, in one process, hadn’t happened before so we were looking at the case of reconfiguring acute provision, the enhancement of community care, diversion from old people’s homes at the same time as diversion from hospitals and most importantly and most uniquely, what the characteristics of a preventive strategy and what’s needed in order to fund that at the same time.”

Programme Lead

“If you think about drugs and alcohol, you’ve got money that’s going in from Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, from Drug and Alcohol Action Teams, from Local Authorities, from PCTs, from the Police, from Probation. All these people putting some money into dealing with these issues but not thinking coherently across the system about where the money’s going and where it’s being spent and where the costs ...”

Local Place, Senior Officer

“Why do you think that people have wanted to come and wanted to participate?”

“I don’t think any one person will be able to tell you, it’s a product of ministers getting it, it’s a product of senior officials seeing the potential, it’s a product of lots of people saying ‘yeah, this is right, we’re in public services and why would we wanted public services to be like this? We’re not doing this job for fun, we do actually believe in this’, and it’s a product of people recognising that we need to make efficiency gains and seeing that this is a better way to do it than by simply making cuts.”

Civil Servant



Questions to consider

As you read these quotes did they suggest a narrative about a system built over time and now in need of repair or overhaul?

Does this reflect your own experience? What sounded familiar or unfamiliar?

Section 1

How it all started

“We cut the brief on what Total Place was down to one sentence, which is ‘how can you get improved outcomes at less cost through greater collaboration, to enable the local genuine focus on place and a deeper engagement with citizens and communities’, that was it and that’s what we kept on coming back to”

“To get people to innovate and think creatively, you need a disruptive influence, well, the disruptive influence is that you’re going to have less pounds, shillings and pence to deliver your services.”

“For some reason it seems to have been the right thing at the right time. I suppose because everyone can see what’s coming, and this has been a safe way of talking about it.”

This section describes the origins of Total Place as an exercise, how it got started, and people’s initial reactions to the work, in Places and in Whitehall.



Before the start of the work we now know as Total Place, there was a critical conversation about: the need for an offer to help leaders in a time of severe fiscal crisis. This conversation was sparked by the nature of public finances, and the increasing expectation of the public. Its context was one of complexity in local service provision and national government policy, a shift to outcomes and whole customer experience, and a hypothesis that an innovative approach to produce better customer experience would lead to a better deal for the taxpayer.

A note titled 'Responding to the Downturn: Local leadership of place and efficiency', was developed and presented to senior civil servants and ministers.

The Leadership Centre for Local Government's thinking around systemic change and the nature of changing culture and practice heavily influenced the content of the paper and the approach suggested. The programme was a governance arrangement that logically led across the CLG and HMT and the natural incorporation of this with Lord Bichard's work on the OEP and customer design.

Operational and Efficiency Programme

The operational and efficiency programme was launched in July 2008 as part of a year long programme examining operational spending in the public sector. The scope of the report applied to all organisations within the wider public sector with a view to examining efficiency, improved performance and greater partnership working at a local level including the empowerment of citizens to help shape the service that they use. Given diminishing public sector finances and the anticipated significant cuts in public expenditure this presented many challenges.

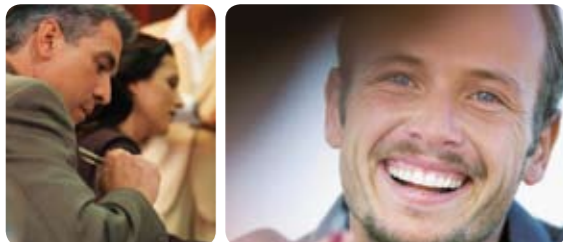
The report discussed effective collaboration as a means to achieve savings by:

- Removing duplication
- Identifying new ways of delivering service through joint innovation
- Investing in services that will reduce costs of other services even if cost benefits fall to different organisations
- Better targeting of spend towards priorities and improved strategic commissioning
- Reducing overheads by the joining together of management structures

The Leadership Centres work looking at a whole area approach was commended as a successful model to potentially deliver these objectives. The development of Total Place recommended that 13 pilot areas look at ways to eliminate barriers to joint working, increase incentives and provide a better service for less cost; this was facilitated by high level ministerial engagement to ensure that issues were swiftly addressed by Government.

The report referred to two pieces of work that suggested a new option and the space for Total Place: The Leadership Centres work in Cumbria- Calling and Counting Cumbria and the - Birmingham Public Expenditure and Investment Study. For more detailed information visit

www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/vfm_operational_efficiency.htm



The origins

Total Place came partly out of the Operational Efficiency Programme (OEP)....

"[Total Place] came out of the OEP before the last budget; the Operational Efficiency Programme, and getting Michael Bichard to head up the local incentives and empowerment it. The Treasury commissioned some work to help Michael focus what he was doing and get some ideas. Michael picked up on some work that had been done with Cumbria, but also with other places, and got really excited about the changes that you could make by doing things locally in that way, and somehow that seamlessly led into Total Place."

Senior Civil Servant

"We've always known that it's inexcusable that the public can't understand why the public sector can't explain, can't calculate what things cost. They don't understand the rigid demarcations the isolated islands that the whole of the public sector work through. As a consequence OEP came along and effectively removed those shackles."

Local Place, Senior Officer

The drive to do it was sharpened by the sense of a growing public finance crisis

"Now, to get people to innovate and think creatively, you need a disruptive influence, well, the disruptive influence is that you're going to have less pounds, shillings and pence to deliver your services."

Politician

"What was interesting about this was that now there's a driver of saving money. In the past it would probably just have been the nice fluffy argument about yes we ought to be preventing people getting ill in hospital or in residential care, that makes sense, doesn't it, to people's dignity. But with this time there's a driver around trying to find some real savings."

Local Place, Senior Officer

It's all about timing...

Our interviewees said that the timing of Total Place was crucial – partly because of the looming deficit but partly also because of the people who held critically important roles in and around Whitehall at the time of its inception.

There was a happy coming together of circumstances and people.

"I suppose there's a number of things that made [Total Place] different, some of which was the impending fiscal crisis, the fiscal situation. The other thing was having some right people in the right place at the right time. The fact that Helen Bailey was in Treasury was massively significant to this and quite frankly if Helen hadn't been there, I don't know if that would have impetus. Irene to the same but perhaps a different extent in CLG because Treasury hold the strings and always have and always will so it was a combination of things about people."

National Body

"For some reason it seems to have been the right thing at the right time. I suppose because everyone can see what's coming, and this has been a safe way of talking about it."

Senior Civil Servant

A number of those people were experienced in both the national and local government systems

“Irene Lucas, and Helen Bailey, who were the two CLG and Treasury senior officials who are both from local authorities, they’re local authority ex chief executives. There were at least three other people, three directors general on the Bichard group, who were all ex chief executives of local authorities, they really understood. We also had membership on that group from people who were from PCTs and the police and they brought their own relationships with them, and there were also other people who brought the sort of additional centralness of central government.”

Civil Servant

Specific personal leadership by Michael Bichard and John Denham has had a huge impact...

“Michael Bichard’s independence and stature has been very important. [then Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government], John Denham’s intellectual power, drive, relationship with the Treasury has been important.”

Senior Civil Servant

“So Michael Bichard has been fantastic, because for any civil servants who are anxious about getting on someone else’s agenda, Treasury agenda or CLG agenda, the fact that Michael is sponsoring it and is supported by ministers to do so, and runs the Institute for Government, just makes all of that very safe.”

Senior Civil Servant

Starting the programme

In Spring 2009, conversations began between Whitehall and places about how this Total Place thing might work.

The initiative was co-led from CLG and Treasury....

“Having this as essentially a joint CLG and Treasury project within Whitehall added a great deal of weight to it, both in terms of perception outside of Whitehall and within Whitehall and the relationships that people have with Treasury are slightly different to the relationships they have with us.”

Civil Servant

“[People would say] ‘Is this a Treasury thing or is it a CLG thing?’ and I say, ‘this is a conversation I won’t have’, it’s a Treasury thing because it came out of a budget process, it’s a CLG thing because it’s a local government thing.”

Senior Civil Servant

with support from the LGA family.

“I think a significant event was the meeting of office holders at LGA probably in March or April last year where they decided to fully and wholeheartedly support the Centre in its work on Total Place. There was some sense of that being in the balance before then, but they were unequivocal in saying ‘we want to do this’ and if that had been a more equivocal message, we’d be in a very much more difficult place - so good political leadership from local government in its collective form there.”

National Body

Places were selected very quickly...

“What then became important from everyone else’s point of view were places wanting to play, and as I recall, we got the 13 places rather quickly over a series of phone calls. So we’re very lucky that we found good places that wanted to do good stuff, and in the main they have.”

Senior Civil Servant

although too quickly for some.

“I think it would have been much better if we’d have had a more coordinated approach to communications from the start, rather than what happened, which was a set of pilots that got picked at the last minute without anyone knowing they were picked or why, which I understand is sort of inevitable, but that meant you got off on a slightly negative foot”

National Body

Initial reactions

Initial reactions to Total Place questioned whether Total Place would be just another initiative or something different.

It did seem different to people on the ground...

“I’ve spent a lot of time thinking ‘if this has been going on for however long, why hasn’t anyone else done anything about it?’ and I’m sure there have been lots of initiatives in trying to get to the bottom of some of the duplication. People have said to me that it just felt that Total Place was different this time. I think there are two reasons for that, one is the financial imperative and the second one is because it has been locally led and I think it really has been. It hasn’t been like a government initiative being done to people, the pilots have been free to choose their themes in terms of where the energy was and allowed to get on and do stuff, which is not the usual way that government initiatives work.”

National Body

“With Total Place it’s like there’s hundreds more people with the opportunity to go along to lots more people and saying ‘actually you need to be doing something as well, it’s costing you a fortune’, and it’s that ability to really make informed decisions across the partners. And we’ve only just started, but you could have a real opportunity to get the right people and the right funding on the table to then really make the right service to help those families, and to make cuts ultimately or to cost less money ultimately. So everybody can win.”

Local Place, Manager

and they could also see that it created more impetus for other linked initiatives

“Actually we’ve got two parallel pieces of work underway here. Total Place came into an agenda that we’re already trying to influence around more partnership working on the frontline. So in simple terms the government have given the police service a target to improve something with the councils, but they haven’t told the councils to do the same. So this supported this agenda in a big, big way with a timeframe.”

Local Place, Senior Officer

People liked the joining up of work on culture and on the financials as part of one exercise...

and there was soon a 'buzz' about it.

Although that was a double-edged sword.

"When I read about Total Place initially there was more than an inference that culture was going to be a key component in exploring those things. And those things then with the money bit just made me think, yay, because the most significant bit was the stuff about exploring what you could achieve through radically better partnerships. In order to do that you're going to have to unpack some cultural stuff - it made me very excited because it zoomed into the people issues around making stuff happen and change and those are things that have been very absent from the meta-narrative I think in this country."

Programme Lead

"The first time it felt like it was going to be bigger than anything we'd done before, was when someone from the Financial Times called just out of the blue because he'd heard about it on the grapevine."

National Body

"There's been quite good coverage. That's been fuelled by the updates that Nicky's done from the Leadership Centre... Those updates have been very, very important because of the wide distribution of those, and we've made sure in both the projects that all the key partners have had access to those. That's actually been a bit like a conduit, it's really pulled things together, it's joined things up, it's connected things in the right way, and I think that's been good."

Programme Lead

"The media, whether it be broadcast media, print media, trade journals, just got very, very excited about the whole Total Place stuff, and I think two things happened, one very positive, the message got out about Total Place being the only show in town really, really important, so it got everyone out in terms of what they were trying to do. The second and less positive was it raised expectations and it became very pop, became this kind of let's use the phrase Total Place and no-one really understood why Total Place was being used as a phrase for anything that seemed to have anything to do with efficiency in public service. So a twin edged sword really. And I think that helped the momentum of what the Total Place partners were trying to achieve."

