CARE IS A SOCIETAL CHALLENGE: PURPOSE BEFORE PROCESS

A Compass Policy Paper by Bob Rhodes

Compass

Published January 2026 by Compass

About the Author

Bob Rhodes founded LivesthroughFriends in 2008 (www.livesthroughfriends.org). It's much more a movement than an organisation; a conversation between like-minded individuals and organisations from across the globe who collectively envision a world where care for each other is rooted in human connection, interdependence, and kindness. He's clocked up 56 years in human services. Inter alia, he founded TACT UK (1991-2006) and subsequently led many de-congregation and social inclusion initiatives in the UK and overseas. His 'evolution' of the Good Life Framework https://livesthroughfriends.org/a-framework-for-good lives has been widely influential. In 2022 he instigated the global Cheltenham Summer Institute, https://www.youtube.com watch?v=5pc4zReyFMc, now an annual event.

About Compass

Compass is the pressure group for a Good Society, a world that is much more equal, sustainable and democratic. We build alliances of ideas, parties and movements to help make systemic change happen. Our strategic focus is to understand, build, support, and accelerate new forms of democratic practice and collaborative action that are taking place in civil society and the economy, and to link those with state reforms and policy. The meeting point of emerging horizontal participation and vertical resource and policy we call 45 Degree Change.

Compass

Contents

Please get in touch, join, support and work with us.

Email us at info@compassonline.org.uk

You can follow us on X @CompassOffice

To find out more about Compass, please visit our website: https://www.compassonline.org.uk/

"*Critiquing problems is far easier than imagining credible alternative futures. That seems to be the biggest problem in our political culture today: a colossal failure of imagination*" - David Fleming

Preamble

I write from the perspective of a practitioner and leader with, to date, 55 years' experience of human services. While some of my early career was spent in youth and community work, psychiatric nursing, and child and adolescent psychiatry (all of which informs my worldview), I've devoted more than 40 years to supporting people with learning disabilities and autism to pursue their lives as valued, included and contributing citizens. During those years I have led or contributed to a number of deinstitutionalisation programmes, including leading the closure of Borocourt consequent upon the 'Silent Minority' scandal in the 1980s. Since then, securing lives worth living with and for people who have been severely traumatized following decades of incompetence, neglect, and abuse – and subsequently further penalised by challenging and complex labelling – has constituted a daily challenge. And, in addressing those quandaries, I and my colleagues and collaborators have both acquired a clear understanding of the components of good 'care' from the perspective of the end user and the oxymoronic nature of the term, 'social care'. Forever, it seems, I have been witness to an institutional and cultural cognitive dissonance which, while embracing the language of, for instance, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), denies individual's essential humanity and citizenship, assigning fellow citizens to a subordinate category to be accommodated as resources permit through largely congregate service commissioning progressed through competitive tendering. As Simon Duffy repeatedly reminds us – a nailed-in institutionalizing and othering mindset.

My journey over more than a half a century furnishes me with an experiential and normative historical perspective that younger observers cannot share. My lived experience and consequent worldview is fundamentally at odds with the Friedman inspired neoliberal hegemony that has eulogised and nourished consumption and individualism in much of the world since the early 1990s. In declaring my preconceptions, I acknowledge that a form of communitarianism has emerged as my core philosophical anchor, sharing Emile Durkheim's belief that, "Man is only a moral being because he lives in society, since morality consists in solidarity with the group, and varies according to that solidarity. Cause all social life to vanish, and moral life would vanish at the same time, having no object to cling to," and Karl Marx's assertion that as human beings are gregarious creatures we cannot survive and meet our fundamental psychological as well as corporeal needs "without social cooperation and association". Prominent amongst our essential psychological needs are loving and caring, reciprocal relationships; belonging; and opportunities to contribute and secure the respect and approval of others – the meat and drink of the core/

relational economy.

This perspective is not born of ideology, although it is based in valuing everyone as equal and cherished. Rather it derives from action research and normative study; in my case from getting alongside people with intellectual disabilities and autism and learning to see the world through their eyes. Then, tenaciously searching out and learning from others who were also struggling with and often overcoming the challenges we were confronting and adapting their solutions to our circumstances as we sought to assist each individual on the journey towards their 'best life'.

