

PRINCIPLES ARE BETTER THAN TARGETS

All too often universal targets, standard setting and inspection regimes fail to encourage the best behaviours or prevent the worst. Quality is a continual process, emerging from principles of human dignity, best reinforced by reflective practice, citizen engagement, challenge and accountability.

LEARNING TO RIDE A HORSE



A PERSONAL STORY BY LIZ RICHARDSON

My friend loves horse-riding. Her greatest wish for her 50th birthday was to go riding with her friends. I hated horse-riding. And the truth was I had never even sat on a horse – not even a donkey on Redcar beach.

My friend did what any good friend would do, and ignored my many objections. Instead, she focused on my ‘weak’ spots where I might be persuaded. Things she knew I was proud of: being a loyal friend; learning new things.

And so, the lessons started. And I hated them. Nearly as much as I still hated horse-riding. Horses were even scarier up close; terrifying when a rider was sitting on top, careering round a small rectangular pen at 15 mph. Much of the equestrian world seemed dominated by impenetrable jargon which a new entrant had to learn to not be a fool. For example, knowing that a ‘forward-going ride’ or ‘lively ride’ actually meant unstoppable charger. And a ‘quiet ride’ or ‘bomb-proof’ could mean a

depressing time with an apathetic mount refusing to trot.

Worse of all, lessons were awful. Time-consuming and expensive, demoralising and confusing. It doesn’t matter how many times someone shouts the same bizarre phrases at me, I still won’t understand them any better.

‘change the rein’
‘leg on!’
‘check your diagonals’

The instructor packed me off to the 50th birthday ride with some not very reassuring parting words, including things like ‘you’re nowhere near ready, I wouldn’t do it if I was you, or wear a body protector.’

We did the birthday ride. My friend had a marvellous time. I managed not to fall off.

And I still hated horse-riding. Life went on, and I was thankful I never had to endure the experience again.

I went back to work as a University teacher. The organisation got a silver grading in its assessment (TEF) – close, but no cigar. One of the main areas dragging down the score was assessment and feedback i.e. how we graded and gave comments on students' work. In my department, we already knew this was where we hadn't quite got things right. But we weren't sure how to tackle it. The Faculty had produced a standardised set of words we could use to describe work, but these left students still unclear what they had done poorly and what to do differently. What the heck does 'be more analytical' mean? What is 'overly descriptive' when it's at home? Some essay comments were about justifying a low mark (ie what the student did badly) rather than suggesting improvements. Students' experiences of getting feedback were also demoralising. All that effort, and they were not good enough. What an unpleasant learning experience they were paying so much for.

Then it dawned on me. It was the same as my horning experiences. We were telling them they had fallen off the horse; that they weren't good enough.. And to change this outcome, all the students could hear was us shouting 'change the rein' without explaining what or how.

We got a group of students together to help us think things through. They offered to work with us, and we put on a joint workshop on understanding feedback. We started conversations with colleagues about why we were doing this, about the fact we wanted to help learning not just appease TEF assessors. We discussed lecturers' concerns that this was about meeting targets, or grade inflation. We emphasised formative feedback rather than focusing on better synonyms for failure. We have lots more work to do, but we are getting better slowly.

What are the morals of this story? Principles are better than prescription. Using opaque language gets in the way of learning. It's better when you see from things from the users' perspective. Advice needs to be meaningful to the recipient. And the end for me? Three years after my first hateful riding lesson, I bought Spot the Pony and we are now learning together.

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'IT CHANGED MY LIFE'



A PERSONAL STORY BY MARK GAMSU

Recently I was participating in the annual meeting of Darnall Wellbeing. This is a community health project which has worked in Darnall and Tinsley in Sheffield for many years. Darnall is one of the most deprived parts of the city, which is one of the reasons that it has a rich and diverse range of communities and cultures.

Darnall Wellbeing is a local community project – it does have a small team of workers but much of its service is provided by volunteers from the community.

While I was at the meeting I was chatting to one of the local councillors – a young Asian woman who is from Darnall. She told me this story.

