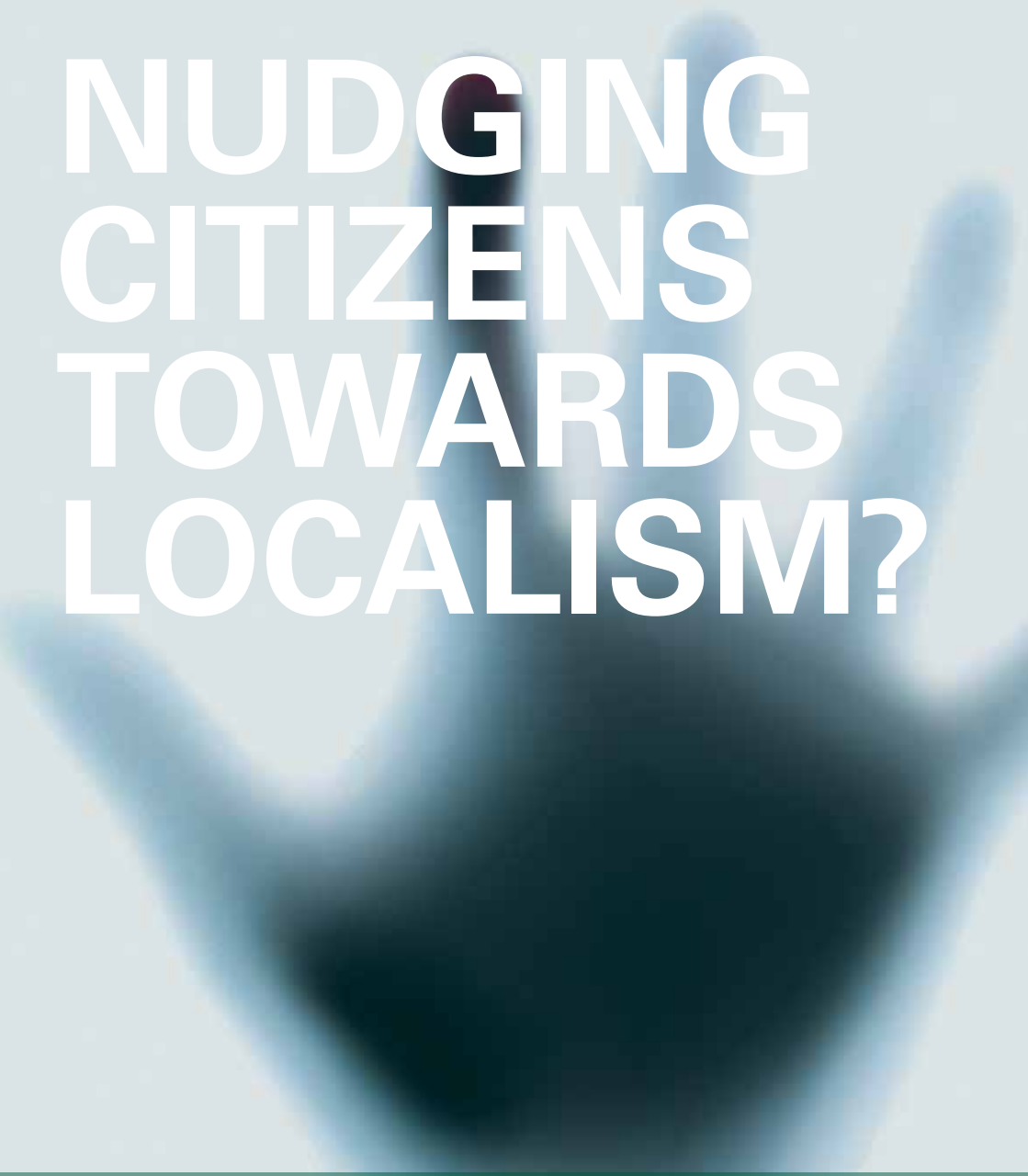
NUDGING CITIZENS TOWARDS LOCALISM?



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with Liz Richardson

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Nudging Citizens Towards Localism?

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Foreword

Times are tough for public policy-makers. Government faces many pressures. Public health outcomes are unsatisfactory. Improved parenting could make a real difference to children's opportunities in life. Many communities suffer from a weak sense of cohesion. Care and support services for the growing numbers of older people are unsatisfactory. On the other hand, improving services to meet these objectives would cost money, which is in short supply.

In this context, behavioural change policies look increasingly attractive. If we can use the resources of social psychology and related disciplines to influence people's choices, the way may be open to securing real improvements without expensive interventions. 'Nudge' – i.e. achieving behavioural change by persuasion from government and other bodies – is a popular theme in policy debates. In this report, Professor Peter John from UCL, with help from Liz Richardson from Manchester University, has examined the effectiveness of the nudge approach, informed by interviews with policy-makers in a range of central government departments and local agencies, and parliamentary reports. The conclusions emphasise that, despite the enthusiasm and the frequent references to behavioural change in the official literature, there is insufficient knowledge about what works and what doesn't in practical contexts. The implementation of nudge policies to promote positive choices across a broad range of areas from smoking and diet to sorting rubbish, from good neighbouring to cutting down car use is patchy.

The report focuses on the use of nudge to encourage citizens to take more responsibility for meeting local needs themselves. It provides an independent view of the evidence and comments on the current government's interest in localism and decentralisation. It points out that the best way to pursue nudge policies is exactly the kind of issue that lends itself to local experimentation and to properly randomised trials. There are real opportunities to improve understanding of the kinds of behav-

ioural changes that would help us achieve policy objectives at relatively low cost by systematically investigating the outcomes of local initiatives. This report commends the work of the Cabinet Office Behavioural Insights Team. It argues that we need more experimentation and more randomised controlled trials so that behavioural change policies can be properly assessed and can be converted from a fashionable idea to a practicable way of achieving policy objectives.

Peter Taylor-Gooby FBA
Chair of the *Nudging Citizens Towards Localism?* Steering Group

Executive Summary

Do policies designed to create desired behaviour changes on the part of citizens need concerted action by central government to ensure their effective delivery? Or is there a need for a more decentralised approach whereby the centre sets the guidelines, but other agencies, the voluntary sector and citizens decide policies and implement the changes needed? This report reviews the arguments for and against these different approaches to implementing policies that promote behaviour change, paying particular attention to the possible tension between national policy objectives and the approach of decentralisation and the 'Big Society'. Greater decentralisation of power could inhibit the government from achieving its objectives, but on the other hand decentralisation could encourage a more legitimate and self-sustaining form of behaviour change. Therefore a key question addressed here is: has the government arrived at an uneasy compromise of not acting enough to push policies through but not fostering sufficient decentralisation to energise localities?

This report comes to the following conclusions:

1. The claim that behaviour change could be implemented by strong central action as implied by the findings of the House of Lords Science and Technology Sub-Committee I report, *Behaviour Change* (2011), still needs much more evidence to support it. There is relatively little robust knowledge about the extent to which citizens will change their behaviour as a result of greater central direction and effort. Governments need to know more about the workings of the policy instruments at their disposal to achieve desired behaviour changes.
2. The House of Lords report claims that there has been a patchy response to the behaviour change agenda across Whitehall. This report supports this view, but also finds that there are examples of good practice and the collection of robust evidence through randomised controlled trials, which have been promoted by the successful work of Cabinet Office's Behavioural Insights Team. This

report for the British Academy recommends extending the work of the Team beyond its current two-year term.

3. The level of expertise and use of behaviour change interventions in local government and the voluntary sector are also patchy and confined to a few innovator authorities and organisations. Local government is often held back by too much focus on strategies and not enough attention to action and delivery. The report recommends nudging local policy-makers so they become more innovative in their approach to behaviour change policies.
4. The decentralisation reforms introduced by the Localism Act and measures to promote the 'Big Society' also rely on behaviour changes for their effective implementation. These causal linkages have not as yet been fully taken into account by central government in its provisions for the implementation of the legislation. This report recommends that more research should be undertaken on the best means to encourage more engagement of citizens.
5. Policy-makers need to pay more attention to the exact relationship between central direction, local autonomy and citizen input to decision making. Such attention would lead to a self-sustained improvement in policy outcomes, which would then be regarded as legitimate by the citizens who have a say in how these policies emerge. The report recommends more interventions that, as well as nudging citizens, encourage them to 'think'.
6. It is not clear at the present time what the impact is of other changes to central tools of implementation, in particular the abolition of Central Office for Information (COI). The report recommends an evaluation of the abolition of COI.
7. The implication of this report's findings is that – in the short-run at least – it is likely there will only be moderate changes in citizen behaviour, both from central direction and from decentralised methods of delivering services and collective goods. The chief reason for this is the lack of knowledge about the exact relationship between government actions, citizen behaviours and effective public outcomes.
8. To remedy the gap in evidence, the report makes the case for more experiments, in particular randomised controlled trials, to find the best means to encourage behaviour change and citizen participation in public decisions. Such research would encourage a virtuous circle of better-guided central government policies (in order to provide the general regulatory framework), greater decentralisation to local agencies and community groups, and more effective mechanisms that stimulate the desired behaviour changes.

1 Introduction

A considerable amount of academic evidence has appeared in recent years about the importance of intelligent policy design in achieving more effective public outcomes. The claim is that citizens will be motivated to do more positive acts for themselves and society through better 'choice architectures', such as default mechanisms and carefully-tailored information signals that encourage them to make the 'right' choices. Such ideas have been influential in economics and psychology for many years. They have been popularised by Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein in their book, *Nudge* (Thaler and Sunstein 2008), and have been widely discussed by local authorities and central governments in the UK, US and France. For example, they appear in the *Giving Green Paper* (2010) issued by the Cabinet Office, as well as in the Department of Health's White Paper *Healthy Lives, Healthy People: Our Strategy for Public Health in England* (2010), and most recently reviewed by the House of Lords Science and Technology Sub-Committee I Inquiry *Behaviour Change* (House of Lords 2011). The Scottish Government has carried out a review of the international evidence for behaviour change initiatives (Southerton *et al.* 2011). President Obama appointed Cass Sunstein, one of the authors of *Nudge*, to head up the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs. In France, the Centre for Strategic Analysis of the Prime Minister employs a behaviour science expert, Olivier Oullier, as an advisor on behaviour change policies.

The attractiveness of nudging has been due in part to the low cost of behavioural interventions, which appear much more applicable in an era of fiscal austerity, and also because it is an alternative or complement to conventional policy instruments, such as legislation and regulation. Mainly for these reasons, nudges have found favour with the UK coalition government elected in May 2010, which has set up the Behavioural Insights Team to champion these kinds of measures across and beyond Whitehall.

The current government's interest in the use of nudges coincides with two other major policies: that of decentralisation and of stimulating more civic behaviour and voluntary activity, i.e. the 'Big Society'. Policy-makers are currently introducing greater decentralisation of decision-making to local communities and voluntary groups. The use of nudges is likely to play an important role in achieving effective decentralisation and transferring power and decision making to local civil society groups, which requires civic capacity and willingness to assume these new responsibilities. The potential irony might be that just at the time that governments have greater knowledge about the effectiveness of behaviour change interventions so they have decided that they do not have enough funding and legitimacy to follow them through, and instead have devolved power to decentralised institutions, which themselves have fewer resources and a long history of dependence on the centre. The result may be an implementation gap – between the intentions of policy-makers and what is likely to happen on the ground – partly because the two policies are working against each other.

Of course, this tension might not exist in practice. The stronger focus on behaviour change within central government, using a variety of soft instruments, may be consistent with greater decentralisation and deregulation areas while also keeping a large number of regulations in place. Indeed, embedding new institutions and policies on the ground may be a more sustainable way of generating the desired shifts in citizen activities, which reflects the diversity of local communities and could be more effective than commands and incentives that emanate from the centre.

Moreover, the agenda of decentralisation could address the 'Achilles heel' of behaviour change policies. One of the problems of behaviour change interventions is that they are seen to be paternalistic (Sugden 2008, 2009) – implying that the state knows what is best for citizens – in spite of not seeking to compel people to behave differently. Moreover, nudge interventions might be perceived to be manipulative, and encourage people to believe that experts are behind the scenes covertly altering the design of public institutions on an unsuspecting citizenry. Involving the citizens more greatly in running and designing local services themselves in forms of co-production and de-centralisation may generate more sustainable forms of behaviour change. In short, governments need to get citizens to 'think' as well as respond to nudge initiatives (John *et al.* 2011). But it may also be the case that the kinds of citizen involvement needed go a long way beyond the decentralisation

and citizen provision of services that are part of the coalition government's plans for localism and the 'Big Society'.

This report aims to discuss the current policy context in the light of knowledge about behavioural change interventions and observations about the extent of decentralisation currently being implemented. The idea is to adjudicate between the different ways in which behaviour change and decentralisation work together. The report is based on developments in England and not those in the devolved territories whose governments have developed different approaches to achieving behaviour change and decentralisation even though there is much in the report that applies to the whole of the United Kingdom. Owing to the complexity of behaviour change policy in the health field, the report does not focus on the internal management of the National Health Service, especially as the direction of reforms was not clear at the time of writing. Nevertheless, the report does pay some attention to the changing role of local authorities in health policy, such as on the responsibility for Wellbeing.