Local Place, Senior Officer



Questions to consider

To what degree do you think the prediction of an impending fiscal crisis was significant in giving Total Place an impetus?

One view is that the recent history of initiatives paradoxically created some 'initiative fatigue' and opened up a pathway for Total Place. Does this feel true from your perspective?

Some critical elements suggested were 'the right time' or 'the right people' or 'the right approach'? Does this help you consider your own experience of how change happens?



Section 2

Inception to PBR

"Everyone wanted to be part of it. I remember the borough commander for the fire brigade ringing me up and saying, 'when can I get involved in Total Place?'"

This section describes how Total Place got started in the pilot places, the processes of 'counting' and 'deep diving'. It also describes how Whitehall started to get involved in the pilot work.

Once the mist had cleared and the 13 pilot areas were agreed, real work began in the places. Local project teams were established and questions on the process were raised thick and fast. The Leadership Centre assisted with the development of local project teams by providing a list of ‘programme leads’ who had a track record in working within places on major change initiatives and who might assist in co-ordinating the embryonic stages of the project and contact with Whitehall. The pilots generally co-ordinated their internal project team through a nominated responsible person. Usually, this took the form of a senior manager or in some cases, the chief executive. Project teams took the majority of May and June to set up and then were adapted as the pilots saw fit.

Starting to ‘get it’

The possibilities were apparent from the start...

“One of the momentous occasions was when we met with all the frontline staff across all the local authorities, across health, and we did have one business, one private provider and a few voluntary in there, and that was just amazing in terms of the energy in the room and the real desire to make things happen.”

Local Place, Senior Officer

“The key political leaders – the city and the county – wanted Total Place to be a success and they made it perfectly clear from the beginning they were going to do it properly and it was to be a success.”

Programme Lead

“Everyone wanted to be part of it. I remember the borough commander for the fire brigade ringing me up and saying, ‘when can I get involved in Total Place? I hear ...’ and in a sense when we designed the four strands, we wanted to give a useful role for people in it all because we do very much believe that the whole public estate plays a big part in it.”

Local Place, Senior Officer

there were some concerns about what it was really about...

“We were getting lots of messages back up from frontline staff and middle managers that they were finding it really hard to get people to see Total Place as something other than just another title for taking 20% out of the organisation.”

Programme Lead

but people decided to hold faith at least at the start.

“And there was just a really interesting conversation about what Total Place was for and why it was worth holding onto. ... In the end it was the Unison rep on our board who was saying, “listen guys, we can do this because this is the best chance we’ve got of protecting our people in communities and frontline users, and actually our staff will go with this, as long as we’re honest with them, as long as we tell them the truth, as long as we involve them, as long as it’s transparent, they’ll see this”, so that was a really neat conversation.”

Programme Lead

An evolutionary way of working

Total Place was intentionally designed by the Leadership Centre as an exercise in working in an evolutionary way, without a pre-determined process or a pre-determined outcome. Some people liked the experimental, fairly open-ended style of working whereas others said they found that hugely frustrating.

The start of the process wasn’t a smooth one.

“I found it a bit of a frustrating process at the outset; it’s been the case all the way through, everything’s got to be done yesterday as far as Total Place is concerned. I guess you’ll appreciate that from your experience, and timescales were ridiculous from the outset. Various events were set up and although I was ostensibly the lead for the county council, key events were set up that I couldn’t get to, I was on holiday or whatever, so it took some while to get into it properly and there was no real infrastructure around.”

Local Place, Manager

“But there’s nothing wrong with a bit of chaos sometimes, good things can happen out of it.”

Local Place, Manager

“Hugely helpful to have that ridiculous timeframe, because without it we would still have programme advisors and others talking about what are best ways of engaging members around this and around that, rather than just getting on and doing it.”

Programme Lead

“It’s as much about a mindset and I think people perhaps approaching us and saying can you give us a toolkit as to how to do this makes me think actually that’s exactly the opposite of what you need to do. This is about thinking it through for yourselves not about just going through the motions and that’s really not going to bring about change.”

National Body

To some people, the way forward seemed very uncertain...

“This is a very demanding piece of work for people and in many ways it’s not the workload, it’s the uncertainty of working. People were not happy to discover that they were entering a process where they can’t see the outcome. They don’t like it and they get very anxious and part of my role was just to try and hold that anxiety while at the same time feeling it myself.”

Programme Lead

“From where many people are now in their understanding of what the world might look like, it just feels that it’s a big jump for lots of people, from what they know and perhaps more uncertainty, less structure and quite a lot of people say they don’t want structure and constraints but when they’re not there, say ‘where’s the structure and constraints?’”

Senior Civil Servant

Others felt there was a fairly clear framework to work within

“From the outset what was really important was designation of two link people within the Treasury to help with all the counting and accessing the data. That was very important because the validity of the X data is questionable as they struggled with accessing accurate and reliable data. We had great hope right from the outset in the sense that we had the Treasury tied in, we’ve got CLG, we’ve got a very detailed Project Initiation Document and here we go, we’re off, and that contained timescales and structure.”

Programme Lead

The openness was quite deliberate – to signal a new way of operating

“I think the network of communication has actually been first class and I think that’s been a primary responsibility for the Leadership Centre. But the way in which things have come out, the way in which the advisors and the project managers’ briefing sessions have taken place, all of those things have helped with the profile of Total Place as well as the actual day-to-day work. When you put it all together it’s a pretty well orchestrated project in the sense that it’s quite joined up, and I think all things considered Total Place in terms of its approach and mechanism has been pretty impressive.”

Programme Lead

“I think without [the events and smaller meetings] what you’d have got would have been no co-ordination or much less co-ordination across the 13 places and across Whitehall departments coming together to make sure the conversations were happening between the two. I think there would have been a fairly big risk, at least, that it would have been similar to past experiences of these sorts of ways of working where the places go off and do one thing and Whitehall goes off and does another thing, and then they come together and disagree.”

Civil Servant

“We’ve tried to make the language feel less top down so we’ve tried to make it more of a collaborative or partnership kind of view. Rather than a “you should do this or do that or don’t do this”, which is why we avoid terms like guidance, templates, frameworks, project plans, we’ve tried to avoid that as much as possible so it doesn’t look like things are being done to places, rather than working together on coming up with solutions and stuff and it can just be about the language, the language is really important.”

National Body

“The Leadership Centre works in a much more sort of fluid, organic way that builds relationship with places. I think there’s perhaps been some learning for me personally in how I might want to operate in the future rather than always delivering to our funders without maybe challenging back, hang on a minute, is this really the right thing for local areas.”

National Body



May to August – The count began

During those first two months, pilots had started to think about how to approach the ‘counting’ aspect of the project. In mid-June, CLG hosted a workshop involving delegates from pilot areas, HMT, pre-pilot areas, the Audit Commission and others, and the suggested methodology was proposed and refined. The methodology was made available to pilot areas towards the end of June. It consisted of a fairly straightforward spreadsheet which listed all of the various funding and delivery agencies who may appear in a place. The pilots were then asked to populate the spreadsheet with their own figures. HMT also provided a table with the COFOG classifications of spend for those places who wanted to classify their count using those definitions. However some used the CIPFA classifications and others classified under LAA themes. There was no single way of doing the count and pilots chose the best way for them.

Further to this and on request from the pilots, HMT provided data for those organisations that deliver services at the local level where it was difficult to obtain. For example, they provided spending figures for the Environment Agency, and courts and prisons in the Total Place areas.

For all other local bodies it was a bottom-up process of talking to the agencies locally. If this proved difficult, places went to the GOs for support in the first instance and if it remained a problem in a number of places HMT provided support through departments centrally. Generally the local approach was normally quicker and helped to inform other agencies locally about Total Place.

The count took place over the summer with the pilots submitting as detailed figures as possible at the end of August. This deadline was put back a month because there simply wasn’t enough time to meet the original deadline of the 31st July.

May to August – Starting to partner locally

The gradual development of partnership working received an injection of pace through doing the Total Place work. Barriers were broken down between organisations and individuals in many places and for perhaps the first time partners came together with intent to do real work on the ground, rather than just turn up to the meetings.

Locally led, partners were able to draw energy from what they felt was important in their place, as opposed to satisfying some centrally chosen criteria about which issues needed to be addressed.

There was a shift in behaviour when partners began to realise that the issues they face were much better tackled by working together on real issues that affected customers rather than staying in their bunkers.

The process was a tonic for partnership working – a possibility for making new things happen.

“So Total Place, I suppose is the ultimate trust position really isn’t it, so many different kind of partners in delivering the same outcome and improving citizens’ lives and putting the citizen at the centre rather than the professional.

Local Place, Manager

We started that morning by saying everybody in that room had the opportunity to contribute beyond boundaries of place or job description or what it said on their business card.”

Senior Civil Servant

“You wouldn’t have known, watching a meeting, who was from which organisation, no idea who was from the local authority, wouldn’t have known ... the three local authorities worked really hard to make sure that nobody got left behind and no local authority ever felt that it was falling behind in terms of status or influence or whatever, but lots of balancing decisions were made, lots of very careful conversations were had.”

Programme Lead

It felt different from usual 'partnership working'...

"I think generally partnerships, either local partnerships or national local partnerships don't have any current running through them, they're sort of switched off and real power is somewhere else and therefore, the conversations you have in partnership settings are quite often imaginary conversations! ... Sometimes you watch partnerships which the whole blooming thing is offline and so what happens in the partnership is like a play and I just experienced more of the real conversations going on online."

Programme Lead

and it does seem to have moved some partnerships on from 'talking about' to 'doing stuff'.

"They would have said that they had very mature partnership arrangements and I think what Total Place has done throughout the time has shown where there are differences and how to overcome them. I think before their partnership was all quite warm words, breathy sounds and it's all lovely, but actually you're going to have to give up this or this isn't going to work for you, but it's going to work for the other people. It's like being in a family I guess, that you're not all going to get what you want all the time, but you're going to work together for the common good."

Local Place, Manager

Bringing people together to do real work was a challenge.

"The biggest achievement for us was getting 42 organisations in the room at the same time, that had never been done before and to get those 42 organisations signed up to a common understanding of what the problem is around access to benefits."

Politician

It has really changed the way people work together...

"The guys were sitting around at table and someone said '18 months ago we would never have even all sat in the same room together, because we would have never thought of any reason of doing so and we would have all been suspicious of the motivation of the others for coming in the first place'."

Local Place, Manager

"If there can be a way of getting people enthusiastically and genuinely to work jointly that isn't triggered by something that's a catastrophe, that has to be a good thing. This, artificially or whatever, forced a process where people came together to work and actually found that each of them had something to contribute to the process and to the party and 'it could be jolly useful in fact if I carried on talking to you', or 'now I know of your existence that really is a good thing'."

Programme Lead

although some people are less sure.

"Through my work on Total Place, what I have discovered is that we are quite good at partnership working in that we all respect what other professionals do, so we have a polite interest in what our colleagues are doing and where our outcomes overlap. We're quite happy then to do some joint working but actually, nobody changes very much because they don't feel they need to, it's almost like somebody's got to break ranks and say 'I'll change, I'll do something different, will you join me in doing something that will change things?'."

Local Place, Manager

What it takes is someone being brave enough to step out of their cave.

"Partners were saying 'No we're not going to move, no we need this, we've got to have this, we can't give anything, and we can't give any leeway'. The chief executive said 'Right, okay, stop. Let's take a step back. Step back and look at this in the round'.

Finally somebody said 'Look I've got £15,000 in my transport budget which I could hold over to next year, I could probably make sure that my staff didn't suffer because I could do this with this'. He started thinking helpfully and creatively about something that was not his own cave.

Because these people are like lions, they stand outside their caves and they roar, don't come in, mine, mine, mine!"