'I was not allowed to drive a car. . . 15 years later I am a councillor representing my community'

'When I was still living at home as a young woman it was hard for

me to go out on my own – I had to be accompanied if I wanted to go to the local shopping centre and I was not allowed to drive a car. I was lucky enough to go on an eight week Introduction to Community Development and Health Course run by the public health team in Sheffield with other local women in Darnall and Tinsley and now..... fifteen years later I am a councillor representing my community on the City Council. It changed my life.'

This story made me think of a number of things.

First, it reminded me about the course. At roughly that time I managed the team who delivered this programme across Sheffield. This course was different to traditional health promotion courses in that it did not just focus on 'health literacy' or health education. Its premise was that people in disadvantaged communities were already interested in their health and the health of their families and communities. The course

put an emphasis on locating the causes of good health and well-being in a wider social context and then supporting attendees to take practical action in their communities. For many people the outcome was to get more actively involved in their community or to start on a path back to education.

The ambition of the course was to create local activists who would promote health and wellbeing.

Second, as I spoke to the councillor and heard her fifteen year long story it struck me how inadequate targets and performance measures are to capture the impact of this small and low cost intervention. In order to justify funding for this course (and this is quite common for community interventions of this type) we were expected to be able to demonstrate that people on this programme had either improved their own personal health and wellbeing or improved the health and wellbeing of their family.

As the councillor who is the subject of this story showed me, the impact of the course was – for her and her community – substantial but the idea of measuring this impact over the short timescale of a financial year or two was clearly not appropriate.

‘We have to develop metrics that reflect the profound nature of the challenge’

I am not against measurement at all – it can make an important contribution to accountability and improvement – but if we are to tackle serious societal challenges to structural inequality we have to develop metrics that reflect the profound nature of the challenge and bring a seriousness to measurement that moves us away from the superficiality of present approaches.

I think that this story supports two Better Way propositions – first, building on strengths is better than focussing on weaknesses and second principles are better than targets.

Mark Gamsu has worked in the voluntary and community sector, local government, the NHS and civil service. He is interested in the relationship between the public and the local state. He is a Professor at Leeds Beckett University and is actively involved in a number of voluntary organisations in Sheffield.

HOW TO HIT THE POINT, NOT THE TARGET



IDEAS FROM BETHIA MCNEIL

The social sector has a curious relationship with accountability. I was warned early on in my career in research and evaluation never to use the 'A word' lest it alienate practitioners. This may just be the case in the youth sector, with which I am most familiar, but I doubt it. There is a sense that accountability is a stifling and constraining force, aligned with mistrust, surveillance and time-wasting bureaucracy. Meaningless data capture, handed over but never used. Never suggest that practitioners might do something in order to be (more) accountable, I was told – you're sure to immediately kill off whatever behaviour you're trying to encourage. If our primary allegiance is to the communities and individuals we 'serve', then having another master, such as a funder or commissioner, to whom we are accountable feels uncomfortable – and this is heightened when the terms of our accountability are often so different to how we judge our relationships with 'beneficiaries'.

That said, the social sector is quick to invoke its track record of accountability and transparency when under pressure: our governance and funding structures mean we have nowhere to hide, we argue, and we know that trust in us is contingent on openness and responsibility.

It's clear that the problem doesn't lie with accountability per se. A desire to be entirely unaccountable to anyone doesn't tend to fit terribly well into the charitable sector. The vast majority of practitioners I've worked with and alongside during my career have shared a fierce sense of accountability to the young people they support. So what is it about certain forms of accountability that are considered so anathema to our work?

I think there are two features of the dominant framing of accountability in the social sector that are driving the toxicity that surrounds it. The first is its

high stakes nature, and the second is its focus on targets.

'High stakes accountability distorts practice, undermines relationships and limits learning'

High stakes accountability creates a fear of failure, or falling publicly short against prescribed and externally set standards. It tends not to offer support to improve, but rather to use one-off assessments of performance, often perceived to be unattainable. There are few chances to try again to make the grade, and failure feels like it has consequences. This kind of high stakes accountability distorts practice, undermines relationships and limits learning. Trust and respect is eroded. There is a sense of time wasted, complying with meaningless and burdensome processes and requirements, of 'jumping through hoops'. Many practitioners do their very best to avoid it altogether: providing poor quality or incomplete data, subverting systems and processes to reduce their impact on practice.