The report is based on a reading of secondary documents and a series of interviews with key policy-makers and experts. These interviews were part of a fact-finding mission and a way of testing out the ideas of the lead author, and are not formal qualitative evidence. The views and ideas that appear from these interviews are not attributed either. We thank these busy people for taking the time to talk to me and list them out at the end of the document. They bear no responsibility for what follows. The report greatly benefited from input from the members of advisory team of Peter Taylor-Gooby, Nick Chater and Graham Loomes. We also received some very perceptive comments from two anonymous reviewers. In addition, Liz Richardson provided very useful material for the case studies (see appendices 2 and 3) as well contributing to the main text throughout. As the discussion of 'nudge' and 'think' shows, we developed many of our arguments whilst carrying out the project, *Rediscovering the Civic and Achieving Better Outcomes in Public Policy* project (see www.civicbehaviour.org.uk), funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, Department of Communities and Local Government and the North West Improvement and Efficiency Partnership, grant reference: RES-177-025-0002. We thank our funders for their support and our co-researchers for sharing ideas. Finally, we very much appreciate the help and support of Selina Chen and Emma McKay at the British Academy who ably guided the project.

The report is structured as follows. It first reviews behaviour change theories as elaborated upon by economists and other social scientists, and sets out how they link to the current concerns of policy-makers. The report then summarises the UK government's interest in behaviour change over the last decade, paying particular attention to the research behind such changes and to the delivery mechanisms. The report assesses the changes in direction in government policy since 2010, taking into account its particular approach to behaviour change. The second part of the report examines local government as well as other decentralised bodies. It reviews the implementation of the 'Big Society' programme since May 2010, and the extent to which central and local governments have the capacity to deliver behaviour change policies successfully.

2 Behaviour change

The idea that public agencies should seek to influence the behaviour of citizens is as old as government itself. The very rationale of a public authority is to provide for the collective good. Governments have always modified individual behaviour to achieve this goal as not everyone wants to do such things as pay taxes on time or dispose of their waste sensibly. Alongside these long held wisdoms and practices, the social science disciplines have been closely identified with efforts to modify citizen behaviour, harking back to their origins in early studies of population, disease, public health, and criminality. In recent years, psychologists and other specialists have advised government about how to carry out strategies that require behaviour changes on the part of the population, such as driving cars more safely, ceasing smoking and reducing risky behaviours, such as drinking too much alcohol. But it would also be true to say that such advice was confined to identifying target populations; offering general incentives to behave differently, such as through the tax system; creating deterrents through the criminal justice system; and providing citizens with information so they can act more responsibly. Even the work on social norms in the 1930s tended to have an impact only in the private sector, through advertising, for instance (Rayner and Lang 2011: 342). Though there was much known about the imperfections of conventional policy instruments, such as over taxes (Lewis 1982), the main strides in knowledge took place in the last twenty-five years or so, and drew on the work of psychologists such as Slovic, Kahneman and Tverskey (Kahneman *et al.* 1982; Kahneman and Tversky 1979; Tversky and Kahneman 1992). The key idea is that human beings approach problems with a set of pre-set biases, which influence them toward certain kinds of behaviours. They tend not to react to changes in incentives or from the imposition of extra costs in a straightforward way. External agencies can still influence behaviour; but they need to understand the exact nature of these biases so they design highly human-centred policies that go with the grain of cognitions, which can produce strong results in the form of changed citizen

behaviours. While the general provision of information might produce apathy and indifference, extra public finance might crowd out or devalue civic action, and regulation might produce resistance or passive non-compliance, carefully tailored information signals and revisions to the exact way in which citizens interface with the institutions of the state might yield powerful results.

The popularisation of the work of economists and psychologists has been a phenomenon of the last decade, with the healthy general readership for trade books, such as *Freakonomics* (Levitt and Dubner 2006, 2009) and *The Underground Economist* (Harford 2007). It was not long before a series of publications advocated greater attention to the insights of behavioural economics. In 2004 the Cabinet Office's document, *Personal Responsibility and Changing Behaviour: the State of its Knowledge and its Implications for Public Policy* (Halpern *et al.* 2004), made the case for using more knowledge about citizen behaviour and for applying theories of interpersonal behaviour to construct better policies that engage citizens with the state. Other pioneering publications were the New Economics Foundation report, *Behavioural Economics Seven Principles for Policy-makers* (Dawnay and Shah 2005) and Tim Jackson's *Motivating Sustainable Consumption* (Jackson 2005). Government interest in the latest thinking was demonstrated by the work that went into the MINDSPACE report, published by the Cabinet Office and the Institute for Government in March 2010 (Dolan *et al.* 2010). This guide gathered together key insights from behavioural economics and psychology and listed them in its memorable acronym.[1]

These ideas have been complemented by other changes in thinking about what kinds of policy are likely to be successful. The private sector has become more interested in marketing and understanding what motivates consumers. Most of all the internet has highlighted and provided more opportunities for re-shaping the information environment by structuring consumer and citizen choices through managing information and presenting different options (Dunleavy *et al.* 2008). The New Public Management set of reforms of the 1990s and 2000s highlighted the central

1 *Messenger* We are heavily influenced by who communicates information; *Incentives* our responses to incentives are shaped by predictable mental shortcuts such as strongly avoiding losses; *Norms* we are strongly influenced by what others do; *Defaults* we 'go with the flow' of pre-set options; *Salience* our attention is drawn to what is novel and seems relevant to us; *Priming* our acts are often influenced by subconscious cues; *Affect* our emotional associations can powerfully shape our actions; *Commitments* we seek to be consistent with our public promises, and reciprocate acts; *Ego* we act in ways that make us feel better about ourselves.

role of the citizen in delivering public services and how the information environment of traditional bureaucracies tended to shut out citizens (Bovaird and Löffler 2009). Recent academic studies of persuasion and marketing have contributed to the current thinking on behaviour change (Cialdini 2000). There has been a greater attention by academics to the role of the citizen in sustaining effective policy outcomes, whether it is about the impact of higher levels of social capital (Putnam 2000; Halpern 2005), the argument for more communal or associative forms of democracy (Hirst 1994) or assessments of new forms of citizen participation (Fung 2004; Smith 2009).

One of the highest profile reviews of behaviour change ideas and research, which drew on work in behavioural economics and psychology, is the book by Thaler and Sunstein, *Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness* (Thaler and Sunstein 2008). This summarised previous work by the authors (Thaler and Bernartzi 2004) and extended their previous thinking (Sunstein and Thaler 2003). As well as many other behavioural techniques, Thaler and Sunstein drew attention to the importance of default mechanisms and choice architectures whereby citizens are encouraged to make the right choice. Here the public agency alters the design of the choices facing the citizens so they are nudged in the right direction. The attraction of the programme is that it appears to offer a non-obtrusive form of intervention, which respects the freedom of the individual, and is attractive to governments who fear intruding into the personal lives of citizens. The current government might like the nudge agenda because it implies less use of legal regulation and because it offers alternatives to the large deployment of public finances to deliver public policies. Nudge then may be seen to be consistent with the desire for a reduced role for government. On the other hand, politicians from the left as well as those from the right have found nudge an attractive proposition (the UK interest in nudge was picked up by senior policy-makers in the last years of the last Labour government and by many Labour-run local authorities).

The concern with liberty is not intrinsic to nudge but might reflect the US context where there is not a strong tradition of social intervention and a suspicion of the role of government. The fear of the libertarian critique probably made the authors of *Nudge* very careful in their claim for a role for the state. They are perhaps more careful than they need to be – particularly if a careful reading of the book leads some writers to suggest that it is very hard to reject the claim of paternalism. The nudge agenda really assumes that the state knows best as it involves reducing the choices – however gently – of the citizen (Sugden 2008, 2009).

This debate leads to the main conundrum of this report: whether Thaler and Sunstein offer too weak a set of mechanisms to achieve sufficient behaviour change, partly from their concern not to overly burden the citizen. Changing behaviours might require a push or a 'shove' from government, rather than a mere nudge. This is the implication of the House of Lords Science and Technology Sub-Committee I in its inquiry *Behaviour Change* (House of Lords 2011).

The potential problem is that given the entrenched nature of the behaviours that government wish to alter, such as eating habits, driving of cars and energy use, the use of defaults and information cues – on their own – may not be enough to shift behaviour and outcomes. Changes in behaviour usually require a combination of interventions, so it may be the case that nudges rely too much on the (important) issues of information provision and choices rather than the whole range of government resources. It is possible that government needs to consider its role as a facilitator of action through the whole range of its policies and the facilities the state provides, such as in the provision of open spaces or cycle lanes. It is not just a question of nudging, but providing a more encouraging environment so nudges can work. In that sense, it may the case that governments are effectively tying one hand behind their backs by not considering the full range of policy instruments and the wider context of behaviour change.

In addition, the focus of nudge might reduce direction from the centre. Local agencies involved with the delivery of public services might not get enough impetus from the top and are not encouraged to apply their energies to achieve behaviour change. Of course, this view is a conjecture at this stage – a year and a half into the coalition government – although it is backed by the recent report of the House of Lords (2011).

The opposing argument is that behaviour change theory is directed also to the traditional resources of government. For the tools of finance and law might themselves be guided by better theories and evidence on behaviour change. Thus nudge both incorporates Thaler and Sunstein's defaults and other light-touch interventions, and the use of the techniques of behavioural economics and psychology to redesign standard policy instruments and their informational environments. The nudge would be about the presentation of information about an economic incentive, and the way the incentive is structured, rather than the incentive itself. For example, studies have examined the impact of information about taxes, such as Chetty and colleagues' experiment on information and excise

taxes (Chetty *et al.* 2009; Chetty and Saez 2009). In fact many nudge interventions involve regulatory changes, such as changing the defaults for organ donations when citizens pay their vehicle taxes or altering the rules on payroll giving. The problem of making strong judgements about the success of behaviour change policies is that it is difficult to maintain a hard and fast distinction between 'soft' and 'hard' tools of government (John 2011). Such language reflects how interventions are selected according to political preferences, rather than a categorical difference between nudging and intervening. As this report argues, policy-makers should select policies based on clear evidence rather than from pre-set ideas about regulation or nudging.

The next section of the report examines the history of behaviour change interventions in central government and assesses whether the current government has shifted its approach, partly through its commitment to reducing the role of the state and by increasing the power of communities, citizens and members of civil society.

Box 1: Are appeals to incentives nudges?

The incorporation of the manipulation of incentives into nudge has caused some controversy. The House of Lords Select Committee on behaviour change attempted their own clarification, setting out a table defining choice architecture as: the provision of information; changes to physical environments; changes to the default policy; and the use of social norms and salience (House of Lords Science and Technology Select Committee 2011: 10). In a separate column, persuasion was seen as a distinct category to information provision, or choice architecture as a whole, and therefore is not classified as part of nudging. The Committee also placed fiscal and non-fiscal incentives outside the choice architecture, for which they were criticised by Thaler and Sunstein and colleagues (see http://nudges.org/2011/03/16/the-behavioral-backdrop-to-financial-incentives/ 23 May 2011, accessed 15 Sept 2011). The nudge is not the incentive, but information about the incentive, which helps it work more effectively.

3 Central government and behaviour change

3.1 General considerations

There has been a long history of intervention and government-sponsored research on behaviour change, which has been carried out by departments of state, particularly those concerned with long-term policy goals that require the cooperation of citizens. For example, governments seek to encourage citizens to engage in healthy behaviours as well as treating them in hospital; they try to get people to carry out more environmentally friendly activities, such as recycling more of their household waste, as well as building roads and financing public transport; and they encourage pro-social behaviours in the community to reduce crime as well as catching criminals. Governments have been collecting evidence and commissioning work themselves for a long period of time, and this has influenced how government departments have designed and rolled out programmes and policies. In some key policy areas, such as road safety or diet, the evidence is so strong it would be hard for government not to act. Thus there is an impressive amount of behavioural research carried out by government. Moreover, it could be said the approach of behaviour change fits well into the culture of some parts of central government which have a technocratic way of working, which support the collection and analysis of evidence for different policy positions, and where policy-makers are searching for the right toolkit to effect change.

3.2 The use of behavioural research in central government

The departments of state range from those very interested in implementing behaviour change policies to others that tend to lack commitment. Of course, the reasons why a particular government department

might be interested in changing behaviour will have much to do with the task of the organisation as much as being a verdict of its performance. In addition, the practices of central government departments vary and each has its own tradition of applying social science and of using evidence. Such variation draws attention to the different kinds of meaning attached to behaviour change at the centre, and how an incumbent government works with that understanding. Even if there were a desire to run a centrally-inspired programme of behaviour change, it could not be a unified set of policies, partly because each organisation uses the term and evidence differently.

