

# Back to a better place?

**Adam Fineberg** looks back at 2000-09 and argues that a future focus on growth could enable Total Place-type practice to develop

The last 14 years have seen a retrenchment of local public service provider work and action to improve their own and partnership services. This arose because of financial austerity and de-investment combined with a determination of political priorities over the period.

When working with these providers on the learning and lessons from the Total Place programme in 2008, I called for providers to grab the mantle of this ensuing disruption and innovate and improve to provide progressive, more impactful and overall more efficient services.

Unfortunately, the austerity measures were so intense that discretionary services were significantly affected and thresholds for mandatory services were raised. Risk aversion and the need to focus on delivering statutory services ensured this innovation and improvement was stymied.

With a further round of austerity ahead, a growth-focused public service provision with duties required of providers can enable Total Place-type practice to develop, unlike what happened post-2010.

The noughties (2000-09) were a period of review, reflection, disruption and the redesign of public services. 'Total Place', through a series of methodologies, sought to redesign public services as user-centric services. The Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) was the place where stakeholders, under the auspices of the responsible body – local authorities – deliberated on the future of the local area. The Community Strategy was the strategy and action plan developed by the LSP to deliver on the its way forward for the local area.

The Audit Commission's One Place was a pilot project of the Audit Commission – the inspection and advisory body for local government – to look at a local authority area and see how, from a citizen's perspective, local services were suited to and meeting citizens' needs. There was a recognition that it is best for the citizen and state to invest to save by providing early, preventative services to avoid the citizen need for and uptake of local services.

Neighbourhood/locality hubs were local infrastructure around which services co-located as a local one-stop shop for local citizens. The Team Around the Child, family, etc, was a local case review forum for multi-disciplinary services to meet with the citizen who were being supported by the team, meeting often in hubs. The Lead Professional was the individual who led on the co-ordination of the services of the Team Around... as an advocate, support and main point of contact for the services and citizen.

The Troubled Families Programme utilised Total Place, Team Around and Lead Professional methodologies and practices to support families

receiving services from a number of providers. The Integrated Working Initiative of the Department for Children, Schools and Families developed the concepts and the need for different service providers to share data on citizens, develop an Assessment Framework and single Case Management System, as well as identifying the role of the Lead Professional.

Building resilience in citizens was seen as a benefit for the citizen and their wellbeing and the state in terms of alleviating needs, hence demand for services. Public services were encouraged to adopt a strengths-based approach to working with citizens, as opposed to a historic, paternalistic approach which was seen to engender citizen behaviours which led to their reliance on public services.

## The Growth Coalitions sought to harness public services/sector spend to meet the objective of what is good for local people is good for local growth

Researching and examining the customer journey and experience is a Total Place methodology that draws from the consumer world which gained insights into how the citizen navigated public service support and the benefits or otherwise arising from the support system.

The whole system/systemic working was the result of a recognition arising from the learning of Total Place methodologies that it was best that the often-complex web of activity of public services serving citizen's needs ought to be seen as a system, learning from psychotherapy and its approach to supporting families, seeing them as a system of family dynamics.

Elements of these methodologies have come to varyingly inform public service provision since.

My work on the Growth Coalitions project began in the noughties. It sought to harness public services/sector spend to meet the overall sustainable growth-orientated vision and objective on the basis that what is good for local people – good housing, education, environment and public services, etc – is good for local growth.

Local services would work better for local people and the national economy by utilising the 'tools of government' – an enabling state, leading to a rationalisation and co-ordination of local services and the development of the local area and its citizens.

Smart local government provides a tailored, practical application of Growth Coalitions' methodologies.

It would be beneficial if in the coming period local



authorities, locally and beyond, were to develop the responsibility to act in partnership with internal and external actors to realise the strategic, overarching Growth Coalitions' objective.

These include duties to: collaborate; integrate; co-locate; engage public, private and community stakeholders; co-design public services with the user/household at the centre; share data; develop a single common assessment, case management system, joint dataset and analytics capacity; build citizens' resilience; develop a cross-organisational

© Maxim Ibragim/Shutterstock



staff development programme; and have regard to the above and central government policy to act in a democratic, considered, balanced way to achieve growth and public services improvement to the overall benefit of local citizens.

Local authority performance could be ascertained through an accountable self evaluation framework governed by the Office for Local Government.

Such an approach and driver for local areas' public service improvement and local growth avoids disruptive and costly re-engineering of organisations

### **Local services would work better for local people and the national economy by utilising the 'tools of government'**

and requires minimal legislation with efficiencies to be achieved.

This growth-focused public service provision can

realise inclusive, impactful local sustainable growth achieved through and benefiting public services improvement and development, alongside improved and accelerated national growth, realised through enhanced prosperity in every local authority area. ▶

*Adam Fineberg is an adviser on 'whole system', innovative approaches to growth and development and service provision*

[www.fineberg.org.uk](http://www.fineberg.org.uk)