

# The Enabling State in London

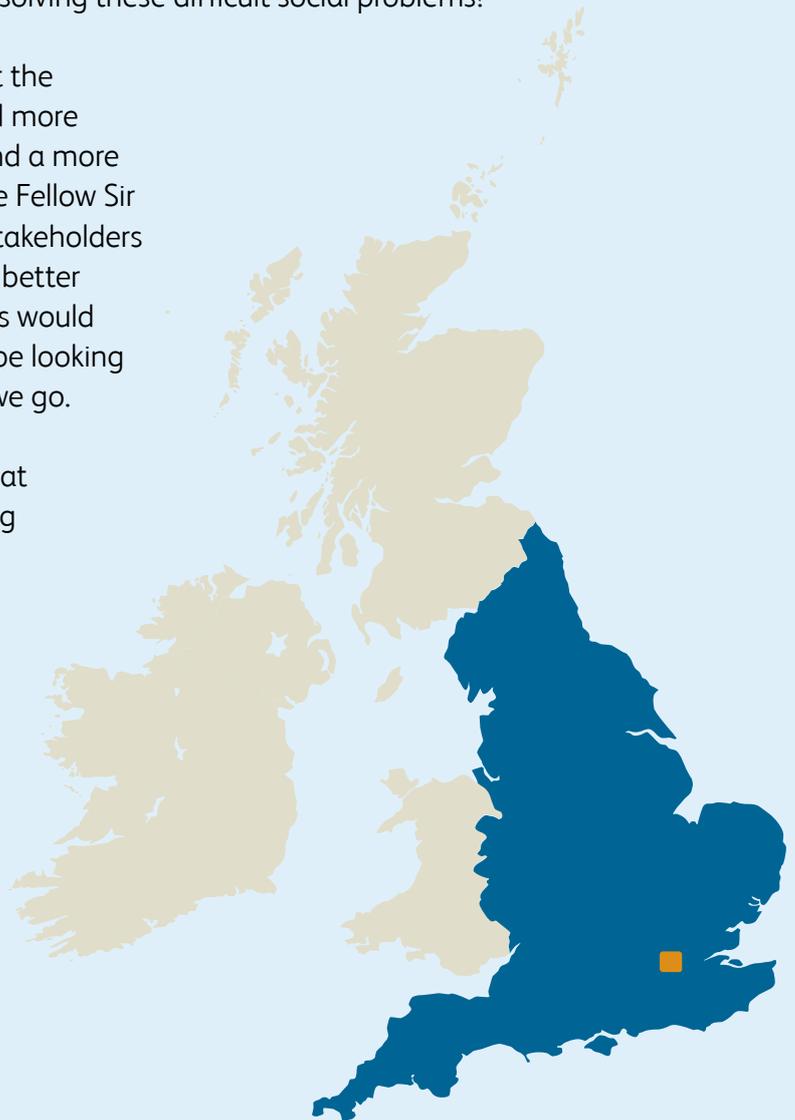
Key issues raised at our London *Enabling State* roundtables on 6 & 7 February 2013 at the Paul Hamlyn Foundation

The UK and the Republic of Ireland have experienced huge improvements in wellbeing in the last 100 years, however a number of complex social problems persist. Could a new relationship between the state and individuals hold the key to solving these difficult social problems?

The Carnegie UK Trust believes we are at the beginning of a fundamental shift toward more empowered citizens and communities and a more enabling state. With the help of Carnegie Fellow Sir John Elvidge we are engaging with key stakeholders across the UK and Republic of Ireland to better understand this movement and what this would mean for public service delivery. We will be looking for opportunities for shared learning as we go.

This report summarises the issues raised at our roundtable discussion on the Enabling State at The Paul Hamlyn Foundation in London, over two sessions on the 6th and 7th of February 2013. Roundtable discussions were also held in Cardiff, Belfast, Newcastle, Dunfermline and Dublin during December 2012 – February 2013.

We hope you find the report of interest and we would be pleased to hear your views. Please contact Jenny Brotchie, Policy Officer at [jenny@carnegieuk.org](mailto:jenny@carnegieuk.org) or on 01383 749757. You can find our discussion paper [here](#).



## 1. Context

The Enabling State discussions in London in February 2013 were the last of our events around the UK and Republic of Ireland exploring the issues raised in Sir John Elvidge’s discussion paper. Held in the offices of the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, both groups of roundtable participants were largely from the third sector.

In each of the other jurisdictions, the concept of the Big Society had been raised by participants. In the roundtable discussion in Newcastle the week prior to the London discussions the Big Society had been repeatedly criticised. In London, we were therefore particularly interested to explore whether the participants found any relevance to the Big Society programme and what their experiences of specific interventions had been to date.