One of the leading departments currently is Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), which has pioneered policies to promote behaviour change, especially on the environment. The department has a long history of research into this area, and has named behaviour change as a core part of its mission, influencing the design of regulations as well as nudges. The department has been increasingly aware of the importance of seeking to change citizen behaviour in order to reach policy goals as shown by its document, *A Framework for Pro-Environmental Behaviours* published in 2008. The Department of Education has used economists to evaluate behaviour change, though with some reduction of interest in recent years. Civil servants in HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) have developed an interest in behaviour modification in relation to tax payments, and carried out the pioneering experiments into changing information about reminders for tax returns, consulting with Steve Martin, one of Cialdini's co-authors (see the discussion below). The department is currently commissioning a range of tax trials, several in partnership with the Cabinet Office's Behavioural Insights Team.

The Department of Health has not joined the current wave of enthusiasm to the same degree, because it has its own long-running research and policy agendas. In a Supplementary Memorandum to the House of Lords enquiry by the Department of Health (BC 151), the department reported the extensive amount of research it carries out which covers important elements on behaviour change. Current policy interventions concerning the white paper on health (Department of Health 2010) are underpinned by a substantial amount of research, for example by the setting up of a Policy Research Unit on Behaviour and Health (http://www.bhru.iph.cam.ac.uk/about-us/). Other departments which have a long tradition of using such research are Department of Work and Pensions with regard to programmes to encourage welfare to work,

and the Department for Transport. Other departments have not shown such an interest in behaviour change theories and evidence, such as the Department of Communities and Local Government (but with recent interest, such as in housing design), and the Home Office, in spite of its eminent tradition of research into crime through its research arm, Research Development and Statistics, and an impressive list of initiatives in its submission to the House of Lords inquiry. A number of other departments, such as Department of Energy and Climate Change, have become much more interested in the potential of behavioural changes in recent years.

It should also be said there are other routes for behavioural research to influence government policy: for instance, the Government Economics Service produced guidance in 2008 about how behavioural economics could be used to inform policy (House of Lords evidence, 2 November 2010: 13). The Government's Social Research Service was another generic source of information (as was the Central Office for Information). The statistics service, and numerous advisory bodies also play a role as well as the Economic and Social Research Council and its research. Potential coordination is increased because the Government Economic and Social Research team (GESR) is now the combined body of the Government Economics Service and the Government Social Research Service. There is increasing coordination across government, as evidenced by the appointment of Rachel McCloy, a psychologist from the University of Reading, in a Public Sector Placement Fellowship. The government's Chief Social Scientist, or CSS, (although there is not one in post, currently) plays a role in coordinating the supply of evidence. With all these previous and current initiatives, the Behavioural Insights Team builds on existing good practice in central government.

In spite of the large amount of social science advice that government receives, it is hard to resist the conclusion that the overall attention to behaviour change policies at the moment tends to be patchy and dependent on departmental initiatives and ministerial interest. The Green Alliance in its submission to the House of Lords behaviour change enquiry conveys the general picture very well: 'We are starting to see movement in the right direction with behavioural units being set up in DECC, CLG and DfT, and pockets of people in the Cabinet Office. Yet these posts are not yet core to the policy creation process, and the rational actor model is still largely prevailing'. These views are iterated by the House of Lords sub-committee report:

> *Though there is a lack of applied research on changing behaviour at a population level, there is other available evidence that the Government need to use to better effect. We were therefore disappointed to find that, although we received some examples of evidence-based policies, such as policies on energy-efficient products and smoking cessation services, we were also given many examples of policies that had not taken account of available evidence, including policies on food labelling and alcohol pricing. (House of Lords 2010: 5)*

Seasoned observers of the decision making process should not be surprised at this finding. Policy change comes from many sources: party preferences, ministerial initiatives, public opinion, European Union directives and international pressures are some of the influences, which are ranged against forces that keep policy on the same track, such as routines, departmental cultures, budget lines and producer group lobbies. Behaviour change theory is relatively new, and does not comprise a massive body of research evidence that would compare with that available for different kinds of health treatments for example. In any case, social science rarely presents policy-makers with clear policy recommendations where the proposer knows for certain that an intervention has the desired effect. Moreover, policy-makers have their own biases and apply heuristics just like citizens. Decades of research on the way in which policy-makers use evidence shows us that politics and values are very important in explaining why policies emerge in the way they do (Weiss 1979, 1997, 1998; Weiss *et al.* 2008). Governments tend to keep on doing the same things out of habit and find it difficult to change their policies (Rose and Davies 1994).

Moreover, research on how to *implement* behaviour change is not currently based on evidence that applies to the population, such as the meta-analysis of trials, with the exception of some welfare and employment interventions. Although much is known about the reasons why individual behaviour affects policy outcomes, there is much less known about what governments or other public agencies can actually do to change behaviour (see John 2011). That is, we do not fully know what tools of government work and which do not work. In this way, the use of evidence on behaviour change needs to be judged fairly and not against an abstract standard that a typical public agency is unlikely to achieve (which is the tenor the House of Lords report). In spite of the patchiness, there is a good diffusion of the use of evidence across Whitehall. But the idea that there are clear alternatives to present policies is not realistic given the lack of evidence of what the alternatives should be.

With more evidence, governments and other agencies could then decide where regulation works and under what conditions light-touch strategies offer more promise.

3.3 Behaviour change and the UK government since 2010

As the previous section discussed, the coalition government's interest in behaviour change overlays a pre-existing set of activities, either from long-running programmes of research in specific policy fields, or the previous government's interest in the behavioural sciences. The Labour government 1997-2010 developed an interest in the topic, particularly in policy areas of crime and heath, and this is indicated by official publications, such as the Strategy Unit paper discussed above. The former Head of the Civil Service, Lord O'Donnell, who was trained as an economist, also has an interest in the field.

As well as pushing ahead with lines of work already established, the coalition brings its own particular interest and approach to behaviour change. This partly reflects the interest of key advisors, such as Steve Hilton. But it also embodies a particular approach to the state shared by the Conservatives and many Liberal Democrats, and brings together, significantly for this report, both the themes of behaviour change and decentralisation. The coalition agreement states:

> *We are both committed to turning old thinking on its head and developing new approaches to government. For years, politicians could argue that because they held all the information, they needed more power. But today, technological innovation has – with astonishing speed – developed the opportunity to spread information and decentralise power in a way we have never seen before. So we will extend transparency to every area of public life. Similarly, there has been the assumption that central government can only change people's behaviour through rules and regulations. Our government will be a much smarter one, shunning the bureaucratic levers of the past and finding intelligent ways to encourage, support and enable people to make better choices for themselves.*

Although the government is interested in changing individual behaviour, it wishes to do so in a non-bureaucratic and decentralised way, without using the strongest levers of the state, which it believes failed under the previous government. Instead it wants to concentrate on the softer

resources of the state and on encouraging a more dynamic and self-sustaining form of behaviour change from decentralising power. In the government's point of view, the two elements of this report – behaviour change and decentralisation – link together closely. The challenge is to work out how they both fit together within government structures and to assess the particular contributions of each element. Might this involve avoiding the very instruments that behavioural experts think are the right ones to use and concentrating on what seem to be the weakest tools of government? In this way, critics could argue that government has adopted the packaging around the behavioural sciences, but has failed to address the core issues. It could be said that the government likes the ideas in *Nudge* because they appear to embody light-touch government consistent with its belief in a reduced role of the state.

However, it would fair to say that the nudge agenda still means using the powers of the state to address policy outcomes, which may involve changing the rules and providing finance. It is also seen as a complement to other stronger forms of intervention. As the Minister of State at the Cabinet Office, Oliver Letwin and his colleagues make clear in the report on energy use, 'These insights are not alternatives to existing policy. They complement the government's objective to reduce carbon emissions across all sectors, and show how we can support these efforts in relatively low-cost ways' (Cabinet Office, DECC and CLG 2011: 3). Once government considers a new policy intervention, such as changing the default on organ donations, it involves consideration of the full range of policy tools, such as changes in the rules, as well as the softer tools.

But the interventions that the government has highlighted are often light-touch in character. For instance the Green Deal, to promote more efficient energy use, seeks to alter the signals citizens receive so they invest in energy-saving appliances. It does this by giving feedback to citizens about how much energy other consumers near to them are using (and using randomised controlled trials to test this out). Government has used its power to set up the scheme but is working with the private sector to deliver the change.

A wider question is whether there has been a general shift away from using more traditional tools of government or whether the commitment to soft government is essentially rhetorical. In submissions to the House of Lords inquiry, Oliver Letwin suggested that behaviour change is a

replacement for conventional tools or government, but at other times he has described it as a complement. Therefore it appears as if government thinking has not been consistent. One key tool of intervention – the availability for finance – has been reduced, although behaviour change policies need not involve large amounts of public funding. This would only be the case if the spending cuts to core public services like policing, social services, housing were to have effects on behaviour, such as on the level of crime. There have been many regulatory changes implemented by the Better Regulation Executive, which also operated during the Labour government as the Better Regulation Taskforce and the Better Regulation Commission. In practice of course it is hard to reduce the regulatory burden, and the government has a legislative programme to introduce its changes. Aspects of the the Green Deal, for example, will be implemented by legislation some of which gives rights to tenants to demand energy efficiency in the homes they rent and changing Energy Performance Certificates.

One factor that directly impacts on the implementation of nudges is the provision of information. Here the government has turned against the funding of centralised messages through the government communications service, the Central Office for Information (COI). The Cabinet Office (2011a) report on communications reviewed the large budget on communications of £1.01 billion per annum, of which £540 million was on direct communication activity operated through COI. The government had already frozen this spending in May 2010 and further cuts to the budget led to a 68 per cent reduction in external spending through COI from £532m in 2009/10 to an estimated £168m in 2010/11. But the document argues that the review of government information should be wider:

> *'It has become clear that what is required is not just a solution regarding the future of COI, but a different approach to government direct communication. While the reductions in public expenditure are one driver of this, it is also clear that some government direct communication has been unrelated to an overall sense of government priorities; has not always been based on the best evidence; has lacked good measures of impact or effectiveness; and has used a media mix which is skewed towards higher cost, less targeted channels.' (2011: section 1.5).*

It would appear that by abolishing the Central Office for Information the government has reduced its investment in a key means of achieving behaviour change. However, the behavioural science perspective holds that general communications messages are not always effective drivers

of change and that these messages tend to be resisted by citizens unless the information is about direct danger. The other change in approach is the decline in mechanisms of public consultation, which were very common under the previous Labour government, although such partnerships and deliberative exercises have not disappeared entirely.

3.4 The Behavioural Insights Team

As well as inheriting various structures and policies, the coalition government has set up the Behavioural Insights Team as its main institutional innovation in promoting behaviour change. This was created in May 2010 as a unit within the Cabinet Office. It comprises seven officials. It takes advice from experts, such as Richard Thaler, and set up an academic advisory panel.[2] Its work is consistent with normal practice in the centre of British government: it does not deliver policies directly, but acts as a champion and helps other departments and private sector bodies to carry out new measures. It has a two-year life.

It would be wrong to judge the government's efforts on behaviour change just by the work of the team for several reasons. The first is that the team does not intend to take responsibility for delivery and remains a facilitator. The correct measuring rod is the extent to which it adds value given its size and resources. The second reason goes to the heart of this report. The judgement of successful delivery of policies rests on whether the government's reforms as a whole have shifted individual behaviour. The government would claim that its policies on public sector reform, decentralisation, choice, the 'Big Society' and the reduction of the deficit join together to stimulate a more self-energised UK where citizens and communities take responsibility for their behaviour, even if guided by central government. This begs larger questions that the Behavioural Insights Team cannot be expected to address, such as the extent to which the coalition's approach is based on a plausible causal model of change. For it may be the case that the policies which have been introduced do not in fact join together, that they have not been implemented effectively or that they have been opposed or defeated.

In this context, the team has pioneered a number of reforms and papers (see Cabinet Office 2011c for a summary), such as on energy use, which

2 The author is a member of the panel.

involves working with the private sector trying out different kinds of incentives for consumers to change behaviour. There is also a paper on health (Cabinet Office 2010), which reports the work on smoking cessation, and a paper on charitable giving, jointly written with the Office for Civil Society in the Cabinet (Cabinet Office 2011b). Team members offer seminars across Whitehall to encourage the use of behaviour insights.

The team was influential in persuading the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) to require those who are renewing their driving licence to choose whether to agree that their organs may be donated in the event of their death.[3] The Behavioural Insights Team worked with the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) on a consumer empowerment strategy, *Better Choices: Better Deals* (April 2011). The team worked with the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) on energy saving, aiding the redesign of Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs).

In keeping with the theme of this report, not all the insights have to be 'soft' nudges. Rather than just finding new nudges, the team is interested in identifying low-cost measures that improve public policy and demonstrably work. One example is the midata programme, set out in the Consumer Empowerment Strategy, which arises from a partnership between government and providers, energy firms, mobile providers, search engines, banks, regulators and consumer groups. This gives consumers access, in a portable electronic format, to the data businesses hold on them, which can make it easier for them to switch energy supplier. Moreover, consumers can observe their spending patterns. Here the government is changing access to data, which is a regulatory change even the government is working cooperatively with the industry.