Third sector partner

"It always seems to stop when we get to the resource issue, about 'we'll do less, could you do more?', it's almost that seems the barrier, that nobody can actually say 'we'll give up something or you take responsibility for that and we'll pull out of that particular case'... It's quite an interesting one but I think it will take more senior managers to say 'let's pool a bit of that budget and see whether we can get you working in a more integrated way', as opposed to just joint working which doesn't work."

Local Place, Manager

July - Choosing the themes

It was also during July that the pilots decided on the themes for their 'deep dives'. Initially there was talk of using LAA themes as the basis of the deep dive but it became clear it was important that the pilots went where the energy was in each locality and focused on issues most important to them. Many used their LSPs to decide upon the theme and by the end of July a definitive list was all but finalised.

There was delight at being chosen...

"He said, 'I've got this thing about Total Place, I don't know what it is but it sounds really interesting' and he went to the meeting and then suddenly, probation was selected as a Total Place theme and he came back to the office and danced down the corridor. I think dancing down the corridor was how he felt in that we couldn't believe that we'd been selected to be a Total Place theme because probation is normally seen as on the outskirts really of what happens in local districts."

Local Place, Manager

and that places chose to work on the difficult stuff...

"I think the other side of it is that we didn't want places to do the easy things which have already been looked at to a greater or lesser extent. So, we're really pleased that a lot of places also chose intractable, complex issues which were the brief at the start. Drugs and alcohol, improving outcomes for young people, etc. So, I think we got a good mix of those two things and that happened organically."

Civil Servant

"We chose a theme that ... for us it was drugs and alcohol that every agency could coalesce around. We chose drugs and alcohol because it's a major issue for us in terms of health inequality. Some health colleagues were interested from a PCT position. It's a major issue that links to people turning up at accident and emergency...Huge consequences in terms of crime and disorder and it's linked to violence..."

Local Place, Senior Officer

which seems to have galvanised new energy.

“The Chief Executive involvement and high level involvement from the partner organisations and having that drive at a very high level from elected members, gave us an opportunity to flag up a difficult issue and then how we can try and find some solutions.”

Local Place, Senior Officer

July - Customer Insight work

The customer insight work also began over the summer. This was an IDeA led piece of work which linked to aspects of Total Place and became part of the process. It took the form of a review of the customer insight work that was already going on within the pilots and led to pilot case studies which were shared in March.

August to September – High-level counts, deep dives and interim reports

During August and September work commenced on the pilot’s interim reports for PBR. This was the first of only two main milestones of the project: interim reports for PBR (18 September), final reports for Budget 2010 (5 February).

The ‘Deep Dive’ processes also began at this time. ‘Deep Dive’ is a group of techniques used to rapidly immerse a group or team into a situation for problem solving or idea creation. After choosing their theme, pilots began to look at where and how the money was being spent and also at the cultural elements of partnership working – the ‘how do we do things around here’ questions. Again, the ‘Deep Dive’ process was not centrally driven and how the pilots tackled it was their own choice.

The count process gave places an idea of what to go for

“It was somebody for whom I have enormous respect and he said right at the start ‘we’re not going to go around deep diving, we’re going to go snorkelling. We’re going to look around and we’re going to do quick and dirty shortish things, and if we see some treasure under the water that’s good, we’ll go for it, but I don’t know that there’s just one thing we should look at’.”

Programme Lead

“I think the numbers were what surprised people initially. The spend numbers, the sheer numbers of projects and programmes that are running that Lewisham residents would have access to surprised a lot of people...It surprised me certainly, yes.

When am I going to stop discovering new projects and programmes and new amounts of spending and the rest of it? It was absolutely amazing.

We didn’t finalise the mapping until quite near the deadline because you keep discovering funding... I was shocked, yes.”

Local Place, Manager

“Actually at the end of the day the use of the high level count was one of the most productive things in the whole of the programme actually.”

Programme Lead

But getting the information in was challenging to say the least.

“We did find with health the best way to obtain financial data was to come up with a load of figures that they didn’t agree with so they then gave us the figures that we wanted.

That worked brilliantly, because we took what we thought was the best guess and it provoked quite a debate, and in the end they said ‘would you like us to do it?’ We just smiled sweetly and said ‘we’ve been asking you for three months to do it’, and then they did it. So it’s all about tactics, I suppose.”

Programme Lead

“The other key message is not to underestimate the amount of data gathering, the amount of data supporting, data cleansing and the amount of barriers there are to data sharing, just to inform the first steps of the process for you. I think that’s apparent across all of the themes. Some of that stuff is very, very difficult to get to, it’s in all sorts of different formats and people haven’t necessarily got time within partner organisations to spend time with you going through that data, cleansing it, getting it to the right place and presenting it in a way that helps the Total Place thought.”

Local Place, Senior Officer

The impact of seeing data in new ways was immense...

“I think for me it was getting to the ability to see where there was lots of duplication and spend in an area and bringing a richer picture than we’ve ever had before, that has been such a phenomenal experience for me and it makes you think completely differently.”

Local Place, Manager

“This has for the first time given the politicians who wouldn’t be aware of that, a real eye opener to how much this is costing the public sector and the potential savings that we could make.”

Local place, Senior Officer

“The deep dive analysis showed just how little local people were getting for all that spend. So the PCT is spending 200% of the average and yet it’s one of the worst health records in the county. The schools are spending 73% more than the average and yet, you know, there isn’t a single child in this area who gets free school meals that achieved five GCSE A-C’s. The extra spending isn’t working and it’s just not good enough.

So that really has grabbed people’s attention about what might we do differently.”

Local Place, Senior Officer

and new ways of representing it helped.

“I remember when we took our asset map, Helen’s remark was ‘this is far more influential than a 15 page report on assets, this says it all, it’s so visual’. When you look at the deployment of Jobcentre Plus, DWP, the districts, the parishes, when you look at the density in certain areas of public sector assets you cannot but ask challenging questions about why and how do we do this?”

Programme Lead

July to September – Whitehall departments gearing up to work on Total Place

While all this feverish activity was going on in the pilot places, Whitehall departments were also gearing up to support the pilots. As in the pilot areas, there was some confusion at the start about how to get involved without swamping the pilots and how to make sure the right assistance was offered at the right point.

Whitehall officials felt they had permission to get involved with the work

“[Total Place] was a way of getting a grown up sensible dialogue between Whitehall and places, and I think the kinds of dialogues we’ve had around Total Place have been better in quality and quantity than anything I’ve seen to date; better in the sense they’ve involved more places, and they’ve involved more officials talking about the same thing, and there’s been a sort of attitude of respect and listening, which isn’t always the case.”

Senior Civil Servant

“Because [Total Place] had emanated to a greater or lesser extent from central government, people who were children of central government agencies felt that there was permission there. And because it was owned by local agencies, those people felt it was all right and all of these flows of permission I suppose came together and coalesced in a place that people felt safe to have those sorts of conversations. And we’re not talking here about hugely risky conversations, the conversations which I suppose the man on the street would have said, ‘wasn’t that something you did anyway?’”

Local Place, Manager

and they rolled their sleeves up and got on with it.

“There’s been quite a different engagement in the way that the pilots have been organised, in the way that the centre have actually got out from Whitehall and come and rolled their sleeves up and seen and worked together I think in quite an equal way.”

National Body

However, some civil servants have a different view of what ‘being involved’ means from the people in the places.

“One of the programme managers has said jokingly in a meeting, ‘they come to one meeting where they ask us lots of questions and they think they co-design something’. I think in the very, very early stages, people really did think that their job was just to gather information and that was being involved. The civil service’s idea of what’s being involved and doing things is very different to what happens on the ground, so there’s almost a disconnect in language as well as roles.”

National Body

“[Michael] wanted [HLOG] to be engaged with the work and to actually do work themselves and I encourage that and he made that clear right from the start. It was that sense that ‘you’re going to have to do some work together, guys and you’re not in here to listen, you’re going to be here to do some work, even if it’s not in this room on this day, you will go away and do some stuff and on that basis, you’re in?’.”

National Body

The interim report was a real turning point in getting Departmental leaders involved.

“At the HLOG meeting where the report was tabled, a succession of people said ‘this is really good, there’s some really important stuff in here, and we have to respond properly’. So within almost all of the major Whitehall departments, somebody was saying to the people who were engaged in the pilots, ‘this matters, this is serious, we may not agree with it/we may agree with it but there’s something going on here that we need to be engaged with’. The collective impact of it was for a group of directors general to say ‘we need to do something about this’ and more significantly maybe, the ministerial group got it as well and Denham [Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government] and Byrne, [Chief Secretary to the Treasury] really latched onto it and said, ‘Ministers, you need to do this is for real, there is some good stuff going on here and we need to do it’.”

National Body

“I think the other thing that has been of great benefit is the opportunity to escalate to departmental level, without that I don’t think there would have been the credibility at local level because we’ve all been trying to do this for the last 20 odd years. We always butt up against those challenges which are in the ‘too difficult’ box, because we can’t influence central government or we can’t influence central policy of some of those main agencies, but here was the opportunity through the lead officials group and the ministerial group, to be able to do that.”

Local Place, Senior Officer

“It’s not every day that you get an opportunity to pick up the phone on the back of Total Place and speak to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. Now those things wouldn’t have happened without Total Place.”

Local Place, Senior Officer

“You need someone like the Leadership Centre or someone to provide us with that ability to get to the right people because as I say, and data protection was just an example of that fragmentation within government, too many different stories coming out of too many different bits of too many different departments, we just want an answer, we don’t want a plethora of different answers from you.”

Local Place, manager

The Champions made a difference to some places...

“Champions ... need to be somebody who is located within the top tier of Whitehall, who knows their way around the system, who’s prepared to get on the phone to somebody else and make a contact so the chief exec of the PCT can speak to someone at the Home Office, and talk to the right sort of person about the right sort of issue.”

Civil Servant

“Take the lesson and find somebody who can keep introducing and opening the doors and helping you get past blocks in the Whitehall system because it’s a different system, it works differently and you need a guide through that and the more clout your guide’s got, the better really.”

National Body

“I was surprised, pleasantly by the number of positive references to DG champions in the reports, which struck me as going beyond a politeness to people really meant it, the sense of having that dialogue with Whitehall which reinforces again, the way we try to approach Total Place in a spirit of co-design.”

Senior Civil Servant

but there needs to be a better way of working with the 'doers' too...

and there's a worry that the Champions idea is not scalable.

"I think there is a challenge to bridge the distance between ... the gap between the champions who were all very, very senior and therefore very, very busy ... versus your more kind of grade seven, grade five, who I'm not sure we reached out to and educated enough just about the project, let alone about the work they could have done specifically with us locally.

So if we did this again you could see a session with Whitehall people and local people who'd been involved in Total Place before saying 'how can we do this better?' 'Alright let's set up these project group conversations on a monthly basis.'

Programme Lead

"Where we've been at the moment, is that all of the people involved are converts broadly speaking. If you broaden this out to meet Michael Richard's recommendation from the OEP last year, to all places having champions, then that's going to be challenging because not all DGs are yet bought into this"

Civil Servant



Questions to consider

Total Place didn't come with a toolkit or a fixed approach – rather places were asked to experiment in their own way with a set of methods. In your own experience does that seem a good approach? How could it be different?

It was a confusing start for some, but seemed to develop momentum, rapidly. Why do you think that was?



Section 3

From the PBR to the final reports

"We did some work with young people and libraries and the entire success of that was based on pizzas."

"Wow, this amount of work has been done effectively in less than six months. We started in September really and had to finish in January to get the report in."

"We're really up for this, be brave, be bold, challenge, let's really go where we haven't gone before."

This section describes the second half of the programme from September to February, the creative design process, a 'call to arms' at a major event and the production of the final reports.

This period included the ‘design process’ which was very individual to the places. It was characterised by the stage of taking the deep dives and identification of themes into a plan which typically involved - broadening the inquiry and then consolidating into a set of potential practical proposals.

October to December – Doing the creative design

At the start there was a lot of talk about design, how to do things and share ideas on the Community of Practice, and developing cunning plans or ‘disciplined creativity’. This was quickly submerged in the sea of activity. The design ceased to be a linear thing and became iterative and emergent: design learned from content and content was driven by design.

