



Scenario Planning

A strategic process for those concerned
with the provision of public services

Supported by:



The Leadership Forum
Developing senior leadership in Children's Services





Introduction

“There is nothing permanent except change”
- Heraclitus, Greek philosopher

No one can predict the future. Many have tried and failed over the years. Within the public sector and local government in particular, it is difficult enough to anticipate change within an electoral or financial cycle, let alone in ten or fifteen years time.

However, as policy-makers and leaders we must be able and willing to explore the forces that drive change, to anticipate change where we can and develop a shared understanding of the sort of future we want to see. If we do, the prize is being better able to plan for uncertainty and become more adaptable in meeting change as it happens.

The pace of change facing local government is unrelenting. Budget constraints, increasing demand, assessing more complex needs, technological advances, party politics and constitutional reform all create a turbulence and challenge for the public sector.

The reality is that to be on the front foot, local government has to respond quickly to an ever-changing landscape and become more agile.

Futures thinking is an effective way to help leaders and managers consider the opportunities and barriers that may lie ahead. In particular, scenario planning is an excellent process which can help leaders to navigate the complexity with differing perspectives. It allows wide ranging interests to articulate a common sense of the future and helps us to test our current assumptions and strategic plans.

Scenario planning is an enriching process for future-facing local government.

“If the rate of change inside the organisation is less than the rate of change outside the end is in sight.”
- Jack Welch, CEO of GEC

Introduction to scenario planning

Scenario planning is a technique which is central in the family of futures tools and techniques routinely used by businesses, academics and policy-makers. Scenario planning helps us to identify, explore and make sense of the main factors driving change – both from within our organisations and from the many structural impacts that exist locally, nationally and internationally.

Scenarios are stories written from the perspective of a particular point in the future, usually ten to fifteen years ahead; any further out tends to be less reliable and effective.

Each storyline draws upon the potential outcomes and impacts of key drivers-of-change. Scenario architecture is generally constructed on the basis of the relationship between drivers, regarded as highly important and highly uncertain in terms of how they might play out. Other drivers are then considered within the context of the main scenario architecture.

Groups can use scenarios to immerse themselves within different future worlds and consider their roles, leadership approaches, organisational values, workforce planning and stakeholder engagement.

As a result of working on scenario planning individuals are:

- More comfortable operating in a culture of change
- More resilient and confident in strategic decision-making
- Gain greater clarity of wider organisational purpose and values
- Develop enhanced political intelligence when working with stakeholders with differing views.

Once scenario storylines have been written, they can be used to back cast (as opposed to forecast), to look back to the short and medium term and consider opportunities and barriers that may need to be addressed going forward.

For the organisation, the potential benefits of scenario planning include:

- Articulation of a desired long term future
- Co-design and adoption of new a new strategic vision
- Testing and reappraisal of current strategic assumptions and plans
- Safe space for debate and discussions between staff and elected members in a spirit of open inquiry
- Co-design of services and partnership with wide-ranging stakeholders.

Why use scenario planning?

Scenario planning can be used in number of ways. It is important to be clear about the purpose of using scenarios, as this will inform how the process is constructed and adapted. There are also certain conditions required to ensure success in the use of scenario planning:

- Leadership buy-in and involvement in the process
- Clarity of purpose. What is the scope or theme to be explored. For example, 'vibrant town centres in 2025'; 'the purpose and nature of local government in 2020'; 'the changing relationship between state and citizens in 2025'
- Expert facilitation
- Commitment to ongoing use beyond the creation of the scenarios themselves.

Scenarios are rarely used in isolation and can be used to develop capacity within the organisation. For example:

- Horizon scanning – enhancing the organisation's research function
- Strategic planning – supporting management staff and workforce planning
- Leadership development – considering leadership capacities to lead in times of uncertainty
- Public consultation – Scenario planning is an inclusive, innovative and empowering way to support a statutory consultation processes.

Scenario planning in practice

“Scenarios are a way to structure, think about, and plan for, future uncertainties. It requires the articulation of more than one possible future (typically three or four).”

Case study one

A Council recently used this method with senior council staff, Head Teachers, classroom practitioners and community development workers.

Outcome	The group developed four scenarios exploring what learning might mean for the locality in 2025.
Impact	As a result of this process, the group identified 24 clear ideas for change innovation, to help prepare for uncertainties they thought may impact on their aspirations for education attainment. As a group, they are currently implementing these changes and monitoring drivers of change on an ongoing basis.

Case study two

A Council recently used this method to develop a shared understanding of what living in the local area would be like in 2020. Bringing together a range of local stakeholders the council was able to use the emerging scenario as a way to explain to the public what the ‘prize’ would be following controversial short term changes.

Impact	The scenario was then used to support a public consultation process and generate discussions with local residents.
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Case Study three

A government body recently used this scenario process to imagine what social care and support services might look like in 2025. This process resulted in four very different notions of care around the integration of health and social service agenda and commissioning outcomes.

Impact	The results are currently being used by social care regulators, policy makers and front line staff to consider workforce planning and leadership competencies.
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The Virtual Staff College

Ten Step Scenario Planning Process

“Scenarios do not provide you with specific answers. Rather, they allow you to ask better questions of yourself, your plans and the actions of your colleagues.”



Definitions

- **Trend:** A series of events
- **Driver:** The underlying force that changes the long-term direction of trends
- **Scenario:** a story about how the future might evolve
- **Cues:** individual key episodes or occurrences which might act as a trigger for change or can be viewed as examples of change.

