

## Behaviour change and LSPs

### Key messages

- Local partners and government bodies are increasingly seeking to promote 'behaviour change' – amongst individuals, groups and populations – seeing this as a potent strategy in their attempts to tackle intransigent social problems (obesity, climate change, anti-social behaviour, low aspirations in poor communities)
- Total Place acts as a spur to engaging local people to act in ways which result in lower service delivery costs and better outcomes
- Promising routes are being pursued, informed by techniques, eg, from social marketing and micro-economics. These use appropriate mixes of incentives and disincentives, individual and group support for effecting changes, peer models, etc
- There are concerns that over-reliance on 'behaviour change', especially aimed at individuals, may mask the need for more fundamental social and economic changes.
- A focus on behaviour change serves to emphasise the importance of understanding and influencing what 'makes people tick'
- There is considerable scope for learning about what works and what doesn't work across different fields (eg, public health, environmental services, waste recycling) and disciplines (eg, psychology, economics and sociology)
- Guidance based on research and experience across these themes suggests the importance of:
  - being very clear about the 'problem' to be tackled and the justification for using behaviour change methods to tackle it
  - gaining strategic/ political buy-in
  - evidence and understanding of causal processes: what you can seek to influence on the path to achieving the outcomes you want
  - testing and evaluating the approaches being adopted

### Introduction

The current interest in 'behaviour change' stems from a belief that solutions to many intractable social problems can be found, at least in part, by seeking to influence the attitudes, behaviour – and actions - of individuals, households and groups.

Focusing on 'behaviour change' is not a new approach; it is inherent in many public policy applications of psychology and economics, recently popularised by 'Nudge' – the work of Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein. A focus on behaviour change underpins the burgeoning field of social marketing, notably in public health and climate change. Drink driving, smoking cessation and 'Five a day' campaigns are the most obvious examples.

It is a theme featuring in Total Place, where some of the pilots are thinking along the lines of, “if we can find ways of encouraging residents to behave in ways which both improve their satisfaction with services and reduce the costs of service delivery, we’re onto a good thing!” In other pilots, it’s a concern too, eg, where local priorities relate to behaviours such as alcohol abuse that lead to significant longer term costs. More generally, individual and community self-help may increasingly come to be seen as a way of reducing pressures on the public purse.

Too much emphasis on ‘behaviour change’ can divert attention from fundamental causes of problems, by concentrating on the individual or the family alone and failing to take account of larger socio-economic forces which lie behind many observed behaviours. That said, developments in concepts and thinking around behaviour change offer routes to innovative, complementary actions.

At heart, the attention being given to ‘behaviour change’ serves to draw out the **fundamental importance of understanding what makes people tick** – and using this to inform a wide range of interventions to address local priorities. This is the case not only in relation to approaching a wide range of social problems but also to economic challenges, eg, in promoting business innovation and in tackling worklessness.

## Concepts & state of the art

Recent projects at national level offer some ways forward in understanding and applying behaviour change as a tool in policy making. The Social Market Foundation report, *Creatures of Habit*, for example, sets out three categories of influence on human behaviour, with implications in deciding what types of intervention to use to promote change:

- ‘external’ (financial incentives and disincentives, levers and making it easier/ more difficult to do something)
- ‘internal’ (primarily about influencing and breaking habits, and challenging perceptions, eg, about risks and the likelihood of future rewards)
- social (about influencing norms in society and groups within society, eg, around what is acceptable and desirable behaviour and what is not)

This type of analysis fits with current developments around Customer Insight (see the L2D briefing<sup>1</sup>), in the emphasis on customer segmentation, looking to differentiate between groups or clusters on the population.

NICE (National Institute for Clinical Excellence) provides guidance on behaviour change interventions. This stresses the importance of assessing the social context of interventions, removing barriers that prevent changes, and targeting those people who find it difficult to alter what they do, or who are not motivated to do so. NICE highlights needs for action at three levels, while ensuring consistency in direction at each level:

### a) individuals

- help people to develop accurate knowledge of the health consequences of their behaviours
- promote positive feelings about the outcomes of change and belief that change is possible
- provide visible evidence of desirable behaviours within peer groups
- help individuals set goals and plan for their achievement

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<sup>1</sup> Learning to Deliver (2008) Customer Insight and LAAs [www.wmcoe.gov.uk/download.php?did=1493](http://www.wmcoe.gov.uk/download.php?did=1493)

*b) communities*

- operate through social networks and kinship
- support organisations that promote participation in leisure, community and voluntary activities
- promote resilience and basic skills
- promote access to financial and material resources needed to facilitate behaviour change