One of the key activities of the unit is its use of randomised controlled trials to test out interventions, which has become more a feature of its work as the team has settled in and developed its approach. The team worked with Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs (HMRC) in February 2011 to pioneer different wordings for the reminder of tax returns. Even though the letters are a nudge, they are carried out in the context of enforcement, which involves using the legal power of government. Another example is the team's work with Manchester City Council testing

3 The ethical arguments around behaviour change interventions are outside the scope of this report, but the example of organ donation is one where ethical issues go beyond a concern with paternalism (see brief discussion in Chapter 2) and involve considering whether the full range of moral concerns is being captured, as the Nuffield Council on Bioethics covered in their report (2011: 178).

whether the placement of the signature at the head or the bottom of a council tax discount form encourages people to be more honest.

The Manchester experiment illustrates that the team works beyond central government departments and deals directly with local authorities, hence spanning the central-local divide and showing a model of innovation both promoted by local authorities and central government. But it would also be fair to say the most of the team's work is with central government departments because these have day-to-day dealings with the Cabinet Office and its ministers, and where central government has the power and legitimacy to act. Moreover, the team has been met with enthusiasm across Whitehall.

When policies are new, behavioural insights have been very influential, as with energy. However, when policies require redesign or change to the defaults of standard methods of delivering services it can be much harder to achieve change. While most parts of the civil service welcome changes, some civil servants are acutely aware of their costs, such as when redesigning an electronic form, for example, or a standard letter. Much of what government does is locked into information technology systems and subcontracts with other agencies and the private sector. These systems are hard to change or are very expensive to do so. It is much easier to embed behavioural insights while IT systems are being designed rather than re-specifying them at a later date.

Overall, when considered alongside the other kinds of initiative across government, the conclusion to draw is that there is a considerable amount of activity at the centre to encourage smarter policies, much of it encouraged by the work of the team. In fact, the amount of activity across government sometimes makes it hard to assess whether the team has been influential or whether the government department concerned initiated a particular activity. What can be asserted is that the Behavioural Insights Team is developing its approach and has become more experienced at promoting change, especially from its use of robust evidence. The 'sunset' clause that provides for the team's closure in 2012 is premature.

3.5 The UK government's approach to behaviour change

It is better to review the Behavioural Insights Team in terms of the government's overall approach rather than consider whether the light-touch approach and relatively modest resourcing of the team is enough

to produce a total sum of effort to effect enough change. However, the general impact of the government's behaviour change policies is very hard to assess, and perhaps it is too early to do so. The issue is whether the focus on the initiatives and light-touch intervention is enough to deliver significant changes. Given the powerful forces affecting behaviours that are driven by the private market, such as eating habits driven by the food industry, the behavioural changes are not likely on their own to deliver significant changes. The effect sizes of the interventions are likely to be small and may be overtaken by the wider social changes happening in British society. This is the argument of Marteau and colleagues in their review of nudges and health, which supports much of the policy on nudges, but still concludes:

> *Without regulation to limit the potent effects of unhealthy nudges in existing environments shaped largely by industry, nudging towards healthier behaviour may struggle to make much impression on the scale and distribution of behaviour change needed to improve population health to the level required to reduce the burden of chronic disease in the UK and beyond (Marteau* et al. *2011: 265).*

Of course, this argument sets up a counterfactual that is hard to assess: if governments were to use legal and other forms of compulsion, along with more public finance as well as the tools of behavioural economics, would they gain leverage on delivering climate change targets, reducing obesity and so on? The only example of this kind – and this is partial too – was the 2005-2010 Labour government which did use legal power and public spending *and* was interested in behavioural changes, but achieved only modest changes in individual behaviour. Yet it may be argued that it was relatively late in office that Labour discovered these ideas about behaviour change, and it is not fair to assess the 2005-2010 period as evidence for a particular approach. Therefore, if there is a lack of evidence about the strength of current behaviour change policies, there is also lack of evidence about the effectiveness of the alternatives.

4 Behaviour change in the locality

4.1 Background and history

While behaviour change policies are being pursued by central government, they already exist at the local level. Local authorities and other bodies are trying out nudges and other kinds of intervention. This is not surprising and is one of the consequences of decentralised government: politicians and officers in charge of the many services run at the local level are responsible for devising policies in the general interest. This is beneficial for effective interventions because they can be based on a diverse range of local experiences. Local authorities can learn from each other and customise policies that may appropriate in one place rather than in another. In spite of a high degree of centralisation of local life, English local authorities have always tried out new policies, even in the 1980s and 1990s when governments were taking away functions and finance from the sector (Atkinson and Wilks-Heeg 2000).

The problem with these forms of experimentation is that they tend to be confined to a small number of innovators, and practices tend to diffuse only weakly to other local partners, partly because institutional cultures of local government are very strong. The previous Labour government was interested in ways of overcoming the limits of the diffusion of knowledge by promoting best practice through the performance evaluation system, such as the Best Value regime and the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA). However, the current government has abolished this form of performance measurement even though there is some evidence that it fostered innovation (Brannan *et al*. 2008).

4.2 The impact of behaviour change ideas

The rise of interest in behavioural change policies began with a few pioneering councils, often because senior officers and executive councillors became interested in the idea, and sometimes because scrutiny committees advocated new policies, such as on school meals in Wiltshire. For example, in December 2010 West Sussex had a challenge session where they set out the principles of behaviour change inviting representatives from departments. Another example is the London Borough of Barnet with its policies on Green champions. Kent has extensive policies and employs a behaviour change manager. Salford has been pioneering work on health. Other councils have had initiatives more focused on individual services. Coventry City Council and Impower have worked to find creative ways to persuade the parents of children with Special Educational Needs to move over to personalised budgets for school transport; and Croydon has done the same. These pieces of work use a concept called 'value modes segmentation' which involves targeting and tailoring interventions to categorised groups of people (settlers, prospectors, and pioneers) based on market research on aspirations and lifestyles (Keohane 2011). Some councils such as Somerset have examined the whole of their policy machinery and have tried to find where to input behaviour change ideas throughout all services and systems. Such policies are being diffused in good practice networks sponsored by the Local Government Association, such as its Communities of Practice (CoP).

Not all of these policies use approaches draw from behavioural economics and nudge; as this report documents, there are competing models of behaviour change in operation. Many pre-date the coalition government's time in office and even the publication of *Nudge*. A number of councils, frustrated with a lack of improvement outcomes even after sustained New Labour investment, experimented with behaviour change policies, using a wide range of models including not only thinks and nudges, but also many other ideas. Some councils do not explicitly reference nudge-style approaches, but contain some similar ideas, for example the 'value modes segmentation' work could be re-interpreted in the MINDSPACE framework as using social norms of different groups, increasing the salience of behaviour change policies to those groups by tailoring interventions to aspirations, and appealing to people's affections and egos based on their values. As has already been argued, a key issue is the lack of evidence and intelligence about what kinds of policies and interventions create substantial behaviour change.

4.3 Case studies of behaviour change policies in local government

Appendix 2 sets out some case studies of change or policies which have been designed by local authorities to effect change. It presents a broad overview of work taking place, some of which is more developed or explicit than others. Box 2 contains a brief summary of these examples:

Box 2. Summary of case study examples of behavioural change initiatives led by local government

1. London Borough of Lambeth is incentivising reciprocity and participation by working with the community and voluntary sector to plan, commission and deliver services, and is recruiting volunteers, e.g. green champions.
2. Bradford Metropolitan District Council (MDC) has a 'behaviour change team' of integrated uniformed services e.g. park wardens, traffic enforcement, and neighbourhood wardens.
3. Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council (MBC) wants to reverse the 'longstanding paternal culture' (Coppard 2011). Initial steps towards behaviour change include devolution of control over neighbourhood budgets to citizens working with service providers.
4. Somerset County Council is experimenting with whole system redesign for 'total engagement', so that residents may develop from passive recipients of services to active citizens, recruiting citizen volunteers and creating a Somerset citizen 'membership' of the council.
5. Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council (MBC) has undertaken specific pieces of behaviour change work, including a change to the 'default setting' in recycling which increased recycling levels from 16% of waste collected being recycled in 2006-7 to 29.4% in 2009-10.
6. Huntingdon Council has introduced Neighbourhood Agreements. These are non-legally binding contracts between residents and services, that includes in one neighbourhood an Agreement on 'Things to Do' which is designed to increase participation in community activities.
7. The London Borough of Sutton has used more transparent information to improve performance on environmental health by restaurants and fast-food outlets, publicising scores to the public in a 'name and shame' scheme.
8. Carlisle City Council has a policy of 'Scores on the Doors' in Carlisle (see Richardson 2010), which awarded environmental health

scores to different takeaways and restaurants, so that the public could know which were safest.
9. Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead has implemented an incentive scheme, called Recyclebank, which awards points for recycling, which can be spent on discounts for food clothing and leisure activities.

There are several questions that emerge about the use of behaviour change policies by local authorities. The first is whether there is much interest outside the few councils that have pioneered in this area. For many councils work on behaviour change is an aspiration. Like other innovations, it goes in and out of policy fashion as administrations change, or they do not pay a great deal of attention to it, or their priorities are on the bigger issues, such as economic development and growth.

Second, the House of Lords inquiry expressed some concern from its evidence that the local application of behaviour change ideas was less good than at other levels of government: it questioned 'whether there were the requisite levels of skill in designing and evaluating interventions at a local level, or adequate mechanisms in place for the dissemination of knowledge, to allow the government to make the best use of what is learnt about the effectiveness of interventions' (House of Lords 2011: 42). The sub-committee cited evidence about weight control policies. There were problems of the weak evaluation. However, these were based on comments from witnesses rather than robust evidence.

Third, the range of policy fields where behaviour change policies have more readily been applied might not be that large. Undoubtedly there is considerable awareness of such policies, especially in the areas of the environment and transport, where they have traditionally been strong. Forays have been made into a number of other policy areas, including community safety, employability, offending, substance misuse, and complex and vulnerable families; but it may be the case that definitive action is harder to achieve in these policy fields.

Fourth, though many examples at first appearance appear to be comprehensive, they tend not to depart greatly from strategy documents. There is little about implementation, or delivery or policy outcomes.

Fifth, it is not clear whether even inside the innovative councils the interest in behaviour change extends beyond a few champions. An enthusiastic chief executive keen to keep up to date with current policy debates is essential, but policies often meet with more ambivalence from the general officer and councillor cadres. It is similar to central government where some civil servants and ministers are enthusiastic while others are more sceptical. But the situation may be worse in local government, given that councils tend not to have large amount of resources for research and many have cut back on research divisions since the 1980s. There is a strong culture of pragmatism and a suspicion of new ideas in much of local government. This is reinforced by the tendency of councils to use consultants to solve problems rather than to embed ideas in the working practices of local government.

Sixth, the resource shortfall over the coming years may make it hard for local government to introduce behaviour change programmes. The acuteness of the current round of cuts may focus local government on managing the remaining core services. Of course, the opposite point of view is that the need to cut back services will encourage local government to embark on more behaviour change policies in order to involve citizens more. It is hard to know which of these two statements is true, but the shift in the level of resourcing is going to change local government and how it deals with its citizens.

Seventh, there is a danger that the behaviour change ideas may suffer the common fate of many innovations in local government: they are adopted because of the alliance between the enthusiasts at the junior level protected by 'change agents' in the form of senior bureaucrats and leading politicians. But once senior bureaucrats and council leaders move on, as they often do, to join a new authority or become a Member of Parliament, there is a danger that their successors will not protect the innovators, and promote a new set of policies and innovations. As with other innovations in local government, their adoption has a natural lifecycle, which can be influenced by fashion and what is in the news. In the background is the traditional public service culture and hierarchical character of local government, which is hard to shift. Once the enthusiasts have moved on, this culture ensures that the organisation reverts back to its former practices in policy-making and implementation.

Finally, there is a danger of a backlash against behaviour change policies if they become too closely associated with a political project to cut

back funding. During the life of a parliament the political control of local authorities usually swings against the government party (or in this case parties) and benefits the opposition. If the behaviour change agenda becomes associated with privatisation and the decline of the provision of services, it could end up being regarded as part of a political project and lose the cross-party support it has in local government.

4.4 Beyond local government

There is another layer of complexity, which is that decentralisation is not just a transfer of power from central to local government, but also from the local authority to neighbourhood bodies. This implies a greater role for smaller organisations, who have less research and development capacity, and lack infrastructure; they are also organisations that are closer to the communities they serve in several senses and therefore they have fewer incentives to challenge their users or supporters. Under these circumstances, will the desire or capacity to develop behavioural change approaches be even further diluted? Some research suggests that smaller community-based groups see a need for behaviour change amongst their neighbours, but often find themselves in ambivalent and complex relationships with fellow residents. They lack good intelligence on effective techniques, which undermines their ability to deliver behaviour change (Richardson 2008). A case is often made for the role of small-scale community action in generating increased civic behaviour, although these claims are difficult to assess. There are occasions where neighbourhood bodies, particularly larger community-led and voluntary organisations commissioned by public bodies, have undertaken targeted behaviour change work. A full list of examples of behaviour change efforts by decentralised community-led bodies are shown in Appendix 3, but the box below contains a brief summary of some of these examples.