Intentional service design is an unusual way of working for many staff and managers.

“This was an opportunity that brought us together and encouraged us to talk and think in a new way... Ordinarily our work agenda is dictated by what’s written down on the bit of paper that determines what’s happening in the meeting and of course Total Place was saying we don’t want to do that. What we want to do is get your thoughts about how would you do this differently and that’s the platform about you don’t have to think in the conventional ways about what we’re doing. You can think differently and that was a great opportunity.”

Local Place, Manager

“We saw groups of service managers and staff talking about pathways, how do people access services. We saw them talking about re-designing some of those pathways and feeling legitimised and empowered to do that. We saw them engaging with groups of service users in that re-design and coming up with quite innovative and creative ideas about how it might be different. As managers, you want that to happen but the reality is you’re often caught up in doing the day job and having the energy to get people in a room to do that kind of stuff, sometimes is absent.”

Local Place, Senior Officer

“For many people the idea that you actually deliberately design a service is very, very new so what we expose people to is 25 of our favourite examples of services from the private, public and voluntary sector from all over the world where you can see that the agency has thought really carefully about what people need and then has designed around it. And so it gives people suddenly a big bank of examples of things that have happened that people can start to say, oh gosh, what if we did that in our services?”

Programme Lead

Telling stories and speaking directly to citizens changed managers’ and professionals’ thinking.

“People who told stories about individuals at those events got the most traction, so in one place, they talked about Betty, in another they talked about one of the streets that they’re actually working in and in another place they had recovering drug addicts in the room. Those were the things that seemed to help people ground why we would bother to do this.”

National Body

“I had a conversation with the deputy chief fire officer a couple of weeks ago who said something along the lines of ‘what have you done to my boss?’ Because we took all the chief execs of this leadership group out and dumped them in the most deprived areas. Not quite as bad as that, we’d organised meetings and things for them with local people and local workers. Since he did that he hasn’t stopped talking about it and hasn’t stopped asking the question, what impact is this going to have on local communities then, about absolutely everything we do?”

Local Place, Manager

Sometimes you have to get really creative!

“There were some workshops and we said to the frontline deliverers ‘right, we want you to go out now into the street and just walk up to Mrs Angry and say “tell us about X, Y ...’, ‘oh no, we can’t do that with our customers, good grief why would we want to talk to our customers?’”

Isn’t that interesting, they do that every day in their own settings but to walk up to Mrs Angry in the street. So we said “just try, go on, just try”, and they were absolutely staggered that people would talk to them about stuff. We used a lot of that to inform how we might use our language, how we might engage with people.”

Local Place, Senior Officer

“What we were trying to do is break down some of the perceptions about the employers sometimes saying NEETs are a waste of time, ‘they’re unreliable’ and all that kind of business and the NEET young people are saying ‘employers couldn’t care and they never reply to our applications’ ... so we brought together the two cultures and we did a Question Time event, we put the employers on the panel and we had the young people in the audience.”

Local Place, Manager

“We did some work with young people and libraries and the entire success of that was based on pizzas. If you did something, set it up somewhere and bought in as many pizzas as they could possibly eat, they were up for it big time.”

Local Place, Manager

Working across places and agencies generated lots of new insights...

“You could see light bulb moments every now and then where somebody went ‘oh yes’, and you’d get a rush of conversation around a topic that meant that suddenly everybody was linking things together and saying, ‘ah you’re doing that too, and if only’ and more of a join up, so you got two councils saying, ‘well actually we’re doing something very similar, why don’t we work together and see how to share our lessons that we’ve learned from this’.”

Local Place, Manager

“I think people went quite quickly from a sense of wonderment, what is this about, to a sense of actually this could be quite helpful. At the first meeting I attended there were a lot of Chief Executives there covering all the public sector bodies and that was quite unusual... There was certainly an atmosphere of looking at something as a whole group of organisations which was a bit different.”

Local Place, Senior Officer

so why doesn’t this sort of work come easily in the day-to-day world of public service?

“You get all that stuff around anything people do, and they do it because they’ve only got so much time, they feel under pressure, they can’t bear to take another case on; they don’t want to feel they’re failing... and anxiety makes you deaf. It’s one of those clichés but it’s true, it does.”

Senior Civil Servant

“And it was quite interesting to see how nervous some professionals were, going to meet the young people on their own territories which, I remember beforehand. A few of the phone calls were about me trying to reassure people that they’d be fine and they didn’t need to think of reasons why not to do it.”

Local Place, Senior Officer

“I have not felt as though it’s been desirable behavior to demand to know more information. So I’ve had to live with, at times, having less information than typically I would like about what’s going on and I’ve learned to grow a bit more comfortable with that. It’s just tested my comfort zone from time to time ... but it feels all right.”

Senior Civil Servant

In the end people got much more out of it than they expected.

“They have definitely said very explicitly that what Total Place has produced has been much more fundamental than they expected it to be. They didn’t really know how important this thing was but it seemed like a good thing to do. Its generated insights and ideas and change in a way that they were surprised by but pleased by. I think it’s given them much more confidence to be more honest... I think they realised that it’s through those brutal honesties that you gain the confidence to think about how you’re going to do things differently, and you need to have expressed those things in some way.”

Programme Lead

“I don’t think any of us landed it but I think several of us got to quite similar places and that thinking has been at its best, quite radical and quite scary and could lead to something very different happening.”

Programme Lead

October to December – Whitehall and places getting more involved together

As the process developed it made the relationship between place and Whitehall colleagues more transparent which challenged pre-conceptions and opened up the possibility for change to develop. Transactional ways of working look increasingly inadequate. The value of co-design and working collaboratively was highlighted. New conversations opened up and the power of relationships became apparent.

Each tribe has prejudices about the others

“There’s an assumption that both ends make, in that local think that central government don’t know what they’re doing and central government think that local government don’t know what they’re doing, and I think that was perhaps the assumption. I don’t know why [a Director General] would have thought they would have nothing to say in their interim reports but it’s a very strange thing to say.”

National Body

There’s suspicion about Central Government in local places

“I always had this local agencies good, central agencies bad thing in my mind, and now I realise that they’re just people that are dealing with stupid systems as we are and they’re not sat in Sanctuary House going, oh we don’t really care what’s happening to young people, I’ve got a spreadsheet, it’s fine. So it’s made me understand other people’s perspectives.”

Local Place, Manager

and there’s suspicion about local government in Whitehall.

“I think there is a deep suspicion and lack of trust in local Government. Where that comes from I don’t know because many Ministers actually start out working in local areas so it’s amazing how their views then change when they get to the centre. I suppose it’s the centralised way that this country operates and it’s a mindset isn’t it that if you keep things centralised, that that’s a better way of delivering versus letting go of some of that and trusting - believing that giving local Government greater power over a whole place will have better results. To have an ability to join things up in a way that makes more sense to the local resident who ultimately thinks that the council deliver all of these public services anyway. I think that’s the irony in a lot of this.”

National Body

For people working in places, the transactional nature of the interchange with Whitehall is often disturbing

“I had other officials say things like ‘well what policy do you want us to fix’ and you think it’s not about the policy it’s about how we talk to each other and listen to each other and engage and solve problems with each other. ‘Yeah you’re absolutely right so what policy should we fix?’ And you think ‘well okay, so I’ll say it again, yes’. ‘So which policy would ...’ you saw the emails where departments would say ‘can we have your list of specific recommendations for policy change in Whitehall’. ‘Well actually it’s really not effective to take these policy recommendations out of the context of the whole story’. ‘Oh, we appreciate that. Can we have your list?’”

Programme Lead

“[Whitehall colleagues are] just always saying more and more evidence but how much evidence do you need? Local people are saying this is an issue, how much do you need, when is it enough? It’s wanting to see them as a partner in developing change proposals, not an assessor of them.”

Local Place, Senior Officer

But during Total Place the stereotypes started to dissolve...

“Places have started to recognise that Whitehall isn’t one thing, it’s full of people who are different, who work for departments who have quite different cultural norms and responses and that sometimes it’s as hard to get the DH to work with DCSF as it is for us to work with the PCT, the assumption that ‘it’s Whitehall that stops us’, is not actually true.”

National Body

“And likewise on the other side, for us to make contact with and see who the actual people were who you were dealing with. So, they became people rather than just a city.”

Civil Servant

“The senior leaders networking event in Leicester which was late summer last year, that was the first time anybody from a central government department had actually attended a Total Place event and they came mob handed, there was about 30 odd of them that turned up and it was quite interesting in that they were split amongst all the tables and they were sitting there saying, ‘tell us what it is you want’. The message going back to them was, ‘hang on a minute, we’re in it together, it’s a two-way dialogue’, which was radical for them.”

Politician

and small personal actions made all the difference...

“A senior official at DCSF... came out to see us in a very snowy January. Actually he didn’t ask us to come down to London, he said I’ll come up there and I’ll bring a team and I’ll bring my analysts and we’ll sit in a room and we’ll talk about stuff. So he came out of London, a very visible sign there.”

Local Place, Manager

“[I got] an email from one of the directors general to say he thought I’d done a really good job, it was just really, really nice and I thought that’s what Total Place is about. On a personal level it was really nice to feel like we were sat in a room having conversations about what we would do next and it was all of us together, it felt really, really positive.”

Local Place, Manager

as did openness to criticism.

Even so, some people can see no real progress during the lifetime of Total Place

Some people think it was a missed opportunity...

and these are people on either side of the 'divide'.

"We're trying to set up a presentation to a joint board of DWP and Jobcentre Plus, I think that's happening at the end of April [2010]. When I met up with two senior DWP officials we had a good discussion with them and they basically said, "yeah, bring it on, we really need to understand at our director level what's been going on at local level and your case study is a great example in point, of just holding a mirror up to us and saying how ridiculous this is and that's what we need to see."

Local Place, Senior Officer

"The complete lack of trust of central government which intensified, the longer the process went on and just ... put the skids on the whole thing."

Programme Lead

"I am really, really not sure whether it will make a difference in the way that Whitehall plays its role in the delivery of outcomes for its citizens. There is very little reward for taking risks both in terms of behaviour and in terms of decisions."

Programme Lead

"There are a decent number of places where I very strongly feel that had they taken a bit more of a step towards building a bit of a trust relationship with some Whitehall policy colleagues, they would have come out with something much, much better and much more significant and it's a shame that they didn't."

Civil Servant

"In the back of my mind I wonder what the experience has been like for the pilots and in truth I wonder what we've added, through the Leadership Centre, whether we added an unnecessary layer. There are lots of things where we've been communicating through the Leadership Centre with 13 places, why couldn't we just send an email ourselves."

Civil Servant

"I think what was a bit disappointing, we wanted government to be a full partner at the table, not just in terms of meetings and the big events we were running, which was good but we also hoped that maybe they would be able to second someone with us to help with the detailed work. We did offer from some of the policy teams for people to visit and we didn't really get the take up from more junior ranking officials and that was disappointing because that could have been a genuine exercise of working in partnership. I suppose my ultimate aspiration would have been a joint project whereby I could have gone and presented jointly with someone from Whitehall to the DGs and actually it still kept slipping back into transactional mode, us presenting to them."

Local Place, Senior Officer



What would it take to build up enough trust to really collaborate on changing the whole system?

"It's a bit of a cultural thing isn't it? Do you retrench and want to have worked out all of the answers before you show your sums to Whitehall, which is what a lot of places did, or are you a bit more confident in your own knowledge of the issues and your own sense of what needs doing, to say 'we know that this is a problem and we think these are some of the ways to it and can we just talk to you about how this gets there?' and that is co-designing. But co-design didn't really happen, because of a lack of trust."

