

# The Local Lens

*Why policy making and evaluation must start with place, people and purpose*

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# **My career journey: from Whitehall to the Town Hall**



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# Reflections on working across central and local government

- Being closer to communities reshapes your understanding of what good policy and public services look like

Proximity changes your perspective

1

- Policy and service delivery must be rooted in the realities and specificities of place

Place matters

2

- Local government thrives when it is trusted to lead, not just deliver

Trust and empowerment drives innovation

3

- The best outcomes are achieved when the public sector works together and as part of a wider system

Collaboration beats control

4

- No single actor can solve complex problems alone

Systems thinking is essential, but rare

5

- Evaluation drives behaviour by being clear what we care about

Evaluate outcomes, not outputs

6



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# Outputs not outcomes: my experience

- Around 25% of all released prisoners go on to reoffend. For those detained for less than 12 months, the figure is almost 60%.
- The penal system does not have the resources to address the drivers of this behaviour (lack of home, job or education).
- With the system of evaluation not focussed on outcomes, the parts of government that have the means to deliver improved outcomes for prisoners upon release (and wider society), lack the incentive to invest in such initiatives



# A shared mission framework



## Plan for Change

### Milestones for Mission-Led Government

[Strong Foundations](#)

[Kickstarting Economic Growth](#)

[An NHS Fit for the Future](#)

[Safer Streets](#)

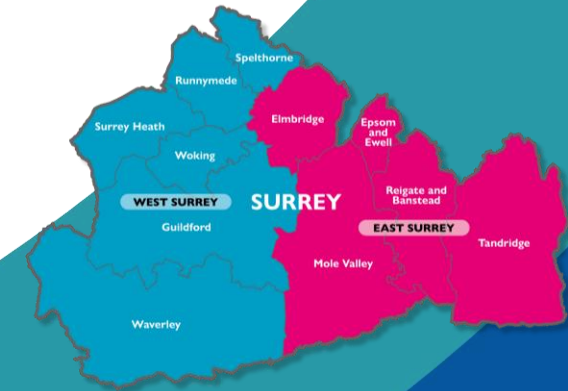
[Break Down Barriers to Opportunity](#)

[Make Britain a Clean Energy Superpower](#)



# Actions vs words: the example of Local Government Reorganisation

- If growth and democracy is what matters, then that's what should be reflected
- But a lot of what we hear is perceived benefit of economies of scale, or dealing with current debt.
- Not thinking about the next 50 years of prosperity or creating thriving communities.
- Also not supported by evidence – benchmarking on the unit cost of services by PeopleToo
- Still has a chance to get this right



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# Civic Lab Partnership

- Bridging Academia and Policy - evidence-based policymaking
- Tackling Real-World Local challenges - infrastructure, sustainability, economic development, and public service.
- Driving Innovation and Sustainability
- Scalable impact – local focus but solutions have the potential for regional and national application
- Strengthening Community Resilience – working across boundaries

# Localism

- Place matters in delivering public services.
- Everything happens *somewhere*.
- Local knowledge leads to better service delivery and outcomes.
- Proximity builds trust and strengthens accountability.
- Local innovation drives better outcomes and resilience, especially as circumstances change.
- Empowered local government makes the whole system more effective and adaptive to change.



# Key challenges

- 1) Lack of investment in **expertise and capacity** to make evidence led decisions – especially given budget pressures
- 2) Demonstrating the **value of preventive spend**, especially where the benefits are not felt by the organisation that incurs the costs of delivery.
- 3) Truly thinking **systemically** in policy design and evaluation.
- 4) In times of straitened budgets, policy making can **often be done at a distance** – detached from the realities of people and places.
- 5) Evaluation is often **experienced as surveillance**, not support.
- 6) Central-local relationships **are often viewed as being transactional, not collaborative**.
- 7) Ensuring that all parts of the state are working to a **common purpose, understanding and set of objectives**.

# What needs to change?

## 1. **Reset the relationship between local and central government**

- Embrace partnership and localism in policy design and evaluation.
- Empower local government to deliver as place leaders.
- Value local knowledge and treat local actors as coproducers, not simply data providers.

## 2. **Invest in capability and capacity**

- Empowerment requires more than permission – it needs resources and support, which will pay off in the long run.

## 3. **Design for learning, not just accountability**

- Evaluation should support continuous improvement, not just performance reporting.
- Create a space for experimentation, reflection and adaptation.

## 4. **Encourage systemic thinking by realigning incentives and breaking down organisational silos**

- Embrace complexity.
- Focus on joined-up outcomes.
- Invest time and effort in building trust-based relationships.

## 5. **Close the loop**

- Ensure that findings from evaluation activities lead to action.
- Create feedback loops where local learning influences national strategy.



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