



## Client Story

# Local Government Leadership: Storying systemic change

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Total Place was a 2009-2010 Local Government initiative to look at how a 'whole area' approach to public services could lead to better services at less cost. It sought to deliver a step change in both service improvement and efficiency at the local level, between local and central government, as well as across Whitehall.

# Local Government Leadership: Storying systemic change



Local Government Leadership decided to set up two levels of evaluation of the initiative to serve as a rigorous learning platform for deepening and extending the changes emanating from what was, unusually, a short-cycle change initiative. The first, an academic study, was commissioned from Warwick University. The second, an Insight Learning Review,

commissioned from Harthill and conducted jointly with an internal team set up for that purpose.

The Leadership Centre were very clear about why they wanted to conduct an Insight Learning Review alongside a more formal academic evaluation. They wanted an engaging process that got to the heart of peoples' experience quickly and effectively, that stimulated insights, and could facilitate learning and future actions beyond the Total Place initiative. The Insight Learning review process is a lively, 'democratic' process founded on collaborative inquiry, where the storied learnings are readily accessible to both those involved, and to others who have not participated in it. It offers the possibility of engaging a large number of stakeholders in a short period of time.

***"It gave me a chance to sit down and reflect on the work I had been doing over the last six to nine months in a way that I had not done before."*** Contributor to Learning Review

More particularly, what the Local Government Leadership were interested in was the quality and depth of stories an Insight Learning Review typically generates. They wanted the rigour of the methodology, and the granular detail this approach creates, because they understood that these rich and detailed stories about planned and emergent change would serve as a solid platform for consolidating the learning and nurturing new practices well beyond the completion of the Total Place initiative.

Typically, Insight Learning Reviews are used to critically evaluate past initiatives – when things go wrong. In the case of the process employed with Local Government Leadership, the focus was overwhelmingly appreciative. The intention was clearly to foster collaboration and joint perspectives, both considered essential to supporting ongoing change beyond Total Place.

*“The Learning History document was widely distributed and went down very well. People enjoyed reading it, as it’s different from standard reports, which can be a bit boring. And people appreciated that a representative variety of stakeholders had been involved, from local government staff to politicians. They felt their views were properly reflected”.* Nicky de Beer, Head of Operations

In total, from March to May 2010, the joint team interviewed over 100 people, representing a horizontal slice from local government employees to politicians, generating over 3,000 quotes and resulting in a 60-page text that was widely distributed and appreciated. One of the spin-off benefits reported was by a member of the joint team;

*“We couldn’t have undertaken the review without Harthill’s expertise, and as we were involved in every element and at every stage of the process, it also gave us the opportunity for some meaningful personal and professional development.”* Nicky de Beer, Head of Operations

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