Scenario Methodology

Scenarios can be built in a number of different ways. Two common approaches are categorised as normative and explorative. Normative scenarios start with an ideal and work back towards the present, whereas explorative scenarios follow a more inductive process. The Virtual Staff College process is based on an exploratory scenario process. The key steps are:

1. Scope, trust and permission

This initial stage involves research identifying key assumptions about the future and scoping the exact theme of the scenario planning process. Leadership buy-in to the process is required at this stage. Although there is no clarity yet around what the process will 'throw up', there needs to be commitment from leaders and participants to trust the process. The most frequently asked question at this stage of the process, is 'What is the Work?'

2. Driver Identification

A bank of drivers is then constructed, identifying a collection of drivers of change. These should include a range of social, technological, environmental, economic, political, legislative and ethical (STEEPLE) drivers of change. The drivers should be succinct and indicate a direction of travel. For example, 'Demographics' is not an adequate description of a driver. A verb should be applied to provide a sense of movement and communicates the direction in which the driver is pushing the future, e.g. 'Shrinking workforce and ageing population'. The drivers are then clustered and the relationship between the clusters explored. This throws up hidden drivers and 'cues'.

3. Ranking Drivers by Importance

The drivers are put in order of importance. The drivers placed on the importance / uncertainty matrix are relative to one another, so while all issues may feel highly important, a natural hierarchy should emerge.

4. Ranking Importance by Uncertainty

The drivers are then ranked by uncertainty; whether or not the outcome of the driver is certain or uncertain. Stereotypically, demographic drivers tend to be fairly certain, whereas issues of technological advancement tend to be more uncertain. This is an important part of the process and will determine what drivers are used to form the scenario architecture (i.e. the 'critical uncertainties' and the 'predetermined elements').

5. Importance-Uncertainty Matrix

A matrix of drivers defined by importance and uncertainty is constructed. The purpose of this stage is to identify clearly the role the key drivers will have in the generation of the scenarios. That is, the 'critical uncertainties' in the 'scenario space' upon which the different futures will depend, and the 'pre-determined elements' in the 'forecasting space' which will feature in each of the different scenarios.

6. Roll-out of Key Drivers

The notion of causality is central to scenario building. We must understand the relationship between cause and effect to reach multiple, plausible futures. In this stage we begin to look at the relationships between the drivers and also to look for hidden drivers or 'cues', are they are sometimes known. At this point in the process we start to decide which drivers should be chosen to construct the scenario architecture.

7. Scenario Building

Here the strands that emerged are drawn together in the driver rollout and, hopefully, you will arrive at two key drivers that are independent of one another. You can then use the two drivers to create a 2x2 matrix that creates four distinct scenario themes. At this stage in the process, the scenarios should be a bullet point narrative, combined with a short description that encapsulates a sense of each future. Once you have created the scenario worlds and named them you should test the plausibility of the described world or scenarios by considering the question "how did we get to here?" and, through this, produce an event timeline which you can use to plot the main influential episodes which set the context for your scenarios.

8. Scenario Writing

In depth storylines are then written as descriptive narratives. Various literary devices are used to convey a sense that the scenarios are written from the perspective of the future (future-present language as it is sometimes referred to).

9. Scenario Testing

After drafting the scenario sketches, we test for a number of factors against the evidence, views and assumptions collected thus far: -

Plausibility: How believable are your stories?

Internal consistency: How logical are your scenarios? Are there any 'leaps of faith', where the data doesn't support your scenarios?

Surprise: The scenarios should contain an element of surprise that should capture the reader's attention.

Gestalt: How do the scenarios look on an overall level?

10. Immersion

One of the most important aspects of the process is to immerse groups of people within each scenario and prompt them to think about what the realities of living and working in that world might be. A number of prompts can be used to immerse groups in the worlds who are also encouraged to think about what would need to happen, what near term change would have to be effected to either avoid or more towards any of the world-views described in the scenarios.

Using our ten step scenario process, the Virtual Staff College (VSC) has developed a range of workshops, materials and services, to specifically support Local Authorities and partner organisations use scenario planning effectively.

Demonstration workshops; The VSC offers a one-day demonstration workshop to learn about scenario planning, how it works, the benefits and how to facilitate a basic scenario planning process. This will include a short amount of time to explore potential scenarios pertinent to your particular organisation.

24 hour or two-day scenario planning workshops; as part of its ongoing commitment to developing the leadership capacity of those involved in the provision of public services, the VSC offers an in-depth 24 hour or two day scenario planning workshop that blends scenario planning theory, emergent leadership practices and the construction of a live scenario planning process.

Workshops will be co-designed so that they are delivered and facilitated according to the specific set of needs identified by the organisation or Local Authority. Workshops can also explore emerging ideas around systems leadership and the relationship between the citizen and the State, as critical context for developing scenarios.

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Appendices

Example scenarios storylines from a recent two-day process with Chief Executives and Lead Members for Children's Services

(designed and delivered in collaboration with partners in the Local Government Association and the Society for Local Authority Chief Executives)

The scenario sketches contained in this Appendix were developed over two days by senior officers and elected Members at a two-day scenario seminar run by Virtual Staff College with colleagues from LGA and SOLACE. The scenario process was designed to create a range of storylines to describe society in 2024. The Scenarios are now being used to consider what children's services might look like 10 years into the future.