'Hitting the target – missing the point'

Targets are a close relation of high-stakes accountability. Targets can be implicit or explicit; their effect is usually the same. Targets have

been widely blamed for practices like 'parking and creaming', 'cherry picking' and gaming – dehumanising and corrupting the relationships that should be at the heart of all that we do. We've all heard the phrase 'hitting the target; missing the point'. We roll our eyes, and nod – we've all been there. The unspoken agreement is that the targets are never the point, and arguably once something becomes a target, the point is lost.

So, what is the point? No one is arguing against accountability, but what if it were lower stakes? What if accountability were always experienced in the context of receiving support to improve, and where 'goals' felt attainable, reasonable and fairly judged? What if working towards these goals felt like a good use of everyone's time? This could be revolutionary.

But perhaps even more importantly, any goals need to be aligned with 'the point' – the 'why' of why we do what we do, and the 'markers' that help us understand what high quality looks like. These are not targets, but signals that help us reflect and improve, and perhaps most importantly, are completely aligned with the change we hope to effect in the world.

Moving towards a lower stakes experience of accountability would call for a large-scale shift in the way the social sector and its funders think and behave. Difficult, but entirely necessary. However, alongside this, we need to collectively commit ourselves to better understanding of what high quality looks and feels like in our work, and focusing our accountability and improvement effort here. This is arguably even more challenging – it would represent an opening up of our practice to the best sort of scrutiny: deep reflection

and peer assessment, and the voices of those we seek to serve. Let's allow targets to take a back seat, while we focus unwaveringly on the point.

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HOW TO MOVE FROM TARGETS TO PRINCIPLES IN SCHOOLS



IDEAS FROM GRAEME DUNCAN

Education in England is becoming a game of high-stakes accountability, where school performance is being boiled down to single performance measures based on the progress of pupils. And the impact of this is becoming clear; schools are reacting quickly to the high stakes incentives that this system creates.

'A forty per cent rise in permanent exclusions over the last three years is one result of high-stakes targets'

The curriculum is being tightened to focus on core subjects that will get the schools credit, to the cost of arts, humanities and languages in particular. Children who are unlikely to perform are finding themselves too often excluded from the mainstream system with a forty per cent rise in permanent exclusions over the last three years.¹ Teachers are increasingly

leaving state funded schools before they reach retirement and the secondary school system can neither retain nor recruit enough teachers.² School environments are suffering across the country as a result.

This is all being done in the name of social mobility. But school choice used to mean parents could pursue different curricular opportunities for their children. That choice has been eroded and means the only differentiator is becoming performance, which will further drive the inequity in the system as history shows that high performing schools, even when in poorer areas, attract more and more affluent cohorts.

Whilst accountability is essential, this target-based approach runs counter to the principles for which many

1 Making the Difference, Gill, Quilter-Pinner, Swift (2017) – <https://www.the-difference.com/our-research/>

2 Retaining and developing the teaching workforce, National Audit Office (2017) – <https://www.nao.org.uk/report/supporting-and-improving-the-teaching-workforce/>

joined, or would join the teaching profession, and is fraught with perverse incentives. Combined with year-on-year real-term cuts in school funding, it is leading to a greatly reduced quality of experience for all involved.

The education sector has become obsessed by the 'what'. What works, what targets have been achieved, what is the performance of the school etc. It has completely lost the sense of 'why' and 'how', which is where principles lie.

'Principles are seen as a luxury that cannot be afforded'

As a collective impact charity focused in education, we too often see places where principles are seen as a luxury that cannot be afforded. Leaders under intense pressure are regularly betraying the principles that brought them into the job in the first place. They are paying a heavy price, but some children, particularly those being so regularly excluded from the mainstream system, are paying a far heavier price.