The Big Society programme can be described as having three central aspects:

- empowering communities through localism (for example the community right to challenge and community right to buy)
- encouraging volunteering and charitable donations (for example the national citizens service for young people)
- open public services (commissioning and procurement of public services from third sector and private sector providers).

Despite high awareness of the phrase the Big Society, there is low awareness amongst the public of what it means and a high degree of scepticism amongst the third sector about the programme. The programme has been re-launched 4 times by the Coalition government.

Though the Big Society initiative is not highly thought of, this does not mean that the previous Labour model of highly centralised public services, controlled through New Public Management tools such as targets and benchmarking, was supported either. The Francis report on failings in the provision of care in Mid Staffordshire NHS was published on the 6th of February 2013. The report concluded that patients were routinely neglected by a Trust that was preoccupied with cost cutting, targets and processes and which had lost sight of its fundamental responsibility to provide safe care. These conclusions were undoubtedly in participants minds during discussions and were held up by a number of participants as a damning indictment of New Public Management.

The challenge in an English context is therefore not how to return to the New Labour approach to public services but rather how to decentralise and empower communities effectively.





Discussion on 6 February



Sir John Elvidge (right) presents his analysis with Martyn Evans, Chief Executive, Carnegie UK Trust, to the left.

## 2. Key Themes

Four key themes arose in the discussions in London:

- Retrenchment and the role of the State
- The ability of individuals and communities to fill the gap
- The need to reenergise democracy
- The role of business and philanthropy

More detail is provided in sections 2.1 – 2.4.

### 2.1 Retrenchment and the role of the State

Both discussion groups expressed broad agreement that the State had indeed failed some citizens and the financial crisis had provided an opportunity to re-evaluate the State's role and its relationship with individuals, communities, businesses and the third sector. While some rebalancing appeared to be welcome, there was a many participants spoke about their concerns regarding the extent and pace of change.

This rapid retrenchment had sparked considerable debate in England about what the role of the State was or should be. A number of participants noted the State's important role as an equalising force, balancing competing interests in society and ensuring that the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups were protected.

There was broad agreement that the role of the State should be firstly to do no harm but that this was difficult to achieve given the competing interests of members of society. Going further than this, improving wellbeing was seen a legitimate role for the State. However to do this effectively the State's relationship with citizens would have to go beyond crisis interventions. Too often the State's involvement was seen to come at the wrong stage and therefore be highly inefficient. The story of a woman who just needed her boiler fixed to allow her to heat her home, wash and clean was given as an example. Once these basic needs were fulfilled she was able to improve other areas of her life.

A number of participants underlined that early action is key to resolving complex problems and that the State should be refocused on stopping harm occurring in the first place rather than crisis management. Moving resources 'upstream' was welcomed but there were seen to be real challenges in this approach as vocal interest groups would fight to retain resources and act as 'shroud wavers' should the resources available to acute services be reduced.

While prevention is seen as socially progressive, a number of participants highlighted that when we talk of prevention we are usually talking about ‘other people’ changing their behaviours – there is a suggestion of ‘them and us’ in this debate and a risk that those who are unable to prevent negative outcomes could be blamed for their occurrence.

## 2.2 The ability of individuals and communities to fill the gap

The view presented in the discussion paper, that individuals and communities can and should do more to improve wellbeing, was generally supported in the discussion sessions. The move to coproduction in England was seen as positive and a renewed focus on what people are currently contributing, or could contribute, was endorsed. Participants in the discussion reflected on their own experiences with public services and noted that they were rarely asked to contribute positively, for example in schools or youth services.

The State’s capacity for any truly radical shift was questioned and participants queried whether an Enabling State could ever be created in a top down manner. Many appeared uncomfortable with the Coalition’s (presumed) assumption that in pulling back the State others would be able and willing to step in. In particular, there were real