Civil Servant

"As a chief exec in local government I don't really understand what it's like to try and work directly to a Minister. Equally many of those people in the most senior positions in Whitehall do not understand what it is to drive an organisation our size in the locality. Until we understand each other's worlds Total Place will not grip, the trust will not be sustained. A lot of good things we've started talking about won't get off the ground because we don't understand each other's worlds well enough."

Local Place, Senior Officer

"For Whitehall, it's as if we're right back in maybe the LPSA stage of working together. Local areas are well ahead of us. The next thing we need to do, although it would be even more painful and difficult than this has been, is Total Government."

Civil Servant

January to February – senior leaders' event to the final report

This was a crunch period for Total Place. It became focused on specific proposals and business cases. It was pressured, with tight deadlines to meet and there was a lot to do.

This commitment from many key individuals was shown at a significant event in snowy Gateshead on 15 January 2010 when 120 senior people from all levels and across the organisations involved in total place came together. This happened midway between the PBR and the final reporting due by 5 February.

Many of the people interviewed commented on Gateshead because it gave people the boost they needed to get the job done. It re-invigorated the belief that Total Place, and the work being done to get the final reports produced, was worthwhile. Particular characters like Helen Bailey and Irene Lucas stand out in people's minds, partly because they demonstrated throughout their own personal commitment to Total Place and their belief that Total Place offers hope for the future.

The senior leaders' event in Gateshead

It felt upbeat and positive – optimism was high...

"I think [the Gateshead event] was seminal in the sense of we got some of the top officials from the government side and all the key pilots, and the language, the body language, the verbal language was very, very upbeat about we've got a chance everyone to do something very special, and it was upbeat and positive. That felt very real to me."

Local Place, Senior Officer

"[Gateshead] made me feel very optimistic because the Whitehall people that were there were really high quality, really good and had great conversations. It turned for me when they had the Chief Executive of Jobcentre Plus and the Director of Benefits something or other from the DWP, and both of them were up for it, and I thought 'ah, okay, this is ...', and the people who there were just so good I thought 'there's a possibility that this will move on'."

Programme Lead

**there was a
'call to arms'.**

"I think it was really Helen Bailey's summary, the last statement that she rounded it all up by saying 'we're really up for this, be brave, be bold, challenge, let's really go where we haven't gone before in exploring the relationships, let's really get into this'. I think that coming from Helen ... and I know that had a big impact on my team and key players from other places that were there....everybody went back talking about what had actually been said, and that was disseminated across all the partners in both places."

Programme Lead

"And I'd say a big turning point probably was 15 January when we went to Gateshead. So to have people like Helen Bailey and Irene Lucas saying it's really important, it's matters, it's very exciting, I think people caught that enthusiasm and realised it was part of a bigger distinction between what Total Place is as a pilot and what Total Place is as a concept. I think they got the concept and now the language is very much about, how can we mainstream Total Place, who are we going to work like this more differently, carry on."

Local Place, Manager

The final reports

Final reports were submitted by places by 5 February summarising the work they had done during the project and the position reached. The reports were sent via the Leadership Centre to CLG and the Treasury. This was the point at which something was given back to the centre so that an overall picture of the work of the places could be seen. Places weren't given a pro forma or instruction about the style of the reports although support was available from the Leadership Centre when sought.

Once the reports were finished the Treasury with input from the Leadership Centre and CLG, developed a consolidated, summary report in March 2010.

**The final report
was produced at
pace...**

"I think the time pressure helps. And that if you give people a deadline and you say we've got to produce something by then, actually you do. You may end up with something of a compromise near the end perhaps but at least you do get something out of it, it doesn't just drag on and drag on. So I think the timescale was actually a help. It was at the worst possible time of year that it could have come, etc. but it's just another thing to do. So could we have done without it? Yes we could. Are we going to be better off with it? I think we are actually."

Local Place, Senior Officer

**and that affected
the final product...**

"Probably a bit more time. Yeah probably a bit more time because sometimes these things can feel terribly rushed and I don't know that you always get the best product when things are rushed."

Local Place, Manager

**but we still
achieved a lot.**

**Some people
believe that the
'numbers' in the
final reports got
watered down...**

**as well as the
'detail' of potential
interventions.**

**Some places were
worried that they
would lose out.**

**Honesty about
what each 'side'
needed definitely
helped**

"Wow, this amount of work has been done effectively in less than six months'. We started in September really and had to finish in January to get the report in."

Programme Lead

"It was worrying that some of the pilots decided to take numbers out of the report at the end because they were apparently scared of the way the government was going to react. Now, maybe we're being a bit heroic but this comes back to if you believe in Total Place and seizing the moment, and if you don't put something in the report which is challenging, then why bother."

Local Place, Senior Officer

"[Places] had a paranoid view that any number would be used against them and that led to a very dramatic watering down over everything, over the final two to three weeks."

Programme Lead

"The ones with the truly grand designs I don't think were as powerful as the ones who'd really gone into the innards of processes for example offenders and really said, 'if you change this little detail, you will get really big results'"

Senior Civil Servant

"I actually think the annexes in the report are far more interesting than what's in the report, and there's loads of stuff there that can be worked on."

Local Place, Senior Officer

"[Their report] came in and I was quite blown away, if it's not too sad because I think that it's an incredibly detailed piece of work. What they did really impressively for me was to tie in with present thinking at DWP and their access to benefits side. And also, to set out really clearly what their kind of ten steps to a better system would be. And within each of those to provide some costings and some numbers and some sense of what this might achieve, in terms of different outcomes but to do it on a step by step basis that was really clear for everyone to see how they go there."

Civil Servant

"One thing that worries me is the scalability stuff and the worry that if the pilots have come up with a lot of savings, the tendency to aggregate that and then just expect everywhere to make those same savings, is a bit of a worry to me ... but then we're reassured by Treasury that that isn't the case, nobody's sitting in the Treasury adding it all up, they're not doing that so ..."

National Body

"This is about human beings saying what am I prepared to give up, on what terms, what is my bottom line negotiating position, and how can we love each other or not? That's the bottom line. Total Place if nothing else has taught us, I think, to be much more open and honest. But there is still subterfuge in the system, there are still people ... and we're all guilty of it ... that are not prepared to lay their cards on the table."

Local Place, Senior Officer

"We tried to be honest about what Whitehall is looking for and places were equally being honest about what they might be able to say, how far they might be able to go. And people were being frank and clear with each other, plus at the same time recognising that it's a good relationship that we needed to have there. So, that would have been infinitely better than people either being too aggressive or being destructive or people meekly saying yes, this is a great idea and then, nothing happening."

Civil Servant

It's hard to 'not know'...

Until you realise no-one else does either!

And after all – it's not really about reports in the end.

"What I felt is that the pilots have always wanted to look brilliant in front of central government and they're not comfortable when they don't have all the answers."

National Body

"One of the workshops which involved locality people and Whitehall people was profound. They [local CEOs] actually found that quite reassuring because it brought them face to face with the fact that Whitehall really didn't have a clue about how to make change happen on the ground and how to implement stuff. And I think it gave them confidence that what they were going to produce, even though they couldn't see what it would be yet, would be really valuable to play back into Whitehall. It was interesting that from that point on they stopped worrying about what Whitehall was going to think about them and just got on with doing the work that they thought was important for the locality, which was very freeing."

Programme Lead

"We're on a journey; the report is at a point in time. I think in a year from now we'll see, you know, or maybe two years, the fruits of this sort of way of working and this way of thinking."

Local Place, Manager



Questions to consider

What do you notice from the quotes about how this period felt? Was it a time of 'conscious incompetence', a period of both huge possibilities, and major risks?

From your perspective, did people really question the old ways of doing things?

Does this feel familiar: disagreement is usually held under the surface during a project but becomes more visible when the task of defining outcomes, conclusions, and savings reveals the extent of the cracks in the partnership?



Section 4

Was it worth it ? Yes, it was

4

"This is an idea whose time has come and that financial context that we're working in means that the time is now and it's the right time to be making this stuff happen."

"The good ideas still have to be done regardless really and when the dust settles, an election's held, whatever we do we're going to keep coming back to this area."

As the interviews were taking place, the final outcome of the May 2010 general election was not known. Nonetheless new ways of working do appear to be emerging. Our interviewees are telling us that, through their work on Total Place, they have seen enough to inspire them to continue new ways of working together to change their places.

During the interviews, people spoke warmly of what they had learned during the Total Place process - both positive and more difficult experiences. We wanted to close the historical part of this report by letting our participants' voices sound out about this new way of working. They describe the inspiration they have gained from doing the work, some of their current thoughts about how a place-based way of working might require new forms of leadership and how they are now committed to moving this way of working forward in their local areas.

A new way of working together

Despite the sense of 'waiting', many places believe they can get started locally regardless of national decision-making.

Total Place gave permission...

"I don't think I can overstate, from where I sit, the significance of having a thing called Total Place to inject energy and purpose and permission into certain sorts of conversations. And the unfreezing of the old was done very much by that imperative of having this thing called Total Place which somehow everyone believed that we were all party to which gave permission to do things which otherwise would have been quite risky to do"

Local Place, Manager

"The 'quirky child' way of doing [Total Place] rather than the dry dusty academic policy work captured imagination and because it was the first way of it being a different way of doing it. It was brave - people had to put a lot of personal judgement into things and actually quite often in this country people don't always stand up and be counted and say no, we're doing it for this reason and that goes back to right people, right place, right time."

National Body

and momentum.

"You hear someone like Mark Farrar, [Chief Executive, NHS North West] who's the NHS lead for Total Place who's really clear that this is an idea whose time has come and that financial context that we're working in means that the time is now and it's the right time to be making this stuff happen. I agree with that so I think the question is how do we build on the momentum that's out there."

Civil Servant

"For me the proof now will be if that does lead to tangible things and that needs to happen very quickly in my view. The conversations have been much more positive and you can tangibly see that with national departments, government departments, changing their mindset. That's already freed up, locally, individual managers in Job Centre Plus, DWP, etc to be really around the table in a meaningful way rather than just there to make up the numbers."

Local Place, Senior Officer

It's possible to put cynicism aside to just get on with the work.

"Pre-election there's lots of cynicism about why are we doing this on the eve of an election? There is a degree of cynicism which people believe that there are Machiavellian motives behind this. There may well be but from a point of view of delivering better care and better value, it makes no difference.

The good ideas still have to be done regardless really and when the dust settles, an election's held, whatever we do we're going to keep coming back to this area aren't we?"

Local Place, Senior Officer

"Changes have been made but not to the degree that they can be made. So I think what sets Total Place out against other initiatives and programmes and improvement ideas is that it is talking about radical change. And so outcomes that could be delivered are not going to be delivered by 5 February or April or whenever else. You're talking about lives and therefore they could be years down the track".

Local Place, Manager

People can see this as a new way of working.

"I don't think it's changed my beliefs and principles about what we should do. I think that what it's changed is the possibility of making things happen. I can see how we can get genuine whole system engagement in bits of work now in a way that I probably used to believe that we should do, but couldn't necessarily see a way to achieve that."

Local Place, Senior Officer

"I think that this was possibly an ill conceived or hastily conceived project, possibly to give the current Government something to say on their manifesto about delivery and in fact it has turned into a hugely worthwhile exercise in my opinion."

Politician

"In the light of the UK public sector this will be a signpost, Total Place pilots will be a signpost for the different ways in which we're going to do things for the future, and I think time will prove that right."

Programme Lead

There's a sense of waiting in some places...

"Well at the moment it's just an offer so really nothing's been achieved, nothing's been signed up to, so we'll wait and see if that's physically and metaphorically signed up to by government. We've signed up to it on our side."

Local Place, Senior Officer

"There are huge amounts of uncertainty and Government has gone into budget mode and not sharing anything and there's been a silence. It could get killed stone dead next week for all we know, at Government level, or there could be another Total Place bit, there could be a lot of backing for it.

And also with the election coming up, who knows? So I'm optimistic that we can still make a difference locally but it does still need to be that two way process and we're not sure whether the commitment is still there from Government."

Local Place, Manager

but they feel ready to go...