Moving from a target-based system to a more principles-led system would require a giant leap of trust in the teaching profession that is not frequently modelled by Ministers. There are four principles, generally

used in collective impact approaches around the world, that I would suggest adopting.

'Here are four principles that could replace targets'

1. **Locally led:** the idea of a one-size-fits-all version of education is a scary one. Local context can see huge variations in the employment prospects, wealth, and the experience of education in children's homes. Whilst there is no doubt a core of subjects such as English and Maths should be assessed strongly as they unlock all other subjects, local leaders, families and children need a greater say in the curriculum that the school offers and the culture by which it operates.
2. **Research informed,** particularly in areas of disadvantage, where children will typically have less experience of education within their family to draw upon, and less ability to afford educational opportunity outside of school. Their schools just have to be more efficient in developing their capabilities and knowledge if they are to close the gap. The research base, although still nascent, and the principles by which effective practice should be implemented (identify need, design solutions

based on evidence, deliver in a carefully monitored way, reflect on the outcomes and learning gained and repeat the process) need to be widely adopted to close the gap.

3. **A collective approach:** education has become very fragmented. I was involved in the launch with the then Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, of the chains of schools, which later become the academy chains. Their vision was simple – before too long 15-17 organisations would be running all the schools in the country as it was ridiculously fragmented that 140 local authorities ran schools as it stood. We've now passed 5,000 different organisations. The carve up of the sector has been very competitive, and any sense of the collective has waned. There are several local attempts to bring people back together but this needs to be expanded and better bring together 'context knowledge experts' (local leaders, teachers, families and children) with 'content knowledge experts' (those specialist in helping schools adopt effective interventions targeted at specific needs).

4. **Capacity building:** the sector remains very low on capacity and attempts to create a market for school led improvement in delivery is failing. Current and future leaders need to be developed to lead the transformation of the system through the development of principles such as those laid out here.

A targets based approach has led us to a place where we haven't enough teachers to fill classrooms, and when a school can be seen to deliver success against its single accountability measure by excluding non-performing pupils at a great cost to those pupils and society. Something has gone seriously, seriously wrong.

The need to move towards a balance between accountability and principles is clear.

Graeme Duncan started his career as part of the first Teach First cohort in 2003, and has since worked in the beyond profit sector focusing on the issue of educational inequity. In 2015 he set up [Right to Succeed](#), a collective impact charity focused on changing educational outcomes in areas of disadvantage.

LOCAL CORNERSTONE: PURPOSE VERSUS TARGETS — A BETTER WAY



A CASE STUDY BY EDEL HARRIS

Over recent years, with the emphasis on austerity and the resulting public service funding crisis, the social care sector in the UK has become an industry that in many cases has lost the focus on the person requiring care and support. Time and tasks have become the order of the day with often stressed, low paid workers following a schedule and a set of rules that have more in common with a manufacturing production line.

Power needs to be felt within local communities where one of the most intimate of transactions is delivered by people who are trusted to do a great job. To this end Cornerstone has introduced a new model which we call 'Local Cornerstone'. The model is based on several principles, the most important being related to our purpose:

'To enable the people we support to live a valued life – a life they choose.'

If you work on the premise that people who want to work in the social care sector are motivated by making a positive difference. If you recruit for values and attitude and you then provide an environment where colleagues are genuinely trusted and empowered to do a great job, you will find that amazing things happen.

'Can you imagine a workplace with no managers?'

Can you imagine a workplace with no managers, no supervising and checking, no burdensome policies and procedures, three simple measurements and a network of up-skilled, local, self managed teams all focused on achieving a charitable purpose?

Cornerstone is changing its culture to remove hierarchy, replace traditional management with a coaching

approach and by stripping out unnecessary policies and procedures we are trusting people to do the right thing. We only recruit and retain the very best people by hiring for values. We are improving staff retention and happiness by demonstrating our appreciation of the wonderful work our colleagues do and by allowing team members to manage their own workload. By reducing our central overheads and as a result of a significant investment in technology we have managed to do all of this in a financially sustainable way.

