

ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP
FOR DISTRICT COUNCILS

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

at a

PARLIAMENTARY HEARING

held in

Committee Room 21, Houses of Parliament, London SW1A 0PW

on

Tuesday 21 February 2017

Before:

Mark Pawsey MP, in the Chair
Professor Colin Copus, De Montfort University
Julie Cooper MP
Robert Courts MP
Mims Davies MP
Matthew Hamilton, District Council's Network
Simon Hoare MP

(From the Shorthand Notes of:
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Witnesses: CLLR MARK TOWNSEND, Leader, Burnley Borough Council; PAM DONNELLY, Executive Director, Customer Operations and Partnerships, Colchester Borough Council; MIKE PURSEHOUSE, Early Help and Prevention Manager, South Norfolk Council; TREVOR SCOTT, Director for Governance and Corporate Services, Wealden District Council; and CLLR JULIAN DALY, Leader, St Albans City and District Council.

THE CHAIRMAN: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. This is the second evidence session we have been taking, as the All-Party Parliamentary Group on District Councils, on the effect of collaboration between district councils and other bodies. We had our first session, which was when we took evidence from five separate authorities on how they work together with other authorities, and today we are going to focus on the relationship between district councils and other agencies and organisations. I am joined on the panel by two MPs, who are Julie, who is a Labour MP from Burnley, and Robert, who is the newly elected MP for Witney, and he is cutting his teeth on how a select committee works, I think, having just arrived here in Parliament. We do hope that one or two colleagues, and here is one, will drop in and out throughout the afternoon, although, unlike our session last time, I do not think we are expecting any votes. Robert has told me that he needs to leave in 15 minutes or so, so we will certainly make sure that he has the opportunity to put a question to you. I am wondering whether, first of all, each of you, as members of our panel, might just give us a little bit about where you are from and just a word or two about the relationships between your councils and other agencies and organisations, and then we will lead into some questions.

PAM DONNELLY: I am Pam Donnelly and I am from Colchester in Essex. I have two roles which bring me here today. First of all, I am the Executive Director with responsibility for all public sector partnerships and, secondly, I am Chair of the responsible authorities group, which is known as the Safer Colchester Partnership. I would say that, in the main, our relationships with public sector and voluntary sector partners is excellent in Colchester. We have worked very hard over a number of years and I think that the state of those partnerships is now bearing fruit in the sense that we have some examples of real collaboration and integration which, hopefully, we will get the chance to talk about, recognising of course the challenges.

CLLR JULIAN DALY: First, thank you to the MPs and to the GCM for giving some visibility to district councils; it feels like we are kind of hidden, but do all the hard heavy lifting. I am currently the Leader of St Albans City and District Council in Hertfordshire, and just commenced my sixth year. I sit on the board of the Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership as the elected representative of the other boroughs and districts that make up Hertfordshire, and I also chair our local strategic partnership which is sort of left over from New Labour; we kept it going because of its value to collaboration. I am quite a big believer in hierarchy, so there is a scale thing that kicks in for some things, like the NHS, and there is a localism which kicks in for us or parishes or residents. Somewhere in your notes, there is a comment about us having a leading places role with a very clear understanding of our local community, which I think is absolutely true, and I hope that will be echoed by colleagues here. Personal trust is a really important thing,

not picked up in your suggested questions, but I would quite like to talk about that, if I get the chance, and, if it fits into questions, I will lever it in. Collaboration, I think, is more than local government and local government agencies; it is definitely about getting business, voluntary groups and residents involved, so horses for courses.

TREVOR SCOTT: Good afternoon and thank you very much for the opportunity to come along this afternoon. My name is Trevor Scott. I am the Director of Governance at Wealden District Council. For those of you who are not familiar with it, Wealden is in the top ten largest rural district councils in the country. We sit in the heart of east Sussex, stretching broadly to and surrounding Eastbourne on the coast in the south up to Tunbridge Wells in the north, so we cover quite a significant patch of geography. We take in landmarks, such as the Ashdown Forest and the Pevensy Levels, and a fair bit of the South Downs as well at the entrance point.

Really, I suppose, in terms of our council's position on collaboration, we would step back in time to around about 2010 when we started our transformation journey as an organisation and recognised at that time that we were going to move more towards a model of being what we would describe as being a facilitating and enabling council. That was to move away from probably more traditional models of direct service provision and, I suppose, a relationship between members, officers and those services about actually formally delivering those services to residents and more towards positions of community leadership and positions of working with other organisations in order to collaborate and create an environment within which the council was at the centre of many relationships, but which recognised the complexity of the public sector and recognised that one individual council cannot possibly deliver all the services that are required for our residents on our own. Therefore, it was pretty critical to work in partnership with a range of different organisations both within the traditional local government family and also outside into the wider public services, be that through the blue-light services, and then further on in terms of the business sector as well. If we are looking at having an influence on things like economic growth, then clearly councils are not going to be able to challenge and deliver that agenda on our own. That is very much our journey and why we are here today.

CLLR MARK TOWNSEND: I am Mark Townsend, the Leader of Burnley Borough Council, and I am in my third year. What I lead is a very ambitious council and, to do that, we obviously realised that partnerships are exceedingly important, and a place-shaping role is what we see ourselves as having in terms of moving the district forward, but we also understand that in the wider context, if Lancashire succeeds, the area where we are, then Burnley succeeds. In terms of that place-shaping, it has all been about working very strongly with business. We were recognised as the most enterprising place in the UK a couple of years ago, we are in the top ten for private sector jobs growth and we recently had the second-highest digital jobs growth in the UK, so there are lots of exciting things going on, but we realise that we cannot do any of that without the partnerships that we have with business, with the third sector and with local partners. We have some good examples of that partnership working and how we are building an ambitious, outward-looking district going forward.

MIKE PURSEHOUSE: I am Mike Pursehouse, of South Norfolk Council. South Norfolk is at the bottom end of Norfolk, it is very rural and the council borders on the bottom of Norwich. Again, South Norfolk has really changed its emphasis to a place-shaping council over the last few years, particularly around economic growth. We have a GNDB agreement with Norwich and Broadland, which provides sustainable growth but is also around early help and prevention, so I sit on the Early Help and Prevention Board for Norfolk where we try and develop a broader partnership which, as has been said, we are trying to build. We know that South Norfolk cannot do everything ourselves and that we have to do it in that place-shaping role and particularly focused on how we support our communities to develop their own resilience.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you for a nice mix of officers and elected representatives. Robert, do you want to start with the first question?

ROBERT COURTS: I, in fact, still sit on West Oxfordshire District Council until May, so that is an interest declared, but it also gives you an idea of my background. We, at West Oxfordshire, have a well-established co-operation regime with other councils, with Cotswold in particular and then through the developing 2020 programme, so that is something I am quite familiar with and, of course, we explored that in the last session. What I am interested in today is whether you have found that there are obstacles to that sort of working programme with other bodies and, if so, whether you found some a bit more productive than others, so I would just like you to enlighten me on what has been the most productive from your perspective.

CLLR JULIAN DALY: To start with the positives, I suppose, in my experience, collaboration works. I think there is a unifying theme in the way St Alban's does it, but it has come about through practice, and that is having a common sense of what we are trying to achieve. We work very well with the local voluntary groups to bring them into our building because, in my experience as Leader, every time I came in, there would be a lot of very stressed individuals sitting by the reception desk and wanting to deal with the council, whether the council could deal with them being a completely different matter, whether it is homelessness or debt problems or so on. We were invariably referring them on to the Citizens Advice Bureau, who were several buildings away, and they would probably never get there, but, by bringing the Citizens Advice Bureau into our building and saving on the rent, using empty space that we had, we were able to provide the service to the residents. That is working back where we were trying to solve a local problem communally.

On the other hand, and I mentioned that I chair the strategic partnership, I think in the second meeting I had on that it was very clear that we had a number of families that were troubled families, so about two weeks before David Cameron stood up and said, "Wouldn't it be good if we focused all our efforts on the troubled families", we had agreed that that is what we were to do. That was interesting and the way we approached it was to say, "Give us the top 20 troubled families", and the police gave their top 20 and so on and, when there was a commonality and there were 13 families that were on

everybody's list, we homed in on them, a small number of people causing a lot of trouble for us to focus on. Big government comes along and there is a huge process where it then takes two years to work out which is a troubled family, do they meet these criteria, and very nearly derailed the whole thing, so there is a big government process that does not work for local government-tailored solutions, I think, and that was probably the most glaring example we had.

ROBERT COURTS: Could you pick up the point about obstacles. What was in the back of my mind ---

CLLR JULIAN DALY: The obstacle there was data-sharing, we think, the legislative regime which meant that the county council had most of the interactions with Social Services, but were having to go to DWP 99 names at a time to work out who the top ten were, so there were 1,300 troubled families in Hertfordshire and how were we going to find them with all this rigmarole. For tailored solutions, respecting the fact that there need to be data-sharing constraints, if we have all got a common problem and we want to work together, why is that not being removed?