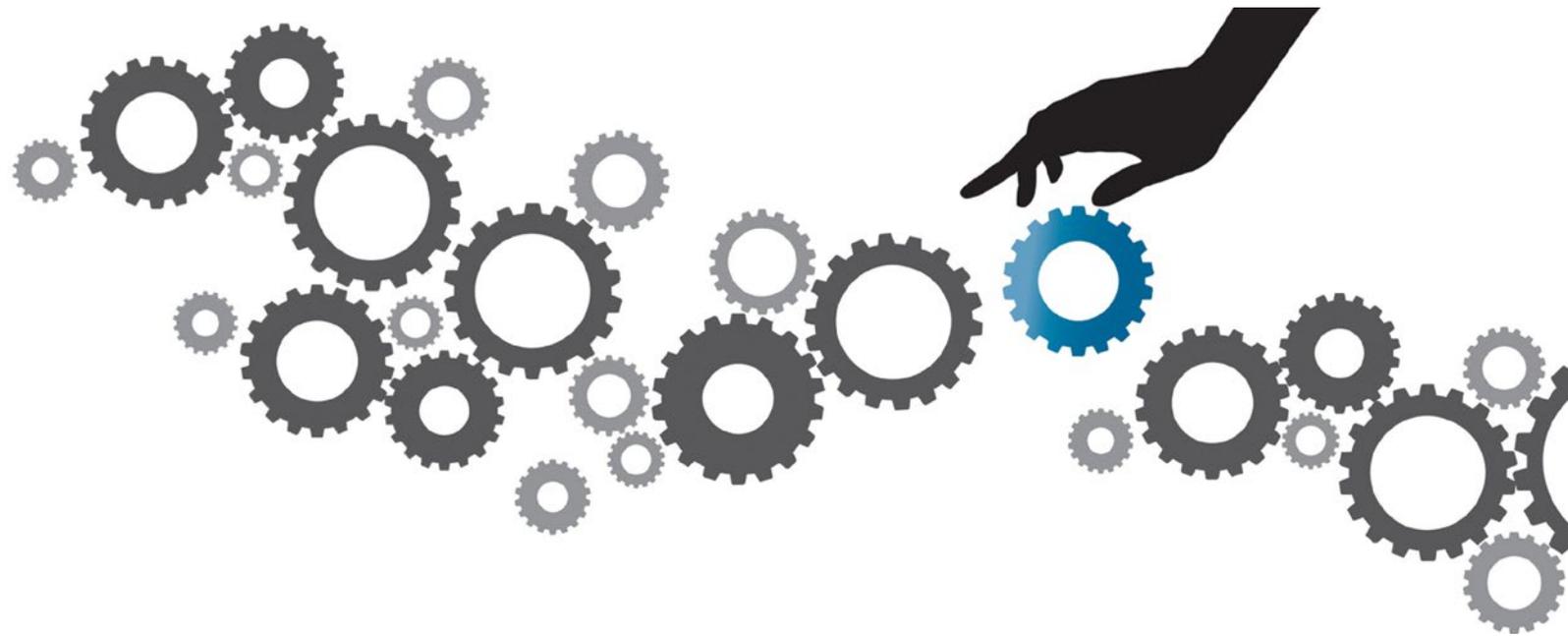
concerns that the very networks required to make the Big Society work were the ones being eroded due to reductions in public spending.

The current speed of change in England was felt to be particularly damaging to the community and voluntary sector which were struggling to adapt to the rapidly shifting funding landscape. While open public services may be seen to be beneficial in moving delivery of public services to the third sector, in practice most charities are too small and local to bid for the large-scale public services that have been put out to tender. There was little evidence of a trickle-down effect where larger third or private sector providers would subcontract charities to deliver locally.

It was generally felt that complete withdrawal of the State was not the answer. This could lead to unacceptable levels of harm and exacerbate inequalities. The State should instead seek to redraw its relationship with communities by helping communities take greater control. There was discussion about why community action was not more prevalent and some suggested that this was not due to a lack of will within communities but rather, a result of systemic barriers that communities face in dealing with the State.



Discussion on the 7th of February



The relationship between the State, local government and communities was discussed. The role of local government was seen as key to unlocking community capacity and therefore localism was fundamental to any vision of an Enabling State. In the absence of strong local government, with adequate financing, many community and voluntary groups were losing funding and ceasing to exist. There was debate about whether this relationship with voluntary services was helpful and in the medium to long-term should the third sector seek to diversify funding rather than come to rely again on funding from the State.

As in other discussions, participants were concerned that a focus on individual and community action could be used as a way for the State to abdicate responsibility for reducing social inequalities. A related concern was that alliances, networks and community services were inconsistent – relying on them alone as would likely exacerbate inequalities.

### **2.3 The need to reenergise democracy**

The discussion in the London roundtables included a recurrent thread on the need to reenergise democracy. New Public Management

had been considered a failure (at least in part) and there was a sense that technocratic solutions to social problems had reached the end of their usefulness. While New Labour had argued that all that matters is delivery, and that every problem is essentially managerial, a number of participants argued that the questions that currently face society are political questions about what kind of society we want, and means and ends towards that society. Some felt that the current level of debate shows a failure of political leadership. While articulating a need and desire for more political debate on these issues, the groups also noted the problem of citizen engagement in politics.

Many participants spoke about the importance of citizens being involved in local decision making and the value of working more closely with local communities to co-produce solutions. There were concerns that the public spaces to have these debates and discussions were being lost, both in terms of physical assets like community halls and social assets like small voluntary groups. While reenergising democracy, and particularly local democracy, was seen as important, the groups were not able to offer clear suggestions on how to do this.



## 2.4 The role of business and philanthropy

The London discussion sessions were held in the Paul Hamlyn Foundation which may have meant that the role of philanthropy played a bigger part of discussions than elsewhere, though increasing charitable giving is a key part of the UK Government Big Society programme.