Most importantly we can see the difference this new way of working has made to the lives of the people we support.

'Free to use her imagination and skills'

Clare moved into a self-organising team in Glasgow. Clare was supported to appreciate her value and given the confidence to recognise that hers is a valued profession. She was paid more. She has blossomed in her role and every day undertakes activities with the people she supports that are not restricted by a list of tasks and over-burdensome processes and policies. She is free to use her imagination and skills to meet our charitable purpose. She recently attended a care review. In her old

role she would never have been allowed or expected to attend such a meeting. With her new found confidence as a 'professional' she contributed as an equal and her input was appreciated. Clare left the meeting feeling ten feet tall and knowing that the outcome for the young man is exactly what it should be thanks to her contribution.

A Local Care and Support Team in Irvine support Mary who has had a very traumatic life. Her children were taken into care and only recently is she back in touch with her daughter who was planning to get married. Mary is too unwell to attempt the trip. The team decided that Mary should experience being a 'mother of the bride'. They took her to buy an outfit and to get a manicure; they organised a buffet and transmitted the ceremony onto a big screen. The whole team came to the 'wedding' dressed in their finery. This wasn't within contracted hours but because the team are trusted and empowered to deliver on the charitable purpose they were able to make this happen. The Prosecco served at the wedding, in the old days would have been a breach of our Alcohol Policy!

Brian lived with his sister Joan in Dundee and was her main carer. Joan had dementia. Cornerstone colleagues visited Joan three times

a day. Joan died suddenly and all the contracted hours of care were immediately stopped. The team realised that Brian was grieving and lonely. Because he was the main carer he had lost all community connections. The team decided to continue to call in to see Brian to help him to re-establish friendships in the area. After a while the daily visits became 'now and then'. The extra hours of time were paid for by the Cornerstone Foundation

'Throw away the rule book'

Throw away the rule book. Recruit and retain the best people with the best attitude. Value them and trust them to do a good job. Remove the

obstacles that are in their way and challenge regulation and contract compliance when you believe it is contrary to the outcome you are trying to achieve.

No one wants their legacy to be that they met their KPIs – we are driven by a sense of purpose and a desire to make a difference.

Edel Harris joined [Cornerstone](#) as CEO in 2008, having previously been Deputy Chief Executive of Aberdeen Foyer. A former Metropolitan Police Officer, her background is in health promotion. Edel is also a Director of the Aberdeen Football Club Community Trust, Director of the Scottish Council for Development and Industry (SCDI) and of the Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce.

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO IMPROVE A PLACE? EARLY LESSONS FROM BIG LOCAL



A CASE STUDY BY MATT LEACH

In 2010, the Big Lottery Fund embarked on a unique, ambitious and radical experiment – to provide 150 local communities with £1 million each over fifteen years, with all decisions on how the money should be spent, and on what, devolved to local residents.

‘Big Local represents the biggest current trial of a Better Way’s assertion that principles are better than targets’

As a programme it represents perhaps the biggest current trial of a Better Way’s assertion that principles are better than targets, an opportunity to explore the extent to which place-based, bottom-up solutions are capable of tackling problems decades of top-down funding have been incapable of resolving. At the half-way point of the programme – which will run until 2025-26 – it is starting to be possible to take stock of where

the programme has got to and – tentatively – to form a view on the extent to which some of these ambitions have been fulfilled.

What is immediately apparent when you encounter many Big Local areas is the extent to which a principle-driven approach to funding – devolving power, resources and control to a community level, providing unconditional support over the long term; and avoiding top-down targets or short term spending goals – has succeeded in generating mass community action and participation. At the last count around 1,500 local residents were involved in community level governance over the programme, and at least an order of magnitude more in delivery of Big Local funded activity.

What is also striking is the way that, under a single programme, very different approaches to delivering change have been able

to emerge, community by community, reflecting local priorities, assets and opportunities.

Lawrence Weston, a community on the outskirts of Bristol, has used Big Local funds to spearhead its own regeneration, using Big Local money to underwrite ambitious development plans across their estate, ensuring local residents benefit from new homes and energy projects coming into their area.