Box 3. Summary of case study examples of behavioural change initiatives led by community-led or -based bodies

1. Zest, a Development Trust in Sheffield, has programmes to tackle child obesity and fitness classes for older people and those recovering from serious operations. Zest has implicitly used behavioural change techniques that re-design systems around an 'intelligent consumer', e.g. successfully instituting self-service in the library.

2. Bolton Community Network use innovative methods based on intelligence about 'nudge' style behavioural change interventions, such as 'Upsy Downsy', a workshop to promote positive mental health, using a board game based on Snakes and Ladders to improve mental health and wellbeing.
3. Hawthorne Park Trust, Wyre BC has introduced behavioural changes to decrease anti social behaviour and increase the number of young people involved in community activity.
4. Handforth Residents and Contour Housing demonstrate a novel example of a community-based 'think' in their 'Big Chin Rub' community philosophy project. The project has changed residents' behaviour, encouraging them to become involved in civic activities. These outcomes have included a revival of interest from the estate in the community house.
5. Manton Community Alliance uses its resources building community action, engagement and citizen trust in institutions. The key behaviour changes have been that residents who had not previously been democratically engaged have now taken part in local decision making.
6. Irwell Valley Housing Association was an early initiator of 'nudge' style approaches to behaviour change in 1998 with its groundbreaking Gold Service scheme. Gold Service rewards social housing tenants for 'customer loyalty' e.g. paying rent promptly in return for cash back, faster repairs, and access to community and educational grants.

5 Decentralisation and the 'Big Society'

5.1 Centralism and UK politics

It has been long observed that the UK – or rather England – displays a high degree of centralisation. This comes from the concentration of power in the executive, which is usually controlled by one political party with a majority of seats in Parliament. There was no separation of powers between the institutions of government (Loughlin *et al.* 1985; Loughlin 1986). Combined with the centralisation of cultural, media and social life in London, and the dominance of the South East economy, the result has been that localities have tended to be over-dependent on the centre, not just for finance, but also for policy – in spite of bottom-up initiatives being transferred from local to central government. Governments have changed policies frequently and local authorities have become used to waiting for the next initiative and then responding. The irony of such centralisation is that governments have often found it hard to deliver policy objectives and outcomes, partly because centralisation has resulted in a great deal of administrative complexity. Moreover, local decision-makers have become adept at surviving radical policy initiatives and in behaving strategically.

In addition, the political system is becoming more complex in itself, with a range of decision-makers influencing policy, such as decision-makers in European Union institutions. The courts, such as the European Court of Justice, the European Court of Human Rights and the UK Supreme Court, have become more influential. Powers in certain parts of the UK have shifted to devolved bodies, this has added to the complexity of delivering policy.

Labour in power from 1997-2010 struggled with the effective delivery of its policies in such a complex system, gaining success in some fields but achieving less in others. Since May 2010 the Conservatives and

Liberal Democrats have developed a new approach which involves the decentralisation of power to local areas. They aim to reduce regulation, remove a regional tier of administration, carry out public management reforms, implement decentralisation in education and health, and encourage citizen involvement in the provision of public services.

5.2 New localism and delivery of behaviour change

The Department of Communities and Local Government has launched an extensive programme to decentralise power. It has dismantled the Audit Commission, kept a close watch on the local implementation of policies, and has strongly reduced the finance for local government. Core to its reforms is the Localism Bill published in December 2010, which led to the Localism Act of November 2011. This creates new freedoms for local government, such as giving a right of general competence, abolishing the standards regime, and providing for elected mayors. While some measures reverse Labour's policies there remains much similarity, such as in promoting the same term 'localism', and in seeking to create dynamism in local government through stronger political leadership. The legislation creates a new opportunity for communities by creating a community right to challenge, which gives community groups and others the right to take over public services, and the right to acquire assets. It requires local authorities to maintain a list of assets of community value. Communities have the opportunity to nominate for possible inclusion the assets that are most important to them. When listed assets come up for sale or change of ownership, community groups will have time to develop a bid and raise the money to buy the asset. The problem is that this aspect of the Act has led to considerable opposition from landowners and existing interests, so that the government cannot pursue it quickly.

The Act allows for local referendums and rights to approve or reject local council tax increases. The Act abolishes the regional planning guidance, giving more freedom to local authorities, and it gives the community a 'Right to Build'. There are a number of other reforms, such as the reform of local social housing which provides local authorities with more flexibility and reforms their financial arrangements.

Overall the Act is a package of measures that reduce controls on local government and give it more flexibility. Some measures are designed to inject more life into local government; others involve more and not less regulation, such as provisions for local referenda. It is one of the

complexities of decentralisation that through giving freedom and rights to one set of local partners, such as community and voluntary groups, it becomes necessary to control the actions of local government, which requires central government supervision.

The Act had only just been passed at the time of writing, but it is possible to make some observations about the impact from recent decentralisation legislation on behaviour change policies. One is that there are fewer mechanisms to regulate local government, which will have a role in delivering many behaviour change policies. In future it is likely local authorities will be given responsibility for tackling obesity and improving health. They already have a key role in local health boards. The directors of public health are likely to move into local authorities. Their role has been stressed in the recent white papers, *Creating Growth, Cutting Carbon*; and *Healthy Lives, Healthy People.* By virtue of their powerful role in local communities, their extensive contacts with the citizens and their own behaviour change efforts (see above) local authorities will play an important role in delivering behaviour changes. Will the relaxation of central direction make a difference here? There probably is some weakening of the ability of the centre to command the changes, but this could be countered by the advantages of local variation and implementation of behaviour change. In the traditional model of local government the centre sets out the general lines of policy and local authorities have the discretion to implement it. Arguably the intense regulation of local government from the mid-1970s to 2010 undermined this principle of decentralisation (Loughlin 1996), but it is still there nonetheless. Indeed, the House of Lords Science and Technology Sub-committee heard evidence from its witnesses that local discretion would be desirable: 'different local areas have different local needs and so interventions should reflect these differences. In relation to sustainable transport, much of our evidence agreed that local authorities were best placed to design behaviour change interventions because they were most qualified to assess the need for, and implement, interventions' (House of Lords 2011: 42).

The main problem with the line of argument is not that decentralisation undermines behaviour change policies, but that the decentralisation measures currently in place may not be strong enough to do the job. The underlying causes of centralisation – the legal power or government and the power of the purse – remain in place even though there is some more flexibility in the power of general competence and changes in some financial rules. Even though there is a will to foster localism, central government still has access to the traditional financial and legal

levers, which can be pulled at a moment's notice. For instance, the Department of Communities and Local Government, charged with promoting localism, also proposed in 2011 to compel councils to have once-weekly bin collections (which would have undermined other department's efforts to promote more recycling and better use of food waste). In the end, sense prevailed over political expediency, but the example shows the contradiction between belief in localism and traditional pressures on government, from the media and questions in Parliament, to use its long held powers to act.

These tensions occur across government, with some departments making large policy changes that are designed to achieve behaviour change but without localism. The Department of Work and Pensions has a work programme to deliver new welfare programmes where the minimum requirement is that the contract should be greater than £20 million, which rules out local contractors or community groups from providing these services. This is likely to mean that there is a uniform approach to service provision carried out by the large consultancy practices and large providers (even though there should be a fair amount of subcontracting within these contracts).

Most of the Localism Act is about decentralisation to communities and this itself uncovers another paradox of behaviour change, which goes to the core of the government's approach to public administration and governance. In practice, the right to challenge and community control of assets must have community involvement and require encouraging behaviour changes on the part of the citizens who will implement such measures. This is again one of the paradoxes of decentralisation: that there needs to be a transition period when some kind of centralised set of actions can help implement the decentralist provisions. In practice, there are provisions in the Act and support for local groups, but it is one area of behaviour change upon which government is relatively silent. The real danger is not the articulation of an alternative view about service provision, which is less top-down and more citizen friendly, but the movement from more centralised modes of delivery to a new kind of government and politics. It is not obvious that communities will move – on their own – towards this goal. As with other governments and their programmes, there is arguably a danger that society, administration and politics will not move as fast as central policy-makers want. The difference in this case is that the current government has abjured itself from many of the traditional levers behind doing so, but does not know for sure how innovation will actually come about. It is possible the

government ends up in the worst of worlds, relaxing the central controls over local government and other agencies, without being in a position to deliver enough decentralisation so that an alternative approach to governance can work.

This policy agenda is new, and legislation has not yet been implemented. However, there has already been some mapping of moves towards decentralisation by local government (for example see a comprehensive list in Big Society Network and Micah Gold Associates 2011, and some examples in Carr-West, Lucas and Thraves 2011) which suggests many authorities are already beginning to review what could be devolved, to whom, and how. However, this focuses primarily on opportunities to devolve to existing community and voluntary organisations, including parish and town councils. There have already been asset transfer programmes, for example in Birmingham CC and Wirral MBC. There are many successful examples of transfers to community control, including Castle Vale Community Housing and Whitton Lodge in Birmingham, to development trusts across the country, and to Tenant Management organisations (for example see Tunstall *et al.* 2011)

While devolution to existing community organisations may be a route for decentralisation, it may also put extra demands onto already stretched community participants and organisations, which have different levels of capacity and willingness to take up the new offers. There are some moves to increase capacity in the third sector but it still relies mainly on an existing pool of volunteers and groups, which are hard to enhance. Neither do these changes provide any guarantees that local government will feel comfortable transferring power; there are many signs that institutions are likely to resist the transfer of control to communities (Richardson 2012 forthcoming). For example, one survey of local authorities found that although councils already have had a long history of delivering 'Big Society' and localist measures, they were extremely risk averse and this was a barrier to decentralisation (Carr-West, Lucas and Thraves 2011). A report for London councils (Travers 2011) also found that there was a well-established and pragmatic approach by local government to the use of third sector providers to deliver services. There were several examples of localism in action, such as the well-established mixed market in housing, a trust in one south London borough to manage heritage buildings, leisure trusts run by arms-length organisations, and community transport services. However, the report cautions that the difficulties of transferring risk, the fragmented nature of the third sector and variable quality and capacity would all need to be

dealt with before London councils could be persuaded to significantly extend the use of 'Big Society-type providers'. Councils felt that there was little evidence of a 'groundswell of enthusiasm [by citizens] to 'join up and take part' (Travers 2011: 2), an issue picked up in more detail below in 5.3.

5.3 The 'Big Society'

A cornerstone of the coalition's policy is the promotion of the 'Big Society', which is a self-governing set of relationships whereby citizens cooperate to deliver more services themselves and assist in the delivery of effective policy outcomes. The state will do less and people and communities will do more. As with the Localism Act, which seeks to implement part of the 'Big Society' programme, the 'Big Society' aims at far-reaching decentralisation of power; it is also about behaviour change because it requires citizens to do new things to move from being relatively passive toward being more active citizens, if they are not already. In this way this version of behaviour change is different from the technocratic approach which is thought to be common in central and local government; it is one that is self-starting, where citizens are set free from bureaucratic routines. The problem is that while behaviour change is based on some evidence of what kinds of nudges work, the 'Big Society' agenda comes with little evidence about how to get there.

The implementation of the 'Big Society' is primarily the responsibility – in the first instance – of central government, and is coordinated by the Office for Civil Society, overseen by Francis Maude and the junior minister Nick Hurd. The Department of Communities and Local Government has a role though its minister, Greg Clark. The government is providing support to a set of voluntary organisations, and the Department of Business Innovation and Skills are also involved here, in seeking ways to reduce 'red tape'. The government is training 500 community organisers and is setting up a National Citizen Service. Behind these initiatives are pockets of funding, which are directed though different bodies. The government is promoting giving to charity, which involves the direct application of behavioural economics techniques. Also, there is the Big Society Bank, which aims to use money from dormant bank accounts up to £200m. Much of the rest of the 'Big Society' is delivered through other reforms of the public sector, in particular in health, with the involvement of community organisations and the private sector.

There are provisions for groups of citizens to take over the running of public services, although these will also involve the private sector.

There is much debate about the prospects for a major upswing in volumes of citizen activity. Evidence indicates that government can affect the level of civic engagement though a series of long-term strategies of engagement with the voluntary sector (Maloney *et al.* 2002) and by encouraging civic action (Mettler 2005) – involving both central and local initiatives. Isolated examples of citizens coming forward to take over the running of public services following public spending reductions in 2010-11 can be found, for example in Wiltshire in the library service.

However, this is against a background of well-documented shifts in types of civic activity in which people engage; preferences for new individualised and consumer-based expressions of solidarity and philanthropy have arguably overtaken traditional forms such as volunteering. Across Europe and the US there has been a rise in individualised forms of participation, which some have called 'chequebook activism', 'outsourced activism', and activities known as 'buycotting', i.e. buying consumer goods on political or ethical grounds (e.g. Micheletti 2010). Evidence shows that the spread of newer modes of participation is an extension of the repertoire of citizens and not a radically different alternative to existing modes of participation (Hooghe and Marien 2011). However, only a minority take part in collective action (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995; van Deth 2009). There are clearly changes in citizen behaviours not directly initiated or controlled by governments and government policies. This suggests that governments will have to work even harder to deliver 'Big Society' policy.