The transactionally-focused commodification of services approach, known as marketisation and characterised by the rebranding of social services as social care when government rejected the solid, sustainable, and societally bonding proposals of the Barclay committee in 1982, was destined from the start to be divisive, incoherent, institutionalising and unaffordable. It has been irremediably broken for a long time and successive administrations have deferred confronting the problem, seemingly because they are concreted into a mindset that asserts that the only solution resides in finding lots more money. Frankly, even if products and services constituted a comprehensive solution to our care needs – which they do not – no amount of funds will suffice. The colossal failure of imagination to which Fleming refers is demonstrated in the apparent inability of the political 'class' to imagine and champion alternative narratives. I will argue that those narratives emerge if we start from a basic presumption that the role of public services is to help people help themselves and each other. Barclay's proposals were for the 1980s, and his committee then was very clear that 'how' was for local interpretation in accordance with the "differing informal, voluntary and statutory resources of the communities served". While the world we live in has and will continue to change, what does not change are our fundamental human needs which are inextricably located in our needs for relationship, value, belonging, and the agency and security inherent. The need to make local a central tenet has not changed. And, now as then, one size will not fit all. Hence choices over priorities, structures and methods have to be devolved to truly democratic local bodies.

Barclay's conclusions began with this statement:

"*...if the needs of citizens are to be met in the last years of the 20th century, the personal social services must develop a close working relationship with citizens focussing more closely on the community and its strengths.*"[1]

There can be no viable future for real care in persisting on treating citizens as customers. In the rest of this piece, I will summarize the problem and propose an alternative narrative.

Key Recommendations

- Real Care is rooted in human connection, interdependence, and kindness. This vision is attainable if Government sets its mind to fostering resilient caring networks within interdependent and resourceful communities supported and where necessary curated by locally designed, person-centred, community focused, and locally accountable social services.

- **Responsibilities for Social Services must be restored to a strengthened Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government**.

- Central Government should step back and **devolve authority and responsibility to Local Government** for the realisation of locally relevant and sustainable Social Services.

- **All resources associated with the non-medical care and support of their citizens will be transferred to the relevant Local Authority Social Services Department (LASSD)**. This will include the resources held by Health Commissioners and NHS England pertaining to people detained for more than 12 months in a Special Hospital (excluding State Forensic facilities) or similar specialist setting.

- Agree a simple and unambiguous statement describing the essential responsibilities of LASSDs, utilising and updating/improving upon the recommendations of the Barclay Committee as initial guidance/a starting template.

- LASSDs should:
- **develop, nurture and sustain a close working relationship with citizens**, focussing more closely on the community and its strengths and **recognising that the majority of personal care and support is provided by informal carers**.
- **curating the development and iterative implementation of individual good life plans** with individuals, their loved ones, friends and neighbours.
- **Building and sustaining the skilled professional workforce required** to realise purpose.
- Contribute to the **creation of a new community social work professional** possessing a broad spectrum of essential clinical as well as relationship and strengths-based practice knowledge and skills.
- Develop, nurture and sustain a **robust democratic accountability and consultative governance system** which supports, informs and advises elected members in the exercise of their responsibilities.
- Understand the supplementary and complementary nature of asset/ strengths and relationship-based community social work practice.
- **Invest social services resources in local communities**, seeding and supporting flexible and place-based support services and valued local employment.
- Produce short-term and long-term strategic plans for and with the

Settlement negotations.

- The government publicly celebrates the phasing out of the commoditised terminology of ‘Social Care’.

Summarising the Problem

On our journey we have learned that:

- Much of what we've learned about supporting extremely marginalised and excluded people to enjoy inclusive and contributing lives informs a general understanding of care and support for us all.

- Valued and effective care and support is a consequence of a skilfully curated integration of those elements that only the core/relational economy can contribute (or does best) with those elements that are most appropriately the sphere of professionals and agencies. Explicitly, good care is an amalgam of both. A system that is not equipped to curate the integration of the relational/core and service economies fails people and squanders public funds.

- Despite the pernicious influence of consumerism and individualism in all aspects of our culture, people espouse the opportunities offered to be active contributors to the wellbeing of those they care about when what I'll describe as strengths-based approaches are practiced.

- Central government's primary responsibility is to nurture a society which supports and values the core/relational economy. By its very nature the social care market undermines societal cohesion. We need to stop treating citizens as consumers and instead nurture contributing citizenship and participative democracy.

- Social Services need to be supplementary and complementary to strong and caring citizens, families and communities.

- Social Services need to actively nurture local communities in which people requiring care – which is all of us to varying degrees at stages in our lives – can thrive.