The sketches below are:

Networked World

My World

Flat World

Post Welfare

Citizens independence

Citizens dependence

Functioning Reliance

Dependent dysfunctional society (2025)

Citizen Smythe

Post workshop, delegates will immerse themselves and teams in each world and are challenged to think about the following questions:

- What do you like and dislike about each world described?
- Which of the scenarios seemed most plausible?
- Which of these worlds do you think our community expects us to be planning for?
- What actions are now required by the following groups if we are to achieve or avoid any elements of the world views described
 - i) Government
 - ii) Children's services
 - iii) Community groups
 - iv) The business community.

The bank of drivers of change or cues which the groups used to consider and construct their scenarios were:

Social:

- Richer education for young people going forward
- Longer childhoods – driven by longer life expectancy
- More blended extended families
- Baby boom from the east will impact on education health
- Growth in cities/urban populations
- More complex levels of need for individuals
- More connections and friendships in virtual world
- Families geographically spread
- Ageing population excluded
- Pension age rises
- Ageing population working to 90
- Poor young people with poor social mobility
- Shift back into intergenerational activity and living
- Working longer with less time for volunteering community action.

Technological:

- Apps make me do
- Digital growth – more IT literate population
- Technological leaps
- Move away from the 'historical' solutions/systems/management in care
- Degrees on web – fewer buildings (MOOCs)
- Cyber crime increases
- More local, self employed teachers and itinerant specialists
- Shift to bigger element of online education and mental health support
- Over 50 per cent electric cars
- Less air travel – more localism
- Gap in tech savvy groups with limited consultation opportunities – more social isolation
- 3D printing – can make products locally.

Environmental:

- Global outlook but local focus
- Reduction in natural resources – water, oil, energy through climate change
- Rising costs of fuel impacts on
 - (i) Workplace choices
 - (ii) Network choices
- Rethinking endless pursuit of living together
- Less distinction between private and public aims and roles
- Population profile changes through migration
- Energy costs rise
- More major disasters geologically.

Economic:

- More from public/private realm
- Self service for public service with increase in social spaces
- Better educated become more frustrated
- Increase in time banking
- Asia/Australasia becomes dominant world economic zone
- Increase in private investment
- Social Impact Bonds, for example
- More scope for innovative people who work locally
- Local government wholly self-funded, self sustainable
- More recycling businesses.

Political:

- Growth in religious/identity conflict
- Less trust in politicians
- Fewer politicians
- Major change in political engagements
- No free benefits system – work for benefits
- Less public engagement in ‘formal’ politics
- More public engagement in informal politics
- Closure of borders.

Legislative:

- ‘Regions’ replacing local identity
- Much more legal complexity across national boundaries.

Ethical:

- More use of DNA profiling, pharmacological treatments
- Big Data, more competition
- Increased commercial application of personal information
- Predictive trends analysis
- Right to die becomes accepted policy
- Less people helping without financial reward
- Medical profession gets real
- More ethical debate.

Timeline

2014
-
2015

- Referendum on Scottish Independence
- UK General and local elections
- Austerity impacts on services.

2016
-
2017

-
- Middle East regional conflict 'addressed' by west
 - Energy price volatility
 - Increased social inequality through pensions reform and aggressive welfare reform
 - Citizens demand for more power and control of services
 - Revised regulatory period for adult social care
 - In/out referendum on UK Membership of EU.

2018
-
2019

-
- Dependency ratio of those in employment supporting ever growing number of older population
 - Introduction of Council/supermarket rewards schemes. For example - 'Waitrose basic' (funded centrally for citizens to use for education and health and 'topped up' as an incentive for community action/volunteering
 - Impact of ethical debate and legislation around voluntary euthanasia
 - UK Border control
 - Primacy of BRICS economic power
 - Debate of personal information usage.

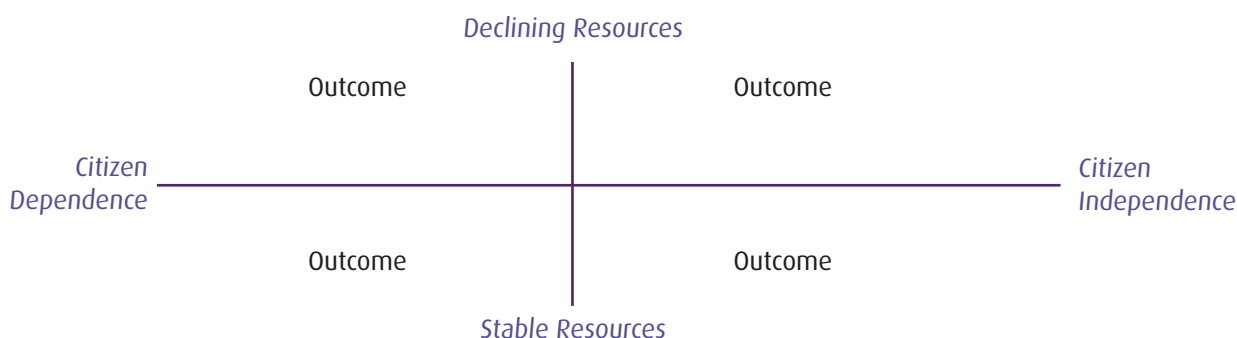
2020
-
2024

-
- Relationship between citizen and state radically different
 - Commercial/civil application of brain scanning technology
 - Social services reform
 - Rise of community-centered spaces
 - Potential local government reorganization
 - Shift in political values from centre
 - UK General and local elections
 - UK Border control.

2025
-
2026

-
- Impact of a decade of health and social care integration
 - Enforced/voluntary localism
 - Technology through smart homes, information and generation, communication technology, stratification, analytical and data mining capacity, the internet and the qualified self.