Although there have been changes over time in types of activity, overall, there are stable long-run trends in overall volumes and levels of different sorts of civic activities in the UK and elsewhere. Evidence indicates that in more disadvantaged areas, there are relatively high levels of mutual aid – being a good neighbour – but lower levels of other more formal types of civic activity (Tunstall *et al.* 2011). Participation is strongly linked to income, wealth and education (Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley 2005). Lower-income households and communities experience barriers to doing more through lack of resources (Tunstall *et al.* 2011), although more affluent or well resourced groups also experience barriers such as being 'cash rich but time poor'. Again, these constraints and barriers are another reason why 'Big Society' may need behaviour change policies to be based on high quality evidence about how barriers can be overcome for specific groups within the population.

Data on levels of different forms of civic action in the UK suggests that there is a healthy base of citizen activity generally, but with potential for more. Some optimistic surveys show that 5% say they want to start getting actively involved in local issues (Ipsos MORI 2010). 5% may be a small percentage, but in absolute terms would mean 1.7 million people. A further 24% want a say in decisions that affect them, which would amount to nearly 9 million people. The Hansard Society's Audit of Political Engagement in December 2010 (Hansard Society 2011) suggested that 14% are already active, but 51% felt getting involved could make a difference. Only 14% were 'willing localists', people who were not actively involved but willing and likely to do so locally. The survey found 11% of people say they want to be more involved (these are called the 'exaggerators'), but they may well be overstating their desire or capacity to engage. Local areas have their own estimates of what is realistic to expect which were in range with the national surveys, for example, one North East local authority: 'works on a 1% basis', with 1% of the population active consistently in neighbourhoods, another '14% dip in and out', and 85% want information or may come to meetings if there are big issues (Richardson 2012 forthcoming). However, again, the question is how this potential might be tapped, and how those citizens who say they would be willing to be more active than they currently are will come forward.

Historic trends suggest that without encouragement or intervention, citizens do not necessarily come forward spontaneously. Usually, upswings in civic involvement are associated with a national crisis, such as the great depression in the US in the 1930s or the experience of war (Skocpol and Fiorina 1999; Skocpol 2003; Putnam 2000; Kier and Krebs 2010). The closest example to the kind of civic change that is implied by the 'Big Society' can be found in the reinvention of social capital in the US in the 1890s and 1900s, as described by Putnam. This was a response to immigration and social change (Putnam 2000), but involved national debate – a large 'think'.

Despite their willingness, these potential localists need to be activated by behaviour change policies. These as yet do not exist in any comprehensive or consistent form. And even if behaviour change policies were in place, the uplift in levels of 'Big Society'-type activity might be relatively small and not on the scale that is needed to deliver decentralisation and 'Big Society'. For example, John *et al.*'s (2011) field experiments to increase civic behaviour by testing various 'nudges' and 'thinks' showed positive, low-cost but modest results.

It is too early to say how successful the 'Big Society' will be and hard to suggest even what the measuring rod should be for its success. In terms of the themes of the report, it is probably the case there is not enough attention to ways in which government and other bodies can change citizen behaviour, through such methods as incentives and information cues, partly because there is not a vast amount of knowledge about how to do this in such a radical way. It may be the case that a centralist and interventionist approach to stimulating civic action is not consistent with the aims of the programme, in which case it is an example of one of the dilemmas posed by the research question of this report.

The input of behavioural sciences is on the more specialist areas such as charitable giving. One route is through generating effective institutions to create a better context for giving. This would have the support of much innovative work in political science and political economy, such as that by Elinor Ostrom, whose work would support giving power to decentralised institutions and allowing citizens to take a role (Ostrom 1986, 1990, 1998). Some of the institutional reforms such as the right to challenge and the provision of local performance information may have this characteristic, but it is possible they do not go far enough in embedding citizen involvement to promote collective action.

It seems likely that – without more thought out interventions about how to engage citizens and the creation of a supportive institutional context – the initiatives will be piecemeal and hard to sustain. There needs to be a change in citizen behaviour, so that citizens do things that they were not doing before. This is not to say that volunteering and civic action are in decline – far from it – but there needs to be an upswing in civic involvement for the 'Big Society' to work fully.

6 Conclusions

6.1 Review

This report started with the potential contradiction between policies to support behaviour change and the commitment to greater decentralisation of power. It has reviewed the behaviour change agenda in central and local government, and has examined recent transfers to power to explore the problem. This part of the report reviews the extent to which there is a potential contradiction between these two policy objectives. Given the controversial nature of these policies, the report gives some play to both points of view before tentatively seeking to resolve the argument. The arguments for and against are summarised in the two text boxes, boxes 4 and 5.

Box 4: For: There is a tension between behaviour change and decentralisation

Behaviour change and decentralisation are not consistent with each other because a full understanding of behaviour change requires the utilisation of all the tools of government: it involves recalibrating finance, laws and regulations, as well as default and choice mechanisms.

If government decided to hand over decision making to other bodies then it does not have access to these command and control tools of government. As a result there may be only a small number of things that government can do. As one person interviewed for this report said, 'there are only so many default mechanisms government can change'. If the implication of decentralisation is that the stronger tools are not used to change behaviour then it will not be possible to effect as many changes as behavioural science suggests. This is the argument of the House of Lords Science and Technology Sub-committee on behaviour change. The light-touch interventions that the government is following through the encouragement of the Behavioural Insights Team

may disguise a failure to deal with social and economic problems, such as growing obesity and climate change. The decentralisation of power to local government also undermines the implementation of behaviour changes. Similarly the move to the 'Big Society' is hampered by a weak, hands-off and private-sector-led approach to its implementation. Spending cuts may exacerbate these tensions.

Box 5: Against: There is no tension between behaviour change and decentralisation

There is a different model of behaviour change than that implied by a top-down approach. Relying on top-down tools of government is not likely to achieve success so should not be seen as the measuring rod as the House of Lords report argues (House of Lords 2011). Instead the decentralisation of power may be associated with greater freedom and the re-energisation of communities, which would then encourage behaviour change by citizens. In this context, the role of the centre is to carry out light-touch nudges, to craft information signals, and also to redesign local institutions so they can give citizens feedback on what they are doing. The existing government policies are good examples of what can be achieved and are part of the more general shift in power. Some of the work of applying behaviour insights does not involve working with decentralised partners at all, for example projects with national level companies and the local private sector. There are ways of coordinating partners without the use of compulsion.

6.2 Conclusion

This report discusses the evidence for different ways of examining the link between behaviour change and decentralisation, which differ partly because of the different interpretations of what is effective behaviour change and different views about the best way of achieving it. Much depends on the extent to which the science is really there for the effectiveness of centrally directed behavioural interventions and whether it provides a viable alternative to nudging. This report suggests that evidence for a more proactive approach is hard to sustain with current levels of knowledge of what works. In this case, it is probably wise for government to gather more evidence before proceeding with the behaviour change agenda. This will require more randomised controlled trials that assess what tools of government deliver changes in citizen

behaviour. A step-by-step approach to achieving behaviour change is inevitable and desirable – if it is backed by evidence.

The report has highlighted the role of local government in promoting the behaviour change programme. Notwithstanding the issues of patchy or poor quality implementation in localities, examples from local government and other decentralised bodies suggest that there is already a similar set of ideas about behaviour change across local authorities of all political types, and some community-based bodies. If there were a more consistent framework from central government and more attempts to involve decentralised institutions in planning for behaviour change, the result could be a better combination of top-down and bottom-up policies.

Though the report has not ruled out the idea that a more decentralised path to implementation could work and deliver strong benefits, it has paid some attention to the problems of delivering the widespread behaviour changes needed to secure progress toward the 'Big Society', and the tough challenge the government faces in decentralising power and achieving behaviour change at the same time, especially with a relatively light-touch approach to implementation. At the same time, the experimentation with a programme of decentralisation brings much risk and uncertainty to the policy process.

No one recognises the ironies of a central programme for decentralisation better than central government policy-makers themselves. But the fact remains that there *is* a central programme, which has put in place new legislation measures, such as community rights. Decentralisation already co-exists with centralisation. Neither is nudge antithetical to what some have called 'shoves', that is the harder tools of government. In practice, tensions would be reduced, or not exist, if there was a strongly supportive legislative and central policy context within which local institutions could enact behavioural change policies they are locally choosing anyway, with the backing and mandate of citizens, and where delivery was underpinned by robust evidence.

The most significant potential problem is that it may be the case that not enough change will come about from this programme – neither enough behaviour change, nor enough decentralisation. But only time will prove this assertion to be correct. If it were true, it would still be the case that there is no necessary contradiction between decentralisation and policies to promote behaviour change, but that in practice they are both

hard to achieve together because of the implementation challenges. The most likely scenario is that the government will achieve some decentralisation and some behaviour change, but perhaps not enough of each to satisfy all the critics.

7 Ways forward: Policy recommendations

This report aimed to adjudicate between competing arguments, so recommendations are naturally tentative. In many areas, the outcomes are not yet clear, and there is little empirical evidence to assess different claims. However, we suggest some ways forward on these debates.

Policy recommendations:

- There is a need for better evidence on effective methods to increase citizen activity on a large scale, for example through the use of nudge-type techniques, and deliberative 'thinks'. (See pages 17, 18-22). More randomised controlled trials are needed to test out behaviour change interventions (26-7).
- The work of the Behavioural Insights Team should be extended beyond its two-year life in 2012. (22-7)
- The impact of the abolition of Central Office for Information needs to be evaluated. (24-5)
- Local government policy-makers need to be nudged alongside citizens for a smooth and collaborative transfer of control to communities. (29-35)
- The legitimacy of behaviour change policies and interventions should be based more on accountability to citizens. This requires large-scale 'thinks' to garner support. (10, 43-4)
- Local implementation requires innovators and change agents to be nurtured and protected, with a higher acceptance of 'failure', and more space for creative experimentation than has traditionally been the case in central and local government. (29-35)
- More power should be devolved from local government and to empower smaller organisations with lower levels of capacity than local authorities. (34-5)

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Appendix 1: A list of people interviewed for the report

- Toby Blume (Urban Forum)
- Professor Paul Dolan (Director, Centre for Wellbeing in Public Policy)
- Tess Gool (Local Government Improvement and Development)
- Dr David Halpern (Cabinet Office)
- Michael Hallsworth (Senior Researcher, Institute for Government)
- Dr Gemma Harper (Chief Social Researcher, Defra)
- Warren Hatter (Ripple)
- Liam Hughes (Local Government Association)
- Nigel Keohane (New Local Government Network)
- Dr Rachel McCloy (Government Economic and Social Research Team)
- Steve Martin (Work Foundation)
- Dr Adam Oliver (Senior Lecturer, London School of Economics)
- Alison Seabrooke (CEO, Community Development Foundation)
- Professor Gerry Stoker (Professor of Politics and Governance, University of Southampton)
- Ms Katherine Kerswell, (Kent County Council)
- Daisy Ricketts (Clerk to the House of Lords Science and Technology Select Committee)
- Andrew Ross (HM Treasury)
- Justin Smith (Chief Executive, Volunteering England)
- Professor Robert Sugden (University of East Anglia)
- Tom Walker (Department of Communities and Local Government)
- Steve Wyler (Locality)

Appendix 2: Examples of behavioural change initiatives led by local government (for online publication)

Below are examples of behavioural change initiatives led by local authorities. This is intended to present a broad overview of work taking place, not all of which is based on nudge or think models, but incorporating other models and theories of behaviour change.

1. L.B. Lambeth (Lab)

London Borough of Lambeth is seeking to reshape the settlement between the citizen and the state, by using a new model of a 'co-operative council, which is based on ideas from the co-operative movement. Its aim is to incentivise reciprocity and participation, through working closely with communities and the community and voluntary sector to plan, commission and deliver services, with the council as a strong community leader[4]. Lambeth's moves towards a 'co-operative council' have been well-flagged in the national press, and were started by an official Commission which looked at what needed to be done across the council as a whole.

So far, the implementation of the model appears to focus on commissioning processes for community-led and run service delivery, community and voluntary sector provision of grants, independent services and facilities, and 'traditional' volunteer recruitment e.g. green champions.

4 Co-operative Council Citizens' Commission (2011), The Co-operative Council Sharing power: A new settlement between citizens and the state (London, London Borough of Lambeth).

Some of the more 'nudge' orientated proposals include an 'active citizens dividend' that would give a council tax rebate to those residents who get involved with organisations that help deliver community-based services. It is not yet clear how this will be implemented.

The Council believes that significant shifts in its organisation, culture, skills and staffing are needed to deliver the changes. For instance, job specifications for forthcoming positions at the Council should be reviewed and amended to include required new competencies, and the hierarchical management structure should be revised to give staff more freedom to innovate, engage and communicate.

2. Bradford MDC (Lab)

Bradford MDC faces a significant challenge and opportunity in changing the model of service provision from a 'dependency-inducing' one to a more facilitative approach (Richardson 2012 forthcoming). Bradford MDC sees itself as at the early stages of re-defining the issues, before it moves on to reconfigure delivery models. There has been a strategic decision to shift the approach of the whole authority towards behaviour change; however the challenge lies in carrying out this policy. BMDC have expressed interest in exploring a broad range of complementary approaches to behaviour change and active citizenship. They have participated in several workforce development sessions to learn about 'nudge' techniques and work through how MINDSPACE might be implemented in the district. Spending reduction and the consequent re-structuring of front-line environmental services has given the authority the opportunity to create what it calls a 'behaviour change team' of integrated uniformed services e.g. park wardens, traffic enforcement, and neighbourhood wardens.