- Relationship-based, community social work has been de-skilled and attenuated during the market era and will need to be reinvented for present times.

- Similarly, contemporary social services leaders and managers will be challenged by a radical change of direction from transactional, rule-based practice to the discretionary and delegated authority implicit in effective relationship-based, community social work type practice and will need help.

- Social Services must be governed, led, managed and delivered locally – with inclusive and deliberative local democracy.

- Central government is only competent to specify Purpose. It is too

- far distant from the lives of citizens to prescribe Method. Local must be the default position.

- The unremitting and insoluble debate about social care – deferred for yet another 3 years during the Casey review – will continue to remain unresolved as long as it remains couched in terms of how do we fund social care?

- The imposition of the Market on Social Services has been an abject failure – economically and societally. As Michael J Sandel observed in 2012, "The most fateful change that unfolded during the past three decades was not an increase in greed. It was the expansion of markets, and of market values, into spheres of life where they don't belong."

- Notably, marketisation has thrust competition law, regulations, and priorities (notably around risk management) into a sphere of activities where its impact is especially counterproductive. System conditions that are focused on market-management are anathema to local, one person at a time, practical planning and strengths-based problem-solving.

- Resource management (rationing) systems that are based on deficit-focused assessments – i.e. are you needy/impaired/at-risk enough to justify help? - are a symptom of the arbitrariness and opacity of purpose that surrounds the failed state of the social care 'experiment'. I would assert that the assessment should establish what you need in order to progress towards your good life which, for many, has a much-reduced need for funded support implicitly.

- Commoditised and marketised social care has, from its inception, been a 'Whitehall' initiative – centralised, authoritarian and influenced by commerce and the Friedman-inspired ideology referred to earlier. This was not a grassroots project driven by professionals, operational research nor inspirational practices. Hence, it is not surprising that instead of acknowledging the inherent and inevitable failure of marketised care experiment, heads in the sand, the centre has ploughed on regardless. The polymath economist David Fleming tells us in no uncertain terms that, "*perversely*", when a system is collapsing, "*the conventional responses to this phase seem to be devoted to the cause of making the system, in its hour of need, even less resilient… solutions are sought in standardisation and efficiency improvements, in increasingly centralised command and control, and in tighter insistence on process, rules and procedures – that is, stamping out any new vision, experimentation and self- reliance… the solution is seen as even larger scale, greater rigidity, and further complication – a classic case of the amplifying feedback of a complicated system in trouble*".[2]

- Our current situation is a consequence of “conviction politics” based in ideological fervour that brooked no opposition. Changing direction will demand comparable determination and commitment not to compromise in the face of the powerful interests arising from the commoditisation and marketisation of social care. There will be much shroud-waving instigated by corporate investors and well-remunerated CEOs. A robust transition strategy can be assembled.

- The fundamental change of direction needed will only be brought about by policy-makers with the fire in their bellies deriving from normative experience and study.

- We are far from alone in our conclusions about the radical change demanded. The volume of published evidence deriving from experts by experience, family activists, practitioners, academics, leaders and thinkers across a spectrum of relevant disciplines is deafening but unheard by those who not only need to hear but also to invest in the normative study that truly informs and educates.

Towards an Alternative Narrative: Restoring Local Social Services for Our Times

Compass

The Casey Commission Review:

Detailed terms and conditions pertaining to Baroness Casey's review have yet, at the time of writing, to be made public. But the overarching task is described as:

"*The commission should start a national conversation about what adult social care should deliver for citizens and build consensus with the public on how best to meet the current and future needs of the population.*"[3]

It seems the opportunity has yet again been missed to address the fundamental question about, from the end user's perspective, what constitutes good and valued care?

Echoing David Fleming's observation about the political elites' "colossal failure of imagination"[4], it appears that the Government is asking the Commission to talk to customers about the products they would like. Surely the Government should be asking the Commission to curate a deliberative conversation amongst citizens about the nature of the care and support they would want for themselves and those they love without implicit assumptions that comprehensive solutions are to be found in products and services? The fundamental question may be 'what are the characteristics of a good society?'.

In particular, if things are to radically change, it is crucial that experts by experience, families and carers are enabled to explore and share their experience in fora which encourage and support blue sky thinking and reflection about what really matters. The Commission needs to acknowledge that the experience of the last three or four decades has nurtured a consumer mentality that is no basis for attending to achieving, "consensus with the public on how best to meet the current and future needs of the population", if that is interpreted to mean a vision of how we, as a society, are going to care for each other throughout our lives – from the cradle to the grave.