Scenario logics



Networked World

Storyline

Today in 2025 people take the collective responsibility for the choices they make and how they live their lives. This is based on equality of choice and access to resources and most important, enabling technology.

Science and technology enable citizens to make life choices to ensure longer, fuller and healthier lives. People individually choose how best they wish to be supported; virtual and face-to-face social networks are widely available and people chose how they wish to connect with the wider world. Technology is such an enabler!

Families and communities are obliged to support those outwith their immediate family and this is incentivised and rewarded but, for most, helping others in the community, who are older or have more complex needs, is simply part of an emerging culture of inter-generational wellbeing, developed over the last decade as a consequence of deep government austerity measures and aggressive welfare reforms. "We'd better do it for ourselves as no one else will" was a common thought 6-8 years ago.

The relationship between state and citizen has changed from that of the provider and passive recipient of services. People consider themselves much more as customers – brain scanning companies are routinely selling data to Tesco on consumer choices and preferences, both for today and for future needs. The State no longer exists as a provider of first response. Social workers and other professionals enable citizens to come together and make more choices, largely based on intelligent, enabling technology and science to provide services like housing and education for themselves.

What might it be like to live in this world?

Anna has access to her own technology – her tablet has her name on the back. It was given to her on her first day at school. She gets a new one every now and again. It's her gateway to her virtual world, her friends and her own counseling services. She is desperate to know how best to look out for her mum and her brother. She'd be lost without the virtual advice she gets each day.

Anna's parents have been talking to those at their community anchor organisation – their second home, in truth. Anna's mum confides to other mums there about the e-information she has received about her alcohol misuse and how it is affecting Anna and her brother. It sets out a likely negative impact on the family over the coming seven years . Being able to talk this through and draw support is a huge weight off her shoulders. She feels safe there. It's a trusted space where people take time to be with her. There is no old fashioned social worker – telling her that her children will be taken away. In this community space she is with her own. Other parents are asked to take Anna and her brother for a short period to and from school to give her a break and spend more time with her recovery network. There is no stigma in this. Community support is widely accepted as a cultural norm and has been since the damaging impacts of deep welfare and financial policies of a decade ago.

My World

Storyline

Today in 2025, new technologies mean that the ageing population is no longer talked about as was the case a decade ago. Smart technology and the development of 'lifestyle' science application means individuals have a much better control and responsibility for themselves from childhood to the final stages of their life. Body worn technologies mean that people can arrange to see friends, get support, monitor for initial signs of ill health with the blink of an eye. This is a far cry from twenty years ago when professionals were obsessed over data protection. Information is now king and public services, thankfully, no longer have a role in 'assessing' me. Individuals have ability to take control of their own lives.

What might it be like to live in this world?

Detailed information about Anna and her family, like every family in the area, is held on the citizens information portal. The portal is the main place where she and her family access advice and guidance, self assessment and a range of programmes with supportive apps. The portal sends e-prescriptions for Anna's mum and her brother's ADHD medication: it's a vital resource. Her family fridge is coded and only opens to accept healthy drinks and food. The family car will not start if the in-car monitor detects alcohol on the driver's breath.

The social and health impacts of ADHD on Anna's brother, Anna's performance at school and the chaotic behaviour of her parents are starting to trigger red flags in the portal authorities. The family will receive close attention through enhanced information monitoring but there is no real concern, at present, to bring the welfare of the family into professional and central 'control'. There has been a steady acceptance of this kind of safeguarding by Anna's family and the wider society for many years. In truth, she is not worried.

Anna and her brother have many virtual friends who provide day to day encouragement, which helps her devise her coping strategy and mum and her online counseling appointments every evening.



Flat World

Storyline

Today in 2025, Society is very fatalistic with very little hope that science or any sense of community makes any kind of difference. There is an accepted culture of individualism and many people are unwilling to accept or modify their health and social behaviours based on the consequences of their life choices. "It's my life. I'll do as I please" is so often heard. Many people live alone and reports of social isolation are high.

What might it be like to live in this world?

For this family, parents and the wider community accept the status quo. People refer to families such as Anna's as 'learned helplessness families'. There is no motivation or incentive to improve their lot in life. It does not occur to Anna to ask if it has to be so. Professional social workers are desperate to 'Magnify the Vice of the Child'; a mantra for social care services and a hugely important role in the world where few think listening is important.



Post Welfare World

Storyline

Today in 2025, housing is key. There is a wide range of independent living approaches, achieved by inter-generational familial and community approaches that ensure mutual support for residents of all ages with complex medical and mental conditions. 'Social Worker' exist but their role is markedly different from the role of a decade ago; they are enablers for the community – levers of local control. Citizens, providers, health professionals and public servants have evolved to find their proper roles in supporting people throughout life from cradle to grave. All decisions and arrangements, particularly at transition points of life i.e. loss of employment, moving into retirement, good health into ill health, bereavement etc. are informed by the individual, medical, social and genetic priorities. The role of the state is central in supporting communities.

What might it be like to live in this world?

Anna is well supported within her community by another family who support her and her mum and brother and whose daughter is Anna's buddy. Anna's mum draws support from the mother of Anna's friend; herself a recovering alcoholic. She understands. Occasionally, Anna sleeps over with her other family. Governors and teachers give priority and support to Anna and particularly her brother. Anna's brother is picked up from school by his friends mum.