"If we get the go-ahead from government on the concordat you bet your life we'll then roll-out a massive engagement programme which says this was just the start of a very different way of working."

Local Place, Senior Officer

"I think the other bit is the parent/child relationship that exists between government and local government where they say 'here's a bag of money, go and do something', so you're not just talking about how can we carry this on, how might we do something different. We've got to be grown up enough to say 'do you know the conclusions of this report? We don't need anybody's help, we need to stop blaming other people, we need to get a grip and do this for ourselves'."

Local Place, Senior Officer

"It's not long in the degrees of separation before in whatever topic you're talking about you tend to get to Total Place one way or another, be it improvement programmes within councils or from a finance perspective or customer insight. Many, many paths lead to Total Place so it's definitely, definitely got something to give."

Local Place, Manager

and are keen to work with Whitehall differently.

"Local Government's got a lot less defensive and a lot more confident and engaging and those are the sort of people that you want... There have been some amazingly poorly handled engagements between central and local government and we're getting out of those. Where the behaviour just feeds stereotypes on both sides, central Government people get more and more superior and detached and the local government people get more and more defensive and you end up nowhere. Well we seem to be melting that effectively and I think it's partly about confidence on the local government side. I think it's got its ears open, interested in thinking through a different way."

Senior Civil Servant

"I would stand on a national platform now and say Total Place has really started to shift some of the cultural relationships between all of us ... what this has done has gripped the imagination."

Local Place, Senior Officer

"I think one of the most valuable things to local government would be to convince them that most of this they can do without central government permission, which isn't a position they usually start from."

National Body

Learning about leadership of place

One of the core areas of learning during Total Place was about how leadership might need to shift to support a place-based way of working – both political leadership and officer leadership. Some of the confidence that people have gained from the process seems to come from trying out new forms of leadership collaboration and finding out that those actions do have a positive impact.

People are thinking about what it might take to move from leadership of isolated agencies to collective leadership.

"I think that there appears to be some new and exciting ways of thinking about leadership across the public sector which is a bit about people giving themselves the head space to think about these things and collaboratively work out what it is that they are trying to achieve together and then what are we going to do about it. Things like one of the pilot reports, very confident tone of kind of we're doing it now, we're getting on with it."

Civil Servant

"Magnanimous leadership is about saying that if you stood back and asked the question of yourselves "What benefit are we getting out of this Total Place pilot", at certain points quite frankly there would be absolutely nothing. So at that point you take your toys home and not play. The magnanimous leadership response is saying, do you know what, I'm going to give resource to that, I'm going to support it 110% despite the fact I know there is not a tangible financial reward to me, there's not a great organisational reward to me."

Local Place, Senior Officer

Some of it is about building much more personal relationships between local leaders.

"What I was hoping it was going to do ... was to gel an approach. Firstly to build personal relationships because one of the things that was a lesson out of the 2007 floods in here was that some of the very senior people didn't actually have a personal relationship with each other. I was so struck by a comment that the Chief Fire Officer said 'I didn't know the Chief Constable well enough to ring him at home at 3:00am, I didn't have his home number...' to say 'Upton is going to go under water'. You know, all the official stuff is in place but actually on a personal level you need to say: 'we need your help here' and so it was about building those personal relationships."

National Body

"Some of it was also people being relatively sophisticated in their understanding about what partnerships need in terms of leadership behaviour and co-leadership, rather than there being leadership coming from a single place. I've always talked about partnerships as leadership systems; where leadership is coming from many places and there is an orchestration job which means that somebody needs to be connecting up the leadership of all the different leaders so that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts."

Programme Lead

Some of it is about just rolling up your sleeves and getting grubby.

“Quite often when you’re doing work like this, sometimes the senior people don’t think they need to come to the creative bits. They think they can just receive the output. So it was really exciting that they not only committed the time but came and clearly found great personal value in it, and they contributed really well on the day. They were all really good at rolling their sleeves up and just getting along with everybody else.”

Programme Lead

“And I think certainly some of the Whitehall people who I think got a bit dirty in it, they’ve contributed really well and they’ve also generated insights for themselves as to what life is really like on the ground down there in the locality.”

Programme Lead

“There are some iconic stories that people tell about very senior people going and sitting on the floor eating pie, with deprived families and just listening to their stories.”

National Body

“It is easy to become quite arrogant about it because you think you know, and it was quite sobering that in the same way we look to Whitehall and say they’re disconnected. As a Chief Exec doing a lot of the strategic stuff you can become quite disconnected from your own community and your own community experiences. So it’s about getting some of those customer messages into our own organisations locally. So when we’re talking about leading a place we’re leading a place with people in it and we’re aware of our impact and effect, not just the performance target stuff.”

Local Place, Senior Officer

As long as you can agree that it’s actually everyone’s problem...

“One of the things we said all along is that a lot of these Total Places have been local authority led with partners... so what will happen is you’ll go and you’ll set it all up, and Health will say ‘we’ll help you with your problem’, and DWP will say, ‘I’ll help you with your problem’, and what we want to say to everybody in the room is, ‘it’s not our problem. It isn’t a local authority problem. It’s our problem, so you’re not helping me. We together need to solve it’.”

Local Place, Manager

you can even sort the money out!

“So this was the Damascene moment when he said you can have some of my money at which point I thought somebody would cry, I nearly cried; it was such an amazing move away from the old position. Long pause, somebody else said ‘If you’re going to do that then in fact I could probably do this and I’ve got this money in my something budget that perhaps we could move over to there and we could take the girls that use that or whatever’ so people were starting to leave their positions and that was just like a bolt from the blue and it was marvellous because to me that made Total Place worthwhile. The sub-title of Total Place is ‘working together’ or it was here anyway, and at the eleventh hour that’s what appeared to me to be happening and I thought well if that has happened, that has been worth every moment, every penny, every bit of sweat that’s happened.”

Politician

Small triumphs are memorable

Reports aside, what people remember are those small triumphs

Whether it’s small practical things...

“We were doing this property work and at the very, very first meeting in a discussion one of the guys from the police said just as an example we’ve got 40,000 feet of space, this is really wasted, we’re trying to use it. And the guy from OCT said, blow me down, we need 40,000 square feet of space and they rushed off in a corner and started bargaining. So little magical things happen like that along the way”

Local Place, Manager

“It’s just like young people said when they ring the benefits agency it could cost them a fortune (when using their own phones). They’re hanging on the phone, they’re kept waiting, all of this. Well they’ve turned it into a free phone number. Just little things like that are starting to shift and change. Some things are more... will be quicker than others like the local things we can change but you do feel we’ve got that way in as well, with the DWP to actually say we want a transitional benefit; we want it through one person. We want to have things more integrated.”

Local Place, Senior Officer

“They’ve also helped us start to put together the beginning of work about a co-ordinated public sector approach. So for example, we’ve signed up to a statement of principles called Terms of Engagement about how we’re each going to manage our individual budget process. So things like - we will talk to partners before decisions are taken so that we’re clear about what the impact will be. We’ll share information, we’ll co-ordinate our budget processes so we can line all the time lines up so everybody knows what happens when.”

Local Place, Senior Officer

“We’re actually making huge progress with DWP about transitional benefits. Transitional benefits didn’t exist before Total Place. So from an evidential point-of-view if one of the outcomes is that we achieve some transitional benefits that will help people, whether they’re leaving care, leaving prison, leaving hospital or whatever, if we’ve got a transitional arrangement that’s controlled at the point of service delivery, those are very serious and very considerable outcomes to have achieved.”

Programme Lead

or quite significant bureaucratic shifts.

“The PCT very significantly, shifting its willingness to look at Children’s Services. So going from a discussion where we’d spent about 18 months talking about it, really nothing happening. We’ve now, just in the last couple of months, gone through both the executive bodies of the PCT and the council, a decision which puts about 40% of the children’s budget straight into the Joint Commissioning Budget, single pot and the agreement about the structure that will support that and all the rest of it, so a big, big shift, big shift.”

Local Place, Senior Officer

“One of the quotations that have meant the most to me was from the director of strategic commissioning at the PCT who said to me she was in some sort of commissioning meeting with the PCT and halfway through the meeting she suddenly thought, we can’t do this if we haven’t got our local authority colleagues around the table. And it was a meeting about PCT commissioning, it wasn’t actually anything about anyone wider, but she’d realised that if you continue do to things in your own silos, funnily enough it’s not going to be very joined up.”

Programme Lead

A new vigour for the public service ethos and for individuals too

As part of the process of Total Place, many people have found themselves reconnecting with the idea of public service and that in itself has made the whole process worthwhile. Those positively engaged are continuing and are passionate about this important work. People remembered why they chose to serve the public.

Taking a fresh look reminds people why they do this in the first place.

“I think for me seeing people who’ve been leading these services for a very long time looking at them very differently and stepping back, and listening far more to the customer experience and having the space to rethink that because of that learning, has been an absolutely amazing experience ... their enthusiasm for it to work has been phenomenal.”

Local Place, Manager

“After working for 30 years it’s been a real boost to be doing something from such a different angle. So, there have been nights when I’ve been thinking what an earth am I doing and why am I doing this? When you look at that in the context of everything else it has been a great boost. Simply because I was so used to doing what I do and I can do it with my eyes closed almost. So these were tasks and organising things that I would never have done and discussed things with people I would never have talked to otherwise.”

Local Place, Senior Officer

It is difficult work...

“So from a personal, psychological and from an organisational systems view, the unknowability which Total Place confronts people with is disturbing.”

Programme Lead

but in the end it’s about making a difference and having meaning.

“Well it’s just confirmed for me that this is the right thing to do. I love it because this is the kind of work I like. It brings different agendas together in a way that’s very coherent. It makes sense, it’s not entirely coherent yet but it’s getting there. I’ve worked in public services all my life. I love working in local government and it’s always about at the end of the day and the end of each year you stop and ask yourself well did I make any difference to the people who live here and this is one of the things that helps me answer yes I did.”

Local Place, Senior Officer

“And you could hear pennies dropping and you just think it’s worth it for that, for that alone. If that’s all that this project’s achieved then that’s got to be worth doing, hasn’t it. So it was good and it felt like work that was worth doing, we felt as if ... well I certainly did ... I didn’t get up thinking ‘oh God, I’ve got to go through that’, I actually got up thinking ‘yes, I have a good task to do today, I have something meaningful to do’.”

Programme Lead

Suddenly it becomes a priority.

“One of the other chief executives said to me ‘I suddenly realised how important Total Place was when I realised that when I had a conflict of meetings I’d choose to go to the Total Place meeting’. Total Place is just as a marker for efforts to really engage borough wide became more important than running my own organisation.”

Programme Lead

“It’s got a star dust hasn’t it, it’s got some kind of star dust quality that means if you invite people ... and the same happened in our place on a good day, if you invite people to meetings with a Total Place label, they come.”

Programme Lead

The cynics and the fans may need to get together.

“I’m sure there’s certainly a lot more cynics out there than there are those that have been converted to this way of working.”

National Body

“Also an issue with Total Place has been, in part the slightly ironic result of it being such a change... having such a paraphernalia of change programmes around it, you know, Facilitators and Programme Managers and Communications, Press this and Press that, and it’s marched an awful lot of people up the hill and raised an awful lot of expectations.”

Senior Civil Servant

“It’s almost like an inverted pyramid; we’ve got a few people trying to drive what is a huge process. I suppose what we were always trying to do, is how we turned it around so that you got more people connected and making a contribution. It’s so huge, that a handful of converts is never going to drive a city of this size into a Total Place thinking mindset.

“I think we’re going to need to use those converts, those people that believe in the approach and I think we need to do more of what we’ve started. I think we need to do more working together, more collaboration between the centre and local areas. I think we need to widen that out across other policy areas. I think we need to build this way of working as a part of the way we design services, the way we deliver services and less of ‘them and us’. Also less of a local Government and the people they deliver services to.”