3. Barnsley MBC (Lab)

In ex-mining town Barnsley, the Chief Executive of the MBC has talked about a 'longstanding paternal culture' and a 'fundamental problem of dependency across Barnsley communities', where needs were met from cradle to the grave. It was argued that there had been a: 'realisation [that] this is not solved by better (traditional) public services and more money – they may increase dependency, but [is] not solved by ripping money away either. [We] need a new starting point based on

engagement, social capital, mental wellbeing, putting individuals and communities back in control […] recognising people as assets.' This demands significant change from the Council and public services, requiring 'completely different skill sets, capacities and working arrangements required [and] many services to be rethought and redesigned with the community. Managing the transition is daunting.' (Coppard 2011).

Initial steps towards behaviour change include devolution of control over neighbourhood budgets in a pilot project in one neighbourhood, using the community budget model for neighbourhood services.

4. Somerset County Council (Cons)

Somerset County Council is experimenting with whole system redesign for 'total engagement', so that citizens may move from passive recipients of services to active ones with a direct role in shaping, supporting and delivering services (Big Society Network and Micah Gold Associates 2011).

Total engagement means that more services are commissioned out to the community and voluntary sectors, local people have more say over services, and there is more citizen activity and volunteering. Initial re-modelling work was started by Micah Gold Associates in 2011, and supported by the Big Society Network. This work is in the early stages, and so far, they have mapped systems for community engagement across the whole council, and made proposals for a fundamentally new model.

Rather than a small staff of engagement workers undertaking thousands of interactions, the model proposed involves a corporate approach: every one of the hundreds of thousands of interactions between residents and the council becomes an opportunity for active citizenship. For example, it suggests training front-line staff at service points and in contact centres to recruit citizens to be more active e.g. by volunteering and forming a Somerset citizen 'membership' of the council. The Council already uses Inovem 'Inclusionware' as a software package to co-ordinate a corporate approach to consultation, and one option is to extend the functionality of this software to support the new more ambitious approach. Community Action Teams, made up of services, residents, third sector organisations, and councillors would work together in neighbourhoods to solve problems.

Proposals include a menu for service devolution to parish councils, and criteria for risk delegation to parishes. Another suggestion is that commissioning and procurement are reviewed so that potential new services that could be delivered by voluntary sector groups can be identified and fostered, and these groups have the opportunity to compete for contracts.

5. Knowsley MBC (Lab)

The council has undertaken specific pieces of behaviour change work, notably making a change to the 'default setting' in recycling and introducing co-mingled 'grey' bins (where citizens put in paper, glass and other recyclable items without needing to separate them) across the borough in 2008-9. This work was led by local councillors, after they rejected a proposal from officers to move to alternate weekly collections. Environmental Services data showed only 16% of waste collected was being recycled in 2006/7, with the rest going to landfill. However, if the authority didn't meet targets of 35% recycling by 2010-11 they would face a £7.5 million fine. A survey of 15,000 households showed that 43% said 'nothing' would encourage them to recycle more, but 65,000 grey bins were rolled out in six weeks, alongside other organisational changes e.g. re-structuring of bin collection teams. Waste recycling increased from 16% in 2006/7 to 29.4% in 2009-10, just under the 30% target for that year.

The change of behaviour among residents was dependent on the behaviour of the organisation changing first. Elected members went through a learning programme, bringing in their own rubbish to a session where they went through individual items to find out what could and could not be recycled, and tried out the new bins themselves first so they could deal with queries and allay residents' fears. They acted as champions in their wards, at community meetings with 150 people, persuading individuals to recycle and passing on names of people who wanted to participate in the scheme to Officers. Elected members on the board of the housing association worked in partnership with them to include the 13,000 tenants in the recycling scheme. Elected members were awarded the Member Development Charter Level 2 from North West Employers' Organisation for this work[5].

5 Source: unpublished assessment report for NWEO Member Development Charter Level 2, see www.nwemployers.org.uk

There has been community engagement based on The Campaign Company's concept of 'value modes segmentation' in two different wards[6]. KMBC has developed a wider strategy on behaviour change: engage, education, enforce, encourage. Other related work in Knowsley includes smoking cessation commissioned by Knowsley Health and Wellbeing, also using market segmentation approaches.[7]

The authority has also undertaken behaviour change work with residents in Reeds Road, North Huyton.[8] Reeds Road is a small neighbourhood which is part of a larger area called Bakers Green. The neighbourhood is part of the North Huyton area of Knowsley Council, and as of February 2011 was managed by neighbourhood workers from the council's area office, overseen by local elected members on the Area Partnership Board. Partners on the project were: residents of Reeds Road, the ward councillors for Reeds Road, Knowsley MBC, Knowsley Housing Trust, the police and PSCOs, Safer Knowsley partnership, and other departments of the council including anti-social behaviour unit (ASBU).

Reeds Road had been experiencing problems with drug dealing, gun crime, and intimidation of residents by criminals operating in the area. Agencies found it hard to engage with residents, and it became a 'no-go' area. Residents had been shot at in 'drive-by' shootings from scramble bikes. There was graffiti, and burnt out cars in green spaces. Parents felt that it was unsafe to let their children play outside. Residents also experienced problems with the poor reputation of Reeds Road, for example they felt ashamed to invite guests to their homes, and taxis and deliveries refused to come onto the estate. Agencies were concerned about the safety of officers going into the area, and withdrew PSCOs. After a series of successful enforcement actions in 2008, the Council and partners started to try and rebuild the community.

The traditional approaches of holding public meetings and trying to establish residents' groups were not successful, so the agencies tried a different approach. They initially started to win trust by reclaiming green space, and then set up Fun Days, social events, youth activities, creative arts projects, and participatory budgeting so that further physical

6 North West Together We Can (NWTWC) (2010), NWTWC C*ommunity Empowerment Awards September 2010* (Stockport, NWTWC).

7 See: http://www.collaborativechange.org.uk

8 NWTWC (2010).

improvements and future community projects could be decided on by the residents. 200 people who had previously refused to come onto the estate attended the first Fun Day in March 2010, which featured air hockey, children's games, and a local ice-cream van. There was a 'Who wants to be a Millionaire' exercise where participants used handsets to vote between new youth activities and other local spending options, specifying whether the money should be divided between a few activities or several. A local social enterprise did art work with children on the hoardings as partners felt that it was important to value residents and do creative arts. The children were proud of their art work and brought their parents and grandparents to see it.

There have been improvements in engagement and residents' trust in public institutions as a result of the project. Children and families now use green spaces on the estate. Residents have attended community events and fun days, and have taken part in decision making. Community Champions are starting to emerge. Before the project, elected members were frustrated. They understood the residents' problems but were unable to resolve them with agencies effectively; after the project they felt huge strides had been made. Reeds Road has witnessed vast improvement from its particularly low starting point. Street sweepers are no longer finding bullet casings, pizza delivery companies will now deliver on the estate, children now play out on green spaces, and residents feel able to attend community events and participate in decisions over funding for community projects.

The work on Reeds Road has had a wider significance for community engagement strategies in Knowsley. It was a demonstration of a new way of working, using an understanding of the people who live in a place. Knowsley Council are working with the Campaign Company on 'value modes segmentation' i.e. understanding what matters to people, to take this forward and try to transform the council's relationship with citizens. This understanding is now being used to inform the authority's Community Engagement Strategy, and work in other neighbourhoods. The council has moved from 'we can fix them', to 'people can fix themselves, if they decide they want fixing!'

6. Huntingdonshire DC (Cons)

In Ramsey in Huntingdonshire, the council has introduced Neighbourhood Agreements, which are non-legally binding contracts between

residents and services. In one neighbourhood, there is an Agreement on 'Things to Do'[9] which aims to increase community action and community spirit through a negotiation about what the council, other services and residents themselves will each try to contribute.

7. LB Sutton (Lib Dem)

As with other councils, LB Sutton has used more transparent information to improve performance on environmental health from restaurants and fast-food outlets, by publicising EH scores to the public in a 'name and shame' scheme[10].

This is part of a wider attempt by the council to change behaviours across policy areas, based on open dialogue and engagement with residents. Other examples include Smarter Travel Sutton, which used advertising that showed cycling as a 'normal' mode of travel. People were targeted at home, work school, shopping and at leisure. Key aspects included: personal travel planning advice; workplace travel plans; additional cycle parking; and a dedicated website. Outcomes included a 75% increase in cycling over the 3 years.

8. Carlisle City Council (NOC)

A similar example to LB Sutton is 'Scores on the Doors' in Carlisle[11] where data showed there was a problem with food safety and food hygiene in city centre kebab shops, mostly run by people from a minority ethnic background. The authority started the 'Scores on the Doors' initiative to award environmental health scores to different takeaways and restaurants, so that the public could know which were safest. The authority also wanted to find out why this problem existed. Extra qualitative data gathered showed that the problems were language barriers and high turnover of staff. Consequently, the authority offered translation of legislation for businesses, but there was a low take-up on this offer. To address this, 'midnight football' was set up for workers in the takeaways and restaurants working late at night. 5-a-side pitches were

9 http://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/SiteCollectionDocuments/HDCCMS/Documets/Community%20Initiatives%20documents/summer_2011_-_issue_15.pdf

10 http://www.yourlocalguardian.co.uk/news/local/suttonnews/9341448/

11 Richardson, L. (2010), *Using disaggregated equalities data to improve services* (Manchester, NWEO).

opened in the late evening, and the activity was used to build trust with those workers. Using this, the authority have persuaded workers onto food safety courses held in their first language. The council describe their approach to the use of quantitative and qualitative evidence in behaviour change work as 'a recursive why'; that is, exploring data and examining causes by continuing to ask 'why?' at every stage.

9. RB Windsor and Maidenhead (Cons)

As part of their work as a Big Society vanguard, RB Windsor and Maidenhead have implemented an incentive scheme for behaviour change, called Recyclebank. This awards points for recycling, which can be spent on discounts for food clothing and leisure activities. RB Windsor and Maidenhead are now exploring a volunteering incentive scheme, in discussion with Nectar, to set up a social enterprise focusing on volunteering to support people with low level care needs[12].

10. London Collaborative

Work commissioned by London councils from OPM and Young Foundation in 2008-2009, and funded by Capital Ambition, involved a network of London Boroughs (London Leadership Network) in a series of practice exchanges. A publication from the project[13] included case studies of: green behaviours in LB Barnet; tackling gang and weapon violence in LB Southwark; education about knife crime in LB Bexley; and competitive edge (sports) in LB Richmond. An appendix contained a further 12 examples of behaviour change initiatives across London boroughs on health behaviours, youth crime, and pro-environmental behaviours. The practice exchanges discussed other examples, including Southwark Circle, and energy meters in LB Camden. As part of this project, a feasibility study was also conducted on a pan-London Smart card to incentivise active living[14]. There have been some pilots in other areas e.g. Young Foundation/Birmingham East and North Primary Care Trust 'Healthy Incentives' programme which provides points as rewards

12 http://www.rbwm.gov.uk/public/news_atrb_spring2011.pdf

13 See: London Collaborative (2009) *The Capital Ambition guide to behaviour change* http://www.youngfoundation.org/files/images/londoncollaborative_behaviour.pdf

14 Young Foundation (2009) *Incentive cards and behaviour change in London* http://www.youngfoundation.org/files/images/incentive_cards_final_0.pdf

for healthy activities. However, a revisit of lessons from the project in February 2010 found barriers to implementation included local government attitudes to risk, obstacles of organisational cultural change, and ethical and political legitimacy dilemmas[15].

15 http://issuu.com/networklondon/docs/revisiting-a-london-collaborative-checklist-25.2.1

Appendix 3: examples of behavioural change initiatives led by community-led or -based bodies (for online publication)

Listed below are examples of behavioural change initiatives from community-led or based bodies. This list is intended to present a broad overview of work taking place, not all of which is based on nudge or think models, but also other models and theories of behaviour change.

1. Zest, Sheffield

Zest[16] is the trading name for Netherthorpe and Upperthorpe Community Alliance (NUCA), a community-led and locally managed Development Trust. From its small beginnings as a local forum of concerned residents, Zest quickly grew and generated wider community and political support for an ambitious programme of regeneration to address the complex social, economic and environmental problems of the Netherthorpe, Upperthorpe and Langsett area. In 2000 they secured £5 million funding and became the first community-led accountable body in the country to manage a Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) programme. Since then Zest has grown as an organisation, acquired assets and successfully made the transition from grant dependence to contract- and commission-based service delivery and social enterprise. In 2011 they employed around 80 people with an annual turnover of over £2.3m, and delivered a wide range of projects, including:

16 http://www.zestcommunity.co.uk/

- Zest Healthy Living Centre – gym, swimming pool, library, community café, computer suite, health programmes and wider support services, all under one roof;
- Zest One-stop Shop for information, advice and support around jobs, training and enterprise;
- Zest Young People's Project – delivering a wide range of positive activities, linked to a structured programme of personal development opportunities.