THE CHAIRMAN: So there was a lack of buy-in by other organisations that you approached?

CLLR JULIAN DALY: Because they were terrified of the legislation, so the legislation was not helping; it was hindering.

THE CHAIRMAN: Does anybody else want to come in? Mark?

CLLR MARK TOWNSEND: There are three good examples in Burnley where we work collaboratively, me and my councillors, on communities in legal building control. What I would like to emphasise really is that it is all very tactical in nature and very piecemeal. There is not a journey that we are on collaboratively towards an end game of what real collaboration looks like, but it is really just on a needs basis and it is all a bit piecemeal, so we will do one thing with one authority and another thing with another authority, and it is very difficult to pull together, so it is very tactical. I put my own authority in this as well, that there is a difficulty in letting go and being risk averse. Those, I feel, are the main barriers to actually building up trust between local authorities, that we are in this together, we are working together and, if there is common ground in terms of economic development and other such things, it is the all boats rise-type syndrome.

THE CHAIRMAN: We are particularly interested in your working with other bodies rather than other authorities. In other authorities, they will understand your structures and they will want to get to the same end game. What are the challenges with working together with other bodies, whether it is other government bodies, private businesses, charitable organisations or whatever?

ROBERT COURTS: Mark's point is exactly what I was interested in and was driving at. Working with other councils, they will recognise your way of working, they will

recognise your structures, and what I was wondering is whether there are some organisations with which that does not work because they simply do not understand the way you work.

CLLR MARK TOWNSEND: I think that is always going to be the case, especially where you have the private and public sector working together. Certainly in Burnley, we have done lots of work over the years, especially with the business fraternity, in terms of making sure that the private sector understand how councils work and we try to understand each other's perspectives, but that all takes time and it is whether we have that time in the future to build on things like that.

THE CHAIRMAN: Pam, you want to come in on that?

PAM DONNELLY: Yes, I just want to pick that point up because I certainly believe that, unless you have a shared goal, shared priorities and a shared vision and understanding about how your relative organisations work, then that creates a fairly big obstacle to progress. One of the ways, I think, that we can overcome that, which certainly we have in Colchester, is by creating a framework for a range of governance that allows you to set some clear priorities that you will share. An example would be the Safe Colchester Partnership where fire, police, health, probation and the voluntary sector, our garrison, the university, the borough and the county all share exactly the same four priorities. That has led us to understanding each other's organisations and some of the barriers, such as data-sharing, intelligence-sharing, but actually to try and overcome them. Another good example would be budgets. We all have our own ring-fenced budgets, but, by sharing some of those budgets and pooling them for a common goal to make Colchester safer, that has really helped us overcome some of the obstacles that we faced.

SIMON HOARE: How much of an impediment is it? I am not answering my own question by saying that I think a lot, but I hope that is what you are saying because I think it is something which the Government needs to attend to, particularly if councils across county boundaries are trying to tie up, merge, mesh, conjoin, whatever phrase is used. There is a rather abstract piece of legislation which says that one local authority, if you are going to merge them, cannot be served by two police and crime commissioners. That is something, I think, which was written in. Why? Nobody can remember why, but certainly it frustrated West Oxfordshire and Cotswold merging because it would have had two PCCs. That may not be something you have faced because you are not trying to merge councils, but that seems to be an impediment which really should not be there.

TREVOR SCOTT: I think you are absolutely right in that example. Fortunately, certainly from our experience, that sort of legislative barrier is relatively infrequent. I think one of the issues around obstacles in the example you have given is this concept about working across local authority boundaries and this concept of the county council boundary being somehow more significant or more important.

SIMON HOARE: Inviolable.

TREVOR SCOTT: Yes, and more inviolable than any other boundary, and I do not think it is something that we would necessarily recognise. Certainly, when we look at devolution, now we are breaking down some of those concepts around county barriers and I think that is helping to establish relationships.

Going back to the original question around some of the obstacles, clearly, relationships are absolutely fundamental to this and spending time and effort developing those relationships and developing trust with external partners is fundamental to being able to work with them to establish shared goals and shared outputs. Then, certainly when you are working with people outside of the local government family, you come across the language barriers. We talk, having recently entered, I suppose, into the health economy slightly, about having to learn to speak NHS and it is an entirely different language from that of local government, and you can imagine that they are in exactly the same position learning local government and vice versa with the police. I think it is about investing an awful lot of time, effort and energy into learning each other's languages and also the profile of district councils. Certainly we have found with the NHS that there seems to be a lack of understanding about the roles of certainly the district council and the role we can play in the entire prevent agenda and the services we pay for and contribute that actually could unlock significant savings down the line for the public purse within the health agenda which they are simply unaware of and, therefore, they do not come to us about that conversation. You feel at the moment that it is very much the district council that is in the driving seat, trying to unlock those conversations and getting people to talk to us.

MIMS DAVIES: I come from the NHS actually and I am about to go to the Westminster Hall debate. The area I am particularly interested in is the well-being issue in terms of it being devolved down to the district level. The reason that I have come to that is through pharmaceuticals and other areas which are saying that they do not believe that the connection between the NHS and district is working well for exactly the reasons that you described. The query I was going to raise is about working together where it is a shared service or shared person and how you manage priorities, particularly where you have a duty to co-operate zone and how you manage that conversation with people outside. I am talking about particularly a role in my constituency, which is one being held at a unitary level which is being shared where there is a duty to co-operate around housing and whether there is a conflict of interest and how to get over that, so it is a difficult one to unlock. You can have all the structures in place, but how do you actually make sure that everyone has representation?

MIKE PURSEHOUSE: I think that the culture of middle management is fundamental in unlocking this because there is governance and all sorts of issues. Actually, if you get middle managers who actually want to make it happen, then it can. Front-line staff do not care about boundaries because they are working with families and with communities, and senior management want to save money, so it is those middle blockers who have got their remit, they are on a journey in terms of their career and potentially they are blocking the system, but, if they work together, then a lot of the governance evaporates a lot of the

issues.

MIMS DAVIES: That is helpful.

THE CHAIRMAN: Pam, you wanted to come in on the last question?

PAM DONNELLY: Yes, in relation to Mr Hoare's question about the PCC, we have not specifically had that issue; Essex is a big county, so there are plenty of opportunities to collaborate within Essex, although there is a very good example with the Sustainability and Transformation Plan process where we have north-east Essex, which I can say is Colchester, working cross-boundary with Suffolk. I think it brings to mind the importance of knowing each other well, because we do not. Those two county and district authorities do not know each other well because we have not worked together traditionally in the past, so it is a barrier. I think everything we have said about the relationship, getting to know each other and understanding the language is all really critical in working across boundaries like that.

CLLR MARK TOWNSEND: I have just a point to follow on, I think, really in terms of the barrier between district councils, which can be the amalgamation of different footprints that we are dealing with in that the district council obviously is a very tight unit, but then, when you are talking about the CCG footprint, the police footprint and all the different aspects of that, it does not help in terms of the complexity in the different stakeholders who are actually involved.

Just coming back to a point that Mike just made, I know he talked about middle managers, but actually I would put senior managers into that bracket as well in terms of barriers to amalgamation and success. I always found the same when I worked in private industry that, if you are looking for efficiencies in working together, always be looking to see what you have to do to put yourself out of a job and things will look after themselves after that. If you are really good at what you are doing, you will always find another position, but there are a number of barriers in organisations at all levels, so I would just want to add that.

THE CHAIRMAN: Talking about personnel, when you identify that there is a need for working together with another organisation, are the approaches best made through an officer or through an elected member, and what role do elected members play in introducing the kind of organisations with which a council might choose to work?

PAM DONNELLY: I think it really very much depends on the type of joint working you want to do. I think we have examples in Colchester where our leader has taken the initiative and has driven integration and collaboration with other organisations. An example would be the garrison and the university, which are both very significant players in the town, but on other occasions I can think of myself, as a director for partnerships, where I have picked up an opportunity. Clearly, I have cleared it with the cabinet and the leader and I have driven it, but we always need, at whatever level in the organisation, that political support behind us.

THE CHAIRMAN: Is it the ability to get on at a personal level, so could some of these partnerships and relationships fail because the personal relationships do not exist?

PAM DONNELLY: They have, and one of the reasons why, and why I love the job I do so much, is that it is very much about getting to know the individuals concerned. Councillor Daly mentioned trust. I cannot emphasise how important that is, particularly when it comes to sharing intelligence in order to protect a vulnerable resident, for example, when you need that trust and strength of relationship. We have been very glad in Colchester that the Police and Crime Commissioner has committed to our borough commander staying for a decent length of time, which means that we can get to know him or her and build that relationship.

