

Solace Summit 2014 – Leading Local Solutions (15 – 17 October)

Report for the West Midlands Solace Branch

Liverpool was home to the fourth Solace Summit ‘Leading Local Solutions’, the event proved to be very popular, with over 300 delegates attending over the three days and a waiting list for tickets. In return for sponsorship to attend this sell-out event we have put together a joint report for members of the branch who were unable to attend.

Following so closely after the Scottish independence referendum in September it was not surprising to see devolution as key theme for many of the speakers and the debates, this alongside consideration of leadership skills and the transformation of the public sector made for a very enjoyable and informative Summit.

Pre-summit Tour

The pre-summit tour started in Liverpool One, a 42 acre site at the heart of the city that had transformed, via £1bn investment and close working between the public and private sector, into a mixed used retail-centred complex and opened in 2008, and is now in the top five of retail destinations in the UK. The tour then moved to Liverpool Waters a UNESCO heritage site, to consider the development proposals within the regeneration strategy for North Liverpool. The first stages of transformation were evident in the Titanic Hotel, and is set to continue with the next phase of development of the Tobacco warehouse with apartments bars and shops planned alongside the plans for Liverpool Waters.

The Future Shape of Local Government and Launch of the 2020 Vision

Grant Thornton and INLOGOV launched their [2020 Vision](#) at the Solace Summit. The research identified several scenarios for different types of authorities to facilitate an open debate on the future challenges facing local government and the response required by the sector, concluding that ‘it is self-evident that things are not going to get easier in the next ten years. Rather the reverse. It is vital for the sector to consider what more it needs to do to manage its destiny’.

President’s Address

Mark Rogers (Chief Executive, Birmingham City Council and President of Solace) opened up the Summit with a very engaging and energetic [opening address](#) full of humility, banter and passion... an underlying tone throughout the opening session of the day. His speech covered the changes agreed at the AGM (including confirming a further 2 years as president) and three broad themes:

1. The Policy Board – a group of Chief Executives and Senior Officers willing to shape messages and speak on behalf of the profession
2. Devolution – Mark pushed the point that although it’s somewhat frustrating that it’s taken the Scottish referendum to get politicians to take notice, devolution is now out of the ‘too difficult box’.... however it will go back in if we don’t respond quickly. All

political parties need to recognise two issues, first the growing disconnect between the centre and the rest of the country and second that the majority of decisions is best made closest to those whom they affect. Mark stressed that any deals around devolution need to be fair to all – urban and rural areas, and Solace must play its part through evidencing snippets of good practice to drive through local decisions.

3. Influence comes with responsibility – Mark then went onto to talk though value based leadership and recognising the important roles we play and that the level of influence we have brings great responsibility. He continued to say we need to be clear who's responsible, why we're responsible and to what extent. Mark stressed the need that we must have the debate on these issues. Solace will be working with other professional bodies to develop an ethical code to demonstrate a commitment to the highest standards.

What Makes a Successful Leader?

A lively panel discussed what motivates us as individuals and leaders in our professional organisations.

Louise Casey (Director General, Troubled Families Unit, DCLG) kept the passion high with another very engaging presentation. Her opening point stressed that the successful Troubled Families Programmes are the ones that have strong leadership and seeing through the programmes when they get difficult. Louise stressed the point strong leadership in the troubled families programme isn't about structure and process: it's about the relationship between the worker and the family, the worker asking the right questions... 'a jack of all trades, master of none'... the relationship. There is a need to build up trust, be brave, bold and overcome those obstacles that will inevitably get in the way. Louise finished by stressing that as senior officers we have the responsibility to transform children's lives.

Steve Backley (Olympian and Medallist) then spoke about his sporting success, followed by the success of the Olympic Games in 2012. He emphasised five non-negotiables to [successful leadership](#): find your passion, power through clarity, create empowering belief, surround yourself with talent and deliver your maximum. Paul Hannan followed this with some of the science behind success, key to which is employee engagement and the growth mindset, however he cautioned that most employee engagement programmes do not work and that transformational leaders need to support employees to engage themselves. Paul then talked about Jim.....that we all have a Jim in our organisation – not fully engaged, but not disengaged either, always on time, does his job...but how can we make him more proactive. Paul stressed the need to manage people's emotions, not just focus on performance and outcomes. Paul took us through his research on Intrinsic Management and how to create a culture where employees feel and perform at their best. His book on Intrinsic Engagement is available via Solace. Paul finished by quoting happiness is the cause of high performance rather than the result itself.