National Body

It’s hard but rewarding at the same time.

“It’s incredible what it does for your confidence to realise that you really have made a serious contribution to something significant, and people have clearly listened.”

Local Place, Senior Officer

“Nothing I’ve ever worked on has made me feel so stupid or so clever, because there are days when you come in and you do stuff and it really works and you think, my god I’m going to change the world here, this is totally different to anything I’ve ever done.”

Local Place, Manager

And finally...

“Oh I could do it every day of the week; I just find it fascinating because it’s inspiring isn’t it, looking at how you change things. I find that the concept of Total Place is a really liberating one in terms of freeing you up to think about things in a different way.”

Local Place, Manager

Interviewees seem to be saying that they have experienced revival, invigoration, frustration, bemusement, fear, connection and empowerment for themselves and for the citizens they serve. They have learned a lot; practical and innovative ways of working, more about partners and colleagues from other parts of the system, insights into themselves and their customers, and how they can save money. And they believe they have more to learn together.



Questions to consider

Based on what you have read, how do you think that local government and local agencies could work better together with the public, supported by national government and others to design and implement of services for the public?

The participation of citizens in designing, implementing and ownership of public services changes the nature of the skills and behaviours public servants. How are you and your colleagues, officers and politicians, equipped and prepared for this?



Afterword

“... Let’s get into a conversation of ‘how are we going to do this together?’ ... by focusing on an outcome [we] both collectively want to achieve, that we get into a different way of thinking.”

“It feels like you need the pressure of some sort of special thing like a pilot, to get the synaptic jumps to start jumping.”

The experience of Total Place has surfaced or re-surfaced issues of national politics, governance, public funding, and the balance of power. Many of these challenges were known or suspected already but this programme has highlighted them in an incontrovertible way. As the first phase of Total Place has drawn to a close, those challenges have come to the fore and mixed teams of pilot place and Whitehall departmental colleagues are working hard to find ways of addressing them.

Any new way of collaborating across large systems holds its challenges and Total Place is no exception. During the interviews, participants mused on some of the questions that have struck them during the work and thought about how they would face up to and work with those challenges locally and nationally. This section allows space for those thoughts and invites you to think for yourself about those challenges in your local place. Here, people consider how a change of Government might impact thinking about area-based working; how funding and governance processes might need to change to support such a change; and how this evolutionary way of working might be scaled up across the public sector without losing its unique feel. Finally, there is a call for collaboration - to move forward what we have learned together.

New government

As we talked to them in the run-up to the May 2010 election, pilot interviewees expressed different views about what effect a new government might have on the future of a 'Total Place way of working'.

There's lots of change nationally but it's cross party....

"It's clearly got not only a lot of resonance across political boundaries at local level, it also has at national level so the Conservatives have been publicly indicating it's in their sights and the way they think about these things. I think the scale of the challenge that local areas will face is the fiscal policy that drives them towards reducing the deficit, there'll be a genuine necessity out there, so there'll be plenty of incentives."

Senior Civil Servant

"It happened on a number of occasions [that] shadow ministers publicly indicated that they were supporting this agenda, rather than using it as a political football. We could have got into a difficult and contested political space on this and the fact that we haven't thus far and each day that goes by without us doing it, I just count as a blessing really. If we make it another couple of weeks we've got away with it, but I think the fact that we've been able to say 'and this has support from all major parties at national level' has been key in people doing it."

National Body

The churn of people may still affect the next steps...

"I'm not optimistic, I talked to an ex-minister the other day about whether he thought there was any chance of actually getting this kind of stuff talked about openly, nationally and he was very...depressing about it."

Programme Lead

"The key to this is continuity. If we have churn, both with civil servants, ministers and local government, then this is going to go badly wrong and given that we've got an election ahead of us, with all the change that that implies, I think there are some serious risks here.

"Now I know Cameron and the Lib Dems have said that they think this is a good thing to do but my experience in this locality is that the reason we've been successful for instance on the integrated access model is continuity.

"So, the uncertainty at the moment which we need to keep our eye on is continuity and if there is a change of government, how we re-establish relationships"

Local Place, Senior Officer

but perhaps a 'Total Place way of working' is an idea that can transcend ideology.

"Despite the fact that this was a Labour Government sponsored initiative the work was being done by people on the ground from different places and was very much seen as their work rather than Governments work. For example I think that the member champion in the LGA was a Conservative politician talking to a Labour Minister."

National Body

Governance

Total Place has huge implications for local governance arrangements and for the governance relationship between Whitehall and places. People in Whitehall and places are working together on how those arrangements might change but there is still a lot of thinking to do.

Some places instigated new arrangements to manage Total Place.

"One of the things that we've not directly been involved with but that has been quoted in the report as being a good thing out of Total Place, was the public services board that was created as part of the governance framework of Total Place, but that will remain in place going forward."

Local Place, Manager

"If we work collaboratively and then separate in order to make decisions and then come back again further down the road, how long is that going to take us? So somehow we've got to have some mechanism to circumvent some of that, to put some pace into this because of the timescales."

Local Place, Senior Officer

So what can you do?

"You don't need to do major moves of money around and between Whitehall and local government. If you simply put a local leadership role on the top of a whole set of existing arrangements and relationships, you will get results"

Senior Civil Servant

"It just struck me that there are all these bodies, all full of worthy people, all funded by the taxpayer, somehow not quite getting it together for the citizen, because of the way all the interactions work. And, as I said, a good way of driving best value is to put local leadership on top of all of that and knock some heads together and try to sort out these things. It's not really going to happen at any other level."

Senior Civil Servant

"I think the resolution of this is going to be political. The spread of Total Place thinking will pose again the question about local political leadership and accountability. There is in fact a big shift in the centre of gravity away from the centre but also away from the traditional power bases of councils. Devolution in Scotland and Wales, and moves toward sub-regions and elected mayors in England are all part of this unsung change."

Senior Civil Servant

Working across places rather than within authorities makes new demands on elected members.

"There are a group of members who have executive responsibility and the nature of their work in the council gives them a broad view. They readily come to understand these sorts of issues. But there are members further away from those positions who've got more locally based responsibilities, some of whom can feel quite alienated away from all of this and some of whom want to have a piece of defensible space, something that they can call their own, that they have done for their communities and in the Council. They're very proud of the Council. You get a lot of conversations about 'brand.' Councils want to be able to take pride in something that's theirs and pride in a partnership is a bit diluted for them."

Senior Civil Servant

"There are some places that have deliberately chosen not to involve their members in the early stages because they didn't feel they're capable, so there is a bigger discussion about members' experience of this type of work, the support available in terms of development for politicians, and their and officer's understanding of the role of leading a place."

Senior Civil Servant

A new way of negotiating with national Government seems vital...

“The major stumbling block I think has been that it’s always been perceived as an officer led activity and there was very, very patchy engagement from elected members right up to probably just before Christmas, so we’d gone half way through the project virtually with very little engagement. It was only when we got to Gateshead, that we began to see more elected members.”

National Body

“It has always slightly worried me that there hasn’t been enough engagement with either elected members and the non-exec members of PCTs to bring them along, because at the end of the day the paper’s going to go to them to basically transfer this money over to make savings.”

Local Place, Senior Officer

“If you put a health professional together with an education or LAA professional, they’ll talk, it seems to take only a couple of minutes before you’re talking about the regulations that stop them doing the things that are common sense that they want to do. Concordats, discussions with central government give you a vehicle to suddenly start discussing those. Not demanding but trying to find a way that gets at what the guidelines were asking for, but maybe in a different way.”

Local Place, Manager

“Sooner or later you reach the limits of managerial administrative stuff and you’re into what’s going to connect democratic accountability to these new structures and are the existing structures of local government processes sufficient? Are they strong enough to actually carry the weight of what we’re talking about here, to give real people an influence over them?”

Senior Civil Servant

“There is that side which is about the citizen, the customer and anybody with a brain could know that there’s a better way of doing things. On the other side of that equation is local government being shafted by central government in relation to this is an opportunity to reduce the expenditure lines in an arbitrary way. I think there is a political side to this equation which we shouldn’t forget that some will say ‘well what we’re doing here is pandering to the cuts agenda which could go badly wrong if we don’t make this intelligent, if this is not an intelligent process’.”

Local Place, Senior Officer

“My view is that whilst it’s absolutely right for local authorities and the public sector in places to be ambitious, it needs to be tempered with a dose of political reality. Because there is no way many Departments are going to cede things to local places. And the more you talk to civil servants about accountability and governance, the big financial accountability issue stands out. So I just think it’s naïve for someone in a place to say, you just give a mega-billion budget and we’ll spend it, do it for you in a different way.”

Local Place, Senior Officer

“I think there’s a real issue about governance, how does Total Place relate to the democratic process and unless that’s sorted out, then I think we’re on a hiding to nothing.”

Local Place, Manager

but no-one is quite sure yet how to do it.

“I’ve had the bizarre experience, and I don’t want to tell the story in an unkind way. People came from local government to see me [in Whitehall] to ask me why we don’t do more to enforce localism.”

Senior Civil Servant

Shifts to public funding

Developing the most effective service and saving money are not mutually exclusive. In some cases not investing can cost the State more as people become a burden and cycles of cost continue through generations. During the pilots a number of difficult challenges arose. There is a need for a mechanism to decide who gets the efficiency savings identified by local places to encourage agencies to be willing to ‘invest to save’ when the return is not to their organisation.

The cost of failure is undeniable and many believe you can do better for the public at less cost...

“The interesting bit again with the financing is actually the scale of the cost of failure. [Total Place] is a way of ensuring my community costs less because we’re meeting the needs of that community more efficiently and they’re not using resources. That’s how you will make savings, not by cutting services.

“We don’t need to ask for additional money, we just want to spend it differently, that’s all we’re asking for. Some people will argue that money should be ploughed in there, and they think I’m heretic because I’m saying ‘actually I can help you spend less money’, and I’m saying ‘I don’t want to spend less money, I want to have better outcomes and as a result you won’t have to spend so much money’. There is a difference.”

Local Place, Manager

but that may result in decisions that the public will not like.

“We have a much bigger challenge I think around how we take our communities and our public along with us. If you were a law abiding, taxpaying, hard working family with your name on the council house list, how should you react when you learn that the flat that you had in mind and should have got, has been handed to somebody who’s a little toe rag but has got 300 crimes to his name. What we need to be able to do is say ‘if we didn’t give this flat to this young lad, he would be burgling and stealing your car’.”

Politician

There are major questions about where efficiency savings will go...

“The struggle that all Total Place pilots are going to have is.... around who benefits from the savings or the efficiencies. How you divvy those savings up or how you agree what investment is put in from each of the various parties. It’s all those things and there’s no final arbiter of that, there’s no rule, there’s no framework put in place for that which says ‘you will do it this way’.”

Local Place, Senior Officer

and about those situations where one local agency invests so the other can save.

“‘Hang on a minute, if I’m putting money in my budget but the benefit’s going to somebody else’s budget, why should I do it?’

Now that’s got to be Treasury, it’s got to be Cabinet led and it’s got to be pushed across. The trouble is, I’m not sure how much engagement has actually gone ahead with the view that you break down the way that the senior civil servants are responsible for the spend in each of the departments because unless you remove that, you’re going nowhere.”

Politician

“There is still a bit of a legacy that some of the other partners could see the attraction of investing in more prevention but when it came to savings, most of the savings seemed to be in health and that did create a bit of a nervousness because they’re accountable for a different set of budgets.”

Local Place, Senior Officer

People are offering ideas... single place budgets...

“Challenge No. 2 is that in order for the objective to work, local government has to spend a bit more in order to help the health service save a shed load. The context is one in which the local authority’s currently under-spending on adult social care, so how you manage that shift in the current financial circumstances is really challenging, you do need something like a single place budget.”

Programme Lead

some way of directing resources...