MIKE PURSEHOUSE: Just to follow up on that point on the personal relationship, to give an example, over the last eight years, we have had six police district commanders, and I got on with the first two, the third one was not quite so good, and now we have a really good one who just gets the partnership working, so any information-sharing, any contentious issue is dealt with, it is fundamental. To start with, that has to be based on the personal relationship and then governance can feed in after that to ensure that the personal relationships do not scupper the proper, good work.

THE CHAIRMAN: But, if there is not the right person in the role in the other organisation, and you described a situation where that was the case, how do you make it happen?

MIKE PURSEHOUSE: Well, that is going above their head, which is a horrible thing to do for a district council, but it is trying to find the avenue ---

THE CHAIRMAN: So there are ways around it?

MIKE PURSEHOUSE: There are ways around it, yes.

JULIE COOPER: I would like to pick up on a few of the earlier comments, this perception that there is a big divide between us here and local government, and I should declare an interest as a former borough councillor, and I am really pleased to see Burnley Borough Council represented here today. I have the utmost respect for the local council because I know that it is really instrumental in driving change. One of the things that concerned me when I was involved at the council level was the relationship with government and how that potentially could be used as a facilitator to developing a plan or potentially sometimes as a barrier. I would be interested in how you would view that, as a starting point.

PAM DONNELLY: I would give the example of support from the DCLG. One of the things that we talk about in our evidence is the creation of what we call our 'community hub', which was £205,000 of direct funding through the DCLG into that collaborative working with fire, health, police and our county partners which gave us the catalyst to get

that moving. It is now self-sustaining, it is the subject of a three-year business plan going forward and I would say that that is directly accountable to the support and the ongoing interest. We have had three visits from the DCLG to see how we are doing and how we are spending the money and, in fact, we have another bid in right now for further support, so I would say that it is absolutely critical.

SIMON HOARE: Can I just tease out the sort of requirement for, effectively, personal chemistry to make these things work. Rather like Robert, I spent 12 years on West Oxfordshire District Council, so that is two of us, and several years as a cabinet member for resources and, with a colleague, we drove through the change agenda, as we called it in those days. I remember that we took a strategic decision, and it was a political strategic decision, that the imperative was of efficiency and cost-effectiveness and that, if officers were going to get in the way or other parties were going to get in the way, they either got trampled on or they moved. I would be very anxious to think that that model, which I put in slightly brusque terms, is not replicated elsewhere whereby the need to drive efficiency and to deliver better-quality services to local taxpayers is in some way able to be held to ransom by the inability of two or three people in different organisations or the public sector who, effectively, hold the project to ransom and there is either then an absence of strategic leadership from the chief executive and/or the senior management team and/or the leadership of the council at a political level.

CLLR JULIAN DALY: I would agree with that to a degree. I think there must be a risk of that happening and, without picking on councils, I am sure that it does. I think that comes back to a sort of theme there, in my mind, that, if you have a clear sense of what you are trying to achieve, you then work out how to achieve it. In my earlier example of troubled families, the council representatives reported back to me that there was quite a lot of angst about who was paying for that, and my view and the chief execs' views of the relevant bodies was that it actually does not matter because it is going to save us collectively so much money and probably, for each of us, more than we are bringing in, so to the middle-ranking officers it was, "Stop fussing about that; we'll work it out". In fact, we are now several years into it and it has not been a practical problem; people put in the resource that it requires, and some families have a lot of police resource, some have a lot of our social housing resource and so on. I think it gives a very clear view of where you are trying to head. In your example, you had a strategic efficiency drive and that gave clarity to where you wanted to end up. To my mind, if you are clear on where you want to end up, it is, by definition, going to be more efficient because you get rid of all the stuff that you do not actually need going in to get where you need to be.

CLLR MARK TOWNSEND: There are just a couple of points, and I would just declare a separate interest here that, although I am Leader of Burnley Borough Council, I actually work for another council as well in a day job, so I do see things from different sides of the fence in the sense of poacher and gamekeeper. I can see a whole degree of government frustration as well. I do not know how many councils there are in the country, 350 perhaps, off the top of my head, something like that, but every time something comes out from the centre, I get the view, as Leader of the Council and as a worker in a council, but then there are 350 individuals within the councils inventing the

same wheel just to do it slightly differently, and I just think of the frustration that that must build up in that everybody is just doing it slightly differently just for the sake of a few postcodes, and there must be a whole, massive saving there in governance. I am not saying that there has to be a diktat from the centre on that as it probably needs something a bit more nuanced than that, but, once it then gets out in terms of an initiative, it is the individuals within the councils who turn that into their own particular baby, their own particular initiative within their council and everything turns out slightly differently, so I think that they do then become the barriers to change in terms of holding on to those particular projects or aspects.

TREVOR SCOTT: I have a slightly different view on this issue about individuals and personalities blocking things. I think actually that the responsibility is on the council to create the right culture whereby the staff feel supported and enabled to thrive within this more complex, collaborative environment. Taking your example, going back to 2010 and speaking personally, I can recognise a number of the kinds of qualities that you describe being present at that time, and I think actually the onus on local authorities was to help people through that change curve in order to come out the other side. I certainly think that what we have seen and experienced now is actually a range of officers across the ranks coming to us and saying, "We've got this wonderful idea and we'd love to work in partnership". We had one only recently where a couple of members of our economic regeneration team came to us and said, "We'd love to set up a dementia awareness group. Please can we do it?" and we have let them and off they went, and they had the energy and the enthusiasm to go away and do this.

THE CHAIRMAN: Is that working separately and independently or working with another body?

TREVOR SCOTT: It is working with external partners, so they were able to use their own drive and energy to set up some support networks within the local community and to draw on the grant funding in order to deliver projects that help people with dementia. I think that it is about creating the right culture, and I think local government has gone through quite a significant period of change where actually most staff now are not in that mindset of wanting to block things or to be in the way because actually they see the benefits of it. If you articulate the right strengths and you articulate the right outcome, which I think most district councils do because it is mostly transformation change, they recognise the benefit to their role and to their job, and actually most people are in public service to do public good and they see the opportunities that working in collaboration with other organisations presents and they are quite happy to dedicate an awful lot of time to doing that.

SIMON HOARE: I think, Mr Scott, that you are right, which is why I was slightly alarmed to hear from your side of the table, for want of a better phrase, that there is still deemed to be the potential, due to a lack of personal chemistry between officers and third parties, to lead to a hiatus or a frustration. I would have thought that the message there is that there is not a goose that lays golden eggs for local government anymore, that it is collaborative working, thinking outside the box, not being tied by geographical

boundaries, whether it is county, district or whatever it may happen to be, and that, if people have not got with the project by now, there should be very fundamental questions asked about what their definition of a public service is, not self-service to maintain their job, their little empire and their description.

THE CHAIRMAN: Following that, what happens if there is a need for collaborative working with an organisation to provide a service, but that organisation does not exist? What happens then?

TREVOR SCOTT: Certainly, if the organisations do not exist ---

THE CHAIRMAN: Can district councils, can local government stimulate the existence of the body if there is not one there already?

TREVOR SCOTT: I think it is fundamental to what we are now doing and the way we are working in a fairly complex environment. Certainly we have a recent example where we work with a local GP practice on preventative healthcare now and it is around social prescription. There was nothing there beforehand and it was the energy of the local government officers, supported politically as a good idea, to go and try and model this, to go and make the relationship with the local GP practice and then to make relationships with all the other community groups that were in existence and then act as a conduit to bring them all together, so we now have a position where our local leisure provider goes along on a weekly basis to a GP surgery and the GP can refer patients to the leisure provider who then refers them on to other community groups, and that is tackling issues around rural isolation and it is reducing prescription costs to the local GP. I think there is an energy there to go and create these organisations or perhaps, where those organisations are not talking to each other, to act as the conduit, the facilitator, to network them together to unlock some of this potential.

THE CHAIRMAN: Can anybody else give us an example of that?

CLLR JULIAN DALY: I have two and I will try to link them together in a way that will not take an hour to try and answer this question, and they are both economic development-driven. One of the things we have done is encourage three institutions, two in our district and one over the boundary, which have strong intellectual property skills in the green business in a very wide sense, not particularly carbon capture. One is the Building Research Establishment, building houses that are energy-efficient and so on, which is largely self-funded, and another is Rothamsted, which is an agricultural research centre, which takes a lot of government money, and then the University of Hertfordshire, which is in Welwyn and Hatfield. That also has a strong green knowledge and green business potential for our local economy, selfishly, and for the national economy, and they sell a lot of that to China, to Brazil, to America and so on, but it was us that got them together to pay for the Green Triangle Partnership where we have collectively put in funding to support a workforce to push that message out.