The draft terms and conditions for the review are worryingly explicit about the role of social care in ameliorating the NHS's bed-jam problems in short order. The 'Thatcher reforms' of the last century radically changed the nature of public services and citizens' relationships with public services in little more than a parliament. A similar cultural and hegemonic revolution cannot be realised over the course of a year but can be completely derailed by the pursuit of short-term impact.

It is essential that the terms and conditions pertaining to the Review are developed to ensure that the Commission reports societally rather than transactionally; considering how we can care for each other throughout our lives in an holistic societal context rather than via an implicitly shallow consumer survey. The Commission will have

will have no credibility if it is peopled by the 'usual suspects' and 'educated and informed' through evidence, which may be partial representations, presented in committee rooms by plausible, articulate, and well-briefed 'experts' and representatives of perceived stakeholders. Intervention Theory (Bennis et al) and extensive parallel studies tell us that we are most likely to generate innovative solutions and make better decisions if we engage in normative study, which is when we experience something live and tangible that enables us to challenge our own assumptions. Assuming that the motivation for commissioning the review incorporates a recognition that the prevailing system conditions are not fit for purpose – and we must assume this given that the review is not directed to advise as to how the existing system may be sustainably funded – it is essential that members of the commission spend time studying the work in order to first hand understand the current operating principles prevalent in the system and their consequences. In the context of how we care for one another throughout our lives, the work means getting to grips with what happens and why it happens. From this, informed decisions based on knowledge can be made by leaders regarding how to lead the creation of a transformed system.

In **Much More to Life than Services** (2010), I recounted Rose's story. In brief, here was a lady in her 50's with a learning disability who I met in a day centre where, in receipt of minimal therapeutic earnings, she was a key member of a catering team providing meals for the centre and local schools. She had lived all her life in the same house in a small (what had been) mining community where she was well-known and loved. Rose was in reality the main carer for her very frail and failing octogenarian mother, supported in turn by her sister who lived just a few doors away in a council property. I learned that Rose was a lifelong member of her chapel community, a member of the local 'club', and able to shop locally 'on the slate' (her sister dealing with payments) including for takeaways. Things could hardly be better! However, I met Rose when undertaking a review of self-advocacy arrangement for that local authority amongst a small group of experts-by-experience attending Rose's day centre who had agreed to share their thoughts and experiences with me. During the discussion someone asked Rose, given her mother's age and frailty, what plans were in place for when Mum was no more. Rose was unphased and confidently announced that she would have a place in a group home. "But there are no group homes in your village", came the incandescent reply. The nearest, it emerged, were likely to be in a town some 15 miles away. In no time the group had devised innovative plans for Rose's family home to become a supported living house when the time came, some volunteering to move in! I doubt that it happened. I raised the scenario as a theoretical situation with a social work team later that day. "That would be no problem here", I was proudly advised, "we review all our cases annually and there would be a crisis plan. A place in a group home would be made available.". "Where?", I asked, "Could she be helped to stay in the home and community where she's known and cared for?". "No", came the reply, "the council

doesn't permit single occupancy of family homes". It was soon clear that undertaking any form of creative thinking and problem solving in Rose's best interests was not on the 'menu'.

I share this story by way of an example of the normative study approach. Time and again, systems and processes in organisations take over and lead to the normalisation of compromises that folk with agency would not tolerate. The Commission, in pursuing its work, must get to grips with what really matters to people.

The marginalisation of Civil Society is a Global manifestation

Before I attend to proposing my take on an alternative narrative for social services, it seems important to make the point that this is by no means solely a UK problem. In September 2024, LivesthroughFriends co-hosted a 3-day conversation/normative study event where we welcomed experts-by-experience, family activists, practitioners, academics, thinkers, leaders and policy folk from a dozen countries and three continents. Their brief was to discuss the shortcomings of current care systems and explore alternative strategies. The gathering comprised people who primarily operate in the context of disability and neurodiversity but I am in no doubt that their conclusions have resonance for all spheres of 'care'. At the end of the event they compiled a communique setting out those areas on which all agreed. They said:

> "*In collaboration with like-minded individuals and organisations from across the globe, we collectively envision a world where care for individuals with intellectual disabilities and autism is rooted in human connection, interdependence, and kindness. This shared vision can be achieved through an intelligent combination of person-centred, locally designed services and the fostering of resilient, caring social networks.*"[5]

A Communique for Change

This Communique is a collective expression of our shared concerns and aspirations. As Michael J. Sandel has observed, "*The most fateful change that unfolded during the past three decades was not an increase in greed. It was the expansion of markets, and of market values, into spheres of life where they don't belong.*"[6].