This is an impressive scale of operation for a community-led body, and compares well to other local accountable bodies in the same authority area. Zest has rescued the local library and swimming pool, and added a modern gym to the centre. They now have three buildings in community ownership and directly manage services and staff.

Zest focus on providing services which change behaviours; programmes to tackle child obesity; fitness classes for older people and those recovering from serious operations; as well as services to get people back to employment and for business start-ups. Looking at their work, it could be argued that Zest has implicitly used behavioural change techniques that re-design systems around an 'intelligent consumer', based on high expectations that citizens will respond to these systems with positive behaviours. For example, they successfully instituted self-service in the library against scepticism from the previous providers and local authority[17].

2. Bolton Community Network – changing health behaviour

Bolton Community Network is managed by Bolton CVS[18], a third sector organisation offering support, training and guidance to the voluntary and community sector of Bolton. Their work to change people's health-related behaviour was begun by NHS Bolton who had identified inequalities in health outcomes: a 15 year gap in life expectancy between the most deprived and most affluent areas of Bolton. NHS Bolton were keen to find ways of getting preventative health messages into 'hard to reach' communities, but previous attempts by health professionals had not been effective. Traditional methods such as leaflets and posters inviting

17 Source: unpublished application and assessment reports for a national Community Regeneration Award 2009.

18 http://www.boltoncvs.org.uk/

people to awareness-raising sessions had been tried by health professionals, but take-up had been low.

Bolton CVS already had established relationships with many minority ethnic and marginalised groups through its projects, so a partnership between NHS Bolton and Bolton CVS was formed, through its Community Network project. A formal service level agreement was developed between the two organisations for a three year plan of action to narrow the gap around health inequalities in Bolton.

Community Engagement Workers were trained to use innovative and interactive methods to engage with people. This training was based on intelligence about 'nudge' style behavioural change interventions gathered by NHS Bolton. These included interactive games designed to train people how to self-screen for testicular and breast cancer, in games called 'Bowel Bingo', 'Road to Cervical Screening' and 'Open Wide', where players feel for hidden lumps in boxes using 'bio-like' models. 'Upsy Downsy' was a workshop held to promote positive mental health and was developed using a board game based on Snakes and Ladders. It explores how to make good choices over bad choices and 'think happy habits'. Statement cards are used to demonstrate 'upsy' habits like having alcohol free nights each week, moving players up the ladder on the board. 'Downsy' habits, such as ignoring problems and avoiding possible new opportunities, take the player down the snakes on the board. After participating in the game, participants make pledges to take on a new good habit and are contacted a few weeks later with a gentle reminder and support information about local classes and organisations they may find useful.

As a result of the programme, there has been greater equity in uptake of health promotion programmes and services, such as prevention, screening and treatment services. NHS and Bolton CVS monitoring data shows the following outcomes[19]:

- Increase over the period of the project in women from BME communities attending cervical screening appointments.
- Upsy Downsy game delivered to over 1150 people who have all pledged to take on a new habit to improve mental health and wellbeing.

19 NWTWC (2011), Community Empowerment Awards March 2011 (Stockport, NWTWC). See www.nwtwc.org.uk.

- Over 1000 people taught to self check for testicular and breast cancer.
- Self-reports from members of BME communities that they have either cut down or stopped using shisha smoking pipes.

3. Hawthorne Park Trust, Wyre BC

In 2001 a group of residents from the Thornton neighbourhood in Wyre BC, an area near Blackpool, formed the Thornton Action Group. Its focus was on the lack of leisure facilities and poor quality of public green spaces in the neighbourhood. The local park was neglected, under-used, and lacked play provision. One trigger was proposals for a new housing development which would bring new families to the area without the necessary infrastructure, and increase demand for amenities and play spaces. The Hawthorne Park Trust was formed in 2007 as a spin off from the Action Group and the ownership of the land in the local park was transferred from Wyre BC to the Trust on a 50 year lease. The Council assisted the Trust with a variety of issues including legal advice, accounting support, health and safety, planning and funding guidance. Transferring this asset represented a change of approach for the local authority.

Phase one of the project began in 2007 and involved draining the field, laying lawns and paths, creating the wild life and wetland conservation area, and installing the first items of play equipment. The Parks and Open Spaces Section, volunteers from the Council's Coast and Countryside Rangers and volunteer groups were responsible for planting trees and shrubs. The Council's Natural Environment Officer supported the Trust with the environmental design process of the park as part of the wildlife and biodiversity action plan. Following a successful bid to BIG Lottery and a number of smaller funders in 2009, phase two began with the addition of further play equipment, which included an area for older children, designed with the young people in question. The Hawthorne Park Trust has agreed maintenance arrangements for the park with the council.

Interviews with council officers, the police, local residents, and others involved in the project found that it had produced a decrease in anti social behaviour in the neighbourhood, an increase in the number of young people who were involved in community activity, increased use of the park by all ages, and increased inter-generational contact. Two fun

days, attended by more than 800 people each time, were highlighted as good examples of the project's benefits. Residents get involved through a Friends of the Park group, for example, litter picking, making bat and bird boxes, and tree and shrub planting. Hawthorne Park was awarded the Lancashire Environmental Fund 'Best Practice Open Spaces Project 2009'. Pre- and post-surveys of the project conducted by the Trust in 2007and 2010, although with small samples, show[20]:

- 2007, 6% said the natural environment was good. In 2010, 50% said it was excellent/good.
- In 2007, 9% felt there were enough opportunities in Thornton for children and young people to enjoy leisure/physical exercise safely. In 2010, the figure rose to 34%.
- In 2007 no one rated the park as a source of community enjoyment and a focus for community pride. In 2010, 84% said that it was excellent/good.

4. Handforth Residents and Contour Housing: the Big Chin Rub Community Philosophical Inquiry

This report has talked about both 'nudge' and 'think' approaches to behaviour change. A novel example of a community-based 'think' is the Big Chin Rub community philosophy project. It was initiated by the Contour Housing group, a social landlord, but each neighbourhood ran their own project through local residents' groups. In 2010, just under 50 different groups across Contour Housing took part in the Big Chin Rub week, including residents' groups and groups of staff members. This example is of one of the 48 Big Chin Rub groups.

The project was in the small housing association estate of Knowle Park which is in a wealthy area of Cheshire called Handforth. Knowle Park is made up of 100 homes, and was originally a Manchester overspill estate that was taken over by Contour Housing. It is a quiet, clean and well-managed neighbourhood of semi-detached houses in cul-de-sacs, in an attractive area, and bounded by several areas of privately owned homes. It was not a focus for any intensive work by the housing association, which had previously had relatively little contact with groups on the estate. A residents' association had been running a community centre for

20 NWTWC (2011), *Community Empowerment Awards March 2011*(Stockport, NWTWC). See www.nwtwc.org.uk.

several years, based in a converted three bedroom house given for community use. But the residents had become 'burnt out', described the community activities as having gone 'stale', and were looking for ways to re-energise community activity and increase numbers of volunteers. The community house was under-used. The group were also concerned about a lack of things for young people to do in the neighbourhood, and a lack of transport and social activities for the whole community. Residents were not clear what they could legally do with young people, whether they needed CRB checks, and if they could get access to a piece of waste land nearby for youth activities. They had previously tried to get advice on CRB checks but had received confused information. The housing association was debating whether to take the community house back into use for housing.

In July 2010, residents and a facilitator from Contour Housing organised a Big Chin Rub evening. 15 residents met in the community house one evening over drinks and food to discuss how to define the concept of 'a good community'. The group started by looking at a Lowry 'match stick men' painting and used the image to debate around an open question: 'What does it mean to have a 'good' community?' The facilitator then created a discussion by probing people's answers, in a similar structure to a university student's tutorial. For example, asking: 'Does it always have to be like that everywhere for everyone?' The idea of community philosophy is to bring people together, use an approach where everyone can participate as equals to explore common ground, listen to each other, and see where this might lead. Outcomes for Knowle Park included[21]:

- Resident organisers running the community house feel their energy has been rejuvenated. There is revived interest from the estate in the community house, and the committee. Since the project, there has been a curry night, quiz evenings, and a neighbours' lunch under a gazebo in the back garden of the community house.
- New groups have been set up by volunteers who had not been involved before, including a children's after-school and homework club run by two mothers, and a men's club.
- The residents' group is now working with the housing association to get funding to create a wildlife area on the waste land.
- Volunteers feel more confident in doing activities and understand

21 NWTWC (2011).

the legislation better e.g. CRB checks. They found out that they did not need CRB checks for some activities and were then able to set up new groups without volunteers being worried about the legal rules.
- Contour Housing have agreed to retain the community house for communal use.

5. Manton Community Alliance

The strap-lines for the Manton Community Alliance (MCA) are: 'Residents are part of the solution rather than passive consumers' and 'No such thing as "hard to reach"'. MCA started life as a Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder funded under the New Labour programme, but has always classed itself as a project with a difference, choosing not to use its resources to pump prime projects but building community action, engagement and citizen trust in institutions:

> *'In 2004 MCA rejected the established model for area based renewal (i.e. Pump priming projects) as it is too costly, offers low return and is unsustainable. MCA replaced it with a social capital model for renewal designed to create a new relationship between people and public sector turning the relationship from one that was often adversarial to one that is collaborative.'*[22]

Some of their outcomes include[23] mobilising high proportions of the population to take part in decision making and community activity, for example through participatory budgeting. In 2007, 564 people from a population of around 6,500 actively participated in various activities (approx 8%); this number rose to around 2,250 (approx. 35%) in 2011. A core group of 40 people involved in leadership roles in 2007 expanded to around 86 people in 2011. While in 2009, turnout for local elections was 22% (compared with 35% in the local authority district), in the same period 12.6% (some of whom had not voted before) took part in democratic decision making through participatory budgeting. MCA sees deliberative activity as both complementing and promoting electoral democratic engagement. They used the PB process to gather data

22 Manton Community Alliance (2011), Manton Community Alliance (MCA) Delivery of Localism: Outcome Summary: 1. (http://www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk/documents/110919%20Summary%20of%20Impact%20-%20MCA%20Localism%20Model.pdf, accessed 16 January 2012).

23 http://www.mantoncommunityalliance.org.uk/

on residents' priorities for the neighbourhood which then influenced services: for instance, these priorities were formalised in a voluntary 'service-level agreement' between public service providers and residents, which was monitored by the community.

6. Irwell Valley Housing Association

Irwell Valley was a very early initiator of 'nudge'-style approaches to behaviour change with its ground-breaking Gold Service scheme[24]. Gold Service started in 1998 and rewards social housing tenants for 'customer loyalty' i.e. paying rent promptly and keeping to the terms of their tenancy agreements. Tenants apply to be members of the scheme, and receive cashback of £1 per week, faster repairs, access to grants for community projects and educational and back to work bursaries. 90% of Irwell Valley tenants are Gold Service members. Research comparing the scheme to other incentives for neighbourliness[25] found that residents thought it offered incentives for being a better neighbour, and made it more likely that people would be penalised for negative behaviours. After debate throughout the social housing sector about the ethical implications of the scheme, it has been widely adopted by other social landlords.

24 www.irwellvalleyha.co.uk

25 Bastow, S., Beck, H., Dunleavy, P., and Richardson, L. (2007). 'Incentive Schemes and Civil Renewal', in Brannan, J., and Stoker, G. (eds.), *Re-energizing citizenship: Strategies for civil renewal* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan).

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(2005-2006), and chair of the Social Policy and Social Work Research Assessment Exercise Panel (2005-2008). He has also published 22 books, 114 articles and 110 book chapters, and has advised governments in the UK and abroad.

British Academy Policy Centre publications

Raising household saving, a report prepared by the Institute of Fiscal Studies for the British Academy, February 2012

Post-immigration 'difference' and integration: The case of Muslims in western Europe, a report for the British Academy project *New paradigms in public policy,* February 2012

Building a new politics?, a report for the British Academy project *New paradigms in public policy,* January 2012

Squaring the public policy circle: Managing a mismatch between demands and resources, a report for the British Academy project *New paradigms in public policy,* November 2011

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Choosing an electoral system, a British Academy report, March 2010

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Punching our weight: The humanities and social sciences in public policy making, a British Academy report, September 2008

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The idea of 'nudging' or persuading citizens into certain behaviours has gained considerable popularity in recent years and has become a particular policy focus for the coalition government. But how does this interest fit with the government's desire to decentralise power and create a 'Big Society'? In *Nudging Citizens Towards Localism?* Peter John and Liz Richardson examine whether positive behaviour change is most effectively achieved through central government action, or best decided and implemented at a local level, through the combined efforts of local agencies, the voluntary sector and citizens.

Nudging Citizens Towards Localism? finds that the exact relationship between government action, citizen behaviours and effective public outcomes remains hazy, despite examples of good practice and robust evidence across government. There are real opportunities to use the nudge approach at a local level, but without more experiments to close the gap in evidence, government might have to settle for only moderate changes in citizen behaviour.

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