In the Arches Local in Chatham, local residents have established themselves as both community champions and custodians of a local environment that is finally improving as a result of residents' collective effort – transforming local greenspace, and tackling pollution arising from poor maintenance of the railway arches that provide the name for their area.

On the Welsh Farm Estate in Birmingham, we've seen local residents championing and initiating work to improve local greenspace, promote enterprise and transform their area through arts and culture, including an ambitious partnership with the Birmingham Repertory Theatre.

And in Newington in Kent, we've seen a community come together to rebrand their entire area, as

part of wider work tackling wider perceptions of the area and celebrating a positive sense of collective identity and place.

Given time, money, trust and support, each of those local communities – and many more – have been able to harness local energy and initiative, thrash out shared priorities, focus attention and effort, and start on a journey to transform their areas in sustainable ways that reflect their individual circumstances and needs. This is a very different way of tackling entrenched issues in communities; not the cookie-cutter strategic objectives of external funders; the relentless cult of attempting to artificially replicate 'what works' irrespective of context; or the perilously short timescales of too many publicly funded programmes. Rather a myriad of micro-solutions, responsive to context and driven by genuine bottom up, resident leadership.

That is not to say that Big Local has been problem free. Some areas have encountered conflict or have taken time to get started. Other communities have hit problems when projects didn't come off or proved more difficult than they initially hoped. But many have shown incredible imagination, resourcefulness, and resilience taking

on a programme which – through its freedom from targets or tick-boxing – forces responsibility onto individuals and communities to set priorities and make decisions. Indeed, given the time and support to build confidence, skills and capacity, most communities have shown they have the potential to take on responsibility for defining and commissioning their own solutions to the challenges they face.

And it is the realization of that potential that makes Big Local – arguably – much more important and interesting than just another funding stream, with lessons of relevance to national and local government and communities themselves.

When I visited Church Hill Big Local in Redditch recently with the Chief Executive of the local council, we were taken on a tour of the area. We saw a neighbourhood that – five years into their Big Local programme – had transformed itself through a rich mix of local voluntary action, small amounts of Big Local funding and a creative partnership with a local authority that had itself started to reorganise its services around a recognition of the importance of place. Pathways had been cleared, environmental improvements delivered, issues around litter and minor vandalism addressed. As a result, not only was the community a

much nicer place to live, but minor crime and antisocial behavior had dropped to the extent that police and Police Community Support Officers no longer needed to be based there.

It immediately raised the question – if committing relatively small amounts of money to communities and trusting them to get on with brokering and commissioning their own solutions to local problems can be quite so effective, why aren't we doing it everywhere? At a time when local authority budgets are pressed ever harder, and councillors and officers struggle to deliver even statutory services, might one way forward be to explore the potential that might come from allowing communities to take the lead in prioritizing what they feel needs tackling, and giving them the resources they need to commission their own solutions?

'Significant change in any place takes time and has to be founded on and around the people who live there.'

If we are to even tentatively go down that route, we will need public agencies brave enough to match the commitment of the Big Lottery Fund in 2010-12. To release the potential of communities, long-term commitment is key – the Big Local timeframe stretches over ten to fifteen years – and once the money is committed

to an area there is no conditionality and no going back. Critically, alongside that money comes a willingness to give communities the space and support to develop the skills and confidence they need; a huge tolerance of different approaches; an acceptance of the need to allow people to take risks; and a recognition that communities, if they are to grow in confidence, need to be allowed to make mistakes, review, learn and recover from them. Significant change in any place takes time and has to be founded on and around the people who live there – something that is too often absent from shorter-term, project-based initiatives.

It's early days to reach final judgements about the success of Big Local – there are another seven years and lots of learning, evaluation and experience still to come. But if a fund based on principles continues to demonstrate the outcomes we are starting to see on the ground, it may start to beg the question: why are we continuing to set targets?

Matt Leach is CEO of [Local Trust](#), which is investing £1 million each into 150 different neighbourhoods to promote resident-led transformation of some of our most deprived places. Matt's past roles include CEO of HACT, the social housing sector's ideas and innovation agency, and a senior civil servant at MHCLG and the Cabinet Office.