This shift has influenced social care professionals to focus excessively on methods and measures, often at the expense of the original purpose. Regulatory systems driven by fear, compliance, and control have created a climate where vulnerability may be exploited, and genuine understanding is sacrificed. Systems have been hardened and become distanced from people, communities and everyday life. As a result, the creativity and resourcefulness of frontline workers are being unnecessarily restricted, and processes and procedures have become

too complex to be navigated by those they are meant to serve. We can do a lot better.

There are some notable exceptions where agencies have reorganised and put people, gifts, relationships and place first. However, others continue to use the language of reform and say they support a move to collective acts of care and community capacity building but do so without a realistic understanding of the fundamental changes in approach that are needed.

The Empowerment of Individuals and a Shift in Perspective

A major challenge is to help individuals with disabilities to empower themselves and actively participate in shaping the systems that impact their lives. We must shift from transactional interactions to deep, meaningful conversations that acknowledge the unique perspectives, connections, and strengths of each person. Instead of assessing individuals, we should listen to them. By adopting a curious mindset, we can explore new possibilities, test innovative ideas, and move away from harmful practices like "digging in heels" to achieve desired outcomes.

Self-Advocacy and Community-Centred Care

Self-advocacy should be at the heart of new, localised preventative services. Many individuals with disabilities feel fearful, uncertain, and lost in jargon due to the current system. Their voices are often overlooked in decision-making processes, hindering their ability to live fulfilling lives. Effective services must be adaptable and supportive, complementing individuals' gifts, talents, skills, and networks. They should be driven by the unpaid caring economy of family, community, and friends, with attention always given to developing potential and participation.

A System of Possibility

It's important to remember that the system is not the people. Many individuals within the system are well-intentioned but constrained by broken processes. We must create a system that allows staff, users, and families to maintain their values and embrace change. Every family is unique, and everyone is fallible. By reducing fear, modelling calm, and building confidence, we can foster a culture of community and resilience. Resonance, our gut feeling, is a powerful tool for changing minds.

A Collective Effort

Achieving change requires the constant support and contributions of everyone. Many of us already prioritise relationships and community. By modelling positive behaviour, we can inspire others to follow suit.

The Role of Professionals

Individuals with disabilities and their families should lead conversations about what truly matters to them. Professionals must step aside and allow their collective voice to emerge. We envision communities

led by people who live and work there, built at the speed of trust, an interactive social network of ‘homes’ for all to enjoy.

Independent documentary film maker, Dogma Films, had carte-blanche to report the event. Their short film, which captures the spirit of the gathering, provides another medium for reflection[7].

An Alternative Narrative for Care and Social Services

Compass

Central Government Steps Back

In 2013, Locality published *Saving money by doing the right thing – why 'local by default' must replace 'diseconomies of scale'.* The Executive Summary to the report began by asserting that the study "*shows that the UK public sector is wasting millions of pounds on services that do not meet people's needs. When people's problems go unresolved, their needs remain the same or get worse, creating unnecessary demand and rising costs*."[8].

The interventions reported by the study (and a plethora of others) clearly demonstrated that services are far more successful in meeting people's needs when they:

- Are local by default
- Help people help themselves
- Ensure a focus on purpose, not outcomes, and
- Manage value not cost.

Locality's report ends with a call to action: "*We know how to improve the lives of individuals and communities and the good news is that it doesn't take any more resources to do it* (NB. After a decade or more of austerity this is undoubtedly no longer true). *But it does take courageous public sector leaders who are willing to follow evidence and abandon old beliefs. Only they can do it*."

This statement failed to take account of the fact that public sector leaders do not set the underlying system conditions and it is those authoritarian, centralising, hyper-regulated conditions set in Westminster linked to the mind-numbing impact of an increasingly consumerist and neoliberal hegemony that has stymied clear-thinking and innovation.

David Fleming in his 2016 masterpiece, *Lean Logic*, asserts that:

"*Localisation stands, at best, at the limits of practical possibility, but it has the decisive argument in its favour that there will be no alternative*"[9].