*c) populations at large*

- fiscal and legislative interventions
- national and local advertising and other promotional activity

The Government Social Research Unit has reviewed models of behaviour change at individual and community levels. Their guide stresses the importance in delivery planning of:

- specifying the audience groups and target behaviours
- identifying the behavioural models most relevant to the objective, and the main influencing factors to work on
- incorporating techniques known to be effective
- engaging the audience in the process of developing a prototype
- piloting the intervention and evaluating it before wider roll-out

The Young Foundation has worked with Capital Ambition (the London equivalent of IEWM) to produce a 'rough guide' to behaviour change in local government, drawing on the experience of projects pursued by pilot authorities. Their background research highlights distinctions between 'nudging' (primarily economic choices) and conscious deliberation (moral choices) and notes the risks of class bias in defining what behaviours are deemed unacceptable. Their guide is also conscious of needs to respect the freedom of the individual on one hand and, on the other, the duty of care to people adversely affected by the behaviour of others.

Defra have recognised the importance of behaviour change in addressing climate change and have a Sustainable Behaviours Unit as the focus for this work. They have developed a 'pro-environment behaviour change framework'. Key messages from this include:

*What others are doing is key*

- perceptions of fairness matter: "I will if you will"
- work on the basis that people learn from each other and follow social norms
- government and other organisations need to practice what they preach

*The sense of making a difference matters*

- people can be sceptical about the nature of 'problems', their causes and the likelihood that they personally can effect change

*'What's in it for me' is important*

- people are more concerned with what they can gain than what they might lose: they want better health and lower outlays
- feel-good factors and avoidance of guilt
- people don't want to change their lifestyles
- fit with self-identity and perceptions of status

This work has informed a number of Defra's policies including the Greener Living Fund aimed at third sector organisations with the ability and reach to implement projects that would influence pro-environmental behaviours in the wider population.

## Examples in West Midlands and London

There are many examples of projects in the West Midlands which feature behaviour change at their heart. Amongst the more systematic have been 'Learning Demonstration' sites promoted by the NHS's National Social Marketing Centre (NSMC), such as that on smoking cessation in Stoke on Trent<sup>2</sup>. This sought to determine why so few pregnant women were engaging with the service and what do about this, concentrating on two priority neighbourhoods, Meir and Bentilee. Action centred on a pilot in 2008, the Me2 stop smoking club, based at children's centres, with monitoring and evaluation over the following 18 months. Group sessions focused on the positive elements of quitting and allowed women to share tips and experiences. 'Stress-busting sessions' were offered in partnership with local providers, as well as new ideas for creating 'me time.' Small incentives included branded products offered to women when they joined and when they reached their individual goals. In-depth training was provided to front line staff, including the use of a DVD with actors demonstrating an effective brief (five minute) intervention. The pilot groups were successful with 60% of participants setting a quit date being still having stopped at the four weeks' mark. Group members reported increased self-esteem and well-being. The service more than trebled its level of quit rates.

NSMC have gathered case studies of behaviour change projects to populate their 'Showcase' database<sup>3</sup>. Examples from the West Midlands include:

- 'What's pants...?', the first cervical screening initiative in the UK to link data trends, audience segmentation and social behaviour research with an awareness campaign.. Methods used included modified service provision (eg, additional screening clinics; radio and bus advertising; and direct mail). It pioneered ways of measuring, behavioural change
- Telford & Wrekin PCT and Council ran a programme ('Woodside Gets Active') to increase physical activity amongst children and their parents in a priority neighbourhood, offering organised walks, leisure swimming, and discounted access to health and fitness centres<sup>4</sup>
- 'Choose How You Move', a Worcestershire County Council initiative to encourage the take-up of sustainable transport options through improvements to public transport, cycle routes, pedestrian access, a variety of incentives and travel advice
- Envision, a national education charity<sup>5</sup>, has been supporting young people aged 16-19 in Birmingham and London to deliver their own sustainability projects. They have staff and adult volunteers working in schools and colleges to help students decide on projects, and provide ongoing support at weekly meetings.