The community provides sitter services allowing Anna's mum and dad to go to the pub or out for a meal once a week. There are many people in the pub that they know and socialise with, get support from.

Anna looks forward to her youth club – she is at her 'second home'. Mum and dad go there too. It is a chance for quality family time with other local families.

Dad is out of work but three local employers have committed to offering him extended work placements. He can go between the three until he settles and each build in an element of adult learning with others at the community hub.



Citizens independence

Backstory

At the Scottish Referendum in September 2014, there is a 'No' vote. The elected national Government in the 2015 election is a minority one, with a centralist agenda. Austerity continues to bite, with grant funding declining and funding arrangements for local authorities changing. At the European referendum in 2017, England votes to stay in and therefore continues to feel the effects of some economic instability centered around the BRIC countries. In 2018 there is a significant local government reorganisation and many councils are merged into regional bodies in order to find economies of scale. By 2022 local government does not resemble the structures we had back in 2014, with resources and funding all pooled regionally to maintain services; this at least preserves social welfare provision for those in society that need it.

Key characteristics

This scenario imagines a world which comes close to matching the original vision of the 2010-2015 coalition government in England. The public sector shrinks and the State retreats, but the economy defies the worst fears of those, particularly on the left, that see government expenditure as essential for future growth. Because of the energy and creativity in the private sector, the economy does not nose dive as many feared and begins to stabilise. For a great many people, the good times are coming back.

Storyline

Citizens have responded well to the pressures placed on public services and there are many examples where communities are supporting each other effectively (although there remains inevitably some places untouched by the growth of citizen capital and life is still tough in these places); the hallmark of this society is citizen independence and individual choice.

What the government has effectively succeeded in doing is breathing life into local communities, creating a new, dynamic, public sector. It has unleashed a creativity that people didn't know existed and generated a whole new sense of personal and collective responsibility.

Citizens contribute through a Time Bank arrangement, which helps reduce the proportion of dependency on public services and allows individuals to 'top up' their personalised budgets, which give them access to services. A citizen's basic entitlement provides them access to education and healthcare, and there is a booming healthcare insurance market, for those that can afford it (The Tesco Health Service).

Employers in most parts of the country also take their responsibilities to society seriously and behave philanthropically where they can. Communities are genuine assets and this gives rise to a significant rise in mutual and other employee led organisations; again this reduces the burden placed on the regional 'hubs' to deliver traditional services. There is a general expectation that families provide the first port of call for any social care support (children and adults).

The impact of these social trends on the delivery of children's services could include the following:

- The end of local government as we know it, regrouped regionally, as more and more services are commissioned by local authorities but provided by the market
- The political leadership of local authorities increasingly accountable to local resident's associations or lobby groups
- Almost all services funded through personalised budgets in order to hand control over to users
- Local services, including education and social care, provided almost entirely by the private, voluntary and community sector, with the voluntary and community sector tending to make niche provision for the most vulnerable
- Health services moving in a similar direction, with incentives for people to be well and the performance of providers judged by their ability to reduce health inequalities
- New and radical approaches to schooling, including innovations such as home tuition based on on-line learning, stage not age learning, human scale schools, or celebrity teachers working with huge groups
- Social entrepreneurs of all kinds setting up schools in order to promote a particular curriculum vision

- The local authority as the provider of last resort offering a basic service, much like Pupil Referral Units, for children at the margins
- More new disabilities and syndromes of one kind or another, the identification of which help concerned parents to navigate their way through an increasingly complex and fragmented system
- A much greater reliance on self regulation, in education, health and in social care, with responsibility for any tragedies, such as a child death, being firmly laid at the door of the local community rather than the system as a whole.



Citizen Dependence

Backstory

At the Scottish Referendum in September 2014, there is a 'No' vote. The elected national Government in the 2015 election is not a majority one and despite some major changes in party leadership, austerity continues to bite. In 2016 the first councils start going bankrupt and it is clear that the current model of local government is no longer sustainable, not helped by the 'initiative overload' put into action by the new government. The pace of outsourcing the delivery of traditional public services to the private sector and voluntary providers gathers pace and local government begins to reorganise itself on a regional footing in order to survive. England votes to stay in Europe at the Referendum (just), coinciding with a period of electoral reform that ultimately leads to digital voting.

At the next General Election in 2020, the increase in voter turnout, ensures a majority government; by this time, local government is 50% smaller than it was 5 years previously. The NHS has undergone a seismic shift in this period and like local authorities, is firmly established on a regional footing. Whilst national policy has stabilised, the significant cut in public spending is really starting to widen the gap between citizens; this is a society characterised by inequality (the 'haves' and the 'have nots') The population continues to age, but a increasing proportion of this population are deemed to be below the poverty line. Whilst some voluntary, faith-based organisations and businesses do respond positively to the cuts in spending and make a contribution to their local communities, the picture across England is not consistent and society becomes increasingly fragmented by 2024.

Key characteristics

This scenario imagines a world in which, despite coming under real pressure, the government remains absolutely committed to a reduction in the size of the State, in the belief that, sooner or later, ordinary people will step forward to fill the gap left by the disappearance of the services that used to be provided for them (an unrealistic assumption it transpires). This unwillingness to intervene stems partly from principle and partly from necessity. There is no money, because there has been no economic revival.

Storyline

Central government gradually disentangles itself from the great majority of its historic commitments to the health and welfare of ordinary people, supporting only the bare minimum of provision for those who are genuinely unable to look after themselves.