Off the back of that, going back to your question about how government can help, we

have an enterprise zone partly in my district and partly in Dacorum, which itself is creating its own infrastructure, and that was joint work between Dacorum, St Alban's, the local enterprise partnership and the Green Triangle, so we have a large site for the green business enterprise zone and, within the individual sites that BRE, the Building Research Establishment, and Rothamsted have got, they have allocated chunks of land for the smaller, if you like, incubator bit coming up through to the bigger sites. I think the answer to your question is that we have provided the drive, but it would not have happened if we had not had the relationships with the institutions and our neighbours to make it happen.

THE CHAIRMAN: Pam, you have something to add?

PAM DONNELLY: I would add to that that I think we take our role as community leaders really seriously, creating sometimes quite flexible organisations to meet a need, whether it is regeneration or a voluntary group or a university, but a good example would be the creation of the town team, which goes back to town councils' emphasis on business. The business community has not always found a way of communicating together as collaboratively as it might, so the council has stepped in and taken a real leadership role in bringing groups together to create an organisation that can then stand on its own two feet and we can take a slight step back.

JULIE COOPER: That fits in very well with the point that I wanted to make. I am a perennial optimist and these are exciting times. They are difficult times, but they are exciting and every downturn presents an opportunity and, in my experience in Burnley Council, the council did seize that opportunity. There has been a blurring of boundaries between the public and private sector, and that is not a bad thing when the relationships are strong. Perhaps Mark from Burnley will want to say more about the business links and the bond-holders in Burnley because it has led to stronger results, but one of the frustrations with government, which I was trying to get at with my first question, is that I felt, when I was a member of Burnley Council, that some of our efforts down this path were being frustrated for a council which had lost over 50 per cent of its funding in recent cutbacks and the Economic Regeneration Unit, which is a really dynamic team in Burnley. I remember having this conversation with government ministers at the time and the local council, explaining to them, "I want to work on your agenda, I want to help grow the local economy, but we are being frustrated because we actually might need to make the key people redundant", and I know that some of the neighbouring councils were in that position. I just wonder what your view on that is and if you have been more successful than I ever was at communicating that to government. It was not a conflict of interest; it was showing a misunderstanding, I think, that councils were actually being inhibited. There have been some fantastic examples of council leadership, some of the examples are here today, dynamic and leading forward great plans that everyone here should be celebrating and helping you to do more and better, which is what I was trying to get at really. Have you encountered that and how successful have you been with government at making them understand what you are trying to do in that field?

PAM DONNELLY: If I can answer that, I think the DCN is an example of where we

certainly use every single opportunity we can through the DCN and other lobbying groups to make our voice heard, certainly where housing is concerned, which would be the best example I can think of, where we have taken opportunities to meet with government ministers and, hopefully, we have made our point very clear and I think we have been heard. Obviously, time will tell as to whether that feedback and that consultation feeds in as effectively and as directly as it might, but I would say that we certainly grab every opportunity that we can, but we would like more.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mark?

CLLR MARK TOWNSEND: There are just a couple of points. In terms of areas where we have built things that were not there before where we have had to collaborate, I have a couple of examples. Obviously, as a district council, we are not involved directly in education, but we see it as absolutely essential in terms of our place-shaping role that education and educational attainment in Burnley improves; it is very poor at this moment in time comparative to other areas. As part of that, we have just tried to get involved in a small initiative with the STEM subjects where we have established a relationship with a company called Primary Engineer and we have extended that into Secondary Engineer, so basically the council has put direct funding into the organisation to try and stimulate the training of teachers in STEM subjects across Burnley, and we are hopeful that that is going to provide dividends in the future. Certainly we have got real problems in the housing market, which are totally different from anywhere else in the country, where people want to build houses, we have 2,000 empty ones in Burnley and we have a totally different set of challenges with brownfield sites in making them attractive to the private sector. We have started just recently a housing JB to basically bring people in who will share in brownfield and greenfield-type sites to try and get them all along. There are lots of different things that we are doing and I would say that we have turned ourselves into a dynamic council in looking at different ways of doing things.

Just coming back to the government thing, we will always keep lobbying government because we do not see it as handouts, we see it as investment to building on what we are doing, but, by the same token, when I am talking to people within Burnley and when we are place-shaping, never use the money as an excuse not to do anything; there are ways of making things happen, and that is, I think, where you have to show your civic leadership in terms of moving the agenda forward.

THE CHAIRMAN: You started with education, and one of the things we are quite interested in is trying to work out in which sectors there is activity, and you have picked on an area of service delivery that is not a responsibility of district councils.

CLLR MARK TOWNSEND: Indeed.

THE CHAIRMAN: You seemed to indicate that, as a council, you have committed some money towards that because you saw it as a priority. If we took an additional area of liaison with health, liaison with the emergency services, liaison with education and any other bodies, who would be the easiest, and how have you created this input into health,

given that, in most authorities, that is the responsibility of the county council? How has that worked, what have you done, why was it a priority, and who did you get to help achieve the change that you wanted to take place?

CLLR MARK TOWNSEND: I am going to be very straightforward with you on the health agenda. As a district council, certainly where I sit and trying to get involved with it, I am almost waiting for somebody to give me a coherent answer in how things are moving forward before I can even offer an objective scenario in terms of moving it forward. It is so complex to try and understand and the footprints are so different. We obviously have our stake and we have our say, but, in terms of trying to collaborate, we understand our place in trying to do, if we can call it, the preventative part of the agenda, but, in terms of us being coherently involved in some kind of overall big picture strategy in moving it forward, I would say we are a long way from that at the moment. Certainly I can say from an education side that I would like to think that we would be able to use the experience we have there to apply something similar on the health side.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes, so my question is: how did you come to create this additional body that you are collaborating with to drive education standards forward?

CLLR MARK TOWNSEND: Well, initially, that was started from something that Julie just alluded to actually: setting up the Burnley bond-holders and the relationship that we have between the council and business where we got a momentum within the business fraternity where we were attracting the inward investment. Then, the really key thing was quite how we were going to actually make sure that our people share in that prosperity and make sure that they have the right skills to enter all these brand-new jobs that are coming into Burnley. We looked at the attainment and things like that and said, “We now have to turn our attention to that particular piece of the jigsaw”, so, working with the bond-holders, we went and attracted Primary Engineer and we talked to them about setting up an initiative. They did that and they liked it so much, to be honest, and the way we bought into it with them that they actually moved the whole organisation into Burnley, and now we have extended that into a primary and secondary school initiative, so going from four through to 16 and training teachers in the STEM subjects.

THE CHAIRMAN: Did this arise from businesses saying, “We’re getting youngsters coming out of the education system who haven’t got the skills that we’re looking for”?

CLLR MARK TOWNSEND: Absolutely.

THE CHAIRMAN: But, as a district council, you understood and recognised that and said, “Well, okay, we’re going to use our facilities to do something about it”, rather than just letting the businesses continue to complain and saying, “Well, it’s nothing to do with us; it’s the Department for Education and the county council”, or whoever it may be?

CLLR MARK TOWNSEND: I would say it is a two-way thing. I actually sit on the LEP board as well and, basically, it was the LEP actually saying, “We have a shortage of skills”. Then, when I went round all the secondary school teachers, went round the

further education establishments and talked to the principals and talked to the primary schools, the thing that hit me was the blame game going right the way through it where everybody says at each stage, “What I’ve inherited from the last stage isn’t good enough”, so we had to find a way of working with them and we had to go right back to the four-year-olds and work right the way through. We had to stop this train of basically the principals blaming the secondary heads and the secondary heads blaming the primary heads; you get the picture. You can never actually pin anything on anybody to say, “Where is the problem?”, so we had to start at the basics.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, let’s stick with education, so are there any other examples of working in the education sector that you could tell us about. Julian?

CLLR JULIAN DALY: Yes, I was going to broaden it a little bit, but I will try not to do that. These are sort of devolution thoughts as much as collaboration, but a lot of what we have been doing is going back to the recession, thinking what is the economy going to be doing, how do we support it, hence the Green Triangle point I was making, the green businesses. Because of that relationship, we identified that it is all very well these intellectual power houses coming up with ideas that the Chinese will spend £3 million to get hold of if we did not have the people capable of delivering it locally, so our FE colleges, a bit like your suggestion, but probably a step forward, have taken on quite a lot of apprentices who work at the BRE site to get that knowledge so that what the BRE is telling the building industry to do can be rolled out. We are doing that at a localised level because we can see that need. Coming back to Julie’s question about governance, more discretion, at the county level in our case because that is what the structure is, is coming with strings attached: “Here’s your money. You’ve got particular skills which have global relevance. Let’s get on with it. The FE colleges are capable of working it out”. One of the lessons which has come from that, I think, is that the FE college on our side – and we straddle two districts – recognising that they have got this mismatch between what they are turning out and what business is wanting, with the LEP and this interaction, which comes back to the trust bit, around our strategic partnership, and we have the FE college represented, we have the secondary schools represented and other avenues into university, there has been a very conscious effort to try and think through what the current employment requirement is and a little bit into the future. On top of that, you have stuff going on at the national level that is not necessarily right for Hertfordshire, let alone the west of Hertfordshire which is where we come from. That gives you a flavour.