Local Roots to Growth

On 16 October following an evening of entertainment by The Soulaces at The Cavern Club the morning opened with this insightful session. The UK has been growing through a protracted recovery and the impact on local economies has been significant. This session focused on several ingredients of recovery, including Simon Ridley (Chief Executive, Planning Inspectorate) the role of the national planning policy framework (nppf) in creating a positive planning framework and plan led system with a presumption in favour of sustainable development. This was followed by Robert Hough (Chair of Liverpool Region LEP) who spoke about the experience in negotiating the Growth Deal and identified three key ingredients to local growth – identify your priorities, develop the right structures and make sure you deliver – before concluding that each local area must find its own ‘institutional fix’ – what is best for you to deliver local growth? Finally, Andrew Carter (Chief Executive, Centre for Cities) outlined why the local growth agenda is top of the national political agenda, and that the imbalance in the national economy means that in comparison to other countries, cities are underperforming. To combat this there needs to be a presumption in favour of devolution, with Government being clear about why it can’t devolve. The challenge is to create high skilled jobs, housing and efficient transport systems that create attractive conditions for workers and businesses. To deliver this, local authorities need more control over the money spent in the area and more control over how the money is raised from the local tax base.

The writers attended their chosen break out sessions

Public Service Redesign

Local government is at the forefront of public sector reform and taking a fresh look at services and how they are designed. David McNulty (Chief Executive, Surrey County Council) spoke about the cultural transformation at Surrey County Council, starting with a package of staff development interventions for employees (over 10,000 staff had accessed the coaching programme and there had been a reconfiguration of rewards for staff that incentivised high performing behaviour, and there has been a move to values based recruitment). Helen Lazarus and Gavin Pyke (Design Council) emphasised the ‘5 Ds’: Discovery, Design, Develop, Decide Deliver. They are ready to be the best partners others can work with and argued that organisations need to keep thinking through the cultural journey, how change the behaviour of the public, change the expectations and change how the support is provided. Finally, Michael Mousdale (DWF) emphasised the importance of the need to disrupt to progress, make mistakes and don’t be afraid to come forward with ideas.

Democracy – what CX’s need to know ahead of the Parliamentary Election

David Smith (Chief Executive, Sunderland) led the discussion on the challenges ahead of the Parliamentary Election stressing the need for us all to take a collective responsibility through having a consistent and clear approach around processes. Focus was on Individual Election Registration (IER) and the need to get it right to ensure everyone is

able to vote. Alex Thomas from Cabinet Office went through some of the changes ahead, although stressed its mostly business as usual. The main changes to note....the extension of the timetable from 21 to 25 days and one that was welcomed by the audience was the opportunity to start counting before completion of verification....although the detail is yet to be finalised.

Jo Miller (Chief Executive, Doncaster) stressed the need for resilience and plan early going into emergency planning mode. Simon Verdon (MD, Democracy Counts) went through the challenges of IER and the complexities. He gave an example of Bedford BC who have given all 7,000 canvassers tablets which has given real time data....and longer term savings.

David concluded the session by summarising the key points: have a clear plan in place and test it out early; read and reflect on the performance of others particularly the 2014 reports; consider resource, capacity and ensure staff know their roles (the success of Sunderland); use technology where you can and ensure the robustness of your register.

Welcome from the New Chair of the LGA

The afternoon session commenced with Councillor David Sparks outlining the unprecedented challenges facing the sector and the opportunities for devolution. He argued that there needed to be a common agenda for local government within the UK, and that there was no value in creating devolution in England, if there was centralisation elsewhere (for example, Wales). Devolution in England should be to local authorities, or to combinations of local authorities with a variable model across the country depending on local need. He also highlighted the LGA's blueprint for the next government, a series of costed proposals set out in [Investing in Our Nation's Future: The first 100 days of the next government](#).