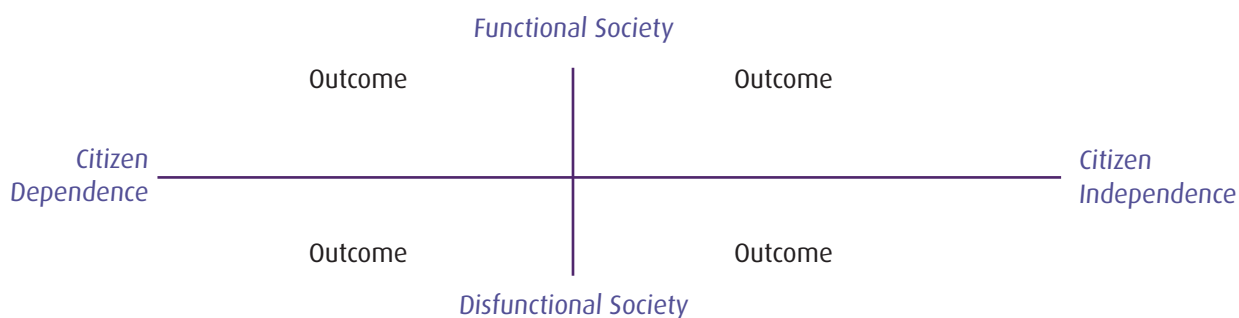
Local government itself bears little resemblance to that of 2014 and is organised regionally. Many non-statutory services have simply disappeared and the early intervention agenda is failing to gain traction; children's centres have closed up and down the country. There are isolated pockets where communities organise themselves to replace disappearing provision, but this is patchy at best and most citizens become apathetic, with shrinking horizons and limited ambition as they resign themselves to living in a country where government, either national or local, does not simply provide the support they had become so dependent on.

Community facilities start to close. In many parts of the country, the library service virtually disappears, as do local authority leisure centres and grants to the arts. At first there were widespread protests, but gradually people realised that it was a waste of time. If the big trade unions were failing to stop job losses, what difference could ordinary people make when the local swimming pool was handed over to the private sector and the cost of membership quadrupled.

Apathy sets in and it looks as if the country is going to descend into a kind of collective national depression. People have got on with their lives much as they always had done but the spark has gone. Nobody much seems to miss what they have lost, and the country appears resigned to getting a bit poorer and a bit shabbier.

As the most talented individuals abandon a country that can not match their ambition, emigration rather than immigration becomes a major cause for concern, whilst those that are left tighten their belts and learn how to live with a gradually declining standard of living. The local authority becomes the provider of last resort for only the most vulnerable and only when the market fails to deliver; there is a sharp increase in critical incidents and systemic failures; the country becomes used to this.

Scenario logics



Functioning Reliance

Backstory

In 2015, Ofsted rapidly loses credibility as the makeup of local authorities and children's services alter radically and the inspectorate fails to keep up. China's economy exacerbates a financial crisis and the UK is forced to act as its own consumer economy as China is no longer able to act as the world's bank primary consumer of goods, services and raw materials. In 2016, Ofsted disappears, increasing unemployment, high levels of unmet demand by public services, the world economy begins to seriously falter, pressures on food and energy begin to be really felt. In 2017, unmet demand remains at unprecedented levels.

There is a reducing UK tax base, general global economic breakdown, including disintegration of a united Europe and PIG countries burnout. In 2017, UK housing crisis, growing social inequality, UK keeps borders open and is subject to mass immigration, USA pulls up drawbridge, many European countries close borders to immigrants. In 2018, those who are most able and most skilled can find jobs but unemployment remains generally high, the whole world is online. In 2019, there is greater demand on Mental Health services and the 'Chinese' model of schooling prevails (Elite v. basic educational 'drilling'). In 2020, domestic and sexual violence is common within communities, collapse of the Middle Class, pensions disappeared, UK Elections (Lack of leadership and strong national politics), NHS / Welfare unsustainable, local Govt unsustainable, public turns to alternative politics, extreme religion more represented, state's ability to 'influence' citizens (with exception of mass schooling) is eroded

Key characteristics

Education - Pre-school state provision, greater curriculum control in schools, faith and independent schools are in the majority, higher Education controlled too, reduced diversity within schools, schools not necessarily brick-based.

Children's Services (Limited, with primary focus on troubled families) - Early intervention, 'fit' and 'unfit' parents, smokers can't keep their children, no discretion for LAs, national standards, less active intervention for premature babies? assisted dying supported for children and adults.

Smaller children's team, general focus on the more vulnerable, small adoption & fostering agency, civic fostering common, families pretty much manage themselves plus last resort back up from local authority.

Police / Armed Force - Regulate vigilante, 'compulsory' volunteering in return for support later, technology to enforce, iris recognition/ finger-prints, Longer working lives.

Health - Forced caesareans to standardise procedures, no smoking in cars, no surgery for obese or smokers, 100% vaccinations (i.e. USA), assisted dying for children (i.e. Belgium), risky health choices have consequences, self diagnosis.

Storyline

In response to reduced funding, national government in 2024 is centralist (presidential), having dramatically shrunk the size of government at a local level, which in turn has become a straightforward delivery agent for Westminster, with some regional difference reflected in delivery. The primary focus of the national government is issues associated with Public Health (for example, habits such as smoking have become unthinkable) and regulation from the centre has increased. England has become isolated internationally, with tighter border controls, effecting diversity across the population. However, society in general is ordered, safe and tightly controlled (albeit with reduced choices).