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<sup>2</sup> [www.nsms.org.uk/public/CSView.aspx?casestudy=84#top](http://www.nsms.org.uk/public/CSView.aspx?casestudy=84#top)

<sup>3</sup> [www.nsmcentre.org.uk/showcase-case-studies.html](http://www.nsmcentre.org.uk/showcase-case-studies.html)

<sup>4</sup> for more examples of physical activity case studies see the Physical Activity West Midlands (PAN-WM) website [www.pan-wm.org.uk/panlist.aspx?id=PAN\\_CASESTUDIES](http://www.pan-wm.org.uk/panlist.aspx?id=PAN_CASESTUDIES)

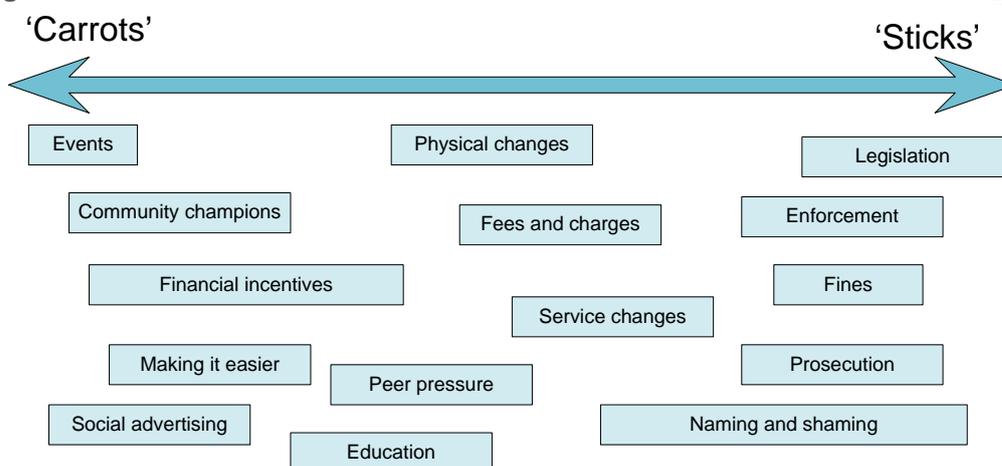
<sup>5</sup> [www.envision.org.uk/](http://www.envision.org.uk/)

The Capital Ambition guide features four pilots in London:

- ‘A Greener Barnet’ involved projects to reduce waste, litter and carbon emissions, with the latter working through three phases: waking people up to unsustainable behaviours (working with Groundwork to knock on doors, show thermal images of the area, and offer to install smart meters), introducing new behaviours (looking to reinforce changes through community development and social networking), and ‘refreezing behaviours’ (tasking stock of the extent to which behaviours have changed, publicising success stories and reinforcing positive messages)
- The Southwark pilot sought to tackle problems with gangs and weapons primarily through engaging local people in one-to-one conversations, working with parents, schools, and through residents better placed to relate to young people than many local authority officers
- The Bexley project involved a series of interactive workshops run in schools and with youth and community groups, to challenge attitudes around about knives and gangs, and provide wider reassurance about young people’s safety
- Richmond’s ‘Competitive Edge’ project focused on increasing participation by young people in competitive sport, through inter-school sports, opportunities to try different activities, and twinning with sports clubs

Other London boroughs are picking up the behaviour change theme, with, for instance, Sutton adopting a ‘Smarter Choices’ initiative to give residents greater choice and encourage them to reassess some of their habits and behaviours (exercise, litter, behaviour towards others, alcohol consumption, etc, etc). Figure 1 illustrates how Sutton are thinking about the range of tools they can use in support of this.

Figure 1 LB Sutton: Tools for Smarter Choices<sup>6</sup>



<sup>6</sup> Source: Daniel Ratchford, LB Sutton, presentation to London Sustainability Exchange, Sept 2009

There are many more initiatives across the country pursuing similar goals and related methods: what can be lacking is cross-fertilisation (learning and adapting) and co-ordination, ensuring that campaigns and other initiatives 'start with the resident' and pull in the same direction, rather than compete for the time and interest of local people. Furthermore, in some instances, such as where public bodies need to engage local people more effectively, there may be a prior need for them to demonstrate how they have changed their own behaviours (eg, in showing how they value and are influenced by community engagement, or in tackling climate change).

## Implications for LSPs and LAAs

'Behaviour change' approaches and techniques have **potential applications across many LAA targets**, most obviously, eg, in relation to:

- obesity and exercise (primary school reception year and Year 6 - NI55 and NI56; adult participation in sport - NI8)
- CO<sub>2</sub> emissions/ adapting to climate change (NI198)
- household waste sent for recycling (NI192) and residual household waste (NI191)

It may feature in delivery plans on many others such as community cohesion (NI1 and NI2), young people's participation in positive activities (NI110), under 18 conception rate (NI111), and the rate of hospital admissions for alcohol-related harm (NI39).

The vogue for 'behaviour change' has the **merit in encouraging partners to pay greater attention to understanding what makes people (and organisations) really tick**, what influences their behaviours and decision-making, and the pulls and pushes from other sources which affects what they do and how they do it. In this, it is promoting more nuanced approaches to different 'customer segments' – linked to developments in the practice of customer insight (see the L2D briefing on Customer Insight and LAAs).