Demand Management a New Contract with Communities

The focus of the session was how we can shape local services into a smaller state with active citizens. Martin Reeves (Chief Executive, Coventry City Council) introduced the session by talking about demand management and the need to understand communities and be more active via effective insight to ensure effective investment. Dr Henry Kippin (Director, Collaborate CIC) emphasised the different ways to build insight through engaging with those who are trusted in the community (for example, the pub landlord) and the businesses and organisations where the community meet (e.g. Sainsbury's). Dr Carolyn Wilkins (Chief Executive, Oldham City Council) outlined the transition to a cooperative council, and the need to rebalance what the council does in conversation with partners, challenges included engaging with communities and recognising that they don't need to be in charge of everything. Merran McRae (Chief Executive, Calderdale Council) outlined how they had used demand management as a tool for communities, however, critical to this was the importance of sharing expertise across the council and embedding in business plans, and identifying internally what demand the council had created.

Where's the evidence? Making smarter policy choices

The afternoon discussion session was chaired by Abdool Kara (CE, Swale District Council) with a panel comprised of Neil Wholey (LARIA and Westminster City Council), Donna Malloy (Director of Implementation, The What Works Centre) and Dr Clive Grace (International Consultant Knowledge Navigator) delivered this session. The session concentrated on the need for researchers to meet, share channels and focus resources to improve local areas collaboratively using the gathered intelligence. Starting with needs analysis, assess the evidence monitor the interventions on place and thereafter evaluate to achieve culture change and improve connectivity. Collaboration across and between local authorities and researchers can achieve this aim. Good collaboration will bring economic development and policy change. This work must however be maintained - nothing works for all time. It becomes outdated quickly, ongoing research is vital and this culture requires embedding in local authorities so that they operate successfully. The key message is raising awareness of the benefits of research and analysis with bring about culture change and stimulate local authorities for the benefit of all.

Skills for Leadership

Following the launch of its report on skills for leadership - [Asking the Right Questions](#) twelve months ago this session looked at responses to the report and what Solace is putting place to support senior local public service staff. Bob O' Neill (Executive Director, IMCA) spoke about the disrupters and the need to rethink what we do and how we do it. In his view, the next decade will be the decade of local government, however there are issues that are: multi-sector, multi-disciplinary and intergovernmental. He suggested a number of different ways to get to the future including the need to create meaning, the importance of building trust relationships and the need to communicate and keep a promise. Catherine Staite (Director of INLOGOV) emphasised three key skills for leadership: creativity, courage and charm. Creativity – there's a better way to do it – find it. Courage – learn to say no, let go, make connections, got to tackle bad behaviours – it will not be tolerated. Charm – feel valued and valuable, make others feel important, lead by example and bring people together.

Public Service Transformation: What's working and what's not?

The independent Service Transformation Challenge Panel has been asked to advise ministers on what needs to happen locally to increase the pace and scale of transformation. Sir Derek Myers and Pat Ritchie (the co-chairs of the panel) discussed their early findings, including that leadership is the most important ingredient for transformation, in particular the need for cross-sector collaborative leadership in managing local expectations, raising ambition and accountability.

Change the Ending

The morning of the final day started with a creative session on story telling and writing, giving the audience some insightful ideas on how to shape their future

The Chimp as Leader

Dr Glen Mead (Chimp Management Ltd) delivered this light hearted session which had some very insightful reflections for the assembled audience. The session focused on why we think, feel and behave the way we do. The company helps people to get the best out of themselves and others. You need to focus on what you can control, be less reactive, realise that you make mistakes (nobody's perfect) and by reflection you can learn to do something different in future. Be aware of what is going on inside your head and manage it. The key message here is: keep that Chimp under control and give him the doughnuts he wants every now and then!

Panel Session

A lively panel session, exploring the opportunities and challenges of working in local government, brought the summit to a close.

Finally for the more energetic attendees there was the opportunity to take part in a walk and for those with perhaps an avid interest in regeneration or even football there was a visit to Anfield. This was certainly a summit with something for everyone.

The next Solace Summit will be taking place 7-9 October 2015 in Bournemouth.

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