THE CHAIRMAN: And Trevor?

TREVOR SCOTT: Well, I was going to broaden it a little bit into the skills agenda more generally, and we have certainly experienced it locally through our devolution bid across East and West Sussex and Surrey.

THE CHAIRMAN: We had a whole session on local authorities and devolution.

TREVOR SCOTT: Certainly one of the key asks of that devolution deal is around taking greater responsibility over the skills agenda. I think our experience is that the funding

streams that cover things around skills are so disparate and provided by so many different organisations that actually external parties find it very difficult to understand where they need to target their efforts in order to attract funding. Again, you are back into language barriers and blockages, but actually, by passporting that funding and that responsibility down to a more local level, we were able to tap into our locality about where the skill shortages are, what the local jobs economy is like and where the infrastructure investment is coming and to tie those strategies together, so actually we are then funding the future generations for the employers that we are trying to attract to the local area.

If I can go back to the question around some of the frustrations on government, in our experience, probably issues around infrastructure funding are critical to the whole issue of economic growth within our patch. Rural districts obviously require investment in their major parts of infrastructure, be that road, rail, broadband or mobile, and often those marketplaces are not attractive to the private sector on their own, they need some form of stimulus, and often that takes significant government funding in order to bring that attraction in. If you are talking about roads, obviously that links then into the housing market and the development of housing, so we can deliver the Government's housing targets, an agenda for growth, but you then get a population that says, "Well, what about the infrastructure? What about investment in education? What about investment in all the other trappings that go with it?" If we are finding that our new homes bonus is being taken away because it is being used to pay for adult social care, how do you then fund or contribute towards some of those issues that that money was previously earmarked for, our infrastructure? I think that possibly part of the frustration is around that funding going last minute when we use all of our new homes bonus funding for capital support for things like the rolling infrastructure projects.

THE CHAIRMAN: I want to stick with collaborating with other public services, and we have done education, so perhaps we could now turn to the health agenda. We know all about the issues of delivery, but, as district councils, you are more involved in preventative health because you are responsible for sport, recreation and those economies. What sort of partnerships have you got there and how easy were they to make, and what relationships do you have with your local clinical commissioning groups, for example, and how have those structures emerged?

PAM DONNELLY: Well, our relationship with the CCG is a good one, and I suppose it should be because I am the vice-chair of it. We have collaboration across the piece, but I would come back to something I mentioned earlier, which is the Community Safety Partnership.

THE CHAIRMAN: I do want to ---

PAM DONNELLY: Do you want me to leave that point there?

THE CHAIRMAN: I would like to deal with health really because that is a big agenda, and then I am happy to move on to crime and safety.

PAM DONNELLY: I will fix specifically on the health issue. Through the CCG and also latterly through the Sustainability and Transformation Plan process, we have fought hard, and I would have to put the emphasis on fighting hard because it has been really quite difficult to get our health partners to recognise what we do as a district and the impact of what we do on the health and well-being of local people. For example, the link between health and housing, the link with disabled facilities grants, those are all areas where, sadly, our health partners have been quite open-mouthed and surprised ---

THE CHAIRMAN: Are they looking at your area of responsibility and saying, “Well, you haven’t got much input, so why do we need to consult with you?”?

PAM DONNELLY: They are saying the opposite. Once we took the time to explain to them what we do, what our reach is and what our influence can be on health and well-being, we have been welcomed.

THE CHAIRMAN: But are you saying that there was an initial barrier in other agencies not understanding the input that you have?

PAM DONNELLY: Absolutely.

THE CHAIRMAN: Has anybody else had the same experience?

TREVOR SCOTT: A similar experience, I suppose. Our geography is complicated by the fact that we have three CCG areas covering our district and, therefore, that makes it slightly more difficult to engage with all three equally, and two of them are working with our county council partnership in terms of the joining up between the CCGs and adult social care and one has recently become a part of it from that discussion, and now actually one has invited us onto their board, so we sit on their steering board. It took about a year, but, through building up those relationships and conversations and doing what Pam was describing of explaining that the role of the district council extends beyond the administration of disabled facilities grants and actually into some quite significant areas around public health, then actually the CCGs are beginning to understand the important role that the district council can play in this area.

I think one area where we probably struggle, and certainly I have seen very few examples of good practice by district councils, and I think the DCLG are about to try and address this, is through the return on the investment economy side of things in terms of demonstrating that £1 of expenditure by a district council on a leisure centre contributes to the prevent agenda in the wider economic sense. I think that, until we can catch up on that particular point, we are always going to be struggling to get ourselves heard as loudly as we should do because actually people do not realise that certainly we were in a position where we could have closed down leisure centres to save money and to meet our transformation savings, but, instead, we invested in them to increase the kind of return in the health of our local people. That decision, if we had not thought about it in wider public purse terms, could have been made because it would have met the short-term objective of saving money. I think we now see it as the kind of connectedness of the

wider public purse, but I do not think we are that skilled yet at demonstrating the value of that to other partners.

JULIE COOPER: Following on from a lot of the points that have just been made, to what extent would you say that structures are the problem and that actually it is focused on the people and places agenda, focusing on the person and the place, instead of the different structures, whether it be local government, the health groups, the CCGs, education providers, et cetera? How much is that a problem and is that something that you need support to steer through?

MIKE PURSEHOUSE: A classic example we have in Norwich and just outside Norwich, which covers Norwich, South Norfolk and Breckland, is that the structure is difficult because there are three district council areas, it covers two CCG areas and, seen at that governance level, it is quite a problem and there needs to be much more thought about a holistic assessment of the need of what that individual wants, particularly when they are close to a border and they can access services from a GP in one district council area and a mental health nurse from another area. It is quite a problem and it does need addressing.

TREVOR SCOTT: Returning to Mark's point, and I wonder if there is a different perspective from officers and politicians here, I think that the public health bureaucracy is very hard to get a handle on. At a one-to-one level, we have the same conversations and, because we think it is the right thing to do, we spend a lot of money on making our leisure facilities available both directly and behind the scenes for people who cannot afford it, for health reasons, but it is not very joined-up, the health service, so, of all the collaborations we have got, I would say that health is the least joined-up for us. We have a member of the CCG on our strategic partnership to give us some health input. We have had two over the six years, so it is not as if they are turning over too fast to appreciate it. You can see the penny dropping, but it has still taken six years to get the penny dropping. We have made an effort, like Mark has, to go out and meet schools and senior people in the hospitals which are outside our borough boundaries. As I said earlier, I am trying to keep it practical and, if we can find something we can work around, we can establish that trust and ---

JULIE COOPER: Can I just pick up on something you were saying, because you have just reminded me that it is so important. With my hat on as a Shadow Health Minister, have you been asked to contribute and to feed into the development of the local STPs?

TREVOR SCOTT: Not really; superficially.

THE CHAIRMAN: Some are nodding their heads.

PAM DONNELLY: We have been a key member, but we had to fight very, very hard for that place.

JULIE COOPER: Well done!

THE CHAIRMAN: As a district council?

PAM DONNELLY: Yes, as a district council.

THE CHAIRMAN: So would you say that at the outset there was a chance that your input might not have ---

PAM DONNELLY: Very much so, and it is only because of my oversight on the CCG board that I recognised the opportunity. It is not down to me, it is down to a view of our portfolio-holder, our cabinet member, who was very keen to have that input and to try and deliver a truly transformational plan.

MIKE PURSEHOUSE: I think it was probably, "What is the point of district councils being involved in the STP?"

PAM DONNELLY: That was their key question.

THE CHAIRMAN: That was the question, "You do not have any input into health, so what's it to do with you?"

MIKE PURSEHOUSE: Yes, that it was the county council, not the district.

TREVOR SCOTT: If I can finish my point, the end of it was about this sort of silo mentality where the district councils have been forced out of that, so we are thinking about the greater good for the communities that we represent and that means that you do deals with your neighbouring authorities or you do deals with the police to get the level of service that you want for your area and immediate vicinity. I still feel, and maybe Hertfordshire is the exception, but I do not think it is, that it is quite parochial, that the NHS is quite parochial, "We do it our way", and it is quite surprising when you say, "Well, what about easy access to the leisure centre?" or whatever, and I think we have seen a bit of that on the STP. Everybody says that the obvious solution to the social care problem is getting counties to work more closely with the NHS. It is easy to say, but actually delivering that, I think, is much harder. We can be part of the solution, but the structures or whatever, as you were saying, Julie, are not there to help, but they could be.

