

BRIEFING

The latest views from LGC's panel of 50 expert columnists



FROM PIECEMEAL TO WHOLESALE

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Services

Ed Miliband's recent Hugo Young Memorial lecture focused on public sector reforms.

The Labour leader spoke about creating a new public service culture based on individuals working together with practitioners.

Residents needed a role in solving their own crises and improving services.

And some recent attempts, though well-intentioned, were actually disempowering, he said.

He talked about the power and potential of supporting people to solve issues or crises by hooking them up with peers in similar situations via social networks.

To conclude, Mr Miliband said decisions should be made by users and providers together.

The community budgets programme, recently the subject of communities and local government select committee scrutiny, is the coalition's attempt to take forward Labour's Total Place, a programme to which Mr Miliband referred.

Total Place put users at the centre of the design and provision of redesigned, integrated public services.

The committee's report, published last October, pointed to the need for more integrated, outcome-focused services across local public services more generally.

In response, the coalition pointed to work carried out for its community budgets programme.

It also mentioned other initiatives, including the £3.8bn better care fund, which aims to promote integration between health and social care services.

However, a significant



Ed Miliband: public service reform firmly on the agenda

proportion of this fund will be dedicated or 'ringfenced' for the realisation of what in effect are key performance indicators.

Indicators can prove obstacles to integration. The focus should instead be on:

- breaking down silos;
- consideration of whole systems;
- identification and responding to local issues;
- effecting 'whole-system' change in behaviours and cultures while promoting localism itself.

System change is, however, perhaps not practically feasible over the short and medium-term timescales, given the wider context.

The drivers needed for such a change are not in place.

We need an ambitious push for long-term system change.

The great upheavals and reassembly of the public service system required are likely to be most unproductive – at least for driving

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improvements in outcomes for people and the tangential efficiencies which ought to derive from this.

The coalition's response amounts to a piecemeal collection of initiatives and examples of very recent, localised practice and experience.

The government does not form or cite any kind of strategy to drive, as a bottom-line requirement, the necessary step change to transform public services.

As a result, public service provision will mainly continue

to be organised and operate as a corporatist, managerial and paternalistic response.

It will mainly remain focused on organisations not people.

The necessary requirements in these times, as Mr Miliband articulated, is an individual or personalised, strengths-based approach.

This would recognise the public service provisions' perhaps inadvertent displacement of local social capital.

It would value and incorporate community capital in redesigned services.

And value the experience and contribution of frontline workers, and citizens as recipients of services.

But these requirements are unlikely to be realised.

Currently, frontline workers will not always act with the best interest of local citizens in mind.

And public service workers and their cultures and behaviours, predominantly determined by the context, are and will be key determinants in realising change.

Should Labour be returned to government, we might see the party continue where it left off with the Total Place programme.

If Mr Miliband's speech was aimed at the voters, then it had a powerful and well-understood message: that public services have not been organised and delivered to serve the people.

If this is a political foretaste to a programme for government, then perhaps we can hope for the system change that is required.

Mr Miliband certainly set the tone for the debate. I look forward to the discussions which will ensue.