The relationship between an Enabling State and philanthropic organisations was not felt to be particularly clear in the discussion paper. Philanthropic activity often runs in parallel to government activity – for example carrying out small innovative projects to test concepts that, if successful, can be scaled-up by the State – but the philanthropic sector very rarely funds any activities that are the territory of the State. A clearer understanding of the role of philanthropy in an Enabling State will be necessary to avoid the risk that such organisations are seen as potentially filling the gap left by the retrenchment of the State which participants did not see as a practical solution to the level of need in society.

In both discussion sessions issues to do with the relationship between State, businesses and local communities were explored. On the one hand, the State was seen to have an important role in protecting individuals and communities from the negative impacts of market through greater regulation. For others though, businesses were seen as key social actors and could be harnessed better to improve community wellbeing. Participants queried the view, sometimes given by the third sector, that the market is bad, the State is better but charity is the best. Participants urged the team to consider further the role of the private sector as social actors.

### 3. What does an Enabling State mean in London?

In our discussions outwith England, the Coalition Government's Big Society programme was held up as an example of the risks involved in creating an Enabling State. Our discussions in London reinforced this.

There was general agreement with the need to support community activity, and a view that this could assist in the reenergising of local democracy. The trends towards coproduction and prevention were supported by participants, though often with words of caution about the potential impact on inequalities. But the current retrenchment of the State was seen to be happening too quickly to build effective, local responses. The bonding and bridging capital of local voluntary organisations is a necessary part of a successful Enabling State but these organisations are being hardest hit by the combined impact of government policies. A successful Enabling State model would need to support local community spaces and activities, particularly in more deprived neighbourhoods to balance out the equalities impacts. A positive role for business as social actors may also be required, as will a clearer articulation of the role of philanthropy.

### 4. Next Steps

Our engagement with stakeholders in each jurisdiction is now complete. We are now carrying out an extensive literature review and seeking out practical examples of an Enabling State in action.

Our findings will inform our final Enabling State project outputs which we will publish later in 2013. The Carnegie UK Trust would like to thank Rob Bell and his colleagues at the Paul Hamlyn Foundation for hosting the London roundtable events and providing invaluable advice and guidance.

#### London Roundtable Attendees – 6 February

Robert Bell, Paul Hamlyn Foundation  
 Adele Blakebrough, Social Business Trust  
 Tony Bovaird, Third Sector Research Centre  
 Anna Coote, New Economics Foundation  
 Peter Couchman, Plunkett Foundation  
 Andrew Dick, Big Society Network  
 Alice Hood, TUC  
 Alan Hudson, Fellow of Kellogg College  
 Rashid Iqbal, The Childrens Society  
 Matt Peacock, Streetwise opera  
 David Robinson, Community Links  
 Razia Shariff, Third Sector Research Centre  
 Jane Steele, Paul Hamlyn Foundation  
 Gethyn Williams, National Council for Voluntary Youth Services  
 Martyn Evans, Carnegie UK Trust  
 Jennifer Wallace, Carnegie UK Trust  
 Jenny Brotchie, Carnegie UK Trust  
 Sir John Elvidge, Carnegie Fellow

#### London Roundtable Attendees – 7 February

Diana Brittan, Carnegie UK Trust Trustee  
 Jenny North, Impetus Trust  
 Julian Corner, Lankelly Chase  
 Steve Wyler, Locality  
 Maggie Atkinson, Childrens Commissioner for England  
 Robert Bell, Paul Hamlyn Foundation  
 Robert Dufton, Paul Hamlyn Foundation  
 Benita Refson, The Place2Be  
 Martyn Evans, Carnegie UK Trust  
 Jennifer Wallace, Carnegie UK Trust  
 Jenny Brotchie, Carnegie UK Trust  
 Sir John Elvidge, Carnegie Fellow

You can keep up to date with our progress by visiting our enabling state [project page](#) and by following @CarnegieUKTrust, #enablingstate on Twitter.

To sign up to our Enabling State newsletter please get in touch with Jenny Brotchie, Policy Officer at [jenny@carnegieuk.org](mailto:jenny@carnegieuk.org).

The Carnegie UK Trust works to improve the lives of people throughout the UK and Ireland, by changing minds through influencing policy, and by changing lives through innovative practice and partnership work. The Carnegie UK Trust was established by Scots-American philanthropist Andrew Carnegie in 1913 and we are delighted to be celebrating our centenary in 2013. Please see our website for further information on our centenary plans.

**Andrew Carnegie House**  
**Pittencrieff Street**  
**Dunfermline**  
**KY12 8AW**

**Tel: +44 (0)1383 721445**

**Fax: +44 (0)1383 749799**

**Email: [info@carnegieuk.org](mailto:info@carnegieuk.org)**

**[www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk](http://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk)**

**Written by Jennifer Wallace, Policy Manager**

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