And Henry Moore of the ABCD Institute, in his ground-breaking work in Savannah, surely was amongst the many who have demonstrated how great things happen when government has the guts and insight to, in his words, "*Lead by Stepping Back*".

Government stepping back and devolving authority and responsibility to Local Government for the realisation of locally relevant and sustainable Social Services will be central to resolving the insoluble 'social care crisis' – for the simple reason that central government is incapable of working in locally relevant and sustainable ways.

That is not to say that Whitehall doesn't have a job to do. Its job is to ensure that Local Government can do its job and not be impeded by contradictory system conditions. Preceding that inevitably incremental task - challenges will not all be identified at the outset - the government's primary task will be to clarify the purpose of social services. In his ground-breaking Manifesto on Regulation, Professor John Seddon sets out the argument unambiguously:

"*The problem with the UK's system of regulation has been that politicians and regulators specify measures and methods. This is diametrically wrong, killing the experiment and innovation on which improvement depends. Politicians and regulators should not be involved with management and delivery. Instead, to them should fall the important and necessary role of establishing the purpose of the service (a purpose defined in terms of the citizen or the customer). Isn't that, after all, what every MP should be most concerned about?*

This simple change will shift the locus of control from the specifiers to those who are being regulated. The leaders of our public services will then be responsible for making their own decisions"[10].

The task is not rocket science and should constitute just a few days work for an experienced Civil Servant. The UN Human Rights Conventions, to which the UK is a leading signatory, provides detailed templates.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) is a human rights treaty that outlines the rights of disabled people, including the right to live independently (far better in my view if the term 'interdependently' is adopted), participate in education, and be protected from all forms of discrimination and violence. A domestic improvement might be to recognise the problems implicit in asserting 'independence' as always achievable and desirable. For me, based upon a career amongst folk with intellectual disabilities and neuro-diversity, interdependence is a much more realistic and valuable state of being and worthy of consideration.

Concurrently, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is an international outline of the fundamental rights of children and young people (under 18). Older citizens are less well 'addressed' but the UN has recognised the need for a comprehensive legal framework to protect the rights of older persons and is currently in the process of drafting an international treaty on the matter.

As I've been flagging throughout this paper, it is vital that, in defining the purposes of Social Services, the government publicly celebrates the binning of the commoditised terminology of 'Social Care'. Synchronously, responsibilities for Social Services must be restored to a strengthened Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, and charged with the primary role in promoting

In establishing an unambiguous statement of purpose it will be necessary, via a facilitated and speedy national conversation – not a paper consultation – to agree a simple and unambiguous statement describing the essential responsibilities of LASSDs, utilising and updating/improving upon the recommendations of the Barclay Committee as initial guidance/a starting template.

The overarching purposes of LASSDs should include:

1. Developing, nurturing and sustaining a close working relationship with citizens, focussing more closely on the community and its strengths and recognising that the majority of personal care and support is provided by informal carers.

2. Curating the development and iterative implementation of individual good life plans with individuals, their loved ones, friends and neighbours.

3. Building and sustaining the skilled professional workforce required to realise purpose. Any dispassionate observer of the social care system cannot dodge the conclusion that a multi-disciplinary team culture has evolved that reflects the aspirations of an over-specialised culture where the aspirations of professionals, rather than the best interests of the people served, prescribes structure. I believe that the future lies in the creation of a new community social work professional possessing a broad spectrum of essential clinical as well as relationship and strengths-based practice knowledge and skills. Such professionals already exist within support services we have built to support people with challenging reputations to live contributing lives. No doubt the professions will 'have kittens'. It may be best to proceed quietly!

4. Developing, nurturing and sustaining a robust democratic accountability and consultative governance system which supports, informs and advises elected members in the exercise of their responsibilities. Every system developed must incorporate open access public sessions preceding every full council meeting and facilitate universal engagement.

5. Understanding and revelling in the supplementary and complementary nature of asset/strengths and relationship-based community social work practice and creating an environment within which the resourcefulness, creativity, and gifts of citizens and their associations are celebrated and community cohesion strengthened.

6. Investing social services resources in local communities, seeding and supporting flexible and place-based support services and valued local employment.

7. Producing short-term and long-term strategic plans for and with

the communities served which, amongst many purposes, will inform annual Local Government Grant Settlement negotiations.

