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**Paul Abraham**  
Managing Director & Client Partner - Capita Local Public Service at Capita

## Another route to reform?

**Dealing with multiple emergencies, and a funding crisis with nothing but challenging times ahead, local government needs reform more than ever. Paul Abraham (Managing Director and Client Partner for Capita Local Public Services) explores what a practical evolution of public services could look like and what steps we can take in the short term to get us there.**

As Transformation Director at Essex Council, back in 2015, I led a transformation programme to deliver around £250m of desperately needed savings and helped the County Council on its journey to become a commissioning organisation. This followed on from one of the proudest moments of my career - being part of the team that helped turn around the Children's Services in Essex from 'Inadequate' to 'Good' (Ofsted rating). I was a small part of a much bigger (and brilliant) team and was privileged to work alongside inspirational leaders like Director of Children's Services Helen Lincoln – and to be guided by the energy and leadership of the late, great Dave Hill.

However, what seemed like a mountain to climb for us back in 2015, is immeasurably harder 6 years later – especially following on from 18 months of national lockdown and a significant increase in demand. The costs for social care are steadily increasing and, despite the potential short-term relief provided by national insurance increases, funding reform remains the most talked about issue when I speak to colleagues in local authorities. We face uncertainty with winter approaching and a pandemic that isn't yet beaten. The climate emergency is becoming more pressing. Furthermore, despite the bright moments of human courage, collaboration and selflessness

that the pandemic has brought to the fore – it has also exacerbated instances of abuse, neglect and harm where vulnerable people are either isolated or even worse, locked in to domestic situations with no seeming means of escape.

Local public services provide the vital safety net for those needing help and are integral to delivering national solutions at a local level. The agility the public sector displayed in recent months has raised the expectations of politicians and the public but, without fundamental reform - which seems to be on the back burner again- it will be challenging to keep up this pace.

### Relational public services

Capita has been working with DEMOS and a variety of public sector stakeholders on a programme of work to explore how we might 'embed community development, human relationships and social health at the heart of public service delivery'. If we are to harness the civic strength we witnessed during the early months of the pandemic, we need a different model that utilises the mobility of local organisations, has collaboration between people, providers and partners at its heart, resets the relationship between service users and providers, and thinks about solutions in terms of community outcomes. But how can we think about the future when we have fires to fight today?

### Creating the headspace for change

We need a significant boost in productivity if we are to free valuable time to create and sustain outcome-focused, relational services. We can start this journey now by rethinking our data infrastructure and usage, along with dealing with digital exclusion. Providing public services with a shared wide area network has already saved one region £30m and allows seamless handling of cases across organisations. Better use

of automation can release 40% of frontline worker's time, and data scientists are able to provide them with insights, helping them serve citizens more effectively and provide opportunities to be more proactive with our interventions.

### **Time to act**

The pandemic has upset the balance. Made us try new things. Work differently. We need to take this opportunity to rethink public service and then come together to change it. Better use of data and insight – built around citizens, families, and communities – will be integral to the sector maintaining this pace and ensuring that every single penny of available funding is spent in a way that protects and supports the most vulnerable members of our society.

If you would like to find out more about our work with DEMOS on 'Relational Public Services', our partnership with Good Things Foundation and our Digital Inclusion Roadmap, insights from the Productivity Institute or more on networks, data and automation, please get in touch with me at [\*\*paul.abraham@capita.com\*\*](mailto:paul.abraham@capita.com)