There is **great scope to learn from experience across different fields** (eg, social marketing in health and tackling climate change) – what works with different groups in the population.

Initiatives based on promoting behaviour change are, however, **unlikely to be quick fixes** - unless, say, there are big enough financial incentives or penalties involved.

Beware too that some current work is superficial, lacking understanding from research and experience, and without a theoretical underpinning which allows approaches to be effectively assessed for impact and 'what works'. There are **concerns in some localities that certain neighbourhoods are "in danger of being social marketed to death"**, because they have been targeted for all kinds of behavioural intervention (anti-smoking, teenage pregnancy, anti-gang campaigns, etc).

The Capital Ambition guide stresses the importance of **being clear about the 'problem', the justification and purpose of the intervention**: Is it about

- reducing social harm or promoting social good?
- reducing individual harm or promoting individual welfare?
- achieving efficiencies?
- promoting autonomy (individuals and communities taking more control of their own lives)?

...as each will have implications for behaviour change methods used. Where the focus is on influence through moral choice/ values, this is more likely to point to community-based action than to individual incentives and disincentives.

The NICE guidance advocates – in parallel to the L2D briefing on LAAs, Efficiency and Value for Money:

- be specific about target behaviours, audiences (individuals? groups? wider populations?) and the intended outcomes
- base the approach on sound understanding/ evidence on causal processes (there may be significant risks that you are tinkering with symptoms not underlying causes)
- spell out what is to be done, to whom, in what social and economic context, and in what way – setting out and testing hypotheses
- make use of proven psychological models
- evaluate: all the more important given that there can be many factors affecting the likelihood of successful outcomes

The guidance stresses the need for better outcomes and process data, and more attention to cost effectiveness.

The Capital Ambition guide additionally points to the importance of:

- **engaging local people** in developing behaviour change projects
- **working to gain understanding and buy-in at political/ strategic level**

This advice highlights that many interventions based on behaviour change need skills in community engagement and change management, alongside social marketing – a skillset new for many people in public sector organisations and **potentially a priority for staff development.**

## Resources

Behaviour change: practical guide: an overview of behaviour change models and their uses (Government Social Research, 2008)

[www.gsr.gov.uk/resources/behaviour\\_change\\_review.asp](http://www.gsr.gov.uk/resources/behaviour_change_review.asp)

Capital Ambition Guide to Behaviour Change (2009)

[www.youngfoundation.org/our-work/the-capital-ambition-guide-behaviour-change](http://www.youngfoundation.org/our-work/the-capital-ambition-guide-behaviour-change) + also presentations from 'Behaviour Change for a More Sustainable London' [www.lsx.org.uk/news/events.aspx?id=3330](http://www.lsx.org.uk/news/events.aspx?id=3330)

Creatures of Habit (Social Market Foundation, 2008) [www.smf.co.uk/creatures-of-habit.html](http://www.smf.co.uk/creatures-of-habit.html)

Framework for pro-environmental behaviours (Defra, 2008) [www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/social/behaviour/](http://www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/social/behaviour/)

Healthy weight, healthy lives: policy document, toolkit, consumer insight summary, DoH

[www.dh.gov.uk/en/PublicHealth/HealthImprovement/Obesity/HealthyWeight/index.htm](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/PublicHealth/HealthImprovement/Obesity/HealthyWeight/index.htm)

Learning to Deliver: Briefings & 'How To' guides [www.westmidlandsiep.gov.uk/index.php?page=495](http://www.westmidlandsiep.gov.uk/index.php?page=495)

'Climate Change: Communicating to Change Behaviour'; Efficiency, value for money and LAAs; Customer Insight and LAAs – briefing (2009) [www.wmcoe.gov.uk/download.php?did=1625](http://www.wmcoe.gov.uk/download.php?did=1625)

National Social Marketing Centre [www.nsmcentre.org.uk/](http://www.nsmcentre.org.uk/) + showcase

NICE guidance (2007) Behaviour change: generic and specific interventions to support attitude and behaviour change at population and community levels [www.nice.org.uk/PH006](http://www.nice.org.uk/PH006)

Nudge: improving decisions about health, wealth and happiness, Thaler and Sunstein (2008) [www.nudges.org/](http://www.nudges.org/)

West Midlands Physical Activity & Food Networks (portal to Change 4 Life, Food, Infant Feeding, Obesity, and Physical Activity Networks) [www.pan-wm.org.uk/default.aspx](http://www.pan-wm.org.uk/default.aspx)