“We could all be putting in a lot of effort to save somebody else some money that they spend on something that we don’t think is at all appropriate. That’s why in the Total Place submission we requested a power to direct resources so that you can say to other public bodies, you’re not going to spend it like that, you’re going to spend it like this. Because I think there will need to be an element of compulsion in this kind of approach. But the politics is the trick in this, at the moment.”

Local Place, Senior Officer

or Treasury as broker.

“If that was the original intention and we fast forward to now we’re still at a place where the offer is on the table for central government to work very differently across its spending departments with Treasury to then broker a new deal with us and the localities. That tests Total Place.”

Local Place, Senior Officer



Scaling up a Total Place approach

There has been considerable debate since the end of the first phase about how you might scale up a Total Place approach. Is mainstreaming the principles of whole area working possible or even desirable? The normal process of ‘roll out’ was challenged by these interviewees and they were keen to emphasise the fact that variability between places matters once you move out of the pilot stage. They were particularly concerned about the places that have not yet met the conditions of leadership, relationship and willingness.

The idea of scaling up often brings traditional programme management approaches to the fore

“I didn’t understand the huge desire to do this but if there is one overwhelming barrier to this as a concept, it’s the fact that everybody wants to tidy it up and scale it up and write it up and measure it and it’s going to be incredibly difficult. It’s like trying to say ‘evaluate Twitter’, ‘you are required to evaluate Twitter around outcomes for people’.”

Senior Civil Servant

but those approaches often stifle the very creativity that Total Place has tried to engender.

“I think the really interesting question is how we sustain it over time? It feels like you need the pressure of some sort of special thing like a pilot, to get the synaptic jumps to start jumping. When it’s over, I don’t know how you stop it just being passed back into project management delivery systems which will break up the synaptic jump, so that they stop happening again. Where the learning is for me, is how do you create opportunities for new ideas to spark constantly, while enabling those new ideas to still have strong pathways to be implemented?”

Programme Lead

“How can we take some of the principles that lead to change but apply that on mass to the whole sector without it becoming bureaucratic and slow and dull and you know, all the sort of energy goes out of it?”

National Body

Not all places are ready to do this sort of work.

“I don’t believe that every place in the country has the leadership qualities and the strategic capability to be able to do this properly. So I would be asking questions as we go forward - a bit like foundation trust status. I think we could honestly claim this, you guys have shown through your work on Total Place to date that you have won your spurs, so we’re going to give you more freedoms and we’re going to let you play with your own train set to greater extent and self-monitor, and, if this turns out well after a year or so, we’ll give you yet more freedoms, and so on.”

Programme Lead

“One final thing, local government itself needs to accept that you’re only going to get a certain number of places trusted to do this and if that can be seen as another wake up call for local authorities to improve their performance then that’s fine by me.”

Local Place, Senior Officer

Working together on the challenges

Total Place work has been a great opportunity for showing where we can take action and highlighted the big questions where we can continue to develop and explore. Now there needs to be an impetus from both places and from Whitehall to get together in a constructive way to address those significant challenges.

It's time to get into the conversation about 'how do we do this, together'.

"The mindset shift is, we've described it at various times as saying at one end of a continuum there's 'if only they'd leave us alone, we'd be fine' and the other end of the continuum is 'but they don't let us do anything', and actually say let's get off that because that's just a broke or an unhelpful way of viewing the world... Let's get into a conversation of 'how are we going to do this together?' ... by focusing on an outcome [we] both collectively want to achieve, that we get into a different way of thinking about rather than 'You're not delivering properly what we told you to', 'well we never could because you told us something that couldn't work', that's a sterile conversation but nonetheless one that's lasted a very long time."

National Body

"How do we continue the relationship between the centre and the local areas and actually starting to model some of that and sort of continuing that leap of faith and just to say 'okay, well let's model some of it, you know, let's take away the performance management that you're saying is such a barrier, let's bring together some funding streams and actually see what happens. You know, I'm sure the sky won't fall in and if we do that together, you know, we can actually advance some of that to the next stage.'"

National Body

"Perhaps local areas should be more forceful and knock on the door more to central Government, I think they probably should but it's just not done like that, whereas actually you just suddenly had that opportunity. Central Government wanting to have that dialogue and us wanting to have that dialogue and with the momentum and the publicity of Total Place behind you we were able to do that. One good learning point for us is that you just go and ask and you have those conversations."

Local Place, Manager

Challenges to consider

How do the insights gained from Total Place lead to new action and forms of delivery and infrastructure?

At a local level, what political leadership is required for a place-based way of working?

Is there a need for a parallel process for national politicians? What might this look like and how might you support new practices?

How would you ensure that savings and investments work equitably for places and agencies?

And, last but not least, based on what you have read, how will you support local government and local agencies to work together with the public and supported by national government and businesses to make significant changes to the current system?

Glossary

CIPFA – Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy

CLG – Dept of Communities & Local Government

COFOG – Classification of the Functions of Government

CoP – Community of Practice

DCSF – Department for Children, Schools & Families (now Department for Education)

DG – Director General

DH – Department of Health

DWP – Department for Work & Pensions

GO – Government Office

HLOG – High Level Officials' Group

HMT – Her Majesty's Treasury

IDeA – Improvement & Development Agency

LAA – Local Area Agreement

LGA – Local Government Association

LPSA – Local Public Service Agreement

LSP – Local Strategic Partnership

OEP – Operational Efficiency Programme

PBR – Pre-Budget Report

PCT – Primary Care Trust

RIEP – Regional Improvement & Efficiency Partnership

People

These people are mentioned several times in the document and the organisations and positions relate to their roles during 2009/2010.

John Atkinson, Managing Director, Leadership Centre for Local Government

Helen Bailey, Director, Public Services, Her Majesty's Treasury

Lord Bichard, Chair of the high level officials group, Director of the Institute for Government and Chair of the Design Council

Irene Lucas, Director General, Communities and Local Government

Appendix A:

The pre-history of Total Place

Before the concept of Total Place was launched there were moves towards more coherent joined up working. The introduction of Local Area Agreements and the pooling of funds in the Area Based Grant put the emphasis on partnership working.

This and a focus on leadership, and particularly leadership of places rather than organisations support the space and need for working, thinking and leading differently. The Leadership Centre for Local Government has developed over the four years and it had two critical elements: a strong set of relationships around local government and some individuals in Whitehall, and an understanding of place and public service operations from systemic view point. These informed conversation between the Leadership Centre and the Department of Communities and Local Government at the end of 2008 and beginning of 2009 and resulted in a paper called Responding to the Downturn: Local leadership of place and efficiency which was the embryo of Total Place.

The 2009 Budget included mention of the programme and the Total Place approach was outlined in the Operational Efficiency report by Lord Michael Bichard in April 2009.

Local Area Agreements (LAAs)

Local area Agreements (LAAs) were launched in 2006 and constituted a new contract between central and local government to deliver the priorities of local people. The aim was to encourage the delivery of shared goals through strong local leadership with effective support from Whitehall. It aimed to minimise bureaucracy and maximise delivery thereby achieving greater efficiencies allowing local authorities and their partners to work in a joined up way to meet the challenges in the locality such as crime and anti social behaviour, public health and the economic and social well being of communities.

The LAA brought together local ambition, knowledge and understanding to achieve local priorities. It signified a major change in the way that central and local government worked together and helped to provide a new way of ensuring better outcomes for citizens as well as improved public services.

Area Based Grant

In 2008 Central Government reduced the number of ring fenced budgets and 'pooled' a number of revenue streams into the Area Based Grant. This was designed to improve flexibility and to help deliver the LAA outcomes implying that resources should be moved to meet priorities. The aim was to increase local authority's flexibility over the use of their mainstream budgets and to improve stability by allocating budgets on a three year basis.

Responding to the downturn: Local leadership of place and efficiency

This document described an outline of a development project, which was then named Total Place. The document described a high level systemic approach to programme as well as the compelling financial and public case for change and is summarised below.

Issue

1. Proposal to outline a development project to identify the next wave of efficiencies, aligned to improvement in outcomes and the development of the local leadership skills necessary to deliver these.

The work is intended to guide future Government efficiency work and the sector support programme necessary to deliver this.

Timing

2. Urgent.

Recommendations

3. That you agree that we use the nine Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships, working with the LGA family to undertake nine area based leadership of place & efficiency exercises, which examine:
 - Total public spending across a defined area
 - Efficiency opportunities for a particular priority within that area
 - The leadership necessary to deliver improved outcomes and efficiencies
 - Barriers at local and national level to achieving this.

Appendix B: Learning histories

What is a learning history?

- The learning history approach captures stories that people tell about a change effort and reflects them back to the organisation to help it to learn
- Presents the experiences of participants in a way that generalises the learning for the organisation as a whole and helps people to move forward effectively
- Includes reports of actions and results and underlying assumptions and reasoning
- Includes perspectives of a variety of people including those who did not support the effort
- Tells the story in the participants' own words
- Can be critical part of the organisational infrastructure to support learning
- Is a tried and tested approach to building learning organisations

There are three imperatives

- **Loyalty to the audience** – giving what's needed to move forward
- **Loyalty to the story** – the mythic moments
- **Loyalty to the data** – rigor and integrity

It also challenges organisations to:

- See how its engrained patterns of behaviour limit effectiveness?
- Be more robust when challenging its own strategic direction?
- Raise awareness and review the detail of what's working and what's not?

Learning reviews are an intensive learning process designed to provide feedback loops between intended and actual results. The Learning review:

- Accelerates leadership, team and organisational self-awareness
- Drives effective strategic learning
- Have the data upon which it is possible to correct operational inefficiencies fast.

To sustain excellence in an environment of continual and disruptive change, the ability to learn and adjust your path as you go is essential. Yet many such learning efforts focus exclusively on the task and technical dimensions of the inquiry for any learning to become truly embedded.

Learning reviews help you to see yourself, your relationships, your work and the outside world as inter-connected all the way round, each level affecting and being affected by the other. It can help ensure you balance each dimension as you learn the lessons of what is working and why for your organisation.

Learning histories are multi-voice, multi-perspective inquiries into how critical events and outcomes unfolded over time. The learning history approach fosters learning across an organisation at operational, strategic and cultural levels.

For more information go to www.harthill.co.uk

Thanks and acknowledgements

We would like to thank all of the individuals and places who agreed to take part in the Total Place learning history. Over 100 of you agreed to be interviewed and recorded so that the learning history team could work with the concrete material and multiple perspectives to form the story of the learning during this experience.

Our intention was to do justice to the individual stories, often told with great candour, whilst also attempting to distil the collective story giving voice to the fans and the critics alike. The overwhelming impression was one of passion, engagement and many pearls of wisdom from the wealth and talent of everyone we talked to.

The Learning History Team

Jane Allen – Harthill Consulting

Jayne Bench – Be Birmingham

Roger Britton – Worcestershire County Council

Nicky de Beer – Leadership Centre for Local Government

Karen Ellis – Harthill Consulting

John Jarvis – Leadership Centre for Local Government

Rachel Litherland – IDEa

Cat Parker – Coventry City Council

Pete Saunders – Harthill Consulting

Holly Wheeler – Leadership Centre for Local Government

Our thanks go to: Sarah Abdel-Aal, Lord Bichard, David Bolger, Virlina Choquette, Siobhan Coombs, Rebecca Cox, and Daniel Shamplin-Hall.

The work of the team was steered, supported and championed by John Atkinson, Leadership Centre for Local Government, Mike Attwood, Coventry, Solihull & Warwickshire Total Place pilot and Helen Bailey, Her Majesty's Treasury.

Professional advice and 'super' vision on the Learning History methodology was provided by David Rooke, Harthill Consulting.



Local Government Association

The Local Government Association is the national voice for more than 400 local authorities in England and Wales. The LGA group comprises the LGA and five partner organisations which work together to support, promote and improve local government.



Leadership Centre for Local Government
Local Government House
Smith Square
London
SW1P 3HZ
Switch 020 7187 7388
www.localleadership.gov.uk

Leadership Centre for local government

