



Place

2016's State of the Sector research suggested that charities were grappling with how to reshape their relationships with the state

In light of continuing austerity and the ongoing shift away from grants to contract funding, a number of the 2016 [State of the Sector](#) interviewees stressed the need for a fundamental rethink of how the social sector came together with public service partners and other stakeholders to protect, promote and champion the people and communities they worked with:

'... [If resources] could be better aligned and focused around the needs of people, rather than the needs of services, then I think it would be a really good thing. We are supporting local authorities in a number of places to do that.'

Over the past two years, NPC has given significant thought to what greater collective action (and impact) across the sector might look like and so we decided to pose place-related questions as part of our 'Snapshot of the Sector' qualitative survey in 2018.

The appetite for place-based work is still there

The leaders we spoke to for this most recent survey were positive about the place agenda, often having seen examples of its usefulness first-hand.

'There is a lot happening in some places, for example after Grenfell the collaboration between organisations and agencies in the area was terrific.'

'We're seeing a lot of funders wanting to fund in a place-based way, including a number of Govt central departments. Hopefully this will drive greater collaboration.'

'There are some really good examples of orgs coming together in a place because they see the strategic benefit.'

But is place a growing trend... or is it just trendy?

Interviewees felt that place-based approaches run the risk of being the 'latest big thing.' Several reported that thinking about place was part of their usual way of working. Others were concerned that there wasn't enough recognition of the commitment and sheer hard work required to bring about effective place-based collaboration:

'It's a lovely idea but ultimately it's about having money on the table.'

'If people are on the same page then can often do great things; but if, for example, a local authority is very resistant to it, it's difficult to force collaboration.'

Many are investing time into discussing place-based approaches with partners, without seeing a return:

'We have a lot of discussions, but nothing happens... you have to have the heart and guts behind it to actually want to change something.'

Some also expressed a concern that there is an unrealistic expectation of place-based approaches as a short-term fix in the UK context:

'[In the] US there are ideas about how long it takes to get new ideas off the ground and [look at] generational problems rather than trying something different for a few years. There is short termism here that we can challenge and look internationally at, for example, 20-year programmes and their impact.'

Meaningful place-based collaboration is challenging

Some felt that collaboration across the social and public sectors can be difficult to implement in practice, largely due to differences in culture and working practice:

'There are lots of opportunities but [both] statutory agencies and the charity sector need to behave differently. A lot of charities, especially small or more vulnerable ones, have very little capacity to do all of the learning and working, and all of the meetings... This is where local community foundations or some sort of infrastructure to support is important, and that needs to be made clear to the statutory agencies.'

'I would like to see more about engaging with councils to change their commissioning processes rather than blanket procurement...in many cases those [procurement] rules aren't working anyway.'

NPC's plans for 2019

In this round of research, we heard that place-based work is happening, it is difficult, and people are interested in exploring it further. To support that, we have made place a core part of our new strategy, we will make place-based work part of our upcoming State of the Sector research, and we are fundraising for a programme of work including pilots of a place-based approaches around the country.

Please visit our [website](#) or contact policy@thinknpc.org if you are interested in supporting this work.