SIMON HOARE: Just as we have in the planning field a duty to co-operate, it strikes me that the relationship between district councils and CCGs is determined actually not by the district councils but by the CCGs, and some are pretty good, some are very good and some are absolutely abysmal, and do not just go to one, unless you recognise that there is a layer of democratically accountable local government within the boundaries. CCGs sort of slightly evolved in an Act of Parliament which nobody quite expected and was not frightfully well scrutinised. Should there be retrospectively some sort of duty to co-operate in terms of synergising better the current services? One thing that always strikes me is that local authorities and developers come up with marvellous master plans for sustainable urban extensions, which usually have a pink-coloured box somewhere within

the 2,000 homes which says “Healthcare”, and then the CCGs say, “Well, we’re not going to commission this”, and then the GPs say, “Well, we don’t want to have another GP surgery because we want to preserve our income stream”, et cetera, thereby actually creating further headaches for councillors down the line as social infrastructure does not marry up with the delivery of physical infrastructure with new housing and additional demand. Should the DCLG and the Department of Health be working better together at a strategic level to introduce some form of formal duty to co-operate?

THE CHAIRMAN: Also, is that a better route than the informal arrangements, which in some cases work or do not work, or would you rather see a formal structure?

CLLR MARK TOWNSEND: I think at some stage there has to be a formal structure. At this moment in time, the district councils are just seen as, not as an afterthought, but as a consultee rather than some body that has some significant influence on the shaping. It is almost like the district council could be used as a lightning rod to divert what is actually happening in terms of putting a face to the decision. I will just give you the experience that we have in Lancashire at the moment where we are trying to set up, and we are setting up, a combined authority where five streams in skills, housing, prosperity are all working absolutely great, and then we have this thing called ‘public sector reform’ that includes health. Basically, we have two unitaries, a county council and then 12 districts, and the districts are all holding back, thinking, “What are we getting dragged into here?” It is a whole level of risk and uncertainty where the districts are not quite sure about what they are being pulled into. What I found about district councils is that we would be happy to get engaged in those formal structures as long as we felt we had a significant influence in terms of what is happening. We know the constraints, but, if you are going to get us involved, allow us to at least influence.

PAM DONNELLY: I can give an example of where it is working really well. I would agree with what Councillor Townsend said, that we do need structures ultimately, but at the moment we have not got them. Politically, our cabinet are driving the desire to co-operate with health because they take, as I guess most of the democratically elected members do, the health and well-being of the residents extremely seriously. We have a failing hospital, sadly, in Colchester which I think has driven a lot of the engagement, but let me just give you an example of where we have been invited to take part, as a stakeholder, in a planning exercise for future GP surgery provision in north-east Essex. Our CCG started to co-commission GP services from April and are starting to plan what the next five to ten years will look like, and they are doing that alongside us. I think that is really important, that all the data and intelligence that we have about Colchester and Colchester’s residents is feeding into where the surgeries will be, what they will look like and how they will integrate with our services.

SIMON HOARE: That is fantastic to hear and that should be something which is rolled out and replicated across the country. It strikes me as being far too important an issue on far too sensitive and important a subject for it just to be left to the individual initiative in geographies and ---

PAM DONNELLY: Yes, I take your point.

SIMON HOARE: --- that there should be an umbrella which compels the CCG and the local authority. It would not in any way, I would suggest, undermine what is clearly excellent practice in Colchester, but CCGs elsewhere, and thinking of my own CCG, it seems highly reluctant to get involved with the county council, let alone our districts, and some form of stick is needed as much as we have a carrot.

THE CHAIRMAN: One of the aims of our report is that, where we can identify areas of good practice and things which are working well, we can then highlight those and encourage people take them up. I wonder if we might now move on to crime and, Pam, you started to tell us a little bit about the work that your authority is doing in respect of community safety. We are trying to work through the different agencies that district councils might work with, so how is that working in your area?

PAM DONNELLY: It is absolutely invaluable and some of the debate we have had so far, I think, all comes together in Colchester through the Safer Colchester Partnership, which brings statutory and non-statutory organisations together. The key thing is the shared vision. We have four key priorities that we all share, we have a clear vision that we all share, whether it is police, fire, health, whatever it might be, and we have a detailed action plan of the stuff we will actually do on the ground with the grant that we get from the Police and Crime Commissioner to make Colchester safer. I know that that is really very high-level, but underneath that it drives some really good localised working with health, and alcohol and drug abuse would be an example, with fire in terms of keeping vulnerable people safe from fatal fires, and also with the police, which is, as I say, our main partner in the partnership. I would go so far as to say that we have a single location for the community safety hub where all those partners are represented, working together and sharing intelligence to try and crack the challenges that we face in Colchester. Most recently, we have reviewed all of that to take into account modern slavery, gang-related violence and child sexual exploitation, so we keep it really, really focused on the new and emerging issues.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mike, do you have a hub or something of that nature?

MIKE PURSEHOUSE: Yes, we have an early help hub in South Norfolk, very similar to what Pam is talking about. For me, what the district council brings is that it is all about getting to the root cause of the problem and, if you can deal with the housing issue, the employment issue and the debt issue, then actually you have made a big jump into dealing with crime. To give you a practical example, it is the police culture change for particularly front-line beat officers who can actually see the benefit of actually getting in and, rather than the police doing their usually running and charging into a situation, they just hold back and think, "What is the impact going to be on the four-year-old in the family if I deal with the 15-year-old?" That culture change, that mind shift, has been dealt with through really effective partnership working.

THE CHAIRMAN: So is the message we are getting that the working relationships in

community safety and with the police are longer-standing and more effective than with other sectors?

CLLR MARK TOWNSEND: No, I would not say that. If I can use Burnley as an example, we set up something quite a number of years ago now called the Burnley Action Partnership, which brings together the council, health, fire, police, the voluntary sector, and we produce a shared vision through the partnership in terms of basically saying, "What are the problems? What are we going to do to address a common action plan associated with that?" We do ensure, and this is a council-instigated thing, it is not something that came from anywhere else, that we pull those agencies together, working within the confines of the borough, to ensure that we have a common and shared action plan every year in terms of the key priorities going forward and covering all of those various areas. We have our challenges, but certainly, without that and without producing a common action plan, I think we would be in a far worse place than currently where we are.

MIKE PURSEHOUSE: If I can just add a point on the community element, I think crime and disorder is one of those things that always gets communities involved, and what we have found is that it is really the grassroots communities. We talk about the voluntary and community sector, but I think there is a big difference between the two, between the paid and the voluntary sector and that really grassroots-level community group who want to actually do something on a playing field and who just want get that dementia café going so that they can support vulnerable old people. That has been really effective and it has not required any governance to do it, just local working, local small grant schemes.

THE CHAIRMAN: So are they projects and relationships that are easy to get going because there is an immediate problem in a recreation area and there is lot of local goodwill and people can see a more tangible and immediate result of getting involved with something like that, whereas the health agenda is much more of a challenge?

TREVOR SCOTT: Well, to go back to your original question, I would certainly say that the relationships with the police are more established than, comparatively, the relationships in the health sector. On a wider point, I think things like the strategic partnerships, which encompass a whole range of organisations across the sectors, are probably the starting point of the collaboration journey really, but community safety, I think, followed fairly quickly thereafter in terms of the relationships that were formed with the police. Certainly in our patch, we have excellent relationships with all of the blue-light services at both the Sussex level, the Wealden level and then at the much more local level where we draw our parish councils as well into things like financial groups to tackle low-level anti-social behaviour. By having the partnership, it has formed relationships and then offshoots as well, so we have a working group in adult services that looks at behavioural insight as a method of tackling issues around crime and disorder, so we use some of the sort of nudge techniques now. We have people like the police coming to us with their data now to share that with us and to say, "Let's now have a look at some of the core issues that perhaps we can apply some of these techniques to to come to a co-designed solution". One of the critical aspects within Wealden is around

road safety. We have some of the most unsafe roads in the country in terms of the killed and seriously injured data, so we have been working with the police at looking at some of the accident hotspots and designing signs, and some of our early test results are showing that we are getting speed reductions of nine or ten miles an hour on 50-mile-an-hour roads, bringing them down to around about the appropriate speed for that road.

THE CHAIRMAN: But is that work being done because the highways authority is not doing it? Have you needed to step into the void or are you treading on other people's toes with that kind of activity?

TREVOR SCOTT: I think you can probably look at engineering as being the solution to road safety and not necessarily some of the other aspects around driving behaviour. Certainly our scrutiny committee and portfolio-holder led a really active project on looking at road safety within our area which then resulted in something not being for government around funding for safer roads. Out of that, we identified and established the relationships with the police which meant that we could do something that was complementary to try and help tackle the problem with our local knowledge. It did not tread on the toes of the highway authority partly because they have got some significant priorities themselves that they are focusing on and partly because their budgets are already stretched in dealing with the basics around potholes, so, if there are things that we can do, low-level cost interventions, but using our knowledge and skills to bring about change, then they are quite happy to support us in again providing data and access to some of their equipment to measure some of the experimental results that we were getting.