Children are well parented in general, with technology playing a significant role in young people's lives, not least as a safe outlet for 'rebellious' behaviour'. Communities are resilient and function for the majority, with the general population living in self-reliant units, which might be singular or plural, virtual or real, familial or non-traditional. There is a generally accepted set of norms that govern behaviour, determined by the majority, where individuals are interdependent in order to survive and flourish. Civic pride and making a positive contribution within the community is rewarded, supported by taxation which also rewards participation and compliance.

There are no universal services provided at a local level, with the priority of local government being predominantly about seeking a mandate for consensus and implementing local taxes; voting is compulsory. Local businesses are encouraged to participate positively in their local community and are, like citizens, rewarded for doing so.

What might it be like to live in this world?

Family A

Working parents: both work from within their own gated community with limited physical contact with the outside world, using technology as their window to the world. They work long hours, compensating for global time differences and are guilty of persistent, low level neglect of both of their children.

Both children attend an 'elite' school as parents can afford to pay private school fees. At school, they outwardly appear scruffy, are often hungry and find it difficult to concentrate.

The family is completely 'invisible' to local, public services – this is the new norm.

Family B

Dependent grandparent: he doesn't meet local thresholds for care as he is not deemed to be sufficiently vulnerable. With no NHS in place, the family are not able to support him and he asked to leave the family home, as he is a drain on resources.

Mum is single and suffers from a range of mental health issues. The children are fathered by multiple partners. The eldest daughter is classed as an 'elite' student and has received sponsorship from a local business in order to attend a good school, moving through the graduate programme for under 8s.

The eldest son has a range of physical disabilities and is considered for adoption in order to receive the specialist care he requires.

The younger 2 children are educationally average, with the younger boy suffering from a range of behavioural issues; they both struggle in school, subject to bullying and instances of sexual exploitation.

The family receives little in the way of constant services, which have in the main disintegrated. They do receive limited support from faith-based organisations in the community.



Dependent dysfunctional society (2025)

Backstory

Ever-increasing need and demand for high quality public services, together with ever-diminishing economic resources, created the perfect storm around 2016 and we started to see the dismantling of the enabling state and the abandonment of any attempts to work with individuals, communities and the third sector. Citizens have little by way of choice and are dependent on an ineffectual state.

During the following years, 2017- 2019, social cohesive and efforts around social policy fragmented. There was a UK housing crisis an a two tier society creating vast inequalities. Those with well paid jobs became protected but unemployment was high and those who could not navigate their way became lost and increasingly dependent on the state, who had little resources.

In an effort to attract economic migrants and increase the UK tax base, the UK kept borders open and were subject to mass immigration. Many other European countries, and even the United States, closed their borders. However, by 2020, the world had become truly connected and people lived in an increasingly virtual world.

The EU community was dismantled and nation states competed for precious but dwindling energy and food resources

Storyline

Today in 2025, communities are socially conservative, tribal and reliant on a faltering and small state.

Ofsted rapidly lost credibility as the makeup of Local Authorities and Children's Services alter radically and the regulator failed to keep up.

People increasingly looked to the state for everything and dependence was high. With increasingly complex needs and social problems, the UK saw a huge rise in the number of people presenting to health professionals with alcohol and drug dependency. By 2019, this had put a huge strain on mental health services.

Other negative patterns in social behaviour became apparent and incidences of domestic and sexual violence are all too common. Social unrest and violence routinely flared up in urban enclaves. People are angry and that anger is directed at the state who are seen as weak in terms of political leadership and have sold off public assets to plug the pensions gap. Five years ago, in 2020, pensions disappeared.

At that time, people were starting to recognise that the NHS could no longer support people from cradle to grave and people looked for reform in local government seeing it as unsustainable. Crisis took hold.

Now, today in 2025, people are desperate for new politics, radical change and political and religious extremism is all around offering the disaffected a voice.

This is a scary world and it is common-place to see gated-communities and also no-go areas; the parks and town centres.

For years the experts warned that the increasing numbers of those living longer could not be financially supported by a dwindling number of people who were economically active. They were right. One politician, last month, compared life in the UK today in 2025 as Dickensian.

Today, international relations are low and the threat of war is always immanent. People have developed what psychologists from the 20th century termed a 'learned helplessness'. People are apathetic, dependent on the state and cannot see how to better their own lot.

What is it like to live in this world?

Family A

Working parents: both work from within their own gated community with limited physical contact with the outside world, using technology as their window to the world. The parents work long hours, compensating for global time differences and are guilty of persistent, low level neglect of both of their children.

Both children attend an 'elite' school as parents can afford to pay. At school, they outwardly appear scruffy, are often hungry and find it difficult to concentrate.

The family is completely 'invisible' to local, public services – this is the new normality.

Family B

Dependent grandparent: He does not meet local thresholds for care as he is not deemed to be sufficiently vulnerable. With no NHS in place, the family are not able to support him and he is asked to leave the family home, as he is a drain on resources.

Mum is single and suffers from a range of mental health issues. The children are fathered by multiple partners.

The eldest daughter is classed as an 'elite' student and has received sponsorship from a local business in order to attend a good school, moving through the graduate programme for under 8's.

The eldest son has a range of physical disabilities and is ultimately put up for adoption to receive the specialist care he requires.

The younger 2 children are educationally average, with the younger boy suffering from a range of behavioural issues; they both struggle in school, subject to bullying and instances of sexual exploitation.

The family receives little in the way of constant services, which have in the main disintegrated. They do receive limited support from faith-based organisations in the community.