As flagged earlier, central government's other key function is to sweep away the obstructive system conditions that, in the main, the imposition of the market and the growth of generic and centralised regulation have engendered. In progressing this 'liberation' the government should initiate a national conversation pertaining to the nature of a good life and a good society, family and community life, work/life balance, and the steps it can take across the departments of government to respond to the emerging conclusions. At the core of this debate must be issues regarding the nature of citizenship, the redistribution of wealth, the working day/week, Universal Basic Income, carer's leave/sabbaticals, career breaks, etc. as well as relevant amendments to competition law.

Conclusion

Compass

This is a road for the courageous as little will happen until the first mile is traversed and initial unforeseen threats and obstructions have been successfully addressed. As with life in general, this must be a journey which will present choices, opportunities and problems. However, the resolving of the 'social care crisis' by re-engaging with an understanding that how we care for each other is a societal issue for which the market is not a sustainable solution does constitute a challenge where a caring and principled government can make a difference – as long as it is prepared to confront individualism, consumerism and 'selfish capitalism'.

As 'providers' and 'professionals', we (at LivesthroughFriends) have, against the grain, continued to practice in the Barclay mode, promoting inclusion and both de-institutionalisation/prevention of institutionalisation by demonstrating that relationships and communities are at the nub of 'care'. Long experience tells us that this approach works and that government's job is to create the societal conditions that enable us to care for each other throughout our lives. In this essentially communitarian structure, the role of professionals and services are primarily as curators of care - locally and one person at a time in a context of genuine local democracy - supplementing and complementing the 'core economy' appropriately with skilled services where necessary – not as the 'buy our stuff' sole solution.

If we are to evolve a sustainable and truly caring society and effective and economic social services, as was so clearly recognised by both Seebohm and Barclay Committees during the early years of Social Services Departments, we must build upon the care that is naturally present in strong, resourceful and interdependent communities. In pursuit of this, the challenge for government is to restore agency to citizens and to design societal systems and social services that have their primary purpose in resourcing, supporting, and where necessary supplementing the associative activities of families and communities. This, of course, cannot be a top-down activity – hence the imperative to find an 'imagery' that is generally understood through which inclusive, democratic change can evolve. ABCD Institute's Mike Green describes these folk as "Gappers" who work to meld the gifts of both the core and institutional economies in the interests of citizens, families and communities.

When we talk to people about what really matters to them the universal answer is loving and reciprocal relationships closely aligned with a strong sense of belonging. These attributes are not in the gift of services BUT supplementary and complementary services can be designed to support families, friends and others to give their gifts. However, concurrently, there's a societal job to do in enabling citizens to invest in relationships and supporting people to reject passive consumerism and assert active citizenship. At some point we all have needed and again are likely to need care. Not to put too fine a point upon it, commissioned care institutionalises and others. Is that really

what we want for ourselves or those we truly care about?

Escaping the claws of the market may seem radical but it has contemporary parallels. In addressing agriculture and food security, and environmental protection and biodiversity remediation, going back to fundamental principles – acknowledging the disaster that rapacious humanity has wrought – is widely espoused. One element of this is called 'Rewilding'.

In a nutshell, a couple of years ago I wrote this:

"*At Rewilding Care, we define rewilding as the intentional, societal-scale nurturing of interdependence and reciprocity to the point where real agency is restored to citizens, families and communities. Rewilding seeks to reinstate the natural interdependent societal relationships that have served humanity so well over millennia as the basis for a sustainable and flourishing future. Rewilding recognises that collaborative relationships constitute the basis of care and that professionals and services, that also have useful specialist roles, are complementary and supplementary actors whose core role is to support and strengthen the agency of citizens and their various associations. Rewilding means valuing people for their gifts rather than emphasizing and exploiting perceived deficiencies. Rewilding thrives on the apparent chaos of our unique lives and relationships. Rewilding Care builds upon the essence of humanity and it works!*"[11]

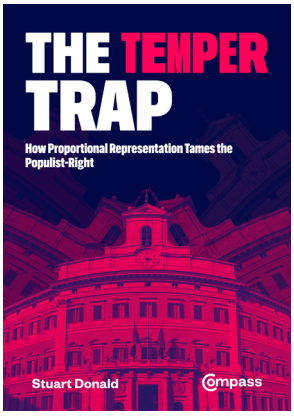
Whenever change is mooted the 'yes, butters' start murmuring about the 'devil being in the detail' and, of course, it is if one sets out with the never realised proposition that a comprehensive plan must be in place before anything can progress. In this case, the devil will be in the detail if government insists on doing anything more than setting out the parameters within which the re-localisation of social services and restoration of personal agency to citizens will be enacted. Given a clear steer about what defines good care and support from an end-users perspective, it will be for local authorities in democratic collaboration with their citizens and communities to utilise all the resources at their disposal to evolve relevant, continuously improving and sustainable solutions. Change will begin when central government steps back.