SIMON HOARE: Mr Pursehouse, can I just take you back to something I think I heard you say. I think part of this inquiry is to try to identify good practice and also to highlight potential potholes, if you will forgive the pun, that might need to be looked into and filled, et cetera. If there is one thing that local government is very good at doing, it is providing financial accountability, probity, a Section 151 officer, et cetera. I think I heard you say, with regard to what has been a very good experience so far as South Norfolk is concerned, that it is with no government constraints and small grant schemes, working alongside the voluntary sector. Now, the voluntary sector sort of slightly ebbs and flows, does it not, in terms of quantum and in terms of quality and, at the end of the day, whether it is small or large grant schemes, this is public money derived from council tax or a government grant, whatever it happens to be. What risk is there, do you think, and how is it best addressed if there is, of a collection of horror stories? I am thinking of the front page of *The Daily Mail*, "Council gives money to paedophile dementia group", or something of that nature where somebody has not quite been vetted properly, they have done something pretty awful and they have been the recipient of local government funds. That is a potential pitfall which I never think of as being thought of enough. Yes or no? Pam, you are nodding vigorously.

PAM DONNELLY: Well, I can just imagine the headline in *The Daily Mail*, which is making me feel anxious.

SIMON HOARE: Yes, all headlines in *The Daily Mail* should always make one feel anxious anyway, just as a matter of principle!

PAM DONNELLY: I am conscious that Trevor is a director for governance, so I am slightly anxious about saying anything about governance, but there is governance and there is governance; there is light touch and, at the same time, there is accountability. I can think of a number of grants that we award or bids that we make which are very tightly governed and accounted for within the budgetary and financial framework that we have, so I do not have any real concerns about that. I think it is about finding a compromise that allows the project to go forward while, at the same time, never compromising the accountability for the public purse.

THE CHAIRMAN: Perhaps I could extend that to a broader question of accountability. We know what a council's statutory duties are and we know that councillors are accountable at the ballot box if the council is not delivering, but, where we have joint working and part of the delivery is being made by a third party, how can a council allay Simon's anxieties and ensure that (a) the results are going to be forthcoming and (b) that the body that the authority is working with is going to be reputable and is going to do the job properly?

TREVOR SCOTT: From my perspective, to start off, the governance arrangements that you put in place need to be proportionate to both the objectives and the amount of the money that you are giving to those organisations. I think there is an inherent danger of local government becoming paralysed by fear of things like *The Daily Mail* headlines in giving £10 to an organisation that might generate the headlines you describe and, therefore, the answer is: do not give the money to anybody; let's keep it to ourselves and not spend it on doing a public good. Organisations now, certainly local government organisations, are relatively mature, and I think our approach to risk is evolving. I think we are kind of moving out of that place of being absolutely paralysed by fear and risk and are now putting in place structures that recognise the need for some flexibility, the need to embrace an element of risk, but actually to be relatively skilled in understanding that and managing those risk points as and when they arise so that, hopefully, we never end up in that position. Actually, I think part of the new world is about understanding risk and managing it, but also understanding that part of innovation and collaboration means that you will not be successful all the time and it is about having strategies to manage the failures as and when they arise as well as the successes.

MIKE PURSEHOUSE: One of the practical things we do to minimise that risk is that we used to have a maximum award of £1,000 and brought it down to £300, and the important factor was that it is about testing an idea, so, rather than launching into a new community project, we will give you up to £300 to test your idea and check that it is feasible, but also with our community capacity team and with adult social care as well, just that kind of local detail about, "Actually, is this group sound? Is it in the right area? Is it doing the right things?" so that you can minimise a group and it is a very minimal risk. Of course, we have had a very successful Go For It grant scheme, which is £300, where ourselves, adult social care and children's services all put £1,500 in the pot, and we have got *The*

Daily Mail and the recent headlines, but actually the vast majority, 85 of them, were perfectly sound and good, solid community organisations that just want to make a difference, and the vast majority are like that.

CLLR JULIAN DALY: As to Simon's question, I think there is more risk in good stuff not happening because the bureaucracy of the Civil Service mentality prevents it. In the way we approached it, we found that the CVS, the Council for Voluntary Service, were filtering, so a lot of charities were going to them, saying, "How do we get money out of the council?", and our collaboration with them was to say, "Since you are doing all the work, we will get you to the first cut", which filters out some rubbish, and then the council staff and the politicians look at it and we make sure that it is transparent, to come back to Simon's *Daily Mail* test, so we report everything that we are given and why, and we have a proportionate service-level agreement. We used to have a very bureaucratic process which put off any well-meaning folk because of the time spent doing it, which would mean that it did not happen. For the bigger contracts, which are largely to do with homelessness, we have quite detailed strategic investment in the service, so we give them sort of three-year grants, we have a three-year programme, and that is marked quite tightly, and then we have a lower level, which might be a single-page document, which is subject to all the same transparency, but does not get the heavy duty on the way in in terms of reporting on how it is doing.

SIMON HOARE: The pendulum seems to go from one side to another and one might presume that it might end up somewhere in the middle. Because local government is a very good repository of good governance, it strikes me that that is something which is passportable into the voluntary sector, that, effectively, they sort of buy in more of the cost. Likewise, there has got to be some sort of tick box, has there not, for organisations applying for funds, that anybody who is dealing with the public, and I cannot remember the right phrase, is CRB-checked, as we used to call it, or whatever it is now?

MIKE PURSEHOUSE: DBS-checked.

SIMON HOARE: Thank you very much, DBS-checked. Really, we do not want the dead hand of the state, out of timidity, not doing anything because Paul Dacre might write something ghastly, but, by the same token, there needs to be an element of public safety and accountability. If you are using public money, the robustness of the security of the people delivering the service has to be as good as if they were officers of the council because often they are doing it under that umbrella. That seems to be the direction of travel in partnership, buddying up, call it what you will, with the voluntary sector and, whilst it is a good principle, some of the governance stuff seems to be slightly inferior.

THE CHAIRMAN: I would like to move it on and cover the areas where collaboration exists. We spent quite a bit of time talking about economic development earlier on, we have covered health, we have covered education and community safety. Are there any other areas where you can tell us about effective collaboration taking place? A simple one is emergency preparation, but are there other areas of collaboration that you are

undertaking that we perhaps ought to be aware of, or have we covered the main bases?

PAM DONNELLY: We are working very closely, and actually always have, with the fire and rescue service. There is a good example of where we are working very collaboratively and recognising that actually their officers and ours visit the same homes on a regular basis, if there is some shared opportunity around vulnerable visits, so we are now doing shared vulnerable visits in the community with our zone wardens and fire and rescue service officers, which actually is a bit of an operational pilot which is then going to develop into a wider, more scalable programme of work. It will also involve our health partners, so we are bringing that wider perspective into what has been a well-established relationship.

THE CHAIRMAN: And that is the link into troubled families, is it not, in the sense that one agency will identify challenges that it can then share with others?

PAM DONNELLY: Absolutely.

TREVOR SCOTT: I have a not dissimilar example around emergency services in the area of flooding and flood resilience. We are doing a project with the fire service which is identifying those properties which are prone to flooding and, by putting in some initial funding ourselves, we have attracted grant funding as well from the Environment Agency that will see us approaching the top 100 properties in our district which are most prone to flooding with a view to grant-aiding householders to put in measures that will prevent flooding or prevent the damage caused by flooding, if that comes about, and we see that as a much more proactive approach than investing in sandbags, for instance, or anything of that nature. That has been quite successful.

MIKE PURSEHOUSE: We have particular collaboration with DWP where we have been working quite closely with the benefits team just to try and understand that journey.

THE CHAIRMAN: Most districts will have a pretty strong relationship with their DWP officers, of course, because of housing benefit.

MIKE PURSEHOUSE: Yes, the housing benefit is a particularly good one, but it is DWP who are on a journey of change and that culture of thinking, "Is that person coming in just to sign on, or are they actually coming in for a job?" It is the practical element which has changed, I think, in the last couple of years about how we take that person, whether it is a health, a labour or a housing issue or whatever, take them on that journey and particularly around community volunteering as well where I think there is a big part to play within our market towns for those people who are not quite work-ready, getting them involved in the local community and building up their work-related skills to then get a job, which is very positive.

CLLR MARK TOWNSEND: More on an informal basis, I think, is the work that we do with some of our large housing associations. Obviously, they have got their ears to the ground in the communities and some very strong preventative work with their troubled

families and homelessness, so really it is in terms of prevention and helping the council and the housing associations to make sure that the communities are remaining robust and stable. Certainly I think there is some excellent work that has gone on in Burnley with a major housing association and it is something that we look to build on in the future.