Citizen Smythe

Backstory

There is low turnout at the EU and local elections in 2014. A further coalition government is elected in 2015. A number of UKIP MPs are elected who favour a 'little England' view of the country. This has a knock on effect to local government where in many places local politics becomes increasingly fractious and ineffective. In 2018 the UK votes to leave the EU. As the UK economy declines, there is no longer an option of support from European neighbours. By the 2020 general election there is total disengagement from formal politics with communities looking to support themselves and their communities in different ways.

Key characteristics

In this scenario it is expected that the State will be operating with a significantly lower tax base than currently and so will withdraw from non-essential services and most of the Welfare State. However, divisions in society and increased inequalities mean greater demand for high end care and health services. Funding has been removed from early intervention and preventative services which are increasingly the remit of philanthropists and charities. The scale of the public sector as a whole, including local government is much reduced. Remaining public services are stretched and of poor quality. Communities are divided and sometime isolated so it is harder for services such as child protection to track and find children and families. The various 'wars' on drugs, crime and poor health have been lost. Prevention has failed and society has descended into a downward spiral.

Storyline

It is 2025. After the 2015 and 2020 elections, national and local government is increasingly dysfunctional with significantly reduced tax revenue and society is polarised between those who have and those who have not. The haves and the have nots: the Smythes and the Smiths (more later) are self-reliant to varying extents.

The competition over resources such as food, energy and adequate housing has led to civil unrest, an increase in crime and an increase in inequalities

and poverty across the country. Communities are starting to cluster into tribes reflecting different sectional interests. The more affluent live in gated communities; the poor live in ghettos. Cornwall has declared itself independent. Each 'tribe' is protecting itself based on sectoral and self-serving social and economic interests. Gun ownership – and use – is more common and more visible. As government at all levels has become increasingly discredited, communities look to their own leaders for guidance and protection.

The affluent in this society can buy good quality, healthy food. Some of the poorer people grow their own vegetables but not all have access to land or the wherewithal to do this and rely on food banks. Some steal food from fields or warehouses meaning these are often protected by armed guards.

Energy supplies are at a premium; there is increased tapping into electricity and gas supplies. Those communities that can, protect their own energy supplies whether these are re-opened coal mines, fracking sites or wind and hydro power. While there has been an increase in community owned renewable power, the idea of protecting the local environment, let alone the planet, seems irrelevant to most people. No one who has the choice lives in areas prone to flooding. Some towns and villages have been abandoned following the severe floods during the winter of 2019.

There are well rewarded employment and business opportunities for a few: in energy businesses, security, private education and healthcare. For others there is casual work, the black market and crime as a last resort. Regulation of the safety of workplaces and the conditions of workers is, to a large extent, a thing of the past.

Internationally, the UK has withdrawn from the EU after the referendum and is ignored by its big players France and Germany.

So, on this now more isolated island, there is a return for some to 'Dickensian' living conditions – cold and damp, overcrowded housing, little or no formal work, poor diet, contaminated environment and minimal support services. Anyone who has avoided this fate jealously protects their privileges. A few philanthropists step outside their privileged world to support those who are less fortunate but this is exceptional and charitable services are patchy.

What might it be like to live in this world? Life for two families the Smiths and the Smythes

The Smiths are a poor family of mother, father and two schools age children. One of these children, a daughter, has a disability. The Smiths live with Mrs Smith's parents in a small, cold house in a dangerous part of London. They occasionally do work for cash in hand and have both committed minor crimes. If they need extra money for food or heating, they sometimes borrow from neighbours and they pay weekly instalments at high interest to a loan company which is well known in the area. They have no prospect of paying this off. One child attended a local school for a time, but left after being bullied and has not returned. The daughter who has a disability does not attend school; there is nowhere nearby available to her and her parents cannot afford to transport her out of her local area. The families health is poor, and there are sometimes violent arguments between the adults. Their only access to healthy food is a local food bank which does not always have sufficient supplies for all the people who need it.

The Smythes, likewise mother father, two school age children including a daughter with a disability, live in their own home in a pleasant, secure community. Life is comfortable but restricted as they are at risk of violent attack if they venture into less affluent parts of town. Both children are escorted to school with an armed guard and their food, ordered online, often arrives in an armed van if it has had a risky journey from the depot. Both the adult Smythes work. Mrs Smythe is a doctor providing private medical care. Mr Smythe is a director of the local fracking company.

Children's social services for the Smiths and the Smythes

For the Smiths, health care has been random and patchy so there is no one, in what remains of 'the system', who knows that the children exist. Police services are likewise basic and reactive.

Police officers enter the Smith's house after reports of Mr Smith's persistent theft and increasing violence. They discover the two children, cold, ragged and looking as if they have taken drugs and so take them to a police station where a duty social worker is called. The social worker is stressed, sees the children cannot go home and phones random local charities to ask who will take them in that night. Mr and Mrs Smith do not know how to get their children back and the children are 'lost' to the system because social services has no time to check up on charity children's homes. They stay in the home till they can stand it no longer, then they run away.

The Smythes pay for health services so their daughter's disability is picked up at birth and the family pay for therapies and assistance and a place at a special school. They live in a neighbourhood where local communities buy in services so there are playgroups and pre-school activities for the children. There are private social workers who cover both rich and poor areas. When a social worker is called about constant crying and sounds of loud arguments in the Smythe's house, she visits, feeling resentful that she has to waste her time on a rich family when she still hasn't had time check up on the Smith children who she sent to a dodgy charity run children's home the day before.



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