HOW TO DRIVE GENUINE IMPROVEMENTS IN PERFORMANCE

INSIGHTS FROM BETTER WAY DISCUSSIONS

In early 2018, the London cells discussed the question of whether principles are better than targets.

Problems with top down targets are clear. They lead to gaming and are disempowering. Although some people thought national targets had raised standards in, for example, poor performing schools, most were concerned about the side effects, including high levels of permanent exclusions. National benchmarks also failed to reflect different circumstances and are often too short-term to allow time for real change. So we talked about better ways to motivate improvement and achieve accountability.

'Measures that drive learning and improvement cannot be accountable targets'

Goodheart's law (a Bank of England economist) is that measures that drive learning and improvement cannot be targets for which you are

held accountable, but we often use targets for both roles.

If targets are not set top down but are used locally either to drive learning or promote accountability, they can be helpful. People understand and even demand targets – eg the people at Grenfell Tower wanted accountable targets for the use of donations. But these should be set with the full involvement of the people affected, and reflect the richness and diversity of their priorities.

Importantly they should always flow from purpose, mission and values (and where they are used by funders there should always be negotiation). A starting question should be: what does 'good' look like to you? Targets should also capture wider benefits eg the contribution to the community, and the degree of local engagement.

What we need is more 'reflective' and 'inductive practice', with data

about performance put into the hands of those on the front line who can use it to drive improvements themselves. Targets can then give something to aim for, and help break change down into manageable pieces. Performance measures can help people navigate their way to excellence – a kind of sat nav – by providing parameters to help them.

What needs to be encouraged is a more investigative mind set, coupled with higher aspirations– not just to turn the dial from minus one, but to move it to plus one. But the way to do this is to empower and equip self-learning.

‘We need a network of curious people, who really want to understand how change happens’

We need a national network of ‘curious people’ who really want to understand how change happens and what the levers are, including amongst commissioners. In the USA there are ‘cities of learning’, which look curiously at the resources in a place and how they can be better used.

Some funders are starting to be more interested in an organisation’s ability to learn, rather than in targets. But many organisations still ‘pretend’ they can deliver targets: more honesty is needed.

There should be greater trust, linked to a deeper understanding of what we are trying to achieve and what we can control. Top down targets are currently being used as a substitute for these.

‘The “how” not the “what”’

Outcomes stars – which reflect the many outcomes that people may wish to achieve eg to experience good mental health – may be useful tools but it is bit like giving a picture of a car to a production line worker and saying: ‘build that’.

The current model of social change – and the targets that are set – neglect the wider influences that affects lives though communities and systems. We need to better understand how change happens and invest in the wider things that affect everyone’s lives, not always focus on individuals.

The ‘how’ is often far more important than the ‘what’ – the operating principles matter and these need to reflect individual needs and rights. Rights based schools were achieving higher results than Academies, we were told, and it was suggested that parents, or consumers of services, should have the right to complain to an ombudsman if their legitimate expectations were not met.

An example of the power of the 'how' is the decision by the Housing Department of Great Yarmouth council to free itself from a standard process and treat all individuals individually, recognizing they had different needs. By adopting a system based on conversations with people about their housing problem, the council cut the waiting list from 6,000 in 2010 to 309 by 2015 – a reduction of ninety-five per cent. This was achieved without targets and was based on a systems-based Vanguard Consulting analysis – with the aim of reducing waste by getting it right first time.

Could funding be linked to evidence of the application of the Better Way propositions?

Accountability is very important but it should not be illusory. Trying to hold service delivers to account for the outcomes in people's lives is wrong because it is people who are responsible for those outcomes. We should focus on the things we can control, eg how our organisations are run, whether we respect human rights.

'National government should set aspirations and establish a regulatory and policy framework, not targets'

National government should not set top-down targets but it should set aspirations, provide the necessary national infrastructure and establish a regulatory and policy framework, as well as adequate resources. At the moment the setting of targets can obscure under-funding.