CLLR JULIAN DALY: There are two things. One is that there is a devolution issue. From my point of view, the devolution offer, and Simon touched on it right at the beginning, seems to mean that everybody seems to be trying to work out what the counties and districts do, but just all the same. What I am interested in is what the Government does for us that we could do better, so I find it very frustrating, thinking about the job centre benefits bit. We have a number of people there in that statistic, but, because I get an insight through the troubled families work, we could come up with a solution for them if we had more influence over the job centre other than an interrelationship over how the benefit money was spent. We have the relationships with the FE colleges and we could be training individuals with the skills, but then it is matching it up and, because it is in silos, that does not happen. If I were making a pitch, it would be to have a bit more control over the local spend, and I am sure that it would save a lot of money for central government.

THE CHAIRMAN: How would you do that?

CLLR JULIAN DALY: Well, at the moment, it is just straight out, is it not?

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes, but it is for the individual autonomy of the recipient and it is for them to determine how they spend their benefit, not for local authorities to tell them.

CLLR JULIAN DALY: Not how they spend it, but how we spend public money on getting somebody who is on benefit back into work, for example. We thought that there were lots of young people, but, when we got the job centre to drill down into the data for us, we discovered that actually there were lots of people over 50, and there is a market, a job employment market, for people over 50, but the job centre, because they had never really analysed the data, had not worked out the issue nor made the link back to us, because we talk to employers a lot and that is at the right level, so it was that sort of thing. We have 750 people on jobseekers' allowance and a proportion of that will be churn, but the hard core, the 250 to 500, we could definitely help, if we had a proper mechanism to do so.

THE CHAIRMAN: So you have identified an area where more collaborative working could be beneficial within the community?

CLLR JULIAN DALY: Yes, because we have got a very localised knowledge of the economy, whereas the job centre is covering multiple areas. Just to spray out a few ideas on collaboration, one of the things I have noticed as our central government resource has been restricted is that we are making more and more use of councillor skills, whatever party they are from, whether they are the administration or the others, so we have lawyers, so why not plug into their skillsets? We have accountants, so why not plug into

their skillsets? There are structural engineers and so on. I suspect that Mark has touched on some of this sort of thing, but I am sure you bring your own skillset to bear. Making more of that, I think, is an interesting thing that is going on.

We are spending a lot of money on arts and culture because we think it is the right thing to do, but, because we have not got any money, we are having to go out to the community to fund it, so we have an £8 million museum project where half is coming from the development of museums side and the other half from the public, but again collaborating with the public because it is not just about local institutions, but actually the public want to do it, and I want them to do it because I do not want them to view the museum as a municipal asset, I want them to look at it as a community asset.

Lastly, we have a group, Look St Alban's, which is all about public realm planning and design, those sorts of things, and we have an expression where we kind of lead from behind. On the museum, it is the charity out there raising the money from the public, and Look St Alban's is actually creating an environment in which what really matters to people, funnily enough, is how the buildings look when they are built, so that is shifting developers' attitudes. I am not sure if that is the kind of collaboration you are interested in, but it was just to spray out a few off-the-wall ideas.

THE CHAIRMAN: I am looking to bring things to a conclusion, so I look to each of my colleagues and ask them if they have any final questions, and I am wondering if you might then just tell us of anything that we might not have asked about and things that you think will be valuable to us. Julie, I think you have a question.

JULIE COOPER: From listening to all the really good examples of the work that is going on in so many areas in your respective councils, it seems to me that you are perhaps best-placed, and I am interested to know if you agree or not, to break down the silos. We have talked about everything today, housing, health, education, community safety, everything that affects a person's life within a community, but would you agree that your councils, with support, are best-placed to break down these barriers and to be the real place leaders for people?

MIKE PURSEHOUSE: I think the district council, with the early help hub we have created, has seen that a really tangible outcome of this is that the district council deals with 0 to 100, that we deal with all ages, that we do not have any specific agenda, so we have that overview of that place and, ultimately, we want people to be in a good-quality home, have a job and to end their lives in as comfortable a way as possible, whereas, if you go with mental health, they have their remit, as have DWP, et cetera, so I think that place-shaping role is where we can really bring that silo-working to an end.

THE CHAIRMAN: Anyone else?

CLLR MARK TOWNSEND: There are just a couple of things that come to mind when we talk about this, that it is being small enough to care and big enough to influence. The small enough to care, I think, is there and, if you wandered around Burnley, I think you

would get that, but it is the big enough to influence that is the real problem. Just coming back to what Julian was saying about the devolution agenda, I just see it as absolutely paramount that district councils are absolutely engaged with the devolution agenda within combined authorities because, if not, then a real opportunity is going to be missed because it is that small enough to care element that will be brought into those combined authorities where they can be just too big and that individualism gets lost. I think there is a really key element there.

THE CHAIRMAN: Trevor?

TREVOR SCOTT: I would support a lot of what Mark has just said really about the concept of being small enough to care. I think that one of the benefits of district councils is that we absolutely know our place, we absolutely know our locality and we know the key players within that economy and within the communities and we are absolutely able to tap into those skills, that ability and that connectedness to bring about change at a local level, as well as the ability of our local politicians who understand their locality and to bring their experience to bear within the organisation, and it does not just bring political accountability, but it brings a whole heap more benefits to the local council. In terms of the ability to influence, certainly our leader sits on our South-East Local Economic Partnership that stretches from Sussex, Kent and Essex and is very influential at bringing funding from that level to bear within East Sussex because the relationships that exist within our county mean that we are actually quite joined-up about recognising the benefits of funding that may well not go within our district. If it is spent on a project within Eastbourne or Hastings to bring tourists to that locality, then actually it is about encouraging those people to stay an extra day and to come and visit something within our district or vice versa, and we have this thing in Sussex which is around driving the economic and tourism strategy and not being in competition with the near neighbours, but actually looking at what is complementary and working together to be far more influential at that slightly higher level to bring down the larger pots of money which then have a much greater impact in terms of the issues we are able to influence locally.

CLLR JULIAN DALY: I think that the words that Julie used were quite strong compared to where I think we stand, but I think we are well-placed to take a lead. Simon, with his probing into the duty to co-operate, is probably on to something because there are quite a lot of things that we get a bit blocked, not particularly in the health space, where some properly phrased and drafted duty to co-operate would be really helpful. The slight worry on the duty to co-operate, because I am getting issues with it on the planning side, is that it needs to be structured in a way in which it is positive, not negative. When you were talking about it earlier, I could just imagine the health service saying, "Great, we can offload that problem to the county", but it has to be crafted so that that does not happen. When I was saying earlier about the troubled families and that we had a budget, I said, "Stop it; that's not the right debate", because the debate has to be about how you solve the troubled families' issues. Please bite on that cherry and come up with something, but just bear in mind that it can have a negative and a positive approach and, if you try and structure it so that it is positive, I think that would be of huge value.

THE CHAIRMAN: Pam, the last word goes to you.

PAM DONNELLY: I think we are in a great position to do that very task. I think we have a holistic view and, quite frankly, I think our residents expect us to. They do not care whether it is health, fire, police, the voluntary sector, the borough or the county, they really do not care. They want a range of public services and they look to their community leaders, the districts, to provide that leadership.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, can I say thank you to each of you for coming along. We have had an interesting discussion concluding on discussions about the connection with the community that exists through district councils. I am very conscious that, when we started talking, there was a bit about the relationships and how important those are, and I think Simon hit the nail on the head when he said that what you can lend to some of those bodies is the structure, the discipline and the governance that you know about, which will help us to get districts to move forward. Thank you very much, and to Professor Colin Copus and his team from De Montfort University who have been scribbling notes, so they have a good record. We have had a couple of really fascinating evidence sessions, so thank you very much for sticking to the brief. It is very easy, I know, to get enthusiastic about relationships with other districts and we have spent a lot of time talking about that, so we really wanted to drill down into the relationships with other bodies.

In our next two sessions, we will be looking at comparisons overseas, what happens in other countries and how that works. Certainly one of the things that I identified when I was a district councillor was how often we spent trying to work something out and then realised that somebody else must have done this before at some stage, so that would be an interesting session, and we will certainly spend an entire session looking at the devolution agenda and the impact of that on district councils. We aim to get a report prepared, which will be presented here in Parliament, and we want to make sure that the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government has good sight of it. We have invited him to come along to our launch and, hopefully, he will respond to the recommendations that we may be able to come up with on the basis of what you and others have told us both in your evidence session and also through the many written responses we have had. I think that something like 75 district councils sent in a response to our call for evidence, so you made the cut and we were interested enough in what you wrote to tell us about for us to ask you to elaborate on what you do.

SIMON HOARE: There is no prize!

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much indeed for joining us this afternoon.