Notes

[1] Social Workers: Their Role & Tasks, 1982
[2] https://leanlogic.online/glossary/wheel-of-life-the/
[3] HM Government, 'Independent commission into adult social care: terms of reference", 11th July 2025. Available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-commission-into-adult-social-care-terms-of-reference/independent-commission-into-adult-social-care-terms-of-reference
[4] Fleming, David, *Surviving the Future: Culture, Carnival and Capital in the Aftermath of the Market Economy*, 2011, Ed. Shaun Chamberlain, Chelsea Green.
[5] https://livesthroughfriends.org/always-a-new-adventure
[6] Sandel, Michael J., *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets,* 2013, Penguin.
[7] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5pc4zReyFMc.
[8] 'Saving money by doing the right thing: Why 'local by default' must replace 'diseconomies of scale'', 2014, Locality. Available from: https://locality.org.uk/assets/images/Locality-Report-Diseconomies-updated-single-pages-Jan-2017.pdf
[9] Fleming, David, *Lean Logic: A Dictionary for the Future and How to Survive It*, 2016, Chelsea Green.
[10] Seddon, John, *Rethinking Regulation: A Manifesto - How to improve public-sector productivity and morale*, 2024, Triarchy Press.
[11] Rhodes, Bob, 'Rewilding Care': Could letting relationships flourish revolutionise social care?', 2023, Relationships Project. Available from: https://relationshipsproject.org/rewilding-care/.

More Compass publications

To read more publications published by Compass please visit https://www.compassonline.org.uk/publications.

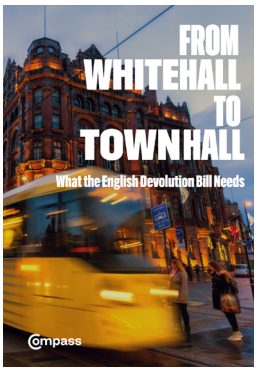


The Temper Trap: How Proportional Representation Tames the Populist Right

One of the longest-running arguments against proportional representation voting systems has been that they aid and abet 'extremist' parties into legitimate political voices. Yet, with only four MPs, Reform UK are dominating in opinion polls for the next UK election.

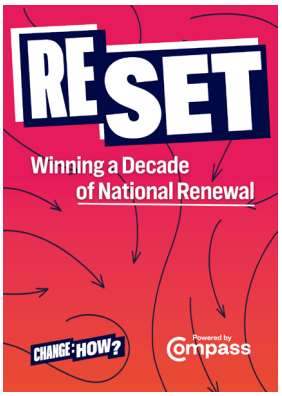
This paper, authored by Stuart Donald, provides comprehensive analysis of how PR systems actually do the exact opposite – acting as a balancing force to tame the Populist-Right.

From Whitehall to Townhall: What the English Devolution Bill Needs



The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill provides a once-in-a-generation chance to deliver the radical change to local government needed to bring about a system that truly works for people in their places. But the current emphasis on the creation of new 'Strategic Authorities' doesn't do that.

This report brings together leading voices in local government reform – John Denham, Dr. Jessica Garland, Sarah Longlands, Sue Goss, and a foreword by North East Mayor Kim McGuinness – to advocate for what is really needed constitutionally, electorally and financially to make the English Devolution Bill the success it can be.



Reset: Winning A Decade of National Renewal

A course correction is needed fast. If Labour doesn't clarify what kind of society it aims to bring about and fails to seriously develop a programme that lights the way to it, the populist right's version of change will prevail – change that divides and weakens rather than unites and empowers.

Compass believes that Labour must reckon with the fundamental questions and challenges contained within the paper if it is to craft an expansive, alliance-based programme capable of securing meaningful change and radical renewal. And in the process, defeat Reform by taking them on, not by mimicking them.

COMPASS IS THE PRESSURE GROUP FOR A GOOD SOCIETY

We believe in a world that is much more equal, sustainable and democratic. We build alliances of ideas, parties and movements to help make systemic change happen.

JOIN COMPASS TODAY action.compassonline.org.uk

CompassGoodSociety
CompassGoodSociety
CompassOffice
Compassoffice.bsky.social